



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Strength beyond structure : social and historical trajectories of agency in Africa

Bruijn, M.E.de; Dijk, R.A.van; Gewalt, J.B.

Citation

Bruijn, M. Ede, Dijk, R. Avan, & Gewalt, J. B. (2007). *Strength beyond structure : social and historical trajectories of agency in Africa*. Brill, Leiden. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/18528>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License:

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/18528>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Strength beyond Structure:
Social and Historical Trajectories of
Agency in Africa

Edited by
Mirjam de Bruijn
Rijk van Dijk
Jan-Bart Gewald

BRILL
LEIDEN, BOSTON
2007

Contents

Figures	<i>vii</i>
Maps	<i>vii</i>
Photographs	<i>vii</i>
Preface	<i>ix</i>
1 Social and historical trajectories of agency in Africa: An introduction <i>Rijk van Dijk, Mirjam de Bruijn & Jan-Bart Gewald</i>	<i>1</i>
2 Manchester as the birth place of modern agency research: The Manchester School explained from the perspective of Evans-Pritchard's Book <i>The Nuer</i> <i>Wim van Binsbergen</i>	<i>16</i>
3 Dreams and agency during Angola's War of Independence <i>Inge Brinkman</i>	<i>62</i>
4 Chief Hosea Kutako: A Herero royal and Namibian nationalist's life against confinement 1870–1970 <i>Jan-Bart Gewald</i>	<i>83</i>
5 Agency in Kapsiki religion: A comparative approach <i>Wouter van Beek</i>	<i>114</i>
6 Les enveloppes pour Papa Daniel: La transformation des relations domestiques dans les ménages des Congolais de la diaspora <i>Julie Ndaya</i>	<i>144</i>
7 From individual act to social agency in San trance rituals <i>Thomas Widlok</i>	<i>163</i>

8	The dynamics of families, their work and provisioning strategies in the changing economies in the urban townships of Bulawayo, Zimbabwe <i>Otrude N. Moyo</i>	189
9	Images of Africa: Agency and nature conservation in South Africa <i>Malcolm Draper, Marja Spierenburg & Harry Wels</i>	215
10	Solitary births in Téra, Niger: A local quest for safety <i>Gertie Janssen</i>	240
11	Agency in and from the margins: Street children and youth in N'djaména, Chad <i>Mirjam de Bruijn</i>	263
12	Negotiating the memory of Fulbe hierarchy among mobile elite women <i>Lotte Pelckmans</i>	285
13	The safe and suffering body in transnational Ghanaian Pentecostalism; Towards an anthropology of vulnerable agency <i>Rijk van Dijk</i>	312
	Epilogue Theorizing agency in and on Africa: The questions are key <i>Francis B. Nyamnjoh</i>	334
	List of Authors	339

Figures

7.1	Complementary aspects of the healing dance	179
-----	--	-----

Maps

	Map of Africa showing the case studies in this volume	<i>viii</i>
9.1	The Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park in Southern Africa	226
11.1	N'djaména, Chad	266

Photographs

4.1	Chief Hosea Kutako as a young man	87
4.2	Chief Hosea in later life	108
4.3	Chief Hosea and his wife	109
5.1	Sacrificial jars	122
5.2	A divination session	128
5.3	A divination pot	130
5.4	Smashing the sacrificial jar	135
6.1	Le Berger et la Bergère	155
9.1	Images reprinted from South African postcards	220/1
10.1	Women in Tondigoungo	248
11.1, 11.2 & 11.3	Typical but contrasting street scenes in D'jaména	274/5
12.1	Fatma's house in Bamako, Mali	294
12.2	A maid preparing food	296
12.3	A Parisian shop catering to the local African population	300
12.4	An advertisement in a Bamako telephone shop	301



Map of Africa showing the case studies in this volume

Preface

A major eye-opener during the course of the writing of this book has been that agency is perhaps the most slippery and fuzzy concept the tool-kit of social science has ever produced. Yet its value in drawing together a wide and diverse range of insights into the ways in which people and their social formations negotiate the realities of their circumstances is undoubtedly of great importance. The concept has brought the book's contributors together from different fields of expertise in the social sciences of Africa and the book itself therefore has a mysterious agency of its own. In a number of expert meetings organized by the African Studies Centre's (ASC) research group on agency and social transformations in Africa, contributors from the disciplines of anthropology, history, sociology, philosophy and socio-economics discussed the pertinence and relevance of the concept of agency in everyday situations in Africa.

Agency is a difficult concept to grasp in that it contains a lot of the values of the people who explain it. Unravelling the concept of the agency of the researchers concerned should, therefore, always be part of a research project. The authors of this book also have specific agency, each of them creating space for reflexivity and intentionality while doing research. The way they do this is revealed in their texts and in the choices they make, for example, as to who to interview and who not, and which archives to read and which not. It is remarkable to note that agency provides for a dialectical relationship between Africa and the researcher, much as it forces researchers themselves to become reflexive about their position in revealing Africa to others. Agency research not only reveals the psyche of the researcher but, more importantly, the way this knowledge production has come about and how the researcher positioned him/herself in that regard. More than anything else, agency research has contributed to the strength of African Studies in the present predicament of our understanding of Africa and of the ways academic reflections can and must be informed by African reflexivity.

Agency is not always successful, as our empirical studies demonstrate, and agency is certainly no panacea for improvement or for a neo-liberal agenda that prescribes the self-agentive, self-serving, autonomous individual capable of dealing with any situation. Instead, the empirical studies assembled here demonstrate the frailty of African existence and its hardships and, irrespective of which reflection still exists, agency thus looms large. In this sense the book argues, agency holds a promise and, however hard reality may be, a promise of the human capacity of reflection and creativity.

The empirical studies contained in this anthology pursue the importance of this promise through African history, through various domains of social life,

through religion, politics and socio-economic circumstances, and through the production of knowledge of and on the continent. As such, it aspires to offer a rich and varied contribution to the current state of the social sciences of Africa where it may serve to confront and question long-standing deterministic views of the African predicament, which often unduly result in African pessimism.

This book is the result of input and support from the institutions that collaborated in the organization of the workshops, discussions and research projects. We would like to mention two workshops that helped to form the basis of this book. The first, entitled 'Agency in Africa; An Old Issue, A New Debate', was held on 16 June 2003 and was organized by the Faculty of Intercultural Philosophy and the Trust Fund of Erasmus University in Rotterdam and the ASC's Agency in Africa theme group. The second workshop, 'The Concept of Agency in African History: A Workshop on Structure and Agency in African History', was held on 27-28 May 2004. The articles presented in this book were first discussed at these workshops and a few others, which came from informal discussions within the theme group itself, were added later. The meetings were made possible by the financial support of the African Studies Centre, the Trust Fund of Erasmus University in Rotterdam, and PALLAS of the Faculty of Arts, Leiden University. We thank everyone who participated in the workshops and the theme-group members for their support, critical remarks and stimulating presence at the meetings. We thank Ann Reeves for her careful and meticulous editing of the book, Mieke Zwart for doing the layout and the African Studies Centre's secretariat for their logistical support. A special word of thanks goes to Francis Nyamnjoh for reading and commenting on the texts, and for his kind contribution in the form of the book's epilogue. Finally, we, the editors, feel indebted to many of our African colleagues and interlocutors without whom the majority of our empirical studies would not have been possible and many of our insights into African realities would not have emerged. Our appreciation of their patience, reflection and promise is beyond what words can express.

The Editors

Social and historical trajectories of agency in Africa: An introduction

Rijk van Dijk, Mirjam de Bruijn and Jan-Bart Gewald

Introduction

By choosing agency as the focal point in a variety of case studies from Africa, *Strength beyond Structure* places itself within the academic tradition that seeks to explore the relationship between agency and specific circumstances in the human experience. Agency is part of the production of certain social formations and the dynamics of interaction between people and between societies and their predicaments and the environment. In our quest for an understanding of the dynamics and social transformations of African situations, a focus on agency leads us to the domains of creativity, inventiveness and reflexivity. It emphasizes the possibilities and opportunities individuals and social groups perceive when faced with the constraints that mark so much of African social life. The case studies provide an alternative view of people and society in Africa by looking at the ways social strength is created in the hope and expectation – perhaps unwittingly and unexpectedly – of negotiating many of the structural limitations encountered in daily life. Each of the contributions in this book provides answers and insights as to the nature of agency in the production of these social formations.

Over the past four decades, all the major social-science paradigms from structuralism to Marxism and world-systems theory that sought to explain the predicament of African societies in terms of structure have been countered and critiqued by perspectives that emphasized human creativity and resilience, in other words ‘agency’. One of the important contributions of the agency perspective to the academic understanding of social change in Africa has been its capacity to explode often victimizing approaches in exchange for a much more balanced understanding of the local processes at work in Africa. The editors have taken this approach as a challenge to a situation that developed around the year 2000 when African pessimism became a dominant perspective in much of the international development literature and in the media attention

the continent received (see for example, Anugwom 2004). The book develops an alternative interpretation of Africa's predicament by emphasizing the strengths of people, organizations and institutions in overcoming the constraining structures that are present in the everyday lives of many Africans today.

The promise of agency: Exploding the structure-actor dichotomy

Our discussions on the concept of agency and its relationship with social transformations were primarily informed by history and anthropology within African studies. In this debate, the essential dilemma for social and human scientists is how to grasp the dichotomy between actor and structure. As is clearly shown by the contributions in this book, it is imperative that this dichotomy – actor vs. structure – is addressed in an attempt to make sense of how people deal with their circumstances, however difficult perceptions of creativity, resilience and reflexivity in such conditions may be. For academia, this difficulty is related to the ways in which social science often presupposes a theory of structure in which the creation of dichotomies seems to be a necessary rhetoric and analytical tool. But it is also related to methodology. Our methodological 'tools' are probably not well enough developed to research the processes and dynamics that evolve in human societies in the negotiation between actors and structures. The papers in this book all rely on empirical research and attempt to grasp what agency means in specific situations. For that reason, the presentation of the case studies is clearly informed by the preoccupations of the different researchers *vis-à-vis* their interlocutors and the circumstances in which they live.

Let us turn briefly to the debates that inspired our thoughts for this book. A view of African history indicates that, no matter how constraining circumstances can be in environmental, economic, political or social-cultural terms, African societies have demonstrated time and again numerous ways in which such conditions are negotiated in often unexpected ways. As Lonsdale (2000) has shown in his historical research, such conditions never become so totalizing or hegemonic that all creativity in countering or coping with the circumstances African societies are subjected to is annihilated. This specific approach to African history successfully negotiated the structuralist approaches of the 1970s and particularly influenced studies of resistance and rebellion in history by focusing on actors and agency. For example, Ranger (1999) and Youé & Stapleton (2001) emphasized the vision from within, highlighting the narratives of the people who lived through these transformations but in the process shaped them and gave them meaning. One cannot simply define a duality between changes from the outside and an actor's responses; on the contrary the inter-linkage and co-production between actors and these changes make for social transformations.

To come to an understanding of these exceedingly complex dynamics, empirical realities need be at the centre of our analysis. This is illustrated in the work of the researchers who have participated in this book. In the historical studies in this volume, the dichotomy between actor and structure has become a tool in the analysis of social transformation. It has become possible to analyze the complex dialectical interplay between actor and structure over time, indeed the emergence of agency in seemingly static and pre-determined conditions. The historical contributions illustrate clearly that there is a continual interplay, a truly dialectical relationship between social thought, as presented by historical actors, and the structure of the material conditions in which they live. It is in this complex interplay, in which neither is ultimately determinant, that agency emerges.

Parallel to this approach in the study of African history, we can situate the development of what has become known as the Manchester School, linked to the Rhodes Livingstone Institute (RLI). Eventually, this School questioned early structuralism and structural functionalism in the study of Africa by turning its attention towards those kinds of social formations that countered or transformed elements of African life that in earlier studies had appeared as essential structures. The Manchester School opened up a perspective on the significance of institutional agency and the way in which African people appeared to produce networks and associations as formations in which this agency could be recognized, and which clearly transformed, for example, the structures of kinship (see van Binsbergen, Chapter 2). The debate around the concept of agency in the actor and structure dichotomy should also be situated in relation to the production of knowledge, in particular relations of power in our world. The RLI vision on the actor-structure relationship can be interpreted as a response to the colonial predicament of Africa in the 1950s and 1960s. In a sense, the actor-structure dichotomy was not only a product of analytical academic thought but also had a political role to play in a power-of-knowledge arena very much dominated by colonial and post-colonial practice, thought and rhetoric.

This birth of a perspective on agency became particularly relevant with the rise of Marxist interpretations of the African condition. The prevailing Marxist analysis of the underdevelopment of Africa in the 1980s was countered by actor-oriented models of development and modernization that emphasized the creation of so-called 'interfaces' as the meeting points where local societies would engage with the Western encroachment of capitalism. This transpired, for instance, in the work of Norman Long (1968, 1989), while Bierschenk *et al.* (2000) took the lead in the French discussions. Interestingly, feminist approaches have also been at the forefront of this discussion as the work of Henrietta Moore and Megan Vaughan (1994), amongst others, demonstrates. Furthermore, religious formations came to be seen as one of these interfaces,

demonstrating the enormous symbolic creativity of African groups in mediating and negotiating this encroachment, also in immaterial terms (Comaroff & Comaroff 1993). In the mid-1990s, the Marxist tide definitively turned: social change came to be understood by looking at actors in terms of their decision-making, livelihoods and access to resources. This change was also visible in policy circles where democracy, decentralization and civil society became central in the discussion. Taking the dominant development of the underdevelopment perspective to task, the research focus on agency helped to put African people back at the centre of development policies (see, for instance, Kaag *et al.* 2004, de Haan & Zoomers 2005). The emphasis in these studies on agency has important consequences for the discussion about the development of Africa where it challenges the internationally recognized development models of the World Bank and other international institutions.

The rise of yet another leading paradigm in a structural understanding of the African predicament, namely that of world-systems theory and later globalization studies, appeared to produce a counter-discourse perspective on agency. Both paradigms would seem to provide a perspective in which Africa is perceived as a victim of processes that combine economic, political and cultural transformations on a global scale. This victimhood is often thereby described in two different trajectories that can be distinguished as 'push' and 'pull'. Firstly, in terms of push, globalization has meant that through such processes as SAPs (Structural Adjustment Programmes), Africa was pushed towards the market, to neo-liberalism, to specific ways of state formation, and to the acceptance of global structures and organizations. In terms of 'pull', globalization has resulted in the opening up of African societies to the global market, i.e. the enormous appeal of consumptivism, the introduction of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies), the media as well as the pull of international travel and migration, particularly to the West.

Other studies, as a reaction to this view of globalization, have demonstrated how a more balanced view of the manner in which African societies were affected by globalization should involve agency and the notion that a process of creative appropriation of globalization was well underway, as was evidenced by new social formations. In these studies, an attempt was made to bridge the actor-structure divide. Studies concentrated on new patterns of mobility, new religious bodies, conflicts over new resources and so forth. These new social patterns have been seen as the outcome of a process of internalization or the appropriation of globalizing tendencies (see van Binsbergen & van Dijk 2004) in a creative process of interaction between actor and structure, where agency has become a key element in the understanding of social change. One example is the spread of Pentecostalism on the African continent where the engagement with global structures of this particular religious ideology is producing other

new forms of global (transnational) relations (van Dijk 2001, Gifford 2004). Another example concerns the relationship between society and the ecological environment. In studies on climate change, an attempt has been made to understand changes in the physical environment in relation to the actor's perceptions of and appropriation of his/her environment and vice versa. The reflection of (perceived) changes in the ecological environment is leading to new patterns in agricultural work and in migration (de Bruijn & van Dijk 2005). In these new relations, social and political inequalities are produced and agency will be contained in new power relations and hierarchies within local communities (Nyamnjoh 2002) and transnational or translocal formations (Clarke 2004, Nyamnjoh 2005).

The examples of the Pentecostal churches, their agency and global engagement demonstrate yet another dimension of our understanding of agency: institutional agency. As we have been able to define agency as a process of negotiation between structures and actors, institutions and social organizations are capable of demonstrating such agency as well. While examples of such institutional agency abound (for example, Amnesty International or Greenpeace; for Africa see, for instance, Draper *et al.* Chapter 9, this volume), the point is that this once more underscores the fact that agency is not tied to the individual actor exclusively and, secondly, that agency is bound up with power, politics and the social hierarchies they produce.

These insights into agency research and analysis in African Studies do not exist in a scientific vacuum but are supported by extensive theoretical reflections. Sociologists such as Giddens (1987), Archer (2003), Ortner (2006) and Emirbayer & Mische (1998) have formulated similar ideas about the relationship between structure and actor and theoretically developed the concept of 'agency'. In studies on the relationship between the environment and society these ideas have also been formulated by more theoretically oriented researchers. An important contribution in this respect has been made by Ingold who emphasized the interaction between the (natural) environment, society and actors as processes of social change where actors and environments mutually define each other and transformations are situated in the dialectical linkages between actors and their environments. Ingold extends this notion of agency by including the animal: '... by taking the animal-in-its environment rather than the self-contained individual (animal) as our point of departure' (Ingold 2000: 186). One cannot understand the environment without the role of actors and vice versa and it is this continuous dialectic engagement between actor and environment that determines agency. In the African situation, the environment is often perceived of as a space of uncertainty in which negotiations, manoeuvring and muddling through are essential aspects of agency (Berner & Trulsson 2000).

If agency is simultaneously produced by actor and structure, it generates a reflexive and negotiating moment between the two. This is what we call a promise of agency, namely the teleological insight that both terms in the dichotomy are products of human action, intelligence, creativity, resilience and organization, and are therefore forever lodged in the making. It is this promise of agency, which results from the juxtaposition of actor and structure, that forms the basis of this anthology. The contributions do not perceive agency as a 'state of being' but as a 'process of becoming'. What was started by the RLI in studying agency, we propose, is still relevant in the context of the present-day juxtapositions to which individuals and communities are subjected on the African continent. If we take, for instance, Mamdani's dichotomized relationship between citizen and subject (Mamdani 1996) the promise of agency that should be put centre stage is the process by which both of these states-of-being are being negotiated by people, groups and institutes in a never-ending process of becoming. It is the promise of being not fully captured by either of the two states that feeds into an analysis of how people and societies produce the trajectories that move out of, mediate or negate these states of being.

In the contributions in this book some important elements of this process of negotiation and the power relations it implies are discussed. Domains of creativity, inventiveness and reflexivity in this negotiation process are interesting fields to explore in relation to the realization of agency in the face of power hierarchies. Negotiations between individuals and their perceived (social and physical) environments and also between people are always informed by relations of power. Not only structures and actors act upon one another, but also the production of agency in various domains of society generates different power (im-) balances. In this process, new inequalities are produced and social hierarchies established. In our opinion this process is central to the forms of transformation that we observe in African societies.

The different chapters in this anthology explore the features of reflexivity and the way it becomes relevant in the economic, political, historical and socio-cultural domains of life of African individuals, groups and societies. The book progresses from the naive view that people in Africa also 'have agency'. We instead emphasize how Africans realize agency, thus moving away from an ill-conceived premise of agency towards a promise of agency, i.e. reflections leading to agency that may or may not become fulfilled. The fact that we need to understand the social, economic and political conditions, constraints, opportunities for and ramifications of reflexivity as strengthening agency means that no easy assumptions can be made about what agency is or about whose hands it is vested in. This can only be demonstrated through detailed empirical research and can never be assumed or taken for granted.

Questioning processes of development

Though being the product of modernist thinking, these perceptions of agency and reflexivity stand in contrast to other modernist assumptions that emphasize or assume the makeability of society. These latter assumptions have not only had a long history in the social sciences in general, but particularly in the study of society in Africa. These included notions of society in which pre-conceived structural patterns of economic, political and socio-cultural life were extremely dominant. Structuralist traditions of social thought prefigured the existence of deep structures that would render the predictability of social behaviour possible. For instance, the envisioning of kinship structures in anthropology made predictable, or so it seemed, the ways in which marriage or inheritance relations are organized in African ethnicities. Likewise the patterning of economic relations, for example in terms of 'peasant' structures, domestic modes of production or livelihoods, seemingly attributes levels of predictability to the ways in which economic production, supply and demand, or even reciprocities appear to be organized. Without such structures predictability becomes impossible. Modernism in the social sciences thus provided the grounds on which projects of social engineering, such as in the form of 'development', could be envisioned on the African continent. It is in this respect remarkable that development theorists – as well as practitioners – have taken on board the concept of agency so forcefully as this runs counter to the idea of makeability and, therefore, counter to interventionist paradigms that assume the possibility of guided if not 'mechanical' transformations of social realities. If agency and reflexivity are related to an unpredictability of outcomes of processes of change that people, groups and societies initiate, the notion of 'development' becomes hard to conceive.

The premise of a structural patterning of social life has seemed to produce individual variation as a deviation from the general rule, a point well recognized and thus contested by the Manchester School. If, for example, a matrilineal system of inheritance predicted ego to inherit from his mother/brother, an inheritance from ego's father would likely be described as 'exceptional', as countervailing to the kinship system and thus anomalous. Yet from the individual's perspective, a reflection on and negotiation of what 'structure' would seem to predict may in fact be a sensible thing to do and be perfectly understandable in the context of prevailing circumstances or in the perception of an individual's understanding of things. In other words, the strength of a realization of agency should be recognized in the ways in which the individual would go about the constraints of such an inheritance system, thus calling for a better understanding of the kind of reflexivity that allows a person, group or institution to take a different course of action.

This problem of individual variation and of an inconclusive ‘hegemony of structures’ is not new to the modernist assumptions in the social sciences yet is precisely what this book is about. It considers how social situations appear to be governed by underlying or overarching principles and predicaments but still produce their own forms of reflexivity, their own forms of thinking about these structures and the actors involved that inform their agency.

The book’s starting point in exploring the meaning of agency in Africa is to acknowledge the fact that the academic and the local interlocutor share in the production of structures and patterns as reflexive thought-constructs. Agency in other words is the on-the-ground refraction of the ways in which academics and locals alike perceive patterns, structures and predicaments that generate the contexts and frameworks in which action can be seen to take place. After all, the unpredictable only appears when looked at from the point of view of structure and pattern, hence from a position that is already abstracted from reality, something that exists at some distance from the lived realities on the ground and therefore has a reflexive dimension to it. The book questions this distance that notions of structure and pattern appears to create and takes as a point of departure the idea that agency is about human capacity, i.e. this motivational strength to produce that reflexive distance, to monitor social behaviour from a reflexive distance, and to come up with opportunities and alternatives that are not ‘automatic’ but are inspired by the ways in which social realities always allow for many paths to be taken.

This search for how agency can be fruitfully studied on the African continent follows on from works such as those by Arens & Karp (1989), Jackson & Karp (1990), Honwana (1996) and Amselle (1998) that have already hinted not at the uniqueness of agency but rather at the underlying strength of processes of reflexivity. While these studies may appear to have come close to a more or less western-informed philosophical reflection of African primordial modes of thought, they have not fallen into that trap. Instead, they have kept an open mind towards the specific African cultural, economic, social and political conditions that have shaped and transformed reflexivities over the course of time. Ethnographic questions such as who these thinkers are, who inspires action, in what terms this reflection is taking place, and what its constraints and opportunities are have all come to the fore. While Africanist research on agency has benefited from philosophical and sociological reflections on the concept, it has nevertheless created a specific ethnographic context for its understanding precisely because reflexivity cannot be taken or understood out of context.

Strength beyond Structure also wants to underscore the fact that such a perspective on social realities in Africa is crucial to our understanding of current processes on the continent. Without being unduly optimistic about prevailing conditions in Africa in political, social or economic terms, the

articles in this book share the notion that social behaviour is nevertheless not fully preconditioned by the structures these conditions appear to create. Social transformations *do* occur and their apparent unpredictability is often the result of an imperfect understanding of how people perceive and reflect on their condition, predicament and underlying structures. Following Ortner (2006) and Archer (2003), we posit that there is no agency without reflexivity; agency is not simply 'acting' but is reflexive, purposeful acting and directed towards a changing of the predicament, structure or condition that has been perceived in the first instance. Automatisms in acting or customary behaviour, such as shaking hands, can therefore not be considered as agency in the way we intend to explore it in this book. Nor can 'actors' be perceived as 'having' agency as often so much of their acting is taken for granted and does not require or involve reflexivity of any kind. What people 'have' is their capacity and their strength to reflect on their situation, structures and actions in an attempt to look beyond their current constraints, however bleak their prospects for improvement may in fact be.

While many of the African societies that are discussed in the following contributions deal with hardships of poverty, violence and uprootedness, we will see that reflexivity never falters; in fact reflexivity travels along the paths of coping, insecurity and destitution as well as along the paths of progress and prosperity. In each of these situations, 'actors' and 'structures' are matters of critical thought and reflection, subject to scrutiny and evaluation, and objects that in a sense are 'good to think with' and inform further steps. It is for this reason that agency prevents the local from being the victim of the global, the traditional being the slave of the modern, or the citizen being the subject of relentless authority. We think that the exploration of reflexivity directly links us to the creativity and inventiveness of actors, and that it is on this that research in agency should focus if it is understood as a process in the making, but also where actor and structure inform each other and in fact are one.

Contributions to the book

Our research was guided by a specific set of questions: it is of course essential to know how people reflect upon situations and how agency subsequently emerges. It is evident that not everyone in a society has the same possibilities of reflection to act out agency. Here we are also confronted with a dilemma for the researcher. The choice as to whose agency to put central in the analysis is important in view of the results and may often be justified both in political and scholarly terms. This problematic of where to locate reflexivity and agency in our studies of African societies is dealt with from the perspective of history in the first three contributions. The first, by Wim van Binsbergen (Chapter 2),

deals with the emergence of the concept of agency as a field of study within the rise of the Manchester School and its influence on important nodes of knowledge production revolving around the RLI in Zambia. Being an important school for the empirical study of societies, including those in Africa, it developed not only an epistemological basis for the concept of agency but also particular methodological ‘solutions’ to the ways in which people’s negotiations with actual situations and circumstances take place, i.e. the so-called case-study method. ‘Following the event’ became a clear strategy for exploring how agency was premeditated upon reflexivity and also how agency reflected reality. For example, negotiations by individuals of kinship, chieftaincy, law and a range of other structures in day-to-day situations became a prime focus for study, allowing an understanding of how agency matters in the continuing shaping of social relations and conditions.

The following two pieces, by Inge Brinkman (Chapter 3) and Jan-Bart Gewalt (Chapter 4), also deal with this problematic of how and where to locate agency from a historical perspective. While they zoom in on the apparent agency of important figures in processes of societal change, and thus seem to locate agency with those who appear to have great visionary power concerning the future state of their respective societies, this is not a sufficient answer. In both cases the notion of the location of agency is not just simply with the ‘important leader’ who was capable of effecting important changes in the form of resistance to colonial rule. Clearly in both cases, i.e. of the Herero cultural hero Hosea Kutako, and the resistance movement led by leaders who presented powerful dreams as sources of resistance in the colonial situation of Angola, reflexivity matters. Yet the two cases demonstrate that in the context of historical study this form of agency in a way remains a ‘black box’ as there is no means of accessing reflexivity other than from what has transpired and been recorded in situations of public speech, contestation and narration. For instance, the story of the ‘noble’ man presented by Gewalt shows how this man’s agency changed in relation to constraints imposed by the political environment but also by his own changing personality. The room for reflexivity and intentionality behind his actions and the decisions he took are not a constant given but change in time and space, yet in this case the way these changed in the face of the colonial predicament will forever remain undisclosed.

While in Inge Brinkman’s chapter, the source of reflection in the mind and narratives of the main leaders of the resistance movement is located in the dreams that inspired their actions, the following three contributions by Wouter van Beek, Julie Ndaya and Thomas Widlok locate agency in important ways ‘outside’ the person in the kind of cultural repertoires people are engaged in. Each describes cultural-ritual settings in which cosmological-ethnic notions of logics of action (see van Beek on the Kapsiki, Chapter 5), religious notions on

the power of spiritual forces (see Ndaya on the Congolese *Combats Spirituels*, Chapter 6) and the cultural grammar of ritual dances (see Widlok on the San, Chapter 7) display forms indicating how and along which lines agency is culturally premeditated. These three chapters suggest that, to be able to become reflexive, culture must and does provide the modalities, the material and the repertoires to do so. In other words, cosmologies, spirits and rituals appear as sites that are good to ‘think with’. Reflexivity thus requires an external source or at least a source such as that of the Holy Spirit, and its inspiration for leadership, in the case of Julie Ndaya’s contribution, is perceived to come from elsewhere yet is capable of influencing and penetrating a person’s internal thoughts, ideas and even identity. The clear advantage – if not challenge – of these contributions that locate agency in local cultural repertoires of causation is that they provide an emic understanding of these processes. The meaning of agency and its underlying reflexivity are not the prerogative of western academia but, as these pieces intend to demonstrate, are very much lodged in the ways in which cultural patterns and repertoires exist of how reflexivity is experienced and agency is formulated and expressed.

The next group of contributions by Otrude Moyo, Malcolm Draper, Marja Spierenburg & Harry Wels, and Gertie Janssen locate and explore agency not in the context of the seemingly powerful or their local cultural patterning but in the context of the powerless or the marginal confronting external domains of economic-political power (see Moyo on Zimbabwe, Chapter 8), the power of international organizations and environmental policies (see Draper *et al.* on parks in South Africa, Chapter 9) or in the face of Western yet failing biomedical powers (see Janssen on reproductive practices in Niger, Chapter 10). Much of what we could call agency research has been inspired by the idea of giving a voice to the voiceless (the poor, women, children, etc.) and has been justified in scholarly terms by the fact that very little research has been done on these ‘forgotten’ groups to provide a better understanding of reality. These contributions allow the reader to know more about people’s ideas, projects, hopes and fears. An interesting insight from the contributions is that the position of the interviewees with regard to their agency may change over time according to the different circumstances people find themselves in. These contributions demonstrate that in some instances acting out one’s agency is easier than in others, particularly if political, economic, environmental or social conditions have become so stringent and limiting that reflexivity becomes almost entirely captured by the structures that prevail. These contributions explore the limits of reflexivity. Do people indeed have the ability and chance to express and give form to their own wishes and fantasies or are they limited by the structures that constitute part of their social world? These structures do not only exist outside these actors but are co-created as a reaction to others and by their own agency.

This idea of structure being created by collective agency brings us to a contradictory feature of structure, as was positioned by Giddens (1987): it is both enabling and constraining for an individual's or a group's actions and agency. The same question can be asked about agency itself. Does it provide people with possibilities and opportunities or does it limit social action? In the case of Zimbabwe's urban citizens (see Moyo, Chapter 8) or in the establishment of nature parks that negate the local people's interests in terms of land rights, produce and markets (see Draper *et al.*, Chapter 9), the impression given is that agency is curtailed to a certain extent by socio-economic circumstances, although these invite the actors to reflect on their situation and, within the limits of their condition, initiate actions that in turn may alter their circumstances. In these specific cases however, this is often in vain. For Janssen (Chapter 10), who has researched practices in childbirth and reproductive health in Niger, women are faced with a number of choices and challenges as to how the birth takes place. Based on various cultural notions of silence and secrecy, there is a great deal of group pressure towards giving birth in solitude despite the availability of care, help and support locally and in small bio-medical clinics. But the way agency is expressed for mothers-to-be makes it powerful and restrictive, limiting the possibilities of reflection from becoming the source of other kinds of action. Indeed, one can be curtailed in one's agency: agency is never neutral but is embedded in social, cultural and political ideas that are linked and developed through the groups a person belongs to.

The issues raised lead us to one important conclusion: agency in itself may also repress the agency of others. The problem is whose agency is dominant and who finally defines whose agency can be part of the process of transformation. Thus analysis of social change and the role of agency require an examination of the political and power relations in the societies concerned. We can also refer to the interface between agencies. Different agencies participate in any one process of transformation. The confrontation between these agencies, their oppositions and their connections are relevant to understanding the direction of change.

We should also consider whether agency is situated in individuals alone or whether it can be of a collective nature. Is this even relevant? People are often encouraged, if not forced, to develop their agency. Where do they find the inspiration? In their community or from the context in which they live? The individual is the most basic level at which agency can be found, yet agency is always relational and therefore also transpires in group relations. The final three contributions, by Mirjam de Bruijn, Lotte Pelckmans and Rijk van Dijk, all demonstrate how agency becomes the product of a certain group identity, either as marginalized street children (see de Bruijn, Chapter 11), as a category in a social hierarchy that can be called 'nobles' as opposed to slaves (see Pelckmans,

Chapter 12), or as the stranger and foreigner for whom a religious identity provide the means to secure a place in society (see van Dijk, Chapter 13). These contributions demonstrate that although these groups' agencies appear to be lodged and limited in clear structures of citizenship, hierarchy and identity, their reflexivity leads them to explore the production of new structures. Street life thus becomes a structure of opportunity irrespective of its harshness, slave relations provide structures of economic and social positioning also in trans-migrant situations where these relations end up in the diaspora, and stranger-hood becomes embedded in new religious structures of Pentecostalism as a road to citizenship in its own terms. Should we not also try to understand agency as an emic theory of causations as proposed by Gell (1998: 19). Do the street youth, the Ghanaian hairdressers, the Kapsiki, the Angolan soldiers and the church members have their own ideas about the form and limits of their agency? It becomes clear in the cases presented in this volume that these ideas about agency are strongly related to the confrontations that people have in their lives. For instance, the interventions by NGOs in the case of the nature parks and the street children in N'djamena have changed the ideas of self and of the possibilities of negotiating change. The same is true for confrontation in circumstances that are beyond the reach of people in the first instance, as is the case for the Congolese in their churches, or those with HIV/AIDS in Botswana. It is in confrontation with these that people come to define their own possibilities and agency. The strength of reflexivity apparently lies in its challenge and contestation.

Through this, we have come full-circle from exploring agency as an idea of opportunity, action and transformation, whether it be in emic terms of the local and whether or not it is limited by external structural powers, to a consideration of how new structures emerge as a result of agency.

References

- Amselle, J-L. 1998, *Mestizo Logics: Anthropology of Identity in Africa and Elsewhere*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Anugwom, E.F. 2004, 'African Social Sciences and Development in the New Century: Challenges and Prospects', *African Development Review* 16 (2): 399-414.
- Archer, M.S. 2003, *Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Arens, W. & I. Karp (eds) 1989, *Creativity of Power: Cosmology and Action in African Societies*, Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Berner, B. & P. Trulsson (eds) 2000, *Manoeuvring in an Environment of Uncertainty, Structural Change and Social Action in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Bierschenk, T., J-P. Chauveau & J-P. Olivier de Sardan (eds) 2000, *Courtiers en Développement: Les Villages Africains en Quête de Projets*, Paris: Karthala.

- Clarke, K.M. 2004, *Mapping Yoruba Networks: Power and Agency in the Making of Transnational Communities*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Comaroff, J. & J. Comaroff (eds) 1993, *Modernity and its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- de Bruijn, M. & H. van Dijk 2005, 'Introduction: Climate and Society in Central and South Mali', in: M. de Bruijn, H. van Dijk, M. Kaag & K. van Til, *Sahelian Pathways, Climate Variability and Society in Central and Southern Mali*, Leiden: ASC Research Report 78, pp. 1-16.
- de Haan, L.J. & A. Zoomers 2005, 'Exploring the Frontier of Livelihood Research', *Development and Change* 36 (1): 27-47.
- Emirbayer, M. & A. Mische 1998, 'What is Agency?', *American Journal of Sociology* 103 (4): 962-1023.
- Gell, A. 1998, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Giddens, A. 1987, *Social Theory and Modern Sociology*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gifford, P. 2004, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy*, London: Hurst & Co.
- Honwana, A.M.R. 1996, *Spiritual Agency and Self-renewal in Southern Mozambique*, London: School of Oriental and African Studies.
- Ingold, T. 2000, *The Perception of the Environment, Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, London: Routledge.
- Jackson, M. & I. Karp (eds) 1990, *Personhood and Agency: The Experience of Self and Other in African Cultures*, Washington/Stockholm: Smithsonian Institution Press/Almqvist & Wiksell.
- Kaag, M. *et al.* 2004, 'Ways Forward in Livelihood Research', in: D. Kalb, W. Pantser & H. Siebers (eds), *Globalization and Development: Themes and Concepts in Current Research*, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, pp. 49-74.
- Long, N. 1968, *Social Change and the Individual: A Study of the Social and Religious Responses to Innovation in a Zambian Rural Community*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Long, N. 1989, *Encounters at the Interface: Perspective on Social Discontinuities in Rural Development*, Wageningen: Pudoc.
- Lonsdale, J.M. 2000, 'Agency in Tight Corners: Narrative and Initiative in African History', *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 13 (1): 5-16.
- Mamdani, M. 1996, *Citizen and Subject, Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Colonialism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Moore, H.L. & M. Vaughan 1994, *Cutting Down Trees: Gender, Nutrition and Agricultural Change in the Northern Province of Zambia 1890-1990*, London & Portsmouth, NH: James Currey/Heinemann.
- Nyamnjoh, F.B. 2002, 'A Child is One Person's Only in the Womb': Domestication, Agency and Subjectivity in the Cameroonian Grassfields', in: R. Werbner (ed.) *Postcolonial Subjectivities in Africa*, London: Zed Books, pp. 111-38.
- Nyamnjoh, F.B. 2005, 'Images of Nyongo amongst Bamenda Grassfielders in Whiteman Kontri', *Citizenship Studies* 9 (3): 241-69.
- Ortner, S.B. 2006, *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power and the Acting Subject*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Ranger, T.O. 1999, *Voices from the Rocks: Nature, Culture and History in the Matapos Hills of Zimbabwe*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

- van Binsbergen, W. & R. van Dijk (eds) 2004, *Situating Globality: African Agency in the Appropriation of Global Culture*, Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers.
- van Dijk, R. 2001, 'Time and Transcultural Technologies of the Self in the Ghanaian Pentecostal Diaspora', in: A. Corten & R. Marshall-Fratani (eds), *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America*, London: Hurst & Company, pp. 216-34.
- Youé, C.P. & T.J. Stapleton (eds) 2001, *Agency and Action in Colonial Africa: Essays for John E. Flint*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Manchester as the birth place of
modern agency research:
The Manchester School explained
from the perspective of Evans-
Pritchard's book *The Nuer*¹

Wim van Binsbergen

*Taking agency not as enactment but as denial or compensation of structure, this chapter identifies the Manchester School as a principal context in which agency came to revolutionize structural-functionalism. Against the background of the evolving study of South Central African society, the argument highlights Manchester's main methodological points by a thought experiment: how differently would Manchester have written Evans-Pritchard's *The Nuer* (a foundation text for anthropology)? This brings out Manchester themes like the absence of an ecological perspective, the study of custom and kinship, society's articulation into constituent groups as the basis of social organization, conflict, social process and an ethnographic*

¹ This chapter is a substantially revised translation of a chapter from Wim van Binsbergen: *Van Vorstenhof tot mediaproduct: Een culturele antropologie van Afrika, vooral Zambia* (1995/2006). I am indebted to the ASC and the EUR Trust Fund for financially contributing to this intellectual event; to Jan-Bart Gewald for his editorial advice; to the Victoria University, Manchester, UK, and the Institute for African Studies, University of Zambia, Lusaka for major institutional contributions to my anthropological work; to Richard Werbner and to the memory of Jaap van Velsen, and to many other members of the Manchester School, to my research participants and adoptive kinsmen among the Zambian Nkoya people and in various South Central African settings; and to André Köbben, Douwe Jongmans, Wim Wertheim, Bonno Thoden van Velzen and Jeremy Boissevain. See also: http://www.shikanda.net/ethnicity/illustrations_manch/manchest.htm

method (extended case analysis) capable of capturing such a process. Thus articulating the agency revolution Manchester brought, the argument chides Manchester's lesser ability to cope with urban and colonial situations and, in general, with disempowering macro-level processes, in the light of which the emphasis on local-level agency seems misplaced.

Introduction

At least two definitional modalities may be discerned in the approach to agency. The relationship between agency and structure can be conceived as one of neutral but necessary complementarity: structure can only exist to the extent to which it is brought to life in concrete acts by concrete actors. However, according to another much more attractive definition of agency, agency is not so much the coming to life of social structure through actors' concrete social behaviour but the freedom that actors take, in their interaction, to manoeuvre between the stipulations set by structure. Agency then becomes not so much the enactment but the denial, the compensation, the improvisation beyond structure. In this chapter, the emphasis is on the second approach.

My contribution here to the study of agency will mainly be in the field of the history of ideas, more specifically the development of social-science theory and method in the twentieth century, with special emphasis on Africanist anthropological research. Until the second half of the nineteenth century, North Atlantic intellectual tradition derived from the converging influences of the Judaeo-Christian and the Greco-Roman tradition, a largely individual-centred image of man. Religion, ethics and morality, aesthetics, as well as dominant models of social, political and legal action and accountability mainly emphasized individual agency before others and before God. 'The social' was a category that had to be specifically invented and installed in the intellectual toolbox of the West. And the emergence and subsequent professionalization of the social sciences had the effect of eclipsing earlier 'models of man' (cf. Simon 1957) based on individual agency, for example, those derived from dominant forms of *belles lettres*, historiography and Christian theology. Instead, a sociologicistic paradigm was favoured in which agency was systematically underplayed and overarching, blindly dictating social structure was welcomed as the new paradigm. Classic structural-functionalism in the social sciences, including anthropology, during the 1930s and 1940s marks the triumph, albeit short-lived, of this paradigm.

This chapter illustrates how that paradigm was effectively challenged by the Manchester School – the work of Max Gluckman and his associates – whose

main inspiration lay in the apparently loosely structured rural societies of South Central Africa in late-colonial times (the mid-twentieth century) with their subsequent urban developments. Although agency scarcely appears as an explicit concept in the Manchester conceptual toolkit, my argument will demonstrate how the school of social research in fact amounted to the modern revindication of agency research. Therefore, a detailed examination of the theoretical and methodological position of Manchester will bring out many crucial points of agency research that will remain relevant even decades after the effective demise of Manchester as a coherent intellectual movement.

The ethnographic study of South Central Africa

Within a given culture area, social research often displays a tendency to cluster, thematically and methodologically, into a more or less distinct school. In such cases, specific approaches and theoretical perspectives are developed that may often also be applicable to other parts of the world but which in those other parts determine the general signature of regional studies much less than in the region in which they were originally conceived. Richard Fardon (1990) has called this tendency ‘localizing strategies’. This effect is particularly clear in the study of South Central Africa. In this region, a large group of anthropologists came to be known as the ‘Manchester School’, around the figure of Max Gluckman who was once described as the ‘focal point of our network’.² The majority of these researchers were working at the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in colonial Zambia, which shortly after being founded by Godfrey Wilson came under the leadership of Gluckman (cf. Brown 1973). With the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute as their base, these researchers carried out fieldwork in Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Congo-Kinshasa and Mozambique. Nearly all of them had read anthropology at the Victoria University in Manchester or held academic appointments there. As a group, they can boast several achievements. Through their creative pioneering work they put the societies of South Central Africa on the map ethnographically, in both their rural and urban aspects, in the late-colonial and early post-colonial eras. And in the course of these ethnographic activities, they developed a methodological and theoretical perspective which, at the time, was revolutionary and allowed them to concentrate not on structure but on agency. They could thus do better justice to the exceptionally flexible and unstructured (in Clyde Mitchell’s terms, ‘inchoate’) forms of social organization that they encountered in the region. In this way, they were amongst

² Mitchell (1969) used these words to dedicate the edited collection entitled *Social Networks in Urban Situations* to Max Gluckman.

the first to take their distance from excessively schematic, abstract, mechanical and totalizing structural-functional models, such as those that had been developed in the course of the 1930s and 1940s within British social anthropology, which was the international standard at the time. The Manchester School fell apart in the 1970s but present-day anthropology and sociology of development would be unimaginable without Manchester, even though many other inspirations, such as neo-Marxism, structuralism, configuration sociology and post-modernism, have made significant contributions to these fields.

The methodological and theoretical edifice of the Manchester School was designed initially to grasp the centrality of the participants' agency within the little institutionalized, and constantly changing social relations they found to be typical of South Central Africa. This may be one of the reasons why that edifice in itself is not very formalized. Existing attempts to characterize Manchester³ do indicate themes and variations, but these attempts concentrate on individual intellectual products, their specific authors and the ethnographic situations to which they refer. Such an approach may be in line with what I describe in the course of the present argument, as the emphasis on narrative historicity within the Manchester School but any study in the history of ideas should, of course, seek both to reflect the ideas under discussion and to transcend them in the light of other complementary approaches. In the present study I systematically evoke a number of characteristics of the Manchester School. Here I will use a thought experiment, on the basis of the idea that the essential characteristics of a particular phenomenon are most clearly brought out when contrasted with other similar phenomena. Therefore I find it useful to look at 'Manchester' from the perspective of what is, without a doubt, the most classic and the most influential product of British social anthropology: the book *The Nuer* (pronounced: *Noo-áir*) by E.E. Evans-Pritchard. It entails the description of the ecology and the social organization of a group of Nilotic-speaking pastoralists in southern Sudan, and is based on fieldwork conducted in the 1930s. If the Nuer ethnographic material had been collected from a Manchester perspective, if in other words *The Nuer* had been written by Max Gluckman, Clyde Mitchell, Elizabeth Colson, Victor Turner, Jaap van Velsen or any of the other big names at

³ For instance, Kuper (1975), van Teeffelen (1978), van Donge (1985), Werbner (1984), Kapferer (1987), Thoden van Velzen (1965), Geschiere & Raatgever (1985), van Binsbergen (1985), Schumacher (1994, 2001) and Schmidt (n.d.), and a long series of introductory and synthesizing texts, mainly by Gluckman and Mitchell. It is remarkable that Gluckman scarcely features and the Manchester School not at all in Harris's (1969) authoritative history of anthropology.

Manchester, what would have been the outcome? What principal characteristics of Manchester would we apply for such a thought experiment?

Even several decades after the demise of Manchester, these questions retain a certain topicality. In the first place this is because the rural societies and the people's kinship relations of Zambia and elsewhere in South Central Africa have largely retained many of the basic characteristics sketched in the ethnographic portraits produced by the Manchester authors, despite the massive rate of social change since the middle of the twentieth century, the heyday of 'Manchester'. In second place, Manchester continues to function broadly as a centre of inspiration among anthropologists, not least in the Netherlands, where the research work of Africanists like Köbben, Thoden van Velzen, and Schoffeleers has owed much to 'Manchester'.⁴

British social anthropology in the 1930s⁵

By the middle of the twentieth century, the British School, including names such as E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Meyer Fortes and Daryll Forde, had come to dominate anthropology and the study of Africa. At the time, the works of these authors were only a few decades old but had already acquired classic status and such a reputation of brilliance as to eclipse the many works of anthropology that had preceded them in their own country and in North America, France, Germany, Poland and the Netherlands. The most important members of this group were E.E. Evans-Pritchard⁶ (with research among the Azande, Shilluk, Nuer and Anuak), Meyer Fortes⁷ (the ethnographer of the West African Tallensi) and Daryll Forde⁸ (a specialist on the Yakö in West Africa). At the time, Max Gluckman (1911-1975) was a young anthropologist who had just completed fieldwork among the South African Zulu. A good impression of the first ten years of modern, i.e. structural-functional, participant-observation-based Africanist anthropology can be gleaned from *African Political Systems*,

⁴ My own link with Manchester was even stronger – at the University of Zambia in the 1970s and in Manchester from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s.

⁵ Cf. Kuper (1975), Spencer (2000), Bohannan & Glazer (1988).

⁶ Evans-Pritchard (1934, 1937, 1940, 1945, 1948, 1949, 1951a, 1951b, 1956, 1962, 1965, 1967a, 1967b, 1969, 1974), Evans-Pritchard *et al.* (1934), Fortes & Evans-Pritchard (1969/1940), Beidelman (1974).

⁷ Fortes (1936, 1945, 1949a, 1949b, 1953a, 1953b, 1957, 1959, 1961, 1962, 1969a, 1969b, 1970, 1987), Fortes & Dieterlen (1965), Fortes & Evans-Pritchard (1969/1940).

⁸ Forde (1934, 1950, 1953, 1956, 1970), Forde & Kaberry (1969), Forde & Radcliffe-Brown (1950).

edited by Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, with its contributions from the two editors and Gluckman, Schapera, Richards, Oberg, Nadel and Wagner.

The central problems and aims of British anthropology in the 1930s and 1940s may be characterized as follows. The first was simply to continue mapping out humankind ethnographically. The young discipline of anthropology, now affirming itself as a separate field, was only too well aware of the limitations of the older material available that had often been produced not by professional ethnologists but by colonial civil servants, missionaries and travellers. Moreover, for many part of the worlds even such pre-scientific ethnographic reports were simply lacking. In this period, plans began to be made for one of the most ambitious projects in Africanist anthropology: the production, under the editorship of Daryll Forde, of the *Ethnographic Atlas of Africa*, which would summarize the old and new ethnographic material in a systematic, concise description of all the known cultural areas of the African continent.

A method for scientific ethnography was designed for this ethnographic task, with prolonged fieldwork as its basis. The assumption⁹ was that with a combination of many months, even several years, of goal-orientated participation and observation within the local community under study, the fieldworker would gain insight into connections within the local social organization. This would have eluded him/her if the stay had been shorter or a more distant approach to the local population or a less structured method for the collection and administration of ethnographic data had been used.

To create a foundation for such a structured method of data collection, it was necessary to design a series of interconnected technical terms that would serve to process, systematize, report and compare ethnographic data. This was the period when theories on kinship (around such core concepts as lineage, descent, segmentation), marriage, political systems, and (at a higher level of abstraction) 'institutions', 'structure' and 'system' began to play a leading role in the collection, ordering and interpretation of ethnographic data.

Moreover, these core concepts become more elaborated and integrated, with the result that gradually, as a backdrop to more concrete ethnographic studies, we begin to discern the beginning of a social anthropological theory of societies in general. It was the lack of such an explicit and sophisticated theory that marked the earlier paradigms in anthropology and that made them weak and indefensible in the face of the emergence of structural functionalism. In the theoretical endeavours of this period, the emphasis lay on total, whole societies,

⁹ Which has severe limitations and epistemological flaws, cf. van Binsbergen (2003a, especially Chapters 10 and 15).

which were conceived as more or less isolated, integrated and internally structured wholes: peoples, tribes, kingdoms. Only much later was the idea of such unity to be systematically doubted in modern (post-1960s) anthropology, which has few illusions as to the proclaimed unity of ethnic, cultural, economic and political unit. Modern anthropology stresses the fragmentation of the units of social organization, their lack of coherence and the permeability of their boundaries *vis-à-vis* one another, and it problematizes the wider frameworks of which these social units are part at the regional, national and global level.

In the description of social units, classic anthropology of the 1930s mainly relied on the idea of an underlying ‘value system’ which allegedly was shared by all participants, i.e. by all members of the society under study. To designate such a value system, American anthropology of this period had adopted the concept of ‘culture’, which was originally launched with this specific meaning by the pioneer British anthropologist Tylor (1832-1917). However British anthropologists continued to prefer the concept of ‘custom’, which was not only considerably vaguer than culture, but also had unmistakable connotations of othering, of primitiveness. Culture might still be a characteristic of the middle to upper classes to which most anthropological academics themselves belonged, but custom was predominantly something others had: those whom we study but who are essentially different from us. But designated by whatever term, the social unity that the term was meant to evoke was primarily conceived as a matter of ideas. Culture, internalized in the minds of people and expressed in their language, their explicit and conscious rules of behaviour, was supposed to constitute a more or less uniform and immutable script whose concrete actualization, performance and enactments would then reside in the interaction of people in economic, political and religious contexts.

So in quite a short period, anthropology had moved from the individual’s needs, as stressed by Malinowski. A double layer of the total social order and the web of specific social relations had been imposed and had made individual agency, from a central point of departure, into a problematic residual category.

For the study of agency, this theoretical position had far-reaching, potentially negative implications. One accepted definition of agency is precisely in terms of such concrete actualizations, through which the members of a society, whilst interacting, give concrete substance and shape to their social institutions. From the structural-functionalist perspective dominating British social anthropology in its classic years (1930s-1960s), agency therefore was dictated by, and subservient to, social structure.

In addition to the stress on normative integration that was supposed to dominate individual social behaviour, there was, in British social anthropology of the classic period, an increasing awareness of the interrelationship and the

interdependence of patterns of social relations within a society's various institutional sectors. This gave rise to the notion that what held a society together was not only normative or ideational integration but also such integration as that resulting from the coordination of social relations in various societal institutional sectors. The fieldwork undertaken between the two world wars still has a highly exploratory nature in this respect as it leads to hints or proposals for anthropological theory, to hypotheses that as yet had not been put to any strict empirical test systematically or methodically.

Finally there is the link with the colonial administration. Relations between anthropology and colonialism constitute a topic that was at the forefront of critical attention in the 1960s and early 1970s.¹⁰ And today we witness a new cycle of reflection on this, stemming from our fear lest the production of anthropological knowledge become subservient to neo-colonial relationships around bilateral and multilateral intercontinental aid, to such Structural Adjustment Programmes as the World Bank imposes, and will simply be reduced to just one of the cultural forms of global dominance or hegemony in the context of globalization processes that are engendered by capitalist maximization strategies, and that are sustained in the South by (the desire for) mass consumption and the electronic media.

Characteristically, colonial anthropology described local, non-western societies as more or less closed and self-contained political units of which the local representatives of the colonial power did not take part. The latter remain out of scope even though these local societies were unmistakably incorporated in a worldwide economic and political colonial order. In fact, of course, colonial civil servants, the military and European entrepreneurs served the linkage between the local socio-political units and that global order, and such incorporation must inevitably have had a massive and decisive effect upon the distribution of power in the local socio-political units as early as the 1930s, even if these local political units often managed to retain a semblance of traditional intactness for decades or longer. Thus political anthropological studies from this period present us with a double fiction:

- The suggestion is that the local society is closed into itself, also politically, whereas that society's forceful incorporation in the colonial state was one of its principal features.
- The claim is also that that local society is 'traditional' and essentially unaltered, and that the political processes taking place in the 'ethnographic present' (the 1930s-1940s) are still almost identical to what they were prior to the establishment of colonial rule while colonial incorporation had effectively disempowered pre-existing

¹⁰ Cf. Leclerc (1972), Copans (1974, 1975) and Buijtenhuijs (1972a, 1972b).

local and regional power structures, thus inevitably destroying the pre-colonial fabric of social life.

It would be anachronistic to attribute these obvious major shortcomings to anthropologists' bad faith. Instead, the reason for these shortcomings was the absence of a theory of complex societies which would have made it possible to grasp, within one analytical framework: (a) 'traditional' (i.e. neo-traditional, and traditionalizing) local politics; (b) the colonial state; and (c) global imperialist and capitalist relationships.

The Nuer as a book

In the absence of such a theory (whose construction was to be one of the important achievements of modern anthropology after the 1960s), one can hardly blame anthropologists for not seeing through the fiction of the persistence of tradition, even though such a fiction was the very cornerstone of their own professional identity. In second place, among many anthropologists of the classic period there was a demonstrable intention to adduce, to the scientific, national and governmental forums of their time and age, such facts and analyses as would not exactly put an end to the penetration of colonial powers in non-western local communities but would at least reduce the unnecessary misunderstanding and arrogance attending that penetration. (The anthropologists' own presence in those communities was usually predicated on such colonial state penetration!) The implied aim of many anthropologists was to demonstrate that African societies had their own order, logic and beauty (cf. Evans-Pritchard 1937, Gluckman 1956) and that their members (who often had become very close to the anthropologist during the latter's fieldwork) were in principle the equals of Europeans. Very few intellectuals at the time were capable of a more radical position beyond the ethical revisionist vindication just described. The time was not yet ripe for anthropologists to adopt a more militant position and engage in head-on confrontation with the status quo of colonial governments and colonial entrepreneurs; let alone were they ready to investigate the inbuilt hegemonic tendencies of their own discipline and to seriously engage in a self-critical analysis of the intercontinental politics of knowledge.

Many of the British social anthropologists' themes in the classic period are exemplified in Evans-Pritchard's book *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People*, on which we concentrate in the next few sections. This first appeared in the same year (1940) as the monumental collective work *African Political Systems* edited by Meyer Fortes

and Evans-Pritchard. By this time Evans-Pritchard had already made a name for himself with *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (1937).

The Nuer is the first scientific study of the Nuer people and their social, political and economic life, on which a number of other authors had already produced unsystematic accounts. There is a great deal of emphasis in *The Nuer* on how the data were collected, and this has made the introductory chapter one of the most frequently quoted passages in the literature on anthropological fieldwork. There is a clear concern with the development of an anthropological conceptual toolbox. Concepts are used with great care and with precise definition. Perhaps the clarity, the logical consistence and the classical balance of the brilliantly structured argument are among the book's greatest and most lasting values. In this way *The Nuer* is, as the author himself claims (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 261), an attempt to arrive at a synthesis of anthropological theory of political organization. The central problem of the book is the following:

... to what extent is it possible to discuss the political institutions of an African people as if these constituted a distinct order of phenomena, with as little as possible reference to this people's patterns of kinship and domestic organisation at the lowest, i.e. the most immediate, level of face-to-face contacts between members of one and the same local community. (cf. pp. 190-91)

The book is, in other words, an experiment in the theory of political systems, as much as it is a highly systematized and aggregate ethnography of a particular people. Finally, *The Nuer* also arose from a colonial context: it was written at the instigation of the colonial government of the Sudan.

Without a doubt *The Nuer* is the most widely read and most influential professional anthropological text on Africa. This is for a number of reasons including the classical beauty of its language and composition, and its high level of abstraction, but primarily because the book is the first fully-fledged elaboration of the British programme of structural-functional anthropology in the field of social organization. *The Nuer* has remained the – mildly and politely criticized – point of reference for younger generations of anthropologists who, on the basis of new fieldwork and new, less formalist theoretical reflection, have continued to ponder the segmentary structural principles – usually implicit and largely imperceptible – of the Nilotic societies and other so-called ‘acephalous’ groups (i.e. those lacking formal leadership).¹¹ The book is prescribed reading in almost any introductory curriculum in the field of Africanist anthropology, even though the society that it describes barely exists any more in that form (if only

¹¹ For instance, Sigrist (1967), Middleton & Tait (1958), Johnson (1980), (1982); James (1988), Simonse (1990) and Hutchinson (1985, 1992, 1996).

because of the devastating effects of decades of civil war in southern Sudan during the post-colonial era) and even though the more recent Nilotic anthropology has become increasingly sceptical as to the possibility that Evans-Pritchard's abstractions could ever (notably in the ethnographic present of the 1930s) have been closer to reality than they are today.

The first two chapters of *The Nuer* deal with 'Interest in Cattle' and 'Oecology': the material basis of local social life. Here the author apparently concurs with the Malinowski line, though he does not explicitly make the link. The ecological activities that determine the material survival of local society are in the hands of the members of small local communities. These may comprise a varying number of people depending on the time of the year. The local communities are composed of houses, clusters of houses (forming the homestead), and clusters of homesteads (forming the hamlet). But even at maximal numerical strength, these local communities are not capable of entirely looking after themselves; they are not fully autarkic. In other words, the ecology demands a form of organization that transcends the local communities:

(the tendency to migrate (such as existed in the past), the seasonal transhumance of cattle as is being practiced today, and moreover the desire to replenish the herds that have been decimated by Dinka raids – all of this contributes to the political importance of the units above the village level; for both economic and military reasons it is difficult for villages to retreat into autarkic isolation). (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 93)¹²

The details of this relation between ecology and the wider social structure are masterfully described in the famous third chapter 'Time and Space'. In the next three chapters entitled 'The Political System', 'The Lineage System' and 'The Age-set System', the author sketches the wider political structure that makes the linkages between the local groups possible. Here Evans-Pritchard is wholly within the line of Radcliffe-Brown, and the book's introduction stresses the extent of Evans-Pritchard's indebtedness to him. In *The Nuer*, Evans-Pritchard deliberately refrains from describing in any detail the internal structure of the local groups; that is a task he had reserved for his later book *Kinship and Marriage among the Nuer* (Evans-Pritchard 1951), and for a whole series of other, shorter publications (cf. Beidelman 1974) which never attained the fame and classic beauty of *The Nuer*.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to indicate in detail the specific forms which the wider political system takes among the Nuer, and to specify which significance Evans-Pritchard attributes in this connection to the tribe, the

¹² Evans-Pritchard (1940: 93). (The brackets indicate that the quotation is merely a paraphrase.)

lineage, the clan and the age sets. However, I must say a few words about the role of the feud or blood revenge. Evans-Pritchard defines the feud as ('a protracted mutual enmity between local communities within the same tribe').¹³ Conflicts are the order of the day, and usually imply physical violence. In the case of violent conflict within the local community, people take, through a particular choice of weapons, precautions in order to prevent a fatal outcome. However, manslaughter does occur between different local communities. There is a ('moral obligation to settle conflicts by arbitration') in a bid to bring about reconciliation instead of allowing a feud to arise or continue. On the other hand, one of the pillars of the lineage organization is the obligation to revenge the murder of a patrilineal kinsman (technically known in kinship anthropology as an 'agnate'). The institution of the leopard-skin headman makes it possible to accommodate these two contradictory tendencies and to bring about reconciliation instead of feud. These headmen (and traditionally Nuer society did not know any other type) have no factual material or military power and no great authority, but what they do have is a special ritual link with the earth on the basis of which they can curse people. After manslaughter, the perpetrator takes refuge with the leopard-skin headman, and as long as he remains in the latter's sanctuary he cannot be killed. The victim's kinsmen lie in ambush in case the perpetrator ventures outside his sanctuary. Meanwhile the headman ritually cleanses the killer,¹⁴ and sets in motion the reconciliation process: he admonishes the victim's kin to show forgiveness and opens negotiations as to the number of cattle that the killer's kinsmen will have to pay as compensation. As soon as this is settled, which usually takes a few weeks, the perpetrator is free to return home, and although some general resentment is likely to linger, no counter-killing will ensue.

Evans-Pritchard stresses that the greater the social distance between the local groups involved, the lesser the chance that the conflict will be solved in this manner. The relationships between distant groups is characterized by feud, whereas groups living in each other's vicinity share many local ecological interests and this gives them a reason to strive towards the rapid ending of any major conflict.

¹³ Evans-Pritchard (1940: 150). (The brackets indicate that the quotation is merely a paraphrase.)

¹⁴ In a manner only too familiar from Ancient Greek myths, where such cleansing is of the order of the day; heroes like Heracles and Peleus submitted to it; the latter even reputedly killed Neleus because of his refusal to cleanse him – which proved Neleus's point, albeit posthumously.

It is time to proceed to a discussion of the Manchester School and of its founder and leader, Max Gluckman, which will enable us to discuss that branch of anthropology in detail from the perspective of *The Nuer*.

The Manchester School

Max Gluckman acquired considerable esteem in professional circles on the basis of his PhD on the Zulu (which remained unpublished, as do so many Anglo-Saxon doctoral dissertations) and his articles based on the Zulu material.¹⁵ In 1940 he started working as a researcher with the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in Lusaka, Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), which had been founded in 1938. Gluckman started to do fieldwork in Barotseland, now Zambia's Western Province. Here he studied the economic and political structure; as an individual researcher (i.e. regardless of what he contributed to the work of others through his theoretical stimulus and institutional coordination) he became especially known for his work on the Barotse legal system, namely *The Judicial Process among the Barotse* (first published in 1957) and *The Ideas in Barotse Jurisprudence*.

Very soon he became the director of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute. He managed to lay the foundation for the institute's subsequent development into a world-famous centre of anthropological research through his appointments policy, his own synthetic publications, his influence on the institute's journal (*Human Problems in British Central Africa/Rhodes-Livingstone Journal*, which after Zambia's independence in 1964 was renamed *African Social Research*) and his uniquely inspiring influence on his co-workers. By the end of the 1940s, Gluckman had accepted a teaching position at Oxford, soon to be followed by an appointment in Manchester. He remained in close contact with his former colleagues in Africa and sent his PhD students there for fieldwork. Because his students and former co-workers (J. Clyde Mitchell, E. Colson, R. Apthorpe, J. van Velsen and others) subsequently held the directorship of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, a close link continued between the institute and the University of Manchester. A network of enthusiastic anthropologists of international stature grew up around Gluckman. Through seminars, conferences, and collective and individual publications which always leaned heavily on the work of other members of the group, a clearly recognizable approach came to articulate itself within British anthropology from about 1950 onwards: the Manches-

¹⁵ Especially Gluckman (1969, originally published in 1940) and his articles that appeared in the journal *Bantu Studies/African Studies* (1940-42). These were later collected to form *Analysis of a Social Situation in Modern Zululand* (Gluckman 1958).

ter School. Even though the emphasis continued to be on South Central Africa, specialists on other parts of the world were also gradually drawn into the circle: for instance, India-specialist F.G. Bailey,¹⁶ the Europeanist Ronald Frankenberg with research in Wales,¹⁷ and Emrys Peters, Gluckman's successor in Manchester, as a specialist on the Mediterranean region.¹⁸ Manchester researchers in the Near East included Avner Cohen¹⁹ and Emmanuel Marx (cf. Marx 1967). Another important figure was Peter Worsley who wrote an important MA thesis on the limitations of the structural-functional model as it had been applied by Fortes to the Tallensi. Worsley was awarded a PhD in Australia on the topic of cargo cults and, as Professor of Sociology in Manchester, he became a major theoretician of the sociology of development.²⁰ Worsley was not the only Manchester figure whose career progressed from Africa to Australia/Melanesia. A similar development could be seen in the careers of Manchester Africanists such as Marwick, Kapferer, Barnes and Garbett, who all made the transition to South East Asia,²¹ no doubt because of the overproduction of African material, the decolonization of Africa and the opening up of South East Asia and Melanesia for anthropological research from Australia.

The term 'Manchester School' suggests a fixed body of theoretical and methodological tenets by which each member would be recognized and would have dominated the work of all members from the founding of that school. That, of course, is fairly unrealistic. It is true that the group had a strong sense of identity until it started to fall apart in the late 1960s because of internal tensions, the geographical dispersal of the group – its members came to occupy professorial chairs all round the world – and finally also because of Gluckman's untimely death in Jerusalem in 1975, before even reaching retirement age. Important factors in the emergence of this distinct corporate identity are the following:

- the forging of a distinctive idiom of anthropological concepts;
- the practice of frequently quoting from one another's work often whilst ignoring theoretical developments in anthropology outside the Manchester group; and

¹⁶ Bailey (1957, 1969).

¹⁷ Frankenberg (1957, 1978).

¹⁸ Peters (1951, 1967, 1976).

¹⁹ Cf. Cohen (1965) who mainly worked on West Africa.

²⁰ Worsley (1957, 1956, 1961, 1956, 1970, 1967, 1984).

²¹ Cf. Marwick (1964, 1965), Kapferer (1969, 1972, 1973, 1976, 1987, 1988a, 1988b, 1996, 1997, 2003), Barnes (1951, 1964) and Garbett (1966, 1969).

- the marked animosity towards the Manchester group among certain other branches of British anthropology.²²

The same few themes were adduced time and time again by the concentration on groups in Central and Southern Africa speaking languages of the Bantu subgroup of the Niger-Congo linguistic family. Yet despite all this convergence, there was also a fair deal of diversity among the Manchester group, and there was a particularly marked historical development throughout the lifespan of Manchester. An ironic consequence of the latter was that Gluckman's own ethnographic work, especially his legal anthropological studies (cf. van Binsbergen 1977), ended up being situated somewhere outside the specific Manchester approach.

The Manchester School is the result of the exchanges between Gluckman and his younger colleagues over a large number of years. While there is not even one publication (as far as I am aware) that lists the major points of the Manchester School exhaustively and systematically and shows their interconnections, it is from four particular kinds of sources that we may gauge the more theoretical aspects of convergence of the Manchester approach.

Firstly, there is Gluckman's own collection of essays and theoretical studies entitled *Custom and Conflict in Africa* (1956), which provides the first extensive formulation of some of his seminal ideas, *Order and Rebellion in Tribal Africa* (1962) and *Politics, Law and Ritual in Tribal Society* (1965).

Secondly, I must mention the books by the other individual members of the group: Clyde Mitchell, *The Yao Village* (1956); John Barnes, *Politics in a Changing Society* (1964); Elizabeth Colson, *Marriage and the Family among the Plateau Tonga* and *The Plateau Tonga* (1958, 1962);²³ Max Marwick, *Sorcery in its Social Setting* (1964); Ian Cunnison, *The Luapula Peoples* (1967); Victor Turner, *Schism and Continuity in an African Society*, *The Drums of Affliction* and *The Forest of Symbols* (1957, 1968, 1967); Jaap van Velsen *The Politics of Kinship* (1964); and Bill Watson, *Tribal Cohesion in a Money Economy* (1958). A complete list of books alone would be three times as long.

²² Especially Cambridge and London. This animosity emanates clearly from Kuper's highly partial chapter on Manchester in a book on the British school of anthropology (Kuper 1975). Of course, Kuper was a Cambridge man, and a Radcliffe-Brown adept to boot.

²³ Also see her Gwembe studies, which were a form of 'rescue anthropology' (cf. rescue archaeology) undertaken when the construction of the Kariba Dam was to eradicate Gwembe society, drowning its territorial base forever under the water of Lake Kariba: Colson (1960), Colson & Scudder (1988) and Colson (1964, 1971).

There are also the prefaces, introductions and separate articles by the members of the group. Especially instructive are the introductions that the more senior members of the group (Gluckman and Mitchell) used to write for the books by the younger members, for example, Mitchell in *Politics of Kinship* (1971).

Finally, there are the collective works which have exerted an enormous converging effect on the Manchester School as a whole through their choice of themes and the critical and stimulating influence of their respective editor(s). The most important of these collections was *Seven Tribes of British Central Africa*, edited by Colson & Gluckman (1951) as a systematic, ethnographic overview of the societies of Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia (present-day Zimbabwe), Nyasaland (present-day Malawi) and Tanganyika (which, with Zanzibar, makes up present-day Tanzania). There were two collections under the sole editorship of Gluckman: *Closed Systems and Open Minds: The Limits of Naivety in Social Anthropology* (1964); dealing with the question of how competent an anthropology must be in adjacent fields of scholarship such as oriental studies or legal studies, and *The Allocation of Responsibility* (1972) on the questions of culpability, sorcery, divination and kindred topics in African societies. Methodological questions were central in Bill Epstein's collection *The Craft of Social Anthropology* (1967), while the potential of the network paradigm for the study of urban relationships in Africa was investigated in the collection *Social Networks in Urban Situation* that was edited by Clyde Mitchell (1969).

Even though these publications did not amount to the development of a neatly demarcated 'Manchester orthodoxy', there are a number of common characteristics that return in the work of all or most of the individual members.

Before we discuss these common themes in detail, it is useful to point out that not all of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute's research took place under the Manchester umbrella. There was a considerable amount of agricultural and nutritional research, as well as work on material culture and local history that was hardly open to a revolutionary perspective on social relations. Among the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute's anthropologists there were some who, in seniority, were on a par with or outranked Gluckman, and would have been inspiring colleagues: Colson, Holleman (1952, 1969) and Cunnison. If the work of these authors can be said to have Manchester traits, then they were mainly indirectly so because the apparently Manchester traits highlighted characteristic aspects of the societies of South Central Africa – aspects which (as a further indication of the scientific and intersubjective nature of anthropology as an empirical discipline) could not fail to come up in the work of these experienced non-Manchester anthropologists.

The theoretical and methodological answers that Manchester had to offer were not just new, they were revolutionary, and even today have lost little of their topicality as far as the study of small-scale sets of social relationships is concerned.

Manchester's central theme is set out in an accessible way in Gluckman's *Custom and Conflict*. Its content may be summarized as follows. The social order is precarious and internally conflicting and we are, therefore, not allowed (contrary to the assumptions of classic structural-functionalism) to take social integration and social continuity for granted. The anthropologist's task goes almost in the opposite direction: to demonstrate how, not in spite of all internal contradictions (contradictions within and between values, norms, roles, aspirations and power relations) but precisely by virtue of these, a minimum of order is being achieved within society. Needless to say, his perspective amounted to a re-instatement of individual agency, freed from the smothering imposition of social structure and the web of social relationships.

The Manchester School is an attempt to devise a coherent body of systematic approaches to this central theme. Related to this central and perennial problem, the Manchester School offered specific theoretical and methodological answers that are eminently applicable to and offer insight into the small-scale social relations on which anthropologists have, until recently, largely concentrated.

The Nuer and the Manchester School

In some respects the Manchester School may be considered a continuation of the inspiration of Evans-Pritchard's work. This was due, in part, to the historical connection via Gluckman's years in Oxford (Evans-Pritchard mentions him in the preface to *The Nuer* as an important sparring partner while the book was being drafted), and to the influence Evans-Pritchard had on British anthropology in general. The shorter text by Evans-Pritchard *Some Aspects of Kinship and Marriage among the Nuer* (1945), a pre-study for a later book with almost the same title *Kinship and Marriage among the Nuer* (1951), was published in the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute series. Gluckman had indicated that another version of Evans-Pritchard's same argument had formed the main inspiration of his own approach to Lozi kinship (Gluckman 1950: 166, Evans Pritchard 1938, 1945).

It is remarkable that the Manchester School acknowledges a close link, not so much with Evans-Pritchard's Nuer studies (of which several major ones were available by 1940), but with another *magnum opus* by Evans-Pritchard (1937): *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, where the dynamics of social control, interpersonal relationships and ritual, against the background of a

moral order, are treated in a much more concrete, and much less abstract and aggregate way than in *The Nuer*. It is important to note that in the first edition of *Human Problems in British Central Africa* (1944), the journal of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, Max Gluckman published a review of *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic*. As such, the review became compulsory reading for the anthropologists who would come to work under Gluckman.²⁴ Under his editorship, the Manchester School dedicated a Festschrift to Evans-Pritchard's *The Allocation of Responsibility* (1972), which deals chapter by chapter with the main themes of the Azande book, applying them to a different ethnographic context than the Azande. Such an honour has never been accorded to *The Nuer* in the Manchester context.

To the limited extent to which Manchester was involved in the study of religion, there was also inspiration from the Azande material, which was much greater than that of the Nuer material, even though Evans-Pritchard (1956) devoted a major monograph to Nuer religion. Manchester's attention was more focused on other institutional complexes in society: law, traditional leadership, kinship and politics. By insisting on the theme of religion, on which he did path-breaking work, Victor Turner²⁵ showed himself to be the odd man out within the group. He remained faithful to Manchester, for instance by coining the phrase 'ritual process' by analogy to the 'social process' that was so central to Manchester. During the disintegrating phase of Manchester, he was to edit a major book on *Colonialism in Africa* (1971) to which many Manchester authors contributed. Yet Turner's elaborations in the field of symbolism, divination, *communitas* and counter-structure meant that he gained world fame precisely because he distanced himself from Manchester, both conceptually and geographically (as Professor of Anthropology in Chicago). The extensive work that has been done in the field of Southern African territorial cults,²⁶ even though closely associated with Manchester in terms of personnel,²⁷ is in terms of theory and concept hardly mainstream Manchester. This work stresses the circulation of people and objects in the context of these cults, which results in local social relationships being overlaid with a wider, regional cultic framework – vast

²⁴ I am grateful to Jan-Bart Gewald for this observation.

²⁵ Turner (1952, 1955, 1957, 1961, 1962, 1966, 1967, 1968a, 1968b, 1969, 1971) and Turner & Turner (1978).

²⁶ Cf. Werbner (1977, 1989), Fry (1975), Garbett (1966, 1969), Schoffeleers (1978), van Binsbergen (1981), Lan (1985) and, as background, also van Binsbergen & Schoffeleers (1985).

²⁷ Comprising Richard Werbner, Kingsley Garbett, Emanuel Marx, Elizabeth Colson, Bonno Thoden van Velzen, Matthew Schoffeleers and Wim van Binsbergen, with only Dale Eickelman as a manifestly non-Manchester Islam specialist.

regions being caught in a more or less coherent net of cultic relations. Another characteristic of these territorial-cult studies is that, with all their attention for history, their main aim is to capture the structure of these cults and see this structure as being enacted and changing over time. For Manchester, on the other hand, the idea of a structure being treated more or less independently from and prior to its history was to be increasingly anathema. On the contrary, if structure was to be anything, it was the specific historicity of its dialectical and precarious unfolding.

However, if *The Nuer* is an impressive experiment in the theorizing about political systems, then this is a line that was encouraged in Manchester. Power, group relationships, conflict, conflict regulation and structural tensions constituted a central field of problems for the Manchester group, to such an extent that their works sometimes give the impression that anthropology, and the human society that forms its object of study, are concerned with nothing but these themes. In formulating theoretical insights in this political field, Manchester time and again reaches back to the standard example of *The Nuer*.²⁸

On one point the Manchester School has explicitly engaged in polemics with Evans-Pritchard's analysis of the political system of the Nuer: notably regarding the interpretation of the feud. Dissatisfied with *The Nuer*'s analysis on this point, Gluckman (1956, Chapter 1) argued that the dynamics of the reconciliation process had only been understood through Elizabeth Colson's study on 'Social Control of Revenge in Plateau Tonga Society'.²⁹ According to both Rhodes-Livingstone authors, the key to an understanding of the feud and its reconciliation would lie not in the overlapping ecological interests of the conflicting groups but in social relations, notably in conflicting loyalties of persons with ties of more or less equal strength with both parties, notably through affinal (marital) relations. As a result of clan exogamy, the entire local community, among both the Nuer and the Zambian Tonga, is riddled with a network of affinal relations. Any outburst of conflict, especially when involving manslaughter, puts a number of individuals in a situation where they are co-opted into two conflicting camps at the same time, by virtue of their affinal relations on the one hand, and of their consanguineal relationships on the other. Clearly it is in the interest of these persons to resolve their role conflict by terminating the conflict: through reconciliation (compensatory payments), and by applying their influence to both parties to reduce the conflict.

²⁸ For example, Gluckman (1965a, 1965b, *passim*), Bailey (1969: 31, 34, 35, 56) and Marx (1972: 281f).

²⁹ Colson, 'Social Control of Vengeance in Plateau Tonga Society', in: Colson (1962: 102-21); cf. Gluckman's chapter 'The Peace in the Feud', in Gluckman (1956).

This may appear to be criticism of minor details, which may not invalidate the essence of Evans-Pritchard's approach and appears to tally with the concrete ethnographic data that he himself presents. However, the implications of this criticism from the Manchester side had far-reaching implications. The criticism suggests a different positioning *vis-à-vis* *The Nuer*'s fundamental problem, i.e. the relationship between the political order and other aspects of society, notably the conditions under which the political order may articulate itself as a distinct, separate domain within the social order.³⁰ Evans-Pritchard attempts to isolate the political order within the totality of a society's institutional pattern, and in doing so seeks an explanation outside the social order as such, in ecology – in humankind's productive and extractive interaction with the non-human world. But if it is true that central institutions in the political system, notably the feud and its reconciliation, are directly dependent upon affinal relations, then it would hardly seem meaningful anymore to insist on the separation of institutional domains, and to claim for the political order an institutional domain of its own. Hence the Manchester adage that 'politics is everywhere'. And when small-scale communities without formal leadership and without effective central authority are studied, we have to look for the basis of the political process in the dynamics of power and transaction at the lowest level of social organization, stressing agency over structure, and not in splendid, grand, abstract schemes involving major groups that comprise hundred or thousands of individuals.

Meanwhile, however, I have proceeded beyond the Manchester School's concrete pronouncements on *The Nuer*. I have begun to formulate, on the basis of the Manchester School's general points of departure, a possible criticism of *The Nuer*, which the Manchester School itself never concretely articulated – at least not in writing, and not to my knowledge.

How the Manchester School would have analyzed Nuer society

Now we come to the experiment I announced at the beginning of this chapter. Above, I indicated the explicit confrontations between the Manchester School and *The Nuer*. However, on a number of points a much more fundamental criticism of *The Nuer* is possible.

There is an absence of criticism for at least two reasons: firstly, the lack of an explicit formulation of the ensemble of basic principles which together could serve to demarcate the Manchester School, and secondly, the sentimental bond

³⁰ See van Binsbergen (1981, 2003b, 2003c).

between the Manchester School and Evans-Pritchard, which made it difficult for fundamental criticism to be expressed.

Let me systematically enumerate the Manchester School's main points and extend that enumeration into a critique of *The Nuer*. What follows is not my own critique of *The Nuer*, but instead what I believe the Manchester School could have formulated by way of criticism, given its own orientation. My aim here is to let the contrastive effect bring out more precisely what Manchester represented as a theoretical and methodological position centring on agency.

Ecology

When we look for answers to Manchester's central question, it is remarkable that the Manchester School consistently overlooked the ecological aspect. Some measure of attention was still paid to this in Gluckman's first Barotse fieldwork described in *Economy of the Central Barotse Plain* (1968, originally published in 1941). However, in his later ethnographic work and theoretical arguments, and in the work of most other members of the Manchester School,³¹ the ecological basis of society is simply taken for granted or ignored, without being in itself the object of painstaking analysis. This is certainly one of the shortcomings of the Manchester School and stands in sharp contrast not only with the ecological orientation of the earliest professional anthropology of Zambia (see Richards 1939) but also with Evans-Pritchard's effective approach to ecology in *The Nuer*. So, ironically, I start out by criticizing the Manchester School instead of the other way around!

Custom and kinship

One answer that the Manchester School initially proffered to questions about the nature and factors of the social order was the concept of 'custom', a term that covers the same grounds as the concept of 'culture' in American and continental European anthropology of the mid-twentieth century. Especially in Gluckman's early work, a large and rather autonomous role in society is attributed to custom. Custom is the ensemble of norms and values. It is endorsed by all members of society and supported by the legal system but also by informal social control and by ritual, and it gives direction to processes of interaction.

³¹ With the exception of Scudder, who was primarily an ecologist. In the works of van Velsen, Cunnison, Watson and Colson, agriculture, animal husbandry and fishing received adequate attention but never in their own right and always as a backdrop for a typical Manchester account centring on social organization and the dynamics of social relations.

This initial position scarcely differs from that of classic British social anthropology. It is only among the later members of the Manchester School that the ideological component of the social structure is more explicitly considered in the context of the non-ideological aspects of society. It was mainly Victor Turner's *Schism and Continuity* (1957) and Jaap van Velsen's *Politics of Kinship* (1971) that emphasized the dependent nature of a particular group's custom. For these authors, norms and values were no longer the fixed, immutable stage directions on the basis of which the social game was played. On the contrary, these authors even tend to a position where they consider them as the flexible, dependent and contingent result of processes of political manipulation within that group. Once more, Manchester authors stressed individual actors' agency over impersonal, generalized structure. Because kinship is the main idiom in terms of which the members of South Central African societies consciously reflect on their own societies, this changing interpretation of custom in the Manchester School has special consequences for the interpretation of kinship. No longer are kinship relations, kinship terms and kinship roles conceived as the fixed elements which cogently prescribe a particular behaviour and group structure. Instead, these elements of kinship begin to be counted among the various possibilities, drawn from various sectors of social life (and not exclusively from kinship) and individuals have to make claims on other individuals. In other words, kinship came to be seen by these Manchester anthropologists as no longer defining a society's total moral order, with direct and fixed, and thus predictable, stipulations for concrete individual behaviour. Kinship furnishes only one of the several possible principles of recruitment of interaction partners within a micro-political process at the village level. This social process mainly revolves around the elderly members' struggle over power, honourable traditional titles (headmanship, chiefship) and the followers necessary to attain and safeguard these goals. Kinship-based claims (of support, loyalty, material, financial and immaterial prestations) may be honoured if this tallies with the personal interests of those involved – but equally such kinship claims are frequently ignored by those on whom they are made. In every concrete social situation, whatever happens factually depends not on specific kinship norms immutably and inescapably stipulating a particular outcome but on the underlying micro-political social process, whose details are always unique, which therefore has its own unique (micro-)historicity, and which entirely revolves around actors playing out their agency. It is in conflicts and in the ritual elaboration of conflicts that this micro-political process takes shape and may be clearly identified. The conscious ideological screen of a society is lifted and underlying tensions become manifest and open to empirical enquiry. Manchester ethnographies thus revolve around the presentation of extended

cases (van Velsen 1967) in which individual protagonists are shown in protracted conflicts, and whose details and backgrounds are spelled out *ad nauseam*.

This is a fundamentally different approach to kinship from that of *The Nuer*. Evans-Pritchard remains silent on the concrete dynamics of power relations within local communities that are apparently defined and exhaustively structured by kinship. His argument ignores specific concrete situations and the actors involved in them. We meet no individual or specific persons under their own names or with their own pronouncements. *The Nuer* presents an abstract description of a kinship-cum-political system, without empirically demonstrating that this is how Nuer society works, and without explaining why it works in this way.

This criticism of *The Nuer* from the Manchester School's perspective also applies to other classic ethnographies. Yet we have to ask ourselves if there are no limits to the extent to which the normative and value system can be manipulated by the local actors in micro-political situations. Are there no structural limits to agency? If everything social is (micro) political, does this mean that everything social can be manipulated without limitation? Is there no small core of fundamental points of departure in a society – principles that have been so much internalized and that are so fundamental that it is impossible to manipulate them – even in the (admittedly little-structured) South Central African societies studied by Turner and van Velsen, and perhaps also among the Nuer?

Part of the answer lies in the legal sphere. In the face of the rigid assumptions that students of positive law in North Atlantic society have been inclined to project onto Africa, legal anthropology has demonstrated that the legal sphere does not work with immutable prescriptive norms and values. Also in the judicial process, norms and values appear as flexible and manipulable – but their application and manipulation is publicly put to the test of specialists and of public opinion, and a society's manipulations are thus publicly reinforced even if occasionally transgressed. In the societies of South Central Africa, one typically avoids bringing kinsmen to court, and as a result many kinship claims escape judicial test. But in these societies, as in so many others in Africa, the judicial process is often resorted to, being at the core of social continuity and conflict settlement. The judicial aspect cannot be discussed at great length here but it is clear that the ironic position of Gluckman – as both the leader and the odd man out within Manchester – has to do with a more intimate appreciation, on his part, of the pivotal role of the judicial within the societies of South Central Africa (cf. van Binsbergen 1977).

Inevitably, another relatively stable and enduring limitative factor in the manipulation-ridden social process is language itself: participants may not all

subscribe to the same values and the same conceptualization of the world around them but often they share a common language (or at least a *lingua franca*), and that language's phonology, syntax and semantics would certainly impose severe limitations on the otherwise unbounded extent to which individual actors can try to manipulate the situation at hand, and each other. However, it is characteristic of Manchester that it hardly ever explicitly considered the role of language in social relations.

Society's articulation into constituent groups as the basis of social organization

From a political perspective, the first step towards understanding the social order, both for Evans-Pritchard and for the Manchester School, consists in exploring the relevant groups or categories into which society is divided or articulated: local groups, kin groups, political parties etc.

In every society participants have explicit ideas as to the division of their own society in its various constituent groups. When asked, they will inform anthropologists of these ideas and will declare which group they themselves belong to. The political analysis in *The Nuer* consists in first place of a description of these group-wise articulations (tribe, clan, lineage, age-set), and of the attempt to show how Nuer social life takes shape within these various groups in their interrelationships.

However, such an explicit, conscious structure is never the whole story. Much of social life occurs informally, in the margins of formal groups, or even outside them. Formal interviews in which members of a society describe its formal, ideal structure need to be complemented with participant observation over an extended period of time and in a large number of different social situations (especially in informal and conflictive situations). It is only in this way that the researcher may identify the informal, implicit, underlying structural principles of the local social process – including those principles that may never be consciously perceived by the actors themselves: principles not of fixed and immutable imposition by the social structure, but principles of negotiation and deliberation, i.e. invitations to the exercise of agency, inserted (through a process of negotiation that often involves open conflict) into the social process through the personal and (micro) historical effects of the actors' volitional acts, in combination with contingent accidental factors. The social process is whatever results over time from the accumulating effects of actors' individual decisions and contingencies. And even the adequate description of such an inevitably highly complex and highly unpredictable social process is not enough for a convincing analysis of a local society. For the dynamics of a society are

determined not only by its internal processes but also by economic, political, cultural and religious factors at the regional, national, international and even intercontinental level – factors which may totally elude the local actors, and which we often study much more effectively from a vantage point outside the local society. For such a wide data collection, the method of participant observation is often not the most suitable (kings, high-ranking civil servants and industrial tycoons seldom tolerate anthropologists in their midst), and instead the researcher has to rely on documentary sources, governmental archives, statistics, legal texts, newspaper clippings, and interviews with key actors at the national and intercontinental level.

What is absolutely decisive for *The Nuer* is the model of the unilineal segmentary lineage. This was the main analytical instrument that anthropology developed in the 1930s-1940s to analyze African political and kinship systems and that was invoked to explain any other social, economic or religious aspect of African societies at the time. Evans-Pritchard was the first to give a concrete formulation to this model and greatly influenced Fortes. Although Gluckman (1950) avoided directly criticizing Evans-Pritchard in his introduction to the first mimeographed product of the Northern Rhodesian fieldwork of the first students of what was soon to become the Manchester School (see also Barnes & Mitchell 1950),³² he argued that the classic model of the unilineal segmentary lineage was not applicable, at least not in South Central Africa.³³

³² This early post-graduate work under Gluckman's supervision marks the beginning of the Manchester School.

³³ Gluckman did not yet go to the extent of claiming that such a model might not even be applicable to the societies for which it had been formulated in the first instance: the Nuer and the Tallensi. That step would be made by Peter Worsley (1956 in his radical, essentially Marxist, critique of Fortes. He argued that Fortes's description of Tallensi society in terms of a segmentary lineage model was unacceptable as an objective anthropological analysis. He suggested that, instead, it was merely a model such as exists in the heads of participants, a participant's ideology which, in Worsley's opinion, had been far too strongly emphasized by Fortes. Worsley claimed that the participants (and Fortes) were projecting that ideology onto a social system whose real dynamics were situated elsewhere: not in the segmentary relationships between large groups but at the lowest local level in the political and economic micro-processes that were taking place at the Tallensi homesteads, where they informed the division of labour, relations between generations, the quest for individual autonomy, etc. Worsley admits that it is legitimate for the anthropologist to describe such an ideology but as a next step he should keep his distance from participants' viewpoints and attempt to explain even their ideology in social scientific terms. Such an attempt, Worsley argues, is likely to open the anthropologist's eye to social mechanisms and processes which he, as a scientist, can describe objectively and in analytical terms (etically) regardless of whether the partici-

Of course the Manchester School does not deny the importance of society's articulation into groups. However, given the school's emphasis on the extent to which any formal model of social organization would be manipulated and dependent in its application and execution upon the specific shape the local political process would take at any specific moment, group formation is seen far less as automatic and predictable from a formal chart. Hence it attaches little value to grand schemes such as unilineal segmentation. In van Velsen's *Politics of Kinship*, the following fundamental insight is developed: Depending upon the nature of a specific problem that confronts a local group, and upon the specific phase in which a certain micro-political conflict finds itself, different and continuous shifting groups of loyal kinsmen will form themselves around a particular individual; each of these groups will have its own, ever shifting, claims vis-à-vis that individual, and its own self-interests. In other words, the articulation of society into groups is a function of the social process, and not the other way around.

Ultimately, social organization is claimed to depend on agency. If we could manage to probe beyond the official local societal ideology and gather concrete data about actual interaction, about the mobilization of people as mutual partners in such actual interaction, power relations and the shifts over time involved in such mobilization, and the concrete social groups to which such interaction partners are locally reckoned to belong, then we would inevitably conclude that such groups tend to be ephemeral and have a shifting composition and boundaries.

Under the heading of transactionalism, and in an explicit bid to reject the structural-functionalist paradigm, similar ideas were advanced by such anthropologists as F. Bailey, Jeremy Boissevain and Frederick Barth.³⁴ Of these 'Three Bs' who haunted anthropology in Britain and other countries in the

pants themselves are aware of these processes, have explicitly named them, and have consciously realized their decisive effect on the social process. Years later the same point was argued by Emrys Peters in his reinterpretation of the political system of the Libyan Bedouins, which had hitherto been described in terms of unilineal segmentation (Peters 1967, cf. Peters 1951, 1960, 1976). Thus the segmentary lineage model, which had been so essential to Evans-Pritchard's attempts to present the political order as a distinct, separate system of supra-local relationships, turns out to be generally unacceptable from the position of the Manchester School, and owes its present unpopularity in part to the success of Manchester.

³⁴ Cf. Bailey (1969), Boissevain (1968) and Barth (1953, 1959, 1966, 1969, cf. 1989, 2001, 2002).

1960s, Bailey has Manchester School roots, the other two do not; and none of them has an Africanist background.

The precise ethnographic data required to determine whether this kind of insight into society's articulation into groups may also apply to Nuer society at the time of Evans-Pritchard's research is lacking, but there is certainly a distinct possibility that it does. In that case, the articulation of Nuer society into tribes, clans and lineages would form an abstract, general scheme in terms of which the participants may have been able to describe and explain the principal traits of their own social organization to their own satisfaction. But in doing so, they would not be answerable to the canon of empirical modern science and their view of their own indigenous (i.e. emic) model would remain an ideology (not meant to be tested but also unable to stand the objective empirical test). The actual formation of groups (in the form of effective political factions) in concrete conflicts would be relatively ephemeral, situational and shifting (even more so than would be implied by the notion of segmentation). That formation and these shifts would be dependent upon factors in the micro sphere of actual political and economic behaviour at the local level, i.e. on agency. The articulation in explicitly named groups would have to be constantly reworked by the participants to keep pace with the constant shift in political relations. In the more recent literature on the Nuer, there are indications that this is indeed the case.

The articulation of society into groups, and conflict

No matter how society's articulation into groups was brought about, the resulting group distinctions will always overlap. Every individual belongs, at the same time, to a number of groups or categories, and the members of each of these groups or categories will exert their own specific claims on that individual. These claims may often be contradictory and in conflict with one another – a lesson already learned from the above discussion of conflicting loyalties and the feud. Individuals have to cope with role conflicts, which means that these individuals are the nodal points between the various groups into which society is articulated. Every social situation, every member of society is subjected to profound tensions and (because the various groups that come together in one individual together constitute society) it is these tensions that are the basis of the social order. In the concrete social process of interactions and transactions, especially at the local level of face-to-face relations, these in-built tensions and cleavages come to the surface. The need to contain and resolve these tensions gives rise to a pattern of relationships and dependence that is directly based on conflict. Conflict is not a regrettable epiphenomenon of the social order – not a

tache de beauté that can easily be wiped away – but the principal basis of integration of society (Gluckman 1956, Coser 1956). Conflict – and not normative integration, culture or custom, or social organization – is what makes societies tick. This point (essentially of Marxian inspiration but with a much longer history in Western thought going back via Hegel, Kant, Hobbes, Grotius and Cicero to Heraclites) and its fundamental difference with the societal conception of Evans-Pritchard in *The Nuer* can be aptly illustrated by reference to a particular form of conflict: the rival analyses of the feud as summarized above.

The social process and the ethnographic method

If the essence of the social order must primarily be sought in conflicts at the micro level, then a new method of anthropological fieldwork is required. Whatever happens in a society, interactions, quarrels, reconciliation and collaboration between very specific individual members will no longer merely serve as apt illustration, just to elucidate an ulterior abstract order of which these concrete cases are merely arbitrary examples. On the contrary, the social order is nothing but the ensemble of all such concrete interactions. It is in concrete cases that the fundamental contradictions and the inbuilt conflicts of the social texture come to the fore – the abstract structural principles only exist in and through the agency that is acted out in these concrete cases. One of the Manchester School's most important achievements is therefore the revaluation and vindication of individual concrete cases in the context of anthropological analysis. A large amount of biographical detail and an elaborate presentation of the social relations between a particular case's protagonists and many other persons in their immediate and more distant social environment offers a convincing (albeit often unreadable!) account of the development of the social process and its main principles.

Manchester ethnography emphasizes the story of the precise sequence of specific events around the key figures or protagonists in the 'social dramas' that it considers to be constitutive of the social order. This implies an anecdotal or narrative position. Here the historicity of the social process (whose specifics cannot be predicted from any immutable structural principles) is adduced as an important explanatory principle, in addition to the more permanent social structure that inspired the social drama and that sets limits upon it. The social drama is essentially a negotiation process between the protagonists' agency, in which they make choices, selectively and situationally, on the basis of the contradictory structuring principles at hand. Often these structuring principles have a certain textual basis in the consciousness of the participants: they may

consist of local concepts, legal rules, and proverbs, which may be exclusively oral but in modern times often also have a written textual basis. As far as the temporal dimension of the social process is concerned, it displays a unique accumulation and concatenation of all the separate minute effects of individual actions; it may yet yield structural elements because actors in the exercise of their agency are constantly testing out and utilizing – in a manner that is often eminently open to empirical research through participant observation and interviews – the range of variation and the institutionally defined alternatives of their social behaviour.

As a late development in the Manchester School, network analysis³⁵ offers formal, often mathematical, methods that allow the researcher to map out this social process very precisely, especially the distribution of, and competition for, power. When compared with the sophistication that has now become possible through network analysis, we have to admit that the ethnographic data presented in *The Nuer*, however elegantly and sublimely as far as the author's style is concerned, are far too sketchy, too abstract and too aggregate. Evans-Pritchard simply did not hit on the proper ethnographic method to describe the dynamics of the social and political process in all its shifting, unpredictable capriciousness. Nor did he feel he needed another ethnographic method because his approach to ethnography was – as so much of British intellectual life at the time – essentially Platonic.³⁶ Behind the bewildering chaos of concrete social events, Evans-Pritchard projected the redeeming abstract permanence of a fixed institutional structure, in other words, of a Platonic idea. 'Manchester', on the other hand, was primarily orientated towards an individual's agency as exhibited in concrete social events. It was convinced that the key to social order lay there, far more than in some abstracted formal social structure.

On the other hand, the Manchester approach runs the risk of the anthropologist getting stuck in the all too meticulous, all too concrete description of a small number of informants, and of producing a family novel in scientific jargon, without generalizable conclusions but also without the literary beauty characteristic of the best family novels.

The challenge of urban society and the colonial situation

³⁵ Mitchell (1967, 1969) and Boissevain & Mitchell (1973).

³⁶ In the philosophical sense (cf. Whitehead, Bradley), there is no doubt that Evans-Pritchard's approach to ethnography was also Platonic in the erotic sense, but that is immaterial in the present context.

In every respect, *The Nuer* is the product of an anthropologist for whom the colonial situation was inescapable, and for whom it was perfectly unproblematic to work, as an anthropologist, for the British colonial government in northeastern Africa. It is a contribution to the anthropology of the Africa of the villages and describes the situation in the 1930s as if the colonial state and intercontinental economic relationships were irrelevant and did not exist as far as the Nuer were concerned. A few decades later, and orientated towards a part of Africa that had been much more touched by (proto) globalization in the form of colonial rule, modern industry and urbanization, the Manchester approach differed markedly from Evans-Pritchard's position. It showed a further phase that Africanist anthropology was to undergo to meet the challenge of Africa's rapid decolonization from the late 1950s onwards and the globalization proper of the final decades of the twentieth century. That challenge lay in the need to develop and renew the discipline's theoretical and methodological mainstream positions; and it consisted of the need for a new political positioning, notably the shedding of anthropology's hitherto colonial and North Atlantic ethnocentric connotations.

Characteristic of Manchester were a high level of political awareness and severe criticism of the colonial situation. Gluckman's formidable and demanding personality was a powerful cohesive force, as was the collective interest the Manchester School members were supposed to show, at Gluckman's explicit request, in the ups and downs of Manchester United Football Club. Could one imagine a better symbol of school formation? Quite a few Manchester School researchers were convinced adherents of a militant Marxism, and as such were card-carrying members of the British Communist Party. One can well imagine that anthropologists of such signature inspired considerable distrust among European settlers and civil servants in colonial Africa shortly after World War II. At that time the clamouring for independence was already on the increase. India, Pakistan and Indonesia, which had gained independence by the end of the 1940s, offered inspiring examples for African independence movements, especially after the 1955 Bandung Conference in Indonesia. Economically, the colonial situation meant that the majority of the inhabitants of the African colonies, i.e. the Africans themselves, had hardly any say over the conditions under which they could sell their labour power at mines, on large-scale farms, in factories, and as domestic servants. As a result, labour conditions for Africans were appalling. Marxism, which had sprung from an analysis of labour relations in Western Europe in the nineteenth century, attempted to develop a theoretical perspective on imperialism and was much better equipped than mainstream anthropology at the time to problematize and analyze the underlying political economy of the colonial situation and the urban labour relations that the colo-

nial situation had engendered.³⁷ In addition, the international labour movement inspired models of collective bargaining that contributed to an improvement in colonial labour relations (Epstein 1958) and the termination of the colonial situation in general.

Historically, South Central Africa had had no cities before the establishment of colonial rule and the capitalist mode of production. However, from that point onwards towns increased rapidly both in number and in size. Their external characteristics, organizational structure and culture were markedly different from the village societies that had formed the stereotypical subject matter of classic anthropology. From the very beginning, urban research had constituted one of the main points of Rhodes-Livingstone research and, for a long time, urban research in Africa was to be inspired by *The Economics of Detribalisation* (1968, originally published in 1942) by Godfrey Wilson and Monica Wilson-Hunter on the mining town of Broken Hill (now Kabwe). After his first period in the field in Lamba villages under the smoke of the mining towns of the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt (a few hundred km north of Lusaka and Broken Hill) and his rural fieldwork among the Yao in Nyasaland, Clyde Mitchell (1955, 1956, 1960, 1965, 1969, 1970, 1974) studied the ethnic processes on the Copperbelt. In a complementary movement, Bill Epstein (1958, 1967, 1978, 1981) chose as the topic of his research the development of a working-class consciousness among the African workers in the same industrial setting of the Copperbelt; and his later work was to concentrate on the study of identity and kinship in town. The most striking aspect of these studies is that they describe an African social context whose unmistakable European participants (who occupied management and supervisory functions in industry) were no longer censored out by the anthropologist – even though the latter was still entirely invisible in his writings. A good example of this kind of urban work is Gluckman's 1958 *Analysis of a Social Situation in Modern Zululand* (originally published in 1940-1942 on the basis of fieldwork in the late 1930s). Social scientists at the time were eagerly looking for a model of complex analysis that could accommodate major cultural differences and the lack of communication that existed between the various segments of the colonial situation (Africans, settlers, colonial civil servants, missionaries and Indian traders). Such a model would also have to account for the interdependence between these segments, not only for industrial tasks but also in so far as they shared a common system of status and class, and all relied on the same precarious, yet more or less workable, social order of colonial society.

³⁷ Marx (1906-1909) and Lenin (1917).

This theoretical and analytical puzzle (to which members of the Manchester School, such as Harries-Jones and Boswell, were later to make significant contributions) posed itself not only in South Central Africa (especially in the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt and major towns such as Salisbury – now Harare – Bulawayo, Lusaka and Livingstone) but also in South Africa, and prior to their independence, in India and Indonesia. In Africa, the social and cultural relationships within the category of African urbanites posed analytical questions to which the studies of social organization in village situations suggested no answers. How did urban workers interact with one another, both at work and outside work, in the typical situation where they had largely left their kinsmen behind in their village of origin? Did they have to adapt socially as far as colleagues, neighbours, fellow drinkers and fellow church members were concerned when with strangers who often had a different culture, ethnic identity and language from their own? Manchester's contribution to the understanding of the African urban environment was as follows. It stressed ethnicity, not as the expression of an allegedly inescapable cultural baggage which the labour migrant had inevitably brought from the village and could not get rid of, but as a creative system of categorization for the social articulation and mobilization of urban contacts. It also highlighted individual networks that – as a further context for the exercise of agency – came to replace enduring corporate groups as the principal structuring element of social life in towns.

In pioneering critical anthropology, the Manchester attitude was highly programmatic. As a matter of course, these researchers took the side of Africans in conflicts of interest regarding the colonial and urban situation. The colonial government and the capitalist entrepreneurs each employed contradictory myths which, in only slightly acerbated form, were to determine the discourse of the South African apartheid state for years to come. Both demographically and in terms of ethnic, industrial and political organization and ideology there was considerable continuity between South Central Africa and Southern Africa in late-colonial times. According to these myths, the African worker would be no more than a displaced villager, without any rightful claim to the city and a putative villager's only frame of reference was supposed to be informed exclusively by the culture, the worldview and the politico-judicial relationships of his rural home. At the same time, the colonial/industrial myth turned the African urban worker into a 'bachelor' so that all his family obligations could be denied and his wages and level of accommodation be kept to a bare minimum. In the face of such fictions it was a matter of intellectual responsibility for the Manchester researchers to stress the extent to which the African townsman was

an ordinary townsman and a worker³⁸ whose modern urban identity should not be allowed to be swept under the carpet merely for the sake of governmental and entrepreneurial interests. The Manchester approach to urban-rural relations (Gluckman 1960, 1971, Apthorpe 1958) thus acquired, through over-compensation, a certain degree of forgivable one-sidedness, stressing the urban identity of African workers (Mitchell 1956) whilst paying far less attention to their continued commitment to their respective rural homes (with a few notable exceptions, see van Velsen 1961). An analysis which acknowledged a village-orientated identity and village-derived forms of group formation, even in town, only came much later (van Binsbergen 1998, 1981, Chapters 6 and 7).

Despite notable achievements in selected fields of urban inquiry (networks, ethnicity, urban and class identity) and a few individual papers which suddenly contained unexpected and isolated glimpses of brilliant and comprehensive insight (Epstein 1967, Gluckman 1971), it would seem fair to say that Manchester was far less successful in its approach to the towns and the colonial realities of South Central Africa than in its approach to rural communities and their types of social organization. It would be several more decades before Marxist political inspiration yielded a systematic anthropological approach of the colonial situation, in the work of French neo-Marxists such as Rey (1971, 1973) and Meillassoux (1975), who also had a considerable impact in the Netherlands. The theory of the articulation of modes of production offered a bridging concept between the village and the town; between the role of village elders and other traditional authorities on the one hand, and capitalist entrepreneurs on the other hand; and between the African countryside and international systems of production and distribution. More recently this political-economy analysis has been enriched, and its materialist and economic one-sidedness has been largely compensated for by looking at South Central African towns from the perspective of cultural globalization, as battle grounds in which the global cultural and religious influences and consumption models are confronted, sometimes successfully, by time-honoured elements of African cultural tradition whose domain was hitherto largely confined to the villages.

Against the background of such later studies, the frequently used Manchester concept of the colonial-industrial situation remained a largely under-analyzed black box. Yet even on these points, Manchester's pioneering work dramatically enriched the analytical scope of anthropology, in a way that was to leave

³⁸ I.e. a proletarian, a person formally selling his/her labour power as a commodity in a cash market, defined by modern industry or other bureaucratic organizations, and the private domestic arrangements of others successfully engaged in these formal sectors and hence capable of employing domestic labour in turn.

The Nuer far behind, and that helped prepare anthropology for the modern world of cultural globalization.

Conclusion

In the 1980s, under the influence of post-modernism, the kind of institution-centred, generalized, aggregate ethnographic description à la *The Nuer* came under heavy attack. For an author like Clifford (1988), that book, despite its scientific form, belonged to the domain of *belles lettres* rather than to that of science because its suggestions of totality, integration and system are exclusively based on the anthropological author's imagination without – or so Clifford argued – being systematically anchored in the empirical data at hand.

Long before Clifford, and in analytical ways that are free from many of the one-sided and gratuitous, undisciplined, personalizing and navel-gazing affectations often associated with a post-modern stance in anthropology, Manchester had already begun to formulate a way out of the unmistakable dilemma phrased by Clifford. Manchester did so, brilliantly, by developing an analytical method that put agency, (micro) historicity, the political nature and the fragmentation of the small-scale social process at the centre of the anthropological endeavour. Herein lies the lasting relevance of this approach, and the continued freshness and relevance of its products – an astonishing and unusually inspiring abundance of collective works and monographs.

The preceding argument aimed to enhance our insight into the societies that formed the original research sites of the Manchester School and the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, i.e. Zambia and its neighbouring countries. In the specific context of the present collection in which this argument appears, this detailed examination of the Manchester School has enabled us to consider the structural-functionalist paradigm against which Manchester's agency-orientated research was directed. In the process, we have seen the methodological and theoretical perspectives that Manchester brought to the study of agency – enough to justify the title, which stresses how Manchester was one of the cradles of agency-orientated research in the last few decades.

Having sung Manchester's praises, it is time for a critical note, especially from an agency perspective. The Manchester approach was predicated on a type of social situation that was familiar to the ethnographic fieldworker in the mid-twentieth century. It was of a local level, was typically rural despite major extensions into the urban areas, and had protagonists who demonstrated and exerted their own considerable agency in a power play with, primarily, other such protagonists at the same local level to reveal the local society's structural characteristics.

This implies a model of socio-political autarky at the local level, the stakes for which the protagonists are in competition for, are supposed to eminently matter in their lives, and their control over these stakes appears to be such that the outcome of their in-group competition is highly relevant. In other words, the Manchester approach was based on the supposition that local rural actors in late-colonial and early post-colonial South Central Africa could, with their agency, significantly determine the course of their own lives.

Expressed in this way, we could wonder whether Manchester may simply have traded the structuralist-functionalist fiction for just another fiction: that of the relevance of the local level, and of local actors' competence in the face of the state and the world system. At this point, we begin to see Manchester's tendency to turn a blind eye to ecological relations in a new light. How can we be so sure that the protagonists in Manchester social dramas were fighting over genuine stakes worthy of their efforts if the very conditions determining their livelihood (food, shelter, access to land) had to remain largely beyond the scope of Manchester's ethnographic research? We have seen how their fascination with the political in social life inspired the Manchester researchers to take worthy positions in the politics of knowledge in late-colonial societies in Africa, but at the same time most of these researchers lacked the analytical imagination to investigate the political domain beyond the micro politics of kinship, traditional leadership and ritual involving an all-Black, all-African cast – usually³⁹ without any analytical thought as to the place of colonial civil servants, missionaries and entrepreneurs within the local political process at the village level. This leads to the uneasy thought that perhaps the stakes in the 'politics of kinship', which Manchester allowed us to study in great detail, were not the real stakes determining – at the level of political economy – the material shapes of the lives of the people involved. Given the fundamental powerlessness and deprivation of African villagers, which was brought about by both colonial rule and the increasing encroachment of world capitalism upon the lives of Africans and their local communities, we may seriously wonder whether the social process as studied by Manchester, which Manchester itself usually conceived as a political process, was not merely about tokens of powerlessness (such as traditional titles as headmen and chiefs, or positions and statuses in the ritual sphere) – keeping local African people busy in a playground of their own traditionalist making, whilst the real power influencing their lives lay in govern-

³⁹ With few exceptions, mainly (cf. Macmillan 1995, Cocks 2001) in the work of Gluckman himself (1958, 1971), the entire collection was an exploration of wider critical concerns beyond the local level.

mental departments and industrial offices beyond their reach hundreds of kilometres away.

Modern state-of-the art anthropology, despite its tendency to jump to national or even continental-level conclusions on flimsy empirical grounds, despite its lack of real linguistic and cultural local competence and its second-hand dabbling in the latest post-modern phraseologies borrowed second-hand from Foucault or Deleuze, and despite its fascination for meta-empirical all-too-comprehensive statements about statehood, global conditions and humankind as a whole, has at least one saving grace. It ventures into what is properly speaking not the anthropologist's empirical domain in a bid to address these ulterior forms and conditions of dependence and hegemony, which largely remained out of the Manchester scope even though, half a century ago, they were just as decisive and unmistakable as they are today. Manchester, while seeking to speak about the locally political, was largely inhibited from speaking about the globally political, which mattered a good deal more. And the attention in present-day anthropology for cultural globalization, the electronic media, the predicaments, identitary strategies and consumption aspirations of individuals, has made us realize that Manchester's attention to the social process in small-scale local communities reflected the information and communication technology of fifty years ago on the very periphery of the then world system. Under today's conditions, we can see very well how the social is composed partly out of the agency-centred micro-political process at the local level (and here, I think, Manchester is unbeatable as a method and a theory, and applies to today's Africa, and to North Atlantic small-scale interaction settings just as much as it did half a century ago), but also out of the technological (especially media-based) underpinning of the illusion of the state, and of collectively consumed images which, even though commercially produced and manipulated, still manage to create a font of shared reference points and experiences that extends way beyond the local community and often also beyond the national state to encompass the entire modern world of media consumption. In this ultimately post-modern situation, speaking of agency (of villagers, urbanites, citizens, consumers, migrants) almost appears to be a naive, modernist denial of the extent to which the magic of commercially produced, electronically mediated, and state- and industry-manipulated semblances of reality – the worlds of simulacra (Baudrillard) – has come to replace reality as it once lived in the Africa of the villages. In that post-modern connection of utter, manipulated and

ignorant powerlessness,⁴⁰ what could agency be except the expression of a nostalgic hope on the part of anthropologists and alienated intellectuals like them?

The second point conjures up, not only in the North today but also and increasingly in present-day African towns and even at the village level in Africa today, an entire Brave New World (Aldous Huxley) of post-agency, which the Manchester group did not and could not anticipate, even though they themselves would be glued – at Gluckman’s explicit command – to the television screen during Manchester United’s matches.

References

- Apthorpe, R.J. 1958, ‘The Interrelation of Rural and Urban Social Structure: A Hypothesis’, in: R.J. Apthorpe (ed.), *Present Interrelations in Central African Rural and Urban Life*, Lusaka: Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, pp. 147-56.
- Bailey, F.G. 1957, *Caste and the Economic Frontier: A Village in Highland Orissa*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Bailey, F.G. 1969, *Stratagems and Spoils: A Social Anthropology of Politics*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Barnes, J. 1951, ‘History in a Changing Society’, *Rhodes-Livingstone Journal/ Human Problems in British Central Africa* 11: 1-9.
- Barnes, J. 1964, *Politics in a Changing Society*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Barnes, J. & J.C. Mitchell 1950, *The Lamba Village*, Cape Town: Cape Town University Press, Communication from the School of African Studies, New Series, no. 24.
- Barth, F. 1953, *Principles of Social Organization in South Western Kurdistan*, Oslo, Brodens Jorgensen.
- Barth, F. 1959, ‘Segmentary Opposition and the Theory of Games: A Study of Pathan Organization’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 84: 5-21.
- Barth, F. 1966, ‘Models of Social Organization’, London: Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, Occasional Papers no. 23. .
- Barth, F. (ed.) 1969, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Differences*, Boston: Little, Brown & Co.
- Barth, F. 1989, ‘The Analysis of Culture in Complex Societies’, *Ethos* 54: 120-41.
- Barth, F. 2001. ‘Rethinking the Object of Anthropology’, *American Anthropologist* 103, 435-37.
- Barth, F. 2002, ‘An Anthropology of Knowledge’, *Current Anthropology* 43, 1-18. .
- Beidelman, T.O. 1974, *A Bibliography of the Writings of E.E. Evans-Pritchard*, London: Tavistock.

⁴⁰ Cf. Ferguson (1999) where the present-day devastation of Copperbelt African life offers a shocking contrast with the Manchester descriptions of three or four decades earlier.

- Bohannon, P. & M. Glazer 1988, *High Points in Anthropology*, New York: McGraw-Hill
- Boissevain, J.F. 1968 (1967), 'The Place of Non-groups in the Social Sciences', *Man* 3: 542-56.
- Boissevain, J.F. & J.C. Mitchell (eds) 1973, *Network Analysis*, The Hague/Paris: Mouton.
- Brown, R. 1973, 'Passages in the Life of a White Anthropologist: Max Gluckman', in: T. Asad (ed.), *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, London: Ithaca Press.
- Buijtenhuijs, R. 1971, 'L'Anthropologie Révolutionnaire: Comment Faire?', *Les Temps Modernes* 299-300 (juin-juillet).
- Buijtenhuijs, R. 1972, 'Defeating Mau Mau: Some Observations on "Counter Insurgency Research" in Kenya during the Emergency', *Sociologische Gids* xix (v/vi): 329-39.
- Clifford, J. 1988, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-century Ethnography, Literature and Art*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Cocks, P. 2001, 'Max Gluckman and the Critique of Segregation in South African Anthropology, 1921-1940', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27 (4): 739-56.
- Cohen, A. 1965, *Arab Border-Villages in Israel: A Study of Continuity and Change in Social Organization*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Colson, E. 1951, 'The Plateau Tonga of Northern Rhodesia', in: E. Colson, & M. Gluckman (eds), *Seven Tribes of British Central Africa*, London: Oxford University Press for Rhodes-Livingstone Institute.
- Colson, E. 1958, *Marriage and the Family among the Plateau Tonga of Northern Rhodesia*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Colson, E. 1960, *Social Organization of the Gwembe Tonga*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Colson, E. 1962, 'Social Control of Vengeance in Plateau Tonga Society', in: E. Colson, *The Plateau Tonga*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 102-21.
- Colson, E. 1964, 'Social Change and the Gwembe Tonga', *Rhodes-Livingstone Journal* (35): 1-13.
- Colson, E. 1971a, 'African Society at the Time of the Scramble', in: V.W. Turner (ed.), *Profiles of Change (Colonialism in Africa 1870-1960, Part III)*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Colson, E. 1971b, *The Social Consequences of Resettlement: The Impact of the Kariba Resettlement upon the Gwembe Tonga*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Colson, E. & H.M. Gluckman (eds) 1968 (1951), *Seven Tribes of Central Africa*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Colson, E. & T. Scudder 1988, *For Prayer and Profit: The Ritual, Economic and Social Importance of Beer in Gwembe District, Zambia, 1950-1982*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Copans, J. 1974, *Critiques et Politiques de l'Anthropologie*, Paris: Maspero.
- Copans, J. (ed.) 1975, *Anthropologie et Impérialisme*, Paris: Maspero.
- Coser, L.A. 1956, *The Functions of Social Conflict*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Cunnison, I. 1967, *The Luapula Peoples*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Epstein, A.L. 1958, *Politics in an Urban African Community*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

- Epstein, A.L. 1967, 'Urbanization and Social Change in Africa', *Current Anthropology*, 8: 275-84.
- Epstein, A.L. 1978, *Ethos and identity: Three Studies in Ethnicity*, London: Tavistock.
- Epstein, A.L. 1981, *Urbanization and Kinship: The Domestic Domain on the Copperbelt of Zambia, 1950-1956*, London: Academic Press.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1934, 'Lévy-Bruhl's Theory of Primitive Mentality', *Bulletin of Faculty of Arts* (Egyptian University, Cairo) 2 (1): 1-36.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1937, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1940, *The Political System of the Anuak of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*, London: London School of Economics, Monographs on Social Anthropology, No. 4.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1945, 'Some Aspects of Kinship and Marriage among the Nuer', Rhodes-Livingstone Paper, London: Oxford University Press.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1948, *The Divine Kingship of the Shilluk of the Nilotic Sudan*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1949, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*, London: Oxford University Press.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1951a, *Kinship and Marriage among the Nuer*, London: Oxford University Press.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1951b, *Social Anthropology*. New York: Free Press.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1956, *Nuer Religion*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1962, 'Fieldwork and the Empirical Tradition', in: E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Social Anthropology and Other Essays*, New York: Free Press, pp. 64-85.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1965, *Theories of Primitive Religion*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1967a (1929), 'The Morphology and Function of Magic: A Comparative Study of Trobriand and Zande Ritual and Spells', in: J. Middleton (ed.), *Magic, Witchcraft and Curing*, Garden City, NY: American Museum of Natural History, Natural History Press, pp. 1-22.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1967b (1940), *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People*, Oxford: Clarendon.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1969 (1940), 'The Nuer of the Southern Sudan', in: M. Fortes & E.E. Evans-Pritchard (eds), *African Political Systems*, London: Oxford University Press, pp. 272-96.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1974, *Man and Woman among the Azande*, London: Faber & Faber.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E., R. Firth, B. Malinowski & I. Schapera (eds) 1934, *Essays Presented to C. G. Seligman*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co.
- Fardon, R. (ed.) 1990, *Localizing Strategies: Regional Traditions of Ethnographic Writing*, Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press.
- Ferguson, J. 1999, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt*, Chicago/London: University of California Press.
- Forde, C.D. 1934, *Habitat, Economy and Society*, London: Methuen.
- Forde, C.D. (ed.) 1950, *Ethnographic Atlas of Africa*, London: International Africa Institute.
- Forde, C.D. 1953, 'Applied Anthropology in Government: British Africa', in: A.L. Kroeber (ed.), *Anthropology Today*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 841-65.

- Forde, C.D. (ed.) 1956, *Linguistic Survey of the Northern Bantu Borderland, Vol. 1*, London: Oxford University Press for the International African Institute (IAI). p. 146.
- Forde, C.D. 1970 (1950), 'Double Descent among the Yakö', in: C.D. Forde & A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (eds), *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, London: Oxford University Press, pp. 285-332.
- Forde, C.D. & P.M. Kaberry (eds) 1969, *West African Kingdoms in the Nineteenth Century*, London: Oxford University Press.
- Forde, C.D. & A.R. Radcliffe-Brown 1950, *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, London: Oxford University Press.
- Fortes, M. 1936, 'Culture Contact as a Dynamic Process', *Africa* (9): 24-55.
- Fortes, M. 1945, *The Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi*, London.
- Fortes, M. (ed.) 1949a, *Social Structure*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fortes, M. 1949b, *The Web of Kinship among the Tallensi*, London: Oxford University Press for International African Institute.
- Fortes, M. 1953a, 'The Structure of Unilineal Descent Groups', *American Anthropologist* (55): 17-41.
- Fortes, M. 1953b, *Social Anthropology at Cambridge since 1900: An Inaugural Lecture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fortes, M. 1957, 'Malinowski and the Study of Kinship', in: R. Firth (ed.), *Man and Culture*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, pp. 157-88.
- Fortes, M. 1959, *Oedipus and Job in West African Religion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. .
- Fortes, M. 1961, 'Pietas in Ancestor Worship: The Henri Myers Lecture, 1960', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (91): 166-91.
- Fortes, M. (ed.) 1962, *Marriage in Tribal Societies. Cambridge Papers in Social Anthropology*, No. 3. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fortes, M. 1969a (1940), 'The Political System of the Tallensi of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast', in: M. Fortes & E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *African Political Systems*, London, Oxford University Press, pp. 239-71.
- Fortes, M. 1969b, *Kinship and the Social Order*, London: Routledge.
- Fortes, M. 1970, *Time and Social Structure and Other Essays*. London: Athlone.
- Fortes, M. 1987, *Religion, Morality and the Person: Essays on Tallensi Religion*, edited by J. Goody, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fortes, M. & G. Dieterlen (eds) 1965, *African Systems of Thought*, London: Oxford University Press.
- Fortes, M. & E.E. Evans-Pritchard (eds) 1969 (1940), *African Political Systems*, London: Oxford University Press.
- Frankenberg, R. 1957, *Village on the Border: A Social Study of Religion, Politics and Football in a North Wales Community*, London: Cohen & West.
- Frankenberg, R. 1978, 'Anthropology or Political Economy: The Barotse Social Formation', in: J. Clammer (ed.), *The New Economic Anthropology*, London: Macmillan, pp. 31-60.
- Fry, P. 1975, *Spirits of Protest: Spirit-mediums and the Articulation of Consensus amongst the Zezuru of Southern Rhodesia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Garbett, G.K. 1966, 'Religious Aspects of Political Succession among the Valley Korekore', in: E. Stokes & R. Brown, (eds), *The Zambesian Past*, Manchester: Manchester University Press for Institute for Social Research, pp. 137-70.

- Geschiere, P.L. & R. Raatgever 1985, 'Introduction', in: W.M.J. van Binsbergen & P.L. Geschiere (eds), *Old Modes of Production and Capitalist Encroachment: Anthropological Explorations in Africa*, London/Boston: Kegan Paul International.
- Gluckman, H.M. 1950, 'Introduction', in: J. Barnes & J.C. Mitchell, *The Lamba Village*, Cape Town University Press, Communication from the School of African Studies, New Series, no. 24, pp. 1-20.
- Gluckman, H.M. 1956, *Custom and Conflict in Africa*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Gluckman, H.M. 1958, *Analysis of a Social Situation in Modern Zululand*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Gluckman, H.M. 1960, 'Tribalism in Modern British Central Africa', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 1: 55-70.
- Gluckman, H.M. 1963, *Order and Rebellion in Tribal Africa*, London: Cohen & West.
- Gluckman, H.M. (ed.) 1964, *Closed Systems and Open Minds: The Limits of Naivety in Social Anthropology*, Edinburgh/London: Oliver & Boyd.
- Gluckman, H.M. 1965a, *Politics, Law and Ritual in Tribal Society*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Gluckman, H.M. 1965b, *The Ideas in Barotse Jurisprudence*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Gluckman, H.M. 1967 (1957), *The Judicial Process among the Barotse of Northern Rhodesia*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Gluckman, H.M. 1968a (1941), *Economy of the Central Barotse Plain*, Manchester University Press, Rhodes-Livingstone Paper No. 7.
- Gluckman, H.M. 1968b (1953), *Essays on Lozi Land and Royal Property*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, Rhodes-Livingstone Papers No. 10.
- Gluckman, H.M. 1968c, 'Interhierarchical Roles: Professional and Party Ethics in Tribal Areas in South and Central Africa', in: M.J. Swartz (ed.), *Local Level Politics: Social and Cultural Perspectives*, Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co.
- Gluckman, H.M. 1969a (1940), 'The Kingdom of the Zulu of South Africa', in: M. Fortes & E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *African Political Systems*, London: Oxford University Press, pp. 25-55.
- Gluckman, H.M. (ed.) 1969b, *Ideas and Procedures in African Customary Law: Studies Presented and Discussed at the 8th International African Seminar*, Addis Ababa, 1966, London: Oxford University Press.
- Gluckman, H.M. 1970 (1950), 'Kinship and Marriage among the Lozi of Northern Rhodesia and the Zulu of Natal', in: A.R. Radcliffe-Brown & D. Forde (eds), *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, London: Oxford University Press, pp. 166-206.
- Gluckman, H.M. 1971, 'Tribalism, Ruralism and Urbanism in South and Central Africa', in: V.W. Turner (ed.), *Profiles of Change: Colonialism in Africa 1870-1960*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 127-66.
- Gluckman, H.M. (ed.) 1972, *The Allocation of Responsibility*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Harris, M. 1968, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Holleman, J.F. 1952, *Shona Customary Law*, Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Holleman, J.F. 1969, *Chief Council and Commissioner*, Assen: Royal Van Gorcum for African Studies Centre.

- Hutchinson, S. 1985, 'Changing Concepts of Incest among the Nuer', *American Ethnologist* 12, 4: 625-41.
- Hutchinson, S. 1992, 'The Cattle of Money and the Cattle of Girls among the Nuer', *American Ethnologist* 19 (2): 294-316.
- Hutchinson, S. 1996, *Nuer Dilemmas: Coping with Money, War and the State*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- James, W. 1988, *The Listening Ebony: Moral Knowledge, Religion, and Power among the Uduk of Sudan*, London: Oxford University Press.
- Johnson, D.H. 1980, 'History and Prophecy among the Nuer of the Southern Sudan', PhD Thesis, University of California, Los Angeles.
- Johnson, D.H. 1982, 'Evans-Pritchard, the Nuer and the Sudan Political Service', *African Affairs* lxxxii (cccxxiii): 231-46.
- Kapferer, B. 1969, 'Norms and the Manipulation of Relationships in a Work Context', in: J.C. Mitchell (ed.), *Social Networks in Urban Situations*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Kapferer, B. 1972, *Strategy and Transaction in an African Factory: African Workers and Indian Management in a Zambian Town*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Kapferer, B. 1973, 'Social Network and Conjugal Role in Urban Zambia: Towards a Reformulation of the Bott Hypothesis', in: J. Boissevain & J.C. Mitchell (eds), *Network Analysis: Studies in Human Interaction*, The Hague: Mouton. pp. 83-111.
- Kapferer, B. (ed.) 1976, *Transaction and Meaning: Directions in the Anthropology of Exchange and Symbolic Behavior*, Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
- Kapferer, B. 1987, 'The Anthropology of Max Gluckman', *Social Analysis* (22): 2-19.
- Kapferer, B. 1988a, 'The Anthropologist as Hero: Three Exponents of Post-modernist Anthropology', *Critique of Anthropology* 8 (2): 77-104.
- Kapferer, B. 1988b, *Legends of People, Myths of State: Violence, Intolerance and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia*, Washington/London: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Kapferer, B. 1996, 'Preface to the 1996 Edition', in: V.W. Turner (ed.), *Schism and Continuity in an African Society: A Study of Ndembu Village Life*, Oxford: Berg.
- Kapferer, B. 1997, *The Feast of the Sorcerer: Practices of Consciousness and Power*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kapferer, B. (ed.) 2003, *Beyond Rationalism: Rethinking Magic, Witchcraft and Sorcery*, New York: Berghahn.
- Kuper, A. 1975, *Anthropologists and Anthropology: The British School, 1922-72*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Lan, D. 1985, *Guns and Rain: Guerillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe*, London/Berkeley & Los Angeles: Currey/University of California Press.
- Leclerc, G. 1972, *Anthropologie et Colonialisme*, Paris: Fayard.
- Lenin, V.I. 1960-1963 (1917 in Russian), 'Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism', in: V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House.
- Macmillan, H. 1995, 'Return to the Malungwana Drift – Max Gluckman, the Zulu Nation and the Common Society', *African Affairs* 94 (374) 39-65.

- Marwick, M.G. 1965a, *Sorcery in its Social Setting*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Marwick, M.G. 1965b, 'Some Problems in the Sociology of Sorcery and Witchcraft', in: M. Fortes & G. Dieterlen (eds), *African Systems of Thought*, London: Oxford University Press, pp. 171-91.
- Marx, E. 1967, *The Bedouin of the Negev*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Marx, E. 1972, 'Some Social Contexts of Personal Violence', in: H.M. Gluckman (ed.), *The Allocation of Responsibility*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Marx, K. 1906-09, *Capital*, (tr. E. Untermann, iii vols), Chicago: C.H. Kerr.
- Meillassoux, C. 1975, *Femmes, Greniers et Capitaux*, Paris: Maspero.
- Middleton, J. & D. Tait (eds) 1958, *Tribes without Rulers*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Mitchell, J.C. 1956, *The Kalela Dance: Aspects of Social Relationships among Urban Africans in Northern Rhodesia*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Mitchell, J.C. 1960, *Tribalism and the Plural Society*, Inaugural Address, University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, London: Oxford University Press.
- Mitchell, J.C. 1965 (1955), *The Yao Village*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Mitchell, J.C. 1967, 'On Quantification in Social Anthropology', in: A.L. Epstein (ed.), *The Craft of Social Anthropology*, London: Tavistock, pp. 17-45.
- Mitchell, J.C. (ed.) 1969, *Social Networks in Urban Situations*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Mitchell, J.C. 1970, 'Tribe and Social Change in South Central Africa: A Situational Approach', in: P.C.W. Gutkind (ed.), *The Passing of Tribal Man in Africa*, Leiden: Brill, pp. 83-101.
- Mitchell, J.C. 1971 (1964), 'Foreword', in: J. van Velsen, *The Politics of Kinship: A Study of Social Manipulation among the Lakeside Tonga of Malawi*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. v-xiv.
- Mitchell, J.C. 1974, 'Perceptions of Ethnicity and Ethnic Behaviour: An Empirical Exploration', in: A. Cohen (ed.), *Urban Ethnicity*, London: Tavistock, pp. 1-35.
- Peters, E.L. 1951, 'The Sociology of the Bedouin of Cyrenaica', DPhil Thesis, Oxford University.
- Peters, E.L. 1960, 'The proliferation of segments in the lineage of the Bedouin of Cyrenaica', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 90, 1: 29-53.
- Peters, E.L. 1967, 'Some Structural Aspects of the Feud among the Camel-herding Bedouin of Cyrenaica', *Africa* (37): 261-82.
- Peters, E.L. 1976, 'Aspects of Affinity in a Lebanese Maronite Village', in J.G. Peristiany (ed.), *Mediterranean Family Structures*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 26-80.
- Rey, P-P. 1971, *Colonialisme, Néo-colonialisme et Transition au Capitalisme*, Paris: Maspero.
- Rey, P-P. (ed.) 1973, *Les Alliances de Classes*, Paris: Maspero.
- Richards, A.I. 1939, *Land, Labour and Diet in Northern Rhodesia*, London: Oxford University Press.
- Schmidt, A., n.d., 'The Manchester School', Department of Anthropology College of Arts and Sciences, The University of Alabama, at: <http://www.as.ua.edu/ant/Faculty/murphy/manchest.htm>.
- Schoffeleers, J.M. (ed.) 1979, *Guardians of the Land*, Gwelo, Gweru: Mambo Press.

- Schumaker, L.L. 1994, 'The Lion in the Path: Fieldwork and Culture in the History of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, 1937-1964', PhD Thesis, Department of History and Sociology of Science, University of Pennsylvania.
- Schumaker, L.L. 2001 *Africanizing Anthropology*, Africanizing Anthropology: Fieldwork, Networks, and the Making of Cultural Knowledge in Central Africa, Durham: Duke University Press.
- Sigrist, C. 1967, *Regulierte Anarchie: Untersuchungen zum Fehlen und zur Entstehung politischer Herrschaft in segmentären Gesellschaften Afrikas*, Olten/Freiburg: Walter-Verlag.
- Simon, H. 1957, *Models of Man: Social and Rational*, New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Simone, S. 1992, *Kings of Disaster: Dualism, Centralism and the Scapegoat King in Southeastern Sudan*, Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers.
- Spencer, J. 2000, 'British Social Anthropology: A Retrospective', *Annual Review of Anthropology* (29): 1-24.
- Thoden van Velzen, H.U.E. 1965, 'De Manchester School en Antropologisch Onderzoek', *Kula* (3): 5-12.
- Turner, V.W. 1952, *The Lozi Peoples of North-West Rhodesia*, London: Oxford University Press, Ethnographic Atlas of Africa.
- Turner, V.W. 1955, 'A Lunda Love Story and its Consequences: Selected Texts from Traditions Collected by Henrique Dias de Carvalho at the Court of Mwantianvwa in 1887', *Rhodes-Livingstone Journal/Human Problems in British Central Africa* (19): 1-26.
- Turner, V.W. 1961, *Ndembu Divination: Its Symbolism and Techniques*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, Rhodes-Livingstone Paper, No. 31.
- Turner, V.W. 1962, *Chihamba the White Spirit*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, Rhodes-Livingstone Paper, No. 33.
- Turner, V.W. 1966, 'Colour Classification in Ndembu Ritual', in: M. Banton (ed.), *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, London: Tavistock, pp. 47-84.
- Turner, V.W. 1967, *The Forest of Symbols*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Turner, V.W. 1968a (1957), *Schism and Continuity in an African Society: A Study of Ndembu Village*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Turner, V.W. 1968b, *The Drums of Affliction*, London: Oxford University Press.
- Turner, V.W. 1969, *The Ritual Process*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Turner, V.W. (ed.) 1971, *Profiles of Change (Colonialism in Africa 1870-1960, Part III)*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Turner, V.W. 1974, 'Lunda Rites and Ceremonies', in: *The Occasional Papers of the Rhodes-Livingstone Museum, nos. 1-16: In One Volume*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Turner, V.W. & E. Turner 1978, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Tylor, E.B. 1948 (1871), *Primitive Culture*, New York: Harper.
- van Binsbergen, W.M.J. 1977, 'Law in the Context of Nkoya Society', in: S. Roberts (ed.), *Law and the Family in Africa*, The Hague/Paris: Mouton, pp. 39-68.
- van Binsbergen, W.M.J. 1981, *Religious Change in Zambia: Exploratory Studies*, London & Boston: Kegan Paul International.
- van Binsbergen, W.M.J. 1998, 'Globalization and Virtuality: Analytical Problems Posed by the Contemporary Transformation of African Societies', in: B. Meyer &

- P.L. Geschiere (eds), *Globalization and Identity: Dialectics of Flow and Closure*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 273-303.
- van Binsbergen, W.M.J. 2003a, *Intercultural Encounters: African and Anthropological towards a Philosophy of Interculturality*, Berlin/Muenster: LIT.
- van Binsbergen, W.M.J. (ed.) in collaboration with R. Pelgrim 2003b, *The Dynamics of Power and the Rule of Law: Essays on Africa and Beyond: In Honour of Emile Adriaan B. van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal*, Berlin/Münster: LIT for African Studies Centre.
- van Binsbergen, W.M.J. 2003c, “‘Then Give Him to the Crocodiles’: Violence, State Formation, and Cultural Discontinuity in West Central Zambia, 1600-2000”, in: W.M.J. van Binsbergen (ed.) in collaboration with R. Pelgrim, *The Dynamics of Power and the Rule of Law: Essays on Africa and Beyond: In Honour of Emile Adriaan B. van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal*, Berlin/Münster: LIT for African Studies Centre, pp. 197-220.
- van Binsbergen, W.M.J. n.d. *Van Vorstenhof tot Mediaproduct: Een Culturele Antropologie van Afrika, vooral Zambia*, Unpublished MS.
- van Binsbergen, W.M.J. n.d. ‘Photographic Essay on the Manchester School’, at: http://www.shikanda.net/ethnicity/illustrations_manch/manchest.htm.
- van Binsbergen, W.M.J. & P.L. Geschiere (eds) 1985, *Old Modes of Production and Capitalist Encroachment: Anthropological Explorations in Africa*, London/Boston: Kegan Paul International.
- van Binsbergen, W.M.J. & J.M. Schoffeleers (eds) 1985, *Theoretical Explorations in African Religion*, London/Boston: Kegan Paul International.
- van Donge, J.K. 1985, ‘Understanding Rural Zambia Today: The Relevance of the Rhodes Livingstone Institute’, *Africa* 55 (1): 60-76.
- van Teeffelen, T. 1978, ‘The Manchester School in Africa and Israel: A Critique’, *Dialectical Anthropology* (3): 67-83.
- van Velsen, J. 1961, ‘Labour Migration as a Positive Factor in the Continuity of Tonga Tribal Society’, in: A. Southall (ed.), *Social Change in Modern Africa*, London: Oxford University Press, pp. 230-41.
- van Velsen, J. 1969, ‘The Extended-case Method and Situational Analysis’, in: A.L. Epstein (ed.), *The Craft of Social Anthropology*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 129-49.
- van Velsen, J. 1971 (1964), *The Politics of Kinship: A Study of Social Manipulation among the Lakeside Tonga of Malawi*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Watson, W. 1958, *Tribal Cohesion in a Money Economy: A Study of the Mambwe People*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Werbner, R.P. (ed.) 1977, *Regional Cults*, New York: Academic Press.
- Werbner, R.P. 1984, ‘The Manchester School in South-Central Africa’, *Annual Review of Anthropology* (13): 157-85.
- Werbner, R.P. 1989, *Ritual Passage Sacred Journey: The Process and Organization of Religious Movement*, Washington & Manchester: Smithsonian Institution Press & Manchester University Press.
- Wilson, G. 1968 (1942), *The Economics of Detribalization in Northern Rhodesia, I & II*, Manchester University Press for Institute for Social Research, Rhodes-Livingstone Papers No. 5-6.

- Wilson, G. 1956a, 'Emile Durkheim's Theory of Knowledge', *Sociological Review* (4): 47-62.
- Wilson, G. 1956b, 'The Kinship System of the Tallensi: A Revaluation', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 86 (1): 37-75.
- Wilson, G. 1957, *The Trumpet Shall Sound: A Study of 'Cargo' Cults in Melanesia*, London: MacGibbon & Keel.
- Wilson, G. 1961, 'The Analysis of Rebellion and Revolution in British Social Anthropology', *Science and Society* (21): 26-37.
- Wilson, G. 1967, 'Groote Eylandt Totemism and "Le Totémisme Aujourd'hui"', in: E.R. Leach (ed.), *The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism*, London: Tavistock, ASA Monograph No. 5, pp. 141-59.
- Wilson, G. 1970 (1960), *The Third World*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wilson, G. 1984, *The Three Worlds: Culture & World Development*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson.

Dreams and agency during Angola's War of Independence

Inge Brinkman

Dreams are not a field of study usually associated with resistance. This chapter, however, offers a historical interpretation of transcripts of dream accounts put down on paper by a guerilla fighter in northern Angola in 1961. It becomes clear that the struggle between good and evil in the dream world is regarded as being directly related to the struggle for independence. Resistance thus comes to involve more than just the violent onslaught of individual agents based on conscious decisions. In a complex intertwining of acting and 'being acted upon' that helps to identify the messages and meanings in dreams, the dreamer is able to contribute to the struggle that is viewed as taking place not only in the daily but also in the nocturnal world.

Agency is a tricky concept. Leave it out and you have a determinist or abstract model, put it in and you risk instrumentalism, the bourgeois subject, the idealised idealistic individual I...
(Lambek 2002: 37)

Introduction

War started in northern Angola in March 1961. Young men gathered together and, in many cases invoking the name of the UPA movement, started killing Portuguese immigrants. The Union of the Peoples of Angola (UPA)¹ was formed in 1958 in the Belgian Congo by Angolan emigrants, and its leadership was based in Matadi and Léopoldville. By 1961 it had a large following in

¹ União das Populações de Angola.

northern Angola and the Portuguese regarded the movement as the most dangerous threat to the colonial regime in Angola. In the first few of days after the revolt started, hundreds of Portuguese were killed, and the remainder of the settlers fled to the regional towns or to Luanda, the capital of Angola. The Portuguese settlers formed militias, and later the Portuguese armed forces started a counter-insurgency. Over 20,000 people were killed and more than half a million Angolans fled to neighbouring Congo (later Zaire).

Portuguese propaganda stated as soon as possible that everything was under control, but northern Angola remained a military zone until 1974. The remaining population lived in areas surrounded by barbed wire and watch-towers, soldiers could not always leave their garrisons and road traffic was severely limited, especially in the rainy season. In 1961 and 1962, there were UPA camps in the forests where the guerrillas and some of their supporters hid.

During military actions, the Portuguese army often entered these camps and found UPA documents: transcriptions of songs, pamphlets, letters and circulars. As a rule, these documents were sent to the Portuguese secret police (PIDE) to be translated. Since 1994, these documents have been accessible to researchers in the PIDE archives in Lisbon.

In the UPA movement's files, I encountered some seventeen written dream accounts dated between March and July 1962 and signed by a UPA soldier by the name of João Jecquetão. At that time he lived near Bembe, in the camp where the UPA's military headquarters was located. On the basis of these documents I investigate here the relationship between agency and resistance from the viewpoint of a guerrilla describing his dream world. A first step towards this is a discussion of the debates on agency and resistance. Then follows a fuller picture of the man who signed the dreams, João Jecquetão, as well as a discussion of the context in which he wrote the accounts. The role of religion in general and dreams in particular during the war requires attention, as do Kongo notions of the nocturnal and the daily world. As we will see, man's engagement with the moral order is a pluriform process of 'undergoing' and acting that involves more than resistance as violent political action consciously decided upon by individuals.

Agency and resistance

Soon after most African states obtained independence from colonial rule in the early 1960s, there was a sharp increase in studies of anti-colonial resistance. This attention for African resistance against colonialism in research circles was, at least partly, an attempt to redress the colonial stereotype of the 'passive, lazy African'. Africans were shown to be capable of action and initiative, even of conscious action that went against the colonial system. In their approach,

scholars of African resistance were clearly championing the cause of African people who stood up against colonial rule and in this way focused on agency rather than structure. This approach coincided with trends in mainstream history, where the attention for history from below, life histories, micro-history, and the social history of people in their daily lives was growing at the cost of the meta-narratives of state structures, economic systems and Grand Old Men (Lonsdale 2000: 5-16).

In later subaltern and postcolonial studies, scholars also studied resistance movements organized by colonized peoples and pointed to the limits of the colonial powers that were often dependent on the influence of local elites. At the same time, however, it was argued that an all-too-exclusive focus on agency could result in a neglect of historical constraint: as if all people were free to choose, without constraint, coercion and power structures influencing their lives. This dilemma was forcefully expressed by Frederic Cooper (1994: 1517, also 1526): 'The difficulty is to confront the power behind European expansion without assuming it was all-determining'.

Another dilemma that continues to influence the debates on domination and resistance is the notion of resistance as a 'reaction to': in this sense resistance can never mean fully autonomous action. Even if the colonized are restored to full agency, colonized people still remain 'the colonized' and are thus forced into a strait-jacket of an opposition between colonized people and colonizers. An analytical separation is created between the dominant and the dominated culture. An example of such separation can be found in the work of James C. Scott on 'hidden transcripts' (1990) and 'weapons of the weak' (1985). In his analysis, dominant and dominated groups separately develop a political culture in which the power relations are imagined differently from what he calls the 'public transcript'. In the public transcript, the dominated uphold a façade of submission and acceptance, but at times the imageries developed in the hidden transcript of the dominated burst into the open. Cooper (1994: 1534) argues against Scott's 'weapons of the weak' when he stresses 'the complexity of engagement of Africans with imported institutions and constructs'. Furthermore, as Sherry Ortner (1995: 173-93) pointed out, the domination/resistance framework isolates events from the context in which they happen. Actions are only evaluated in their capacity of resistance against colonial rule, and so other possible motives and consequences that might have played a role in events become more difficult to interpret.

At the same time, the dominant conceptualization of resistance presupposes autonomous action. Consciousness, agency and violent initiative are taken as the hallmark of resistance. Rosalind O'Hanlon (1988: 222-23) argued that such a notion of resistance is in itself limiting and dominating:

The very dichotomy between domination and resistance, as we currently conceive it, bears all the marks of dominant discourse, in its insistence that resistance itself should necessarily take the virile form of a deliberate and violent onslaught. Rejecting this, we should look for resistances of a different kind: dispersed in fields we do not conventionally associate with the political...

Over the course of time there have been many studies that deal with less-conventional means of resistance. Examples come from the study of banditry by Donald Crummey (1986), James Scott's 'weapons of the weak' and Karen Fields's thesis (1982: 321-61) that glossolalia and spirit possession posed as much of a threat to colonial order as strikes and petitions.

Dreams and resistance

Dreams could be another field of study that is usually not interpreted when considering politics and nationalism. The relationship between dreams and resistance has not received much attention in scholarly research. An exception, however, is the article by Achille Mbembe on the dream accounts of Um Nyobe, a Cameroonian political leader in the 1950s. Mbembe holds that 'the dreams and annotations of Um Nyobe become significant, not as an expression of sexual preoccupations or the residual psychological orientations of his society, but as historical evidence' (Mbembe 1991: 119). Mbembe frames Um Nyobe's dreams in the colonial context: the dreams are related both to colonial incursions into the colonized's imagination and to the resistance against colonial violence (ibid: 104-108). A similar argument is made by Steve Chimombo (1989: 59) who makes it clear that also in works of fiction where dreams are described that they cannot be seen separately from the colonial context. While Mbembe focuses in this respect on colonial hegemony and resistance, Chimombo includes a wider variety of facets of the colonial context, ranging from negative experiences such as colonial prisons to the positively evaluated experience of Christian conversion.

These examples form a critique on Freudian interpretations that seek to interpret dreams in terms of subconscious desires that are in no way related to the political and historical context. While in the West such psychological, individual interpretations of dreams have been common, dreams in African cultures have often been analyzed as a social event. This is also the case in an article by Akira Okazaki (2002: 63-83) who sees Gamk dreaming as an inter-subjective activity through which Gamk people resist the negative influences that impinge on their lives. The problem with Okazaki's approach is that it dissolves the person and replaces him/her with a homogeneous, amorphous collectivity. No specific dreams from specific persons are mentioned in the article, and this undifferentiated approach to inter-subjectivity leaves differ-

ences and power relations within Gamk society undiscussed. Yet, it is clear that dreaming and dream interpretation are related to personal status, social differences and hierarchical relations. Such variations in dreaming and dream interpretation ought not to be explained away in an instrumentalist manner, as if people use dreams merely as a 'bid for status' (Charsley 1973: 244-57, Kiernan 1985: 316, Evans-Pritchard 1976: 230). Just like spirit possession, dreaming 'entails the disavowal of agency' (Lambek 2002: 37). Any hint that dreams are used to further personal interests may lead to an accusation of witchcraft (see, for example, Behrend 1999: 137-38, 142-46). 'People have different dream patterns' (Sithole 1970: 112), but that is not to say that dream accounts are no more than strategic devices to increase power and status. The methodological issue at stake is how to interpret dreams and their interpretation as a profoundly social affair, while at the same time taking into account the personal history and background of the dreamer.

João Jecquetão

This last point leads us to reflect on the man who signed most of the dream accounts – João Jecquetão Filipe – about whom we know very little. He must have become a UPA soldier in 1961 because his soldier's number is 18/61. From the accounts and letters it is clear that João Jecquetão did not hold a position of leadership; he calls himself a 'soldier', frequently refers to his superiors and has to ask permission from others if he wants leave.² Perhaps he belonged to the UPA youth wing, as he refers to the Juventude (Youth Wing) in an inclusive manner. His married status and the references he makes to his children, however, indicate that he was not an adolescent. From the dream accounts and his letters we learn that João Jecquetão was a devout Christian and the Bible quotes suggest he belonged to one of the Protestant denominations in the region.

He was stationed in Bembe at the UPA headquarters. In the dreams there is frequent mention of specific places in the area around Bembe and the descriptions of the localities show that Jecquetão was familiar with the region. It is probable therefore that Jecquetão was born near Bembe or at least grew up there. Jecquetão may have written down the dream accounts himself but he might also have dictated them to someone who wrote them down for him. It is impossible to make any assessment about his level of education. Like many

² IANTT (Instituto dos Arquivos Nacionais/Torro do Tombo, Lisbon, Portugal), PIDE (Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado), Del. A (Delegação de Angola), P.Inf. (Processo de Informação) 11.12.F, p. 900: Manuel Veloso to João Jecquetão, sl, sd. (translation by PIDE 9 August 1962).

other guerrillas, João Jecquetão exchanged letters with other people on a regular basis. But again, it is not clear whether he wrote these letters himself or whether they were dictated to someone.

In the letters to Jecquetão, there is frequent use of kinship terms, as in 'my beloved son' or 'my dear brother'.³ Kin address to people outside the family was very common during the war and the word 'brother' was particularly widely used among men. So it remains unclear whether João Jecquetão wrote to his relatives or other people he knew in the area. The letters refer to a variety of subjects and contain many religious references and Bible quotes, more mundane statements about the exchange of goods, rumours and news about the war and explanations about the writer's state of health. Greetings from third persons were passed on through the letters, and the writers expressed their support for the UPA and sent words of encouragement to each other.

In total I came across seventeen dream accounts in the PIDE archives. Some of the accounts were combined and the accounts were bundled into ten documents. All are translations from the Kikongo original made by Álvaro da Cruz Henrique who worked for the Portuguese secret police. The translations are dated between 9 and 18 August 1962, while dates between March and July 1962 are mentioned in the dreams. Apart from the dream accounts, the archives also contain a number of translations of letters addressed to João Jecquetão and a circular by him, apparently written in a notebook. In none of the cases is it known where the original documents are stored or even whether they still exist. Apart from these letters and the dream accounts in the archives, no further references to João Jecquetão were found.

The Bembe region in 1962

João Jecquetão was in Bembe headquarters when the death of the UPA Field Commander João Batista Traves Perreira occurred. Batista was from southern Angola and had joined the UPA in Congo after he deserted the Portuguese army. Before March 1961 he was one of the people behind a network of UPA propagandists, and after the rebellion started he was appointed Field Commander within Angola. He went to Bembe where he established his command.

³ IANTT, PIDE, Del. A, P.Inf. 11.12.D, p. 187: Maria Adelaide to João Jecquetão, s.l., s.d. (translation by PIDE 18 August 1962); p. 188: Maria Adorada Miguel to João Jecquetão, Mata Maungo, s.d. (translation by PIDE 18 August 1962); *ibid*: 191: Luisa Costa to João Jecquetão, s.l., s.d. (translation by PIDE 18 August 1962); *ibid*: 207-208: Pedro Ferraz Rosa da Cunha to João Jecquetão, Quartel Tinda in Quinamende, 27 May 1962; *ibid*: 11.12.E, p. 190: Pedro Sebastião Kiambati to João Jecquetão, Mata Bumba, 15 June 1962; *ibid*: 11.12.F, p. 886: João Manuel to João Jecquetão, headquarters Bembe, s.d. (translation by PIDE 11 August 1962).

In the literature it is held that he ended the leadership of the despotic and murderous António Geral Nanganessa. There is evidence, however, that Batista was also involved in the extremely violent start of the war and the breach between the two commanders was not as strong as is generally assumed (Davezies 1968: 21-35 (account by Fofó), Marcum 1969: 147, Marcum 1978: 43-44, Pélissier 1978: 573-74).

Suffering set in soon after the war started. Despite desperate calls from Batista for blankets, arms and ammunition,⁴ no help came from Léopoldville. The UPA president, Holden Roberto, reportedly refused to send arms as the risk of Portuguese interception was too high. Instead he advised the digging of trenches as a strategy to protect the guerrillas against air attacks. There are indications that many guerrillas saw this refusal to help as a breach of promise. They kept their hopes fixed on Holden's statement that an aeroplane sixty metres long and forty metres wide would soon arrive with assistance.⁵

According to the official UPA version, Batista died on 6 February 1962 during an attack on the Portuguese-held Bembe town. This led to a major crisis in UPA circles. The ELNA's chief of staff⁶ in Congo, Marcos Kassanga, held that Batista was not killed during an attack but that he had been eliminated by Holden Roberto 'only because he did not agree with the extermination of Angolans, because he did not speak Kikongo, because he did not originate from São Salvador and because he was not protestant'. Kassanga expressed dissatisfaction with Holden's leadership and, together with some other UPA leaders from the south, he left the UPA.⁷ There is no evidence that Holden Roberto had a hand in Batista's death. There is, on the contrary, a letter that indicates that Batista's contacts within the UPA elite in exile were not appreciated in the Bembe region, and his quick rise to a powerful position was not accepted by people in the Bembe area.⁸ So, if people from within the movement were intent on his death, it would not have been Roberto but rather these dissatisfied regional leaders. Be this as it may, Batista's death meant a turning point in UPA history. Many southerners left the movement and no further attempts were made

⁴ IANTT, PIDE, Del.A., P.Inf . 11.12.C, p. 253: Letter João Baptista Traves Pereira, Maole, 23 July 1961; *ibid*: p. 355: letter Paulino Eduardo and João Baptista Traves Pereira, Maole, 24 July 1961; *ibid*: 16.12.C, pp. 361-62: Letter João Baptista Traves Pereira, Bembe, 31 January 1962.

⁵ IANTT, PIDE, Del.A., P.Inf . 11.12.C, pp. 198-99: Summary of statement by Paulino Calandula, Carmona 19 September 1961.

⁶ National Liberation Army of Angola (Exército de Libertação Nacional de Angola).

⁷ *Ibid*: 479-82 (quote 481): Press Conference, Marcos Kassanga, Léopoldville, 3 March 1962; Marcum 1969: pp. 236-41.

⁸ IANTT, PIDE, Del.A., P.Inf 14.15.A pp. 98-99: Pedro Mulatto to the villages of Luquelo, Sangui, 13 January 1962.

by the UPA leadership to establish a military headquarters in Angola. The guerrillas were henceforth organized from outside the country. Batista's death meant that the UPA became a movement in exile (Marcum 1969: 135-36, 157, 158, 228-43, Marcum 1978: 43-44).

This had immediate consequences for the guerrillas in the camps on Angolan territory. After the commander's death, João Jecquetão complained of an increasing lack of discipline and order at the camp, now that no one took corrective measures:

On the 6th May 1962, two individuals, a soldier and a corporal respectively, met each other at the quarter. Given the intrigues that existed between the two, these individuals started to fight. At that time, our *mais velhos* (leaders, elders) were absent from the base. It was known, however, that, according to recommendations from our untimely dead Commander J.B. Traves Pereira, any soldier who would go to fight with another would be punished with fifteen days prison before being brought to trial. It happened, however, when those *mais velhos* arrived they gave no importance to the case. When I noticed this affront from our *mais velhos*, I decided from that date, whenever there would be more intrigues between the soldiers, not to help whatever attitude they would adopt, in case they wanted to do justice.

Signed: João Jequetão (soldier no. 18/61)⁹

Although some guerrilla activity continued, the importance of Bembe as a UPA military centre ended and the region found itself on the edge of UPA activities: a fact that increased its isolation in military and political terms.

Dreams in Bembe's bush

There is no doubt that religion played a pivotal role in the UPA movement. All regional UPA leaders and nearly all of their followers were devoted Christians, in most cases in the Baptist tradition but there were also Kimbanguists, Roman Catholics, Methodists and people from other denominations. Before the war, religion had taken a central place in many people's lives and continued to do so during the war. In addition, the risks involved in war gave religion a more urgent character. The need for protection was felt by all.

The war put many people in danger: people risked Portuguese bombing and ground attacks, drowning in rivers, losing their way in the bush, hunger and wild animals. In such a context, the need for spiritual support and protection increased sharply. There were many ways to invoke God's help but prayer was one of the most accepted and widespread means. All meetings would start with a prayer, usually said by those who had held a position in church before the war,

⁹ IANTT, PIDE, Del. A, P.Inf. 11.12.D, p. 185: letter João Jequetão (translated 13 August 1962); Other statements about mounting indiscipline, Interview 7.

and special prayer meetings were arranged to ask for God's protection. The role of religious leaders was very important in the UPA and also in Bembe. There were several religious offices, such as that of Interpreter of Religion,¹⁰ that helped the guerrillas to interpret the world in which they lived.

For the guerrillas, an important way of protecting themselves was the war cry: *maza* (water). In an account by Inacio Mendes, a young UPA guerrilla who later joined the MPLA,¹¹ the workings of *maza* during an attack on Bembe town in 1961 were described as follows:

In the midst of the confusion, our people shouted the word *naza* (sic: *maza*: water), that is, asking God that from the arms of the enemies water would come out instead of bullets. There was obvious proof that God is with Africa and the Africans during that moment. The bullets fired by the whites were not felt, only from the weapon of Manuel Chaves, an enemy of his country. Apart from this shouting, religious singing could be heard, by dozens of Bembistas.¹²

Asking for God's help thus had very clear and immediate results. In other instances, God chose his own moment to deliver messages to the men fighting for independence. Dreams were regarded as one of the ways in which messages from the other world could be revealed. If explained properly, such messages could help people to face the dangers of life and avoid problems.

From the accounts by João Jecquetão, it is clear that dreams were a matter of concern to the guerrillas. After waking up, Jecquetão often pondered his dreams and asked himself what they could possibly reveal. In all his accounts, he mentions that he related his dreams to several people, usually mentioning them by name. Jecquetão also indicates that he knew about the dreams of another guerrilla, namely those of Commander Manuel Cosmo. Dreams might have been recounted by the guerrillas at the morning quarters and they were often discussed among the guerrillas. For example, after Jecquetão dreamt about being impotent, he asked how such dreams could be avoided.

There are occasions that Jecquetão decided not to discuss his dreams because he knew that some people would not believe him. Thus in one account he explains: 'I have had many dreams, but it is not permitted to speak with all clarity because I know that some believe, but others keep their ears shut'.¹³ The

¹⁰ IANTT, PIDE, Del. A, P.Inf. 11.12.D, p. 216: Pedro Ferraz Rosa da Cunha Isabel to João Jecquetão, s.l., s.d.

¹¹ Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola, (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola).

¹² IANTT, PIDE, Del. A, P.Inf. 11.12.C pp. 370-71: copy of a report written by Afonso Inácio Mendes, s.l., s.d., perhaps Bembe, May 1961.

¹³ IANTT, PIDE, Del. A, P.Inf. 11.12.F p. 751-752: translation of dream account signed by João Jecquetão, s.l. (Headquarters) s.d. (April 1962), (translation by PIDE 18 August 1962).

disbelief of his fellow guerrillas and other people resident in the bush was perhaps one of the reasons for João Jecquetão had for writing down accounts of his dreams. He states: 'All this here was written down to let you know in due course'.¹⁴

Dreams in the guerrilla camp were discussed, attempts were made at interpretation, and they were written down. They often influenced decisions that were taken by the UPA military leadership. João Jecquetão explains that his spirit had been troubled and he dreamt 'many things' before the death of João Batista Traves Pereira. Traves Pereira had actually planned to attack Bembe town on 5 February but because there was a young man who had dreamt about imminent danger, Batista decided to postpone the attack by a day (Interview 31: Mr Garcia Pereira Manuel).

The importance of dreams not only becomes evident in Jecquetão's dream accounts but in interviews many people also pointed out that dreams often helped people to escape from dangerous situations. Informants had examples of people dreaming about an imminent attack and as soon as everyone had hidden, bombers would appear and everybody would be safe. As the leader of FNLA-Ngonda¹⁵ (Interview 34) in Mbanza Kongo put it: 'A person who dreams is more valid than a bomb; as s/he can save many lives'. From the various examples, it is clear that interpreting a dream is not taken lightly. Action would only be based on dream messages after serious consideration and if coincidence could be ruled out, for example, by repeating a specific dream or corroborative evidence from other signs or sources.

Prophets and seers of influence, especially at the beginning of the UPA revolt, frequently worked through dreams. Adelina Quivungo was said to be a dreamer or prophetess in the UPA quarter of Banza Quica to the southeast of Bembe.¹⁶ The importance given to dreams was, by many informants, not seen as something particular to Kongo culture or to the UPA movement. 'Even in the time of the pharaohs, such things happened. It is not specific to UPA' stated Luís da Silva (Interview 14) referring to Joseph's dreams at the pharaoh's palace.

¹⁴ IANTT, PIDE, Del. A, P.Inf. 11.12.D p. 198-200: translation of dream account signed by João Jecquetão, s.l. s.d. (March 1962), (translation by PIDE 16 August 1962).

¹⁵ National Front for the Liberation of Angola (Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola).

¹⁶ IANTT, PIDE, Del. A, P.Inf. 11.12.D p. 38: Summary of statement made by Armando Pedro, Carmona, 8 January 1962.

Dreams, danger and success

This Biblical interpretation of the role of dreams indicates that in the Kongo region dreams cannot be viewed as separate from Christian traditions. Dreams often formed the basis of conversion, even in the early days of Christianity. Christian prophecies were important throughout and dreams also gave rise to a new Christian literary genre, the *ndozi* (Kikongo: dream). The *ndozi* became one of the first ways for literate Bakongo people to express themselves in writing and appeared predominantly in missionary journals (Thornton 1998, 2002: 84, Mbelolo ya Mpiku 1972: 129, 139, Janzen 1985: 225-52).

From the sparse ethnographic notes on dreams, it becomes clear that, to understand dreams, the Kongo notion of the person has to be taken into account. The person in Kongo is conceived of as a composite, parts of which may act independently of each other. Thus it is the soul that leaves the body and is active in the world of the dead during the night, while the 'daylight activities of the body are supposed to be experienced as dreams by the soul' (MacGaffey 1986: 50). As the current conceptualization of agency is related to one bounded individual with one will, this composite conception of the person already poses a problem. A similar problem is presented by the multiplicity of world concepts: instead of one world, the worlds of day and night, of the living and the dead, of daily life and unseen powers are differentiated, even though these are assumed to be related. Hence agency is also not limited to singularity but may be plural: one may be asleep but at the same time undertake action and show initiatives in a dream.

Dreams in Kongo keep a balance between many different agencies and patiencies. In Jecquetão's dreams, the agency of different actors intersects: the dream itself, God, Satan, witches, spirits, angels, the dreamer, etc. Rather than conceiving of agency in singular terms, it is the interaction of these various agencies and patiencies that creates the dream event. Jedrej and Shaw (1992: 11) pointed to what they call 'the duality of agency in dreaming', 'the experience of being acted upon even as one acts'. This is also directly formulated by Obed Mutezo, a Zimbabwean nationalist: 'In my dreams I am two things. I am the spectator. I am also the actor' (Sithole 1970: 113). It is no coincidence that in Kikongo the verb to dream is used in the passive form: *kulotwa* or *kulota ndozi*: one is dreamt, rather than one dreams. In other words, the dream, rather than the dreamer, is the agent (Swartenbroeckx 1973, MacGaffey 2000: 52).

With the Western stress on action and agency, the importance of patiency is often forgotten. Patiency – or passions – may be regarded as the counterpart of agency: it can be defined as 'being acted upon'. In many African cultures, the association of patiency is not only with suffering and passivity but also with creative force, inspiration and success (Lambek 2002: 25-43, see also Gell

1998). Thus dreams may lead to song composition, weaving patterns, herbal knowledge and the ability to foretell the future (Dilley 1992: 71-85, Erlmann 1995: 301-304, Muller 1999: 92-95, Reynolds 1992: 31-32, MacGaffey, 2000: 124, Janzen, 1985: 230-33, MacGaffey 1986: 220-21). Such inspiration and success are at once an indication of one's dependence on forces from the other world and one's ability to rally and manipulate these forces (Bockie 1993: 43, MacGaffey 1986: 29-30, 170). Michael Lambek (2002: 37) describes the activities of a successful female Mayotte spirit medium as a 'complex intertwining of action and passion'. A similar ambivalence about success is also created in the dreams of João Jecquetão.

Dealing with powers from the other world is not without danger. Dreams may come from God or a benign forebear but they can also stem from witches or Satan. Jecquetão fears falling into the 'Devil's trap' in his dreams and is at pains to distinguish between divine messages and Satan's seductions.

A hero not of his own making

In his dreams, João Jecquetão is a winner. There are many instances that establish him as the heroic and successful protagonist of his dreams. Jecquetão is, for example, able to see right through the Devil's traps. In one of his dreams, Jecquetão immediately realizes that he is being offered money by a traitor: 'Oh Jesus,' he then exclaims, 'what a temptation did I have to arrive at this point!' After waking up, he describes the events in this dream as 'diabolic machinations'. In other dream accounts too, João Jecquetão knows who comes from Satan: he recognizes these traitors, he refuses the offerings of Satan's agents and avoids giving in to their seductions.

Jecquetão's heroism also stems from his abilities as a decision maker in his dreams. Though it is clear from the evidence that João Jecquetão does not have a leading position in the UPA, he frequently gives orders in his dream accounts. In most of the examples, Jecquetão receives signs from God about the right course of action to follow and, in retrospect, his decisions always turn out to be right. Often the decisions taken by Jecquetão help his group escape from dangerous situations and prevent capture or death.

Throughout the accounts of his dreams, it becomes clear that João Jecquetão is able to save himself and other people. For example, in one account, God gives Jecquetão the ability to fly and so miraculously escape from a group of approaching whites. It leaves his opponents baffled: 'What are we going to do now?' their leader exclaims. After this, Jecquetão is able to save a woman and a group of children by warning them of the arrival of the Portuguese in time.

His ability to distinguish between Satan and God prevents him from walking into ambushes. In one example, he dreams of an old man and, after waking up,

decides that ‘that animal was a person of Satan because, had that not been so, or if it had been the spirit of God, he would not have become afraid upon hearing us from far’. In another dream, he encounters this old man again and knows him to be dangerous. To prevent being turned in, he disarms the old man and thinks about a way to flee: ‘God, however, with all Power, gave me instructions and I understood how to escape’. He eventually has to kill the old man: ‘God, our Lord, ordered me to kill him, as it was not a sin’. Through this bold action, João Jecquetão is once again able to escape from his enemies, both black and white.

So in all his dreams, João Jecquetão is a clever and heroic man. It is significant, however, that time and again Jecquetão attributes his heroism and his cleverness to God. In doing so, Jecquetão produces a paradox. It is indeed his disavowal of agency that enables João Jecquetão to act in his dreams. On the one hand, this means that God, rather than Jecquetão, is to be praised for these actions. But at the same, it also authorizes Jecquetão’s decisions because the knowledge Jecquetão disposes of in his dreams is God-inspired, there can be no doubt about its accuracy. And at the same time, the mere fact that João Jecquetão is chosen for these miracles and for this divine protection is a sign of his special character. God gives him knowledge in his dreams: about imminent danger, about escape routes, about the right course of action. As it is Jecquetão and not someone else who receives this knowledge, João Jecquetão becomes a privileged person. Finally, João Jecquetão is established as a clear-sighted person, and it is he who is able to distinguish between diabolic machinations and messages from God.

God and Satan

In Jecquetão’s dreams, the forces of Satan and God are in constant conflict. The accounts make it clear that God always wins regardless of the lures and traps the Devil sets. All the same, the fight between good and evil can be hard and intense. Many people that fill the dreams are from the Devil, many events occurring in dreams are detrimental to divine will, and it is but one step to being seduced into Satan’s realm. The major issue then is to distinguish between good and bad, between God and Satan. Jecquetão is thus intent on finding out who is from Satan in his dreams. This endeavour is not confined to his dream world because after waking up he tries to identify the nature of the characters in his dreams. Satan tries to pervert everything. He enters the world of the night and the world of the day with his evil intentions. He harms people; not only in the public political sphere but also in the social life of the family and in the personal sphere.

The struggle between good and evil in Jecquetão’s dream world directly relates to the struggle for independence. Wyatt MacGaffey (1968: 179, 173)

explains in an article about the various worlds the Bakongo inhabit how 'the dream world organises the real one'. This, as MacGaffey states, is not to say that the dream world is any less real but rather real in a different sense: it is not supernatural but 'other-natural'. João Jecquetão likewise connects his dreams to the daily world. In the first place, Jecquetão states that his dreams can reflect events that have already occurred or may indicate future events. He makes his dreams part of the daily world by telling them to other people or writing them down. Some of his dreams call for prayer and it is clear that if Jecquetão were to give in to the Devil's proposals made in his dreams, this would have consequences for Jecquetão when he is awake. The 'I' in the dreams is hence not a mere character but firmly related to João Jecquetão as a person. Jecquetão is not only a UPA soldier in daily life but also in his dreams. God sustains the fight for independence, in dreams and in daily reality, while the Devil is keen on thwarting any attempt to create a better world.

Such a nocturnal struggle relating to the struggle in daily reality has also been noted by Mbembe (1991: 121) in his article on the dreams of Um Nyobe. Mbembe shows how the dreams relate to resistance as Africans attempted to control and manipulate the 'economy of the day' through the 'economy of the night'. A similar view on the struggle can be found among UPA guerrillas. The guerrillas' concern with dreams calls into question the domination/resistance framework in the restricted sense in which it has often been used. Their opposition not only included the political realm of colonialism, but they were as much engaged in a project to purify the land of sin. Mputu was associated with death (MacGaffey 1968: 179), and the Portuguese had 'sinned against the orders of God, but God is not asleep'.¹⁷ In the Holy War against the Portuguese, God would show Angolans how to liberate the land. Domination was evil and so resistance to it had to include much more than a military onslaught that chased the colonialists. The war between God and the Devil in Jecquetão's dream world was part of the war for independence. Jecquetão knows: 'Satan uses the white man in his attacks'.

Violence and legitimacy

In João Jecquetão's dreams there is a sense of imminent danger and the constant threat of violence. UPA soldiers saw the war not only as good in a political sense but also in a moral sense. Portuguese colonialism was considered demonic, an evil to be routed from the land. João Jecquetão also stresses in his dream accounts that those people who tried to harm him were 'diabolic' and

¹⁷ P.e.: IANTT, PIDE, Del. A, P.Inf. 11.12.B, p. 289-91: UPA pamphlet, To: 'Caros compatriotas, amigos nossos, Leo, sd (translation 26 April 1961),

that his rescue came from God. In other words, aggression and protection are both related to forces beyond ordinary living people.

The problem of violence appears very strongly in his dreams. Firstly, the fear of colonial violence looms large. Jecquetão refers several times to the danger of an ambush and notes his fear of being taken captive. When the guerrillas are in a group, they may be prepared to fight but when he is on his own, Jecquetão is sometimes forced to flee. In one dream account, a group of guerrillas – of which Jecquetão is a member – is taken by surprise, and they have no chance to escape. Jecquetão's fear comes true and they are captured. The prisoners are told horrific stories of torture, and, after having transported them to another location, the whites kill two of the prisoners. The other prisoners are subjected to humiliation: they are mocked and their heads are shaven. This treatment leaves Jecquetão horrified. In other accounts, Jecquetão manages to stay clear of the colonial forces or successfully defends himself and his companions.

The dream accounts recount how violence breeds violence. Feeling threatened, UPA soldiers resort to attacking their opponents. These actions are presented as sanctioned violence: either they constitute acts of legitimate self-defence or they are claimed to be ordained by God. Yet, in one of the dream accounts Jecquetão and his companions also kill a group of white women and small children in a house in Kibeka. This is presented in a matter-of-fact way and no further attention is paid to the incident. In another instance, Jecquetão kills a defenceless white man who is trying to hide. Shortly afterwards, his father appears and starts questioning him about the man lying on the ground. Jecquetão's father turns to kill him, and Jecquetão only escapes because he is faster. This can be read as a sign of Jecquetão's uneasiness with this action but no explicit statements are made in defence or condemnation of it.

From the documents, it is obvious that this atmosphere of extreme violence was not restricted to the dream world of João Jecquetão. In a document entitled 'General letter from the inhabitants of Bumba – Bembe', possibly copied from a notebook, the heading reads as follows: 'School year of: 1961-1962. – month of: June – school: terroristic – no. 1 – General Command of service – class: slaughter – group: 1a.- João Jecquetão/soldado no. 18/61'.¹⁸ It is impossible to establish who filled out the school and class categories as 'terroristic' and 'slaughter' respectively and why this was done. It shows, however, that violence had become a part of life, a part of discourse and a part of dreams.

¹⁸ IANTT, PIDE, Del. A, P.Inf. 11.12.D. pp. 196-97.

Dreams, the past and the future

In his accounts, João Jecquetão seeks to demonstrate that his dreams allow him to predict the future. It is this possibility of linking various worlds and times that makes dreams so special. Dreamers are important because they can help people to protect themselves against future events that could negatively influence their lives. One way of drawing attention to a set of dreams is to show that they indeed have this capacity to foretell the future.

Some authors have evaluated people's dream accounts purely as strategic devices or attempts to increase their power and status. There is no reason to interpret Jecquetão's accounts in such an instrumentalist manner, and there are no sources that allow us to state that he intended to use his dreams, or even invented them, merely for his own benefit. We simply do not know whether or not Jecquetão truly believed what he wrote in his own accounts. It is obvious, however, that Jecquetão wanted other people to believe him and that, at least in the accounts, he tried to show that his dreams related to future events.

As with the successful actions in his dreams, Jecquetão creates ambivalence about the powers that help him foretell the future. He stresses his own limitations in interpreting his dreams: 'When I woke up, I did not know, however, I could not understand what these dreams revealed to me,' he states in one account. Yet soon after, it turns out that this particular dream had referred to the foundation of GRAE, a provisional government in exile led by the UPA. In retrospect then, this particular dream is seen as an omen. So, once again, Jecquetão does not present himself as all powerful and is uncertain about the implications of his dreams. At the same time, he is at pains to show in his accounts that his dreams in the final analysis do reveal future events. Through his dreams, João Jecquetão acquires knowledge that would otherwise be inaccessible.

This is important. Through God's inspiration, João Jecquetão is not only able to act heroically in his dreams, he also possesses knowledge that impinges on his daily life. João Jecquetão clearly distinguishes between his dreams and the day world. In many of the accounts, Jecquetão states that he wakes up and gets out of bed. 'After all these were dreams,' he often states. This does not, however, mean that there is no connection between the nocturnal world and the daily world. Jecquetão ponders his dreams, their meaning and what they tell him about the future. Through the divine messages and the links between the dreams and the daily world, the character of his dream becomes connected to the person, João Jecquetão, when he is awake. The heroic qualities he possesses in his dreams come to extend into the realm of the daily world.

As such, anyone can have a dream that foretells the future. During fieldwork it was clear that many portentous dreams during the war had been dreamt by children or fools, people not usually taken seriously (Interviews 13 & 15). The interpretation of dreams was described as a task that required special religious

or political leadership qualities, but dreaming in itself was not seen as a special accomplishment. The examples given during the fieldwork showed that God chooses anyone to receive His messages and that it may be risky to react with disbelief when people recount their dreams. All the same, a person may come to be regarded as a religious specialist through dreaming. The key criterion for this is repetition: anyone may receive a divine message but when dreams that foretell the future or exhibit revelatory features come to a person repeatedly, this is a sign of his/her special character. Dreams and visions may then become signs of prophethood.

Perhaps Jecquetão was attempting to establish himself as a prophet. Yet from the accounts, it is clear that not all people believed in the authority of João Jecquetão's dreams. Jecquetão states that he told his dreams to various officials in the forest but most of them felt there was nothing to worry about. In other words, while Jecquetão was trying to indicate the importance of his dreams, these people did not see his dreams as being of consequence and saw no reason to take any action on the basis of his accounts. In several accounts Jecquetão complains that people did not want to listen to him and even disregarded his dream accounts. Several times, he explained that he did not retell his dreams as he expected many people not to believe him. Instead, some people seem to have viewed João Jecquetão as an impostor and a boastful character. In a letter written by Pedro Monteiro to João Jecquetão, this impression is further underlined:

I am to insist once again on the amount that you are in debt with me; you know that you owe me, but you willingly forget it until I make you remember everything. You must, however, remember that you are one of those who boast of being a grand statesman, but at best, you are in error.¹⁹

From the accounts, it would seem that if it was indeed Jecquetão's aim to become a prophet, he did not achieve his goal.

Final remarks

In this chapter I have adopted an historical approach to dreams. The chapter points out that the calls for a history of the occult (White 2001) might well include dreaming. Such an historical approach implies that a theme is interpreted within its particular time and place, not as an individual or universal phenomenon. The dreams of João Jecquetão cannot be viewed separately from the war in northern Angola after 1961. Even if a focus on resistance may, as Sherry Ortner fears, partly disengage actions from other possible contexts, these men would appear to have largely seen their lives in terms of domination and

¹⁹ IANTT, PIDE, Del. A, P.Inf. 11.12.F, p. 901: Pedro Monteiro to Jequetão, s.l., s.d., (translation by PIDE 9 August 1962).

resistance. They were, first and foremost, UPA guerrillas, and the context of war, resistance and nationalism is fundamental to an understanding of the lives of these men. Being a UPA soldier accounted for a large part of how they 'saw their circumstances, made their choices, and constructed their ideas about the larger society' (Cooper 1994: 1534).

What is more, the dreams are a part of the war. I have tried to show that for those involved, dreams constituted an arena in which the forces of evil and justice fought as much as in daily life. These fights, in the nocturnal world and in the daily world, are seen as being related in many ways.

Dreams and dreamers played an important role in the guerrilla struggle. The agency of dreamers, however, can be said to be 'involuntary' (Gell 1998: 106-108) and consists of a complex intertwining between acting and 'being acted upon'. Dreamers become influential only through the divine or spiritual messages they receive. This, in itself, does not reduce their importance and their will to contribute to the struggle. As Lambek (2002: 37-38, referring to Rappaport) points out, it is through a combination of action and passion that one becomes an agent:

In assuming responsibility and rendering themselves subject to specific liturgical, political, and discursive regimes and orders, people simultaneously lay claim to and accept the terms through which their subsequent acts will be judged. People are agents insofar as they choose to subject themselves to perform and conform accordingly, to accept responsibility, and to acknowledge their commitments.

Example of a dream account

The following dream account is part of a document in which two dreams are described. The document was signed by João Jecquetão, soldier no. 18, at the headquarters in Bembe but was not dated. The PIDE translation was dated 9 August 1962.

TRADUÇÃO

QUARTEL GENERAL, 2 DE MAIO DE 1962

La eu, um belo dia, com a Juventude à povoação de Kibeka; ao fazermos meio caminho, senti um movimento de carros que se aproximavam de nós, e eu disse aos outros companheiros: ouvistes o barulho que se está fazendo? Na altura não tínhamos defesa; levavam consigo apenas duas armas o amigo Wankana e o Luis. Eu, então, disse: não fuja; em nossa defesa, vamos invocar o nome do nosso Comandante Geral: eles cederam e não se perturbaram. E, imediatamente, Deus, Nosso Senhor, amparou-nos e o Espírito Santo reinou-nos; voltejamos o espaço fóra, e um velhote que andava perdido numa povoação, ao dar-se connosco nas vistas fugiu atordoadamente. Entramos numa casa, e encontramos muitas senhoras brancas e criancinhas; chacinámos todas com catanas.-

Ao despertar do sono nessa noite, pus-me a rezar; fiz reflexões sobre a atitude daquele velhote: e concluí que esse animal era a pessoa de Satanás, porque, se não fôsse, ou se ele fôsse espírito de Deus, não podia assustar-se ao sentir-nos de longe. Levantei-me da cama e declarei o caso ao comandante adjunto, sr, Antonio e também ao sr. Medalia; eles porém, disseram-me que nada de perigo havia; e calei-me.-

TRANSLATION

Headquarters, 2 MAY 1962

On a beautiful day, I went with the Youth to the village of Kibeka. When we were halfway, I heard the noise of cars approaching, and I said to my other companions: 'do you hear that noise being made?' At that stage we did not have any defence; only our friends Wankana and Luis had brought arms with them. I, however, said: We will not run away; to our defence we will invoke the name of our General Commander'. They agreed and we were not worried. And immediately, God, Our Lord, protected us and the Holy Spirit reigned over us. We returned to the area outside, and an elderly man who was wandering in one of the homesteads fled in confusion when he saw us. We entered a house and found many white women and little children; we slaughtered them all with catanas (large farm knives).

On waking up this morning, I started praying. I started thinking about the attitude of that elderly man; and I concluded that that animal was a person of Satan because, had that not been so, or if it had been the spirit of God, he would not have been afraid when he heard us from afar. I got out of the bed and told the adjunct commander, Sr. Antonio and also Sr. Medalia about the case. But they told me that there was no danger; and so I kept quiet.

References

- Behrend, H. 1999, *Alice Lakwena and the Holy Spirits. War in Northern Uganda, 1986-1997*, Oxford/Kampala/Athens, OH: Currey/Fountain Publishers/Ohio University Press.
- Bockie, S. 1993, *Death and the Invisible Powers. The World of Kongo Belief*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Charsley, S.R. 1973, 'Dreams in an Independent African Church', *Africa* 43 (3): 244-57.
- Chimombo, S. 1989, 'Dreams, Conversion and Ntara's Man of Africa', *Journal of Religion in Africa* (19): 48-70.
- Cooper, F. 1994, 'Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History', *American Historical Review* 99 (15): 1516-45.
- Crummey, D. (ed.) 1986, *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa*, London & Portsmouth, NH: Currey/Heinemann.
- Davezies, R. 1968, *La Guerre d'Angola*, Bordeaux: G. Ducros.
- Dilley, R. 1992, 'Dreams, Inspiration and Craftwork among Tukolor Weavers', in: M.C. Jedrej & R. Shaw (eds), *Dreaming, Religion and Society in Africa*, Leiden/New York/Cologne: Brill Academic Publishers, pp. 71-85.
- Erlmann, V. 1995, *Nightsong. Performance, Power and Practice in South Africa*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1976, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Fields, K.E. 1982, 'Charismatic Religion as a Mode of Popular Protest. The Ordinary and the Extraordinary in Social Movements', *Theory and Society* 11 (3): 321-61.
- Gell, A. 1998, *Art and Agency. An Anthropological Theory*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Janzen, J.M. 1985, 'The Consequences of Literacy in African Religion: The Kongo Case', in: W. van Binsbergen & J.M. Schoffeleers (eds), *Theoretical Explorations in African Religion*, London: Kegan Paul, pp. 225-52.
- Jedrej, M.C. & R. Shaw (eds) 1992, *Dreaming, Religion and Society in Africa*, Leiden/New York/Cologne: Brill Academic Publishers.
- Kiernan, J.P. 1985, 'The Social Stuff of Revelation: Pattern and Purpose in Zionist Dreams and Visions', *Africa* 55 (3): 304-18.
- Lambek, M. 2002, 'Nuriaty, the Saint and the Sultan. Virtuous Subject and Subjective Virtuoso of the Postmodern Colony', in: R. Werbner (ed.), *Postcolonial Subjectivities in Africa*, London: Zed Books, pp 25-43.
- Lonsdale, J. 2000, 'Agency in Tight Corners: Narrative and Initiative', *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 13 (1): 5-16.
- MacGaffey, W. 1968, 'Kongo and the King of the Americans', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 6 (2): 171-81.
- MacGaffey, W. 1986, *Religion and Society in Central Africa: The BaKongo of lower Zaire*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- MacGaffey, W. 2000, *Kongo Political Culture. The Conceptual Challenge of the Particular*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Marcum, J.A. 1969, *The Angolan Revolution. Vol. 1: The Anatomy of an Explosion (1950-1962)*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Marcum, J.A. 1978, *The Angolan Revolution. Vol. 2: Exile Politics and Guerrilla Warfare (1962-1976)*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

- Mbelolo ya M. 1972, 'Introduction à la Littérature Kikongo', *Research in African Literatures* 3 (2): 117-61.
- Mbembe, A. 1991, 'Domaines de la Nuit et Autorité Onirique dans les Maquis du Sud-Cameroun (1955-1958)', *Journal of African History* (31): 89-121.
- Muller, C.A. 1999, *Rituals of Fertility and the Sacrifice of Desire. Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- O'Hanlon, R. 1988, 'Recovering the Subject: Subaltern Studies and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia', *Modern Asian Studies* 22 (1): 189-224.
- Okazaki, A. 2002, 'The Making and Unmaking of Consciousness. Two Strategies for Survival in a Sudanese Borderland', in: R. Werbner (ed.), *Postcolonial Subjectivities in Africa*, London, Zed Books, pp 63-83.
- Ortner, S.B. 1995, 'Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37 (1): 173-93.
- Pélissier, R. 1978, *La Colonie du Minotaure. Nationalismes et Révoltes en Angola (1926-1961)*, Orgeval: Pélissier.
- Reynolds, P. 1992, 'Dreams and the Constitution of Self among the Zezuru', in: M.C. Jedrej & R. Shaw (eds), *Dreaming, Religion and Society in Africa*, Leiden/New York/Cologne: Brill Academic Publishers, pp. 21-35.
- Scott, J.C. 1985, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, New Haven/London: Yale University Press
- Scott, J.C. 1990, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance. Hidden Transcripts*, New Haven/London: Yale University Press.
- Sithole, N. 1970, *Obed Mutezo: The Mudzimu Christian Nationalist*, Nairobi/London. Oxford University Press.
- Swartenbroeckx, P. 1973, *Dictionnaire Kikongo et Kituba – Français: Vocabulaire Compare des Langages Kongo Traditionnels et Véhiculaires*, Bandundu: CEEBA.
- Thornton, J.K. 1998, *The Kongolese Saint Anthony. Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian Movement, 1684-1706*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thornton, J.K. 2002, 'Religious and Ceremonial Life in the Kongo and Mbundu Areas, 1500-1700', in: L. Heywood (ed.), *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 71-90.
- White, L. 2001, 'On Unpacking the Occult: Why We Need to Go Back to Friuli (or Transylvania, For That Matter)', Paper presented at the conference on 'Magical Modernities in Africa', Wisconsin.

Interviews

- Interview 7 with Pastor Pedro Manuel Timóteo, Luanda, 5 August 2002.
- Interview 13 with Mr Francisco Tunga Alberto, Luanda, 9 August 2002.
- Interview 14 with Mr Luís da Silva, Luanda, 10 August 2002.
- Interview 15 with Mr Augusto José Farias, Luanda, 12 August 2002.
- Interview 31 with Mr Garcia Vieira Manuel, Manuel Rocha Veloso and Garcia Pereira Manuel, Mbanza Kongo, 24 November 2003.
- Interview 34 with Mr Magalhães Pedro Pessoa, Mbanza Kongo, 25 November 2003.

Chief Hosea Kutako: A Herero royal and Namibian nationalist's life against confinement 1870–1970¹

Jan-Bart Gewald

Throughout his life Hosea Kutako was able to overcome the strictures placed upon him in ways that were totally unanticipated by those who sought to control and determine his life. Seemingly destined to a life of obscurity on the fringes of history, Hosea Kutako has come to occupy centre stage in the history of twentieth-century Namibia. Although administrations consistently sought to downplay Kutako's role, his personality was such that he overcame the limitations of race and ethnicity that were placed upon him. Far from being an obscure tribal leader living in a rural backwater, Kutako gave form and direction to African opposition to South African colonial rule in Namibia. As such, an overview of Hosea Kutako's life provides a clear example of the simple fact that, in history, structure is not all explanatory and, similarly, that an over-reliance on individual agency obscures more than it illuminates.

Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-elected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.

Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, 1852

¹ Research for this paper was conducted under the auspices of a WOTRO research grant, and support from the German Research Foundation 389, and the African Studies Centre, Leiden. I would like to thank Willem Dechering, Casper Erichsen, Gertie Janssen and Jeremy Silvester for the helpful comments and insights they provided. I wish to dedicate this paper to the fond memory of Mandhavela Khasera (1975-2004), a fine historian and, above all, a good person.

Introduction

Entering ‘Hosea Kutako’ into a search engine on the Internet will bring up hundreds of references to tourist safaris and package tours passing through Hosea Kutako Windhoek International Airport and virtually no references to the man Hosea Kutako and his importance in Namibian history. In much the same way that very few people realize that New York’s La Guardia Airport bears the name of one of the city’s most controversial citizens, so too have very few people any inkling as to who or what Hosea Kutako may have been.

Hosea Kutako was born in pre-colonial Hereroland in 1870 and died in South West Africa, a colonial territory subject to the Republic of South Africa, in 1970.² During his life, he experienced the transition from independence to colonization, and the destruction of Herero society and the loss of its lands, although he struggled to regain the freedom and self-determination that he and his society had previously known. Initially Kutako campaigned only for his own people, yet at a very early stage he began campaigning for the freedom and self-determination of all the inhabitants of Namibia. In this, Hosea Kutako can be described as the country’s first truly nationalist politician, a man who strove for the greater good not only for himself but for all.

Hosea Kutako was born as a Herero royal, but into a position which, but for the course of history, would never have enabled him to claim leadership of the Herero, let alone of the people of Namibia.³ Like Kofi Annan and Nelson Mandela, Hosea Kutako was born into a position that in the traditional elite would have led to high office, but none of them was, however, pre-destined to command and would not have attained the stature they did if history had not intervened. It is ironic that without the advent of colonial rule in central Namibia, which effectively disrupted the traditional structures of governance as they had existed within Herero society, Hosea Kutako would probably never have gained the standing and authority he later did.

One could provide an overview of Hosea Kutako’s life that would emphasize the subject nature of Africans in colonial Namibia for much of the twentieth century. One could emphasize the grinding poverty, the swelter of repressive racist legislation, the unjust nature of colonial rule and land dispossession, and the seemingly powerless nature of Africans, Kutako amongst them, in the face of a history of so much injustice. Colonial rule was harsh, brutal and repressive

² The territory was granted independence as the Republic of Namibia in March 1990.

³ I am well of the fact that it is generally not done to speak of the Herero as being a single non-changing entity. In my work I use the term as an effective shorthand to describe all those who speak an *otjiherero* dialect as their mother tongue and share socio-cultural ideals.

and no sense of nostalgia can rightly be attached to a period that saw so much injustice. However, to write such a history would be to condemn people to perpetual victimhood, it would be to rob them of any form of initiative other than that taken in response to the initiatives of the colonial state. In the mid-1990s a young German historian published an interesting article that sought for the first time to move beyond a history that portrayed Namibians as helpless victims in the face of German colonial rule. Concentrating on an article of clothing, Prein (1994) demonstrated how the wearing of a top hat by Africans came to subvert German colonial rule in central Namibia. His article has become a classic in demonstrating African agency in the context of colonial rule.

A biography that would do justice to the history of Hosea Kutako would seek a just balance between individual agency and structural determinants. It would not eschew the horrors of colonial rule but it would also not portray Kutako merely as a victim. Instead it would seek to describe the manner in which an individual attempted to weather the storms of history. Often this was in a dialectical relationship between individual actors, as between Hosea Kutako and the individual representatives of the colonial state. In other circumstances it was in historical situations in which the activities of a single actor were simply ineffectual, as those between Kutako and natural disasters such as drought and disease. Nevertheless, it is precisely in the context of processes that appear to be beyond individual human influence that the initiatives taken by individual actors serve to change the course of history. Hosea Kutako was one such person who, contrary to all expectations, did effectively alter the course of history.

A privileged youth 1870–1900

Chief Hosea Kutako (Herero name: Katjikurume) was born in 1870 in the district of Okahandja in central Namibia. He attended school in the Rhenish mission settlement of Omburo where he was baptized by the renowned missionary Eduard Dannert who was stationed in Omaruru in the early 1880s and had a detailed understanding of Herero society (Dannert 1906). Chief Hosea's father, Mutanga, was a clergyman of the Rhenish Mission Church⁴ and his mother's name was Ngarisemo, the daughter of Ngurao who was related to Samuel Maharero.⁵

⁴ Even though there is ample source material, nobody has written a study of the Herero evangelists who were so instrumental in bringing the Christian Gospel to Namibia.

⁵ Basel Afrika Bibliographien (BAB), Israel Goldblatt Nachlass VI. I.2. This document is a deposition written in 1961 (on the basis of internal evidence) and was probably the document provided to Allard Lowenstein (1962) on his visit to Namibia in 1961.

Throughout the 1870s the Herero chiefs were the dominant political, economic and military force in central Namibia. Hosea Kutako was born into the elite of the Herero in the heyday of their economic prosperity and political independence; the veritable Golden Age of Herero history.⁶ At the time of his birth, powerful Herero chiefs such as Maharero Tjamuaha were engaged in consolidating their position as pastoralists involved in extensive mercantile trade with the Cape Colony in the south and along the Atlantic seaboard. As the son of a missionary evangelist and Herero royal, Hosea Kutako received the best schooling available at the time, both in terms of reading, writing, and arithmetic as well as statecraft. Growing up in the vicinity of Omaruru and the chieftaincy of Manasse Tjisiseta, Hosea Kutako accompanied his father when he was transferred by the mission to Ehuameno, which was in the sphere of influence of the chieftaincy of Maharero Tjamuaha in Okahandja. The chiefs of Omaruru and Okahandja, though related, struggled as each attempted to extend his own sphere of influence.

In the early 1890s German soldiers intervened in a succession dispute and, acting in support of Samuel Maharero, installed him as Paramount Chief of the Herero (Gewald 1999: 55-60). In the years that followed, Samuel Maharero and the German colonisers extended their power in a symbiotic relationship. Rival chiefs and claimants to the throne were eliminated and lands and cattle were confiscated for German settlers and the followers of Samuel Maharero. One by one, the Herero chiefs who had opposed Samuel were eliminated in a process of divide and rule. This led to Samuel Maharero's further dependence on German military power and the increasing lack of Herero independence. Hosea Kutako was witness to these events as a young man, subject and relative of the rival chiefs Manasse Tjisiseta and Samuel Maharero. What would have made a lasting impression on him would have been the gradual and unstoppable process by which German colonial rule came to be established in Namibia.

In 1896, the rinderpest pandemic, which had been working its way down through Africa since 1893, struck the cattle herds in Hereroland. Within the space of a few weeks an estimated 80 per cent of the Herero's cattle, their mainstay as pastoralists, died from the disease. In its aftermath, the Herero were reduced to depending on wage labour and employment from German settlers, and government handouts. German settlers moved onto the land and the Herero

Sundermeier (1973) quotes from what must be the same document and states that it was written by Clemence Kapuu, Kutako's successor.

⁶ See Henrichsen (1997, 2000) for a detailed overview of the development of Herero society in the 19th century. .

chiefs, desperate for funds, took to selling off ever greater swathes of their people's land.

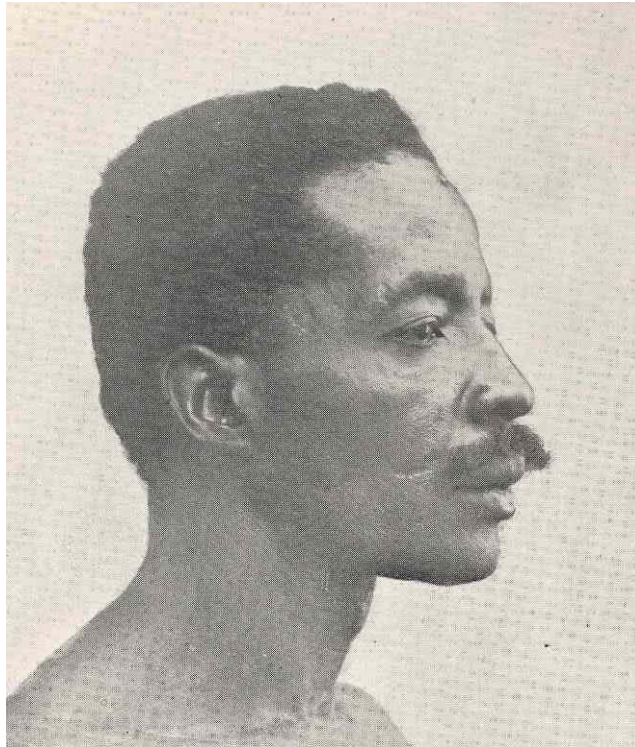


Photo 4.1 Chief Hosea Kutako as a young man

War 1904–1915

In early 1904 the long-anticipated settler war between the Herero and Imperial Germany broke out as a result of self-fulfilling fantasies, misunderstanding and fear, the likes of which had never before been witnessed in southern Africa. In a conscious policy of genocide, German soldiers and settlers sought out, shot, beat, hung, starved and raped Herero men, women and children. When the war finally ended no less than 80 per cent of the Herero had lost their lives. The majority still in Namibia, primarily women and children, barely survived in the concentration camps where they worked as forced labourers employed on state, military and civilian projects (Gewald 1999: 141-230).

Hosea Kutako fought in a number of battles and was wounded twice. He also lost his father and brother in the war. After the defeat of the Herero at

Hamakari, and the flight of their Chief Samuel Maharero, Hosea Kutako was captured and incarcerated in a camp at Omaruru.⁷ Missionaries assisted in the rounding up and administration of Herero captured and incarcerated in concentration camps around the territory (Gewald 1999: 220-24, 241-51). However, there was very little that the Mission could do to prevent German soldiers, settlers and administrators from acting at will within the confines of the camps. Missionary Kuhlmann, who established the camp at Omburo, detailed the extensive abuse of prisoners held in his camp:

One night Lt. Helmich and the soldiers moved to Omburo, there they surrounded the collection station and by force took away a number of prisoners, in so far as they had not escaped, to Omaruru. This brutish action (*rohe handlung*) went against all agreements between the mission and the government, caused great consternation amongst the Natives, and placed the whole work of collection into jeopardy and brought brother Olpp, who was operating in the northern districts, into a truly dangerous position, as the incident justified the Natives belief that the missionaries collected the Herero so that they could be killed by the soldiers⁸

The incident in Omburo was not an isolated one, and other more serious incidents followed.⁹

Hosea Kutako escaped and lived in the bush before being recaptured. When the camps were abolished, Kutako worked as a school teacher at the Rhenish mission in Omaruru and then moved to Tsumeb to work in the mines and join his brother who was a clergy man there. Following the arrest of his brother, Kutako once again fled into the bush prior to travelling to Windhoek where he worked on the railways and became a prominent member of the community.¹⁰

Windhoek 1915–1925

In 1915, shortly after the outbreak of World War I, South African forces swept into Namibia and defeated the German colonial forces. The first years of the South African administration in Namibia were a period in which Herero sought to re-establish the links, contacts and society that had had been destroyed in the 1904-1908 war. The extent of disruption is indicated by the simple fact that

⁷ BAB, Goldblatt Nachlass.

⁸ ELCIN, V 23/1 Omaruru, 1906 Kuhlmann.

⁹ In 1904, a German patrol shot and killed a number of Herero near the Omatako Mountains who had been collected by missionary Dannert. Ibid. VEMA 2503, Konferenzbericht über die Zeit von 1923 - 25, folio 197 mentions that the Herero were trapped in churches in Gibeon and Franzfontein.

¹⁰ BAB, Goldblatt Nachlass.

Herero royals living in Namibia, such as the Kutako brothers, had no idea even of the whereabouts of their chief Samuel Maharero.¹¹

In Windhoek, however, there were some who had no wish to know where Samuel Maharero was and certainly no desire to see him return to the territory. In the interim, between his flight into exile in 1904 and the arrival of the South Africans in 1915, there were those who had acquired positions of importance in Namibia which were in part dependent on his absence and that of all those associated with him.¹² In Windhoek in 1916 there were two men within the Herero community who had risen to positions of power and actively opposed Samuel Maharero's return. These men were Gerhard Kamaheke¹³ and Parmenas Zeraua (Kandimbutui), a policeman, son of the last chief of Otjimbingwe and scion of the ruling Herero family of Omaruru.¹⁴ In 1916 Gerhard Kamaheke was Headmen and Parmenas Zeraua Deputy Headman of the Herero in Windhoek but in the same year the two were deposed by the Herero 'and they selected Hosea Kutako on the understanding that Hosea Kutako would be the regent pending the return of Samuel Maharero'.¹⁵ A vote organized under the auspices of the Native Affairs Department in early November 1917 recorded 175 votes for Hosea Kutako as opposed to 45 in favour of Gerhardt Kamaheke. Consequently by the end of 1917 Hosea Kutako (aka Hosea Mungunda)¹⁶ was recognized by the administration as Headman of the Herero in Windhoek, with a wage of £2.00 per month.¹⁷ An official report notes that on 1 December 1917 Hosea Kutako was in charge of 709 huts, 842 taxpayers and a Herero population of 1450 in the Windhoek location.¹⁸

¹¹ National Archive of Namibia (NAN), SWAA 2085, Office of the Military Magistrate Tsumeb 16/1/17 to the Secretary for the Protectorate Windhuk.

¹² Further research needs to be conducted on divisions within Herero society in the early 1900s, particularly on the split between Omaruru and Okahandja. A partial overview is provided in Gewalt (2002).

¹³ Gerhard Kamaheke was a leader during the Herero-German War, in which he was wounded. He later testified to Major O'Reilly (Silvester & Gewalt 2003: 106,196).

¹⁴ Interestingly Daniel Kariko, also of the Omaruru royals, was also working as a policeman in Omaruru.

¹⁵ BAB, Israel Goldblatt Nachlass VI. I.2.

¹⁶ Hosea Kutako was also known as Hosea Mungunda, during the South African military administration. See Silvester & Gewalt (2003: 85).

¹⁷ NAN, NAW 1, Native Affairs Windhuk to the Secretary for the Protectorate, 5 November 1917, on the appointment of Hosea Kutako.

¹⁸ NAN, NAW 2, Subfile Native Headmen. Letter Native Affairs Windhuk and district 10/7/18 to the Secretary for the Protectorate. Headman Ovambandero Nikanoor Hoveka; Herero Headman Petrus Hosea, Sub Hd, Hugo Kanjii, Silpans Mungunda; Herero Klein Windhoek Gottlieb Makono.

Hosea Kutako proved to be invaluable to the South African Administration. In the course of 1917 Kutako, along with many others, provided detailed accounts of the German occupation of Namibia that came to be included in the 'Report on the Natives of South-West Africa and their Treatment by Germany' (see Silvester & Gewalt 2003).¹⁹ In October 1918 the flu pandemic, which became known as the 'Spanish Flu', reached central Namibia and wrought havoc. Government ground to a halt and all forms of administration were suspended while the epidemic raged through the territory. People died on the streets and in their houses, bodies – let alone refuse and sewage – remained uncollected as about 95% of Windhoek's population were affected by the epidemic and an estimated 10 per cent died (Musambachime 2000). During this time Kutako distinguished himself by assisting the administration and providing relief to those affected.

In September 1919, primarily as a result of his activities during the flu epidemic, Hosea Kutako was formally recognized by the South African Administration as Headman of the Herero in Windhoek. In this position he employed 4 sub-headmen, none of whom were paid by the government. Hosea Kutako consciously sought to accommodate and appeal to the separate factions within Herero society, i.e. he tried to ensure that he represented more than only the Herero of Okahandja. Thus as Headman in Windhoek, he arranged assistance from Hugo Kandji, a representative of the eastern Herero, and Aaron S. Mungunda, a representative of part of the western Herero based in Omaruru.

In December 1919 a number of Herero, including Hosea Kutako and Hugo Kandji, were accused of murder or attempted murder. On account of the charges, they were forced to resign their positions and were replaced by Aaron Silphanus Mungunda (a brother of Hosea Kutako) and Alfred Deeruako (Riruako).²⁰ Fortunately, the charges of murder fell through and, by the end of February 1920, the Native Affairs Department was petitioning the administration for permission to re-instate Hosea Kutako and Hugo Kandji as headmen of the Herero. Interestingly, although the charges were abandoned, Hosea's official reputation was tarnished as officials believed that he had been involved in witchcraft.²¹

¹⁹ The report, which in the Namibian context is more commonly known as 'The Blue Book', ensured in part that Germany lost all rights to its colonies in the aftermath of World War II.

²⁰ NAN, SWAA 66 A13/15, Native Affairs Windhuk 11 December 1919 to Secretary for the Protectorate Windhuk.

²¹ NAN, SWAA 66 A13/15, Native Affairs Windhuk, 23.2.20, The Secretary for the Protectorate Windhuk, Windhuk Location, Herero headmen.

Frederick Maharero and the installation of Hosea

The initially charitable Herero perceptions of the new South African administration changed with the return and reestablishment of Herero in the territory, some of whom had already lived under the administration in South Africa. Following the occupation of Namibia, Herero living in exile had begun to seek contact with family members, friends and colleagues living in Namibia. As forms of overt Herero political leadership came to be tolerated by the South African administration, so Herero leadership living in exile sought to influence the course of events in Namibia. At war's end in 1915, Samuel Maharero, living in the northern Transvaal in South Africa, did not immediately return to Namibia but instead attempted to influence events by sending his son Friedrich to Namibia. Friedrich's visit was to have a profound effect on further developments in Herero history in Namibia.

In July 1920, Friedrich Maharero and eight of his followers from South Africa and Bechuanaland were granted permission to visit Namibia²² and in February 1921 he and Hosea Kutako appeared in the Windhoek offices of the officer commanding Native Affairs, Captain Bowker. They requested permission to visit Orumbo Reserve and invited Bowker to be present. He declined.²³ Had Bowker accepted the invitation, he would have witnessed the ceremony in which Friedrich Maharero laid his hand on Hosea Kutako's head and, in the name of his father, Samuel Maharero, proclaimed Hosea Kutako to be his father's regent in Namibia (Werner 1989: 130-31). Henceforth Hosea Kutako would take a leading role in Namibian politics, a role far in excess of his nominal position as Headman of Windhoek location.

An indication of the changes at hand were provided by events surrounding the visit of Prince Arthur Frederick Patrick Albert of Connaught, Governor-General of the Union of South Africa, to the territory in August 1922. The protectorate administration, anxious to create a good impression, had arranged for the Prince to be greeted by the headmen of the territory's various communities. To ensure that nothing untoward would occur, Native Affairs officers and magistrates travelled across the country to collect and edit the 'addresses' of the different communities. All went well, with the exception of Orumbo Reserve, where Hosea Kutako had assumed his regency, and in Windhoek, where he was Headman. The Herero at Orumbo informed the authorities that 'they did not

²² NAN, SWAA 2085, E.H. Goddard Office of the Native Commissioner Nylstroom, 20/7/20, to Secretary for Native Affairs Pretoria.

²³ NNAW, SWAA 2085, OC Native Affairs in Windhoek, 25/2/21, to the Secretary. Surprisingly no documents could be found in the Archives which detailed the ascendancy of Hosea to the regency. It would appear that no colonial officials were present during the ceremony in Orumbo.

wish to (submit an address) ... as they relied on the Hereros of Windhoek to do all that was necessary for them'.²⁴ Though the Herero in Windhoek had submitted a suitably innocuously worded address to the administration, the Native Commissioner was warned that the Herero in the district intended to submit an as-yet unseen petition to the prince during his address.²⁵

Universal Negro Improvement Association

In early 1922, a rather flustered missionary Kuhlmann explained to his superiors that the following words had appeared emblazoned in indelible tar paint on rocks at the side of a road leading into Omaruru: 'This land belongs to Michael (Tjisiseta). This land is not yours, it is the property of America and the Herero'.²⁶

As if this was not dramatic enough, one of the rocks was also adorned with a mural which depicted a hand gripping a flaming heart. The Universal Negro Improvement Association had arrived in Namibia. The conflation of historical claims to the land with images and ideas of the UNIA clearly showed that the millenarian ideas engendered by the UNIA elsewhere in Africa had caught on here as well. The missionaries were quick to claim that the Herero were being 'communistically manipulated' by outside forces operating from within the Herero reserves.²⁷ But, though the movement had developed amongst immigrant communities in the south of Namibia, UNIA had become the main unifying organization amongst the African communities of the territory by 1922 and would remain so until Samuel Maharero's death in 1923.

The Universal Negro Improvement Association was introduced into Namibia in October 1920 when a number of West Africans and West Indians working in Lüderitz set about establishing division number 294 of UNIA. Initially the movement was confined solely to West Africans and West Indians, and reflected their interests.²⁸ Thus, 'German Jews' were lambasted in articles that

²⁴ NAN, ADM 156, Addresses Cape Coloured Community, Herero and Ovambanderus, Damaras, Hottentots. R.L. Cope, OC Native Affairs in Windhoek, 3/8/22, to Native Commissioner SWA.

²⁵ NAN, ADM 156, R.L. Cope in Windhoek, 22/7/22, to Native Commissioner.

²⁶ ELCIN, VII 23.2, Berichte ans Missionshaus 1910 - 1930, Kuhlmann in Omaruru 20/4/22 to ?. Kuhlmann devoted most of his letter to trying to work out who might have painted the mural, commenting that it must have been a stranger as the inhabitants of Omaruru would have been incapable of painting without letting the paint run.

²⁷ ELCIN, V 32 Karibib 1922.

²⁸ UNIA office bearers had to be able to read and write, and in the context of UNIA this meant being able to read and write in English. The office bearers in Lüderitz were nearly all West Africans or West Indians, the only exceptions being South Africans.

appeared in the *Negro World* for controlling trade in the black location in Lüderitz.²⁹

The driving force behind UNIA and its spread through Namibian society as a whole was Fitzherbert Headly, a West Indian employed as the chief stevedore in Lüderitz harbour.³⁰ In December 1921 while on a month's leave, Headly travelled to Windhoek. He was charismatic and successful in his meetings with the Herero leadership of Windhoek and a branch office of UNIA was subsequently set up in Windhoek. Hosea Kutako, who a few months previously had been appointed by Samuel Maharero as his successor and representative in Namibia, John Aaron Simon Mungunda (Hosea's brother who had fought for the South Africans in German East Africa), the Ovambanderu headman in Windhoek Nikanoor Hoveka, and Headly and a number of other men submitted a New Year's greeting to the Mayor of Windhoek in January 1922. In it, they announced the establishment of their organization and demanded that the municipality assign them a stand to 'erect a suitable Hall for conducting our meetings in an orderly Manner'.³¹

With its red membership cards, red, green and black rosettes, newspapers, calendars and the promise of far more, UNIA attracted the attention of the territory's African inhabitants. Needless to say, this attraction was enhanced by the fact that the Herero leaders had sworn their allegiance to the movement. Furthermore UNIA members believed that their contribution money would be used to purchase land for Africans. By January 1922 it was claimed that an estimated 500 had become members of the movement in Windhoek.³²

For most Herero, UNIA came to be the vehicle for their ideas and demands. By October 1922, UNIA in central Namibia was dominated by Herero³³ and when UNIA sought to open offices in Karibib and Usakos, those sent to initiate the movement were Herero – John Mungunda and Theodor Hanbanue. A month later, West Africans, who had initially dominated the movement, lost control of

²⁹ Fitzherbert Headly, 'A Voice from Lüderitz, Dutch South Africa', in *The Negro World*, 8 October 1921.

³⁰ Fitzherbert Headly arrived in SWA during the German occupation. He spent some time working as a clerk for the Woermann company. Following the South African occupation, Headly was employed on the railways. Initially he confined himself to promoting the position of his fellow educated UNIA members. However from mid-1921 onwards he became involved in nationalist politics and a trade union after the collapse of UNIA. In later life he had a run-in with authorities on account of fish size caught. He remained involved until his death in the early 1950s.

³¹ NAN, SWAA 421, Headly and others in Windhoek 2/1/22 to His Worship the Mayor in council.

³² NAN, SWAA 421, Scotland, Manager of Liebig's Extract of Meat Co., Neuheuis, 20/1/22, to Secretary SWA Protectorate.

³³ NAN, BRMG, 1923, p. 72.

the Windhoek branch of UNIA to the Herero royals.³⁴ John Aaron Simon Mungunda became president and Clemens Kapuuo, the father of the man who would succeed Kutako as chief of the Herero in Namibia, became secretary of the Windhoek branch. At the same time, the branch was closely linked to Traugott Maharero of Okahandja who was an officer of the *Otruppe* in Okahandja.³⁵ To the horror of Rhenish missionaries, Herero graves were visited by UNIA members who poured libation in the name of Marcus Garvey.³⁶ Thus by late 1922, UNIA had become integrated into Herero socio-political activities, closely linked to the *Otruppe* and indistinguishable from the Okahandja Herero royals.

Using the past to fight the present

As a historian, one can get a glimpse of the formidable debating style and mind of Hosea Kutako. Records stored in the National Archives in Windhoek provide an insight into Kutako's political acumen even on issues which appear to deal with the most innocuous of matters. A clear example of this is provided by Kutako's discussion with administration officials in the early 1920s regarding sanitation and taxation.³⁷ In 1922, following the establishment of a 'new and improved system' of sanitation, the municipality sought to raise taxes for location inhabitants from one to two shillings. The discussion that ensued is interesting precisely because it so clearly details the manner in which Herero leaders used their knowledge of the past to confound, trap and put pressure on South African colonial officials. The following excerpt is from a meeting held in 1924 between location representatives and the NAD to discuss the issue of raised taxation.

- H. Kutako: We have heard this from the Municipal authorities, but we want to know these things from you and Mr. Cope. How many years have we been prisoners under the Germans?
- Mr Drew: 1904 to 1915, i.e. since the German/Herero war.
- H. Kutako: How long have we been under the British Rule?
- Mr Drew: 1915 to 1924.

³⁴ NAN, SWAA 421, Harry Drew Windhoek, 10/11/22, to Secretary for the Protectorate. Drew refers to the falling out between the west Africans and the Herero.

³⁵ NAN, SWAA 421, R.L. Cope, OC Native Affairs in Windhoek, 22/11/22, to Secretary for South West Africa. NNAW, SWAA 432, enclosure 11, circular telegram 1/7/16. Traugott carried the rank of *Wachtvorsteher*, in the regiment stationed in *Paradies*, Okahandja. On the *Otruppe* or *Truppenspieler* in Namibian history, see Werner (1990).

³⁶ NAN, BRMG, 1923, pp. 71-72.

³⁷ For a further discussion, see *Gewald* (2000).

- H. Kutako: In the German time we paid 6d per month each, which was deducted from our wages by our employer, and was only paid by natives in employment. For this money many things were done in the Location. The water was brought there. A bridge was made. Avenue of trees planted. A dam was made at Furstenwalde.
- Mr Drew: Did the German Government make all these works from the sixpences?
- H. Kutako: No.³⁸ The Germans also put down four boreholes. They put up the windmill, and made the cemetery. There was a pump over the borehole... The German Municipality helped the old and poor people with food. They gave us sacks for the roofs of our huts. All these things for the sixpences. They bought Community Cattle. ... The only thing the present Municipality has done, was to build a bridge. The people make all their own huts. They get no assistance, no old sacks. ... Go with your car through the Location, and see what has been done. The people build their own houses. In the German time they were helped with sacks, now if anyone is found carrying a sack he is arrested. If we pay 2/- to the municipality, they won't help us. They have done nothing. You must find a place for us to live outside the Locations.³⁹

Hosea Kutako's sentiments, expressed so well in the discussion above, clearly angered South African administrators. However in this instance, for all Hosea Kutako's eloquence, the decisions of the municipality could not be reversed. Thus, when Hosea Kutako asked Drew to intercede on their behalf and postpone the introduction of the 2/- tax, Drew answered, 'It is law', whereupon Kutako could merely respond by answering, 'the Council made the law without consulting us'.⁴⁰

Removing Hosea as headman

For all his uppishness, Hosea was removed from his position as Headman in Windhoek. However on account of his influence and authority, he remained the *de facto* leader of the Herero and, increasingly, all other Africans in central Namibia.

In early 1923 Windhoek Town Council informed the Secretary for the Protectorate that it had decided to dismiss Hosea Kutako as headman due to his

³⁸ Kutako takes the wind out of Drew's attack by answering truthfully and then continuing his own attack by listing everything that the Germans had done for the location inhabitants.

³⁹ NAN, SWAA 66, Memorandum of meeting of Natives with Native Commissioner, 1/7/24, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁰ NAN, SWAA 66, Memorandum of meeting of Natives with Native Commissioner, 1/7/24, p. 6.

alleged ill health.⁴¹ Interestingly, Cope, the Native Affairs official responsible for Windhoek's African population, raised no direct objection to the council's decision but concluded his letter by noting that he considered 'that Hosea should retain a seat on the Location Advisory Committee'.⁴² In other words, though the colonial administration wished to withdraw and withhold all forms of formal recognition with regard to Hosea Kutako's authority and influence, they were well aware of his importance and influence, and sought to retain a certain degree of this by retaining Kutako as an appointed member to the Location Advisory Committee.

Samuel Maharero's funeral and the role of Hosea Kutako

Hosea Kutako did not occupy any formal position recognized by the South African Administration. Nevertheless, the events surrounding the funeral of Samuel Maharero, the Herero paramount chief who died in exile and was buried in Okahandja in 1923, served to emphasize to one and all the central role and importance of Hosea Kutako in Herero and African affairs in central Namibia in the early 1920s.

In Okahandja, on a cold winter's day in 1923, a guard of honour of Herero soldiers, dressed in German uniforms, with German military ranks and marching to German commands, carried Maharero's coffin. A military brass band playing a German funeral march and 170 mounted Herero soldiers riding four abreast preceded the coffin. No fewer than 2500 uniformed Herero soldiers and an unspecified number of Herero women and onlookers followed the coffin to its final resting place on the banks of the Okahandja River. Samuel Maharero, the first paramount chief of the Herero was thus laid to rest in the grave of his father, Kamaharero, and his grandfather, Tjamuaha (see *Gewald* 1999: 274-82).

In the weeks prior to the funeral, Herero from all over the country had been converging on Okahandja. For the Herero, Samuel Maharero's funeral was the largest socio-political event since the Herero-German War, an event organized and run by the Herero themselves under Hosea Kutako's leadership. It was an event that brought to the fore a number of issues that showed that the funeral was indeed, as Secretary for the Protectorate Courtney-Clarke was forced to admit in his eulogy, 'the beginning of a new era for the Herero Nation'.⁴³ The funeral demonstrated to the Herero and the outside world that they were once again a self-aware, self-regulating political entity with their own unique iden-

⁴¹ NAN, SWAA 66 A 13/15 (volume 3) Town Clerk's Office, Windhoek, 17.1.23, The Secretary for SWA.

⁴² NAN, SWAA 66 A 13/15 (volume 3) Office of Native Affairs Windhoek, 15 February 1923, to the secretary for South West Africa.

⁴³ NAN, ACC 200, p. 8.

tity, a socio-political entity that had its own command structures that could match the regulated order and symbolism of the colonial state in time management, uniforms and marching. The funeral showed their continued faith in the British Empire at the time; even though this was a faith which would soon come to an end. It also showed their growing independence from the Rhenish church. The Herero determined the way in which the funeral was to be conducted; who was to attend and, to a large extent, what was to be said. Christian Herero evangelists and *ovandangere* (ritual specialists) spoke on behalf of Samuel's soul. Herero soldiers paraded in honour of Samuel. Samuel's foes, descendants, followers and successors marched and prayed at his grave. Samuel's funeral in effect brought together for the first time the Herero who had survived the Herero-German War.

Hosea Kutako had also become the undisputed leader of the Herero. The official colonial government report dealing with the funeral referred to Hosea Kutako as the master of ceremonies and described him in the following way:

An influential Herero of Windhoek, was formerly Headman of the Windhoek location, under the administration and later under the municipality, is now recognised as the leading Herero in the Windhoek District. He took the most prominent part in connection with the ceremonies at Okahandja, and was responsible for the marshalling of the funeral procession from the location to the grave.⁴⁴

Aminuis 1925–1945

...we are today in the reserve. And it resembles the collection camps under the Germans.⁴⁵

We are a big nation, and as such we shall not develop in a country like this where there is only deep borehole water. In fact it is a desert where no human being ever lived before. It is a country only good for wild beasts. On top of that it is not healthy for the people or the cattle. I told him only one farm can depend on borehole water but it is no use for a whole nation ... we are the original inhabitants of SWA and we know the best and the worst parts of the whole country ... You should rather bring the Europeans here and let us stay where we are. (Troup 1950: 76)

By 1924 Hosea Kutako had risen to the position of Representative of the Herero in Namibia, and was recognized and respected by both the colonial administration and the Herero themselves. However, within a few years he would find himself isolated from a large section of the Herero and viewed with extreme suspicion by the administration. In the early 1920s, the colonial administration

⁴⁴ NAN, ACC 200, Cope, 'Burial of Chief Samuel Maharero at Okahandja'.

⁴⁵ Report of the Commission South West Africa, Pretoria 1936, Cited in Poewe (1985: 145).

established reserves to control the African inhabitants of Namibia and co-opted the services of Hosea Kutako in forcing people onto these reserves. Nonetheless, contrary to the intentions of the administration and the expectations of many Herero, the reserves came to be the source for the resurgence of Hosea Kutako's reputation, position and influence as Herero chief for the Herero, and as Chief of the Herero for the administration. The reserves, which were set up to control, came in fact to provide an arena in which a revitalized and ideal Herero identity could be established. Although it could be argued that the reserves were established as an instrument of control, they functioned as a source of legitimacy and power for Hosea Kutako and, ultimately, as the place of resistance to South African rule in Namibia.

It has been convincingly argued in much of the literature dealing with the history of southern African that the Native Reserves established in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries by the colonial administrations were set up with the intention of control.⁴⁶ They were created not so much to provide land for Africans but to ensure a steady supply of African labour for the colonial economy. The Native Reserves set up in Namibia in the early 1920s were created with the express intent of controlling Namibia's African populations (Werner 1998, Emmett 1999). However, contrary to expectations, for many of the Herero the reserves came to form territory in which the Herero ideal of a remembered historical past – which may never have existed in reality – of pastoralism, polygamy and plenty could be realized. And so the Herero ideal of a pastoralist way of life was re-established, albeit in a new form, on these newly established reserves. Hosea Kutako was the leader of the Aminuis Reserve and thus, far from being sidetracked, became the person who could appeal to deeper core values than other leaders who did not have the rural base he did.

In 1961 Clemens Kapuu, personal secretary and eventual successor of Hosea Kutako, sought to explain in a written deposition to the American human-rights activist Allard Lowenstein why it was that the Herero had moved into the reserves established by the administration in 1923 (Lowenstein 1962: 126-33). Kapuu noted that the people were driven to Aminuis and Epukiro, the two main Herero reserves, when their houses were burnt down, windmills were destroyed at Orumbo (Gewald 2000: 73-76), and 'bombs were dropped in the vicinity in order to frighten them away from the areas. Chief Kutako and some other men were taken to prison at Gobabis where they were kept for two days'.⁴⁷ Werner (1989, 1993) has detailed the history of land dispossession and

⁴⁶ Regarding the establishment of Native reserves in southern Africa, see Lacey (1981).

⁴⁷ Basel Afrika Bibliographien (BAB), Israel Goldblatt Nachlass VI. I.2. This document is a deposition written in 1961 (on the basis of internal evidence) and was probably provided to Allard Lowenstein on his visit to Namibia in 1961. See Lowenstein (1962:

the partially forced move of Herero into the reserves of Namibia away from the areas they had reoccupied in central Namibia during the course of World War II. Hosea Kutako actively assisted in ensuring that people trekked to the new reserves. In some instances people refused to move, and, in the case of Orumbo Reserve, aeroplanes, which had been used with devastating effect against the Bondelswarts, were employed to intimidate the Herero into moving (see Emmett 1987: 35-36).

The active role of Hosea Kutako in urging his people to move into the newly established reserves did not bolster his popularity. In April 1924, Kutako met the South African administrator of the mandated territory of South West Africa and noted that he (Hosea) 'had become very unpopular by advising the natives to go to Epukiro'. In reply the administrator 'warned him to continue to do the right thing and to use his influence to get the people to go'.⁴⁸ The threat implicit in the administrator's reply emphasized that Hosea Kutako had very little choice, and the demonstration bombings by the South African Air Force left people in little doubt as to what would happen to them should they choose not to move.⁴⁹

Throughout 1924 Hosea Kutako and his fellow chief Nikanor Hoveka urged their respective followers to move to the newly established reserves, and in 1925 Hosea Kutako was appointed Headman of the Aminuis Native Reserve with an annual salary of £24 per annum.⁵⁰ Life for people and cattle proved to be difficult on the reserves. Within a few months of being appointed as Headman, Hosea Kutako petitioned the Administration:

I have been sent by the Hereros at Aminuis to lay the following matters before the Government. Aminuis has water surplus but no grazing owing to their being too many cattle round the water holes. the pasture also is not good, and has no fattening qualities. This is shown in the stunted condition of young cattle ... There are only old men and women in the reserve and these can't walk to Windhoek to get their young relatives to give them money for grazing fees...⁵¹

Aminuis Reserve had been established on lands that had only been used in passing by the Herero in the past, lands to which the Herero pastoralists had resorted in

126-33).

⁴⁸ NNAW, LGO 3/1/10, folio 5-6.

⁴⁹ The Rehoboth revolt, see Emmett (1999: 155-67). See also, RMG 2514a, Omaruru (mit Kalkfeld und Omatjette) Band 1, 1899-1913. A. Kuhlmann, Halbjahrsbericht, Omaruru 30.9.25. (author's translation).

⁵⁰ NAN, SWAA 2081, A 460/5 (v.1) From 1918 to 1951, Native Chiefs and Headmen Administrator, Windhoek, 21.7.25, to the Magistrate, Gobabis.

⁵¹ NAN, SWAA 2081, A 460/5. 17.12.25 NA Office.

times of drought or extreme rainfall. Whereas in the past the pastoralists had been able to range far and wide in search of nutrients for their cattle, they were now confined to reserves which were in effect death traps for cattle. If the cattle strayed beyond the confines of the reserve, they were liable to be impounded. Bone meal could have been used to supplement phosphate deficiencies in cattle but the Herero on the reserves did not have sufficient money to pay for it, let alone its transport to the reserves. As Superintendent Barnes in Aminuis noted in 1927:

... stock losses have been very heavy and if continued the many old people depending entirely on milk will have nothing at all and Govt will have to find some means of supporting them. ... bone meal (for Gallamziekte) costs about 26/- per bag for transport alone and thus cost is prohibitive for native use.⁵²

Once confined to the reserves, the Herero did not have the money to travel to the urban centres to purchase goods at fair prices. Furthermore, because conditions in the reserves were inadequate for stock raising and stock had to travel such long distances after purchase by travelling buyers, Herero did not receive good prices for their animals when they later sold them (Werner 1998: 147-55). Under the leadership of Hosea Kutako, the Herero sought to remedy this condition by trying to get traders to settle on the reserve of their own choice, and thus subvert those who exploited the distance between the reserves and the territory's economic centres.

Re-establishing a living past

Though life on the reserves was extremely difficult, they provided the Herero with an area in which a new Herero identity could be established. Almost immediately after the Herero moved onto the reserves in 1924, surprised missionaries realized that forms of living and being that they believed had gone forever in the cataclysm of 1904 were being re-established. Irle also noted that their move was an attempted return to the past. Whilst travelling through the eastern districts, he passed a settlement that had been built in the old style. This sight appears to have been dramatic for Irle notes that it was as if he were back in his youth except that the people were dressed in clothes and not skins.⁵³

Herero believed that they were returning to the ways of their ancestors. They did not consider themselves to have become heathen. Far from it, though the Herero may have turned their backs on the missionaries, they had not turned their backs on religion. Indeed, missionaries who sought to shame their former converts by referring to them as *Ovaheidena*, or heathens, were promptly

⁵² NAN, NAW 28, Barnes in Aminuis 16.6.27 to NAD.

⁵³ VEMA 2501, Gobabis, Irle, Ende März 1929, Halbjahrbericht.

informed to desist from doing so and to refer to them as Herero: ‘as soon as he heard the word *Ouheidena* “Heathenism” from my mouth, he immediately corrected me with the word *Ouherero* “Hereroneess”’.⁵⁴

Herero laid the blame for the introduction of monogamous marriages squarely at the feet of the missionaries. Hosea Kutako, as a former missionary evangelist, was well versed in the tenets of Mission Christianity, and as Herero Chief well placed to speak about issues of polygamy and monogamy. Herero believed that the mission actively sought to reduce Herero numbers through its insistence on monogamous relationships.

The extent to which attitudes had changed *vis-à-vis* the mission is illustrated by the example of Rudolf Kondiua, who worked as Herero evangelist for missionary Irle in Gobabis, and as an evangelist in Windhoek before that. Far from condemning Hosea Kutako, Rudolf Kondiua, a highly respected Herero evangelist, chose to settle with Hosea Kutako in Aminuis. It would be no lie to state that he was central to Herero thinking about Christianity and the mission. In 1923, it was Kondiua who conducted the funeral service and read the scriptures at Samuel Maharero’s funeral. In the early 1930s, when the Herero, refusing to pay church dues, demanded to know what had happened to the dues that they had paid in the past, Rudolf Kondiua was at the forefront of those demanding an explanation. He settled in the immediate vicinity of the settlement of Hosea Kutako and conducted church services, led classes and acted as a personal religious advisor to Hosea Kutako. Rudolf refused to condemn the polygamy of Hosea Kutako, the *Okuruuo* at which Hosea ministered and the circumcision rituals that Hosea had. However, for all of his expressed opposition to aspects of Mission Christianity, Hosea Kutako remained a deeply committed and religious believer in the doctrines of Christianity.⁵⁵

Dealing with the past and a colonial administration

Hosea Kutako continued to express his trust in the workings of the administration and its employees even though the racism and paternalism of the colonial administration were apparent. With hindsight, it is easy to dismiss the activities of many and to dictate choices to them. Too often historians fail to appreciate the conditions in which people had to operate. The choices people should have made in the past and that appear so obvious to us today were never obvious or straightforward in the past. A man such as Hosea Kutako continually needed to maintain a balance between outright opposition to a powerful and vicious colonial administration and complete collaboration with a powerful and possi-

⁵⁴ VEMA 2501 J.Irle, Halbjahrbericht Gemeinde Gobabis, 1 Oktober 1927-31 März 1928.

⁵⁵ Basel Afrika Bibliographien (BAB), Israel Goldblatt Nachlass VI. I.2.

bly providential colonial administration. Placed in a position in which the terrible past was a lived reality and the future was by no means certain, Hosea Kutako sought to ensure the greatest benefit and stability for his people. At all times this required diplomacy and an ability to bring to the fore elements from the repertoire of the past that suited the conditions in which Kutako found himself. At times, memories of the terrible past were brought up to evoke pity and pressurize, and at other times the past was suppressed in the interests of short-term stability and peace.

Even in the most difficult and trying of conditions, Hosea Kutako maintained his composure, pressed his demands, and retained moral dominance in discussions and negotiations with the colonial state. A fine example of this is provided by events in 1933 in the midst of the Great Depression.

In an extensive discussion with the colonial administration in that year, Hosea Kutako, acting as the spokesperson for the Herero of Namibia, pressed Herero demands on issues ranging from education to land rights. At a meeting with Mr Smit, the Secretary for South West Africa, Hosea Kutako began his deposition as follows: 'We will be pleased if you will, Sir, have patience and listen to what we are telling you'.⁵⁶ Hosea drew Smit's attention to their earlier visits and petitions and stated: 'Myself and other men came forward and wanted to know from the Government as regards our status'.⁵⁷ In response, Smit tried to sidestep and outwit Kutako and feigned ignorance by claiming never to have heard of Herero complaints before by stating, 'When did they ask that question? They certainly never asked me that question. Tell Hosea I am not aware of any question asked about status'.⁵⁸ In the first instance, Kutako responded by attempting to explain where and when in the past they had drawn attention to their problems. When he saw that this was ineffectual, he continued:

It seems to me that such a question never came before you, Sir, and therefore we want to start otherwise. Now why we put such a question is in connection with this: *We are the people that are born in this country and who are the owners of this territory.*⁵⁹

Kutako placed his finger on the crucial factor in the colonial debate. He indicated that at the basis of their demands for a more equitable form of administration was the very simple truth that by virtue of their birth and origin, the territory being talked about and administered by the colonial administration was their land, it was Herero land. By stating, 'It seems to me that such a question

⁵⁶ NAN, LGO 3/1/10, Deputation of Representatives of the Herero People interviewed on Friday, 2 June 1933 by the Secretary for South West Africa, folio 1.

⁵⁷ NAN, LGO 3/1/10, Deputation 2/6/33, folio 1.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ NAN, LGO 3/1/10, Deputation 2/6/33, folio 2.

never came before you', Hosea Kutako refrained from being drawn into a series of meaningless claims and counterclaims regarding the submission or otherwise of earlier petitions. He allowed Smit not to lose face, whereas both Smit and Kutako knew that Smit was well aware of the earlier submissions. Hosea Kutako thus had the moral superiority in the ensuing discussion and was able to concede points in the discussion so it could continue and his demands were never compromised.

From control to opposition

Although the reserves had primarily been established to maintain control over the Herero and to ensure a supply of cheap labour to Namibia's colonial settler economy, they also came to function as a power base and unexpected source of legitimacy for Hosea Kutako in his opposition to the colonial state. It was, unexpectedly, precisely the rural nature of the reserves that resonated with a particular image of an imagined Herero historical past that provided Hosea Kutako with legitimacy. Ensclosed in what in the first instance appeared to be rural banishment, Hosea Kutako was able to capitalize on Herero perceptions of what the necessary attributes for legitimacy were. In this way, they could re-establish forms of living that recalled Herero ideas of an ideal Herero life – cattle, traditional religion, and an urban settlement beyond the immediate interference of the colonial state. The reserves turned out differently from what had been expected. Far from being merely sites of total subjugation to the wishes of the colonial state, the reserves were areas in which Herero society came to be reconstructed in the image of an imagined historical ideal.

Hosea Kutako began his career as the leader of men in the urban setting of Windhoek, where by 1920 he had risen to prominence and recognition in the eyes of both the colonial state and his African constituency. This prominence and recognition received a setback when he participated in the enforced movement of Herero from the central Namibian highlands to ethnically specific reserves that had been established by the South African Administration. On the reserves, Kutako was able to capitalize on deep-seated Herero ideas and gained respect and support from Namibia's African inhabitants. Operating from within the reserve, Kutako established his position as the true leader of all the Herero throughout the territory and, more importantly, the colonial administration recognized him as the most important African leader in the territory. It was in this context that Hosea Kutako was invited to travel to the Transkei in the Union of South Africa in 1938 as the leader of a Herero delegation to view the 'progress'

that had been made by 'Natives' under the paternal hand of the South African Administration.⁶⁰

The perceived progress and cooperation on the part of Hosea Kutako *vis-à-vis* the South African colonial administration was soon to change. In World War I, Samuel Maharero had urged Herero to join South African forces against Imperial Germany. In World War II, Hosea Kutako was instrumental in getting young Herero to enlist in the Allied forces in their struggle to defeat the Axis powers. In neither case were the Herero rewarded for their involvement. The events of World War II and its immediate aftermath led to a hardening of attitudes on the part of Hosea Kutako *vis-à-vis* the South African Administration. After the war, in which Herero fought against Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, land that had been formerly occupied by Herero was made available to white settlers in Namibia, whilst the Herero servicemen were provided with little more than a second-rate suit of clothes when they were demobilised. The situation was not improved when in 1948 South Africa's white population voted the National Party into power, a political party that had opposed South African involvement in World War II against Nazi Germany. Indeed, a number of the National Party stalwarts, such as B.J. Vorster who would later become South Africa's prime minister, were serving prison sentences for having undertaken acts of sabotage of behalf of Nazi Germany (see Bunting 1964).

UNO 1945–1960

In 1946 the Government consulted Kutako in connection with the incorporation of SWA into the Union. He refused the incorporation and started petitioning the UN, a work which he has been doing for 15 years. In 1947 Chief Frederik Maharero and Mr. Tshekedi Khama sent the Rev. Michael Scott to Chief Hosea Kutako to get information on conditions in SWA so that he (M. Scott) might take this information to the UN as a petition.⁶¹

In the immediate aftermath of World War II in early 1946, the South African government sought to have Namibia, which had been a mandated territory of the League of Nations, incorporated into the Union of South Africa as a fifth province. Administrators attempted to convince the various African leaders living in the territory to actively support its annexation. In a number of documented cases, South African administrators consciously obfuscated the issue and tried to trick African leaders into supporting South Africa's claims. In some instances African leaders were even presented with the suggestion that they had

⁶⁰ NAN, SWAA 461A50/122/1 Visit of Herero delegation to Transkei and Ciskei, 1938-1942.

⁶¹ Basel Afrika Bibliographien (BAB), Israel Goldblatt Nachlass VI. I.2.

to choose between the territory being handed over to the USSR or remaining within the British Empire under South African rule.

It was Hosea Kutako who actively opposed Namibia's incorporation into South Africa and who was able to draw the world's attention to the plight of the territory's African population. With the assistance of a number of non-Namibians, he successfully petitioned the newly established United Nations and it is likely that, but for his active intervention, Namibia would have become and still be an integral part of South Africa.

Drawing on the historical precedent of Samuel Maharero who 'made a decision in the German times without consulting the other leaders', Hosea Kutako let it be known that South African Prime Minister General Jan Smuts 'must get the Herero nation's answer and not the answer of a section only ... and must consult all the other Headmen and leaders ... I will be doing a wrong thing if I give a decision on this matter'.⁶² Hosea Kutako and his councillors were able to get a message to the Bechuanaland Protectorate where Frederick Maharero, Samuel Maharero's son, was living in exile in Mahalapye under the protection of the Bamangwato Chief Tshekedi Khama. Through his close links with campaigners for a non-racial South Africa, Khama was able to convince the Rev. Michael Scott to travel to Namibia to meet Kutako and his supporters.

In Namibia Michael Scott met African leaders and explained the aims and intentions of the newly established United Nations, as well as what incorporation into the Union of South Africa might entail.⁶³ Subsequently it was in no

⁶² NAN, SWAA 1/1/11 G.L. 37/6/1-19, Incorporation of SWA in the Union of South Africa; Answers from Native Reserves in Police Zone. Letter to the Secretary for South West Africa in Cape Town from Magistrate Gobabis 4 February 1946, 'Discussion with Headmen, Board Members and Residents of Aminuis & Epukiro reserves'.

⁶³ Scott is one of the more remarkable figures in the history of Southern Africa. Having seen Gandhi in India, Scott became actively involved in the anti-colonial struggle, first in India and later in southern Africa. Initially he campaigned amongst the Indian community in Natal, and was later active in drawing attention to and improving the shameful living conditions in Bethel, one of Johannesburg's 'native locations'. After lobbying for Namibian independence, Scott was declared a prohibited immigrant and prevented from ever returning to Namibia or South Africa. In exile, he founded the Africa Bureau in London and continued campaigning for Namibia's independence. In 1958, whilst attending the All African People's Conference in Accra, he delivered a speech to the delegates on behalf of the Herero people in Namibia, who had been prevented from sending their own representatives. He called for the creation of an African Freedom army, claiming, 'Africa needs such a freedom army desperately urgently if it is to be saved from inhumanity'. He continues to be fondly remembered by many in Namibia as his activities brought the injustices of colonial rule in Namibia to the attention of the wider world. For more information about his life and work, see Troup (1950).

uncertain terms that Hosea Kutako wrote to the South African government: 'I am writing to support the claim made by our Paramount Chief Frederick Maharero for the return of the lands belonging to the Herero people from the Mandatory Power, the Government of the Union of South Africa'.⁶⁴ The response of the colonial administration was direct, condescending and harsh. In reply, the Acting Secretary for South West Africa and Chief Native Commissioner, W.J.B. Slater, noted that the Hereros were concerning themselves with matters that 'properly belong to the Government of the country', and in conclusion stated:

... the Union Government can see no purpose that would be served by the Hereros either petitioning the United Nations or sending a delegation to present their 'case'.⁶⁵

Urged to pursue their case through the colonial administration 'because (they were) the wards of the Union Government'⁶⁶ and prohibited from petitioning, let alone visiting, the United Nations, the Herero Paramount Chief Frederik Maharero and his regent Hosea Kutako together with their councillors appointed Michael Scott to travel to the United Nations in New York to speak on behalf of the Herero and the people of Namibia as a whole. In 1947, Scott began lobbying United Nations delegates in New York (Emmett 1999: 253).

In October 1948 he returned to Namibia where he briefed African leaders on his visit and, after consultations with Hosea Kutako, submitted to the South African administration a list of African leaders who wished to travel to New York to present their case at the United Nations. A petition was subsequently submitted to the new South African Prime Minister Dr D.F. Malan. In response, in a letter to Hosea Kutako, the Prime Minister's Office let it be known that the Union Government did not consider themselves accountable to the United Kingdom or to the United Nations regarding their administration of South West Africa and would not grant permission for a deputation to visit Europe. Nor were representatives of the Namibian people permitted to travel to New York. Michael Scott was granted an official hearing by the United Nations in November 1949. Amongst the most moving and powerful of depositions that Scott took with him to the UN were the words of a prayer that had been spoken by Hosea Kutako prior to Scott's departure. In it, Kutako called for God's support and guidance:

⁶⁴ NAN, SWAA 431, A 50/51, Vol. 2, Hosea Kutako in Aminuis Reserve, 18/8/47, to the Secretary.

⁶⁵ NAN, SWAA 431, A 50/51, Vol. 2, W.J.B. Slater in Windhoek, 10/9/47, to Hosea Kutako.

⁶⁶ NAN, SWAA 431, A 50/51, Vol. 2, W.J.B. Slater in Windhoek, 10/9/47, to Hosea Kutako.

You are the Great God the creator of the Heavens and the Earth. You know all those whom you have created. We are only thy creatures. You know also the good and the wrong that we do. Thou seest that we have no dwelling place – no resting place that we can call our own. O Lord, help us who roam about. Help us who have been placed in Africa and have no dwelling place of our own. Give us back a dwelling place. We thank you for bringing back this stranger to us safely. You have protected us during the hours of darkness and our visitor who has been alone in the world. Bless us in all that we are to do, and guide us with your wisdom. O God, all power is yours in heaven and Earth. Amen. (Troup 1950: 217-18)

After Michael Scott was banished from Namibia, the South African authorities attempted to cajole Hosea Kutako into signing a pre-written statement denying the validity of the prayer.⁶⁷ Hosea Kutako refused to sign the statement and refused to repudiate Michael Scott's claims.

In 1952, following the intervention of Michael Scott, Hosea Kutako was invited to speak at St Paul's Cathedral in London, but was once again denied permission to travel. The Canon of St Paul's Cathedral, Rev. Collins, did not mince his words in his reaction:

First Dr. Malan and his associates rejected the authority of the United Nations ... Now the South African Government spits at Christendom by refusing to allow this respected old Christian chief to come to Britain and preach to his fellow Christians.⁶⁸

In a subsequent reaction, the *Times* of London referred to events in Kenya where the Mau Mau had become active and warned of the consequences for South Africa should it continue to dismiss the legitimate demands of African nationalist leaders. Unfortunately for the Rev. Collins, Kutako and the African populations of Namibia and South Africa, Kutako's prayers and Collins' sermons fell on deaf ears in South Africa where the newly established Nationalist Party government set about establishing apartheid, one of the twentieth century's most ambitious social engineering projects.

Odendaal 1960–1970

In March 1960, the South African Police perpetrated the Sharpeville massacre and less than a year later the Nationalist Government took South Africa out of the Commonwealth. The Republic of South Africa thus came to be established under the premiership of the Amsterdam-born architect of apartheid, Hendrik Verwoerd. Apartheid South Africa seemed invincible, and the people of Namibia cut off from the world and their own destiny.

⁶⁷ NAN, SWAA 1981, A 427/48.

⁶⁸ 'Canon of St. Paul's says "Malan spits at Christendom"', *Evening Standard*, 12 September 1952.

In 1962 the South African government appointed the Commission of Enquiry into South West Africa Affairs, which became commonly known as the Odendaal Commission after its chairman Fox Odendaal the former administrator of Transvaal Province. The Odendaal Commission tried to implement the policy of apartheid (otherwise known as 'separate development') and envisaged the total ethnic separation of the people of Namibia.⁶⁹ The reserves were to be made ethnically exclusive and transformed into 'self-governing homelands' under the supervision of the white administration.



Photo 4.2 Chief Hosea Kutako in later life (1961)

It was in this period that the young American human-rights campaigner Allard Lowenstein was able to enter the territory and speak to Hosea Kutako. In

⁶⁹ Republic of South Africa, 'Report of the Commission of Enquiry into South West Africa Affairs, 1962-1963', R.P. No. 12/1964.

his account of the journey, *Brutal Mandate*, Lowenstein describes being smuggled into Aminuis Reserve and meeting Hosea Kutako. Amid furtive panic, the security police moved through Kutako's settlement in search of Lowenstein and, as the young American prepared to leave, Hosea Kutako said:

My brothers must not go in bitterness. More bitterness can bring only more hatred, and in hatred lies help for no one. Go rather in peace, for you did not come of your own will but of God's will; and tell of our sadness, for the Creator does not wish that any of His children should live as now my people must. When you have told the story of my people to your people, and to all the people across the deserts and the seas, they will come to our help, for that too is God's will. ... It is our prayer that those who have so much will remember the sacrifice of God before it is too late. If they do not soon remember, I fear they will one day suffer as my people do, for even the patience of God can run out. (Lowenstein 1962: 131)



Photo 4.3 Chief Hosea and his wife (c. 1970)

Lowenstein, who later helped to bring down President Lyndon B. Johnson, was able to leave Namibia and South Africa, and return to the United States unscathed.⁷⁰ On his return he wrote:

Only Hosea Kutako, the Paramount Chief of the Hereros has overcome problems of communication and tribal barriers to achieve a national following; and he is now ninety-one years old. Everywhere we went there was a veneration for this man that exceeded even our expectations from what we had heard and read in New York.

Such is Chief Kutako's eminence that the government has not been able to silence him and has not dared to depose or deport him. It is Chief Kutako who has set much of the tone of the African opposition since World War II. He is a devout Christian, a disciple of non-violence who once studied for the ministry; and he has insisted that change must come through action by the United Nations. If Hosea Kutako's efforts do not produce results, it is unlikely that his successors will wish, much less be able, to restrain Africans indefinitely from less gentle tactics in the seeking of freedom. (Lowenstein 1962: 117)

Lowenstein's words were proved right by history. On 26 August 1966 armed guerrillas of the newly formed People's Liberation Army of Namibia initiated the armed struggle at Ongulumbashe in northern Namibia.⁷¹ For the next 24 years Namibia was to experience ever more violence as South Africa sought to retain its control before Namibia was finally granted independence in 1990.

Hosea Kutako did not live to experience Namibian independence. In 1970, at the height of apartheid and extreme racist legislation in South Africa, Hosea Kutako passed away on Aminuis Reserve.

Conclusion

Hosea Kutako's life illustrates how the dialectical relationship that existed between Hosea as an individual and Hosea as a person was determined by a variety of structures from pre-colonial Herero society to Cold War geopolitics.

Hosea Kutako was born a Herero royal, yet he was born into a position which in terms of Herero social structure would not necessarily have entitled him to accession to highest office. It was only the unexpected and unanticipated course of history that changed Kutako's seemingly predestined position as a royal on the fringes of power. Nevertheless, Kutako developed skills that he shared with other African royals born into similar positions, for example, Kofi Annan and Nelson Mandela. Cut off from direct access to power, Kutako

⁷⁰ While boarding a flight in Johannesburg, he was intercepted by the South African Security Police, and it was only the quick thinking of a British air hostess that saved him.

⁷¹ On the initiation of the armed struggle in Namibia, see Namhila (2005).

developed skills in negotiation and diplomacy that were to stand him in good stead throughout his life.

Hosea Kutako's experiences of the horrors of war in the Herero-German War led to his deeply held desire to avoid open confrontation at all costs. Kutako was an active participant in this war, was wounded twice and lost a number of family members including his brother and his father, whose body he was forced to leave behind. Soldiers and settlers of Imperial Germany pursued a policy of genocide and actively sought out and killed all the Herero political, cultural, religious and economic leaders. Kutako was captured on two separate occasions and put in concentration camps, from which he managed to escape. He became a rallying point for Herero in the camps and following his escape, he settled in Windhoek and laid low for the remainder of the German colonial period.

In 1915 South African forces invaded Namibia and the territory was subsequently placed under the jurisdiction of the Union of South Africa. By the early 1920s Kutako's position as Herero leader was such that he could not be ignored even though the South African administration attempted to dismiss him from the Headmanship of Herero in Windhoek, claiming that he had no formally recognized position.

In the early 1920s, ethnically defined reserves were established in Namibia as an instrument of control. In contrast to the intentions of the South African Administration and far from being an instrument of control, the reserves resonated with Herero ideals as to what it meant to be Herero. Hosea Kutako used his residence on one of these reserves to develop his legitimacy with a rural power base, and the administration began actively asking Kutako's advice on matters of policy, respecting his position as leader of the Herero.

In the aftermath of World War II, Kutako resisted South African attempts to incorporate Namibia into South Africa. In so doing, Kutako developed into Namibia's first nationalist, as opposed to tribal, leader. Through petitioning the United Nations, Hosea Kutako was transformed from being an obscure tribal leader exiled on a rural reserve into a figure that served to unite the disparate range of disquiet felt by Africans in Namibia into strident calls for Namibian independence.

Surveying the convoluted history of Hosea Kutako's biography, one cannot help but be struck by the fact that Hosea Kutako was able to overcome the strictures placed upon him in ways that were totally unanticipated by those who sought to control and determine his life. Seemingly destined for a life of obscurity on the fringes of history, Hosea Kutako now occupies centre stage in the twentieth-century history of Namibia. Although administrations consistently attempted to downplay Kutako's role, his personality was such that he overcame the limitations of race and ethnicity that were placed upon him. Far from

being an obscure tribal leader living in a rural backwater, Kutako gave form and direction to African opposition to South African colonial rule in Namibia. As such, an overview of Hosea Kutako's life provides a clear example of the simple fact that, in history, structure is not all explanatory, and similarly an over-reliance on individual agency obscures more than what it illuminates.

References

- Bunting, B. 1964, *The Rise of the South African Reich*, London: Penguin Books.
- Dannert, E. 1906, *Zum Rechte der Herero insbesondere über ihr Familien- und Erbrecht*, Berlin: Reimer.
- Emmett, T. 1987, 'Popular Resistance in Namibia, 1915-1966', in: T. Lodge (ed.), *Resistance and Ideology in Settler Societies*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, pp. 6-48.
- Emmett, T. 1999, *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia, 1915-1966*, Basel: Schlettwein Publishing.
- Gewald, J-B. 1999, *Herero Heroes: A Socio-Political History of the Herero of Namibia 1890-1923*, Oxford/Cape Town/Athens, OH: James Currey/David Philip/Ohio University Press.
- Gewald, J-B. 2000, 'We Thought We Would Be Free...', *Socio-cultural Aspects of Herero History in Namibia 1915-1940*, Cologne: Köppe.
- Gewald, J-B. 2002, "'I Was Afraid of Samuel, Therefore I Came to Sekgoma": Herero Refugees and Patronage Politics in Ngamiland, Bechuanaland Protectorate, 1890-1914', *Journal of African History* (43): 211-34.
- Henrichsen, D. 1997, 'Herrschaft und Identifikation im vorkolonialen Zentralnamibia. Das Herero- und Damaraland im 19. Jahrhundert', PhD Thesis, Hamburg: Hamburg University.
- Henrichsen, D. 2000, 'Ozongombe, Omavita and Ozondjembo: The Process of (Re)Pastoralization amongst Herero in Pre-colonial 19th Century Central Namibia', in: M. Bollig & J-B. Gewald (eds), *People, Cattle and Land: Transformations of a Pastoral Society in Southwestern Africa*, Cologne: Köppe, pp. 149-85.
- Lacey, M. 1981, *Working for Boroko: The Origins of a Coercive System Market in South Africa*, Johannesburg: Raven Press.
- Lowenstein, A. 1962, *Brutal Mandate: A Journey to South West Africa*, New York: Macmillan.
- Musambachime, M. 2000, '*Kapitohanga: The Disease that Killed Faster than Bullets: The Impact of the Influenza Pandemic in the South West Africa Protectorate (Namibia) from October 1918 to December 1919*', Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien.
- Namhila, E.N. 2005, *Kaxumba kaNdola: Man and Myth The Biography of a Barefoot Soldier*, Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien.
- Poewe, K. 1985, *The Namibian Herero: A History of Their Psychosocial Disintegration and Survival*, Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Prein, P. 1994, 'Guns and Top Hats: African Resistance in German South West Africa, 1907-1915', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 20 (1): 99-121.

- Silvester, J. & J-B. Gewalt 2003, *Blue Book, Words Cannot Be Found: German Colonial Rule in Namibia: An Annotated Reprint of the 1918 Blue Book*, Leiden: Brill.
- Sundermeier, T. 1973, *Wir Aber Suchten Gemeinschaft*, Erlangen: Luther Verlag, pp. 111-12,
- Troup, F. 1950, *In Face of Fear, Michael Scott's Challenge to South Africa*, London: Faber.
- Werner, W. 1989, 'An Economic and Social History of the Herero of Namibia, 1915-1946', PhD Thesis, University of Cape Town.
- Werner, W. 1990, "'Playing Soldiers": The Truppspieler Movement Among the Herero of Namibia, 1915 to ca. 1945', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 16 (3): 476-502.
- Werner, W. 1993, 'A Brief History of Land Dispossession in Namibia', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 19 (1): 135-46.
- Werner, W. 1998, 'No One Will Become Rich' Economy and Society in the Herero Reserves in Namibia, 1915-1946, Basel: Schlettwein Publishing.

Agency in Kapsiki religion: A comparative approach

Wouter van Beek

This article analyzes the ways in which the Kapsiki/Higi of north Cameroon and northeastern Nigeria perceive their freedom for action and construct their theories of causation. First, the relevant notions of Kapsiki religious beliefs are described. Then the focus moves to the cultural devices they have to preview the future, i.e. divination, and the lines along which they construct their agency. The final section is comparative, taking its inspiration from the classic essay 'Oedipus and Job in West Africa' by Meyer Fortes (1959) on African thinking about personhood. The Kapsiki notion of agency is thus compared with a discussion of agency in reformation theologies and with early Jewish thinking. This comparison – with the focus on Job more than on Oedipus – is used to profile the specific characteristics of Kapsiki notions of agency.

Introduction

Agency is first of all a meta-theoretical concept that informs ways of thinking about the relationship between the individual and society, between agent and structure. It has some existential and emotional overtones because when applying the concept of agency, one opts for the individual dignity and self-determination of one's fellow man. Whatever the circumstances of, say, Africans in difficult circumstances, options for self-determination and *bricolage* of their own lives are always there, though the range of options differs greatly from one situation to another. By manoeuvring between one's social and ideological structures, anyone can create at least some free space for action and meaning for himself.

When used as a theoretical approach, the notion of agency implies an external world that is also viewed as external by the agent, and which has structural features of recognisability and predictability. This external world, the 'structure', has authority against which the agent is accountable for his actions, as acts have consequences and one is somewhere and sometimes held accountable for them. Of course, this means that some actions are more important than others and that the exercise of agency in some fields is more relevant than in others (Cronk 1999: 49). Finally, agency as a theory of causation in a particular culture is a way of explaining why things are as they are, whereas the major features of society and culture have their own etiological explications. Mishaps, in particular, can and often will be explained by referring to the agency of self or third parties.

Thus, agency has a reflexive and reflective quality as well, as people at times ponder their own agency versus that of others. Gell (1998) calls this 'a culturally prescribed framework for thinking about causation' or, in short, 'agents cause things to happen'. What is crucial is the temporal dimension. Emirbayer and Mische (1996) in their seminal paper stress the projective and iterative elements of agency; agents review their past actions, overview their present situation to preview their courses of actions towards the future, both for their own actions as for those expected of third parties. They expect the world to be predictable and events to more or less repeat themselves, to have some 'normalcy'. So the expectations, hopes, fears and desires of the actors *vis-à-vis* their projected futures are rooted in their evaluation of the past, an assessment of the present and the options they see ahead.

In this chapter I describe the way the Kapsiki/Higi of north Cameroon and northeastern Nigeria¹ perceive their freedom for action and construct their own theories of causation. Starting with the relevant notions of Kapsiki religious beliefs, their gods as well as their notions of evil, I zoom in on the cultural devices they have to preview the future by reviewing the past, divination, and on the lines along which the Kapsiki construct their agency. The final section is comparative. As the concept of agency historically derives from theological debates in the Western world, I try to compare the Kapsiki ways with a discussion on agency in reformation theologies and with early Jewish thinking. Of course, the entities compared are of quite a different nature, with varying

¹ The Kapsiki/Higi form one cultural group, living on both sides of the international border. They are called Kapsiki in Cameroon and Higi in Nigeria. In this article I address the whole group as Kapsiki, as the distinction is not relevant for the description and analysis here. I have been carrying out research on the Kapsiki/Higi since 1972, with many field visits being financed by the African Studies Centre, WOTRO and Utrecht University.

degrees of being ‘constructed’ but as I compare them at the conceptual level, their level of institutionalization and historical grounding are less relevant. The comparison is simply used to profile the specific characteristics of the Kapsiki case. My inspiration in this is *Oedipus and Job in West Africa* (Fortes 1959), a classic essay that expounded on these Western themes, as an undercurrent of African thinking about personhood. Comparing in a similar vein an African case with Western intellectual traditions, I want to pursue one of Fortes’s themes, that of Job eschewing the neo-Freudian angle which was in vogue at that time (Horton 1981), and do so in terms of agency.

The personalized god: Kapsiki notions of agency

The Kapsiki straddle the border between north Cameroon and northeastern Nigeria, some 400 km south of what used to be Lake Chad. They form a more or less segmentary society without a clear centralization of power, a village-based society with hardly any authority that transcends the local level.

Kapsiki concepts on agency start with the terms *berete*² and *merhe* as ways of expressing individual means of accomplishing something, translatable both by ‘power’ or ‘force’ in their own way and terms that indicate how to behave towards a source of power. The first term means physical strength: the power one has in one’s body: a real *za* (man) has *berete* and is not afraid to show it. *Berete* is important; being a weak pushover is not valued. Notions of power also often have associations with wealth. *Berete* may be used for people who are rich, having ample financial means and showing it. Physical strength should transform into possession, if possible by legal means.

The second term, *merhe*, means chief and is sometimes used for chieftaincy or dominion (van Beek 1997). In Bible translations it is used for the power of God; in actual Kapsiki parlance it is little used as a generic term, almost always as a personal attribute of people who have a certain position. In fact, the village chief usually has *merhe*. A crucial distinction within this concept is between *ndemerhe* and *merhe nde*. It almost sounds like a play on words but it is essential. A *ndemerhe* is someone who has a rightful claim to authority or chieftaincy, someone for whom power is a natural, inherent attribute. Often this is ascribed through inheritance and lineage. In Kapsiki, the descendant of the chiefly clan *kamaze* who is chosen to be village chief is entitled to the office as

² For Kapsiki orthography I follow the conventions of the current Bible translation in Kapsiki (*psikye*): the *e* is used for a frontal schwa, the *ə* for a guttural schwa, the *ɛ* as in ‘hat’, and *ɔ* as the implosive *d*. The *dl* and *tl* are the voiced and voiceless bilabial fricatives, and finally the *rh* and the *h* are the voiced and the voiceless guttural fricatives.

ndemerhe. Inheritance is not enough, though, as his position has to be recognized by others as well; in the case of the Kapsiki chief he has to be chosen by a council of village elders among the other candidates from the same *kamaze* clan; and then he has to function as a chief is expected to. When these components come together – the right to office, proper procedures and general acceptance – one is a real *ndemerhe*. As an honorific, the village chief – usually called *maze* – is sometimes also addressed as *ndemerhe*. This does not preclude manipulations of genealogies of course, as these underlying lineage histories have their own dynamics and are too important as a legitimizing mechanism for historical change to leave them to the hazards of history (Boyer 1990: 35). This, however, only underlines the ‘rooting’ of the power and authority in the social history of the local group.

Those in power who lack one of these components are *merhe nde*, the one in power, for this moment, for some reason. People elected to office but who can be replaced at the next election are *nde merhe*. Someone who has bought his way into office or whose office does not really belong in the social structure is *nde merhe*. For instance, officials from the national or regional political centre are *nde merhe*: from the president of the republic to the local *préfet* and *sous-préfet*.³ People realize that this distinction, which can be seen as ‘traditional’ versus ‘non-traditional’ authority does not necessarily give more power to the former but, in the construction of their own reaction to power, the distinction is highly relevant.

The terms *berete* and *merhe* have specific opposites. *Berete* is contrasted with *rhere*, which means ‘thief’. In the case of supernatural forces for evil, this is called *blə*. Using force to obtain goods is legitimate, but stealing is not. When someone takes an object from someone else ‘by force’, he is simply stronger, which is to be commended. Stealing is hidden, infringing on privacy (very important in Kapsiki) and inexcusable.

The antipode of *merhe*, ‘power’ is a crucial, central notion of the Kapsiki *ntsehwele* (intelligence), but with a broad connotation that includes cunning, cleverness and even trickery. *Ntsehwele* is a way to remain independent, having one’s own agency, and thus also to circumvent the agency of a third party, power, both *merhe* and *berete*. In folk tales it is the ground squirrel, who in his exploits against the leopard is always the weaker one, but very clever: he even tricks his strong-but-dumb opponent into disaster. In other African groups the spider and the hare similar roles. All these animals combine cleverness with a lack of power in the sense of *berete*. Lack of acting space is a normal feature of

³ The Fulbe chief installed as Lamido in Mogode is a borderline case; the present one bought his office, so is *merhe nde*, but the office belongs to the historical social structure. If he is succeeded by his son, he will be *nde merhe*.

life, as any man has a limited amount of *berete*, a definite lack of *merhe*, both to be compensated by an abundance of *ntsehwele*; no one is strong enough, dominion is a rare thing but one can and should have intelligence in dealing with the representatives of the other two. If things do go awry and none of the above suffice, resignation sets in as life is full of happenings one cannot control, such as illness, misfortune and the things in life that are absolutely certain, such as death. These just happen and one has to endure them, muddling through with a tough skin and a hardened resolve. Sometimes the proper attitude towards external power is some kind of mourning. The Kapsiki express their resignation by *kanewe le ntsu*, just looking with the eyes, without expression, without remorse or recrimination, *tsarha nza*, such is life. They are, however, not without recourse, as we shall see later, but they do illustrate Geertz's remark that the challenge is not how to avoid suffering but how to suffer properly (Geertz 1965: 19).

The relationship with the supernatural world is just as complex and ambivalent. The prime notion of the supernatural world is *shala*, which translates as 'God' in Bible translations but is a far cry from any real monotheistic notion. *Shala* is first and foremost one's personal god, one for each human being. But the individualized *shala* easily gives way to a more collective notion when a group of persons with some link, for example, kinship, is considered. *Shala* stands for the other side of world, as the counter identity of any living being or group of beings. In principle, each and every being has his or her *shala*, people, animals, but also a river, a village, a house, a piece of bush, a spot. *Shala* is a general term and a specific identity depending on the unity referred to.⁴ *Shala* is the key term in Kapsiki cosmology. *A shala menete* (God did it) is the usual utterance of acceptance in the face of adversity. Resignation but also joy and fear are in general appropriate attitudes versus *shala*.

So each individual has his or her own *shala*, each group of people has its *shala*, and these two *shala* are neither very different nor equal. The master of the house has his *shala*, and so has each of his wives, all children. There is a *shala* of the compound (*shala ta rhe*), one of the ward, the clan, the village. Some special trees have their *shala*, as do all mountains, and each outcropping on the plateau definitely has its own *shala*. How different are all these *shala*? Though this would be typically an outsider's question, most Kapsiki agree that essentially all are the same, in fact are one. But, again, this type of question is not normally asked. The context of speech or ritual act is sufficient to distinguish the relevant *shala*, be it a social group, a spot or an artefact.

⁴ *Shala* has honorifics that are sometimes used: *Mehete tehwu rhweme*, *Jigelafté*, *Kwamaduwe*. These titles have no specific meaning; they are, in fact, the terms neighbouring groups use for their world of the gods.

At a sacrifice, a man may address *shala taḍa*, my own *shala*. If the other family members are present he would address *shala ta rhe*, the *shala* of the compound; at a lineage ritual *shala ta rebu* (our *shala*) is the aim, as in the case of any group, however composed. The village sacrifice, at *Rhungweḍu* addresses *shala ta meleme* (the village *shala*) and during the initiation of girls, the young voices sing in praise of *shala ta rhwemetla* (the god of that particular mountain, Rhwemetla).

A *shala* is referred to in the first person,⁵ never in the second but sometimes in the third: your *shala* never heard, as this would be a serious infringement on privacy. Speaking about the *shala* of a third person is possible when he is absent but it is close to gossip. This restriction avoids misunderstandings as it is always clear who is meant. *Shala* is the counter-ego of each and every one, and as individual identities blur so do the different *shala*. In short, *shala* is the supernatural pendant of the major identity relevant at that particular moment.

The only exception to the first-person use is *shala pele rhweme* (god in heaven or the sky), the encompassing god above. But as all *shala* are deemed to reside ‘above’, *shala pele rhweme* can also be seen as the totality of all *shala* together, or even the indication of someone of his or her personal *shala*. But that is rare, as people usually use *shala taḍa*. *Shala pele rhweme* is used by both Christians and non-Christians (Muslims prefer to speak Fulfulde), and no misunderstanding can ever ensue. After all, everyone is talking about the same: what is the difference between *shala* and *shala*?

For our purposes here, the relationship between an individual and his or her *shala* is crucial. The main question— which invokes some discussion when prodded – is the amount of responsibility one has for one’s actions. ‘Doing the same as our *shala*’ is a shared notion but what does it imply? Where is one’s *fte* (guilt, fault, mistake)? How responsible is a person for his or her own actions? Several views have been expressed on this issue. Most have been posed in relational terms: the type of dependency one has had with the personal *shala* is expressed as a horse versus its rider, or as a slave versus its master.⁶ The general consensus is that whatever our dependency on the upper world, any mistakes, transgressions or faults are ours. Some make their *shala* account for their transgressions (it is not my fault, my *shala* made me do it) but that is seldom taken seriously. A mistake is one’s own mistake; of course, *shala* made us stupid enough to make mistakes but the consequences are ours. If *shala* had wanted it to be different, *shala* should have made another type of horse that did not throw its rider (*shala*). ‘Theology’ never supersedes practical reason, and a ‘system of

⁵ Either singular or plural, my *shala* or our *shala*. The Kapsiki language has an inclusive ‘we’ form, meaning including the listener, and an exclusive one, distinguishing the speaker’s group from the listener. In speaking about *shala* this makes a large difference: our *shala* with you as member, or our *shala* in opposition to yours.

⁶ Sometimes also as son versus father but that is mainly used by Christians.

thought' never impinges on personal responsibility, a situation typical of a religion without scripture. Kapsiki religion, as far as one can speak of a system at all, is a means to live here and now, to cope with 'disturbances of normalcy' and to make sense out of relative chaos.

The relationship itself is basic, a person with *shala*. Dependency is the norm in the relationship: *shala menete* (god did it) or *tsarha wusu* or *tsarha nza* (such is life). *Shala* has its hand in everything, good and bad, blessing and disaster. *Shala* takes lives but also helps people to overcome illness. If a child dies after an extended illness, the father says '*shala* has worked', i.e. he has kept death at bay and has prevented a quick death. In itself, death is a normal happening, but a long illness calls for some explanation. Yet *shala* is ambivalent enough to punish whoever breaks its taboos. Not so much laws and commandments but taboos are the subject matter of some of the wrath of *shala*. Any infringement upon a taboo can cause a mishap: a bad harvest, sickness, a child's death, dead cattle, a sign of being *ndegema*, not in harmony with *shala*. Whether this is active involvement of *shala* or the self-evident outcome of a breach of taboo is less clear. An individual can fall out of grace with his/her personal god in many ways, some of which may be defined as taboos. A fair number of actions are taboo, ranging from forbidden sexual relations to the slaughtering of a pregnant goat or having a cock crow on one's granary. Not all these can be prevented but they still call for reparation. What is important is that infringement brings a disturbed relationship, and this turns the tables of fortune. Without reparation, bad things can happen: illness, infertility, bad luck in trading or in cultivation. No specific threat is associated with *shala*. Protection as such is not possible and so careful living is called for. If or when mishaps do occur, divination should indicate the source of the trouble.

The notion of *shala* is more than just the relationship between an individual and his personalized supernatural world, it involves a cosmology as well. The collective *shala* are also called 'people in the heaven' and on the death of their respondent will come down, enter a womb and be born as infants on this earth. At the time, the shadow of the deceased goes down into the hereafter, visualized as a place in the ground, the heavenly generation moves down as well, and with them a more elevated layer of their *shala* that moved down from still higher heavens. The 'people in the earth' then move further down, *kwa tliḍi*, into the grass. So each person is part of a column of beings, which with each death moves down one stage. However, the whole edifice is seldom mentioned, as people just relate to their own *shala*, and in some minor way to the people in the earth, whom they have followed on the way down.⁷

⁷ The case of twins is illustrative; there is some discussion among informants as to whether they have one or two *shala*; however Kapsiki agree on the fact that they *are* in

Thus, with some confidence the Kapsiki can surmise that ultimately their interest and that of their *shala* will run parallel, even if at a given moment one can never be sure of the positive influence of the *shala*. Even more ambivalent is the relationship between an individual and someone else's *shala*: the Kapsiki, with their individualistic orientation, consider the well-being of the one as a threat to another person. Often some notion of 'limited good' is expressed: any threat I encounter will attack my neighbour and vice versa, and any wealth I accrue will be deducted from the share of others.

Shala-related beings may be dangerous too: 'Va, the personification of the rain, and 'veci, the sun, can be encountered in person, which calls for a sacrifice. These beings are relevant in very special situations only, like during a drought, and then are dealt with collectively either in a rain sacrifice or in communal rituals. An ambivalent aspect of *shala* is the concept of *gətəli*. The term implies some danger but primarily means a very localized *shala*. That might be the *shala* of a house, which coincides with but is not identical to one's personal *shala*. Even if in the sacrificial invocations the term *shala* is used towards a third person, one may speak of the *gətəli* of the house. Also, the *shala* belonging to specific places in the bush, especially places with permanent water are called *gətəli* or *shala tenkwa*, *shala* of that place. Danger is present when this term is used, as these *gətəli* may possess a person and lead to serious psychic disturbances. Special medicine, known only to a very few specialists, must be applied to prevent these dangers.

Agency implies accountability, which again implies justice. This is implicit in the Kapsiki cosmological picture and is of a fuzzy but definitely personal nature. Throughout, what happens to a person has a reason, either in his *shala*, his own conduct or that of others. The question as to whether it is deserved or not and whether misfortune is unjust or not is not effectively raised. Though notions of 'being right' and 'whose fault' are important (especially the latter, *fete*, a fault is important), these are resolved on a casuistic basis, case by case. Any judgement is called *meha rhwu* (light the fire) or *katla fete* (look for mistakes). The relationship is always two-sided. As for general justice, one can trust *shala* to be on the right side – one's own, that is – but never completely, never totally and never unconditionally. 'Il y a des accommodements avec le ciel', Molière wrote, and that holds for the Kapsiki as well: one's relationship with *shala* is reciprocal but unbalanced, inescapable but open to negotiation,

some way their own *shala*, being never children, never fully grown-up, as people who are structurally liminal (van Beek 2002).

ever present but most of the time as a residual discourse. After all, *shala* is accountable for large issues, the individual is in charge of his own details.



Photo 5.1 Sacrificial jars

Finally, the times when people speak of *shala* are often mediated by either other people or objects. Usually *shala* is mentioned in greetings to other people or expressions of resignation towards others; the discourse on *shala* is mediated. Special people, like blacksmiths or clairvoyants, are often the other party in such a discourse. Speaking of one's *shala* is most relevant in a situation where someone else is present; the relationship between *shala* and oneself is a triangle as the other person – with his own *shala* – is the easiest referent in the discourse. Objects may serve as intermediaries but mainly to focus the discourse in

the bilateral relationship *ego-shala*. In rituals, during sacrifice, in the public celebration of a private sacrifice, in elaborate burial proceedings and most clearly in divination, an array of specific objects may focus communication with one's *shala*. The essential object in the cult is the sacrificial jar, *mele*, but a flint stone, a specific tree, the entrance to the compound or a variety of small objects may serve as well. When speaking to the jar, the sacrificer reflects on his (mis)fortunes, ponders past deeds and his way to the future. In the case of the *gatali*, this mediation is absent; those local *shala* are not part of a mediated environment but directly confront the individual and, characteristically, are dangerous.

The dark side of agency: 'Evil'

Agents have many faces, one of them evil. Things that happen are, in theory, mishaps, misfortune or suffering, and more than any other happenings, the negative things in life call for an explanation, not so much because of the misfortune itself but because of the timing of the event and generally because most evil is seen as originating from a human source. Misfortune is the clearest example of the action of agents. For the Kapsiki/Higi, one has to discern between those ills and evils that come from people and those that come from god. The first source is called *ndrimike*, badness, but this term does not apply to problems stemming from *shala*. *Ndrimike* is an event that should not have happened and is the result of an external agent.

Most evil stems from human agents. No clear distinction can be made between natural and supernatural threats but three sources can be discerned. First, there are people who have a bad or special *mehele* (character or spirit). Witches (*mete*) are the clearest example. A witch is someone (male or female) who inherits a special type of *shinankwe* (shadow) and at night it leaves the sleeping body through the anus and roams in the bush, red, like fire, as a kind of wild cat. It eats the shadows of sleeping children's hearts. On waking, the victims feel weak and become ill. Unless the *mete* drops the shadow of the heart, the victim will die. Witchcraft is deemed to inherit matrilineally (in a strictly patrilineal kinship system). The Kapsiki on the whole are aware of who are *mete*. Most witches, however, are not active, as jealousy, ire or lust for vengeance are considered the motor that sets the involuntary processes of witchcraft in motion. Evil needs a trigger. So witches are more or less responsible for their vile acts; it is their *fte* (fault). However, not every witch is known as such. One major risk for the village resides in de strangers coming in who, because of virilocal residence, tend to be women. Often women who marry into a village are barely known, so many a witch is supposed to reside among them.

Folk tales warn young and eager men of the dangers of the beautiful but unknown wife coming into the village for marriage.

Kapsiki divination may indicate that a certain illness is the result of *mete* activities but cannot indicate which one. The high-status diviners known elsewhere in Africa are not found in this area, which ties in with the acephalous juro-political organization of the Kapsiki in which pronouncing a judgment over other people is difficult. The usual reaction to the suspicion of witchcraft is to cry into the dark of the night: 'Let go, let the heart go'. Hopefully the witch will fear detection and return the shadow of the heart. What is essential in this is that the *mete* in question be someone close, either a kinsman or a wife or co-wife. Witchcraft is, nearly always in Africa, the 'enemy within the gates'. If someone, either a 'known' witch or a newly arrived wife, is suspected of taking the shadow of a child's heart, the sick child is put before her in the full presence of as many people as possible, saying: 'Here it is. Do eat the rest now'. However, this seldom happens as the Kapsiki have no way of securing a witch's identity. Formerly, if a child died, the supposed witch was chased from the village and her ears were cut off. Since colonial days, the government has no longer allowed this, and so witches proliferate, people say.⁸ Treatment of *mete* infliction may be limited, and protection is normal and easy to obtain. Everybody knows some protective medicine and each blacksmith can furnish the *rhwe* needed for a newborn baby. Kapsiki society is not witch-ridden; the number of accusations is very small as relatively few illnesses are attributed to witches. Children are deemed to be about the only possible victims for *mete*, and only the combination of diarrhoea without blood, fever and the constant need to urinate (more or less the symptoms of bacterial dysentery) point to *mete* influence.

Other harmful people include the men or women with the 'evil eye' (*hweteru*). Their spirits roam the village at night in no specified form and suck blood from people and animals. The victims do not die but become listless and unproductive. These *hweteru* act from sheer spite and jealousy, and are deemed to be in command of their bad shadow, which is inherited matrilineally. In this case, people generally do not know who is *hweteru* in the village. There is no known cure and only protection is possible to guard against them. This is easy to obtain: a common plant species gives fair protection. However, it remains important not to foster jealousy: anything nice or beautiful must be hidden from view.

⁸ In recent years, with accusations of witchcraft regaining acceptance in the Cameroonian courts, very little has changed in the Kapsiki practice of witchcraft accusations. They ask how anyone can know exactly who is a witch.

A third kind of special agent, though much less harmful, is the 'spirit walker' (*kelengu*). Their shadow leaves them at night, in their own image, and joins colleagues in the village. Together, their shadows are believed to go on noble exploits like stealing sorghum from enemy fields or waging war on the spirit walkers of neighbouring villages. When they steal the shadow of the harvest, they put it with their own crops and, as a result, their supply of grain seems interminable. Their main thrust is against other villages, so people do not consider the *kelengu* as shameful or evil and speak freely about it. This *mehele* is handed down from father to only one son, and the spirit walkers can be recognized by their linear somatic type; they explain their own thinness by their excessive activity: 'We are never at rest; we work during the day and steal at night'. As protection, one must shield one's fields from the *kelengu* of other villages. Some medicinal plants offer protection, as does a thorn hedge or a row of black sorghum around the field. The *kelengu* are sometimes aware of future events, in which case their authority is uncontested, one reason why they are sometimes dubbed as clairvoyants. Whatever they see happen in the spirit world, will happen shortly afterwards in the daily world. When they kill people among themselves in their battles, that spirit walker will die within a few days. No medicine will help. Women may be walkers too, for any war has to have its spectators.

It is not only innate properties that pose a threat to the individual. Serious danger comes from the overt actions of people, be they specialists or not. The most harmful people are those who practice *beshengu* (black magic). As the epitome of evil in Kapsiki society, this magic is practiced by someone who aims to harm others, killing them or rendering them infertile. It is evil because it harms and because it intrudes. The term *beshengu* denotes not a specific object or combination of things but a great number of different ways of harming other people. Some are well known (but hard to get, for example, the whiskers of the leopard), others are very secret and known only to the specialist. *Beshengu* is a specialist's job, done professionally by blacksmiths who are the ritual intermediaries par excellence in Kapsiki culture. The Kapsiki are sure that all the important men have such a *beshengu* bought from a specialist in another village: power cannot exist without *beshengu*. However, it is not the possession of *beshengu* that is evil, but its use. One can defend oneself against possible attack but some kinds can be used for protection. In many ritual texts and public discussions, curses are formulated against the users: 'Anyone who walks with *beshengu* (i.e. who carries it with him in order to use it), let him drop dead in his tracks'. Still, according to some informants, those curses were often mouthed by the very people who at least owned the deadly 'medicine', if not actually used it.

The threat of use does not come from inside the compound, such as witchcraft. People think this kind of sorcery comes from outside but not from far away. *Beshengu* is, in the minds of the Kapsiki, sought after by people who are kinsmen, probably agnates, who are jealous of their clan and lineage brothers or interested in their misfortune. A large inheritance may trigger the use or accusations of *beshengu*, usually between the agnates competing for the inheritance. One must live carefully, especially if one has gained some social prominence, in order to minimize the dangers. Protection against this threat focuses on protection. Constant vigilance is needed, and protection against *beshengu* must be kept in good shape.

As with any activity aimed at the supernatural, the use of *beshengu* carries a risk. When an untimely death occurs, people may suspect a sorcerer, in which case the *wuta* ritual is performed, a complicated affair that takes one of the relatives of the deceased to a village far away. The culprit is ritually killed in a large pot (*wuta*). Afterwards the relative lets the village know that he has 'gone to *wuta*' and waits for the culprit to die. The next death is interpreted as the result of this ritual. The culprit is then buried without any public mourning. However, there is danger of contamination. Close kin of the culprit are considered to be in danger too, for death by revenge resembles an epidemic and will also attack them. A special ritual is performed to protect the culprit's kin from the rightful vengeance that has been exacted. This epidemic nature of death by revenge or death due to one's own *fte* (fault) is central in another ritual, *sekwa*. In principle, *sekwa* is a means of ensuring the repayment of debts: when someone refuses to repay a debt, the creditor may put his *sekwa* in the debtor's compound, and then death will strike the compound like an epidemic, wiping out the debtor's household as well as anyone who has ever eaten there. This *sekwa* is often used as a threat but the threat is seldom carried out. It is considered a perfectly legitimate way of enforcing repayment, and neither its manufacture nor its possession or use bears any social stigma. *Sekwa* consists of objects well known to everyone. There is no remedy against its use except to pay one's debts immediately. When applied, it is put in the middle of the courtyard where it is visible to everyone. But things rarely go that far.

A last threat that has its origins in one's own guilt is the curse *bedla*. When a close kinsman or kinswoman does not behave according to the rules of conduct (for example, by not showing proper respect for a mother's brother or a father), one may resort to a formal curse. This does not imply a great deal of ritual but is just spoken: 'If such and such has misbehaved against me in that manner, then she may not get pregnant any more'. A wide variety of afflictions can be administered this way, and the closer the relationship between the parties, the more dangerous the curse is, the most feared curses coming from a mother and her brother. As the formula indicates, the curse is only effective in cases of

factual and serious misbehaviour. It can be eradicated by a simple ritual of blessing but only *ex post facto*.

Both *sekwa* and *bedla* show that the Kapsiki sense of justice centres on finding fault more than on deserving merit. Whoever is an evil agent should be caught and punished, and this may accrue epidemic qualities. People associated with the guilty one become vulnerable as well: they lose their defences and risk being punished along with the culprit kinsman. The threat of revenge does not stop at the limits of one body but flows over into the patriline.

Constructing causes: Divination and the agency of the past

Misfortune may hit anyone at anytime. Nobody is exempt; nobody is safe so the actual dangers of this 'risk society' the Kapsiki live in are better sought out. The things that are going to happen are mainly defined as mishaps, misfortune, illness and adversity. Divination, of course, is one way to glean something of what is going to happen in the future, and any prediction couched only in rosy terms is to be distrusted. An informant explained: 'I always consult that particular diviner, as he will tell me what will go wrong. And misfortune is what happens really'. The future is written in the idiom of disaster. Yet most disasters and problems have a margin of human action, and people can act upon the root causes of misfortune. In theory, any action that results from divination aims at redressing wrongs in the past, restoring disturbed relations, expiating transgressed taboos, and by rewriting one's personal history. Human agency against misfortune is mainly expressed in retroaction: damage control and restoration of the past.

Not everyone will seek out reasons for misfortune. Some proud men state that it is better to 'sit and look with the eyes' (*newe le ntsə*) in resignation and quiet acceptance of life's sorry facts. It is the women, they say, who do things, who try to change the course of life. They are the ones who consult the diviner to know why, to know how and to make an effort at redressing a wrong. In actual practice, men and women both do so but women are more frequently clients at the diviner's. This is not the place to dwell at length on the technicalities of divination (see van Beek 1987, 2007) but in Kapsiki divination several aspects stand out. There are a restricted number of viable and believable systems for divination that one can freely choose from; divination results are couched in probabilistic terms but are formulated in idiom exuding confidence and certainty, and soliciting second opinions is normal practice.

The most general and widely reputed divination technique is with the crab (*dlera*). This freshwater crab (in French *crabe chanteur*) lives in the small pools on the Kapsiki plateau that retain water even during the dry season. The crab is not seen as a direct representation of *shala* and is not essential in rituals or sacri-

lices: it is just an animal whose tracks can predict the future. Each crab knows the future, the diviners say, but some are quicker than others and the slow ‘speakers’ have to be replaced by faster specimens. Each crab lasts but a few months in divination and is fed grains of sorghum every few days. Some lore is attached to the crab but it is not central in the *rhena heca* (tales).



Photo 5.2 A divination session

Diviners are usually blacksmiths, a special category of people among the Kapsiki who perform the main ritual functions in society (van Beek 1992): they are not only the metal workers of the village (for iron and brass) but also the undertakers. They also make music, are well versed in traditional medi-

cine/magic and they perform divination in its various forms. Though not exclusively theirs, most divination techniques are firmly tied to their craft.⁹ This minority group (5%) is strictly endogamous and the various smith families have links of fictive kinship with the patriclans that make up the fabric of social life in a Kapsiki village. Smiths have the reputation of *ntsehwele*, of seeing hidden things, the reputation of links with the spirit world, and theirs is the authority to foretell the future and explain the past.

During a divination session, the crab is placed in a jar full of objects that symbolize the client, the village and the question asked. The smith tells the crab what the problem is and puts him in the jar to rearrange the objects. Each 'answer' takes about a quarter of an hour, and the smith then 'reads' through the rearrangement of the objects, the crab's answer. After a few hours of probing, the cause of the affliction becomes clear, as is the remedy. Both client and diviner are in constant communication with the crab: it is addressed as 'crab of the jar', or 'crab of the earth': an animal that knows, never as a supernatural being.

The remedy consists mainly of sacrifices that are described in detail, usually small offerings, often at the crossroads in front of the compound. Cases are relatively homogeneous in their recommended treatment. Sorghum grains are usually called for, often from a special source, the chief clan, a boy, a blacksmith, i.e. the special persons in the village. Seldom is a major sacrifice called for, at least not the first time. Small gifts to injured kin or to the blacksmith are often recommended, as are gifts to children. Getting sorghum or other ritual items from other people is not simple. The chief and the blacksmith are used to these demands, being predominantly 'social persons', and they can be acquired from kinsmen or friends too. But non-kinsmen will be reticent, afraid that it will be used against them. During the sacrifice, all 'evil things' are routinely sent away, outside the compound walls, and then the trail to the donor of the items may follow.

Divination is thus a way to reflect on one's past use of agency and ponder redressing present problems. The divination jar, with its map of the individual situation, is the perfect object for reflexivity: one's family, village and all relevant others are represented in the crab's pot.

The reflexive focus is on the past more than on the future. The past has to be redressed as the problems stem from the past. The sacrifices aim at defusing them, by redressing them and by a certain routinization of events doing away

⁹ So the term 'blacksmith', though common in the literature on West Africa, is not overly apt as they are the general specialists among the Kapsiki, as among most of the groups in the Mandara region.



Photo 5.3 A divination pot

with the problems and making the future conform to the expected routine of daily life. Such an object, like a jar representing one's *shala* as well as one's father, are conducive for reflectivity. They are, in a different way than Lévi-Strauss used the expression, 'good to think'.

Divination is a way of getting behind the surface reality and at the deeper reasons and problems: the diviner has to produce a plausible theory of causation. One of the means is to deconstruct the problem, and the process of divination frequently entails a rephrasing of the question.

In many cases the blacksmith already has enough background information to rephrase questions and redefine problems himself from his own knowledge of his clients, and he habitually does so. The problems of the present are routinely explained by mistakes in the past, and the way to redress, the agency in the present, is implemented through a restoration of the past as it should have been. The case of Kwafashe, who has a boy but wants a second child, serves as an example:

When her husband Sunu was at a foreign diviner's he asked about the reason for his wife's – relative – infertility. The diviner suggests a curse but the answer is 'no'. Then the client himself suggests a possibility. Some time ago her child fell off his

wife's back – a bad omen. In such a case another woman should first strike the mother and then tie the child back on. Kwafashe, however, tied her child on herself, as no other women were present. The diviner arrives at the following advice: she has to go back to the same place with an old woman, let the child slip off her back and then follow the correct procedure. In striking Kwafashe, the old woman has to say: 'You must become pregnant again', and then tie the child back on. Some red beer has to be given to the *shala* of that spot. The diviner even said: 'If she does not become pregnant again, I will pay you a goat'.

After this, Kwafashe's mother consults the crab in her village. According to the crab, she has to go to that spot at night, with her child and a blacksmith, and with a chicken. She should let the child slip from her back and the smith should cut the chicken with Kwafashe and the child holding it, as an offering for the *shala*, leaving its head on the spot. Then the smith ties the child on its mother's back again, with a small slap on the mother's back. The smith eats the rest of the chicken.

Kwafashe followed the instructions because of the renown of the crab divination and out of respect for her mother but mainly because the presence of a blacksmith adds to the efficacy of any ritual.¹⁰

Contradictions do occur but are seldom seen as a serious problem. Clients do not expect the unanimous verdict of specialists, but a discussion. Variations in divination advice are deemed normal and one diagnosis is deemed insufficient. After all, serious afflictions seldom stem from one source or cause. Not only can a type of illness or problem originate from various afflictions, in one individual case the problem may stem from more than one reason. In fact, any problem demands more than one explanation: why this specific affliction, and why now. Each of these basic questions can have its own answer. Complexity is inherent in misfortune, and more than one opinion should be explored, with trial and error being the main strategy. This complexity is crucial. Life is complex and the future is not to be trusted, so one has, in Kapsiki ethno-philosophy, to prepare for misfortune. Good things, good harvests, harmonious relations and good health do not call for an explanation. Divination tends to predict disaster. One additional reason is that disconfirmation of a prediction of misfortune is never a problem in itself. People will not complain about good luck and anyway divination indicates how to avoid possible misfortune. If disaster does strike, then divination is vindicated as the clients can always be defined as having made mistakes in the performance of the required sacrifices. But predicting disaster is not a conscious strategy to avoid disconfirmation, it is more a general attitude towards the future. Divination exudes a certain mistrust of the world at large and the future in particular: the normal way of things is not to be trusted

¹⁰ Kwafashe still only has one child but this son has given her grandchildren now, so the problem has been solved in another way. However the diviner never gave her a goat.

and people have to intervene actively, even if the major playing field is in the past.

The construction of agency in Kapsiki religious thought

The main notion of agency resides in the interplay between an individual, his position in life and the 'other side of the world'. Kapsiki personhood is in constant flux between being a *za*, a real man who stands alone, and his inevitable dependency upon others. Others are never fully trusted, and one can never rely upon a third person to further ego's cause; not even kinsmen or full brothers, let alone strangers. The notion of a personal *shala* in its dialectic between individual and group reflects this: individuality stands out in its relationship with the 'people in heaven', while their fundamental likeness is stressed. One is at the same time a person in the vertical axis of birth and death, of descent from heaven and disappearance in the earth, and yet part of the group both on this earth and above, while in death all distinctions are lost. Kapsiki personhood reflects the dialectic between agency and structure: a living being is at the mercy of his *shala*, and still fully responsible and accountable for his actions. Excuses for mistakes are always there but never sufficient, while any real assets are gifts from above, facilitated by the outside world. So one can never be sure of one's position in society or of riches or wealth. In the end, it is the relation that wins out over the individual personality, but the struggle is always there. In Kapsiki, with its clear insistence on privacy and autonomy, the notion of private input in agency may be relatively large but relationships in this Mandara mountain society, with the kinship idiom as their node, are crucial and fundamental (cf. Ellis & ter Haar 2004).

The temporal element, which Emirbayer and Mische (1996) rightfully stress, is at the heart of Kapsiki notions of agency. Not only do *shala* and the individual replace each other in due course, life is always constituted by past actions, both by oneself and by the other. A taboo broken, an action condemned by *shala* and past mistakes all colour one's chances in life. But for the Kapsiki, the main actions come from outside, from third persons. Things that happen are usually seen through misfortune, and mishaps are an outright catastrophe as they call for explanation. A sense of 'normalcy' prevails in Kapsiki dealings with events; a normal string of events contains some mishaps and some good fortune reasonably balanced. A breach of this gently undulating line of events calls for an explanation. Divination, evidently, is one way of redressing the balance. What has happened in the past to cause misfortune, what mistakes, what evil actions, what thoughtless actions of people who should know better? Who has misused their relational situation? Whose fault is this? The sense of justice behind it is clear. Revenge or retribution is a public matter and nothing

to be ashamed of. And any retribution is extremely strong, easily transforming from retribution against the individual culprit into an immediate danger for all his associates. The redress of an illness turns into an epidemic: *sekwa*, *wuta* and other redressive punitive measures become epidemics unless carefully curtailed by people close to the culprit.

Thus, the agency attributed to the other, the external agent, seems to be stronger and more effective than that attributed to oneself. A certain helplessness against the wayward other prevails, and only the curtailing of third-party agency helps: one has to build a protective perimeter. The huge wall shielding the compound from the inquisitive eye of fellow villagers is both a symbol and a symptom. This instrument of privacy is a major feature of Kapsiki architecture and an important focus of ritual attention at the same time. Ritual defences concentrate on keeping the evil other outside this wall, immobilizing him or her, and guarding some of the agency of the house's inhabitants. The same defensive and slightly helpless posture is found in the general stance towards misfortune: 'sit still and look with the eyes'. The only things that can be changed are mistakes from the past, and then simply hope for the best. So agency in Kapsiki religious thought is aimed at the past more than the future; not only is the past more knowable, it is also a repository of past actions and current relations. The present is the child of the past, but in the future each individual has to deal with a lot of these children. Kapsiki agency is caught in a temporal as well as in a relational squeeze.

When *merhe* is the matter, when some people are really *ndemerhe* and have rightful and acknowledged power and dominance over others, the rooting is definitely in the past, also for actions in the future. It is revealing that when individual justice is transformed into vengeance on the other, the tables are turned. The wronged individual is no longer in a minority position but stands as the stronger party *vis-à-vis* the whole group of the other. So strong in fact that the participants of the other group have to distance themselves from the culprit 'brother'. Individual agency is multiplied by societal backing and the power of rightful vengeance. Here the distinction between *ndemerhe* and *merhe nde* is relevant. With a firm foundation in the past, agency operates in a different way than without such legitimization. Political strife and the dividing lines within Kapsiki society focus for a large part on this dichotomy, and on the attribution of various sorts of dominance over people. However, the first ideal in Kapsiki life is independence more than dominance, being a *za* (man) in one's own right is more important than holding sway over other – non-related – people. The politics of identity centre on having a large house, both in terms of people and wealth, being secure and free from external interference.

Comparisons

To glean how specific our Kapsiki case is in West Africa, we start here with a quick comparison of some West African cosmologies and their notions of agency, and then enter into a wider comparison. Meyer Fortes in his essay on the themes of Oedipus and Job in West Africa used the notion of destiny in Tallensi thought as a central focus, and indeed destiny or fate is a notion that is recognizable in quite a few West African societies. Fortes (1959) highlighted the dialectics in Tallensi society between one's destiny and the dynamics of lineage and power, between individual, society and the 'other world', i.e. agency. Horton (1981), in his reply on Fortes, adduces Kalabari, Ashanti and Yoruba notions of a similar kind, with a recurring triangle between man, society and divinity. The notion of 'prenatal speech' or guiding spiritual agency present in some of the cases implies a guiding principle through an individual life, a notion of what the individual is going to become. Though Fortes and Horton named their approach as one of 'social psychology', they addressed the question of agency of the individual versus his society and the 'other world'. Horton concluded that Tallensi notions and the 'theory of agency' are not to be taken as emblematic for West Africa but that the existential paradoxes of life that are addressed by these notions are.

When compared to our Kapsiki case, this latter aspect clearly emerges. Of course, the notion of destiny is not found in Kapsiki thought, at least it does not provide a productive construction to understand Kapsiki cosmology. But the personalized notion of god in Kapsiki encapsulates both the notion of a destiny described above and the idea of human agency within that destiny. Kapsiki notions of the mutual dependency of the three 'agents' – individual, society and 'other world' – show a fundamental similarity with the Fortes/Horton examples in that the triangle individual/society/other world is important even if the details of that equation are different in one major aspect: Kapsiki lineages are not dominated by ancestral figures. The personalized concept of *shala* in fact precludes an important place for ancestors as an intermediary function is neither possible nor desired. Between ego and his *shala* is nothing, resulting in a bare, direct and volatile but also an open and manageable relationship. Ancestral aspects stop at the relationship between a man and his deceased father.

At the concluding rites of burial, the personal sacrificial jar of the deceased is put on the tomb and filled with red beer just before nightfall. The following morning sees a farewell party – consisting of the son of the deceased, some of his children (not his wife), a brother and the chief blacksmith – hold their last rites during which the beer is poured into a new jar, and the old one is smashed. The new jar is then taken back home, from then on to be addressed as 'my father' (*yitieda*). Grandfather is forgotten, at least never addressed in ritual. In the sacrificial texts only *shala* and the father are addressed.



Photo 5.4 The end of the father: Smashing the sacrificial jar that represents the father of the deceased

Patrilineages do exist of course and are important in a village but their religious backing is of a different kind and is not through ancestral figures. The Kapsiki make neither sculpture nor masks and after the smashing of the sacrificial jar, there is nothing related any longer to the deceased's father. The main unit is the village, more than the lineage, and all lineages are confined to the village as such. Thus the Kapsiki face a diffuse but coherent and smallish 'society', 'this worldly' as well as 'other worldly' when exercising their individual agency, but they do distinguish a clear-cut vertical relationship with the supernatural world in an unbreakable chain in their own way. Characteristi-

cally, relations between clan and lineage brothers are not easy, and are often strained and subject to pressure from accusations of sorcery (van Beek 1994).

Now let us compare the West African case of the Kapsiki with some features of agency in two other types of discourse, early Jewish and early modern European. Taking the Jewish example first, we can take our cue from two exilic books of the Bible, Habakkuk and Job, which both question the justice of God's actions (or inactions). The prophet Habakkuk¹¹ decried the absence of God's intervention in times of adversity:

O Lord, how long shall I cry for help,
And thou wilt not hear?
Or cry to thee 'violence'!
And thou wilt not save?

So the law is slacked
And justice never goes forth.
For the wicked surround the righteous,
So justice goes forth perverted. (Habakkuk 1: 2, 4)¹²

He sees the Chaldeans flourish and cannot square this with his conception of Yahweh:

Thou who art of purer eyes than to behold evil
And canst not look on wrong,
Why dost thou look on faithless men,
And art silent when the wicked swallows up
The man more righteous than he? (Habakkuk 1: 13)

In early Jewish tradition, the most poignant expression of the discord between right and reality is the Book of Job. The text¹³ is constructed as a play, featuring a mythical inhabitant of a mythical place in a mythical past: Job, a rich man in the land of Uz. He is a good man and disaster strikes without reason: in a short

¹¹ The Book of Habakkuk contains no reference to any of the usual identity markers like Sion, Jerusalem, Israel or Judah. It was probably included in the canon around the 4th century BC as part of the 'Twelve Prophets' collection. From the subject matter, the threat of the Chaldeans, Habakuk is placed around 600 BC but the actual prophet remains very elusive. The final text is of a later date, probably exilic.

¹² The Bible quotes are from the Revised Standard Version.

¹³ The Book of Job is probably in its final form, a text from the 4th century BC edited from a basic text developed during the Babylonian exile. The message easily reads as a complaint by Israel against their God who has allowed them to be led into captivity. A new interpretation however, based upon among other things, linguistic evidence, places the text just before the Babylonian exile, around the 7th century B.C.

time he loses his possessions, his children and his health. Job believes God to be the ultimate justice, and the source of the human condition, he knows his deeds are good and yet still suffers. This is an unsolvable dilemma: God, who is just, punishes me without cause. The conclusion should read that God is unjust but this is an impossible *sequitur*. The reader knows some background to the problem that is beyond the reach of Job, in that Job is the subject of a wager between God and Satan, Yet, that knowledge hardly solves the problem (such a wager would be on the wrong side of justice anyway), and this fact is never mentioned again in the text, either by friends or at the end when God answers Job directly. Throughout the magnificent and highly poetic text, Job's friends lament his sufferings and keep looking for causes in Job's life and history: there must have been something wrong. Job emphatically denies any wrongdoing, and even if his friends see in this denial the sin of pride, he remains firm and steadfast about his absolute freedom from sin and guilt. Remarkably, though evil is noted to exist in others (whose sins remain unpunished, living as they do in wealth, health and prosperity), Job's afflictions are never attributed to their wrongdoing: no notion of witchcraft – which would have been such an obvious option for many Africans – nor any notion of collective guilt enters the deliberations. Job looks for his answers in a better knowledge of God: 'Please answer my question as to why this injustice is happening to me?' He realizes that evil exists, does not question its presence or origin, but simply argues that it is in the wrong place. Injustice is evil out of place.

I would give him an account of all my steps;
Like a prince I would approach him.
If my land has cried out against me,
And its furrows have wept together;
If I have eaten its yield without payment,
And caused the death of its owners. (Job 31: 37-39)

In this fragment of Jewish thought, I want to highlight a few themes for the sake of comparison. First, the conception of God should square with that of justice. God is the *fons et origo* of justice, of the law, of the difference between right and wrong, between sin and rightfulness. Justice is grounded in the word of God but the two are interdependent and cannot exist separately. Without justice, the concept of God has little meaning. Or, paraphrasing Kant: 'Justice without God is blind, God without Justice is empty'. This justice is both a collective issue, as with Habakkuk complaining about the well-being of the Chaldean, or individual as in Job. But the difference between individual, unmerited suffering and the collective one is not marked. Both texts address in the individual also the nation, as Job's plight can well be read as a lament of exilic Judah that has lost its faith in the redeeming power of Yahweh.

Human agency then is a choice guided by law, accountable *vis-à-vis* this divinely inspired justice. The measuring rod is fundamental justice and the leeway for individual action is to follow the law, to ignore it or to rebel against it. In this choice man may change the course of history but only indirectly: it is the divine retribution or punishment that really sets the course of history. The story of Jonah, probably composed in the same era, has a similar theme. Jonah is called to foretell God's wrath to unrighteous Nineveh. The prophet does so, albeit reluctantly. When Nineveh immediately repents, God changes direction and spares the city, much to Jonah's chagrin.

The underlying question in the texts is whether God is accountable to the law as well. In Habakkuk, God's justice is a question of time ('If it seem slow, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay' Habakkuk 2: 3), in the book of Jonah God follows the law closely (and chides Jonah who wanted to punish Nineveh) but Job is by far the most complicated. When God finally answers, it is something of an anticlimax. He does not solve the – insolvable – puzzle but through Chapters 38 to 41 stresses the fundamental differences between God and man. He does not speak about justice or about evil but he highlights his own power, his unlimited realm of action, in short his own agency. Nowhere does he justify Job's suffering; nowhere does he answer the fundamental problem of the unequal and unjust division of evil in the world. God is simply not accountable to Job for his actions. In fact, it seems the only duty God does have is to answer, simply as a sign of presence. Job, who more or less swore that he would challenge God as if in a court, acknowledges the presence of God, his superiority, his 'out-of-reachness' and acquiesces. Job then receives double what he owned before the wager, and his friends are chastised for seeking fault with Job.

The end of play, but not the end of philosophy. The end rankles (Armstrong 2005) as the divine nature of the law is upheld but not the lawful nature of the divine. Anyway, the fundamental triangle in early Jewish thought is between God – law – human beings, the latter being interchangeable with the group, at least in these poetic texts.

The third case for comparison has put the notion of agency on the agenda of Western thinking, i.e. European theology during the Reformation. Agency was the main topic of the famous debate between Luther and Erasmus on the opposition between a free and a bounded choice. In early modern Europe the main issue was the dynamic balance between free choice and dependency on God, and the challenge to do something within that dependency. Agency addressed the accountability and responsibility of the creature versus his creator. How much room for action and freedom of choice does man have in the world versus God – or for that matter versus the laws of nature? Any freedom of choice implies three aspects: some space to manoeuvre, recognizable consequences of

the choice, and accountability after the choice. All these were given in theological discourses of the time, but the positions varied.

Erasmus found himself in the Roman Catholic court, maybe willy-nilly, defending free choice in a very even-handed discourse,¹⁴ while Luther argued the absolute ascendancy of God's will and foreknowledge (a difficult point!).¹⁵ How much room had God left man to operate in and how much leeway did God's omniscience and foreknowledge of the future leave to man's agency? For both opponents, man was allowed agency but the realm and impact of his actions differed in the two visions. Erasmus saw a larger playing field for human agency, 'good will cooperates with the gift of grace'; for Luther, human nature was an arena of the forces of good and evil without a fundamental choice of his own (Archer 1996). Later, in the pessimistic view of Calvin, human agency was further reduced through the notion of predestination.¹⁶ There, the omnipotence and omniscience of God as well as the notion of sin, the dark side of agency, prevailed over the vagaries of human choice, resulting in a precarious balance between grace and fate, and in Calvin's theology the tilt of the swing was not towards man's agency but to God's will and purpose. Man's agency, in that very restricted vision, was limited to doing what God intended man to do: working hard, being frugal, and investing in his afterlife even if no guarantees could be won through human endeavour (Gannon 2001). Calvin saw human choices and actions as ultimately irrelevant to man's eternal salvation (Archer 1996).¹⁷ Thus, the debate on agency led to a debate on sin, merit, blessing and punishment, and inevitably the notion of evil with the most harrowing question of all: whence evil?

In Western theology, the baton was taken a logical step further by Leibniz in his *Theodicée*,¹⁸ a short tractate on the problem of evil. He focused less on personal justice than on the provenance and existence of evil itself, and in his hands the question of evil – not just evil out of place – became the ultimate test of any theology, and the ultimate test of the concept of God, thus ushering in the Enlightenment. Like the composers of Job, Leibniz limited God by absolute concepts: collective justice and reason became the leading and defining concepts for thinking about God. It is important that the fact of human agency as

¹⁴ *De libero arbitrio diatribe sine collation* (1524).

¹⁵ *De servo arbitrio* (1525).

¹⁶ *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536).

¹⁷ When Max Weber developed his thesis on the relationship between Calvinism and capitalism, one of the consequences of the debate on human free will was that Weber allowed a fair amount of room for agency, albeit more collective than individual (Gannon 2001).

¹⁸ *Essais de théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal* (1710).

such was never in doubt, as very few theologians or philosophers denied the existence of human agency.¹⁹ At issue is the degree of agency: does the human being have a sizeable playing field (to couch it in modern terms) even if the field does not seem to be very level?

Let us now use this *tour de horizon* of West African, Jewish and West European systems of thought to highlight some core features of our main case. The Kapsiki notions of agency, as we constructed them through their religious expression, show just as many dialectics as we saw in Western thinking, but dialectics of a different kind. Early Jewish thinking wrestled with the relationship between the law and Yahweh, as the core issue was justice. Evil as such was considered self-evident but its unequal (i.e. unjust) distribution was the main problem. The course of history should reflect both justice and the power of Yahweh but often did not. Western thinking had to grapple with the notion of an absolutely superior godhead, which was attributed with superlative epithets like ‘omniscient’ and ‘omnipotent’. This started thinking about agency off on a different footing, and guilt, sin and the notion of evil became touchstones of divinity.

Kapsiki dialectics centre not on the vertical relationship ‘man – divinity’ but on the one between individual and society. Dependency on the supernatural world is neither absolute nor unchangeable. The gentle and clausulated monotheism of the Kapsiki notion of *shala* precludes the absoluteness inherent in Western theological thinking. The same holds for the religions Fortes and Horton analyzed, and in fact for African religions where a number of gods operate: polytheistic systems bear an inherent relativism because of the division of labour between the gods and because of the usual strife and competition that characterize the relations between the various gods. As in Kapsiki, the relationship in Tallensi society between the individual and society itself is crucial. But in Tallensi this relationship is expressed mainly through the idiom of lineage kinship which hinges on the ancestors as the epitome of both that society and its link with the other world.

Absent in the African cases are the ‘absolutes’, the almost mathematical ‘omnis’ like ‘omniscient’, ‘omnipotent’, ‘all-good’ and ‘all-just’. In Jewish and European thought, concepts as such were dominant and formed the measuring rod both for reality and the divine. History should be a vindication of God’s presence plus his attributes, so the concepts of justice and merit are continually used to measure the contingencies of history. West African religions, in fact the great majority of non-scriptural religions, have never known a class of professionals nor taken that pathway of theological reasoning, and thus have avoided

¹⁹ Erasmus mentions only Wycliffe and Mani but even that is debatable, see Archer (1996).

some conceptual pitfalls. If the notion of the divine is not so totally different from the human (as in *shala*, for example), then relations between the two can and will be more reciprocal and mutually interdependent. The main relationship is one of mutual dependency and negotiation, even reciprocity. In many African religions, the ancestors take prime place and more than anyone else they stand in a reciprocal relationship with their progeny: without the one the other would not exist, without the second, the first would be insubstantial. In Kapsiki thought, mutual dependency is an *a priori* given: the chain of beings is inexorably linked, a chain which can only sink and will sink faster if one endangers oneself.

The comparison with Job is enlightening when one recognizes the very impossibility of an African ever saying something like Job: Job is absolutely certain that he has made no mistakes, done no wrong and committed no sins, and never even breached any taboo. For a Kapsiki, this would be unthinkable: there is always something in the past that can be unearthed, some people who have taken issue with one's actions, some taboos broken. The total absence of any third party in Job is also striking; for an African Job the first question would be one of witchcraft: 'Who has done this to me?'. Susan Reynolds Whyte (1997: 30) remarks about the East African Nyole: 'the question I hear Nyole people ask is not "Why me?" but "Why you?"'. Their immediate focus is not on the self, but on the other: who are you behind this affliction and why are you doing it?' The Kapsiki notion of justice is just as pragmatic and relativistic: the self is never guiltless but surely the other people are not without guile and *fete* either.

So the caprices of history are built into the explanatory system of these West Africans, and do not form a major problem as they do in Jewish thought. Even if one thinks one's own actions to be consistent, the other party is certainly much less consistent. Gods are capricious, also one's personal god, and can never be fully relied upon. Ancestors in the religions Fortes and Horton describe are almost the epitome of capriciousness, embodiments of the unpredictability of life, of the vicissitudes of human existence. Fortes compares Tallensi religion with Job. He interprets Job's bowing to God in the end as the restoration of the hierarchy between God and Job, the latter's real sin being his challenge to God on almost equal terms (Fortes 1959). This is, in fact, an African interpretation, which loses the main gist of the story, the absoluteness of justice: Yahweh has to be the upholder of the law he instigated himself. In the more flowing theologies of African local religions, like in Kapsiki or Tallensi, notions of agency are less bound. Justice is present as a background of what I have called 'normalcy'. At the centre of the stage of life stand the vagaries of relationships, with the kinship idiom at its core but branching outwards and upwards. All relations, including kinship ones, have their built-in ambivalences and uncertainties and

that is what the expectations of life are made of. Though they are all reciprocal, very few are balanced, and loopholes out of skewed balances in hierarchical situations are crucial, like the notion of *ntsehwela*.

So the discourse involving the other world is always there, present to be used and adaptable whenever necessary. And necessity does rise with any adversity, with any notion of helplessness, in short with anything that ‘happens’. Religion without script and church, without formalization and fully institutionalized form, never has the power to dominate and subjugate thinking as the religions of Abraham were able to do, eventually. African notions of agency not only reflect a practical ‘theology’ more than a systematic one but also a greater sensitivity to social relations, local power configurations and, lastly, dependency on an uncertain outer world. Of course, this fits in well with a society which was never in a position to move out of political, ecological and epidemiological uncertainties (van Beek & Avontuur 2005). So in the end, agency is what agents can do, human ones, with or without the backing of the other world, in their respective ‘enabling constraints’, within the confines of their personal histories and their network of relations, trying to rearrange their history to make sense of the present, and normalize their future.

References

- Archer, M.A. 1996, *Culture and Agency. The Place of Culture in Social Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Armstrong, K. 2005, *The Great Transformation. The Start of our Religious Traditions*, New York: Ballantine Books.
- Boyer, P. 1990, *Tradition as Truth and Communication: A Cognitive Description of Traditional Discourse*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cronk, L. 1999, *That Complex Whole. Culture and the Evolution of Human Behavior*, Texas A&M: Westview.
- Ellis, S. & G. ter Haar 2004, *Worlds of Power. Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa*, London: Hurst.
- Emirbayer, E. & T. Mische 1996, ‘On Agency’, *American Journal of Sociology* 103 (4): 962-1023.
- Fortes, M. 1981 (1959), *Oedipus and Job in West African Religion*, New York: Octagon.
- Gannon, S. 2001, ‘The Popularity of Max Weber’s The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Calvinism; An Analysis of Historical Trends of Scholarship’, *Gateway*, Internet source consulted 10/2/2006.
- Geertz, C. 1965, ‘Religion as a Cultural System’, in: M. Banton (ed.), *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, London: Tavistock.
- Gell, A. 1998, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Horton, R. 1981 (1959), ‘Social Psychologies: African and Western’, in: M. Fortes, *Oedipus and Job in West African Religion*, New York: Octagon, pp. 41-89.

- Reynolds Whyte, S. 1997, *Questioning Misfortune. The Pragmatics of Uncertainty in Eastern Uganda*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- van Beek, W.E.A. 1987, *The Kapsiki and Higi of the Mandara Mountains*, Prospect Heights: Waveland Press.
- van Beek, W.E.A. 1992, 'The Dirty Smith; Smell as a Social Frontier among the Kapsiki/Higi of North Cameroon and North-Eastern Nigeria', *Africa* 2 (1): 38-58.
- van Beek, W.E.A. 1994, 'The Innocent Sorcerer; Coping with Evil in Two African Societies, Kapsiki and Dogon', in: T. Blakely, W.E.A. van Beek & D.L. Thomson (eds), *African Religion: Experience and Expression*, London: James Currey, pp. 196-228.
- van Beek, W.E.A. 1997, 'Rain as a Discourse of Power: Rainmaking in Kapsiki', in: H. Jungraithmayer, D. Barreteau & U. Seibert (eds), *L'Homme et l'Eau dans le Bassin du Lac Chad*, Paris: ORSTOM, pp. 285-97.
- van Beek, W.E.A. 2002, 'Why a Twin is not a Child; Symbolic Representations of Twinhood in Kapsiki', in: W. van Beek, J-F. Vincent, C. Baroin & P. Roulon-Doko (eds), *L'Enfant dans le Bassin du Lac Chad*, special issue *Journal de la Société des Africanistes* 72 (1): 119-48.
- van Beek, W.E.A. 2007, 'Crab Antics and "Whistling Birds": Animal Divination among the Kapsiki', in: P. Peek & W.E.A. van Beek (eds), *Foretelling the Future, Predicting the Past; African Divination in Perspective* (in press).
- van Beek, W.E.A. & S. Avontuur 2005, 'The Making of an Environment: Ecological History of the Kapsiki/Higi of North Cameroon and North-Eastern Nigeria', in: Q. Gausset, M. Whyte & T. Birch-Thomsen (eds), *Beyond Territory and Scarcity in Africa; Exploring Conflicts over Natural Resource Management*, Copenhagen: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, pp. 70-89.

Les enveloppes pour Papa Daniel: La transformation des relations domestiques dans les ménages des Congolais de la diaspora

Julie Ndaya

Aux Pays Bas, comme dans les différents lieux de la diaspora congolaise, les filiales du mouvement charismatique 'le Combat spirituel' resocialisent ses adeptes, en majorité les femmes, à protéger leur mariage en maintenant le rôle du mari pourvoyeur malgré la précarité économique des hommes dans la diaspora. Dans la vie en exil, les règles administratives et la barrière linguistique sont défavorables surtout aux hommes. Elles rendent difficile l'accès à l'emploi rémunéré ou à l'exercice d'une activité commerciale. Mais les femmes acceptent plus facilement des emplois et elles offrent aussi aux autres compatriotes des services ou recourent aux associations afin d'augmenter leurs revenus. Les groupes charismatiques comme le Combat spirituel leur offrent des stratégies, mayele ya basi en lingala, de contournement des obstacles culturelles, comme la transparence des revenus qui maintient le rôle du mari pourvoyeur en garantissant les positions renforcées des femmes dans le ménage. Ces stratégies sont empruntées des modèles d'épouse traduisant la rencontre des habitus différents accumulés dans le trajectoire social des Congolais.

Introduction

Mon objectif dans cet article est de montrer la façon dont les femmes congolaises dans la diaspora, confrontées à la situation objective de leur époux, gèrent les manques de celui-ci dans une dynamique à la fois de continuité et de rupture. En brassant les éléments des cultures disponibles, où une adhésion à une filiale en Europe d'un mouvement religieux kinois joue un rôle fondamental,

elles créent une nouvelle forme de relations conjugales comme forme de pratique sociale, avec des configurations qui obéissent aux déterminations d'un *habitus* (Bourdieu 1986: 40) local dynamique.

J'ai choisi de présenter un cas à partir duquel je me propose d'analyser la manière dont les femmes congolaises répondent à la situation de précarité économique de leur conjoint. Les relations domestiques dans le contexte congolais sont de fait asymétriques. Elles sont orientées par le code de la famille de 1987. Dans cette perspective, le mari est le chef du ménage, le «patron» pourvoyeur du revenu familial (Tshonga-Onyumbé 1982, Mianda 1996: 310, Walu 1999). La musique congolaise véhicule les diverses facettes de cette culture urbaine partout où vivent les Congolais. Cette conception reste le point de référence des Congolais là où ils se trouvent. Toutefois, le monde social est en train de changer dans un sens anémique. La prédominance de l'homme comme pourvoyeur de revenus est en train de disparaître au profit des femmes. Ce renversement des rôles crée des incertitudes et des tensions dans les ménages.

Afin de rendre compte de ces transformations sociales, je m'efforce d'appliquer le concept d'*agency*, dont le contenu dans la littérature anglophone avec l'accent sur les possibilités de la personne en tant qu'acteur pour créer sa propre situation, malgré les contraintes structurelles qui l'entourent. Cette notion met l'accent sur l'initiative, la créativité de la personne dans la société, mais dans la limite des contraintes perçues. Étant francophone, je n'ai pas trouvé de terme correspondant en français au mot *agency*. Le dictionnaire le traduit par 'agence', terme qui n'a aucun rapport avec le présent débat.

Poursuivant mes recherches pour trouver un terme adéquat, je suis tombée sur un article qui utilisait le terme *agencéité* comme équivalent en français du terme anglais *agency*. J'ai adopté ce mot. Mais, alors que j'avais presque achevé cet article, à la fin de l'année 2005, j'ai eu une rencontre privée en France avec des scientifiques congolais. J'ai parlé avec eux de mon article en utilisant le mot *agencéité*. Je fus considérée comme une extraterrestre, personne n'ayant jamais entendu parler de ce terme qui n'apparaissait par ailleurs même pas dans la toute récente édition du Larousse. A partir de ce moment, je me suis demandée pour quelle raison il fallait que je recoure à des concepts qui parlent des êtres humains dans des jargons qui ambitionnent de rapporter leur implication dans des changements, mais qui leur semblent tomber du ciel?

J'ai abandonné cette voie en choisissant d'analyser mes découvertes de la configuration des expériences différentes en m'inspirant du terme *maye* (Mianda 1996), notion sociologique utilisée par différents peuples congolais. Il s'agit de la capacité de savoir contourner les obstacles structurels. Le *maye* est un des aspects très fins de la culture congolaise caractérisée par le déploiement des stratégies par les acteurs afin de rendre des situations parfois opprimantes

favorables aux ambitions du sujet. La signification de ce terme se rapproche bien de la conceptualisation de la société et de ses transformations qui va avec le terme *agency*.

Dans cet article je présente d'abord le contexte de ma recherche. Puis je décris un cas qui illustre la transformation des rapports domestiques et la dynamique des femmes dans ce processus. Le récit que je rapporte concerne une femme membre d'un groupe charismatique appelé le Combat. Comme méthodologie me permettant de saisir quelques aspects de sa vie, je me suis inspirée de l'*extention case method* (Gluckman 1962, Mitchell 1983, Turner 1972, van Binsbergen 2000) parce que les partisans de cette technique de recherche démarrent du niveau micro afin de mettre à jour des principes dynamiques plus larges. Dans ce sens on peut extrapoler les découvertes faites ici à un niveau plus général du fonctionnement de certains ménages congolais comme on peut les trouver à Kinshasa et dans les différents lieux de la diaspora. En présentant ce récit, la question que je me pose est celle de savoir comment les femmes parviennent à s'assurer que l'homme garde sa position de pourvoyeur là où elles ont – elles-mêmes – des positions économiques renforcées dans les ménages.

Contexte: Les chrétiens combattants

Mon étude concerne les Chrétiens combattants présents aux Pays-Bas et en Belgique entre 1998 et 2004. Se considèrent comme Combattants les membres des groupes religieux qui pratiquent le ministère de la délivrance ou le Combat spirituel (*Etumba ya molimo en lingala*, en raccourci le Combat). Il s'agit en général de personnes éduquées et urbanisées. La majorité d'entre eux est d'origine rurale. Plus de quatre-vingt-dix pour cent ont séjourné pendant longtemps à Kinshasa avant leur arrivée en Europe.

La présence des Combattants en Europe est un phénomène récent qui date des années mille neuf cent quatre-vingt-dix. En fait on devient Combattant par initiation biblique. Cette initiation est acquise pour avoir consulté, lors de problèmes successifs (*mikakatano*) ou de crises identitaires (célibat prolongé, problèmes conjugaux et sexuels, infécondité etc.) un groupe religieux qui pratique le Combat). Le Combat est donc un rituel de purification qui a la qualité de prolonger la fonction d'initié en celle d'*initiator*. Après la thérapie on doit rester membre d'un groupe dans son lieu de résidence et participer au programme de ce groupe. Les Combattants sont organisés en filiales nommées 'bergerie'. A l'intérieur des bergeries, et bien que cela soit en train de changer, les femmes sont numériquement très représentées et occupent dans l'organisation des tâches hiérarchiques importantes.

Une bergerie n'est pas une entité indépendante, elle est sous la tutelle de Kinshasa. Le Combat est en effet né dans les années mille neuf cent quatre-

vingt à Kinshasa, dans une conjoncture économique qui était très défavorable aux hommes. L'initiative de former ce mouvement a été prise par des femmes congolaises scolarisées et/ou faisant partie de l'élite économique et des secteurs où le leadership des femmes était visible sur le plan intellectuel et dans les activités économiques catégorisées à Kinshasa comme la seconde économie ou le secteur informel urbain (MacGaffrey 1986, 1988, 1991, Braeckman 1992, de Villers 1992).

Ce mouvement s'est répandu en Europe avec le grand flux migratoire des Congolaises vers l'Occident au début des années mille neuf cent quatre-vingt-dix. A partir de Kinshasa, diverses filiales se sont établies dans différentes parties du monde. Les adeptes qui me sont familiers sont ceux de la CIFMC. Ils font partie de l'élite intellectuelle et économique congolaise. En fait, la CIFMC a 72 filiales éparpillées dans le monde entier. Il s'agit de groupes fermés. Leur fréquentation est limitée aux seuls membres de la communauté internationale des Combattants, dont il est difficile d'évaluer avec précision le nombre dans le monde. Lors d'une rencontre internationale organisée à Kinshasa en 2000, je pouvais compter approximativement 20,000 personnes provenant des divers pays de la diaspora congolaise (Ndaya 2000). En fait, les Combattants sont considérés comme des égoïstes, car ils sont supposés avoir rompu les liens avec tous ceux qui ne sont pas membres de leur mouvement, qui n'ont pas reçu l'onction de l'Esprit Saint (*molimo mosantu*), y compris les membres de leur famille biologique. C'est d'ailleurs pour cela que les Combattants s'appellent aussi les circoncis spirituels, métaphore utilisée indifféremment du sexe pour marquer leur distinction comme personne ayant intégré grâce à l'initiation de nouvelles prescriptions culturelles. Le mariage (*libala*), par exemple, est l'une de ces prescriptions. C'est l'idéal des Combattants. Les CD et cassettes enregistrées de musique congolaise véhiculent l'idée du mariage comme faisant de la femme une personne responsable. Afin d'assurer l'harmonie des rapports entre les conjoints, les Combattants s'inspirent des versets bibliques comme Ephésiens 5: 22:

Femmes, soyez soumises à vos maris comme au Seigneur, car le mari est le chef de la femme, comme Christ est le chef de l'Église, qui est son corps et dont il est le Sauveur. Or de même que l'Église est soumise à Christ, les femmes aussi doivent l'être à leur mari en toutes choses.

Ce texte biblique est interprété comme suit par une prédicatrice:

Ndenge toza awa na poto ça peut arriver que muasi nde azosala, mobali asalaka te. Yo muasi ozotinda bongo epa na bino, sans koyebisa mobali nayo. ba réponse oza kopesa kaka ya mabe.

Comme nous sommes ici en Europe ça peut arriver que c'est toi la femme qui travailles, l'homme ne travaille pas. Toi la femme tu envoies l'argent chez toi sans le dire à ton mari. Les réponses que tu lui donnes sont seulement mauvaises... Même si c'est toi qui paies le loyer, tu dois respecter ton mari.

Aux hommes il est demandé de protéger leur femme et d'en prendre soin.

Même si elles s'inspirent de versets bibliques comme messages éducatifs, ces prescriptions concernant les relations entre conjoints sont similaires à la perception de la culture kinoise¹ des rapports domestiques. Celle-ci est en fait orientée par le code de la famille de 1987. Le code est issu de la vague de l'«authenticité» sous Mobutu Sese Seko. Il s'agit d'une loi (no. 87-010) qui a pour but d'unifier et d'adapter les règles qui touchent aux droits de la personne et de la famille à la mentalité congolaise. Cette loi comprend différents livres qui traitent de la nationalité, de la personne, de la famille et de la succession. Le livre sur la famille a pour vocation de concilier les traditions des différents peuples congolais avec les exigences de la vie moderne afin d'orienter les rapports hommes-femmes dans la famille et la société. Les idées contenues dans ce livre restent jusqu'à aujourd'hui la principale référence des Congolais où qu'ils soient. Ainsi, dans la culture kinoise, les rapports entre homme et femme sont asymétriques. L'homme est chef de ménage, le «patron» pourvoyeur du revenu familial. Il doit protection à sa femme. La femme doit obéissance à son mari (Tshonga-Onyumba 1982, Mianda 1996: 310, Walu 1999). Les termes de la chanson '*esui yo wapi*' (Où est-ce que ça te fait mal) de la musicienne congolaise Mbilia Bel '*Bandima mobali na santé ya muasi mpe na capacité na ye ya kolatisa*' (on reconnaît un homme à la santé de la femme et à sa capacité de l'habiller) illustre cette mentalité kinoise. Un homme qui n'est pas en mesure d'entretenir son épouse est socialement déconsidéré comme l'indique la chanson de l'orchestre OK Jazza: '*Tala zoba ya mobali oyo akamati ngai na libala ata likambo te se bilamba ya tombola buaka*' (regarde ce mari de rien, il m'a épousée, il n'a rien de bon, je porte seulement des habits usagés). Dans la perception congolaise, c'est un déshonneur pour un homme si sa compagne assure le support financier de la famille. Il n'accepte pas non plus de laisser voir qu'il est entretenu par sa femme afin de ne pas miner sa crédibilité.

¹ L'adjectif 'kinois' désigne une caractéristique typique de Kinshasa, la capitale de la République Démocratique du Congo.

Mais, dans la pratique, la crise économique sans issue au Congo a atteint la masculinité de l'homme dans sa position. L'emploi n'est plus rémunérateur. Le petit commerce qui était au départ une activité permettant aux femmes en milieu urbain d'assurer un complément au revenu familial a pris de plus en plus d'ampleur dans la survie des familles. Dans de nombreux foyers, le travail de la femme est devenu largement la principale source de revenus, comme le montrent les propos d'une Congolaise comme appel à la transformation des mentalités:

Heureusement il y a en République démocratique du Congo de nombreuses femmes vertueuses qui aident leur mari. Amina (juillet 2004: 66)

Grâce aux activités commerciales, à leur flexibilité, au travail dans les organisations non gouvernementales, les femmes ont un pouvoir économique qui dépasse de loin celui de leur mari (MacGafrey 1991: 124-45, Kalombo 1997, Mianda 1996). On assiste de plus en plus à un renversement des rôles, parce que le fait que l'époux dépende financièrement de son épouse est dans le contexte congolais un fait anormal. Lorsque l'homme n'est plus capable d'assurer le confort matériel de sa femme, il devient un *yuma*, un sous-homme. Il perd son autorité dans le ménage. Le nom de *Mario*, donné à Kinshasa à un homme qui gère les avoirs de sa compagne, symbolise le pouvoir économique des femmes face à la faillite de l'homme dans son rôle (Gondola 1993, 1997). Gertrude Mianda (1996: 117-27) a observé auprès des maraîchères de Kinshasa comment les femmes entrepreneuses, grâce au *mayerle*, renversent les obstacles culturels en sauvant l'image de l'époux pourvoyeur.

La situation des hommes et des femmes dans la diaspora est dans une certaine mesure comparable à celle qui existe entre les conjoints à Kinshasa. Malgré l'assurance de pouvoir toucher un minimum vital, les règles administratives dans les pays européens sont défavorables à la situation financière des hommes. L'emploi qu'ils trouvent est en dessous de leur niveau. Ils en sont aussi exclus à cause des barrières linguistiques. Pourtant l'arrivée massive des Congolais en Occident s'inscrit dans ce que Carfantan (1993: 60) nomme un flux migratoire causé par une situation de détresse vécue dans le pays d'origine et un appel de l'Occident. Le rêve de chaque Congolais est d'immigrer en Europe démocratique qui véhicule l'image du respect des droits des personnes, des vertus de l'économie sans frontière et de la libre circulation des personnes et des biens (Courade 1997: 3-30). Les motifs de départ des habitants du Congo Kinshasa vers l'Europe s'expriment par des expressions en lingala telles que *kobeta libanga* (casser la pierre) *kobuaka nzoto* (jeter le corps), c'est à dire se

débrouiller ou pratiquer l'*article quinze*.² Mais bien que la réception d'un permis de séjour s'accompagne de différents avantages comme le droit à un minimum vital, les soins médicaux et la scolarité 'gratuite' pour les enfants, beaucoup de migrants congolais cherchent à exercer une activité économique.

Mais la recrudescence des mesures réglementaires en matière d'immigration et de séjour des étrangers a créé une situation paradoxale. Il est difficile de trouver un emploi, d'étudier, d'entreprendre formellement une activité commerciale. Ce contexte est surtout défavorable aux hommes. Quant aux femmes, elles se montrent plus flexibles, acceptant plus facilement des emplois comme dans le nettoyage (*neto*), l'emballage des produits, le travail dans les abattoirs, la garde des enfants. Mais le commerce surtout est une activité très répandue. Dans chaque ville des Pays-Bas ou de la Belgique, des Congolaises offrent à d'autres compatriotes des services comme la couture, le tressage des cheveux, les soins de manucure, les petits *nganda* (débits de boisson) et vendent différents produits. La vente s'effectue dans diverses circonstances, mais surtout lors des rencontres dans le cadre des associations. Afin de réaliser des projets au sujet desquels elles sont bien conscientes qu'elles n'y arriveront pas seules, les femmes participent à des associations financières comme le *likelemba* et les tontines. Elles profitent donc des possibilités que leur offre la vie en exil pour gagner un revenu supplémentaire. Sans vouloir généraliser, on peut dire que les femmes ont plus d'argent que les hommes. Ce qui crée aussi un déséquilibre et est cause d'un sentiment d'insécurité chez l'homme. D'après une responsable d'un groupe religieux rencontrée à Bruxelles, les problèmes d'argent sont souvent cités comme occasionnant des conflits conjugaux. Les femmes cachent leur argent et exigent des hommes qu'ils pourvoient aux besoins du ménage. La pression sociale provenant de leur famille biologique est telle qu'elle doit rester solidaire avec elle. Comment les ménages congolais en Europe s'impliquent-ils dans ces changements et quels types de rapports conjugaux montrent-ils? Je vais exploiter cette problématique en présentant le cas d'une femme chrétienne à qui j'ai donné le nom fictif d'Esther. Je préfère l'appeler 'maman', comme l'appellent par ailleurs ses enfants spirituels, c'est à dire les adeptes du groupe religieux dont elle est responsable.³ Son récit est exemplaire, car il montre l'amélioration graduelle de son confort matériel à travers différents rôles qu'elle joue au sein de son organisation et la gestion de sa relation conjugale.

² Cette expression fait référence à l'article quinze de la constitution congolaise avec le sens de 'débrouillez-vous'. Durant le règne de Mobutu Sese Seko, l'expression s'est popularisée pour expliquer la corruption et la recherche individuelle des moyens économiques dans un contexte où aucun emploi officiel n'était rémunérateur.

³ En fait au Congo, chaque femme. 'qu'elle soit grande ou petite, jeune ou âgée, mariée ou célibataire, mère de famille ou pas' comme disait Mobutu, est appelée maman.

L'information qu'on va lire est fondée sur nos échanges et mes observations à partir du moment où nos chemins se sont croisés.

Maman Esther

Maman Esther est une femme qui est aujourd'hui cadre respecté dans la hiérarchie de son groupe, après avoir adhéré au Combat il y a longtemps, en raison de problèmes de célibat prolongé. Mes contacts avec maman Esther datent de 1998. Le hasard a voulu qu'à cette époque nous fréquentions ensemble une filiale d'un groupe religieux à Bruxelles. Nous faisons la navette entre les Pays-Bas et la Belgique en passant la nuit chez une connaissance commune. Grâce à ce nomadisme, se créa une certaine affinité entre nous jusqu'au moment où elle devint thérapeute. En tant que responsable, elle reçut un traitement spécial: elle était logée à part mais cela n'empêcha pas mes visites lors de nos fréquents séjours à Bruxelles, tuant le temps à regarder ensemble les cassettes vidéo qui faisaient partie de l'immense archive du groupe.

Lorsque nous nous sommes rencontrées, Esther était mariée à Daniel Mukusa. Mais à l'époque de notre rencontre, elle était déjà combattante depuis environ cinq ans. Elle est née à Ndekese au Congo d'une mère célibataire. A l'âge de 22 ans, elle déménagea vers Kinshasa et adhéra à un groupe de prières pour des problèmes de célibat prolongé. Dans nos conversations, elle me disait qu'elle avait un passé familial à cause duquel elle était vouée aux malédictions. Elle semblait condamnée au célibat. Sa mère lui avait 'injecté la stérilité', et pourtant Dieu fit en sorte qu'elle trouve un mari. En fait, au sein de son nouveau groupe Esther se maria, et pour elle ce mariage faisait partie d'une pluie de bénédictions qui transformèrent de manière radicale sa vie.

Une pluie de bénédictions

'Mon mari c'est mon honneur'

Le port de la bague au doigt devenait le témoignage de la bénédiction de Dieu dans la vie d'Esther. Elle aimait bien se présenter comme madame Mukusa lorsqu'elle était devant un groupe et d'ailleurs, elle exigeait désormais être nommée *maman* Mukusa ou *maman* Daniel. Elle disait qu'elle était femme au foyer, ajoutant à chaque fois que son mari était son honneur; il l'avait fait venir en Europe, l'avait épousée. Avant de prendre la parole lorsqu'elle était invitée à le faire devant un groupe de chrétiens, elle se plaisait à dire que c'était son mari, qui par ailleurs se trouvait aussi parmi le public, qui était son chef, qu'il était le patron au foyer.

Et de fait, les époux s'appelaient mutuellement chéri(e) et manifestaient publiquement leur amour l'un pour l'autre surtout par de petites attentions comme se chuchoter à l'oreille, se prendre la main etc. Et puis, en parlant d'elle-même, Esther se disait femme au foyer. Il était d'ailleurs chaque fois bizarre de l'entendre se qualifier de femme au foyer car sa présence effective dans le ménage était rare. Elle était souvent partie, pour accomplir partout où sa présence l'exigeait les devoirs et obligations que sa fonction de thérapeute lui conféraient. En se désignant ainsi, elle voulait probablement signifier sa présence permanente au foyer, symbolisée par un stencil encadré intitulé 'l'alphabet de la femme vertueuse' qui était installé de manière ostentatoire dans l'armoire vitrée où était exposée sa vaisselle. L'atmosphère de cette habitation invitait à se comporter d'une certaine manière: parler poliment, à voix basse, éviter les éclats de rire. Ce climat était amplifié par les différents objets collés au mur: une affiche avec des textes bibliques comme 'moi et ma maison nous servirons le Bon Dieu'. Un texte écrit sur un calendrier était traduit en trois langues: 'année des conquêtes', '*annos des conquistas*', '*the year of conquests*'. Ce qui prouvait le caractère international du mouvement auquel le couple appartenait. De la même manière que les photos posters qui frappaient l'œil dès que l'on avait franchi le seuil de leur appartement: une photo grand format était posée sur la cheminée. Elle avait été prise le jour de leur mariage chrétien. L'image montrait maman Esther habillée d'une robe blanche, avec un voile lui recouvrant la tête. Papa Daniel était en costume noir et chemise blanche. Le couple était assis de profil et se regardait dans les yeux l'un et l'autre. La main du mari tenait le menton de son épouse à la manière dont on avance pour donner un baiser. Une autre photo encadrée au mur montrait maman Esther en robe bleu marine, la main posée sur la Bible. A côté d'elle une autre image robuste de papa Daniel regardant dans l'appareil avec un visage sévère, comme pour affirmer son rôle de gardien de la famille.

La maison était soigneusement entretenue. On voyait partout dans le salon des affiches avec des textes bibliques comme l'alphabet de la femme vertueuse, des phrases comme 'moi et ma maison nous servirons le Bon Dieu', des fleurs en plastique déposées sur la table du salon et sur chaque appareil électronique comme la superbe télévision à grand écran.

Le salon était impeccablement soigné et rempli de fauteuils volumineux, avec une télévision à écran double qui était toujours allumée. J'avais l'impression que la famille ne regardait pas la chaîne TV5 (comme c'est l'habitude chez les Congolais) mais bel et bien des cassettes vidéo, avec les témoignages des croyants et des prédications. D'ailleurs leurs deux enfants couraient d'un coin à l'autre entre les chaises, le nez presque sur l'écran de télévision, imitant les mouvements d'un prédicateur, anticipant ses mots comme s'ils avaient appris le texte de la cassette par cœur. Esther disait que ses enfants ne pouvaient pas

avoir de jouets. Ils devaient s'initier à la vie religieuse. Parfois les enfants entamaient des chansons religieuses pour les personnes qui arrivaient en visite, chantonnant les mélodies en français, balbutiant des mots déformés comme seuls les enfants savent le faire: *meshi jeji mechi jeji* pour dire 'merci Jésus'.

Esther semblait avoir créé dans sa maison une discipline conçue sur la base des versets bibliques. Elle riait très peu. Chaque parole qui sortait de sa bouche était presque un verset biblique. C'est à cause de cela que les personnes qui la connaissaient depuis Kinshasa lui avaient donné comme surnom 'la compliquée'.

Effectivement, il était très difficile de communiquer avec maman Esther. Même son mari, dont elle louait la place dans le foyer, semblait la craindre, car en privé elle s'adressait à lui de façon désagréable. Ce fut le cas la fois où le couple cherchait un endroit pour garer la voiture que conduisait Daniel. Comme il dépassait les différentes places libres, maman Esther lui dit ceci avec énervement: *Yo wana misu nayo wana ezomona ou bien ezomona te? (Toi, là, tes yeux la voient ou bien ils ne voient pas?)*.

D'ailleurs, elle insultait souvent son mari indirectement en insultant leurs enfants, d'une manière d'ailleurs très commune aux femmes congolaises. Par différentes attitudes, Esther semblait être gênée énormément par ce mari qu'elle avait épousé sans l'avoir connu par avance. Bien que Mukusa fût svelte, il avait certains défauts physiques. Il parlait très difficilement. Ce qui demandait beaucoup de patience dans la conversation avec lui. Il louchait aussi si fort, qu'il était difficile de savoir ce qu'il regardait. Esther semblait vraiment être déçue par cette apparence. Elle ne le trouvait pas présentable et avait toujours des rapports de heurts. Son comportement envers son mari était souvent rapporté à ses supérieures qui lui en faisaient régulièrement la remarque lors des réunions des responsables, comme cela m'a été confié.

En fait, Esther n'avait vu Daniel que sur photos lorsque ce dernier lui proposa le mariage. Comme signalé plus haut, notre protagoniste avait consulté un groupe de Combat à Kinshasa pour les problèmes de célibat prolongé. Après quatre années d'engagement dans la prière, le bonheur lui sourit. Un homme émigré aux Pays-Bas cherchait une femme et avait commissionné sa famille au pays pour lui en trouver une. La sœur de Daniel était membre du même groupe qu'Esther et ses yeux tombèrent sur sa sœur en Christ. Esther avait déjà 33 ans. Elle se sentit bénie en recevant cette proposition qu'elle accepta en rendant grâce à Dieu. Son futur mari envoya la dot d'Europe aux responsables du groupe. Mais le responsable ne remit pas directement la dot à la famille biologique d'Esther. Il décida de bloquer les biens matrimoniaux et il interdit à Esther d'entreprendre les démarches nécessaires pour rejoindre son mari. Ce dernier devait d'abord adhérer à la prière, là où il était, avant de pouvoir compter sur la réunion avec son épouse. C'est ainsi que Daniel devint membre

en Europe d'une filiale du groupe dont sa sœur et sa future épouse étaient membres à Kinshasa. Il y subit une initiation et une délivrance accélérée. Daniel s'appelait originalement Edouard Mukusa. Il prit le nom de Daniel par lequel tous les membres de son groupe de prières l'appelèrent désormais après son adhésion à la communauté de prière.

Né à Bunia, Edouard Mukusa avait déménagé très jeune à Kinshasa où il fut militaire dans l'armée congolaise à l'époque de Mobutu Sese Seko. Il faisait partie de la division qui surveillait le fleuve Congo entre Brazzaville et Kinshasa. Pour s'acquitter de cette tâche, il avait été envoyé avec ses collègues en Suisse pour y suivre une formation. Mais à cause de la crise économique au Congo, et surtout à cause des pillages de 1993 et 1995, il déserta de l'armée. Il quitta la Suisse pour demander asile aux Pays-Bas. Il trouva du travail 'gris' à la poste dans le triage du courrier. Lorsque sa femme vint en Europe une année après l'envoi de la dot, elle fut accueillie par le 'berger' et la 'bergère' de leur groupe. Ce couple devint les parents spirituels des futurs époux. Grâce à son obéissance envers ses parents spirituels, sa persévérance dans la prière, la richesse expressive de son interprétation des versets bibliques, maman Esther grimpa rapidement les échelons dans la hiérarchie de son groupe. Elle devint thérapeute et plus tard le couple fut nommé « berger » et « bergère » (*papa et maman mukambi*). Il s'agit du premier rang au sommet de la hiérarchie du groupe de Combat. Cette fonction ne peut être occupée que par un couple hétérosexuel marié, nommé par Kinshasa. Les membres du groupe les appellent *papa* et *maman* puisqu'ils sont les parents spirituels du site. Le couple jouit de beaucoup de prestige. Il existe plusieurs règles tacites au sujet de la forme de relation qu'on doit entretenir avec le *papa* et la *maman bergère*. Comme l'indique leur nom, les bergers sont les gardiens du groupe. Ce couple endosse la tâche éducative et il est le garant de la bonne marche de la filiale.

Mais bien que cela diffère d'une filiale à une autre, si formellement on parle de *couple berger*, c'est la *bergère* qui est la figure la plus importante auprès des membres. Elle a les rôles thérapeutique, économique, culturel et religieux.

'Si une femme s'élève, son mari s'élève aussi'

Etant donné qu'à Kinshasa elle était déjà consacrée thérapeute, son zèle dans la prière aida Esther à être nommée *intercesseuse* européenne et spécialiste de la prière agressive. Chaque semaine, elle faisait des tournées dans différents pays auprès des filiales pour y conduire les séances. Très peu de temps après avoir exercé cette tâche, elle reçut l'autorisation d'initier une filiale dans son pays de résidence et fut officiellement intronisée en 2002, en présence d'une lourde délégation de *frères* et *sœurs* en religion venus de Kinshasa et de partout en Europe.



Photo 6.1 Le Berger et la Bergère

Ce développement rapide et progressif dans la vie d'Esther était surtout remarquable dans son apparence. Elle était métamorphosée. Elle accumulait les perruques, les vêtements, les chaussures et différents sacs à mains. Chaque élément de sa tenue était assorti aux autres vêtements qu'elle portait. Elle disait qu'en tant que responsable, elle devait être présentable et prête à partir lorsqu'elle était appelée. C'est pour cela qu'elle avait différentes perruques qu'elle pouvait enfiler pour être directement disponible si elle était appelée à accomplir une mission. Cette disponibilité permanente l'obligeait à avoir différents vêtements et accessoires tout prêts.

L'ascension dans la hiérarchie lui donnait aussi accès à différentes opportunités qu'offrait son nouveau groupe d'appartenance, comme l'accès à un réseau très large de disciples, avec le prestige et les avantages qui y sont liés, comme l'exercice d'une activité commerciale.

En effet les groupes de prières sont aussi de véritables marchés. Les rencontres offrent l'occasion de vendre et d'acheter des marchandises. Il est

d'ailleurs déconseillé aux chrétiens d'acheter de la marchandise chez d'autres personnes. Cette activité commerciale est souvent monopolisée par les personnes qui se trouvent dans les hautes positions hiérarchiques. Ce sont elles, en l'occurrence les mamans spirituelles, qui sont les principales fournisseuses des biens vendus. Par le biais des membres, les femmes entreprenantes se constituent une clientèle sûre en étant certaines de toucher leur argent, étant donné que le système de vente des objets entre Congolais est la mensualité ou l'achat par paiement échelonné: on prend un objet chez une vendeuse, il coûte tant. Mais on n'est pas obligé de payer la totalité du prix de vente à l'achat de la marchandise. On paye en tranches jusqu'à extinction de la dette. Mais le paiement par mensualité peut s'accompagner de quelques problèmes. Il arrive que l'acheteur disparaisse ou évite la rencontre avec le vendeur. Ce que les Congolais nomment 'système *Tora Bora*', terme qui s'est infiltré dans leur parler depuis 2001 lors des bombardements des grottes afghanes par les Américains qui cherchaient Bin Laden. Son emploi fait allusion à l'attitude d'un mauvais payeur, qui se cache lorsque le vendeur est à sa recherche: 'le vendeur pense que son client est ici, il va le chercher, mais ne le trouve pas'. Une réputation de mauvais payeur est une entrave aux relations. Mais, en tant que chrétien, on doit respecter les normes aussi à travers différents moyens de pression.

Cette constatation de l'activité commerciale au sein des groupes religieux n'est pas neuve. Elle a aussi été notée par d'autres observateurs. Bayart (1989), par exemple, nomme l'initiative même de créer une église comme participant de 'la politique du ventre' pour dénoncer les responsables comme escrocs qui profitent de la superstition populaire pour s'enrichir. Cette constatation est partiellement juste. Il y a bien sûr des abus. Mais de tels groupes n'ont pas une longue existence. Ils se désagrègent très rapidement et sont rejetés avec dédain. Acheter dans ce contexte constitue un contre-don pour compenser la disponibilité et le travail gratuit (*musala ya Nzambe*) des responsables. Bastide (2000: 81) a remarqué le même système de dédommagement dans son étude du Candomblé au Brésil. L'achat compense dans ce cas-ci l'information, les soins et les efforts que dispensent les responsables.

Esther prit elle aussi part à cette activité économique. Dans chacune de ses tournées, elle se munissait de marchandises à vendre, dans son groupe mais aussi dans chaque lieu où sa tâche requérait sa présence. Et puis, à ses retours de missions, Esther rapportait des cadeaux à son mari. Elle lui donnait des enveloppes contenant de l'argent (*mabounza*) qu'elle percevait des adeptes, des dons en espèce ou en nature, des bénéfiques sur les objets qu'elle avait eu la chance de vendre. L'argent améliorerait le statut de papa Daniel, qui investissait entre autre dans le confort du ménage comme avec l'achat d'une télévision à double écran qui envahissait tout leur salon. L'ascension dans la hiérarchie de

maman Esther se reflétait aussi sur papa Daniel. Il était devenu une personnalité respectée dans le groupe dirigé par sa femme, et vantait cette femme qui était pour lui une bénédiction, au point même de commettre parfois des *lapsus linguae* significatifs en appelant son épouse 'Jésus' au lieu de 'chérie'. Esther elle-même commettait aussi des gaffes, devenues anecdotiques pour les Congolais, comme le jour où, devant l'assemblée des chrétiens, elle fit un discours de remerciements, commençant son allocution en disant 'mon épouse et moi nous remercions l'assemblée'. Devant les réactions de la salle, elle se corrigea, utilisant l'expression devenue célèbre *pardonnez mon émotion* qui rappelle les larmes de Mobutu Sese Seko lorsqu'en 1994 il annonça devant les représentants du peuple sa démission du MPR, parti-Etat dont il était le fondateur.

L'enrôlement de son épouse comme responsable et ses absences étaient compensés par l'ascension du statut de son mari. Les adeptes l'appelaient désormais papa, impliquant tout le système d'attitudes liées à ce terme d'adresse. Ils accouraient lorsque son véhicule apparaissait pour lui ouvrir la porte, portaient son sac, se proposaient même d'être son chauffeur etc.

Peu de temps après l'enrôlement de son épouse, Daniel quitta son travail à la poste. Trier le courrier était désormais en dessous de son nouveau statut. Cet emploi, pour lequel il devait se lever tôt, à cinq heures du matin, ne lui procurait aucun prestige. Leur source de revenu formel était l'allocation accordée par les services sociaux. Mais ils étaient aussi toujours en conflit avec ces instances, parce que les services sociaux exigeaient que papa Daniel recherche un emploi. Or, papa Daniel disait qu'il faisait le travail de Dieu. Sa femme ne souhaitait d'ailleurs pas voir de nouveau son mari accepter un emploi en dessous de leur rang. Et puis papa Daniel ne semblait pas du tout tourmenté par le fait d'adopter un relativement haut niveau de vie grâce aux enveloppes que lui remettait sa femme et qui l'aidaient à faire des dépenses de consommation. Il acheta une voiture, son rang ne lui permettant plus de se déplacer dans les transports en commun. Il changeait régulièrement de costume, portant sa cravate même à l'intérieur de sa maison, avec une multitude d'impeccables chaussures en cuir de marque italienne.

Habitus et Mayele

Les stratégies déployées par Esther ne sont-elles pas tout simplement des déterminations d'un habitus? L'habitus selon Bourdieu est un système de dispositions, un ensemble de schèmes de perception, de pensée et d'action qui obéit à une logique qui est celle de la pratique. Il véhicule les schèmes de pensée et de comportement transmis de génération en génération. Ainsi le modèle d'épouse observé chez Esther traduit une rencontre des habitus différents accumulés dans sa trajectoire et sert de surcroît à résoudre les tensions dans son couple. Les

Combattants, comme Esther et Daniel, bien qu'ayant une origine rurale, ont vécu en ville en passant par les écoles missionnaires. Ils ont accumulé avec le temps des schèmes de conduites liées aux rapports domestiques, retravaillées pour répondre aux conditions présentes. Le renversement des rôles actuel représente une menace pour l'équilibre du ménage. Et pourtant le mariage est l'idéal de la vie congolaise. Mais en recourant aux différentes stratégies, les femmes contournent les obstacles culturels, créant un type de ménage autre, tout en maintenant l'idée du mari pourvoyeur.

Voici quelques unes de ces stratégies: Il y a d'abord le port du nom de son mari. Ceci est une nouveauté, car, dans la tradition congolaise, la femme porte son propre nom même après le mariage. Le port du nom du mari a été introduit au Congo par l'Occident. Ce sont surtout les femmes éduquées, souhaitant se rapprocher des Européennes, qui se le sont approprié en le présentant comme un signe de modernité et d'émancipation. Mais ici il s'agit surtout de confirmer l'homme dans la valeur qui doit lui être imputée, même s'il ne correspond pas à l'image du conjoint préférentiel. L'épouse rehausse ainsi son statut vis à vis de l'entourage. Le port du nom devient alors un des attributs de l'élévation et de la considération dont jouit le conjoint, comme le montre Esther.

Puis il y a la transparence des revenus. Esther donne des enveloppes à son mari, qui doit à son tour dépenser l'argent qu'elle gagne. Elle lui offre alors la possibilité de se montrer le mari pourvoyeur.

La tradition congolaise accorde de fait à la femme un rôle productif (N'Dongola 1980). Mais, traditionnellement, l'homme ne devait pas s'ingérer dans les affaires de sa femme et réciproquement (van Wing 1959: 195). La colonisation transforma cet aspect de la culture pour introduire la conception belge de la femme au foyer. Pour accéder à la sphère de la civilisation belge, le rôle économique de la femme devait céder la place aux tâches ménagères, car le rôle productif était signe du primitivisme et constituait un handicap à son développement. Ainsi donc, traditionnellement indépendantes et actives économiquement grâce aux activités agricoles, les filles devenaient des ménagères dépendantes du chef de foyer. Cependant, malgré ces changements, les femmes exerçaient encore des activités économiques. Comhaire-Sylvain (1968) et Mianda (1996) décrivent respectivement la manière dont vivaient certaines familles de chômeurs du Congo belge et les stratégies des femmes entrepreneuses dans le Congo post moderne à Kinshasa. Grâce aux activités de vente des épouses, la contribution des femmes au ménage était plus significative que celle de leur époux, et elles utilisaient différentes astuces afin de camoufler leur indépendance économique.

Une dernière stratégie est la manifestation publique de la tendresse de la femme envers son mari. Dans la tradition congolaise il y a bien sûr des manières verbales et non verbales utilisées par les partenaires pour se manifester leur af-

fection, mais la tendance actuelle est de l'exposer. Surtout du côté des femmes, tout se passe comme si la manifestation ostentatoire de l'amour permettait de confirmer à l'entourage la valeur qu'elles accordent au mari malgré ses carences.

Ici aussi on retrouve la logique du cumul: l'appellation 'chéri', 'mon mari' (*mobali nangai*), 'papa', les murmures à l'oreille, la multiplicité des petits soins démonstratifs sont des schèmes de pensées et de comportements dont l'adoption s'est faite tout au cours de leur vie.

Les rapports conjugaux présents constituent la scène de la promotion de la masculinité, de la soumission de la femme, mais aussi de l'émancipation de la femme. Esther est donc une femme à la fois émancipée, soumise, productive; ces caractéristiques d'*habitus* accumulées proviennent du monde rural, de la scolarisation missionnaire et des campagnes d'émancipation et du 'retour à l'authenticité' de Mobutu Sese Seko. Elle s'appelle femme au foyer, gagne de l'argent qu'elle remet à son mari. Daniel répond par l'assentiment du renforcement de leurs liens, et elle préserve le mariage en créant un rapport domestique inédit, transformé, une production transculturelle car configuration du vécu humain.

Lorsque l'on parle des transformations sociales en Afrique, on a trop souvent tendance à mettre séparément l'accent sur le mimétisme, sur les discontinuités, sur le métissage. Les changements culturels ne peuvent être conçus qu'en terme de brassage comme la sociologie nous l'a appris, un mélange des comportements anciens et nouveaux dans la recherche d'un compromis correspondant à la trajectoire collective des gens. Mais le local tient une grande place. Les pratiques dans les rapports conjugaux présents comme produits d'une rencontre dynamique entre des systèmes spécifiques enracinés dans la longue durée montrent la prédominance du local. En recourant à des stratégies propres, les femmes combinent différents modèles dans leur ménage, mais le local reste le plus fort comme dans le cas qui nous intéresse, car l'homme conserve son rôle de mari pourvoyeur.



L'ALPHABET DE LA FEMME VERTUEUSE



A bien plus de valeurs que les perles. Pr 31 : 10

Bâtit sa maison. Pr 14 : 1

Craint L'Éternel Pr. 31: 30

Donne de la nourriture à sa maison Pr 31 : 15

Est revêtu de force et de gloire Pr 31 : 25

Fait du bien à son mari Pr. 31 : 25

Glorifie le nom de Jésus - Christ. Pr. 31 : 1 - 30; Col 3 : 17

Habille toute sa maison Pr 31 : 21

Instruit ses enfants selon le Seigneur Pr 22 : 6

Jamais ne se décourage Pr 31 : 17

Kidnappe les pécheurs pour le Christ Marc 1 : 17

Louée par son mari et ses enfant. pr 31 : 28

Marche par l'Esprit Gal 5 : 17, 22

Ne mange pas le pain de paresse Pr 31 : 10

**O

Porte du fruit parce qu'elle demeure en Christ Jn 15 : 5

Quemande devant le trône de grâce en faveur des autres 1 Tim 2 : 14

Renonce à elle-même pour plaire à Christ Luc 9: 23 - 25

Se lève lorsqu'il est encore nuit Pr. 31: 15

Travaille d'une main joyeuse Pr 31 : 13

Use de bonté envers les pauvres Pr 31 : 20

Veille sur ce qui se passe dans sa maison Pr 31 : 27

Wigilante et Victorieuse Pr 31 : 27

Xénophile - a de la sympathie pour les étrangers Pr 31 : 20

Yeux tournés constamment vers le Seigneur Ps 123

Zélee pour de bonnes oeuvres Pr. 31: 10 - 31; Tite 2 : 14**



Bibliographie

- Bastide, R. 2000 (1958), *Le Candomblé de Bahia. Transe et Possession du Rite du Candomble*, Paris: Plon.
- Bayart, J-F. 1989, 'Les Eglises Chrétiennes et la Politique du Ventre', *Politique Africaine* (35): 3-27.
- Bourdieu, P. 1986, 'Habitus, Code et Codification', *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* 64 (9):40-44.
- Braeckman, C. 1992, *Le Dinosauré. Le Zaïre de Mobutu*, Paris: Fayard.
- Carfantan, J-Y. 1993, *Le Grand Désordre du Monde. Les Chemins de l'Intégration*, Paris: Seuil.
- Comhaire-Sylvain, S. 1968, *Femmes de Kinshasa, Hier et Aujourd'hui*, Paris: Mouton.
- Courade, G. 1977, 'Des Papiers et des Hommes: L'Épreuve des Politiques d'Endiguement', *Politique Africaine* (67): 3-30.
- de Villers, G. 1992, 'Petite Économie et Phénomènes Informels au Zaïre et en Afrique', *Les Cahiers du CEDAF*, Bruxelles: CEDAF, pp. 3-4.
- Gluckman, M. 1962, *Essays on the Ritual of Social Relations*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Gondola, D. 1993, 'Musique Moderne et Identités Citadines: Le Cas du Congo-Zaïre', *Afrique Contemporaine* (168).
- Gondola, D. 1997, 'Oh, Rio-Ma: Musique et Guerre des Sexes à Kinshasa', *Revue Française d'Histoire d'Outre Mer* 84 (314): 51-81.
- Kalombo, K. 1997, 'Crise Économique et Émergence du Pouvoir des Femmes au Sein des Couples à Kinshasa', *Démocratie, Culture et Développement en Afrique Noire*, Paris: Harmattan, pp. 201-207.
- MacGaffey, J. 1986, 'Women and Class Formation in a Dependent Economy. Kinsangani Entrepreneurs', in: C. Robertson & I. Berger (eds), *Women and Class in Africa*, New York/London: Africana Publishing Company.
- MacGaffey, J. 1988, 'Evading Male Control: Women in the Second Economy in Zaïre', in: S. Strichter & J.L. Parpart, *Patriarchy and Class: African Women in the Home and the Workforce*, Boulder: Westview, pp. 161-76.
- MacGaffey, J. 1991, *The Real Economy of Zaïre: The Contribution of Smuggling and Other Unofficial Activities to National Wealth*, London/Philadelphia: James Currey/University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Mianda, G. 1996, *Femmes Africaines et Pouvoir: Les Maraîchères de Kinshasa*, Paris: l'Harmattan.
- Mitchell, J.C. 1983, 'Case and Situational Analysis', *Sociological Review* (31): 187-211.
- Ndaya Tshiteku, J. 2000, 'Rapport sur la Participation au Symposium sur le Combat Spirituel à Kinshasa', Rapport interne, Leiden: African Studies Centre.
- N'Dongola, T.L. 1980, 'Quelques Traits d'Organisation Économiques Kongo au Seuil de la Colonisation Belge, Vue au Travers des Etudes Kongo du Révérend Père Van Wing', *Les Cahiers Economiques et Sociaux XVIII* (3-4): 375-93.
- Tshonga-Onyumbé 1982, 'La Femme Vue à Travers la Musique Zaïroise Moderne de 1960 à 1980', *Zaïre Afrique* (162): 83-93.
- Turner, V.W. 1972 (1969), *Les Tambours d'Afflictions*, Paris: Gallimard.
- van Binsbergen, W.M.J. 2000, 'La Chambre de Mary ou Comment Devenir Consommatrice à Francistown, Botswana', in: D. de Lame & C. Zabus (eds), *Changements*

- au féminin en Afrique Noire*: Anthropologie et Littérature, Paris: L'Harmattan, Anthropologie vol. 1, pp. 37-85.
- van Wing, J.H.L. 1959, *Études Bakongo: Sociologie, Religion et Magie*, Brugge. 2ème édition, Louvain (Belgique): Desclée de Brouwer.
- Walu, E. 1999, 'Images des Femmes et Rapports entre les Sexes dans la Musique Populaire du Zaïre', PhD Thesis, University of Amsterdam.

From individual act to social agency in San trance rituals

Thomas Widlok

This chapter provides a practice-oriented approach to ritual, a domain that is usually considered to give only very limited scope to agency. It suggests that in this case, and beyond, a focus on agency provides a productive combination of theory-driven and of data-driven research. This argument is developed with reference to empirical field material on the ritual and political practice of ≠Akhoe Hai//om speakers, people known as 'San' or 'Bushmen' in Namibia. The perspective suggested here challenges earlier analyses of the San trance dance by looking at a number of dances, and their constitutive parts, in terms of a succession of events in which 'cooperative projects' unfold. These projects involve 'play', 'entertainment', 'healing', 'trance' and increasingly 'commercial enterprise'. They can be shown to be mutually reinforcing in some aspects and in competition in others. The ritual forms involved are not passive vessels for the aspirations of individual agents but they structure the participatory frameworks in which agents are positioned.

Introduction

The current ethnography of Africa poses a dilemma: It no longer allows us to appeal to 'tradition', 'custom' or 'cultural grammar' as the driving force behind cultural continuity and change. Since individual agency has been reinstated as a key factor in present-day social thought, it has become a major task to show that whatever differences there may be between Africa and non-Africa, they are not

due to an opposition between self-determined European agents on the one hand, and Africans caught up in traditional structures and customary conventions on the other. At the same time, ethnography (and in many cases Africans themselves) tell us that there are processes that can be described as distinctively African and that a simple transfer of European ideas about agency to the African context can lead to serious misunderstandings. In this chapter I suggest one way of dealing with this dilemma.

My point of departure is the ethnography of San trance dancing, something that non-Africans have always identified not only as being different – or even strange – but also as being a particularly striking instance of non-agency. Trance dancers act in a collective fashion, their acts are ritualized and they fall into a trance, a state of changed consciousness and of reduced control over their body movements. Their agency, therefore, seems to be reduced threefold. However, this view only applies when a specific individualistic and eurocentric image of agency is employed that is a result of a theoretical perspective focusing on functional explanations. The alternative strategy, which I employ below, is to begin with an analysis of the forms of agency that have been found in the trance dance over time and to reformulate what constitutes the concept of agency accordingly.

San trance dancing

The trance or medicine dance of Khoisan-speaking groups in southern Africa – mostly so-called Bushmen or San groups – has attracted considerable attention because European observers found it so strikingly different and thus, in their opinion, worthy of investigation. This is independent of the evaluation of the dance, which ranged from the hostile view taken by missionaries to the enthusiastic reception given it by ethnographers and Western therapists.

Early missionaries in Namibia abhorred the Bushmen's medicine trance dance, declaring it to be 'devilish'. This still has repercussions today in that *Satanab* is another name that ≠Akhoe Hai//om give when they refer to //Gãuab, the spiritual being who they feel in touch with through the trance dance. *Satanab* is likely to go back to a translation initiated by missionaries but it is also likely that the ideas connected to *Satanab* and //Gãuab have merged in a way that either shifts the meaning of the former in terms of the latter or alters the meaning of both. Partly as a reaction to missionaries' views, the professional ethnographers of the mid-twentieth century were more positive in their evaluation of the medicine dance, underlining the important functions it served. They sought to find the role of the medicine dance both as a general social institution in San culture and in terms of the distinctive roles of the San actors when performing the dance. The functions most frequently identified were

conflict resolution, the alleviation of stress and the expression of joy. The division of labour among the actors in the dance was thought to directly mirror the division of labour in subsistence hunting and gathering: men hunt and women gather, men dance and women clap their hands and sing. They all perform their own part in an act that seemed to comply closely with what Durkheim (1912), the sociological ancestor of functionalism, described as the effervescent function of ritual and religion. More recently ethnographers have begun to realize that the gender division in hunting and gathering is a simplification but also that the medicine trance dance has many more facets and variations than previously thought. However, the functionalist assumptions remain largely intact even though the trance dances can serve a number of functions, and sickness is in fact *not* frequently a reason for having a medicine dance (Marshall 1999: 65). The dance is a communal event and includes everyone 'whether obviously ill or not; for in healing, the Ju/'hoansi make no distinction among their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs' (Katz, Biesele & St Denis 1997: 18). Marshall (1999: 65) writes: 'A dance held ... can function both to express the people's satisfaction at having meat and to relieve the tensions generated by the meat's distribution'. And Lee (1968: 53) concludes that 'the !Kung Bushman trance performance can be regarded as a drama in which the stresses and tensions of social life are transformed into a common struggle against external sources of malevolence'. The dance in this view may respond to positive needs (expressions of joy) or negative needs (the dissipation of group tension).¹

A historical or nativistic function in which psychological and sociological aspects are combined is that the dance is a means of dealing with change and social integration (Guenther 1976 & 1979: 118). In some cases, the medicine dance seems to be directed primarily towards ills believed to come from outside the community (Barnard 1979: 77). Its increasing popularity in situations of rapid change has been analyzed in terms of 'the adaptive role of religion, that is, the relationship between religion and the varying ecological and social conditions' (Guenther 1979: 102). With regard to external social relations, trance dancing has been seen as either a form of resistance (initially against missionaries and later against social disruption) or as a form of adaptation (initially to natural stress but later to social stress). A functional perspective could be applied equally well to the San living more or less autonomously in remote areas in the past with them now living under severe conditions of oppression

¹ Barnard (1979: 77) attests to a similar duality of functions, namely sociological and psychological functions. He sees the dance as a response to the psychological need to have an 'outlet for aggression and for the relief of tension' (ibid: 77-8). It is also a response to the sociological need to bring together people who are dispersed and often separated in their subsistence pursuits.

and dispossession. In either case, despite a rhetoric of anti-functionalism (see Guenther 1979), the dominant interpretations put forward as explanations for the medicine dance have been in terms of its adaptation and ability to fulfil social and psychological functions and to respond to a variety of (changing) needs (see Barnard 1979). As with all explanations of religion in terms of their social value, there is a danger of circularity here (see Morris 1988: 131), especially as the trance dance seems to follow a diversity of needs and charged situations. It becomes almost arbitrary to try to establish its cause. A situation of need and stress may be defined with reference to a medicine dance taking place, or taking place with increased frequency, and this in turn is explained in terms of stress and need.

An alternative approach that avoids circular explanations is possible because the rich ethnography available allows the medicine dance to be seen not as a response to a variety of given needs but as a bundle of related practices in their own right. I suggest that new theoretical advances, in particular in linguistic anthropology, can allow better use to be made of the ethnographic record of the practices that make up trance dancing. I present data here from my own field research to support this claim and then proceed in two steps to try to disentangle the practices involved in the trance dance and to scrutinize what constitutes the medicine dance as a total social institution. Firstly, I will show that, despite its relative uniformity, it is misleading to think of the medicine dance as a single uniform ritual insofar as its characteristics emerge most clearly when different versions are compared across space and time. Secondly, I will show that, despite its relative coherence as an event, it is misleading to see the medicine dance as a monolithic action since its internal dynamic emerges clearly as an articulation of diverse practices. To put it more succinctly with regard to the question of agency, the aim is to understand what we commonly think of functionally as the healing dance, a more or less static social institution in terms of social agency. I suggest that we move from a notion of the healing dance as a single act (carried out repeatedly by the group) to one of plural events. And then I suggest to move further from a notion of actions (which characterize the healing dance events) to one of agency. The established understanding of the healing dance as a social institution that restricts individual agency is too narrow a category because it does not take embeddedness in a variety of contexts on board. At the same time it is too broad a category because it does not take account of internal dynamics either.

From act to event: San healing rituals across time and space

The anthropological literature usually talks of the 'San trance dance' (Lee 1968, Guenther 1976), the 'San medicine dance' (Marshall 1969, Barnard 1979,

Widlok 1999) or the 'San healing ritual' (Katz 1982, Katz, Biesele & St Denis 1997). There are two imprecisions in this. One concerns the fact that analytically we may distinguish the key words *trance*, *medicine*, *dance*, *healing* and *ritual* as distinct dimensions and not simply as synonyms referring to the same performances. Performances differ in the extent to which these dimensions are pronounced in each particular case. The other imprecision is that, strictly speaking, there is not *one* San healing ritual but several distinct manifestations of it, namely the giraffe dance, the drum dance, the gemsbok dance and the elephant dance, to name but the most important. Performers readily provide the names of dances that they perform and ethnographers have recorded them but there is little historical analysis of the dances as such and the ways they have been performed on different occasions over the years.

Our first detailed ethnographic accounts of San healing rituals only date back to the 1960s so that the time depth available is limited. As a consequence, ethnographers have tended to compare dances synchronically and to identify types of dance performances in different settings. Guenther (1979), for instance, compared 'farm' and 'veld' performances, which allowed him to analyze the two settings in a temporal sequence (see Widlok 1999: 239 for a critique). More recently, Katz, Biesele and St Denis (1997) compared the giraffe dance and the drum dance as they were recorded in the 1960s and 1970s with giraffe and drum dances performed in 1989. Their comparison gives an idea of the rich historical work that can be done as the record of San healing dances gains more time depth. The researchers found, for instance, that the gender-specific roles described in the earlier dances were later diffused and became more similar. It appears that the distinction between the two dances became more blurred as they began to merge and envelop one another (ibid: 120-21). In addition, the Ju'/hoan men and women describe very specific experiences of the *n/om* (spiritual force) and *!aia* (a state of trance) in these dances at different times. In more recent instances, healing was frequently not seen as the prime aim of the dances (considered 'play' in this context) but at the same time was never excluded (ibid: 121).

This attempt to introduce a more diachronic perspective indicates that, given the variations in the dances in general, it will always be difficult to distinguish clear trends in the historical developments of San healing rituals from changes that take place non-directionally in the course of any new performance. This suggests the need for analytical models to help to (re-)construct historical changes and continuities in San healing rituals and to gain a better understanding of San history by including healing rituals in the picture.² To begin with, it

² It is striking that recent debates that claim to make San ethnography more history-oriented have had practically nothing to say about the San healing dance except to

is useful to partially inverse the established view. Instead of considering the trance dance as a static social form that is adapted by individuals and their changing needs, we should consider the possibility that the trance ritual itself can be a continuous source of innovation and a locus for social agency.

Healing ritual events are if not daily then at least roughly fortnightly experiences for most San people. Medicine dances are not unusual but each event has its own flavour. For the practitioners, this inherent variability does not contradict the impression that there is also a recognizable basic pattern in these events. Alterations are not seen as directional changes because variability is to be expected, although the next event may reverse a previous change or may be different again. Precedents can be found in the ethnography of myth and ritual language. As Wagner (1978: 251) observed, there are indeed many ways in which myths and tales serve 'needs', they can be instances 'of entertainment, or of demonstration, or even of charter' and 'they may, on many occasions, serve none of these functions'. While Europeans tend to interpret myths and rituals in terms of conventionalized symbolizations in relation to a given reality, the practitioners themselves commonly see them as a source of innovation in relation to other existing events (Wagner 1978: 253).

The point has been succinctly made with regard to language and the tendency to locate the agency of innovation and invention in individual speakers following the image that is dominant in societies of literacy, namely that of the writer who puts word after word in an attempt to capture the real world while the listeners (readers) are guided by conventions or culture in their reception (Wagner 1981: 53). However, agency may be considered to be much more socially distributed. It is, after all, the listeners who resolve the flow of words and innovatively integrate it with other contexts. The communicative understanding between speaker and listener depends on their 'continual reinvention' (ibid: 51). Trance dances are events like myths in the sense that they are not simply expressions but bring up conditions for shared conception and perception (Wagner 1978: 256). If innovation and convention are as dialectically related as Wagner and others have suggested, then we may also attribute social agency to events such as trance dances. While these dances can imitate previous events following a long historical trajectory, they are nevertheless substituting previous events and may partially subvert and undermine previous events based on a dynamic between innovation and convention. The following two excerpts help to underline this point. They are taken from my field notes of two medicine dance performances that occurred ten years apart, a reminder of the limited time

allege that its descriptions exoticize the San as an Other (see Sullivan 2001).

depth available to empirically ground our analysis of San rituals in history but also an illustration of continuity paired with change.

We had been told by Xareb that anytime we hear people singing and clapping at night we could join in. There were many *!gaaokwa* (healers) in the camp, he said. Promptly at the same night of that day, we were about to go to sleep, we heard singing from Xareb's place. We went there and found women and children sitting around a fire joyously singing one song after the other. Xareb's son (about 5 years old) was dancing like a *!gaaob*, shivering fervently with his legs, keeping them straight but pushing the feet forward bit by bit. People commented encouragingly on his efforts. Two whistles were being used by boys and the men who supported the dance and the singing. I later asked for the words of the songs and I was told one was 'we are not the tombo (Ovambo malt beer) drinkers', another one was 'a casspir (south African military vehicle) is driving down the hill' and a third one about a person called 'Samisure', the manager of the farm Fisa nearby. I did not succeed to record the exact words of the songs because I was told they are all in the *!Xū* language. I was told that *!Xū* songs are better, more effective for healing. The *≠Akhoe Hai//om* dance performers said they had learned these songs from *!Xū* who lived not far away. The chant was very repetitive with regard to the words, the repetition of what seemed to be one word or one fixed phrase.

As the singing proceeded, more women from other parts of the camp joined the circle, especially some more elderly women but also young mothers with their small children. I counted sixteen women, a large number of children and a good number of men, though not all of those living in the camp. Some of the younger men joined the dancing. There were remarks like 'if only the girls from over there would come', 'if only Seirob (a young man) was here, they would be dancing already'. We were told to hang around because *Dādāb* (an elderly man) would be dancing. So far *Dādāb* had been sitting quietly with the others, there was nothing to indicate that he would be dancing. Then he stood up and began to move and after warming up he took off his shoes and his shirt and put on his full gear which consisted of an ornamented leather apron, a headband and a necklace made of glass beads sewed onto a piece of cloth and two small bags, also ornamented with glass beads which he wore across his chest. The small bags contained *sā-e*, a scented powder which he used in the ritual. Some days earlier I had seen *Koites* preparing *sā-e* from the leaves of a bush. The other bag probably contained little metal pieces which he later produced when sucking people's skin. *Dādāb* also had a whistle hanging around his neck in which he blew occasionally in what seemed to be an attempt to whip up the singing and clapping. He also used the walking stick of an old blind woman. After having danced for a while in this way he began to dance by continually shivering his legs in the same way as Xareb's son had done at the very beginning. He continued this movement for the next three hours (with only one short smoking break) until 2 a.m. in the morning. It is clear that this way of sustained dancing required great energy. There was some relaxation in the form of a changed step when he began to bow down to attend to the individual persons sitting around the fire.

In the course of the dance everyone present was touched at least three or four times as *Dādāb* went around from one person to another, applying *sā-e* to head and chest and holding his hand or his head against these body parts and then moving back in his shivering dance chanting and dancing for himself for a while. He par-

ticularly attended to some small children, to one of the mothers and to Tomab, a middle-aged man who had returned from a long jail sentence a few days earlier. With a few people he sucked their skin, then stepped back, blew his nose and coughed as if throwing up and produced little metal pieces. Particularly at these instances he was being held by Xareb and some others who guided him and who tried to make sure that he did not step or collapse into the fire. The women continued to clap and sing while the men danced. Dādāb was clearly the main dancer and it seemed that he was also initiating some of the songs which were then picked up by the women. But there were times when he was almost ignored as people paused to chat and joke. Some of the women also started songs and they clapped so fervently that they seemed to be in a trance-like state, certainly they were as physically involved as the dancers were. Dādāb was continually trembling like a leaf until he suddenly seemed to go mad, walking over the fire without noticing it before he regained control of his movements again.

After the event I was trying to establish (in vain) what triggered this particular dance. It could have been the fact that it was a Saturday, it could have been prompted by the women who sang a long while before they were joined by others, it could also have been the return of Tomab from jail. When I asked Dādāb about his acts and his use of scented powder he said: 'We are people of one God. When we can smell the same, then there is nothing between us'. (Recorded December 1990)

At the evening of this day visitors from Fisa had arrived, they had been travelling for the last three days. Two of the men were known to be *!gāiaokwa* and it did not take long before young people started clapping and singing around a fire. Women and young men gathered and started to sing at some distance but the visitors first ate their maize porridge. The people at the fire got impatient which prompted one of the visitors to stand up and shout across 'We are coming, we are coming'! Having finished their meal, they put on their apron skins, necklaces and headbands, all ornamented with beads. One of them used a fan that seemed to be made of animal hair, the other one had a dancing stick. Dādāb, too, came to the fire. He told the visitors that he was delighted that they had come because this place lacked *aorekhoeku* (grown-up men). Dādāb was also dressed in his dancing gear and he danced fervently in the usual style. He attended to each and everyone in the large crowd of people that had gathered, circling between them just like the visiting *!gāiaokwa* did. At several points he collapsed, got out of control for a while but then shortly afterwards once again attended to people being seated, talking normally to them. From 8 p.m. till 1 a.m. the dancing and singing was at full force. Not every member of the camp was there, Xareb for one did not come, nor Abakub or *!Gamekhas* (all of them senior persons in the camp). When I asked *!Gamekhas* about her absence the next day, she said she thought it had been simply too cold. (Recorded May 2000)

Note that the difference in length in these two records is not a matter of subsequent editing and condensation but instead reflects the actual difference in length in my field notes. Two things account for this. Firstly, during my research in 2000 digital video technology allowed me to film, without interfering in the event, more than four hours of footage in almost complete darkness

without extra lights. My second account is therefore much shorter because I was able to keep a video diary. Secondly, by then many features were familiar to me so that I did not describe them in detail. This applies to the dancers' dress, their healing acts of rubbing powder across their heads and chests, and the way new songs were started and pauses were taken. Even though some of the same people were involved in these two events, other things differ, such as the presence of visitors, the exact spot where the fires were lit etc., and a few individuals that I expected to join in did not come. But formally the ritual proceedings seemed very similar, especially in comparison to some of the apparent social changes that had taken place in the settlement over the ten years. People had moved, some had died, children had grown up and adults had grown old. Several homicides had occurred, the brewing of alcohol was no longer permitted at the settlement, many *≠Akhoe Hai//om* huts now had locks and doors made of iron sheets which they had not had ten years earlier. In contrast to these changes that indicated considerable social transformation, the healing ritual struck me as very familiar. I noticed that the healing ritual now worked for me too. I had taken part in a fair number of healing rituals in the past but I had been away for several years. I had been told of conflicts and of hard times and I missed the people who had died in the meantime. The ritual made me feel at home, it suggested that people still made an effort to not let anything come between them. I am not suggesting that this subjective impression is necessarily shared by San participants, even though my namesake Tomab – in the first case above – had returned home from a long prison sentence and the ritual may have worked similarly for him as well. I do suggest, however, that even once we get an anthropological record that extends diachronically in time, the situation is complicated by the fact that events occupy different positions in the biographies of the persons involved, including the researcher.

As research methods and interests change, so does our record. We now have details about how healing rituals are initiated (see Widlok 1999), we have more sophisticated technical means of recording (for instance being able to do so at night) and advanced techniques of transcribing pluri-vocal singing (see Olivier 2001) but we still lack detailed analyses of ritual chants and dance movements. In short, our comparisons of ritual events over time, even if they are carried out by a single researcher with a fairly fixed set of interests and abilities, will still be fragmentary and require theoretical models to help to join these fragments and to make sense of them. Above all, we have come to realize that rituals too are open-ended processes and, despite their formality, they have a history and a future, and are instances of agency.

Anthropological analyses of ritual have established that repetition, invariance and formality are far more effective means of creating continuity than putting experiences into simple propositional statements. As Bloch (1986)

showed on the basis of a long-term history of initiation rituals in Madagascar, ritual forms and the categorical distinctions and transformations that they entail are reproduced much more closely across considerable political and economic changes than the propositional meanings or the contents that are attached to these forms. In other words, while propositional messages that are handed on from one generation to another – or spatially from one community to the other for that matter (Widlok 1992) – change rather rapidly and may even be inverted over time, ritualized acts and utterances are closely maintained. Bloch (1986: 116) used his evidence to show how politically dominant power-holders may take advantage of this faithful adherence to ritual forms by appropriating rituals, in this case circumcision rituals, for their own purposes and thereby effectively co-opting participants into particular political projects such as the establishment of a royal legitimacy. When this thesis was applied to other contexts it appeared that the more elaborate a ritual was, the more options it seemed to possess that could be exploited over time. Many hunter-gatherer groups, like the San, proved to be the quintessential exception to these models of ritual as an ideological tool (Widlok 2001).³ In these cases, a leading class of ritual experts is far less evident and consequently there seems to be less possibility and necessity for rituals that serve to maintain political power. Ritual in these contexts deserves particular attention insofar as it differs from ritual elsewhere but it also points more directly at blind spots in the anthropological theory of ritual.

Recent attempts to deal with these blind spots in models of ritual are predicated on an analysis of ritual form and emphasize the positive function of rituals as practices with implicit achievements in history and evolution (see Houseman & Severi 1998, Rappaport 1999). These approaches more successfully incorporate the rituals of hunter-gatherers and other forms of ritual that are exceptional in their simplicity or in other ways but still work as ritual forms. Rappaport (1999: 29) has pointed out that taking ritual form seriously means not only emphasizing formal features such as repetitiveness, performance and formality (as Bloch does) but also stressing that these forms are more than empty shells or

³ A well-known example is Bloch and Parry's thesis on the role of ritual in death and the regeneration of life. After considering data on four hunter-gatherer societies presented by Woodburn, they conclude that in contrast to evidence from many cases in their volume, 'in none of these (hunter-gatherer) instances is there any systematic attempt to transform death into a rebirth or a regeneration of either the group or the cosmos' (Bloch & Parry 1982: 42). Similarly, Bloch's thesis of ritual as rebounding violence, despite its title 'Prey into Hunter', has very little to say about relatively egalitarian hunter-gatherers like the San (Widlok 2001: 167). More generally, rituals among many hunter-gatherer groups and other less hierarchically organized societies are not readily accounted for by established models of ritual as a tool of power-holders (see Woodburn 1982b, 2005, Widlok 1992).

simply media that help to express a message – maybe more forcefully – which in theory could equally well be expressed by non-ritual means such as straightforward linguistic propositions. In this perspective, ritual adds to the substantive contents, it is ‘not a neutral medium’ (ibid: 30). If this was not the case, it would be hard to explain the ubiquity of ritual and why rituals continue to play a role in contexts where non-ritual forms are readily available.

Formal features allow us to recognize a medicine trance dance across time although this might appear to contradict what has been reported about the flexible character of San social life. The adaptive value of flexibility in the social arrangements of the San has been underlined time and again and it has even been suggested that it is *the* key feature that distinguishes San culture and society from that of their neighbours (Guenther 1996, 1999). Instances have been reported in which San curers in their chants during a dance have made ‘distinct reference to the specific social situation being aired and alleviated through the dance’ (Bieseke 1993: 78). The dance ritual has been described as a ‘means of helping resolve tensions’ through the women’s chanting as well as through the healer who, in one instance, while in *!aia* (trance) told the people at the dance that their disputes over cattle had caused bad feelings (Katz, Bieseke & St Denis 1997: 134). I have concluded elsewhere (Widlok 2001: 174) that ‘the cycle of feedback between new social constellations and ritual action and form seems to have been very short’ in the San medicine dance, underlining the fact that healing ritual performances are open to innovation. It is important to point out that all rituals, of course, allow for some degree of innovation and it would be hard to explain rationally how rituals come into being if it were not for human in(ter)vention. However, it is also common that, for ritual innovation to work, it has to proceed piecemeal. In the example given above, the curer *included* reference to current tensions and conflicts but without changing the overall structure of the performance, the arrangement of active participants or the mode of singing.

Maybe the most fundamental flexibility of the healing ritual is constituted by the fact that it does not follow seasonal cycles or life cycles but that the decision as to when and where to dance can accommodate features of the situation at the time. The ritual form may not be altered but the fact that a fairly small group of determined women can initiate a dance through their insistent singing and clapping is proof of considerable openness regarding the concerns of the moment (see Widlok 1999). Conversely, attempts by entrepreneurial healers, who may invite paying patients from other ethnic groups, may be jeopardized because the ritual form of the healing dance requires the active participation of many, in particular the forceful singing and clapping of a sufficiently large number of women. If the women decide not to give their support, as occasionally happens, the healing ritual may not take place or may not get off the ground

as the prospective 'ritual broker' had hoped for. It is for this reason that the question of participatory structure has to be foregrounded.

Given the scope for innovation in terms of new chants, it is not surprising that the manifestations of the San healing ritual changes over time and across space. This is already apparent in the fact that what constitutes *the* healing ritual at a particular place and time is always in the first instance also a particular dance, namely the giraffe dance (Marshall 1969: 369), the gemsbok dance (Sugawara 1990: 119), the lion and the gemsbok dances (Valiente-Noailles 1993: 205) or the elephant dance (Widlok 1999: 251). The chants performed in these dances differ and even within one named category differences usually occur. Although the 'inventor' of a dance may be known for some time to some communities, this is by no means a major criterion for performing a dance. The ≠Akhoe Hai//om of northern Namibia today commonly perform the elephant dance which they say comes from their !Xū-speaking neighbours and is said to be in their language. Similarly, the Nharo of Botswana perform dances that they attribute to the Ju/'hoansi (Barnard 1979: 68). They are not concerned that the chant was composed elsewhere but this is usually considered to make the dance more powerful.

Flexibility in content may extend beyond the utterances contained in songs to ritual acts more generally. The use of substances in the healing dance is a good example. ≠Akhoe Hai//om and !Xū healers living around Tsintsabis today make extensive use of *sã-e*, a scented powder that was apparently also used by Ju/'hoan people when Marshall (1969: 359) did her field research. While in the Ju/'hoan case the substance was used mainly by women to 'cool down' the curers, its use by ≠Akhoe Hai//om and !Xū healers today may be considered to be the opposite (Widlok 1999: 241). The variance may even be found in the way in which the basic distinction between hot and cold is being used in ritual or in descriptions of ritual experiences (ibid: 252). The symbolism of heat and coolness is elaborate among Ju/'hoan healers (Bieseke 1993: 80) but less so among the ≠Akhoe Hai//om. The elaboration of this symbolic difference is also ambivalent insofar as heat is necessary for successful healing but at the same time in need of control through acts and substances of cooling. Variance of contents not only applies to what may be considered to be marginal features but also to the 'two main aspects of the form of the trance dance, the circular dance path and the central fire' (Bieseke 1993: 81). Both are important symbolic themes in San folklore and have been emphasized as key elements in anthropological descriptions of the ritual and non-ritual life of San groups (Valiente-Noailles 1993: 111, 153). But looking at San healing rituals across time and space, even these substantive features may be subject to change. Marshall (1999: 68) notes that 'a dance fire is not a ritualistic necessity' for the healing ritual. There is no indication that the fire-less performances were considered to

be deficient in any way. The ≠Akhoe Hai//om dances that I have witnessed all took place at night, and had a fire built for the purpose. Commonly there were two (in some cases three or four) fires lit and this turned what otherwise would have been a circle arrangement into a dance path in a shape more reminiscent of a figure of eight (Widlok 1999: 240). Moreover, the two fires were in most cases clearly arranged along an east-west axis with the women seated at the easternmost fire and the men at the opposite end, a pattern that is not reported for other groups. Similarly, the dancers did not move in a well-practised circle (Marshall 1999: 67, 131) but moved back and forth between the fire(s) and the various participants. Thus, the contents of the San healing ritual, in terms of chants as well as of ritual acts, can be flexible.

As we begin to realize that the substantive contents of healing dances changes even within short periods, the purpose of a medicine dance and the occasions on which it might be held move to the centre of anthropological attention. Occasions and motives that trigger medicine dance performances change too – not only over the course of history and as a result of the situation of different San groups. Within a particular group and time period, dances can have different ‘reasons’ such as visits, disease, pure joy, a successful hunt or social tensions arising from sharing (Marshall 1969: 354-56). Although the curing element is strong, as indicated by the terms ‘medicine dance’ or ‘healing ritual’, the ludic or entertainment aspect has also repeatedly been pointed out (Guenther 1979: 118, Lee 1968: 53, Sugawara 1990: 119, Widlok 1999: 255). The apparent diversity of purpose makes it difficult to maintain a simple functional explanation of the San medicine dance in terms of a response to a single well-defined need in a cultural system seen as rather self-contained and static. Candidates for such a functional explanation are the trance dance as an expression and reinforcement of the economic division of labour between the sexes, of the political cooperation of all members in a local group and of key values and motivations to deal with situations of stress, tension and conflict (see Widlok 1999: 242 for a summary). One and the same dance may be seen as a function to express satisfaction with the status quo (for instance, after having received meat in a successful hunt) but also to relieve tensions arising from the status quo (for example, generated by the distribution of meat) (Marshall 1999: 65). Ecological stress has been suggested as a reason for the high frequency of dances (Guenther 1979: 112) as well as for the relatively low frequency of dances (Katz 1982: 37). In the face of this diversity of purposes which are usually neither formally announced nor necessarily agreed, I talk of ‘cooperative projects’ that are at times conflicting or at least not necessarily congruent (Widlok 1999). Instead of considering the medicine dance as an event that fulfils a single function, namely that of (re-)creating cohesion through obligatory participation or that responds to a plethora of social needs, it seems more

appropriate to talk of processes of demand cooperation whereby participants strive for their cooperative projects. Those projects could be predicated either primarily on communal entertainment or on particular concern for a particular person who is not feeling well or on collaboration with visitors, or indeed any combination of these (Widlok 1999: 256). To point out the diversity of purposes is not to imply that they are arbitrary or unimportant. Participants feel strongly about medicine dance performances which are, after all, the major opportunity for getting together for collective action and communication in larger groups. But the list of purposes is open-ended, which adds to the attraction of the medicine dance as a ritual that continues to thrive while all other San rituals seem to be declining rapidly under the onslaught of colonial integration. Trance dances not only allow for a variety of purposes but that they also act as a prompt and are thus part and parcel of the social agency involved.

From action to agency: The San healing dance and its ritual forms

Emerging from an analysis of changing contents and purposes as outlined above is a stress on versatility, flexibility and resourcefulness when looking at the San medicine dance across time and space. However, given that the flexibility of San social arrangements has hardly been debated, it is also appropriate to complement this with an emphasis on the continuity of ritual form. Some aspects of the San medicine dances may appear so self-evident that they are not given as much room as they deserve. A major hallmark of the medicine dance is that it is an open, non-exclusive event and the lack of exclusion is the creation of a public sphere which by itself has logical entailments. The public character of the medicine dance means that the contents, consisting of utterances as well as acts, is always subject to scrutiny. The San, like people elsewhere, possess and use individual healing practices, some of which are borrowed from neighbouring groups and some of which are individual creations. For instance, a ≠Akhoe Hai//om medicine man at my main research site was occasionally asked by people with particular complaints and aches to perform individual healing acts. One of his techniques was to burn the patient's skin with a hot pipe, which produced marks similar to those seen on victims of torture. Since these acts take place with the patient's consent, it is a matter of debate how these violent practices should be judged. In any case, it is quite clear that they are formally distinct from healing acts during the publicly shared medicine dance ritual where dancers may inflict wounds on themselves or threaten to burn themselves through their uncontrolled dancing near the fire, but are never known to have inflicted wounds on patients. Having discussed the matter with ≠Akhoe Hai//om, I can confidently say that inflicting wounds on others would not be accepted by participants in a medicine dance, who would simply walk away if a

medicine dancer starting to inflict wounds on anyone but himself. The fact that medicine dancers put themselves at risk is considered to be non-premeditated and usually junior dancers help the medicine dancers to prevent any physical harm taking place. Violence in this context is quite different from the violence directed at specific sets of people in other known ritual settings (Widlok 2001: 172). In the trance dance not people but everyday experience is violated insofar as participants are propelled out of everyday life into an experience that is potentially life-threatening to him/her. The trance dancer is subject to a deliberate exposure of force, sometimes seen as a shamanic separation of breath and body. The singing may pressure him to accumulate heat to the point of near-death (when his breath is separate from his body). This explains why some trance dancers describe the dance as frightening and as leading to total physical exhaustion. But the dancer may be said to give up his vitality voluntarily for the purpose of healing. Women do not usually become trance dancers among the ≠Akhoe Hai//om but Ju/'hoan women do. These female trance dancers sometimes parallel their experience of childbirth with its duality of pain and spiritual energy with the trance experience (Biesele 1997). In both instances autonomy is the ideal and the capacity to act autonomously in these situations grows with personal experience; it is not imposed by ritual or occupational experts. In the ritual setting any imposition is likely to result in participants staying away from a ritual performance. Conversely, just as staying away from a public dance event entails a denial of cooperation, participation in such an event requires solidarity. Participation not only signals support for a common cause but *creates* this support since healing can only take place when people sing, clap and dance together. It is therefore not only the expression of support but the very practices that provide support. Furthermore, it not only expresses allegiance to certain values such as health, mutual support and life generally, but making the performance work through one's participation is also self-referential and self-fulfilling because it actively creates and maintains this support and enhances life.

Exclusivity may have been ritualized in other cultural settings but it is clear that formally this would have to be a ritual completely different from a trance dance. The San healing ritual allows for a variety of cooperative projects under changing historical circumstances and conditions but it is inappropriate for formal conspirative projects of any sort. If we consider the healing dance in terms of adaptive systems the ritual would seem to be a 'general purpose system' that tends towards inclusiveness and the continuation of life in terms of shared health and mutual support. This inclusive continuation of life may be identified as the general good involved in rituals. It unites the cooperative action which otherwise diversifies with regard to the emphasis put on entertainment, healing and collaborative action in separate projects. Its form differs from what

may be called 'special purpose systems', including individual healing arrangements with special classified goals for certain categories of people. It differs, for example, from many of the royal rituals among the Bantu-speaking agropastoralists into which some San groups have also been drawn (see Widlok 1999: 234).⁴ When seen in this light, some of the cases of entrepreneurial trance dancers (Guenther 1975, Katz 1982) can be understood to constitute a challenge to the ritual form of the San medicine dance. Insofar as healers begin to form a more or less exclusive group with special goals, such as making a living from selling their performative skills, they may try to elevate these special goals to take the position of what has previously been the general purpose of maintaining and (re-)constituting a healthy life for all participants, as described in the ethnographic record. When this happens, a fundamental change of ritual form has to be expected. By contrast, little or no formal change is expected when San medicine dances are either socially contracting so that they involve only members of a single camp or expanding beyond the boundaries of San communities and incorporating outsiders. Both trends seem to be occurring at present. There has been a growing focus on individual camps putting on their own dances rather than cross-camp healing ceremonies. At the same time, there is a certain expectation that members of other ethnic groups could readily be incorporated (Katz, Biesele & St Denis 1997: 103, 106).

In case the point about the relative formal constancy of the healing dance as a ritual is misunderstood as a form of orthodoxy, it should be emphasized that not all types of situational flexibility, heterodoxy and creativity are considered aberrant. Concretely, this applies to the element of trance (*!aia* in Ju/'hoansi, *!gai//o* in ≠Akhoe Hai//om). Trance experiences seem to have always varied and so have the ways in which dancers have dealt with these experiences and expressed them in their accounts (see Katz 1982, Widlok 1999). Ju/'hoan healers today differ regarding the degree to which they consider themselves as relatively young and inexperienced in their dealings with *!aia* (Katz, Biesele & St Denis 1997: 109), as having had quite different and mixed careers as healers (see Katz 1982: 225), and as women may differ from men in their relations with the healing power (ibid: 118). Healing rituals that go by the same name show

⁴ A comparison of San and Bantu female initiation, for instance, suggests that San (or more generally: Khoisan) rituals were predicated on the general purpose of assisting girls to grow up into full persons, while in the Bantu context the special purpose of making use of girls' (re)productive powers for the benefit of a certain alliance group is highlighted (Carstens 1982, see Widlok 1999: 228). So far, San healing rituals show a clear tendency to be of the general-purpose type rather than of a special-purpose type. They are considered to be 'good for all' and the healing energy may be held by healers as a valued resource but it seems to be shared equally and to be infinitely expendable when activated at dances (Katz, Biesele & St Denis 1997, 138; Katz 1982: 200).

considerable differences in performances from the 1960s as opposed to those in the 1980s, particularly regarding the degree to which trance is involved (ibid: 121). The participants see these differences as unequivocal and show tolerance of local differences including the experience of trance in different dances. The Ju/'hoan interviewed by Katz, Biesele and St Denis and the ≠Akhoe Hai//om are remarkably similar in their description of dances which may or may not involve trance and healing. Dances without a healing aspect are usually referred to as 'plays' but are not categorically different from dances with trance. Instead of interpreting this as an indication of the amorphous nature of the healing dance, I suggest that it underlines the fact that healing dances are not dramas that follow a certain script or programme. They are not compositions but composite events that develop as a number of constituent practices are brought into specific constellations. The remainder of this chapter spells out why the medicine dance is best seen not only as a plurality of historically shaped dances but also as a dynamic of corresponding and complementary practices.⁵

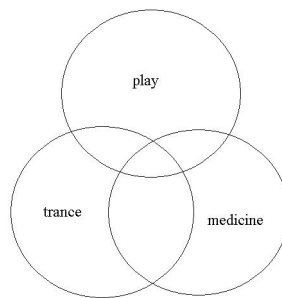


Figure 7.1 Complementary aspects of the healing dance

⁵ By analysing the healing dance as a bundle of combined practices it is possible to show that many of the constituent elements of the dance emerged and are maintained independently of 'stress' or functional necessities and therefore are not amenable to a functionalist explanation. This connects to earlier ethnographic observations on the San trance dance: Marshall (1969) has noted that different songs (giraffe, honey, rain, etc.) also differed with regard to their composite features (dance circle and fire, use of paraphernalia, dancing and music). Lee (1968) has referred to distinctive activities in the process of trance dancing (shivering, punching, running, trembling, shrieking) and distinctive phases of trance (working up, entering trance, acting as if dead, active curing and returning to normal) which may all be considered as separate practices. And Barnard (1979) highlighted the relation between the medicine dance and other forms of medicine (stomach medicine, rain medicine, evil medicine, divination, spiritual medicine, individual curing rites).

As a first step towards recognizing the practices that make up the healing dance we turn to distinctions and comments made by the practitioners themselves and to attempts by anthropologists to synthesize these into a coherent system. There are three aspects that re-emerge in the ethnography: play, trance and medicine (see Figure 7.1).

An experienced Ju/'hoan trance dancer cautioned that one should not assume that a particular dance is only for play because in such a dance, too, a person may fall into a trance. 'Sometimes people just play at a drum dance and sometimes it's a healing dance' (/Ai!ae N!a'an quoted in Katz, Biesele & St Denis 1997: 121). The ≠Akhoe Hai//om also sometimes talk about people 'just playing' (/huru tsu) when dancing but while 'playing' and 'conducting a ritual' are conceptual opposites in Western terms, the same separation cannot be presupposed for the social agency contained in the trance dance. It would be a gross misunderstanding both in terms of local concepts and local practice to treat this 'playing' as if it were an imitation and as if a dance with play and without trance were 'false'. It is important to emphasize this point because there is a marked tendency among outside observers to distinguish medicine dances according to their 'authenticity', where the more intensive the trance is in a dance, the more 'authentic' it is considered to be. It is a matter of empirical enquiry to establish whether the same distinction is made from a practitioner's point of view and in the communicative situation of the speakers involved. Interview data suggest that a dance without trance or with a less-violent trance is not seen as some kind of betrayal of the values of the medicine dance. Such a dance may not be considered to be as effective as one with trance but no attempt would be made to discredit it on dogmatic grounds. Ethnographers have been uneasy to use 'trance' as an adequate rendering of local terms.⁶ Similarly, dealing with the problem of translation regarding the notion of medicine, they 'were constantly frustrated in any attempt to pin down its "meaning"' (Katz, Biesele & St Denis 1997: 18).⁷

When a healer claims to have experienced *!aia* trance, either by saying so explicitly or by behaving in a way that others call *!aia*, he can in fact make a number of claims, for example to have travelled psychically (or physically), to

⁶ '!Aia, often translated as "trance", is actually a state of enhanced awareness in which the healer claims, among other things, to travel physically and psychically over great distances, to see inside other people's bodies, and to contact the gods – all in the effort to heal' (Katz, Biesele & St Denis 1997: 19).

⁷ 'Some anthropologists have translated *n/om* as "medicine", but it is more than just medicine. *N/om* is energy, spiritual energy. There are many referents for *n/om* (...) Things of power, including things out of the ordinary, such as herbal medicines, African sorcery, menstrual blood, and the vapour trail of a jet, are among the contexts in which the word *n/om* is used' (Katz, Biesele & St Denis 1997: 18).

have been in another body, to have been in contact with God or to have been in a state of half-death for the benefit of healing. As we will see, the list of claims is potentially endless because ever more complex dance events and communicative events may occur in which a slightly different claim may be made. Similarly, the list of power-things that are called *n/om* (medicine) is apparently an open one including ancient herbal medicines, sorcery introduced by neighbouring groups and vapour trails from jet engines.

The traditional, formalist approach to this problem has been based on a strict separation between the linguistic form chosen by a speaker and the context of the utterance. Analysis proceeded through a collection of examples of the form used in a variety of contexts. The collection would then be used in an attempt to pin down the literal meaning of a word or lexeme and its figurative or metaphorical uses.⁸ In this particular case, one would need to compare all the instances in which the terms */huru*, *!aia* and *n/om* are used to establish whether they can indeed be classed as play, trance or medicine, and to establish what derived meanings there are. The trouble with this approach is that it proves to be an impossible task and is ultimately self-defeating. As Hanks (1996) pointed out, context is inexhaustible and there is no way of knowing from the data when enough applications of a term have been collected to fix its literal or derived meaning.

Generative linguistics, and also historical linguistics, has dominated linguistics through its conceptualization of language as an abstract system, called grammar, which is put into action by an abstract speaker in changing situations. Variation, semantic or pragmatic in kind, is thought to emerge as speakers put the abstract system to work in certain circumstances. This notion of speakers acting out the grammar of a language has had influence beyond linguistics. In academic and popular anthropology, culture is often seen as being parallel to language in this sense. It is considered an abstract system of rules, regulations and meanings instilled in social actors who act out what has been given to them by previous generations. Change occurs as speakers put cultural traits to new uses or adapt them to changing conditions. Some historians, too, entertain a similar view, if only implicitly, insofar as they talk of heritage and generations, of individuals and collectives enacting their respective roles in historical mechanisms such as the class struggle or the regional political economy. All of these attempts to elicit an abstract system, which is then applied or enacted by speakers, carriers of culture or persons in history, are self-defeating. There is simply no way of knowing when we have accumulated enough acts of speech,

⁸ In the academic division of labour, linguists were expected to fix the literal meanings, while anthropologists were usually left the task of concentrating on metaphors and on lexemes that have no clear literal meaning.

culture or history to produce an adequate description of the abstract system that we assume to be generating the plethora of forms that we see on the surface. Given this impossibility, the research community is divided into two opposing camps – an interpretative one that aims for more and more descriptive detail and has largely given up on the idea of finding any generative principles, and an analytic camp that sees no alternative to reductionist models which are, to some extent, immune to the critical potential of new data. However recently there have been suggestions as to how this unproductive dichotomy can be overcome, at least in linguistics but – as I will argue – also in the anthropology and history of Africa. The key idea is to go beyond a dichotomous division into form and use (in language or in cultural/historical action) and to replace the notion of an idealized speaker (performer of cultural and historical acts) with that of participatory frames in which agents are situated and from which they speak and do other things. Taking the participation framework in which speakers/agents are engaged as our unit of analysis allows us to account for the effects of agency as interaction progresses between all the parties involved in the framework.

Returning to the healing dance we could say that the term used to describe what is happening at a medicine dance has to be interpreted in terms of different positions within the participatory framework. This is not only true for metaphorical uses of a word but also for its literal meaning. The assumption, shared by formalists as well as many relationalists, that there is a well-defined centre from which fixed meaning fades at the margins is an illusion that leads to unsatisfactory linguistic descriptions. When ≠Akhoe Hai//om talk about their medicine dance as being ‘play’ (*/huru*), one may – on the basis of the English lexicon – consider this to be an extension of the literal meaning of ‘to play’ as in playing with toys or cards. However, this assumption would not be warranted either in terms of quantity or in terms of quality. ≠Akhoe Hai//om have very few toys and contexts that are explicitly marked as ‘games’ (*/hurub*). This is in contrast to a good number of occasions on which the healing dance, and ‘playing’ as a frequent element of it, takes place. In a collection of everyday utterances it is likely that, quantitatively, the central meaning of */huru* would appear to be the medicine dance and not playing games. In terms of quality, one could also argue that the ways in which games are played by the ≠Akhoe Hai//om is informed by the way in which the healing dance is carried out, and not vice versa. Games usually involve the whole body, often go with songs or dances and are a valued cooperative engagement – very much like the healing dance. Thus it is difficult to say what the literal meaning of */huru* is. Moreover, there is no way of establishing it once and for all by adding instances and contexts because the context is potentially indefinite.

If the unit of analysis is no longer the individual speaker but the participatory framework in which speakers and listeners engage with one another, it is prom-

ising to look more closely at the participatory structure of a dance because it is often decisive for the path that it takes. The way in which people communicate about dance events in the course of social interaction is part of the event insofar as it initiates cooperation and influences the way in which the dance develops. Consider the following situation taken from my field records.

Around 10 p.m. during a moonlit night weak singing started at the other end of the camp (at !Uri!khums). At /Aba!nanis people were already wrapped up in blankets at their fires. Two senior women, !Gamekhas and her daughter !Hares talked about the singing, they identified the singers, joked about the shrill voice of one of the women but showed no inclination of walking over to join the event. An hour later the singing still continued and a few more voices seemed to have joined in. I walked over to find out who was there and I saw four young women singing, one more senior woman sitting quietly and a number of young boys imitating the trance dance and fooling around. On the way I passed a number of huts where people were lying at their fires but apparently still awake. I/naib, a senior man who also dances the trance dance, saw me passing and remarked: 'It is only a small elephant (dance), only a child elephant, the grown-up people are all asleep'. After a while I returned to sleep but I was able to hear the singing continuing all night. It only stopped shortly before sunrise. None of the senior people of /Aba!nanis attended the dance but a young worker (≠Abarab) had and I saw him before he went off to work the next morning (having been at the dance all night). He was beaming with delight and said that they have been 'playing' (/huru) all night, that it was a great dance and that I/naib, too, had joined in together with one of the !Xū visitors dancing and that it did not stop before sunrise.

We do not and never will know all the social agents involved in this event. It is likely that at all fire places throughout the camp there was talk about this dance and about the singing, an implicit discourse leading to the decision as to whether to join in or not. The fact that many did not come to the dance is also a statement, a communicative act on their part. But there is, even in this clearly demarcated event, no way of explicating 'the whole context' either in the immediate setting or in the larger setting which would include previous performances. Due to my own positioning in this event, I could only hear the comments from one of the non-participants' fires. The women there did not comment on 'the dance', 'the elephant dance' or 'the trance dance', they merely commented (negatively) on the singing they could hear and the singers they could identify. The younger people at the fire were also still awake, they listened to what was being said but they were not in a position to comment, given that they had little experience of the dancing. I/naib, at a fire place much closer to the singing, acknowledged that this was in fact an elephant dance, not just the singing of a few individuals, even though it was a 'small' elephant of children. In his view the elephant had, as it were, grown later on because he himself joined it at a later stage. The singers, the young women and the boys sang the songs that recognizably form part of the elephant dance but they did

not pretend to be serious. Instead they exaggerated their singing and their dancing, making the indirect statement that they were 'playing'. This is then made explicit by ≠Abarab who took pride in the fact that they had been 'playing' the whole night. Being a young worker who was primarily out for entertainment, there was nothing negative in his statement that they had been 'playing' and not healing. I have recorded other events which seemed to be serious affairs but in which some participants would still speak of the /*huru/ais*, the fire where the playing took place, and of the 'words of the game' when referring to the !Xū text of songs sung at the dance. My argument is that any explanation sought for the use of these terms in changing contexts is to be found not primarily in individual competence, preference or individual agency but in the participatory framework which includes everyone present (including the researcher), their social relationships, their positions within groups and settings and the overall conditions of the event, including the prospect of rain or the availability of firewood or bright moonshine – and the available ritual forms.

We are dealing here with a form of social agency in which one event and its participatory frame can actively construct the experience of participants and bystanders through its relation with earlier events connected to trance dances. The effect of this construction can be a positive reconfirmation of social bonds and – in an interethnic setting – of San identity, but it also has the potential to negate certain aspects, for instance, those more closely related to healing. Whatever the case in the particular circumstances, this is sufficient to expand the notion of agency beyond the individuals involved and incorporate the participatory frame since it is more than the passive background or stage for individual agency.

Making reference to a dance always involves positioning oneself, as an active supporter, as a dancer, a patient, a sceptic or a non-participant. Moreover, the dance, its meaning and meandering, and its effect and effectiveness depend on the positions that people take towards it. San people talk freely about the trance dance and there is no sense of secrecy attached to it. There are stories full of fascinating details (for example, of dancers stabbing themselves without being wounded) and stories full of contempt (for example, towards bad dancers and the shrieking voices of singers). In the kind of analysis suggested here, the point is that an appropriate understanding of these comments about dances, as well as of action taken during dances, depends on understanding the way in which participants are positioned and position themselves towards one another – which is the one thing they do not elaborate on in their comments (see Hanks 1996: 164 for a parallel analysis). Participants do not make explicit reference to obligations held towards specific 'patients' or dancers, to the effect of residence with regard to participation, or to their being attracted or appalled by certain persons, actions, places, situations, strategies of demand cooperation and of

responding to these demands. Nevertheless, these aspects of being positioned in social space form the relational baseline that makes actions and utterances intelligible. Social agents also position themselves with regard to the *ludic* aspect of the dance, as well as the *tremendum* aspect (see Otto 1979:14-22), depending on whether they primarily are out for fun or whether they want the dance to achieve something serious and extremely powerful. Many senior men and women want to distance themselves from the young workers who are only out for fun and who may be sceptical of the healing power of the dance. One means of doing this is to consider the dancing of the latter as 'play'. In other contexts however, senior ≠Akhoe Hai//om trance dancers may talk of their own dancing as play when positioning themselves with regard to !Xū medicine dancers who are considered much more powerful and senior in this sense. Finally, the notion of play comes in when participants in the ritual position themselves with regard to the other participant forces, namely //Gauab and !Khub. In their relationship with these superhuman agents, the position of all the participants, including the most proficient dancers, is one of players who cannot wholly control the outcome of the game.⁹ I suggest that this is a realistic assessment given that agency is not exhausted by the acts of individuals.

Conclusion

When rituals like the healing dance are thought to be carried out 'in order to' relieve tensions and create social cohesion, strategic behaviour is presupposed in which 'players' or 'actors' are detached enough to design a ritual to match their needs. By contrast, the practical sense of playing which is outlined above for the trance dancers and which Bourdieu (1977) has ascribed to all practice is radically different in that it is engagement in the game, not detachment from it, which characterizes what agents do. Part of this engagement is the importance of time for the agents, who feel pressed to do something and who adapt their behaviour not simply to what *is* but to what they expect to happen. This analysis

⁹ Moreover, the players have a particular expectation about the rules of the game. Hunter-gatherers often play their games in a way that entices people with assets to bring these in when playing (as a gain) and forces a winner to continue playing, usually until he/she has again lost some of the gains (Woodburn 1982a, McKnight 2002). This creates a mix of competitiveness and cooperation that is different from the way in which games are played in other contexts, including the dominant contexts in the West. As Turner pointed out, the element of renunciation, of giving up a gain under the rules of the game, is something that is not exclusively limited to hunter-gatherer contexts but may also be found in marginal areas of the West, in his case among mature Sunday morning ice-hockey clubs in Canada (Turner 1999: 225).

raises doubts as to whether it is useful to uphold the established view that considered trance dancing as a threefold limitation of agency in terms of its collectiveness, its ritual character and the effect of trance on the body. This functionalist view of ritual as a social institution that responds to a variety of social and psychological needs considers agency solely in terms of acts and actors as in 'game theory' in the narrow, transactionalist sense. However, this is different from the perspective of the agents themselves and poses contradictions and dilemmas for ethnographic analysis in the sense in this contribution. The players do not analyze their own situation in a detached mode and apply the ritual as a strategy for dealing with it but they are driven by their expectations (positive as well as negative) and correspondingly engage, or do not engage, themselves in a certain way and alter the participatory framework of which they are a part. The particular examples of ritual as play and as medicine presented here suggest a view that (re-)discovers agency and agents beyond the narrow scope of individual actors. In contrast to idealized and standardized 'actors', the agents who participate in the healing dance or who have participated in it over time do not all have the same mental image, the same motivation or habitual disposition towards the dance. Their 'share' in the participatory frame called 'healing dance' only partially overlaps. It is incomplete and changes over time. The practices of the trance dances therefore need to be included as sources for innovation and agency. They seem to constitute a source with more lasting effects than the inventions and actions that can be traced to individual persons.

The perspective suggested here is not one of measuring the history of individual agents interfering with the seemingly static forms of collective trance rituals but a history of trance dances as a succession of events in which cooperative projects unfold. These projects vary to the extent that they involve 'play', 'entertainment', 'healing', 'trance' and increasingly even 'commercial enterprise'. They can be shown to be mutually reinforcing in some parts and in competition in others. In any case, the ritual forms involved are not passive vessels for the aspirations of individual agents but are an important feature that structures changing participatory frameworks. We should, therefore, expand our established notion of agency so that it can be understood as an attribute of cultural forms. Returning to the dilemma outlined at the beginning of this chapter we are now in the position to escape the simplistic opposition between European individualism and African traditionalism without glossing over the ethnography of diverging experiences of contexts, such as those of trance dancing. This is not simply a matter of academic interest but also of critical importance for San people today.

References

- Barnard, A. 1979, 'Nharo Bushman Medicine and Medicine Men', *Africa* (49): 68-80.
- Bieseles, M. 1993, *Women Like Meat: The Folklore and Foraging Ideology of the Kalahari Ju/'hoan*, Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
- Bieseles, M. 1997, 'An Ideal of Unassisted Birth: Hunting, Healing, and Transformation among the Kalahari Ju/'hoansi', in: R.E. Davis-Floyd & C.F. Sargent (eds), *Child-birth and Authoritative Knowledge. Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 474-92.
- Bloch, M. 1986, *From Blessing to Violence: History and Ideology in the Circumcision Ritual of the Merina of Madagascar*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bloch, M. 1992, *Prey Into Hunter*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bloch, M., & J. Parry 1982, *Death and the Regeneration of Life*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. 1977, *Towards a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Carstens, P. 1982, 'The Socio-Economic Context of Initiation Ceremonies among Two Southern African Peoples', *Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines/Canadian Journal of African Studies* (16): 505-22.
- Durkheim, E. 1912, *Les Formes Élémentaires de la Vie Religieuse*, Paris: Alcan.
- Guenther, M.G. 1975, 'The Trance Dancer as an Actor of Social Change among the Farm Bushmen of the Ghanzi District', *Botswana Notes and Records* (7): 61-66.
- Guenther, M.G. 1976, 'The San Trance Dance: Ritual and Revitalization among the Farm Bushmen of the Ghanzi District, Republic of Botswana', *Journal of the South West African Scientific Society* (30): 45-53.
- Guenther, M.G. 1979, 'Bushman Religion and the (non) Sense of Anthropological Theory of Religion', *Sociologus* (29): 102-32.
- Guenther, M.G. 1996, 'Diversity and Flexibility: The Case of the Bushmen of Southern Africa', in S. Kent (ed.), *Cultural Diversity among Twentieth-Century Foragers: An African Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 65-86.
- Guenther, M.G. 1999, *Tricksters and Trancers. Bushman Religion and Society*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Hanks, W. 1996, *Language and Communicative Practices*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Houseman, M. & C. Severi 1998, *Naven or the Other Self: A Relational Approach to Ritual Action*, Leiden: Brill.
- Katz, R. 1982, *Boiling Energy: Community Healing among the Kalahari !Kung*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Katz, R., M. Bieseles & V. St. Denis 1997, *Healing Makes Our Hearts Happy. Spirituality and Cultural Transformation among the Kalahari Ju/'hoansi*, Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions.
- Lee, R.B. 1968, 'The Sociology of !Kung Bushman Trance Performances', in: R. Prince (ed.), *Trance and Possession States*, Montreal: Bucke Memorial Society, pp. 35-54.
- Marshall, L. 1969, 'The Medicine Dance of the !Kung Bushmen', *Africa* (39): 347-81.
- Marshall, L. 1999, *Nyae Nyae !Kung. Beliefs and Rites*, Cambridge, MA: Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology.
- McKnight, D. 2002, *From Hunting to Drinking. The Devastating Effects of Alcohol on an Australian Aboriginal Community*, London: Routledge.

- Morris, B. 1988, *Anthropological Studies of Religion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Olivier, E. 2001, 'Categorizing the Ju/'hoan Musical Heritage', in: T. Widlok & K. Sugawara (eds), *Symbolic Categories and Rituals Practice in Hunter-Gatherer Experiences, Vol. 27, African Study Monographs Supplementary Issue*, Kyoto: Center for African Area Studies, pp. 11-27.
- Otto, R. 1979, *Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*, München: Beck.
- Rappaport, R.A. 1999, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sugawara, K. 1990, 'Interactional Aspects of the Body in Co-presence: Observations on the Central Kalahari San', in: M. Moerman & M. Nomura (eds), *Culture Embodied, Vol. 27, Senri Ethnological Studies*, Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, pp. 79-123.
- Sullivan, S. 2001, 'Difference, Identity, and Access to Official Discourses. Hai//om, "Bushmen", and a Recent Namibian Ethnography', *Anthropos* (96): 179-92.
- Turner, D. 1999, *Genesis Regained. Aboriginal Forms of Renunciation in Judeo-Christian Scriptures and Other Major Traditions*, New York: Lang.
- Valiente-Noailles, C. 1993, *The Kua. Life and Soul of the Central Kalahari Bushmen*, Rotterdam: Balkema.
- Wagner, R. 1978, *Lethal Speech. Daribi Myth as Symbolic Obviation*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Wagner, R. 1981, *The Invention of Culture*, Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Widlok, T. 1992, 'Practice, Politics and Ideology of the "Travelling Business" in Aboriginal Religion', *Oceania* (63):114-36.
- Widlok, T. 1999, *Living on Mangetti. 'Bushman' Autonomy and Namibian Independence*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Widlok, T. 2001, 'The Illusion of a Future? Medicine Dance Rituals for the Civil Society of Tomorrow', in: T. Widlok & K. Sugawara (eds), *Symbolic Categories and Ritual Practice in Hunter-Gatherer Experiences, Vol. 27, African Study Monographs Supplementary Issue*, Kyoto: Center of African Area Studies, pp. 165-83.
- Woodburn, J. 1982a, 'Egalitarian Societies', *Man* (17): 431-51.
- Woodburn, J. 1982b, 'Social Dimension of Death in Four African Hunting and Gathering Societies', in: M. Bloch & J. Parry (eds), *Death and the Regeneration of Life*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Woodburn, J. 2005, 'Egalitarian Societies Revisited', in: T. Widlok & W. Tadesse (eds), *Property and Equality. Volume One*, Oxford: Berghahn, pp. 18-31.

The dynamics of families, their work and provisioning strategies in the changing economies in the urban townships of Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Otrude N. Moyo

This chapter considers the emerging family forms, dynamics and economic agency in Bulawayo's urban townships. Because of the inhospitable economic and political environment in Zimbabwe and the absence of innovative governmental social care initiatives, families remain an important coping mechanism in dealing with poverty and militating against societal deterioration. They draw upon varied and complex alliances and networks that span national borders. The chapter considers the usefulness of the concepts of 'families' and 'households' in understanding the economic agentiveness of urban township families and outlines socio-historical formations and political economic changes that have sculpted family forms, work and provisioning strategies in Zimbabwe. Three case studies illustrate emerging family forms, dynamics and their economic agency, demonstrating how families negotiate livelihoods by diversifying work and provisioning strategies. However, while this diversification staves off starvation, the particularistic tendencies involved place insurmountable strain on avenues to translate private troubles into public concerns. While the author recognizes that historically the political economic climate has not been conducive for Zimbabweans to realize their potential and communality, it is argued that the current survivalist mode is eroding the basic glue that holds society together.

Introduction

The economic lives of African families in Zimbabwe continue to be an interaction of structured inequalities in the increasingly globalizing political economy and the agency of individuals and families who are trying to cope with the changes (Moyo 2001).¹ This chapter highlights the economic agency of African families in the context of the changing political and economic environment. It recognizes that economic strategies assumed by families are inextricably linked to family forms, the dynamics of family life, and the resources and opportunities available to them. The concern with understanding families, their work and livelihood strategies arises largely because the nature and patterns of work and provisioning strategies undertaken by families in urban households are often not understood, nor are the dynamics of family life (Muthwa 1994, Moyo 2001).

How individuals in families negotiate their identity and livelihoods remains anecdotal and attempts to unravel how African households work and provision are frequently clouded by the dominant categorization of these households as underdeveloped and pre-capitalist peasants. African livelihoods are often said to be based on patriarchal and self-sufficient peasant economies, with Africans locked in a cultural bind that oppresses women and, in turn, makes the advancement of a free-market economy impossible (Gordon 1996, Riphenburg 1997). These persistent views and understandings of the African family and economic strategies act as a hindrance and liability to an awareness of the dynamics of families and their livelihoods. With these images at the fore, the embeddedness of African families and their livelihoods within the economic, social and political reality has become invisible and an examination of the adaptive resilience of African families, which could suggest policies for their general welfare, is not encouraged.

African families in Zimbabwe have not been static and have been undergoing massive transformation (Ncube *et al.* 1997). The marked changes brought about by colonial capitalism, the struggle for independence, the nationalist ideals at post independence and now the rolling-back of the state accompanied by decline in social care, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and declining local economies through internal policies and the marginal incorporation into the global economic system are part of the shift that is influencing economic activities and also family forms and relational dynamics. In terms of family forms and who is considered family, Ncube *et al.* (1997) suggest that families in Zimbabwe have been mutating and creating a mosaic of patterns – single parents as families,

¹ This was concluded from an investigation into the experiences of fifty households that participated in a study undertaken in Bulawayo's townships. Fieldwork was done in 1999-2000, as part of my PhD entitled 'Dealing with Work in its Context: An Analysis of Household Work and Provisioning Strategies in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe'.

child-centred families, families of siblings and grandparent-headed families – and are joining the web of diverse family forms (Moyo 2001). Family dynamics are varied too, with some families experiencing relational strain, being exploitative of members, sometimes non-coherent and non-harmonious, while others remain cohesive, reciprocal, coherent and harmonious even as they are being torn apart by the effects of change (Moyo 2001).

Analysis of the socioeconomic literature on the status of economic activities suggests that work strategies undertaken by families have historically been changing throughout the world (Pahl & Wallace 1985, Warde 1990, Rakodi 1994). In Bulawayo's townships, work strategies reflect a variety of activities incorporating rural, urban and sometimes international spheres, informal and formal systems of work and self-sufficiency, and activities incorporating farm and non-farm activities (Moyo, 2001). Activities may be consumer driven, sometimes using money and, in instances where money is not available, people exchange goods and services in intricate ways to get by (see Gershuny 1983, Pahl & Wallace 1985, Warde 1990, Leonard 1992, Rakodi 1994). These scholars have argued that families as aggregates of individuals embedded within complex social network systems undertake multiple economic and non-economic activities, domestic maintenance activities and provisioning strategies, and activities in formalized and non-formalized markets, all of which form the basis of families' livelihoods in the changing economies. These ideas bring together the thesis that families are not only consumptive units but also that their dynamics incorporate consumption, production, reproductive and control/sanction dimensions, with family members negotiating livelihoods in different spheres (Muthwa 1994).

Recognizing that African families in Zimbabwe are varied, fluid and constantly mutating (Ncube *et al.* 1997) and that there is no typical 'family', I wanted to find out how people who relate to each other as 'families' cope with economic decline and shape their own lives. The struggle for survival and the intentional quality of the dynamics of families can be seen in family members' own (oral) accounts of the details of their experiences. This chapter draws on narratives of selected families in Bulawayo townships recounting their family forms, dynamics, work and provisioning strategies. Let us begin by considering the concepts of 'families' and 'households'.

'Families' and 'households': Useful concepts for understanding economic agency?

In popular culture, the concept of family is thrown around a lot but an analytical distinction between the concepts of families and households is useful. Different scholars have defined families in different ways and for varied purposes

(Muthwa 1994). Gonzalez (1985) defines a family as a group of people bound together by kinship ties, between at least two of which there is a conjugal relationship. The conjugal pair, often referring to a man and woman plus their offspring, forms the nuclear family. This family has been viewed as a universal phenomenon. In this same lens, it is the nuclear family that has been the cornerstone of social policy and has been used as a measure of the well-being of nations (Ahlburg & de Vita 1997). According to this definition, the extended family is seen as an extension of this nuclear family, with each being identified by the nature of the kinship relationship between the conjugal pair. With the nuclear family as the popularized family form, other family forms are often perceived as deviant, neglected and/or viewed as pathological and therefore problematic (Moyo & Kawewe, forthcoming).

While this definition of family has been used to analyze kinship relations, it has been clearly problematic (see Gonzalez 1985, Muthwa 1994). In many of the households interviewed and presented here there is no visible conjugal pair to warrant classifying families into nuclear units with extensions. From experience and fieldwork in Bulawayo, it would appear that family members bound by conjugal relations may be scattered over several households. The husband-father may be living in another rural area, city or even another country, one or more of the children may be fostered with relatives, and the mother may be working as a live-in domestic worker in another household.² Instead of imposing a reality about families which is inherently unreal (Ncube *et al.* 1997: 107), I explore the following questions: Who is family? What relations and dynamics are ushered in by economic change and severe urban poverty? The discussion below echoes Ncube's description of emerging family forms as highly complex, fluid, amorphous, flexible and varied. The question is how the fluid, complex, amorphous families create and recreate communal-ness to take private troubles into public issues.

Different scholars have defined the concept of household as a unit of analysis in many different ways and for varied purposes. As part of the household economics model, Becker (1981) defines a household as a residential unit whose members share domestic functions and activities, with an internally unified structure and an altruistic head who acts as a decision-maker for the whole unit. In its functional nature, the household is seen as a place of cooperation, mutual responsibility and reciprocity. Yet others, particularly those scholars adopting the Marxist-feminist paradigm, identify households as the arena of subordination (Townsend & Mornsen 1987, quoted in Muthwa 1994). While it is acknowledged that members of a household may share a residence,

² This type of work is prevalent among individuals who lack the financial capital needed to create other work for themselves.

although this is often not the case, Marxist-feminists see households as places of inequity with members engaged in power struggles in decision-making processes as well as in the control and allocation of resources (Guyer 1981, Warde 1990). I consider households in this chapter loosely to mean residential units whose members share a township house as has been described by Mackintosh (1979), Brydon and Chant (1989), Muthwa (1994) and Moyo (2001).

The ethnographic context: Situating families, their work and provisioning strategies in Bulawayo

The ethnographic context and the selection of cases

The selected cases presented here were obtained from a broader ethnographic study conducted by the author of fifty urban households in Bulawayo's townships³ between 1999 and 2000. The study explored how African families made ends meet when faced with a declining economy and a precarious political environment. The households were randomly selected from a list of 1084 household addresses of school children attending a local primary school, and participants were householders, people who were willing to speak on behalf of the members of the households and their 'families'. A series of interviews were held with each household. These were mainly group interviews with women, men and children, relatives, kin, neighbours and friends. The questions were open-ended to allow different themes – about the family, the dynamics of families, and their work and livelihood strategies – to emerge (see Moyo 2001).⁴ Using vignettes, three family cases are presented here to contextualize the findings.

In the initial study, households were used as a point of entry to understand families and their economic agency. For example, within households there were various other families. A case in point is a household (meaning a residential dwelling) – where a *de-facto* child-centred family were lodgers sharing the domestic dwelling and facilities with the owners of the house who constituted another family. It is not necessary to debate the distinction between families and non-families and households and non-households but to understand how people

³ Townships were historically confined spaces for Africans by law due to the policies of racial segregation before Zimbabwe's independence in 1980. Since independence there have been name changes and today townships are referred to as 'high-density suburbs'. Former exclusively white suburbs are now referred to as 'low-density areas'. For an elaborate discussion, see Bond (1993).

⁴ Data from the broader study has been used in various publications by this author on poverty, the socioeconomic status of women, issues of child labour, family violence and lone parenting issues. See also Moyo (forthcoming).

in urban townships view familial connectivity and the circumstances in which they use the word 'family' to explain their agency. Before family cases are discussed in detail, let us briefly consider some of the social formations that have influenced family forms, dynamics, their work and provisioning in Zimbabwe.

Historical and social context of families in Zimbabwe

An in-depth discussion of the historical and structural processes that have sculptured the socioeconomic structure of Zimbabwean society is beyond the scope of this chapter⁵ but an overview of the historical and structural processes that have influenced the work of African families is essential to understand the current position of these families.⁶ First, the institutionalization of colonial capitalism and the peculiarities of Zimbabwe as a racialized society under the hegemony of the colonial capitalism ushered in peculiar social and economic arrangements that characterize African families, their work and provisioning (Gaidzanwa 1996, Moyo 2001). The colonial period was characterized by a racialization of the political economy, with racialization here being defined as the emergence of legal and normative functions to bestow political economy privileges to whites to the exclusion of the African population (Moyo & Kawewe 2002). This became embedded in social practices and institutions throughout Zimbabwean society for at least 100 years of colonial rule until Zimbabwe's independence in 1980.⁷

Laws and regulations⁸ were designed, implemented and utilized by the white-settler regimes to achieve their various missions. Policies included the physical and political coercion of Africans as labourers, legislated discrimination in employment and wages, segregated residence, the controlled movement – particularly of African males – by the pass laws, and the control of African

⁵ For additional information, see Mandaza (1985) and Bond & Manyanya (2001).

⁶ For a discussion about major social changes and the resulting socioeconomic structures, see Mandaza (1985) and Ake (1987).

⁷ For an elaborate discussion, see Sylvester (2000).

⁸ For example, the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 dealt with the forced movement of Africans to create space for European settlers, the Native (Urban Areas) Accommodation and Registration Act of 1946 introduced stricter regulations on African movement into urban areas, and the Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951 placed further restrictions on settlement in rural areas. These laws all infringed upon Africans' livelihoods. See also, Worby's discussion of the administrative procedures and practices the settler government used on Africans as objects or reform/advancement – disciplining the African body, the African family, land tenure and the rationalization of agrarian techniques. Ndoro (1996) discusses the settler government's interventions in economic activities, taxation, labour and housing.

women as minors for life (Barnes 1997, Ndoro 1996, Worby 2000). Simultaneously, educational, agricultural, taxation, land and wage policies were instituted to ensure that Africans did not develop human capital and/or independent markets. The policies covered identified areas and ensured that African families participated in the formal economy in a manner that complemented white-settler interests. All these factors were complementary in creating viable colonial capitalism (Sylvester 1991, Gaidzanwa 1996, Ndoro 1996). African labour was incorporated into the economy of settler governments and used to meet the need for cheap and exploitable labour (Ndoro 1996) with little attention being paid to the well-being of African families except insofar as it related to economic productivity and, through limited liberal policies, attempts to develop the perceived 'uncivilized' (Worby 2000). Although experiences of family life during this period were varied, the dominant structure of family life as described by a racialized polity was strongly patriarchal and often denied Africans, particularly women, their rights and constrained their personal autonomy (see Barnes 1999).

A second element in contextualizing African families, their work and provisioning is Zimbabwe's negotiating of the liberal order of free-markets and democracy under socialist rhetoric at independence and post independence. Like all other nationalist governments emerging from colonial rule, the new ZANU-PF-led government at independence in 1980 became preoccupied with state-constructed realities including families. According to Ncube *et al.* (1997), the extended family was seen through a traditionalist and sometimes romanticist lens as representing the 'African way'. As such, the extended family was viewed as the 'African way' of familyhood providing stability, security, solidarity and collective interests above individual and abstract interests such as love, personal choice and happiness. The extended family was presumed to be the bedrock of traditional African family life. Nostalgic appeals to traditional family forms were and are still made to deride the dynamics in families and social problems (Ncube *et al.* 1997).

Accompanying this traditional view of the family was state-engineered development that was believed to be the first strategy towards arresting all socioeconomic imbalances resulting from the racialized colonial arrangements.⁹ To this end, radical policies¹⁰ were formulated – and in some cases implemented – to counter the effects of colonialism in most areas of social life – in education, health, housing, safe drinking water, nutrition and employment. On paper,

⁹ Nelson (1982) discusses how Africans earned less than half the wages paid to whites in the same positions.

¹⁰ See the *Journal of Social Change: Voices of the Zimbabwe Left*, which evaluates Zimbabwe's political economy against socialist ideals.

blatant racism and discrimination became unacceptable yet in reality the entrenchment of racialization in the political economy prevailed and sculpted pathways to other forms of exclusions and defining new members of the torturable classes (see Moyo, forthcoming). These changes were occurring in a local and international context of unequal exchange that continues to undervalue indigenous labour and undermine entrepreneurial functions of Africans. This unequal exchange in the international system when it interacted with the local scene in Zimbabwe ushered in its own complex problems in terms of bestowing privileges by class, race, ethnicity, gender and regionality (ibid.). While the link between securing wealth for the few had been cemented in colonial times with the state maintaining socialism for white people (Sylvester 1991), at independence the set structures enabled the dominant African ethnic groups to close ranks and secure their privileges to the exclusion and marginalization of others (Alexander, McGregor & Ranger 2000). The result was that some families, because of their connectivity to the power of the ruling class and resource distribution, were rewarded, protected and enjoyed upward social mobility. Many without the resources and the connections continued to eke out a living on the margins (Moyo 2001).

The post-independence period was a time of reconstruction, and efforts were made to reduce the inequities that had been introduced by colonial capitalism. In this regard, Zimbabwe was considered to be one of the more successful African countries economically, politically and administratively (Rakodi 1994). However, within the presumed model of success, hidden realities of inequities plagued the Zimbabwean economy. For instance, while growth with equity was the national policy, it encouraged redistribution but not necessarily efficient wealth creation, and the government did not invest much of what it earned into local profit-making enterprises. Instead, claims by private individuals on government/public resources became a siphoning-off process to realize private interests. In this respect, Zimbabwe is an example of the crisis of enclave state capitalism, characterized by privileges enjoyed by a few who have benefited from the fruits of rapid growth in expenditure. This helps to explain the concentration of the nation's resources in the hands of a small group (Moyo, forthcoming).

A third way to contextualize families, their experiences, work and provisioning strategies is capital flight and the de-industrialization of the fledgling Zimbabwean economy in the late 1980s and early 1990s. As soon as there was an African government, 'white' capital that had been so important to the economy rapidly began to leave Zimbabwe, moving to places where it felt protected. This coincided with rapid global processes that opened up Zimbabwe's economy (Bond & Manyanya 2001). As a result of capital flight, de-industrialization set in, compounding the already massive problems of unem-

ployment, underemployment, high inflation and low earnings. Capital flight occurred within a climate of 'hidden' ZANU-PF-led governmental atrocities in the western part of the country (Alexander, McGregor & Ranger 2000), which led to destabilization in the region forcing a mass exodus of people from the southwestern part of Zimbabwe to seek refuge and economic survival elsewhere, while other Zimbabweans enjoyed the fruits of newly found independence, again compounding the marginalization of this population in economic and political resources internal to Zimbabwe.

The fourth caveat to understand the dynamics of families and their work strategies lies with the peculiarities of Zimbabwe negotiating its place under neo-liberalism where the order of global relations saw an ideological shift from a position in which government regulation of the economy was seen as critical in mitigating adverse market forces to newly found mantra for less governmental interference in the market. In Zimbabwe, the rolling-back of the state through structural adjustment programmes and the mushrooming of non-governmental organizations as part of civil society has seen the return to an economic system that has kept the masses unemployed, those employed have seen their wages stagnate and, with the call to privatize everything, this has led to a decline in social care and public services (Bond & Manyanya 2001). Economic restructuring policies whereby international financial institutions dictated socioeconomic structures have exacerbated Zimbabwe's economic collapse and poverty (ibid.). The changes that followed the adoption of structural adjustment programmes crippled the already ailing economy (Bond 1999) and the cumulative effect of the collapsing economy can be seen in the performance of key economic indicators. For example, industrial output declined because liberalization increased global competition in an economy that was largely small and protected (Carmody 1998). Private, mainly foreign-owned companies found Zimbabwe unprofitable (ibid.). The decline in manufacturing industries coupled with 'white capital flight' saw a decline in industries where this capital was entrenched, for example in tourism, which is a critical sector in foreign-currency earnings. Added to these economic struggles were unfavourable agro-ecological conditions with persistent droughts affecting agricultural production.

In 1999, the World Bank projected that Zimbabwean GDP would contract by 8.5 per cent in 2001, bringing a cumulative decline in per capita real income of 30 per cent. In 2001, unemployment hovered at around 70 per cent and the exchange rate, which had been US\$1 to Z\$5 in 1985, was US\$1 to Z\$1500 on the black market.¹¹ The disturbing issue is that the decline and contraction of the

¹¹ See discussion by James Ruzvidzo Mafirajureva in his article 'Foreign Currency Crisis and the Efficacy of Devaluation in Zimbabwe', where he argues that the

economy was no cause for alarm as further restructuring efforts were advocated by international financial institutions. Rakodi (1994) argues that Zimbabwe was seen then as having better infrastructure, lower poverty rates and better social indicators, but hidden in these relatively 'better' social indicators were people struggling for survival within a largely commodified economy over which they had no control.

As if this was not all, in international trade, Zimbabwe's produce suffered extensively, particularly the tobacco trade which had been the mainstay of the economy. Lifestyle changes in the West (its major trading partners) led to the softening of Zimbabwe's 'golden leaf' tobacco on the international market, negatively impacting on foreign currency earnings. With the economic collapse and the dwindling of national revenue, the ZANU-PF government resuscitated the centuries-old issue of land redistribution. This was a valid concern in the context of local politicians but an issue that precipitated fear in white land owners and foreign governments who saw Zimbabwe going against the prescriptions of the new western mantra on globalization and free markets. The rapid institutionalization of land redistribution policies in Zimbabwe led to further problems concerning land holdings, resulting in Zimbabwe being kicked out of international lending institutions (Bond & Manyanya 2001). All these changes have impacted on people's livelihood strategies and how families sustain themselves in both the short and long term and their capacity to recover and invest.

By the year 2000 Zimbabwe was in economic and political turmoil. The gentler tone of economic commentators that Zimbabwe was on a steady decline had become a panic over the collapse of the economy. As Zimbabweans took to the streets protesting their loss of employment and earnings, declining capacity for basic social-service provisioning, a fall in their standard of living and the loss of purchasing power, the ZANU-PF-led government responded with violence and repressive policies to block dissension. Political violence marred the country and many more people were forced to flee as economic and political refugees. Anecdotal evidence suggests that more than three million Zimbabweans are currently international migrants. It is in this context that most of Zimbabwe's economic troubles and failures lie (see Raftopoulos 1992, Bond 1999).

Zimbabwean currency was put under pressure by balance-of-payment problems. In 1997, the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe was forced to pull out of the foreign-exchange market and this resulted in the crash of the local currency. To further reduce the outflow of foreign currency, the RBZ raised its interest rate and reintroduced foreign-currency controls but this failed to contain the flow of money out of the country and caused it to crash repeatedly.

Zimbabwe is currently faced with multiple crises making life barely livable for the majority of the population (see Moyo, forthcoming). The economy is operating in fits and starts. Production in all sectors of the economy has been crippled and basic consumer items like electricity and water are erratic. Fuel supplies are available only through the black market and at exploitative prices. What used to be a government-sponsored service is now hampered by corruption and incompetence. With the HIV/AIDS pandemic sweeping the country, the fledgling health-care system has virtually collapsed. Hospitals have no personnel, no medicines and waste and garbage collections have ceased in many cities. In 2006, the year-on-year inflation rate was quoted at 782 per cent, which means incomes and pensions have virtually eroded, along with whatever savings people may have had, and the power to purchase goods for many has been drastically reduced. Those few fortunate families who are able to survive rely on remittances from migrants and informal trading. With the foreign currency scarcity, commodity shortages have become an everyday experience. Living conditions for many are appalling and many Africans have slid back to how they lived in the colonial era when several families huddled into crowded housing with very limited personal and public services. Today people survive by selling whatever they can. Many are dying of hunger and the trauma of living a nightmare. Everyday, droves of people are leaving the country just to survive. To add salt to an open wound, if people protest, the ZANU-PF-led government threatens them and has used brutal force to control disgruntled citizens in despair.

The historical processes and prevailing structural changes in the political economy have had a tremendous impact on African families' livelihoods. It is clear too that the effects are not uniform. A few have had opportunities to make money from the misery of many but for many families the socio-historical processes described above have translated into massive unemployment, severe inequality and brutal poverty (see Ndoro 1996, Moyo 2001). At least in Zimbabwe, the changes described define the context in which African families, their work and livelihood strategies occur and the precarious situation in which African families have been acting as agents in the short and long term. Let us now explore how African families are using their initiative to make ends meet under these severe hardships.

The dynamics of families, their work and livelihoods: Selected cases¹²

Case 1: MaPostori: Families of foreign-currency traders

I first met the three young women of the Mpofo family in their long white dresses and white headscarves at their own house.¹³ The sisters thought I had come to exchange foreign currency and I was greeted with ‘Sister, what have you brought for us *sisi-usiphathelini*?’ A Ndebele colloquial phrase for addressing a visitor/traveller. After explaining my research, the girls were quick to say that their family was indeed *osiphathelin*. Today the phrase is used to indirectly inquire about black-market foreign-currency trading. In the midst of Zimbabwe’s economic decline, the Mpofo family have become prosperous foreign-currency traders, amongst their many economic activities.

Mpofo’s family was relatively large with nineteen members in total and with family members scattered across borders. Some were reported to be living in the neighbouring countries of Botswana and South Africa where they were engaged in street trading. On subsequent visits for interviews, I would often find the three young women at home. They explained that they were keeping house and minding the children while the adults were trading on the city’s streets. They were also responsible for managing the family’s currency-trading business in their township house. Their parents preferred to have the young women stay at home because it was not safe to be working on the street. Many street traders have come into contact with the forces of law and order while trading and police raids have resulted in losses of hard-earned cash.

The young women belonged to the religious group of Johanna Masowe Family and as one girl explained, ‘we belong to Johanna Masowe’s faith and family but everyone keeps calling us MaPostori’. Their religious and cultural practices were important to them. For example, all the women had to cover their heads at all times, and children were only allowed to attend school up to grade seven. Clearly, the questions of equality and individual freedom to choose what they wanted for their lives presented challenges. A grade-seven education was felt by the church to be adequate to function in society. I directly asked the young women to share their views about the church’s beliefs in only educating children up to grade seven. They explained that within the church, members had to prove themselves in both a financial and social sense. As such, members,

¹² Some of the cases presented here have been previously used by this author to illustrate issues of single parenting and child labour in Zimbabwe. See also, Moyo (forthcoming) for a discussion of the families of Valerie and MaMluazi presented here.

¹³ *BaPostori* has become the word on the street for the followers of Johanna Masowe and his way of life. The clothes described here are typical attire for the BaPostori sect.

particularly males, are expected to establish themselves in business at an early age so that they can support families and the church. The young women jokingly explained that with their education they could read and exchange money, which was seen as the ultimate power in today's world. Protecting children's moral development in accordance with Johanna Masowe values seemed to be another concern and, in this regard, parental and church socialization was perceived as important. The young women explained that members of the Johanna Masowe did not believe in the use of modern medicines. However, the tensions about 'church rules' and the reality of the young women's lives were jokingly expressed, as in the conversation below:

It is ridiculous for me in this day and age to have an old man, white bearded and all come up to court me. I hate it to have a man chosen for me our sister here is already spoken for by an older man, yet she wants to marry someone else. But out of respect for the family and church elders, she will likely go with our parents' wishes instead of what she wants.

The three young women eloquently described their family dynamics, church ties and the economic activities they were engaged in. They explained that the church was important for their family and everyone attended church together on Saturdays. The connections with the church family were not only seen as critical for extending social networks but also for business. As one of the young women explained:

The church is important for us ... the people we know, the people who can help our family are our church members. When our father had business problems it was the church members that came to his rescue providing start-up capital, offering our house, food and prayers.

While the young women understood that the structure of their church was organized around a strong patriarch who was seen as the head, they explained the influence their mothers had in the family. For instance, one of the young women explained how the senior wife, or their 'older mother' as she put it, was responsible for selecting the junior wives. They explained that their father had two wives. Two of the participants were children of the younger wife, and the older sister, who had already been spoken for, was a daughter of the older/senior wife.

At the time of the interviews, nineteen people shared the five-room house. According to the participants, Mai Guru (the senior wife/mother) and her children constituted a household and Mai Nini (the junior wife/mother) another household. The two wives were siblings, which the young women explained strengthened the bond of family members. The young women explained that although their mothers were sisters, married to the same man and living together under one roof, the two wives worked as economically independent units within

a household headed by a male. The sisters described their family as having a father as the head who helped each family with start-up money but it was up to the mothers to make sure the younger generation kept working, selling things and financing their own efforts. However, in terms of household upkeep, the two houses joined forces to make sure children were fed and utilities paid for. There was borrowing and lending from within the household but there was also borrowing from the church. Working as an independent economic unit did not necessarily mean that individual family members could be agentive in their economic ventures without consulting the father and Mai Guru, the senior wife.

As an example, let us consider the following case. Bhudi (brother) Joe has been living in Johannesburg in South Africa for a long time now. Bhudi Joe is Mai Nini's (junior mother's) son but also the father's older son. Initially, he was a successful cross-border trader and black-market foreign-currency trader but then decided to settle in South Africa and now runs his own clothing shop. Having proved himself, he returned to Bulawayo to ask for a parental blessing for his marriage. Although his girlfriend was one of their own, a Postori herself, Mai Guru did not want Bhudi Joe to marry the woman because she felt that she was going to influence him not to be a 'carer' for his natal family but was instead going to help his wife's family, which had migrated to South Africa. Mai Guru (senior wife/mother) became an influential player in deciding who Bhudi Joe would marry even if he was not her natural son. On his behalf, Mai Guru decided to court a local girl from a family that were close friends of hers. Mai Guru's decision did not go down well with Mai Nini who felt that she was losing her influence over her own children. According to the family, Mai Nini (Joe's mother) was upset that her own sister was treating her unfairly.

Clearly, in this case, the senior wife was securing her position through extending marital and familial relationships by accepting her sibling as a junior wife. Even if she did not have a son herself, the junior wife's son would be elevated to the position of son of the family. And to keep the son grounded in his birth family, the senior wife decided who the son of the family would marry. The senior wife garnered more influence by making sure the junior wife's son stayed close to her by finding a daughter-in-law who would be likely to come under her wing. It would seem that the emphasis on family and loyalty to family elders creates excessive familial tensions but however negative and contentious the tension, it does not splinter the family.

In the Mpofo's case, the son's marriage created a lot of tension. The older son was seen as economically successful and none of his natal family members wanted to lose him to another family even if it meant him establishing his own family. Members of the Mpofo family invested time and energy in the son's marriage to protect their own interests. The family devised strategies to rely on each other, including church relations, but economic interests and family obli-

gations militated against individual decisions. There are surely contradictions brought about by individual agentiveness as opposed to family obligation.

Case 2: Families scattered over three countries: Multiple households make families

The second example is a case narrated by MaMlauzi, whose family was scattered across three countries: Malawi, Zimbabwe and Zambia. When I met MaMlauzi, she jokingly explained that she was married to a Blantyre (a local expression for people from Malawi). Edison was MaMlauzi's husband. She explained that both their natal families were living in two countries. Edison's natal family was living in Malawi although the family had come to Zimbabwe during the Federation of Nyasaland and the then Rhodesia(s). Edison had spent his youth in mining compounds in Mangura, Zvishavane and Hwange. Edison and MaMlauzi had met when their families were living near a coal mine in Hwange and got married. At the time of the interview, they had been married for eighteen years. Edison's parents and siblings had decided to return to Malawi, their original home, in the 1980s and MaMlauzi's family had returned to Zambia in the late 1990s.

When asked about her family, MaMlauzi first explained about her husband's family. Although they had been married for eighteen years, they had separate lives when it came to their kin. MaMlauzi said that she had never been to Malawi to visit her husband's relatives but Edison, her husband, continued to visit and support his family there. MaMlauzi had maintained close relations with her own parents in northeastern Zambia through her cross-border activities. She used to travel to South Africa, Botswana and Namibia selling domestic hand-crafted goods and would bring goods back to Zimbabwe from South Africa then travel to Zambia where she used to sell agricultural produce. MaMlauzi explained that her complex trading route enabled her to visit her parents and siblings regularly. Through her trading she was able to keep in close contact. But the deteriorating Zimbabwean dollar meant that she was forced to abandon her cross-border trading activities but also visits to her natal family.

MaMlauzi explained their family as being separate in terms of day-to-day relations but united by blood or affinity. MaMlauzi described the separateness as being related to decisions about financial support. They both supported their families through their own individual efforts but pooled their resources when it came to their natural children. MaMlauzi explained that they had three children. The oldest child was Edison's son who was born out of wedlock but came to their household when he was young, and Edison and MaMlauzi had two children together. MaMlauzi explained that for a while her husband's son lived in Malawi with Edison's parents and relatives. Edison's boy had presented challenges to their relationship because at one point he was sent back to Malawi

when Edison felt that he was not being taken good care of. The boy then spent five years in Malawi and returned to MaMlauzi's household because of the poverty in Malawi, where he could not even attend school. MaMlauzi was clearly put out by her husband's decision: 'when the boy returned to Zimbabwe he was five grades behind in his schooling ... who was doing harm here?'

MaMlauzi's separate families did not end with Edison's family and her own natal family as she had an additional responsibility – an AIDS orphan who had been left as a lodger in her home. She explained that in order to raise money for utilities she had decided to rent out one of her four rooms to a young mother and her two children. MaMlotshwa had been the mother of Thina, the AIDS orphan now living with MaMlauzi. MaMlotshwa's husband, before his death, used to work in South Africa and had been remitting regularly. In 1999, a year before the interviews, MaMlotshwa had died of AIDS, leaving her two children. The younger boy, Thina, was now part of MaMlauzi's family.

At the time of the interviews, Thina's father was reported to be ill in South Africa and for six months he had not remitted any money to support his children. According to MaMlauzi, Thina's family had been young and just starting out and had concentrated on supporting their own children and building their home but had neglected their relatives. MaMlauzi said that relations were strained within this young family and when Thina's mother died, no relatives came to for the funeral. MaMlauzi explained that the funeral became her responsibility and the neighbourhood association's. After Thina's death, the two children became MaMlauzi's responsibility and although she had written letters and sent people to see the children's relatives in rural areas, no one came. Eventually after about a year, a grandmother came and took the older girl with her but left Thina behind. MaMlauzi explained that 'you could tell that this woman was in dire circumstances herself. She was thinking: what will I give these children?' So, MaMlauzi was left with Thina, who was also ill.

MaMlauzi explained that they were slowly selling their furniture and other family possessions to take care of the boy who needed medical attention but, with the collapse of the healthcare system, there was nothing to help him. After losing the rent from her lodgers, MaMlauzi had established a backyard *spaza*/kiosk (shop) selling groceries. Edison, her husband, was a casual worker at a sugar refinery and although he had been retrenched in 1995 was called back as a casual labourer. MaMlauzi was worried that her husband was 'too' happy with his job and not trying to find other things to augment their income. In her words, 'Edison believes he is working hard. After work, he goes to the beer hall. It is up to me to help the families survive'.

MaMlauzi's strategies began with selling vegetables from a push cart. She explained that when she started this, there were very few others doing so. For a while, selling agricultural produce was profitable and in the early 1990s she

started cross-border trading, which she financed through her vegetable-selling business. She explained that she used to travel to Botswana, Namibia and South Africa selling her wares and would bring back items that were in short supply in Zimbabwe. Because of the stricter immigration controls and the weak Zimbabwean dollar, she had given up the cross-border trade and begun her *spaza*/kiosk shop. MaMlauzi explained that business was not good because there were too many people selling things: 'we are chasing the same customers ... who is buying when we are all selling something?'

MaMlauzi described how she had to stop cross-border trading because she had a child in secondary school and having to pay school fees meant she could not afford to finance her trading business. Since MaMlauzi had relied on her cross-border trading to visit her family in Zambia, stopping this activity had strained her relationship with her natal family and she was not able to see them as often as she would have liked to. MaMlauzi was worried about the breakdown in family ties:

In the past year I have not visited 'my family' because I can't afford to ... and I worry about how they are. At least Edison continues to visit his family because he has a steady income. I wonder what can stop what happened to Thina, families feeling neglected; it could happen to us as well.

MaMlauzi's family dynamics show economic agency as being inextricably linked to familial networks across the Southern African region. Colonial occupation and the creation of trading blocs like the federation contributed to the splintering of families. The regional networks have become the pillar of not only nation-states but also of families who construct their familyhood and livelihoods under the various constraints of their regional experience. MaMlauzi's family has sculpted its familyhood and livelihood by using the physical location of family members around the Southern African region. The family shifts its residency depending on the meeting of their material needs. However, disruption in these regional networks because of the collapse of the economy adversely affects family relations and dynamics. Also, intentional disruptions in networks due to the current stringent immigration controls that restrict the movement of poor people are not only politically implausible but are proving to be economically disastrous to the region that has 'informally' incorporated regional networks into its structure.

MaMlauzi's case illustrates how people are forging families. By taking the child lodger and caring for him MaMlauzi is extending agentiveness in social care. In the absence of established governmental sponsored care, the child would otherwise be on the street.

Case 3: Families reconstituted by transnationality: My mother and I are family

The third case is Valerie, a nineteen-year-old woman and an only child in her child-centred household. Valerie was sharing her mother's house with a ten-year-old distant cousin and a twenty-two-year-old stepsister who seemed not to be involved in any decision-making or in the day-to-day functioning of Valerie's home. The stepsister was not brought into the conversation.

When asked who her family was, Valerie's response was 'my mother and I are family'. She expressed strong views about family. According to her, only her mother and she were family, emphasizing the mother-child axis. Valerie was apparently raised by her mother as a single parent before she met her live-in partner – now her husband – in 1986. The couple had a civil marriage in 1993, which made the family a blended family. At the same time, Valerie's household was an extended family because it included kin relations. However, to emphasize the mother-child-daughter axis, Valerie explained that she had no strong relations with her mother's husband or her mother's relatives, which included her grandmother, aunts and cousins. However, there are two sides to the dynamics of Valerie's relatives and Valerie negotiates and renegotiates her way into her mosaic of kin to get by.

While Valerie's mother was reportedly married, the husband-wife relationship appeared stilted. Valerie's parents did not live together: they were a transnational family, spatially separated but still retaining care for each other – familyhood. Her mother was living and working in the United States and her stepfather was living and working in South Africa. Valerie felt that her family was scattered all over the world trying to make a living and she seemed to be grappling with the ideal of a 'true family' living happily together under one roof. She explained that she frequently received disapproving messages whenever she mentioned that her mother was living in the US and her father was in South Africa. Her friends would tell her, 'Valerie, you do not have a family anymore. Your mother and father's marriage is over'!

Clearly, Valerie and her friends were assessing the notion that families need to live together as a way of fostering intimacy between spouses and their children but at the same time acknowledging that the current economic situation was not encouraging this. Valerie explained that 'my mother wants a comfortable life for herself and me. She will go to great lengths to create better life chances for herself and myself'. Valerie's mother was overly investing in her child having better life chances, at least materially. It was because of the mother-child bond that she felt their family interests intersected. Valerie presented herself as part of her mother's economic strategy because she had been able to take care of her mother's asset 'their house', while her mother went to look for work elsewhere. Valerie saw her mother as paving the way for her economic well-being but at the same time she had mixed feelings about being a

perpetual child, having her mother decide what was good for both of them. This tension is expressed in the following conversation.

Right now I see my job as taking care of my mother's house. I want to go on my own but I can't. I have to follow my mother's wishes. Currently, my work is to take care of my mother's house and property. In 1998 I was accepted to begin my studies at the University of Cape Town in South Africa but I could not go, not because my mother would not pay my fees because she would do anything for me to get a good education. The issue was that I could not find a trustworthy person to take care of my mother's house. So, I ended up staying here. It stresses me sometimes that I can't follow my own dreams. I have always wanted to go to London to try my luck in terms of a job because I have four cousins there but I can't go because my mother wants me to join her in the US. My mother keeps saying that there are limited opportunities for Africans in England. And she says that the treatment of Zimbabweans in the UK is similar to South Africa and Botswana.

Valerie is dispelling myths about global processes breaking up traditional kinship ties and destroying interdependence between family members. She was contemplating emigrating and her relatives were likely to facilitate her 'own' transitions. Once again we see that, rather than migration breaking up family structures, it has led to the redefinition of family structures and functions. Extended family, in this case her cousins although they did not feature as 'true family', continued to provide support in terms of decisions about migration. Moreover, Valerie felt that her connections with her cousins were important since they were her age-mates but her mother would not hear of it. Loyalty to her mother's plans was making her suspend her own plans. At the same time, adhering to family goals provided Valerie with security to strategize her next move. As such, Valerie is covertly agentive while their 'family' is openly agentive, even when physically separated family members in this case negotiated avenues for mutual support, as is illustrated in the following.

I want to leave the country myself but I have to find someone that I can trust to look after my mother's house. I am planning to visit rural areas to find someone to look after my mother's house. I am the third generation raised in Bulawayo city. I hardly know any rural area but I know distant relatives in Lupane. So, I will go there to see if I can find a relative who can come and take care of my mother's house.

Again, we see interdependency of kinship relations with kin being drawn to make the economic activities of related members possible. However, the tension of being a child and responsible for a household remained visible throughout my conversations with Valerie. At one point, she spoke at length about being tied to her home. She rationalized her loyalty to her mother because she was a good provider but also because her mother did not trust her own family members to look after her house, which was an important asset. Since there was no one to take care of the house, it was important for Valerie to stay. Their house was a beautifully renovated six-room house and had expensive furnishings.

Instead of leaving the townships to go to the low-density areas, Valerie's mother had taken advantage of relatively cheap land, had bought her house for cash and done it up to her own taste. Valerie explained that they continued to live in the townships because the people in the lanes knew who the trouble-makers were and knew who carried out the break-ins. In her words: 'it is safer to live in the townships than to live in gated homes in the suburbs'.

She also explained that if things did not work out where her mother was, then she could return to a decent house. Valerie recognized her mother's economic reality and the need to take risks but at the same time keeping the house as a secure asset. Valerie was quick to point out that her mother was not paying a big mortgage in the US but her stepfather was making high mortgage payments on a suburban house in Johannesburg, so he was not of any material help to them. Although separated and distant, Valerie's family still negotiated economic realities within the context of kinship units. Relatives acted as supportive agents for family members by helping each other negotiate shifts in the political economy. Valerie's active attempts to recruit relatives from the rural areas speak to the agentive aspect of family members. Equally agentive were relatives who were recruited to further Valerie's plans, they too were likely to have their own agendas, perhaps wanting a change of life or educational opportunities. However, their agendas would be covertly realized by being helpful to some relative's agency.

Valerie felt that someone from the rural areas could be trusted and in her words 'trainable' in terms of looking after her mother's house. Here we see how those with regular incomes look to relatives for help. There are possibilities of misuse of such relations on the one hand but on the other a chance for a decent living for someone who might have had a difficult rural life. Valerie's house seemed full at weekends when many of her mother's relatives came to visit and would stay overnight, leaving on Sunday evening or Monday morning. However, during the week it was quiet. One can recognize the tension of the visits in her words:

Every weekend my grandmother comes and spends the whole weekend here and she brings five more people – the whole tribe comes over and household items sometimes go missing from the house. My mother's relatives just call and tell me that they are coming – no discussion. When they come announced they expect to be fed well. So I think most of the money my mother sends goes on food for these visits.

Valerie summarized the dynamics of her relatives to illustrate the particularistic tendencies of families as follows:

In my mother's family it's everyone for themselves and the invisible god is for us all! The other people in the family are just too weak-minded, you couldn't trust them. You know when you have certain standards in your home and you bring in someone who is lazy and can't do things – well you get frustrated. My mother is

very particular about her things; she will phone and tell me to dust and oil the furniture. Therefore, it is difficult to find someone who will match her standards. I am the only one. Those other people (referring to relatives) are just useless – ha! I hardly think of them at all if I encounter problems. If I were stranded, I would just call my mother. And now that Western Union reaches Zimbabwe, she sends money quickly.

Valerie commented that she had been in tight situations before and none of her relatives helped. She related an incident when her father had promised to pay her examination fees for her A Levels and then at the last minute decided not to send money. She claimed that she went around to all her relatives who could have got money together but none of them helped her. In her words:

I tried all my relatives (to see) if they could help pay for my fees but nothing. You know my relatives are the type that rejoices when my mother and I are struggling. They are always happy when my mother and I have misfortune. Among my relatives, it matters so much whose child you are and I am the child of a woman they don't care about. So, it is only my mother and I in my family and no one else is concerned about us.

Valerie attributed the particularistic family tendency to relations between her grandmother and granddaughters, but also in relation to fathers. Explaining the particularistic nature of her family, she says:

Almost three-quarters of the children in my mother's family have no fathers. So, all of us' only have our mothers' family. Therefore, we end up all being children of our mothers and our relatives are strictly confined to our mothers' family and the father's side is completely cut out.

Valerie attributes her mother's success to her agentiveness compared with neighbours and explained how her mother had always been ambitious, hard-working and very good at what she does. She started her life as a self-employed trader buying and selling things across the border. She would go to Botswana and order big things, not the trinkets that most people sell at the flea market; she used to order spare parts and electric appliances informally for established companies in the 1980s when these were still very scarce due to government controls on foreign exchange. With her cross-border trading, she managed to finance her own education. Initially she attended night-school, completed a junior certificate, continued educating herself, and got her O Levels. Then she went to train as a secretary, became an executive secretary for an insurance company in Botswana, and in Botswana financed her skills development in accounting. When her company moved to Johannesburg, she asked to move too. By this time, she had figured out the immigration laws and got her US residence permit through the diversity quarter lottery.

According to Valerie, her mother worked for an accounting firm in the US and was the main provider in their household. In 2001, US\$200 per month covered most of their living expenses. Valerie explained that her stepfather was

an ex-combatant, had received the Z\$50,000 gratuity, and received a monthly pension but she had no idea where that went. However, she was quick to point out that this was peanuts considering her father's lifestyle of living large! Valerie visited her stepfather in Johannesburg on holiday but her visits depended on whether she could find someone to take care of the house. She admitted that she usually had fun there. Her stepfather held a managerial position in a construction company in Johannesburg but Valerie emphasized that her mother was their household's provider, not her stepfather who seemed more concerned with his own expansive lifestyle than with their well-being.

Valerie explained that they were not attached to a rural home. Her parents had been born and raised in Bulawayo but she remembered that her grandmother sometimes talked about distant relatives who lived in the Mzola area in Lupane District. Valerie was emphatic about not being attached to any rural home. 'We don't keep a garden or any of that. We buy whatever we need'. Valerie explained that her family did not aspire to that kind of livelihood, where you grew things in a garden or had a field. Her aspirations were to be employed, have a good regular income and be able to afford holidays.

Through her parents' attachment to foreign currencies, Valerie and her relatives can eat well (if the commodities are available on the shelves) and they can afford healthcare and education. Valerie's child-centred household illustrates what Panashe Munetsi (2000) calls the 'born frees', who have education, skills and a strong desire to have jobs and comfortable livelihoods. Such families do what they can to follow money wherever it is concentrated. To put it bluntly, they chase 'middle-classness'. Valerie's family has no desire whatsoever to work the land and condemn themselves to a precarious livelihood. She emphatically pointed out that she was born and raised in Bulawayo, as was her mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. Valerie's family clearly does not want to drown in tradition but wants to be flexible with their familyhood, their skills development, their work and livelihoods and swim with the modern world. If that dream cannot be attained at home, she and the rest of her relatives will follow it internationally. However, what is not so clear is whether the world they run to may chain them to dead-end jobs so that they are never quite able to reach their dreams.

My opinion of Valerie's situation is that her family and a few others like hers have pushed themselves so hard to achieve a decent living that such households may be unwilling to share their wealth with others in a less-fortunate position as they feel that their positions are the result of their own toil and sweat. At the same time, the reality is that the unbearable conditions at home have pushed Valerie's family to leave the country.

Conclusion

The experiences of the families presented in the above cases reflect diverse family forms whose dynamics are complex and mutating over time contingent upon material necessities, care and familial obligations. Their economic agentiveness is negotiated by individual family members as well as by families as collectives in a survival mode to access a nebulous economic structure. The vignettes of families presented here show that family forms, their dynamics and provisioning strategies have been sculpted by historical processes and the prevailing political and economic changes.

There is no 'ideal' family, as was reflected throughout the cases as participants conversed about who they considered to be family. In the first case, a family that is formed through plural wives lives through complex dynamics depending on who can lay claims to which child to secure the adult positions of influence in the family. Family in the first case extends to include the 'church', which is seen as a support system from one angle but as a source of contention in its rules. MaMlauzi's case presents the family as fluid, always forming and scattered over three countries.

What we can learn from these cases is that family dynamics can be hidden but gleaned from intricate conversations, as exemplified in all three cases. The three young women question the senior wife/mother's decision to disrupt the marriage plans of a sibling. They question what to them, as young people, seem outdated modes of family creation: adults negotiating young people's marriages. But at the same time loyalty to adult family members leads to young family members relinquishing their needs and desires. This tension between adult agentiveness and their children's is observable in Valerie's case. Valerie desires to leave Zimbabwe but familial obligations tie her to her mother's home. This tension also exemplifies the various negotiations that individuals have to undertake depending on other categorizations, i.e. gender, age and ethnicity within the economic structure. In some families, adults are situated differently in terms of access to material things, while in other families it is children. In MaMlauzi's case, we met a family spread across three countries, different ethnic groups, and with the man and woman having separate family relations when it comes to kin.

Family forms and dynamics are also connected to the economic structure. Changes in the economy situate families differently, thereby producing – in some families – individual member agentiveness, while attempts remain to work for the collective. Valerie, for example, reflects on a scenario where she carefully strategizes about kin to enhance her agentiveness and that of her mother.

I conclude by arguing that it is critical to recognize that because of the present inhospitable economic and political environment in Zimbabwe, African families remain an important coping mechanism for dealing with poverty and economic deterioration. Families have to draw upon various forms of kinship and fictive, religious alliances as part of the broader kinship network to survive. They have to negotiate livelihoods by diversifying work and provisioning across several spheres. However, while this diversification of work and provisioning staves off starvation, the particularistic tendencies of individual family members and their families may spell strain for solidaristic efforts that require moving private troubles into public/societal issues. At no point in these conversations do these families talk about the community organizing efforts to place their privately felt poverty on the national/public agenda.

References

- Ahlburg, D.A. & C. de Vita 1997, 'New Realities of the American Family', in: A.S. Skolnick & J.H. Skolnick (eds), *Family in Transition*, Reading, MA: Longman, pp. 21-28.
- Ake, C. 1987, 'Notes for a Political Economy of Unemployment in Africa', *African Journal of Political Economy* (2): 82-96.
- Alexander, J., J. McGregor & T.O. Ranger 2000, *Violence and Memory: One Hundred Years in the 'Dark Forests' of Matabeleland*, Oxford: Currey.
- Barnes, T. 1997, "'Am I a Man?'" Gender and the Pass Laws in Urban Colonial Zimbabwe, 1930-1980', *African Studies Review* 40 (1): 59-67.
- Barnes, T. 1999, 'We Women Worked So Hard': Gender, Urbanization and Social Reproduction in Colonial Harare, Zimbabwe 1930-1956, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Becker, G.S. 1981, *A Treatise on the Family*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bond, P. 1993. 'Economic Origins of Black Townships in Zimbabwe: Contradictions of Industrial and Financial Capital in the 1950s and 1960s', *Economic Geography* 69 (1): 72-89.
- Bond, P. 1999, 'Political Reawakening in Zimbabwe', *Monthly Review* 50 (11): 1-17.
- Bond, P. & M. Manyanya 2001, *Zimbabwe's Plunge: Exhausted Neoliberalism and the Struggle for Social Justice*, London: Merlin Press.
- Brydon, L. & S. Chant 1989, *Women in the Third World: Gender Issues in Rural and Urban Areas*, Aldershot: Edward Elgar.
- Carmody, P. 1998, 'Neoclassical Practice and the Collapse of Industry in Zimbabwe: The Cases of Textiles, Clothing and Footwear', *Economic Geography* (47): 319-43.
- Gaidzanwa, R.B. 1996, 'The Ideology of Domesticity and the Struggles of Women Workers in Zimbabwe', in: A. Chhachhi & R. Pittin (eds), *Confronting State, Capital and Patriarchy: Women Organizing in the Process of Industrialization*, The Hague: Institute of Social Studies.
- Gershuny, J.I. 1983, *Social Innovation and the Division of Labour*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Gonzalez, N.S. 1985, 'Household and Family in the Caribbean: Some Definitions and Concepts', in: F.C. Steady (eds), *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally*, Rochester, VT: Schenkman Books.
- Gordon, A. 1996, *Transforming Capitalism and Patriarchy: Gender and Development in Africa*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
- Guyer, J.I. 1981, 'Household and Community in African Studies', *The African Studies Review* 24 (3): 87-137.
- Leonard, M. 1992, 'Ourselves Alone: Household Work Strategies in a Deprived Community', *Irish Journal of Sociology* (2): 70-84.
- Mackintosh, M. 1979, 'Domestic Labour and the Household', in: S. Burman (ed.), *Fit Work for Women*, London: Croom Helm, pp. 173-91.
- Mandaza, I. 1985, *Zimbabwe: The Political Economy of Transition 1980-1986*, Dakar: Codesiria.
- Moyo, O.N. 2001, 'Dealing with Work in its Context: An Analysis of Household Work and Provisioning Strategies in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe', Dissertation, Heller Graduate School, Brandeis University.
- Moyo, O.N. (forthcoming), *Trampled No More: Voices from Bulawayo's Townships about Families, Life, Survival and Social Change in Zimbabwe* (in press, University Press of America).
- Moyo, O.N. & S.M. Kawewe 2002, 'The Dynamics of a Racialized, Gendered, Ethnicized and Economically Stratified Society: Understanding the Socio-Economic Status of Women in Zimbabwe', *Feminist Economics* 8 (2): 163-81.
- Moyo, O.N. & S.M. Kawewe (forthcoming), 'Lone Motherhood in Zimbabwe: The Socio Economic Conditions of Lone Parents and their Children', *Journal of Health and Social Policy*, Special Issue on Africa.
- Munetsi, P. 2000. 'Cutting Edge' – *The Zimbabwe Independent* on Line – Zimbabwe's Bornfrees: <http://www.thezimbabweindependent.com>. Accessed 12 May 2003.
- Muthwa, S. 1994, 'Female-headed Households' Economic Survival Strategies: The Case of Soweto, South Africa', *Journal of Gender Studies* 3 (2): 165-76.
- Ncube, W., J.E. Stewart, J.L. Kazembe, B.R. Donzwa, E.C. Gwaunza, T. Nzira & K. Dengu-Zvobgo 1997, *Continuity and Change: The Family in Zimbabwe*, Harare: Women and Law.
- Ndoro, H. 1996, 'Zimbabwe: The Informal Sector in a Decontrolling Formerly Social Economy', in: G.C.Z. Mhone (eds), *The Informal Sector in Southern Africa, an Analysis of Conceptual, Research and Policy Issues*, Harare: SAPES Books.
- Nehwati, F. 1970, 'The Social and Communal Background of ZHII: The African Riots in Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia in 1960', *African Affairs* 69 (276): 250-66.
- Nelson, H.D. 1982, *Zimbabwe: A Country Study*, Washington, DC: The American University Press.
- Pahl, R.E. & C. Wallace 1985, 'Household Work Strategies in Economic Recession', in: N. Redclift & E. Mingione (eds), *Beyond Employment: Household, Gender and Subsistence*, New York: Basil Blackwell, pp. 189-227.
- Raftopoulos, B. 1992, 'Beyond the House of Hunger: Democratic Struggle in Zimbabwe', *Review of African Political Economy* (54): 59-74.
- Rakodi, C. 1994, 'Urban Poverty in Zimbabwe: Post Independence Efforts, Household Strategies and the Short Term Impact of Structural Adjustment', *Journal of International Development* 6 (5): 655-63.

- Riphenburg, C. 1997, 'Women's Status and Cultural Expression: Changing Gender Relations and Structural Adjustment in Zimbabwe', *Africa Today* 44 (1): 33-50.
- Sylvester, C. 1991, *Zimbabwe: The Terrain of Contradictory Development*, Dartmouth: Westview Press.
- Sylvester, C. 2000, *Producing Women and Progress in Zimbabwe: Narratives of Identity and Work from 1980s*, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Townsend, J. & J. Momsen 1987, 'Towards the Geography of Gender in the Third World', in: J. Momsen & J. Townsend (eds), *Geography of Gender in the Third World*, London: Hutchison, pp. 27-81.
- Warde, A. 1990, 'Household Work Strategies and Forms of Labour: Conceptual and Empirical Issues', *Work, Employment and Society* 4 (4): 495-515.
- Worby, E. 2000, "'Discipline without Oppression": Sequence, Timing and Marginality in Rhodesia's Post War Development Regime', *The Journal of African History* 41 (1): 101-25.

Images of Africa: Agency and nature conservation in South Africa

Malcolm Draper, Marja Spierenburg and Harry Wels

Despite the dramatic political and economic changes in Southern Africa over the last ten years, European primitivist and colonial images of 'wild' Africa(ns) have shown great resilience. This is particularly evident in nature conservation. Although the new (black) political and economic elites entered this domain in the 1990s, and in spite of an internationally endorsed narrative of the need for community participation, representations of Africa(ns) remain firmly based in essentialist notions of the African wilderness. This chapter shows how the new elite has bonded with the old (white) elite, which formerly controlled nature conservation. These representations seriously limit options for local communities to benefit from nature conservation. There is a need to situate and distinguish agency at various levels in society and to take into account its development over time. Despite a growing body of literature on the strategic use of claims of indigeneity by communities, their agency is, in the long term, seriously hindered by the persistent stereotypes that are associated with this concept, as they often do not do justice to the economic and development aspirations of these communities.

Introduction

Images of 'wild' African landscapes have been in the European psyche ever since the intensification of European interaction with the African continent in the colonial era (Jahoda 1999). And nowhere is this probably more so than in the field of nature conservation and nature tourism (Neuman 1998, Wels 2003). International tourists are often lured to visit countries in Southern Africa on the

basis of an essentialist representation of Africa. These images have shown a particular resilience and persistence over time, despite the many political and ideological changes that have taken place in the field of nature conservation itself, and in the wider socio-political and socioeconomic context. The changes have been dramatic, especially in South Africa with its iconic first democratic elections in 1994.

Until apartheid officially ended, nature conservation in South Africa was dominated by white interests (see, for example, Ellis 1994) but, after 1994, attempts were made to transform the sector, not only through changes in personnel at the Ministry of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, and in departments concerned with conservation, but also in terms of the distribution of benefits from nature conservation. The dominant narrative on conservation became one in which local communities living adjacent to conservation areas were to be considered as stakeholders and should benefit economically from conservation. This is in line with global changes in thinking about conservation since the mid-1980s (Adams & Hulme 2001). At the same time, prominent members of the new political elite entered into business partnerships with members of the old elite and became active in the 'business of nature conservation' (see Draper *et al.* 2004). In this chapter we will argue that in their attempts to obtain a share in lucrative tourism enterprises and other conservation-related economic activities, members of the new elite have bonded with members of the old elite on the basis of rather essentialist representations of African wilderness. These representations seriously limit options for local communities to benefit from nature conservation (Draper *et al.* 2004, Spierenburg *et al.* 2006). Based on these observations, we would like to explore two issues here: the need to situate and distinguish the agency at various levels in society of (formerly) oppressed groups, and the agency of one such group at one level – at the level of the new post-apartheid political elite – and how it can hinder and obstruct agency at another level, i.e. the level of local communities. We also discuss how the agency of the new political elite engaging in nature conservation is constructed around persisting stereotypical images of 'wild Africa(ns)', around static and frozen caricatures of Africa's landscapes and people.

Images of African landscapes and Africans

William Burchell, one of the early explorers in South Africa, was a botanist, ornithologist, anthropologist and natural historian. In addition, he was also an amateur landscape painter, and looked upon every landscape as a potential subject from an aesthetic point of view. He travelled some 4500 miles across Southern Africa and painted landscapes not only on canvas but even more so in words in his two volumes of *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa* (1822,

1824). He described Kirstenbosch, now a botanical garden, as follows: ‘The view from this spot ... is the most picturesque of any I had seen in the vicinity of Cape Town. The beauties here displayed to the eye could scarcely be represented by the most skilful pencil’ (in Coetzee 1988: 36).

John Coumbrie Brown, the second Colonial Botanist in the Cape who went to South Africa in 1862, was a Scottish intellectual ‘... nurturing a splendid neo-Romanticist school of landscape painting. He waxed lyrical over the Knysna scenery which he found ‘truly grand and lovers of the beauties of nature will find themselves fully repaid for any inconvenience which may have been the result of a rough voyage’ (in Grove 1987: 29).

National parks as ‘iconographic landscapes’ of nature conservation (cf. Cosgrove & Daniels 1988) received much of their public support thanks to the persuasive powers of landscape painting. The first national park, Yellowstone in the United States which ‘opened’ in 1872, owes a great deal of its (initial) popularity to the landscape painter Thomas Moran (1837-1926). Similarly the flagship national park in South Africa, the Kruger National Park, benefited from public appeal as a result of the friendship of its first warden, James Stevenson Hamilton, with the landscape painter, Harry Stratford Caldecott who visited James for the first time when he was working on a temporary assignment for the South African Railways ‘to paint posters to advertise the ‘Round-in-Nine’ tours (i.e. a trip to Sabi Game Reserve – which later became part of the Kruger – by train)’ (Carruthers 2001: 165). At one stage he wrote to Stevenson-Hamilton about the South African Lowveld: ‘... the place is very wild and exceedingly interesting to a painter’ (Scholtz 1970: 19). Caldecott made the famous ‘giraffe poster’ for the SAR&H, to attract visitors to the park by representing the South African landscape as a new home for all white South Africans (Forster 2003). Aside from his paintings Caldecott became a master at marketing the Kruger National Park in his newspaper and magazine articles. Through his artistry in portraying South African landscapes in paint and in words, Caldecott ‘almost single-handedly, orchestrated a massive national press and publicity campaign in order to consolidate public opinion on the side of the national park’ (Carruthers 1995: 62).

Other white artists painted South African landscapes in words that all breathe a ‘spirit of place’ (Brown 2001), create a sense of ‘belonging’ (Lovell 1998) and that through its (white) readership contributed significantly to the white settlers’ identification with Africa as well as European images of Africa. White Southern African novelists equally place great emphasis on the landscape. The widely read Wilbur Smith (1991: 6) wrote, for instance, about the awe-inspiring wilderness on the banks of the Zambezi River:

The dawn came on with stealthy and deceptive speed and painted the clouds above the great river in subtle talcum shades of pink and grey. Over the Zambezi's dark green waters the river mist undulated and pulsed like ghostly ectoplasm and the dawn flights of duck were very dark and crisp against the pale background, their formations precise and their wing-beats flickering quick as knife-blades in the uncertain light. A lion roared, near at hand, abrupt gales of sound that died away in a descending series of moaning grunts. Daniel shivered with the thrill of that sound. Though he had heard it countless times, it always had the same effect upon him. There was no other like it in all the world. For him it was the veritable voice of Africa.

The master storyteller from South Africa, Laurens van de Post (1962: 59), remarked:

Ever since I can remember I have been struck by the profound quality of melancholy which lies at the heart of the physical scene in southern Africa. I recollect clearly asking my father once: 'Why do the *vlaktes* and *koppies* always look so sad?' He replied with unexpected feeling: 'the sadness is not in the plains and hills but in ourselves'.

In some of the depictions there is room for a touch of domestication, a homestead against the backdrop of an overwhelming, vast, empty space, as the following excerpt from Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1995: 1) shows:

The full African moon poured down its light from the blue sky into the wide, lonely plain. The dry, sandy earth, with its coating of stunted 'karoo' bushes a few inches high, the low hills that skirted the plain, the milk-bushes with their long, finger-like leaves, all were touched by a weird and almost oppressive beauty as they lay in the white light. In one spot only was the solemn monotony of the plain broken. Near the centre a small solitary 'kopje' rose. Alone it lay there, a heap of stones piled upon another, as over some giant's grave. Here and there a few tufts of grass or small succulent plants had sprung up among its stones, and on the very summit a clump of prickly-pears lifted their thorny arms, and reflected, as from mirrors, the moonlight on their broad, fleshy leaves. At the foot of the 'kopje' lay the homestead. First, the stonewalled 'sheep-kraals' and Kaffir huts; beyond them the dwelling house – a square redbrick building with thatched roof. Even on its bare red walls, and the wooden ladder that led up to the loft, the moonlight cast a kind of dreamy beauty, and quite etherealised the low brick wall that ran before the house, and which enclosed a bare patch of sand and two straggling sunflowers. On the zinc roof of the great wagon-house, on the roofs of the outbuildings that jutted from its side, the moonlight glinted with a quite peculiar brightness, till it seemed that every rib in the metal was of burnished silver. Sleep ruled everywhere, and the homestead was not less quiet than the solitary plain.

A common characteristic of most white landscape painting – either in words or in paint – is that it can be considered, following Ranger's interpretation and analysis of two landscape painters in Matabeleland in Zimbabwe, as a 'process of appropriation' (Ranger 1997: 64), resulting in 'colonial spaces' and 'dreams

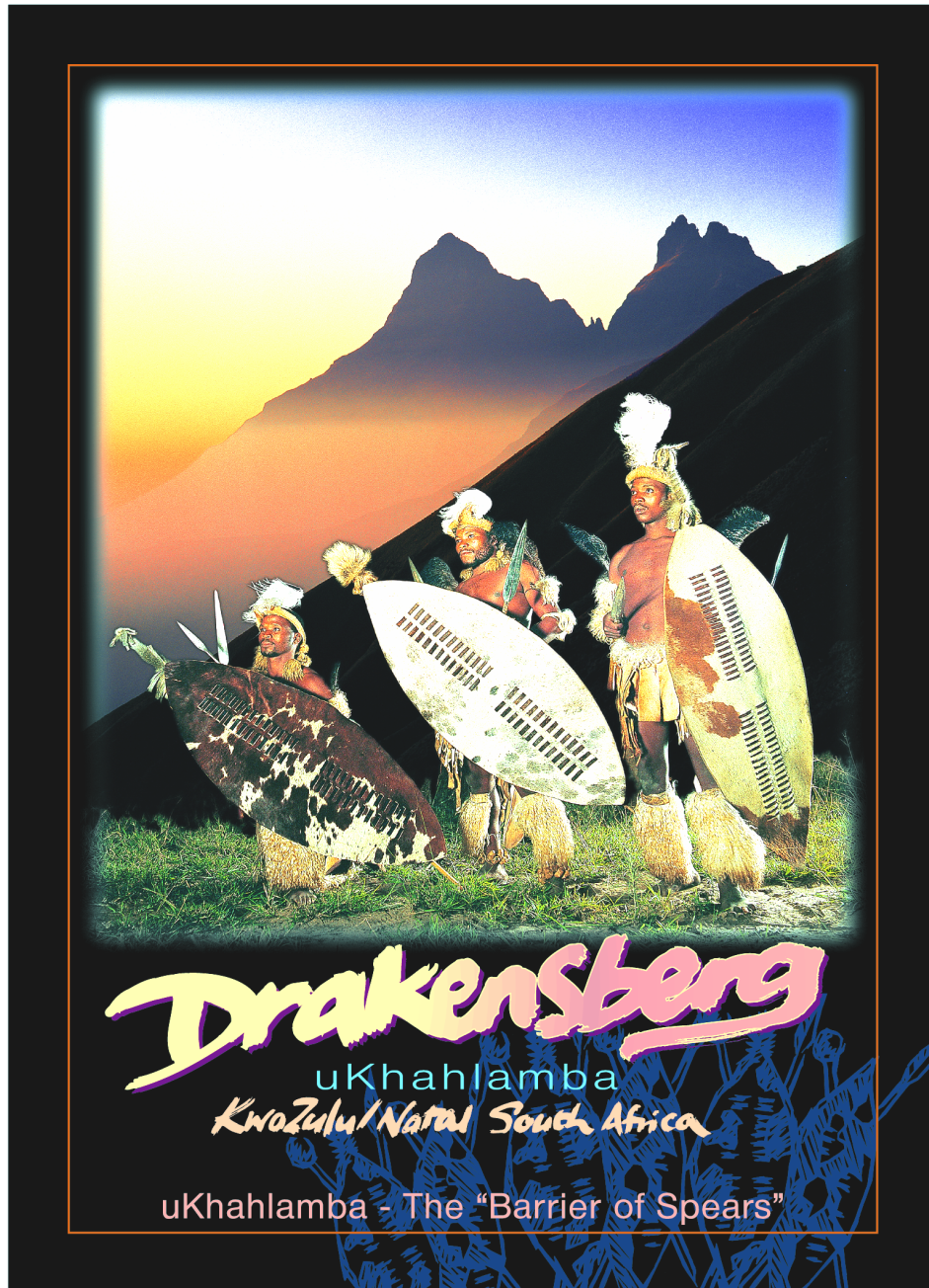
of possession' (Luig & Von Oppen 1997: 29-30). Picturing landscapes is linked to imperialism and colonialism in much the same way as maps facilitated the appropriation of 'empty spaces' (King 1996, see also Spierenburg *et al.* 2006). Mapmaking and landscape painting appear to be in the same league: its art is linked to certain perspectives and ways of seeing that only surface when one understands its construction. 'Landscape's beginnings in Dutch painting arise from a particular organization of perceptions that yields a distinctively textured experience. Its mode of seeing is based in the techniques of linear perspective, surveying and mapping' (Kemal & Gaskell 1993: 14). It reveals the 'eurocentricity of "landscape"' (ibid: 17) that resonates the sentiments of Obed Masuku in Ranger's research as he 'mocked the foolish European habit of seizing upon a fugitive likeness, seen from one angle, and then naming a rock for it – like Queen Victoria Rock at Whitewaters. Great rocks can never be summed up so simply. (...) (There is a) difference between the face (a rock shrine) presents to pilgrims coming from the north – rising like a great smooth brow – and to pilgrims coming from the south, to whom it shows a pitted and tortured countenance' (Ranger 1997: 72).

But where do Africans fit in the landscape? The word 'landscape', according to Schama (1996) in his monumental work on landscape and memory, is derived from the Dutch word *landschap* which depicts a 'unit of human occupation' (ibid: 10) and is associated with the great tradition in Dutch landscape painting in the seventeenth century. Central to the idea is the notion of creation: to shape, to build, to construct. Because of this emphasis on human agency, it is therefore not accidental, Schama argues, that it originates from the Netherlands where a lot of the land is a site of 'formidable human engineering' (ibid: 10). Human agency hence is an integral part of the concept of landscape. In that sense, humans are part of the landscape and even belong to landscapes they themselves help to create. Landscape, in turn, also defines the people in it. Landscapes acquire additional meaning in the interpretation of who belongs and does not belong to a particular landscape. In colonial thinking, the place of white versus African people in the landscape differed. While the whites set out to 'domesticate' the landscape, Africans were supposed to blend in as part of the landscape (see Wilmsen 1995), denying the latter their agency, their role in shaping and defining the landscape (Ranger 1997).

Conservationists Adams and McShane (1996: 5-7) argued that, even recently, western imagery about Africa's landscape has often been expressed in terms of the ultimate aesthetic natural icon, the 'lost Eden'. Anderson and Grove (1987: 4) concur:

Much of the emotional as distinct from the economic investment which Europe made in Africa has manifested itself in a wish to protect the natural environment as a special kind of 'Eden' for the purposes of the European psyche rather than as a

complex and changing environment in which people actually have to live ... Africa has been portrayed as offering the opportunity to experience a wild and natural environment which was no longer available in the domesticated landscapes of Europe.





Photos 9.1 & 9.2 Images reprinted from South African postcards
Photos taken by John Hone and reproduced by kind permission of
Art Publishers (Pty) Ltd, Durban, Johannesburg & Cape Town.

Africa became synonymous with a European sense of authenticity, both naturally and as a model of how people should relate to nature and blend into it.

The Edenic vision of the landscape was capable of accommodating an African presence, because incorporated in the Eden myth is the myth of the noble savage. The noble savage, being closer to nature than civilization, could, hypothetically, be protected *as a vital part* of the natural landscape. (Neumann 1998: 18, italics added)

This particular way of thinking about the human element in landscapes and how landscapes shape society can perhaps be best illustrated by that particular medium that is so often used by international tourists to inform people back home about their adventures in faraway places: the postcard. Below are two examples of postcards bought in South Africa recently that feature people in traditional regalia against the backdrop of a particular landscape. The people on the postcards seem to fit in the landscape and the landscape seems to define the people as much as the people seem to define the landscape. These are two examples where the people contextualize the landscape and where the landscape contextualizes the people, both are embedded in the old discourse of the ‘colo-

nial aesthetic'. In the words of Kirkaldy (2003: 173), describing the relationship between European missionaries, the landscape and the Venda in South Africa:

... what remained constant in missionary thinking and writing in Vendaland during the late nineteenth century was a sense of the land and its people as inextricably bound, (...) (T)he 'heathen Bawenda (Vhavenda)' as the missionaries called them, were portrayed as blending into, or being created by, the landscape which nurtured, succoured and concealed them.

A recent hilarious play by Greig Coetzee (2003) nicely illustrates how differences have existed in the perceptions and representations of black Africans as time-less 'traditional' people, untouched by modernity¹ and the 'modern' white Africans. This theme is explored in a dialogue between two neighbours in a South African town. One is a white Afrikaner (Kenneth) and the other a Zulu man (Mto). In the following conversation they are trying to figure out how to attract investment money for a plan they have for a joint venture.

- Kenneth: Investors, tourists, it's all the same. They want happy natives to make them tap their feet.
- Mto: Surely we can give them something more sophisticated.
- Kenneth: We are. We're building towards a climax: the African Renaissance. A story of triumph over adversity. The rebirth of Africa.
- Mto: Oh right, very sophisticated: sad natives who become happy natives.
- Kenneth: It's more than that. It's about sad natives and angry natives who then become happy natives.
- Mto: And why does it have to be black natives? Why can't it be white natives?
- Kenneth: Come on Mto. That's obvious.
- Mto: What's obvious? You're the first one to say you're African because you've been here since 1710.
- Kenneth: 1664.
- Mto: Whatever. Are you a native or aren't you?
- Kenneth: Yes, but I am not the sort of native that looks right on a postcard.
- Mto: Why not? White Americans have cowboys, white Australians have Crocodile Dundee – why can't you get dressed up as Fanie the Voortrekker?
- Kenneth: What!
- Mto: I'm being serious.
- Kenneth: No way! Crocodile Dundee is a funny guy and cowboys are cool. Us South African whitey's had a useless publicity department.

¹ A highly popular reality TV series was recently shown on a Dutch commercial channel about Dutch families spending a week with a Himba family in Namibia. A sequel was then shown featuring the Himba families visiting their former guests in The Netherlands. The screening of these series sparked a fierce debate in national newspapers about the way the Himba were portrayed in the series.

- Mto: So it's OK for a Zulu like me to dress up in fur and feathers that I never wear at any other time, but you won't sit in an ox-wagon because it's uncool?
- Kenneth: No, not because it is uncool. Because you wearing fur and feathers looks like a Zulu warrior and me suiting in an ox-wagon with a rifle in my hand would just look like an old racist what used to shoot blacks. The investors will kak!

Nature conservation and images of 'good' and 'bad' natives

Nature conservation in the world today and its perspective on exactly what and how to conserve owes much to the legacy of the establishment of national parks in the United States, which was achieved through cooperation between the economic and political elites of the day (Stoll 1997), and were embedded in public support based on romantic notions about wilderness that started in the second half of the nineteenth century (Beinart & Coates 1995: 72, 89, Budi-ansky 1995: 23-28). Yellowstone National Park was established to conserve its landscape and scenery which was widely considered as an 'aesthetically pleasing venue' (Jones & Wills 2005: 65), deriving many of its ideas from the English landscape parks of the eighteenth century (ibid: 69). What national parks in the United States also shared with the English landscape parks – the latter belonging to and created by and for the nobility – was that, from the start, park managers were 'willing to ignore the rights of local communities' (ibid: 72). South Africa followed the US example by establishing the Kruger National Park in 1926, which similarly served:

... as a landscape of power whereby the white elite executed control over indigenous communities. As in the USA, traditional subsistence activities were reframed as illegal poaching. (ibid: 78)

This aspect of processes leading to the establishment of wildlife areas across the world has resulted in strong antagonism between wildlife authorities (often predominantly white, even in Africa) and local communities.

James Stevenson-Hamilton was the celebrated first warden (1902-1946) of what finally became the Kruger National Park. In his extensive memoirs he relates the following:

Before leaving Pretoria it had been impressed on me that the first difficulty would probably be with the natives, since these and the game could not be expected to exist together. I had already decided in my own mind that, so far as it might prove possible, the game reserve would have to be cleared of human inhabitants if a beginning was to be made at all. (Stevenson-Hamilton 1993: 48)

And 'given full opportunity, the lowveld natives were ever more destructive to game than white men' (ibid: 65). His image of the 'natives' was so deeply

imprinted on his mind that he could see nothing but confirmation of his ideas in their behaviour:

The kraal natives were surly and disobliging, especially when they understood my mission, and would tell me nothing of the country. From their hang-dog look I judged them capable of murdering any number of traders, but no doubt I was prejudiced. Afterwards we had considerable trouble with them, and a few years later I had the kraal moved out of the reserve. (ibid: 98)

Such remarks would seem to contrast with ideas about ‘natives blending in with the landscape’. However, Stevenson-Hamilton did to a certain extent refer to those ideas as well. He relied on local Africans who could ‘tell him all about the country’. Not only was it ‘native wisdom’ about nature that should be shared but also everything known about the business of other local Africans, most importantly poaching: ‘As scouts and guides, Stevenson-Hamilton could not do without the “native police”. They accompanied him wherever he went, teaching him veldlore’ (Carruthers 2001: 94). Here we explore Neumann’s distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ natives in relation to the history and current practices in nature conservation. ‘Good natives are those having a “traditional” livelihood sustained by “indigenous knowledge”. They are perceived to be closer to nature and thus compatible with the environmental managers’ design for parks in protected areas. Bad natives are those who are in some sense “modern”, and thus removed from nature, their modified lifestyles and greed for consumer goods representing a particular threat to the natural treasures enclosed’ (Broch-Due 2000: 29). The good native is given a place to stay in wildlife areas. The bad native is ‘naturally’ evicted.

The creation of the Maputoland game reserves involved the passing of legal acts that made many aspects of people’s behaviour in their relationship with nature illegal, which led to prosecution by conservation officers. Ian Player, the globally celebrated conservationist, came to find this prosecution distasteful. He recalls establishing the Ndumu Reserve at the beginning of his career in the 1950s.

There were unpleasant tasks too, and the main one was to arrest people who lived in the reserve when they committed even a trivial offence. It was the policy of the Department to try and have the reserve cleared of human beings. Many years later when my interest in Jungian thought was growing, I wondered if not wanting anyone to live in the reserve was not part of our shadow. It was an equivalent to the Garden of Eden in which there was not room for both Cain and Abel. In retrospect I believe it was a mistake not to have left at least half of the people there. After all they were part of the ecology. (Player in Saayman 1990: 112-13)

Player, a self-confessed romantic, was moved by such wilderness people, mainly in a spiritual way since they

... blunted our Western mindset and subconsciously led us on new paths. Their situation would come to haunt us. They had been part of the landscape, and although it was true that they had killed most of the antelope, it was their slash and burn practices that later enabled the game to increase dramatically when the last person left. (Player 1997: 47)

In 1977 Player founded the World Wilderness Congress, inspired by a vision of Magqubu Ntombela, his Zulu game-scout mentor, friend and spiritual guide. Player claims that the Congress, which from the outset provided a platform for indigenous people to voice their concerns, was part of his repayment of a debt to the people who he had disinherited from their land.

In the second half of the 1980s it became evident that the exclusion of local communities was no longer socially or politically acceptable, nor was it a sustainable way to manage and protect wildlife (McNeely 1992). Not only was it too expensive in terms of deploying personnel and equipment to control poaching, it was also counterproductive as it did not stop the practice or encroachments on wildlife areas. From then on, wildlife managers and policy makers in the field of nature conservation proposed a different approach that emphasized the active involvement of communities in wildlife management (Adams 2004). Instead of an antagonistic party, communities had to become cooperative partners. All kinds of projects were started in this vein, and some pioneering efforts received official political backing and legitimization. Conservationists in Southern Africa were leading the way in this respect with groundbreaking projects in the field of community conservation like ADMADE in Zambia (Gibson 1999), LIFE in Namibia and CAMPFIRE in Zimbabwe (Hulme & Murphree 2001, see also Kiss 1990). South Africa changed its conservation practice accordingly in the wake of the post-1994 transitions. Some have argued, however, that this new approach is still based on stereotypical views of local communities – homogeneous entities, territorially bound – and that these views hamper equal participation and decision-making in nature conservation by those affected by conservation policies (Adams & Hulme 2001).

In this chapter we argue that such essentialist views of ‘communities’ as well as of ‘wilderness’ are shared by old and new elites involved in nature conservation in South Africa. The adoption of such views allows the new elite to influence conservation policies and practices and derive economic benefits from them. This, however, renders it more difficult for ‘local communities’ to benefit from conservation. We will illustrate our argument by analyzing the ‘elite pacting’ processes (cf. Carmody 2002) related to the establishment of trans-frontier conservation areas (TFCAs) in Southern Africa, notably the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park.

Elite pacting in nature conservation in Southern Africa

Practically all international conservation organizations have embraced the concept of TFCAs (Aberly 1999, Wolmer 2003). The rationale for this support is that the boundaries of ecosystems generally do not overlap with national and political boundaries. The huge global threats to the interconnected ecosystems and migrating species allegedly require large-scale conservation efforts (Chapin 2004: 22).

Especially in the south, TFCAs are hailed as opportunities for economic growth through tourism (Wolmer 2003). According to the South African ecotourism magazine *Getaway*, 'Probably the safest prediction that one can make is that shortly the world's fastest-growing market, tourism, will be chasing the world's fastest-shrinking product: wilderness' (Pinnock 1996). By arguing that local communities will benefit from economic growth, the proponents of TFCAs claim social legitimacy for their projects.



Map 9.1 The Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park in Southern Africa

The Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park is probably the largest in the world, encompassing the Kruger National Park in South Africa, Gonarezhou National Park in Zimbabwe and the recently established Limpopo National Park in Mozambique. In October 2001 an agreement between the governments of the three countries to establish the Great Limpopo was signed and, to celebrate the occasion, thirty elephants were released from the Kruger National Park onto Mozambican territory. This occasion coincided with Anton Rupert's 84th birthday. Symbolically presided over by Nelson Mandela in October 2001, it was an extraordinary celebration of Africanism running roughshod over the wishes of an estimated 27,000 affected villagers across the border who feared that elephants might threaten their crops (*Mail and Guardian*, 26 April, 3 May 2002, RRP 2002: 3). One reading could see it as a celebration of the marriage of nations, with the elephants being Mandela's *lobola* (bride price) for his wife, Graça Machel. It could also be interpreted as a culmination of Rupert's career, which had included being founder and chairman of the Rembrandt Tobacco Company and head of Rothmans International. He was also closely involved with the Afrikaner secret society, the *Broederbond*, and is one of the richest men in South Africa. He was involved in establishing the South African Nature Foundation (SANF) in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This was the local division of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), formerly the World Wildlife Fund, which was established around the time the world was beginning to isolate South Africa. The SANF was conceived through close alliance with the WWF's first President, Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, who was considered an ally of white South Africa (Ellis 1994: 59).

The Mandela-Moosa-Rupert initiative represents a push for an inclusive African identity – a new idea of homeland. The former South African Minister of Environment and Tourism, Valli Moosa, who was the first non-white head of the Ministry, expressed it thus:

Southern African boundaries have begun to fall as we and our neighbours embrace the world's most ambitious conservation project, the creation of Africa's 'super-park'. This is the stuff dreams are made of. We are the fortunate generation of South Africans who have witnessed dreams turn to reality. (...) John Lennon shared his dreams with us when he sang: 'Imagine there're no countries. It isn't hard to do. Nothing to kill or die for . . .'. The creation of the great Gaza-Kruger-Transfrontier Park is the single most significant and ambitious conservation project in the world today. It promises to bring a better life to some of the poorest citizens of southern Africa, and is also a real, living and demonstrable manifestation of the African Renaissance. (...) Nature and dreams know no boundaries. (Moosa 2002: 11-12)

Moosa's vision of 'the greatest animal kingdom' is a sincere attempt at resolving the riddle of the national question in South Africa by identifying with nature and the region, above the nation state. The issue of identity is as acute for Indian

South Africans as it is for Afrikaners.² Kader Asmal made it clear upon taking office as Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry in 1994 that he did not believe that the borders inherited from South Africa's colonial legacy were real: 'No one can tell me that my moral obligation stops with the Tsongas in the Eastern Transvaal and does not encompass those who live in the western parts of Mozambique'. Asmal was careful to point out that South Africa was not going to be the leader as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) embraced internationalism. South Africa would play an important but not 'a hegemonistic role ... Modesty is part of reconstruction ... We must learn some modesty in our relations with our neighbours too'.³

Those were the days of SADC and the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), which was the ANC's election promise document drawn up in consultation with organized labour and civil society. It foresaw heavy state intervention in the economic sphere to bring about a better life for all. Within a couple of years however, the government's macro-economic policy changed to a neoliberal supply-oriented approach to development, as witnessed in their new economic policy document 'GEAR' (Growth, Equity and Redistribution) that emphasized the opening up of trade and a big role for the private sector in development. The change took place at the level of the elite following the trend of the pacts made in the negotiation process prior to 1994 (Bond 2000, Hart 2002). An increasing number of prominent ANC negotiators ended up joining the companies of members of the white business elite who also participated in the negotiations. This was a further step in the process of elite pacting (see Carmody 2002). This process had started when members of the white business elite, among them Anton Rupert, had come to the conclusion that apartheid was not (any longer) in the best economic interests of corporate South Africa (Adam *et al.* 1998).

While the shift towards GEAR may have shown confusion about the way development should be brought about by the new government, it also had a good deal to do with a coming to terms with the government's limited economic capacity. In relinquishing an important part of its responsibility to the private sector, the new government lost control over the development process (Carmody 2002). 'Modesty' in international relations was replaced by a self-confident and competitive entrepreneurial spirit. As a result, it seems that

² This became particularly acute in 2002 with the controversy surrounding Mbongeni Ngema's song 'AmaIndia' which popularizes the stereotype of South African Indians lording it over and exploiting black Africans.

³ K. Asmal (25 November 1994), Opening Address at the 'Greening the RDP: People, Environment, Development', Environmental Justice Networking Forum Constitutive Conference, Johannesburg.

regional cooperation is increasingly seen as extending entrepreneurial opportunities across borders. Critical scholars argue that the 'strategic alliances' between the state and the private sector can also be viewed as 'post-colonial discursive constructions that are based on the use of private capital in order to establish zones of influence, without incurring direct costs' (Tevera & Chimhowu 2003: 35, see also Mudenda 2000). According to Mudenda (2000) and Ramutsindela (2004a, 2004b), there is mounting anxiety within Southern Africa that South African investors are somehow 'colonizing' the transfrontier area.

The loss of modesty is well illustrated by Cyril Ramaphosa's presentation which followed Minister Moosa's opening of the World Wilderness Congress in 2001. Ramaphosa, a former giant in ANC politics and leader of the country's biggest trade-union federation, COSATU, left politics for business where he now leads initiatives for black economic empowerment. Introduced by the dramatic overture of an African wildlife film, his face was projected onto the screen and he boomed into the microphone 'Did you hear the lion roar? That's ME!' He had come to announce the 'My Acre of Africa' project at the Kruger National Park in an attempt to raise, mostly foreign, capital for conservation and black empowerment by appealing to donors' desires for, amongst other things, immortality. However, Ramaphosa's company 'Johnnic' is poised to take the lion's share. Mark Gevisser (*Mail & Guardian* 11 October 1996) wrote in an insightful biographical sketch of Ramaphosa that:

As the Randlords harnessed capital in the service of Empire and the Broeders harnessed it in the service of Afrikaner Nationalism, Ramaphosa goes to battle for Black Empowerment. In all three of these phases of South African capitalism, there is a synergy between the ideological aspirations of a ruling class and the personal ambitions of the entrepreneurs themselves: it is not inaccurate, on one level, to compare Ramaphosa to a Rhodes or a Rupert.

Rhodes sought immortality on a granite hill in the Matopos National Park in Zimbabwe, and Ramaphosa is well remembered for his fishing trip with the Nationalist's Roelf Meyer during deadlock in the Kempton Park negotiations in 1992. They bonded in nature sufficiently to get the peace process back on track (Draper 2002). Like former Minister Moosa, Ramaphosa is given to lyricism about his natural heritage, his soul, and the eco-poetics of nature.

The project of expanding the Kruger beyond South Africa's borders seems to be driven by a combination of a new form of 'Super African' nationalism that is coupled with local and international capital interests. 'Nationalizing' through identifying with nature is not new. A settler's desire for an African identity provided major impetus in the creation of the WWF. It came in the form of a letter from Victor Stolan to Sir Julian Huxley in 1960:

Since my naturalisation, I am proud to call this country mine, but I cannot help feeling that it has become a country of understatement, of gentle talk with not enough push behind it. If ... what is left of wildlife in Africa (and elsewhere for that matter) is to be saved, a blunt and ruthless demand must be made to those who, with their riches, can build for themselves a shining monument in history.

Stolan was clearly identifying his *naturalization* with Africa's *nature* rather than any particular nation. It was this concern that prompted him to declare that there was 'no time for Victorian procedure' (Scott 1965: 26-27). The 'blunt and ruthless demand' was for African land on which people lived. Writing during the apartheid government's twilight years, Ellis (1994) saw in Rupert's dream of extending the Kruger into Mozambique, the drive for territorial control and a *boerestaat* (white homeland) outside of the South African constitution in which some control over the means of violence was retained. In other words, 'a Super-Park for Super-Afrikaners' (cf. Wilkins & Strydom 1978).

The quest for identity and fulfilment by the global elite is that of the restless settler. As Mamdani (1998: 6) defines settlers, they need not be white, only constantly on the move. They may be in search of greener pastures for profit-making or they may be manipulating global capital in an elusive quest for homeland. The response of local communities, however, has been a concern for livelihood strategies and a call for environmental justice: 'not in my backyard' and especially no elephants!

TFCAs and discourses of community development

In his opening speech at the official launch of the Kgalagadi TFCA, President Mogae of Botswana stated that the further development of the Kgalagadi should also

... include the mobilization of our respective local communities for meaningful participation in the sustainable commercial exploitation of natural and tourism resources within their vicinity. It should also promote the respect, protection and preservation of their cultural and social environments. ... The communities *should* ... *realise* that they also have a major responsibility to assist the Conservation Authorities we have entrusted with the joint management of this park by co-operatively working with them to promote environmental conservation and to combat poaching.⁴

Central in the representation of 'local communities' by these authorities is the idea that the 'Others' (i.e. the communities) should be aware of their role and function in nature conservation policies. The centrality of this idea also

⁴ Speech by His Excellency Mr F.G. Mogae, President of the Republic of Botswana, on the occasion of the official launch of Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park at Two Rivers on 12 May 2000 (points 10 and 12).

becomes clear when one looks at the answers in an interview by the then-head of the PPDP of the PPF, Leonard Seelig, to a question about the 'criteria for choice of communities' to be included or financed by the PPDP:

I turn down a lot of requests of communities that are just too far away. That's how we keep the focus. (...) So, our first criterion is obviously a geographical criterion. The second criteria is a commitment criteria. (...) I want actually to see people commit to these projects. So commitment, not financial, but in the form of time and what we call 'sweat equity'.⁵

The 'commitment' Seelig is referring to is made explicit later in the interview where he emphasizes the importance of basic environmental and conservation education.

It's critical for any other work we want to do, that they begin to understand what this is all about and why they shouldn't chop down the trees and why they shouldn't let their cattle eat everything. ... I would say that almost anything I do is basically within the context of CBNRM because what I'm trying to show communities through small projects is that they can actually benefit from the preservation of their environment and by taking care of their environment properly.⁶

The required commitment refers to the PPF conservation policy on the 'proper way' to deal with the natural environment. If communities show that commitment they will be considered 'good natives' and granted project money. If not they will be labelled 'bad natives' and considered a problem in the further execution of the PPF nature conservation policy. In other words, 'good' communities must live up to the parameters which have been formulated by the (western-dominated) (inter)national conservation agencies like the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources), the WWF and the PPF. They have to constantly show a state of 'purity', which in western thought means that they have to show a certain 'primitivism' and 'simplicity' (Neumann 2000: 227). The ambivalence inherent in the discourse of conservation has a long tradition in western thought, as was shown above. This is not to argue that international conservation bodies are unaware of the problems of so-called 'enforced primitivism' because their researchers have been pointing it out for some time (McNeely & Pitt 1985). We argue, however, that enforced primitivism may not be conscious policy but becomes practice through the unconscious imposition of latent but deeply held values.

The assumption is that many of the ideas about conservation and the specific role of communities in it fall beyond the consciousness of community members themselves. It reserves the 'true' consciousness and knowledge about these issues for the policy makers in conservation bodies. The Other is naturalized

⁵ Stephanie Speets's interview with Leonard Seelig, PPF/PPDP, date unknown.

⁶ Ibid.

and objectified and, in the same process, separated from the policy makers. The conservation authorities are increasingly assuming airs of superiority in their own construction of reality, to the neglect of those of Others. The distance is increased through the use of a distancing vocabulary which, in its application, seems a replica of the discourse on the 'exotic native' who is still part of the landscape, untouched by modernity. Looking, for instance, at the booklet produced by the South African National Parks to position themselves in the debate on the involvement of communities in nature conservation, the photographs of the Other (i.e. the communities they promise to give their fair share) are particularly striking. The first photograph in the chapter on the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park, for example, is a familiar 'descendant' of colonial photography showing a San family, a man and a woman carrying a child in front of their hut, wearing traditional clothes. Like most of the photographs in the booklet it is a strictly composed picture. The text accompanying it fits the colonial image of the subservient 'natives' accommodating their white 'masters': 'The Nama welcomed all who come to inhabit this land. After all the suffering as a result of that, *they* can still smile' (SANP 2000: 68).

Effects on the agency of communities

The question remains as to how these images and discourses on 'communities' affect their agency. Recently, a lot has been written about groups using 'indigeneity' as a strategy to claim their rights. Indigeneity invokes timelessness and permanence (Niezen 2003: 25) and a certain degree of 'closeness to nature' that would allow participation in nature conservation. However, a particularly poignant illustration of the dangers of invoking this concept is provided by Sylvain who describes how a group of San who had lost their lands to nature conservation, but were awarded a substantial land claim within the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park (now part of the Kgaligadi TFCA) in 1999, were forced to legitimize their claim by referring to essentialist cultural characteristics: '... the identity that will be returned to them with the land is their "traditional lifestyle" as "spear-carrying barefoot hunter-gathers clad in loincloths"' (Sylvain 2002: 1081). Sylvain describes how another group of San who had lost their lands to commercial farmers and had ended up as impoverished farm labourers, having lost all ties with and possibilities of returning to a hunter-gather lifestyle, were denied a claim to land. They had lost the cultural characteristics associated with the San, and their pristine desert landscape had been transformed into farm land (ibid: 1076). Here, the remark made by Bowen (2000) that analytically the concept of indigeneity turns attention away from political-economic interests seems particularly relevant.

The image of communities as territorially bound appears to have similar double-edged-sword qualities. While environmental agencies claim custodianship of 'wilderness areas' across the borders 'for the good of all', communities can only participate and benefit if they are located close to such areas. It is this way of binding communities to specific, narrowly defined territories that militates against them (Hughes McDermott 2002). Such restrictions ignore the fact that they may be dependent on resources much further afield. They also ignore the fact that most communities deploy livelihood strategies that are not bound to one locality. Cattle breeders, for instance, temporarily move their herds to greener pastures; many families rely on remittances from members engaged in wage labour elsewhere; and people from the cities come to collect poles and firewood to sell back in town. These strategies often involve (illegal) border crossings. In other words, being local in this setting is to be transnational.

In South Africa, the territorial binding that resonates colonial and apartheid assumptions about access to land on the basis of group membership (Mamdani 1996, Vail 1989) nevertheless offers a strategy to some of the communities that want to benefit from the Great Limpopo development. After the transition in 1994 to a democratic government, communities that had been displaced under the Group Areas Act of 1950 and subsequent legislation could file a land claim. Such claims greatly strengthen the bargaining power of local people relative to that of the conservation authorities, increasing their chances of extracting benefits from the parks included in the TFCA, some of which were established by way of forced removals. In 1996 the South African Minister for Land Affairs announced that land claims were one of the strongest mechanisms for correcting the balance of power between communities and conservation authorities (Reid 2001: 138). These claims were facilitated by the Communal Property Association Act of 1996, which allows communities to set up a Communal Property Association through which they can acquire, hold and manage property communally (ibid: 138).

One of the most widely publicized claims, and one that is often cited by both SANParks and the PPF as proof that communities are benefiting from the Great Limpopo, is the claim lodged by the Makuleke community. In May 1998 the Makuleke and SANParks announced that they had reached a negotiated settlement of the Makuleke's claim for the restitution of what was then known as the Pafuri Triangle, the northernmost section of the Kruger National Park. This area is central to the Great Limpopo, bordering all three of the TFCA countries. The community was able to prove that it occupied the area until August 1969 when it was removed by the then Department of Native Affairs to an area 60 km to the south and only 6,000 hectares in size (Harries 1987). After eighteen months of tough bargaining, the Makuleke were successful. At the official signing

ceremony at Makuleke village, the new (black) CEO of SANParks announced the settlement as a 'breakthrough for South African conservation' and promised that something like the Makuleke removal 'will *never again* take place'. A new paradigm, he said, had been established within SANParks that aimed at transforming relations with its neighbours.

This celebrated statement, however, obscured the conflictual process that preceded the settlement, during which SANParks tried to prevent the development of community-based tourism in the area subject to the land claim and instead tried to develop a buffer zone between the Kruger Park and the Makuleke community, thus trying to limit the Makuleke's access to land even further (Steenkamp 2000, 2001, Spierenburg *et al.* 2006). The Land Claims Commission, however, recognized and made explicit the conflict of interests between the Makuleke and SANParks and structured the decision-making process accordingly. A rigorous distinction was made between the interests of the Makuleke and SANParks, a step that clearly undermined existing power relations between the two and strengthened the community's overall bargaining position. A particularly energetic land claims commissioner further ensured that the Makuleke claim was taken to its full logical extent.

Although the Makuleke land claim was successful (Steenkamp 2000, 2001), a number of conditions were attached to the restoration of land ownership. The land had to be used for conservation purposes for the next ninety-nine years. No mining, prospecting, residence or agriculture would be permitted and no development was allowed to take place without an environmental impact assessment. SANParks retained the right of first refusal should the land ever be put up for sale. Importantly, the Makuleke entered into a twenty-five-year contractual agreement with SANParks. To manage the contractual park, a Joint Management Board was set up consisting of three SANParks and three community representatives. SANParks is responsible for all of the management costs of the Makuleke part of the park for an initial period of five years. After that, the CPA of the Makuleke community will be liable for 50 per cent of these costs (*ibid.*: 143, Steenkamp 2001). These conditions amount to a compromise between the Makuleke and the state, encouraged by a statement made by the then Minister of Land Affairs that he was willing to support the Makuleke claim as long as they were willing to compromise and not be 'greedy'. Furthermore, representatives of the Makuleke fear that their authority over the contractual park will be further diminished by the new management structure that is to be set up for the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park, of which it is now part. Within this new management structure, the contractual park will have a representative on the Joint Management Board, but given the fact that SANParks is part of the Board, this does not automatically mean that the community will be represented as such.

In the meantime, it appears as if SANParks, despite using the Makuleke success story for publicity purposes, is trying to discourage other communities from trying to obtain a settlement of their own land claims. Some of these have already been approached with similar plans about developing buffer zones between them and the park that they could use for tourism. In practice however, this would mean that not only do they not receive access to the land under claim but that they would also be asked to contribute part of the limited land they now have available for conservation (see Groothoff 2004).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that although nature conservation in South Africa now forms an important platform for black and white political and business elites to come together, cooperation with local communities shows that some groups receive preferential treatment based on their alleged relationship with nature. In the case of the Great Limpopo TFCA, local communities are having to struggle hard to gain influence in the management of conservation areas, even if they own parts of these areas. The organizations involved in TFCA development, notably SANParks and the PPF are increasingly sending out conflicting messages about the role of local communities in TFCAs. On their websites they still stress the importance of the contribution of TFCAs to the economic development of local communities and celebrate the recognition of the Makuleke land claim as a positive event. These statements are in contrast with SANParks interactions with other groups that have filed land claims and with the brochure that was published on the occasion of the signing of the tripartite agreement about the establishment of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park. The Great Limpopo was initially envisaged as a Transfrontier Conservation Area but is now referred to as a Transfrontier Park. In the brochure (SANP/PPF 2003) it is stated that:

... all a Transfrontier *Park* means is that the authorities responsible for the areas in which the primary focus is wildlife conservation, and which border each other across international boundaries, formally agree to manage those areas as one integrated unit according to a streamlined management plan. These authorities also undertake *to remove all human barriers* within the Transfrontier Park so that animals can roam freely. (italics added)

John Hanks's successor at the PPF, Willem van Riet, is self-conscious about accusations of 'managing by prescription' and the sidelining of communities, and declared that the organization has already altered its management style (Michler 2003: 80). Yet, a statement by the PPF project coordinator does not seem to reflect much change:

For community representatives to participate on the actual management of a national park is something unfair to the community themselves. In most cases the people that are appointed to manage a national park have gone and done years of studying to gain a tertiary education. They're well qualified ... I know a lot of critics are advocating for it (community involvement), but in my mind it is the same as having someone living next to an airport come and sit next to the air traffic controller.... You can't make them air traffic controllers. (in Tanner 2003: 83)

References

- Aberly, D. 1999, 'Interpreting Bioregionalism: A Story from Many Voices', in: M.V. McGinni (ed.), *Bioregionalism*, London: Routledge, pp. 13-42.
- Adam, H., F. van Zyl Slabbert & K. Moodley 1998, *Comrades in Business. Post-liberation Politics in South Africa*, Utrecht: International Books.
- Adams, J.S. & T.O. McShane 1996, *The Myth of Wild Africa: Conservation without Illusion*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Adams, W.M. 2004, *Against Extinction. The Story of Conservation*, London: Earthscan.
- Adams, W.M. & D. Hulme 2001, 'Conservation & Community, Changing Narratives, Policies and Practices in African Conservation', in: D. Hulme & M. Murphree (eds), *African Wildlife and Livelihoods. The Promise and Performance of Community Conservation*, Oxford/Portsmouth: James Currey/Heinemann, pp. 9-23.
- Anderson, D. & R. Grove (eds) 1987, *Conservation in Africa. People, Policies and Practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Beinart, W. & P. Coates 1995, *Environments and History. The Taming of Nature in the USA and South Africa*, London: Routledge.
- Bond, P. 2000, *Elite Transition: From Apartheid to Neoliberalism in South Africa*, Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.
- Bowen, J.R. 2000, 'Should We Have a Universal Concept of Indigenous People's Rights?', *Anthropology Today* 16 (4): 12-16.
- Broch-Due, V. 2000, 'Producing Nature and Poverty in Africa: An Introduction', in: V. Broch-Due & R.A. Schroeder (eds), *Producing Nature and Poverty in Africa*, Stockholm: Nordiska Afrika Institutet, pp. 9-52.
- Brown, J. 2001, *Spirits of Place. Five Famous Lives in their English Landscape*, London: Penguin Books.
- Budiansky, S. 1995, *Nature's Keepers. The New Science of Nature Management*, London: Phoenix Giant.
- Burchell, W.J. 1822, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa, Volume 1*, London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown.
- Burchell, W.J. 1824, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa, Volume 2*, London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown.
- Carmody, P. 2002, 'Between Globalisation and (post)Apartheid: The Political Economy of Restructuring in South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 28 (2): 255-75.
- Carruthers, J. 1995, *The Kruger National Park. A Social and Political History*, Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.
- Carruthers, J. 2001, *Wildlife and Warfare. The Life of James Stevenson-Hamilton*, Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.

- Chapin, M. 2004, 'A Challenge to Conservationists', *World Watch Magazine* Nov/Dec: 17-31.
- Coetzee, G. 2003, *Happy Natives*, Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.
- Coetzee, J.M. 1988, *White Writing. On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*, New Haven/London: Yale University Press.
- Cosgrove, D. & S. Daniels (eds) 1988, *The Iconography of Landscape. Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and the Use of Past Environments*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Draper, M. 2002, 'Going Native? Trout and Settling Identity in a "Rainbow" Nation', *Historia* 2002, 55-94.
- Draper, M., M. Spierenburg & H. Wels 2004, 'African Dreams of Cohesion: Elite Pacting and Community Development in Transfrontier Conservation Areas in Southern Africa', Special Issue *Culture and Organization: 'Managing Cohesion in Transnational Organizations'* 10 (4): 341-51.
- Ellis, S. 1994, 'Of Elephants and Men: Politics and Nature Conservation in South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20 (1): 53-69.
- Forster, J. 2003, "'Land of Contrasts" or "Home We Have Always Known"? The SAR&H and the Imaginary Geography of White South African Nationhood, 1919-1930', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29 (3): 657-80.
- Gibson, C.C. 1999, *Politicians and Poachers. The Political Economy of Wildlife Policy in Africa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Groothoff, D. 2004, 'Animals and Animosity. A Tsonga Community Wildlife Project in the Limpopo Province of South Africa', unpublished MA Thesis, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam.
- Grove, R. 1987, 'Early Themes in African Conservation', in: D. Anderson & R. Grove (eds), *Conservation in Africa. People, Policies and Practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Harries, P. 1987, 'A Forgotten Corner of the Transvaal: Reconstructing the History of a Re-located Community through Oral Testimony and Song', in: B. Bozzoli (ed.), *Class, Community and Conflict*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, pp. 93-134.
- Hart, G. 2002, *Disabling Globalization. Places of Power in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.
- Hughes McDermott, D. 2002, 'Going Transboundary: Scale Making and Exclusion in Southern African Conservation', Paper presented at the Environment and Development Advanced Research Circle, University of Wisconsin.
- Hulme, E. & M. Murphree 2001, 'Community Conservation in Africa. An Introduction', in: D. Hulme & M. Murphree (eds), *African Wildlife and Livelihoods. The Promise and Performance of Community Conservation*, Oxford/Portsmouth: James Currey/Heinemann, pp. 1-8.
- Jahoda, G. 1999, *Images of Savages. Ancient Roots of Modern Prejudice in Western Culture*, London: Routledge.
- Jones, K.R. & J. Wills 2005, *The Invention of the Park. From the Garden of Eden to Disney's Magic Kingdom*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Kemal, S. & I. Gaskell 1993, 'Nature, Fine Arts, and Aesthetics', in: S. Kemal & I. Gaskell (eds), *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-42.
- King, G. 1996, *Mapping Reality. An Exploration of Cultural Cartographies*, London: MacMillan Press.

- Kirkaldy, E.N. 2003, 'The Darkness within the Light: Berlin Missionaries and the Landscape of Vandaland c. 1870-1900', *Historia* 48 (1): 169-202.
- Kiss, A. (ed.) 1990, *Living with Wildlife: Wildlife Resource Management with Local Participation in Africa*, Washington, D.C: World Bank.
- Lovell, N. (ed.) 1998, *Locality and Belonging*, London: Routledge.
- Luig, U. & A. Von Oppen 1997, 'Landscape in Africa: Process and Vision. An Introductory Essay', in: U. Luig & A. Von Oppen (eds), 'The Making of African Landscapes', *Paideuma* (43): 7-45.
- Mail and Guardian*, 11 October 1996, 'Cyril Ramaphosa, Deputy Chair of New'.
- Mail and Guardian*, 26 April 2002, 'Mega Park Threatened'.
- Mail and Guardian*, 3 May 2002, 'Old Boys Jeopardise Dream'.
- Mamdani, M. 1998, 'When Does a Settler Become a Native? Reflections of the Colonial Roots of Citizenship in Equatorial and South Africa', Inaugural lecture, New Series No. 208, University of Cape Town, Department of Communication.
- McNeely, J.A. (ed.) 1992, *Parks for Life: Report of the IVth World Congress on National Parks and Protected Areas*, Gland, Switzerland: International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources.
- McNeely, J.A. & D. Pitt 1985, *Culture and Conservation: The Human Dimension in Environmental Planning*, London: Croom Helm.
- Michler, I. 2003, 'Bring Down the Fences', *Africa Geographic* March: p. 80.
- Moosa, Mohammed Valli, 2002, 'Truly the Greatest Animal Kingdom', *Bojanala* (SA Dept. of Environmental Affairs and Tourism) 1 (1): 11-12.
- Mudenda, G. 2000, 'Cross-border White Farmer Migrations in Southern Africa: The Zambian Experience', in: D. Tevera & S. Moyo (ed.), *Environmental Security in Southern Africa*, Harare: SAPES Books, pp. 89-100.
- Neumann, R.P. 1998, *Imposing Wilderness. Struggles over Livelihood and Nature Preservation in Africa*, Berkeley/London: University of California Press.
- Neumann, R.P. 2000, 'Primitive Ideas: Protected Area Buffer Zones and the Politics of Land in Africa', in: V. Broch-Due & R.A. Schroeder (eds), *Producing Nature and Poverty in Africa*, Stockholm: Nordiska Afrika Institutet, pp. 220-42.
- Niezen, R. 2003, *The Origins of Indigenism*, Berkeley/London: University of California Press.
- Pinnock, D. 1996, 'Superparks: An Impossible Dream?', *Getaway* November.
- Player, I. 1997, *Zululand Wilderness: Shadow and Soul*, Cape Town: David Philip.
- Ramutsindela, M. 2004a, *Parks and People in Postcolonial Societies: Experiences in Southern Africa*, Dordrecht/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Ramutsindela, M. 2004b, 'Glocalisation and Nature Conservation Strategies in 21st-Century Southern Africa', *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 95 (1): 61-72.
- Ranger, T.O. 1997, 'Making Zimbabwean Landscapes. Painters, Projectors and Priests', in: U. Luig & A. Von Oppen (eds), 'The Making of African Landscapes', *Paideuma* (43): 59-73.
- Reid, H. 2001, 'Contractual National Parks and the Makuleke Community', *Human Ecology* 29 (2): 135-55.
- RRP (Refugee Research Programme) 2002, 'A Park for the People? Community Consultation in Coutada 16, Mozambique', Research Report, University of the Witwatersrand.

- SANP 2000, *Visions of Change. Social Ecology and South African National Parks*, Pretoria: SANP.
- SANP/PPF 2003, 'Gaza-Kruger-Gonarezhou Transfrontier Park, A New Era in Ecosystem Management and Co-operation for Southern Africa', Brochure published by SANP in cooperation with the Peace Parks Foundation.
- Saayman, G.S. (ed.) 1990 (1986), *Modern South Africa in Search of a Soul: Jungian Perspectives on the Wilderness Within*, Boston, MA: Sigo Press.
- Schama, S. 1996, *Landscape and Memory*, London: Fontana Press.
- Scholtz, J. du P. 1970, *Strat Caldecott, 1886-1929*, Cape Town: Balkema.
- Schreiner, O. 1995 (1883), *The Story of an African Farm*, London: Penguin Books.
- Scott, P. 1965, *The Launching of a New Ark: First Report of the World Wildlife Fund*, London: Collins.
- Smith, W. 1991, *Elephant Song*, London: Pan Books.
- Spierenburg, M., C. Steenkamp & H. Wels 2006 (in press), 'Resistance against Marginalisation of Local Communities in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area, Southern Africa', *Focaal. European Journal of Anthropology* (47): 18-31.
- Steenkamp, C. 2000, *The Makuleke Land Claim: Power Relations and CBNRM*, London: IIED (Evaluating Eden Series).
- Steenkamp, C. 2001, 'The Makuleke Land Claim: An Environmental Conflict', PhD Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand.
- Stoll, M. 1997, *Protestantism, Capitalism, and Nature in America*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Sylvain, R. 2002, 'Land, Water, and Truth': San Identity and Global Idigenism', *American Anthropologist* 104 (4): 1074-85.
- Tanner, R.J. 2003, 'Transfrontier Conservation Areas of Southern Africa and Community Involvement in the Context of International Law', Unpublished MSc Thesis, University of Montana.
- Tevera, D. & A. Chimhowu 2003, 'Situating the Maputo Corridor: A Regional Perspective', in: F. Söderbaum & I. Taylor (eds), *Regionalism and Uneven Development in Southern Africa: The Case of the Maputo Development Corridor*, Aldershot/Burlington: Ashgate, pp. 32-40.
- Vail, L. 1989, 'Ethnicity in Southern African History', in: L. Vail (ed.), *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, pp. 1-19.
- van der Post, L. 1962 (1958), *The Lost World of the Kalahari*, London: Penguin Books.
- Wels, H. 2003, 'About Romance and Reality: Popular European Imagery in Postcolonial Tourism in Southern Africa', in: C.M. Hall & H. Tucker (eds), *Tourism and Postcolonialism: Contested Discourses, Identities and Representations*, London: Routledge.
- Wilkins, I. & H. Strydom 1978, *The Super-Afrikaners inside the Afrikaner Broederbond*, Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball.
- Wilmsen, E.N. 1995, 'First People? Images and Imaginations in South African Iconography', *Critical Arts. A Journal of Cultural Studies* 9, (2) 1-27.
- Wolmer, W. 2003, 'Transboundary Conservation: The Politics of Ecological Integrity in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29 (1): 261-78.

Solitary births in Téra, Niger: A local quest for safety

Gertie Janssen

Silence and secrecy have always surrounded pregnancy and childbirth in Songhay villages in southwestern Niger and continue to do so today in spite of rapid socio-economic developments and bio-medical advances in health care. While cultural constraints may restrict women's knowledge about pregnancy in general and demand that they give birth alone to avoid 'haawi' (shame), their agency ensures that these decisions are made in negotiation with these constraints. Although women decide to adhere to silence, to respect secrecy and seek seclusion, these are all manifestations of manoeuvring within their constrained social space. Do Songhay women act intentionally and consciously when seeking seclusion and maintaining secrecy? This chapter discusses the ways in which these determined women in Niger's Téra district find spiritual and social safety in their choice of childbirth practices.

The case of a solitary birth in Tondigoungo, Téra, southwestern Niger

Aïssa,¹ who is 22 years old and pregnant, is almost at term with her second child. She had her first baby when she was 18 and has not been pregnant again until now. Aïssa is from Tondigoungo and still lives in the village but did go back to her parental house for her first delivery as is the custom, even though the house is just next door. She told us about her first pregnancy and the delivery.

¹ For reasons of privacy, Aïssa is not the real name of the woman whose case is described here.

She had bouts of fever and vomiting at the beginning of her first pregnancy but otherwise experienced no major complications. She attended an antenatal clinic three times. These were then still held in Tondigoungo itself and organized by a nurse who came to the village. Aïssa was given information about pregnancy, infant nutrition and vaccinations, and her weight and the position of her uterus were checked. Some of the women were advised to go to the clinic for further check-ups but Aïssa was not.

Aïssa continued her daily chores – even the heavy tasks such as fetching water and pounding millet – throughout her pregnancy until she felt her first contractions. She felt pains in her abdomen and in her back that she had never experienced before and knew she was about to give birth. The women often chat about their deliveries and about what happens and what one should or should not do. Women should not cry; it is best to sit on one's hands and knees or on one's haunches; and women should not push too hard. Aïssa still managed to prepare food as usual and that way kept herself preoccupied. When people came back from evening prayers and were getting ready to go to sleep² she went inside because she felt that her pagne (wraparound cloth) was wet. She then went into a back room and knelt down on a sheet of plastic that she had bought especially for the occasion. She felt enormous pressure and knew that the birth was imminent. She said that the pains were unlike anything she had ever experienced. While crouching down and trying to keep quiet so as not to disturb anyone, she pushed. She delivered the baby and the placenta followed soon after. However, the baby's head was still covered with the membrane and it did not cry. Aïssa was frightened because she knew the baby should make a sound. At this point Aïssa called her mother who came and cut the membrane with her nail. She fetched another woman and together they cut the umbilical cord with a new razor blade and buried the placenta outside in the yard, while the baby was placed next to its mother. The matrone³ was called in later to wash and take care of the baby. Another woman washed Aïssa and cooked her meals for a fortnight.

Aïssa claims that she had listened carefully when other women were discussing their pregnancies and births and felt that she recognized the contractions from their stories. Everything went better than she had expected because of having heard these stories. She said she would go about childbirth the same way again, not letting anybody know what was happening and giving birth alone, to avoid shame.

² People generally tend to sleep outside for about nine months of the year due to the heat.

³ *Matrone* is derived from the French word *matrone* (in English 'matron'). In villages in Niger it is the word used to refer to a traditional midwife. She will usually have had some training, although not always, and will have been appointed by the village chief and/or committee.

Introduction

Aïssa's description above is a good example of the numerous stories about childbirth that I was told in Tondigoungo, a village in the district of Téra in southwestern Niger.⁴ Many of these stories begin and end in similar ways, with a woman hiding her pregnancy and diverting attention away from it by continuing with all her regular tasks, and then having a few women around to take care of herself and her baby shortly after the birth. What happens in between, during labour and at the actual birth itself, is a bit of a mystery known only to the woman involved, as the way she gives birth remains very much a private and solitary affair.

In Tondigoungo, as in many other Songhay-Djerma villages (Olivier de Sardan 2001), pregnancy and childbirth are surrounded by silence and secrecy. Women consider it important not to attract *haawi*⁵ (shame), evil spirits or witchcraft on themselves, their child or their family and thereby endanger someone's well-being. During pregnancy and delivery a woman and her baby are especially vulnerable to such influences and women realize that precautions need to be taken in this dangerous phase. Keeping a pregnancy hidden from others as far as possible and remaining silent about the pregnancy, any complications and the delivery, and attempting to deliver alone appear to be ways of achieving a 'safe passage – a survival strategy from pre-conception through childbirth' (Chapman 2003: 364).

For the women in Téra district it is not uncommon to deliver their babies alone. The choice for an unassisted birth in an environment which is not considered by many to be a 'safe haven' for mother and child is quite unique.⁶ This

⁴ General information on the social-cultural context, Songhay women and their health was gathered in several villages between 1994 and 1996 while I was working on a district healthcare project as a medical anthropological researcher on reproductive health (Janssen 1996). In 2004 and 2005 the research was resumed in the village of Tondigoungo and consisted of group discussions (involving a total of 22 women) and individual interviews with 21 other women of varying ages, the two *matrones*, and ten men. Several aspects of pregnancy and birth were central to the research, with a focus on solitary births.

⁵ It is practically impossible to translate the concept *haawi* and describe what emotional/social and/or spiritual aspects are involved. The Djerma *haaw* means 'to be ashamed' and *haawendi* means 'to put to shame' or 'to humiliate'. Shame is a central theme in social behaviour; to avoid shame means to have good manners and to be chaste. (Olivier de Sardan 1982).

⁶ There are a few other exceptions in the world where solitary birth is also said to happen. Carolyn Sargent (1989) has described the case of the Bariba in Benin extensively and Megan Biesele (1997) reported similar behaviour among the Ju/'huoansi in the Kalahari. And I have heard reports through personal communication about other parts of the world (e.g. Mexico and Assam, India).

chapter describes how silence, secrecy and *haawi* play a role in the phenomenon of a solitary birth in a village in the district of Téra. The women's decisions to keep their pregnancy secret and to later withdraw from their direct environment and any form of assistance during labour and delivery are placed in their socio-cultural context. The importance that women attach to silence during pregnancy and childbirth is further examined. And the risk of *haawi*, which appears to be ever important, is related to the various aspects of pregnancy and childbirth.

This study looks at women's approaches to and ways of coping with pregnancy in Tondigoungo. The women's preparations, options and choices about giving birth are subsequently examined and finally the births themselves are studied. The women and their direct environment are taken as the point of departure and the others involved in and around birth are thus included. The women's space to manoeuvre and act because of the existing structures is discussed here. The research also examines how women in Tondigoungo are searching for their own safe passage and what choices they are making to achieve this within structures that can be both enabling and constraining.

Sargent's study among Bariba women in Benin (1982: 1484) clearly applies to the case of women in Tondigoungo:

... every women (sic) should attempt a solitary delivery. She should disguise signs of labor and continue to perform daily responsibilities until she feels the urge to push, at which time she should retire to an unoccupied room, and assume the kneeling position for delivery. She is (only) expected to call for aid in cutting the cord, using a razor blade, bamboo sliver, or knife for this purpose.

Despite this ideal, Sargent still noted the importance given to the presence of the indigenous midwife during deliveries. The women in Tondigoungo, however, indicated that they preferred a delivery without assistance and sometimes, if assistance is needed, to have somebody else attend. In many an interview and group discussion it became clear that the ideal birth for a young woman in Tondigoungo is solitary and silent and performed in secrecy. A 'public secret' it may be, from what we shall see, as life is mostly lived in the company of others, people depend on each other and have to obey certain social rules. But 'agency means that people make decisions within the limits of their constraints' (Lopez 1997: 157 in Koster 2003: 24), which is clearly what women appear to be doing in Tondigoungo. Although their decisions are those of adhering to silence, respecting secrecy and seeking seclusion, these are all manifestations of manoeuvring within their constrained social space. Koster's remarks (2003: 307) about women *consciously* acting secretly, which permits secrecy to be considered a strategy, offers food for thought in the context of Songhay women trying to keep their pregnancies and births secret.

The common ideology of silence, secrecy and a solitary birth has remained dominant in the Songhay villages despite the influence of bio-medical health

care and changing socio-economic circumstances, which have put it under pressure. In withstanding some of these new factors and giving in to others, women appear to be seeking their own safe passage towards safe motherhood.

Our daughters know nothing of pregnancy. On the other hand, even we, our mothers taught us nothing. One needs to fall pregnant and deliver to know something oneself. (Olivier de Sardan *et al.* 2001: 8)

I had heard stories about birth, and it went better than I expected, but it still is the hardest work a woman can perform, it exceeds everything else. But you do not want anybody present at a birth, not even your mother. You don't want other women to later say that you were afraid; you want to deliver without a man or woman knowing about it, this way you don't feel ashamed and you are courageous. (A 28-year-old woman with 4 children, 1 miscarriage, Tondigoungo, 2005)

This chapter focuses on the possibilities and constraints for women when making a choice in this matter. First, a description of the village environment is given to provide background and context to the women's lives and to the structures within which they live. The next section highlights the socialization of the women themselves in Tondigoungo, looking mainly at their ideas and activities regarding pregnancy and childbirth. It is here that the secrecy and silence with which pregnancy and birth are surrounded begin to take shape. *Haawi*, or shame, is such an omnipresent emotion and theme that its connotation regarding solitary birth is considered separately in the following section. Finally, the various aspects surrounding and leading up to the choice for a solitary birth are discussed and analyzed. Through the stories of Aïssa and other women in Tondigoungo, the choice for solitary birth is brought to the fore.

The village of Tondigoungo

Tondi-Gungo literally means 'Rock Island' which is exactly what the place looks like when you approach it along one of the dirt tracks through the bush. Tondigoungo is a small village in the district of Téra in southwest Niger, close to the border with Burkina Faso. It is relatively isolated and sits on an outcrop of big, granite boulders that are quite unusual in an area which is characterized by vast, dry, yellowish savannah. Grass grows freely in places where it is not eaten by cattle, goats and sheep, and there are thorny bushes and a few big trees scattered over the plains. Patches of dusty land have been cleared here and there in an attempt to grow sorghum or millet but good harvests are dependent on the variable rainy seasons. Water is a scarcity and the rural population relies on pumps, wells and a few pools. But not only lack of rain can ruin a harvest, as was shown as recently as September 2004 when crops that were almost ready for harvesting were all completely destroyed by enormous swarms of locusts that converged over most of West Africa from the north.

The nearest villages to Tondigoungo are mere hamlets with some scattered huts and homesteads. The closest big village is Diagourou about 10 km away, which has a weekly market, a primary school and a health post with a resident nurse. It is about 25 km to the town of Téra where the district's administrative offices are located as well as three secondary schools and a hospital. The village of Tondigoungo itself has a village chief, a small primary school with three teachers and two trained *matrones* for a population of approximately 1600 inhabitants (about 2000 if the homesteads and hamlets in the wider area are included). The village is situated at the bend of a dry riverbed, where water flows very briefly during a good rainy season. After the rainy season (July/August), water can still be had from the dams and pools (*mares*) that filled up during the rains. The riverbed, however, always offers the opportunity for digging deep pits to obtain water for animals and gardens, and also even for washing or drinking. Normally, drinking water is fetched in buckets and jerry cans from the one big manual pump, which works by turning an enormous metal wheel, or from another smaller pedal pump, both of which are situated a short distance outside the village. During the dry season, which lasts from October to June/July, people depend on water from these pumps. The maximum temperatures are bearable in winter (December/January) but do not drop below 37°C in the humid, hot season just before the arrival of the rains (May/June). In wintertime, people do not have much protection against the cold but the hot season bears down hard on the local people and an incredible effort is required to perform all the necessary daily tasks. People sit quietly in the shade as much as they can. Some daily tasks, however, must carry on regardless of the heat. Thus people rise early, start work in the cooler morning and go to sleep when it gets dark. Most will sleep outside where the air might cool off a bit towards early morning. Life is generally organized according to the Muslim calendar, festivities and prayers, but the natural agricultural calendar plays a role too.

One notices the women first when arriving in Tondigoungo, that is if the children cannot already be seen at their look-out points on top of the rocks. It is a bit like entering a fort when one drives or walks into the village over the narrow, sandy paths, between the rocks, houses and loam walls. The men, when present, are usually gathered in small groups under a *hangar* (a shade made of wood and straw mats) close to one of the small *boutiques* (shops), in or around the big mosque, in smaller praying areas or they are working on the fields. At the time of the year when nothing much needs to be done in the fields, many, especially the younger men, take the opportunity to travel to the capital city Niamey or abroad (*en exode*) as far as Ivory Coast or beyond in search of work and money. The women however, can be found as much inside as outside the village at all times of the year. They will usually be grouped somewhat according to age and household, and they will almost always be surrounded by infants

and young children. In the village they often are at work in their compounds but also on the common ground between the houses. Outside the village they may be busy washing clothes, fetching water, collecting firewood, working in the fields, and pounding or winnowing millet and sorghum.

Whether and when a woman performs all these tasks as part of her daily routine depends on the status of the woman and the composition of her household. Co-wives should also help each other in the traditional sense, but depending on their relationship and interests, they might in fact place extra pressure on each other.

A great part of the division of work is dependent on interpersonal relations, the power relations between people and the social control and pressure by others (Bisilliat 1992, Olivier de Sardan 1984). In the patrilineal and patrifocal Songhay society a woman is obliged to help her mother-in-law with certain tasks and in many circumstances she will do so as part and parcel of her own daily routine. Yet a woman is not often restrained from visiting her parents' house. Before and after the birth of her first child a woman often goes back there. No exact time limit regarding her stay is set and several women indicated that they remained up to seven or eight months in their parents' household after their child's birth. One woman explicitly mentioned that she stayed there because of a row with her husband. Others might stay longer due to their husband's absence, for example if he is out of the country working as a migrant labourer. Women also wander over to their parents' household in their spare time, especially when they live close by or in the same village.

For many in the villages their daily responsibilities lie with the women and the elderly. A lot of the young men are away in search of or at work and from time to time a woman might receive some income (cash, clothes or food) from him. This is usually irregular at best; some women will not have seen or heard from their husbands in months or years and some know that their husband has married another wife elsewhere and set up house with her. In practice, there are a lot more female-headed households than people would readily admit to. A woman usually remains in her village of birth until she gets married and then joins her husband and his family in their village where she is then under the responsibility of her in-laws. The women mainly perform the work while the elderly are consulted for their opinion and advice, although in many cases the elders keep on working in the fields and in the households as much as they can. In Tondigoungo many women marry within the village and only move to the household of their husband's family in another quarter. Men and women do not mingle much in their daily lives: they mainly operate within their own group of friends and relatives of the same sex. It is in her new household that a woman will start building up her 'career' as an adult woman, with her own qualities, standing and possibly esteem. It is also here, however, that she will have to

accept help, advice and assistance from her in-laws regarding pregnancy and childbirth.

Aïssa lives in a big compound belonging to her husband's extended family, with her parental house nearby. She shares her compound with several young women and at various times during the day she can be seen doing handiwork or other household chores in the company of others. Aïssa claimed to know that most of her friends have given birth alone and that the help of a *matrone* is only called in if the birth lasts too long. This would appear to be a commonly known fact even among the men:

According to the president of the village health committee (CSV) there is usually nobody present during deliveries, except possibly the mother of the parturient. 'Women do not give birth in front of others, due to a sense of shame'. (Elderly man in Ladanka, 1995)

The *matrones* attend deliveries, although in most instances this is only partially the case and the parturient goes through the greater part of the birth alone, or possibly in someone else's presence. A natural birth unfortunately does not always occur without problems or complications. Tondigoungo women of course experience these too, although nobody is very willing to recount any such experience. Women in general only speak freely of minor difficulties and mainly those which they have managed to overcome themselves, such as giving birth in the *douche*⁷ or minor illnesses among their infants which they managed to cure. When asked about fatal illnesses or deaths during delivery, many a woman will have a story she has heard but nobody is very specific about the possible causes or the people involved.

For most people, the hospital and its bio-medical care are far removed from daily life in Tondigoungo. Only a few families own a donkey and a cart and others must hire their services when necessary. The road is a bumpy and sandy dirt track and the village has no means of contacting the outside world other than via this track. For a woman giving birth this means that if it is decided that she should be referred to the hospital (usually by the *matrone*, but also the father(-in-law) or the husband may be of influence here), she still faces an ordeal before arriving there. If the decision is made to transport her to hospital, the parturient has to leave the rest of the delivery in the hands of others: to make arrangements, take decisions, do the talking and find the money to pay. She will however once again, but in a more humble way, resort to silence; this time

⁷ A corner of the compound with an earthen or sandy floor that is surrounded by a low wall where people wash and can urinate.



Photo 10.1 Women pounding millet in the village of Tondigoungo

letting the process take over or at most giving a warning when she has to urinate or is in too much pain to carry on. The means of transport has to be organized, which implies that a donkey with a cart and possibly a driver have to be hired and prepared. A companion, aside from the *matrone*, has to be found to accompany the woman and remain with her at the hospital. In addition, money, clothing, some food and water and possibly the *matrone's* kit are collected and taken along. The parturient is placed on the cart, along with the others and is in for an uncomfortable two-hour ride.

The woman is normally taken to the nearest clinic first, which in the case of Tondigoungo would be the CSI in Diagourou. The nurse⁸ living next door and responsible for the clinic is the first to be alerted. She can deal with some basic complications, as she can insert a catheter, give the woman simple painkillers, injections or assist the delivery by way of an episiotomy and stitches. In many cases however, she has to refer the woman to the district hospital in Téra where a lot can be done to facilitate a good outcome for both the parturient and the newborn. Various techniques and medicines can be used during deliveries, and caesarean sections can be performed. Time, however, is one of the trickiest factors in a delivery without medical assistance, especially in cases of severe bleeding, prolonged or obstructed labour and retention of the placenta, and the duration of the transfer of the parturient is therefore of vital importance.⁹ If a woman delivers in a clinic or in hospital, other birth attendants, such as nurses, midwives or doctors, will naturally be present and can assist. Those occasions, however, are the exception rather than the rule for village women. When they occur, they are dictated by necessity rather than choice and therefore reflect some of the worst-case scenarios. The region's few formal birth attendants are thus often out of their depth when it comes to treating difficult cases and have less than adequate means to perform the procedures required.

Bio-medical health care in Téra district is rudimentary, if even available, in most rural villages and for many people in Tondigoungo it is inaccessible due to the transport, financial and cultural barriers, to which one should also add the barriers such as local preferences for treatment, pregnancy risk perceptions and concepts of reproduction (Chapman 2003). In addition to the absence of formal health care for women about to give birth in Tondigoungo, it appears that people in Téra in general seek other remedies for their pains, illnesses and fears.

⁸ Often the nurses responsible for the CSIs are male, although in this case it is a woman (Janssen notes 2004/5).

⁹ The maternity ward at the hospital in Téra registered two maternal deaths in one month, both due to the retention of the placenta. One woman died on her way to the hospital on the donkey cart, the other died within half an hour of reaching the hospital. Both had lost too much blood (Janssen, notes 2004).

In different cases and for various reasons, women turn to relatives, neighbours, healers, sorcerers, imams or spirit mediums for comfort, advice and/or treatment (Olivier de Sardan 2001, Janssen 1996).

At almost all times one can find pregnant women somewhere in the village and birth cannot be a distant experience for anyone. In fact one wonders how it could be kept quiet at all in such a small village. In the densely populated rural village of Tondigoungo, there is constant noise, be it chatter, pounding, animal sounds, children's cries, the prayers of an imam or the occasional radio. People live close together, the houses are small although the compounds vary in size, and life mainly takes place outside. There is not only noise but also pressure for social and physical space for people, animals, goods and rubbish. The density of village life offers most people a sense of protection and support but can also be the cause of friction, gossip and jealousy.¹⁰ Silence and secrecy are thus surrounded by noise and openness, within which their existence demands further explanation.

Women's ways in silence and secrecy

A lot is kept private with children knowing from a young age that they have to avoid asking direct questions and should certainly respect everyone's privacy, especially regarding bodily functions. From as early as about three years of age onwards, children go to the *douche* by themselves and will go outside the village to defecate, as everybody else does, and learn as they grow older to hide more and more. Girls are aware that they should be careful as to what happens to the blood they lose every month. Blood cannot simply be thrown away, as it can attract bad spirits or a malicious black bird which causes illness. After a birth, any blood is also carefully swept up or washed off the floor or sheet and the remainder covered with dirt. The cloths used during menstruation need to be washed carefully for these reasons but also for reasons of privacy. However much a girl or woman washes the garments of others, these cloths she will deal with herself. The older women in the same compound will be aware of when a girl has her period, although this will never be announced as such. When a Muslim girl or woman normally adheres to regular prayers, the necessary interruption because of her period is a clear indication for inquisitive others. A (grand) mother or mother-in-law will keep watch anxiously, especially shortly after a wedding, to see whether a woman is pregnant.

¹⁰ One woman who had moved out of the village with her family mentioned that it was for the sake of 'fresh air' literally but also figuratively in the sense that there was less gossip in hamlet of Borobi (personal communication, 2005).

There are various expressions used to describe pregnancy and the state a young woman is in. Literally, a pregnant woman is called *gunde koy* (she who has the belly) or *gaa hinka koy* (she who has two bodies) and talking about pregnancy in general, one uses euphemisms such as 'she is tired' or 'she is carrying'. In the early stages of a pregnancy, one might speak of *a na handu daaru* (she has skipped a month) (Olivier de Sardan 2001). Missing a period may be the first indication for a woman that she is pregnant but the obvious others signs are nausea, vomiting, tiredness and sometimes fever, headaches and an increased appetite. Those women who are pregnant for the first time (primiparae)¹¹ will spend time listening to the stories of more experienced women (multiparae). This is also in line with the behaviour that is expected from them socially: they should not interfere, but conform to and obey the more dominant parole of older women. When older (teenage) girls do not help their elders they are reproached by others, sometimes through rough scolding. Women do not discuss pregnancy and childbirth openly except in cases of clear problems or anxiety: '*Boro nanga goro ka hangan irkoy se*' (One awaits what the good God will do).

When a woman is pregnant she will keep this to herself as long as possible although the social control in a small village is strong and mothers (in-law) and peers may be very perceptive. It is a custom, however, not to openly discuss or question such matters and a pregnancy will become apparent in time as a woman's stomach gets bigger. When a pregnancy is anticipated however, for instance soon after marriage or when a young woman's youngest child has been weaned, there is often gossip about the possible reasons for a pregnancy failing to materialize.

Motherhood starts generally at a young age in Tondigoungo. To give birth for the first time at sixteen is not an exception and often by the age of twenty a woman will already have two children. Most women want to have several children and consider having a child as a blessing. A child of her own provides a woman with a certain esteem and self-determination. Children provide more helping hands and a security of income and care for the future, which are very welcome in the daily struggle for survival. In 2005, the chief of Tondigoungo explained to me the desire for children as follows: 'Someone who has children can be assisted and will live on in memory and in his children'.

The high child mortality rate has certainly influenced the fertility rate. Of the ten young women (between the ages of 17 and 36) in a group discussion in Tondigoungo, half of the women had already lost one or more children. Aïssa

¹¹ A primipara is a woman who is giving birth for the first time; a multipara has already had at least one child.

mentioned in an interview that ‘You are only truly an adult woman after you’ve given birth to four or five children’.

Education starts early and young girls learn a lot about life and the way to behave from peers and from their parents. Information regarding their place in society and their physical and sexual changes is not given to them at any particular time or by a particular person, as may be the case, for instance with initiation rites in other societies. In addition to helping out with household duties, such as cleaning, washing, fetching water, pounding millet,¹² cooking and sweeping, girls are also expected to look after their younger siblings. Thus girls frequently find themselves among infants, toddlers, older girls and women of all ages. Sometimes they listen in to conversations about pregnancy and childbirth but the women take care not to speak too openly in front of young girls. A mother or grandmother will make sure they speak sternly to their (grand) daughter and tell her how to behave with a man. A girl is also instructed that it is her place to obey and remain quiet so as not to upset the family, the household, the community, evil spirits and possibly even witches. Girls who have reached puberty will still not be allowed in on many of the older women’s conversations but happily join groups of teenage girls and younger women and mothers.

As of the age of about 15 girls join in the gossip about pregnancy and birth giving. But the girls here just giggle, they do not really ‘know’ anything yet. (A 23-year-old woman, pregnant, 2 deliveries, 1 surviving child, in Tondigouno, 2005)

From about 15 years of age onwards a child has the ‘spirit’ (*lakkal*: intelligence) and then knows how to behave among other people. (Woman, 6 children, in hamlet outside Tondigouno, 2005)

The girls are keen to find out more and to decide certain things for themselves. But only having had a child does a woman start to earn more respect and make her own decisions. For a girl or woman to go her own way openly before then is considered rude and one does not seek to be the odd one out in a small community. Generally no one wants to bring this kind of shame upon herself or her family. There are, however, some girls who openly resist the order of command.¹³ This kind of rebellion causes friction and rows so usually the girls join

¹² The woman next door to the house in which I stayed had 2 young daughters (aged 4 and 7) who helped out a lot. They even had their own pounding pestle and mortar since ordinary ones would have been far too heavy for the hands of a 4-year old (Janssen, fieldwork, Tondigouno, 2005).

¹³ During the visit to one household we waited for the return of an older woman. When she arrived she appeared to have returned from fetching water from the pump and was carrying her third full jerry can. She was tired and decided to sit down with us. She then asked two teenage granddaughters to go to the pump and fetch the two buckets of water

in the pecking order by listening and being teased, but it is also a way of learning about what is expected of them regarding their behaviour towards men, in their married lives, when pregnant and when giving birth. These subjects are covertly mentioned using metaphors and riddles, jokes and teasing. Girls do not really have any insight into what to expect of a pregnancy or what responsibilities and tasks lie ahead of them as mothers.

Aïssa, in her own way, very much adhered to this behaviour. She walked around looking proudly pregnant inside her own compound not showing any anxiety, fear, discomfort or pain related to her pregnancy. In a way she lived up to the Songhay ideal of a 'calm and strong manner, (with which she appeared to) walk on her path with pragmatic confidence'. It was a 'quiet strength and determination' (Stoller 2004: 133) that Aïssa showed in her approach to her pregnancy and delivery. Speaking of her previous pregnancy and delivery however, she allowed herself to admit that she had suffered back and stomach aches and that the birth itself was the most painful experience she had ever been through. She also readily admitted that she afterwards did talk about her pregnancy and delivery to others, although she kept the intimate details to herself as no other woman shares this knowledge openly with others.

Our daughters know nothing of pregnancy. On the other hand, even we, our mothers taught us nothing. One needs to fall pregnant and deliver to know something oneself. (Olivier de Sardan 2001: 8)

I had heard stories about birth, and it went better than I expected, but it still is the hardest work a woman can perform, it exceeds everything else. But you do not want anybody present at (a) birth, not even your mother. You don't want other women to later say that you were afraid; you want to deliver without a man or woman knowing about it, this way you don't feel ashamed and you are courageous. (A 28-year-old woman, 4 children, 1 miscarriage, Tondigoungo, 2005)

Slowly girls are familiarized with what motherhood will bring them. They hear the stories and experiences of others and chat amongst themselves. They do not volunteer information easily, but can all, after some persuasion, relate the stories, hints and advice that they have picked up or were given about pregnancy and childbirth. The stories can be so frightening that they are remembered for a long time but are also used as a reference point during or after pregnancy and childbirth. The main issues to feature in the stories are the pain, the precautions to take and the signs to be especially aware of.

that she had left there. The girls refused, causing the old woman to become angry. My assistant was irritated and astonished by such behaviour (Janssen, fieldwork in Tondigoungo, 2005).

‘It is important to take care not to be seen: to hide the pregnancy and the birth against the (possible evil) looks of others’.

‘You will experience fear’.

‘It is going to be something that is bigger than yourself’.

‘You will be grabbing sand and squeezing it until the oil is pressed out’.

(Women varying in age from 17 to 65, Tondigoungo, 1995, 2004/5)

It is during the time in which girls change from puberty to being teenage girls and to being newly pregnant young women that decisions are made about where a woman wants to give birth.¹⁴ A lot is decided for girls and women by those around them.

Differences in the behaviour of pregnant women are apparent between primiparae and multiparae, in addition to natural differences in character and the woman’s position in the household. Nevertheless almost all respond in a similar way to questions about their behaviour and their ideas regarding birth.

Various elements in daily life are considered to pose a risk during pregnancy. If protection is wanted by a pregnant woman or by a mother (-in-law) for her pregnant daughter, the woman usually approaches a healer, sorcerer or a marabout who is specialized in pregnancy and childbirth. Protection is usually given in the form of a potion to drink, something to inhale, i.e. smouldering coals, something to wash with or a talisman¹⁵ to carry. Most pregnant women get a black cord tied around their abdomen to hold the baby in place. Others receive a few small iron-ore stones with specific instructions as to where to bury each stone in the yard. Often treatment is combined with prayers recited to the woman. Several indigenous healers and marabouts – all men – are active in Tondigoungo. Some are considered to be more specialized in pregnancy and childbirth than others; a specialisation that has grown out of experience or demand. Other protection may be in the form of iron tablets, food supplements or physical check-ups during ante-natal consultations. Nowadays women attend these much more frequently than in the past but in most cases it is usually only one to three times during a pregnancy, starting on average well after the fifth

¹⁴ Girls sometimes become pregnant before they marry or a woman gets pregnant out of wedlock (which is not uncommon with so many men being away for long periods of time *en exode*) or possibly while she is still nursing a previous child and such a pregnancy may be unwanted. Then an ‘abortion’ or spontaneous miscarriage will take place. An abortion (*gunde munyan*: literally ‘belly upturned’) is usually induced by drinking a concoction of local herbs, plants or bark. There are always a number of older women who know the right flora and other remedies.

¹⁵ A talisman usually consists of pieces of text from the Koran that have been written out, washed off with water and then sown into a piece of leather to be tied on a cord.

month of pregnancy.¹⁶ Aïssa thought it was quite natural to attend ante-natal consultations and said she would go again for her next planned appointment. But on that particular day she made no preparations whatsoever to go to the clinic 10 km away. Few women from Tondigoungo go or return to a clinic as a precaution before the delivery unless they have been warned to do so. In general, the clinic and its medical treatment are not popular and relations between personnel and patients are often difficult (Moumouni & Souley 2004). The bio-medical healthcare system is far removed both physically and cognitively from village life.

To hide a pregnancy and later avoid any special attention or ill thoughts, a woman continues her work and duties much as usual right up to the delivery. The numerous accounts of women explaining in detail what they were doing just before they went into labour show how consciously they deal with these tasks. The women could also often describe in detail what others around them were doing, thereby indicating the approximate time of delivery and the fact that they assumed that others were not paying attention to them and their imminent delivery.

I had prepared the evening food and people went for evening prayers. When they arrived back they prepared to go to sleep. I was having contractions and had a back-ache in their presence, but only went inside when I felt that my *pagne* was wet. I knew that the birth was about to happen as I was experiencing pains I had not had before. (An 18-year-old woman, first delivery, Tondigoungo, 2005)

I had contractions for a long time, while I pounded the millet and prepared the food. The others had then eaten the food and had gone inside to sleep. I then felt my waters break and knew I was going to give birth. Under the hangar¹⁷ I laid down a *pagne* and that's where I kneeled down to give birth. (A 19-year-old woman, second delivery, Tondigoungo, 2005)

With peers, neighbours and co-wives, the women do talk about their experiences, albeit in a rather covert way. Those women who have already experienced childbirth might make mention of this in answer to which others can recount their own experiences. Comparisons will be made and various experiences related, but the stories will usually not be detailed accounts.

Most women do admit that giving birth is one of the most painful moments in their life. Even though they hide it, show little emotion and tell stories in which everything happened very quickly and nothing special occurred, they will give details when pressed or if the occasion allows them to elaborate. After one

¹⁶ Data gathered in Tondigoungo but also at the ante-natal clinic in Téra (Janssen, notes 2005).

¹⁷ A 'hangar' is the lean-to that is made against the house of wooden poles/branches, with straw mats as a roof.

has lived through that experience they say, one can face any ordeal. Young women and girls are still scared by some of the stories. To such an extent that several women told me after their first birth, as Aïssa did, that they had expected it to be worse and specifically 'more painful'. A few would actually tell me that it had not been too bad, as they had not really squeezed oil from sand!

Despite possible earlier visits to a clinic for an ante-natal check-up, most women prefer secrecy at home for their delivery and seek seclusion when they feel that the delivery is near. Many of the women interviewed recounted looking for a quiet spot, in wintertime this could be outside under the overhang next to the house, as most people would be inside in the evenings and at night. In the hotter periods when people spend most time outside, the woman would go inside. Some women jokingly recalled going inside and actually locking the door.

When a woman is alone she will put down a *panye* or sometimes a plastic sheet¹⁸ on the floor. She will then kneel or squat down over it and squeeze something in her hands or hold on to her legs while pushing to expel the baby. The baby, according to most accounts, is delivered quite fast and the delivery of the afterbirth follows quickly thereafter. Of course there are cases in which the expulsion of the baby takes longer, or where help is needed during this process. Apart from complications, which naturally exist too,¹⁹ there are women who have had women present just before, shortly after, or a long time after the birth. There are women who have quite a lot prepared in the sense of having bought a new *panye* and soap; some have gone to the clinic for ante-natal care several times, while others have done more in the way of protection against evil spirits and witchcraft.

It is after the delivery of the child that the woman usually alerts someone else. As mentioned before, the village is densely populated and people are always nearby. Aïssa mentioned that due to the specific problem of the baby's head being covered by the membrane, she called out for her mother quite quickly. Obviously there are also cases in which a mother (-in-law) or neighbour arrives by herself after hearing the baby's cries. Most women agreed that from the moment the baby was born it was no longer important to remain alone or to take care of oneself in solitude and silence. One could cover oneself

¹⁸ The plastic sheet is usually bought especially for the occasion. In rare cases the baby is delivered onto the bare ground.

¹⁹ I have come across sad cases of, for example, a woman who had and wanted assistance at every birth and still only had three of her nine children survive; another who had had miscarriages and did not shy away whatsoever from openly asking for help early in her pregnancy (Janssen field notes, 1995, 2005).

up and once again be in control of one's behaviour and appearance. The placenta might still need to be delivered if that has not happened spontaneously. The task that an assistant is wanted for first and foremost is the cutting of the umbilical cord. Hardly any woman will do this herself: 'You cannot do this yourself, you do not know how. If you were in the bush, you'd still take both the child with the placenta to someone who could do that' (a woman in Tondigoungo, 2005).

It is dealing with the blood that is considered by most to require special attention.²⁰ The same applies to taking care of the placenta and burying it straight after the birth. This is usually done by a *matrone*, although it might also be another, usually older, woman. The same woman then, in the company of another woman, goes out to bury the placenta with the umbilical cord attached to it just outside the hut where the birth took place. The second attendant to this burial is often a close relative for reasons of safety and security. The manner in which the placenta and umbilical cord are buried is very important to the woman's future reproductive capacities. It is believed that if the placenta is not buried with the cord pointing upwards and laid coiled on top of the placenta, the woman will never become pregnant again. Naturally for her self-protection and safety, the parturient wants to ensure that the afterbirth is buried correctly and needs the person to do that to be experienced, capable and trustworthy and be assisted by someone equally to be trusted. After the main tasks have been taken care of, the *matrone* may be assisted by another woman who will, during the parturient's period of seclusion, be the main care-giver. The new mother remains in her room with her baby for forty days and only sees a few other women briefly. Soon after the birth these women will also come in to visit the woman and her newborn, congratulate her, give her food and drink or assist in some other way.

Haawi and its influences on pregnancy and childbirth

Silence and secrecy help a woman maintain her position in her immediate environment and form an intrinsic part of her upbringing. In a number of interpersonal relations a woman can express herself more freely than in others.²¹ But in whatever context the shadow of possible *shame* and its unforeseen conse-

²⁰ As mentioned earlier regarding menstrual blood. See also Masquelier (2001).

²¹ See Bisilliat & Laya (1992) for a description of various interpersonal rules among Songhay-Djerma.

quences prevent her from speaking or expressing herself too openly.²² Silence and secrecy can be found amidst the lively, noisy and public village life. All of these aspects are directed at averting *haawi*. In the case of a young mother this would be the *haawi* of not being courageous, of not being strong and of not being able to look after herself. The subject of shame in one form or another came up in many of the interviews I conducted. It is most closely described by using the term *haawi* in Songhay but remains a diversely applied and fluid notion (Olivier de Sardan 1982). It became clear that it has its roots in interpersonal relations, both between peers as well as between different generations, in personal emotions, and in shared socio-cultural values.

Haawi can be brought about by the wrong behaviour, the bad use of language or crossing defined cultural borders, but it can also be seen as a virtue. To be ‘ashamed’ in certain situations implies knowing your place and showing respect (especially, for example, a young person towards parents-in-law) (Olivier de Sardan 1982). On the other hand *haawi* can be bestowed upon someone when that person does not conform to the prevailing norms. When the subject of *haawi*, a person is afraid to be talked or gossiped about, to become the subject of witchcraft and not to gain respect.

Even your mother, who has borne you into this world, should not see you naked. That’s not good, it will lead to shame. The shame always remains; people come by and greet you but you never know exactly what the other person is looking at or looking out for. (*Matrone* in Tondigoungo, 2005)

Pregnant women do not want others present (at delivery), because some might have ‘the mouth’, which means that they will tell others how they behaved and what they did. (...) The wife of my young brother cried out during her delivery, which caused people to come inside and witness the birth. She was so ashamed that she would later not join the family in the fields anymore. (...) It is mainly shame that causes women to remain on their own during deliveries. (*Sorcerer* in Tondigoungo, 2005)

One wants to deliver without a man or woman knowing about it; that way you do not get shame and you are brave. (A 28-year-old woman, 4 children, 1 miscarriage, Tondigoungo, 2005)

The almost mythical silence and secrecy surrounding pregnancy and childbirth appear to be prompted by the combination of trying to remain beyond the reach of bad influences of others and entities, and yet relying on the protection and approval of others too. To protect their own lives and those of their babies and to keep their own and their children’s esteem high, without the risk of *haawi*, the first thing that comes to a woman’s mind is to keep her pregnancy and

²² Exceptions are of course the possession rituals in which men and women alike seem to let go of all earthly (or socio-cultural) limitations and dance, jump, stamp, shout, scream, babble and cry. For further details, see Stoller (1989, 2004).

childbirth to herself. At the same time, women will keep performing their daily tasks in the midst of all other village activities, and in this way try to remain beyond suspicion or possible shame.

Bravery is another way to counteract *haawi*. Olivier de Sardan called a 2001 survey into Hausa and Djerma pregnancy and delivery customs '*L'accouchement, c'est la Guerre*' (Delivery is War), citing one of the women respondents. When I asked women in Tondigoungo for their reactions to this quotation, they said 'yes, women here do it by themselves, therefore they are brave and have no shame' and they explained that if a woman had done well (not cried etc.), she would be called *jaartarey* (brave) and *wangari* (a woman who can wage war). Even a group of men, when asked, readily agreed that they called giving birth 'warfare', after the stories they heard from women. A woman who has not yet given birth is not fully a woman to them; as one does not know how she will cope with or endure childbirth.

Choices and challenges in a solitary birth

The people in Tondigoungo made it very clear that to rule out all risks and misgivings regarding pregnancy and birth is impossible and obviously does not lie in our humble human hands. The will of Allah is therefore always praised, prayed for and awaited, and the wills and ways of evil spirits and witches feared and, where possible, prevented by the inhabitants of Tondigoungo. Understanding and abiding by food taboos and rules during pregnancy can be easily learnt after sharing a compound or activities with other women. Knowing what (not) to say and asking others as a girl or young woman about pregnancy and birth is also common knowledge; otherwise reprimands will follow if mistakes are made. Women in Tondigoungo, in this sense, are tied in a network of the spiritual, the social, the physical and the economic context around them. This is not to say that they have no say or choice regarding their actions and activities within this network.

We have seen that averting *haawi* through bravery, silence and secrecy by making use of a vivid social context is done by the conscious decision-making and activities of the pregnant woman. Outwardly pregnancy is a hushed-up and hidden topic among Songhay girls and women in Tondigoungo. But as van Tilburg found in the Casamance in Senegal and Chapman saw far to the south in Mucessua in Mozambique, there are many reasons behind this:

... the rule (is) that speaking makes one vulnerable and silence makes one strong. Silence not only increases the value of the knowledge it protects; it also protects people during periods of vulnerability. (van Tilburg 1998: 178)

It was dangerous and foolish for a pregnant woman to speak about her pregnancy. (Ibid: 1998: 184)

Insecurity about whether a pregnancy will 'hold' (..) led 59% of the women (..) to hide their status from all but the most intimately involved. (Chapman 2003: 366)

These points are of great importance among the inhabitants of Tondigoungo too. The more one knows about a person, through hearing and seeing, the quicker attention can be drawn to them and the more can potentially be held against them. The powers of witchcraft and evil spirits are strong and omnipresent.

A person in Songhay culture consists of three fundamental elements: flesh, spirit, and life force. When witches make a person sick, they steal her or his spirit and hide it. If they consume the person's spirit, he or she dies. (Stoller 2004: 164)

A pregnant woman is especially at risk and particularly vulnerable during a delivery. A bewitched person, and not the person him/herself but the bad characteristics 'behind' him/her, can direct a person, can smell blood more quickly and can take one's spirit away. (Sorcerer in Tondigoungo, 2005)

Protecting the child inside and keeping oneself safe too is also related to one's socio-economic status. To be pregnant and a future mother provides one with a certain wealth. In a society where the door should always be open to relatives and strangers are welcomed with water, preferably *boule* (liquid porridge) and, if possible, other food, there is always pressure on resources and more so in times of drought and scarcity. As in most places, children are much wanted and considered a gift from God. Women expect and hope from their husbands (faraway or nearby) a commitment in terms of money and clothing that cannot always be provided. So what Chapman (2003) points out for Mozambique applies to the situation in Tondigoungo too:

As pregnancy is itself a sign of good fortune and impending wealth in terms of social capital (...) it has the potential to arouse jealousy and distrust between neighbours and competition between women already sharing the attention and resources of cash-earning men under a variety of formal and informal polygamous arrangements. (Chapman, 2003: 367)

Haawi can take many shapes and forms. Bringing *haawi* upon oneself and one's child and family is something one wants to avoid at all costs. *Haawi* haunts people like the fear of evil spirits and witchcraft does and it should not be lightly discarded. The young women know the stories of courageous and presumably strong and healthy mothers, they also know of the ordeals they have to survive to be recognized in a similar way. The women also have to make sure they retain good relationships with their husbands and families, their co-wives, neighbours and the *matrones*. So these relationships are determined every day over and over again by undertaking daily tasks and responsibilities. Some women are better at this than others, and some are in a better or stronger position to organize this than others. But all women can benefit from social, spiri-

tual and cultural appreciation, respect and admiration. The women may have had a little formal health care but from the point of view of the village, biomedical care is far away, incomprehensible, often inhospitable and there are numerous barriers between the village women and official concepts of 'safe motherhood' (Davis-Floyd & Sargent 1997).

Safety is what the women of Tondigoungo are seeking during their pregnancy and at the time of their delivery. Women look for their best options for safety from among the various keepers of knowledge such as sorcerers, healers and imams and from the different limited options from *matrones*, official health workers or others, and from their relatives, peers and friends. Although the manner of this quest varies, one can recognize the shared ideal among young women and mothers alike to go about this in a partly shared but also private way. For the women in Tondigoungo the answer for physical, spiritual and social safety for both mother and child is to be found in solitary childbirth.

References

- Bieseke, M. 1997, 'An Ideal of Unassisted Birth: Hunting, Healing and Transformation among the Kalahari Ju/'hoansi', in: R.E. Davis-Floyd & C.F. Sargent (eds), *Childbirth and Authoritative Knowledge; Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bisilliat, J. & D. Laya 1992, 'Le Système Familial Songhay-Zarma', *Journal des Africanistes* 62 (2): 161-81.
- Chapman, R.R. 2003, 'Endangering Safe Motherhood in Mozambique: Prenatal care as Pregnancy Risk', *Social Science & Medicine* (57): 355-74.
- Davis-Floyd, R.E. & C.F. Sargent (eds) 1997, *Childbirth and Authoritative Knowledge; Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Janssen, G. 1996, 'Rapport Final des Recherches Anthropologiques Médicales dans le Cadre du Projet aux Soins de Santé Primaires (PASSP II), des Arrondissements de Téra et Filingué, Niger', Unpublished report, SNV, Niamey.
- Koster, W. 2003, *Secret Strategies; Women and Abortion in Yoruba Society*, Nigeria, Amsterdam: Aksant.
- Masquelier, A. 2001, 'The Blood Stain: Possession, Menstruation and Transgression in Southern Niger', Paper presented at American Anthropological Association conference, Washington D.C.
- Moumouni, A. & A. Souley 2004, *La Maternité Issaka Gazobi et l'Hôpital National de Niamey*, LASDEL, Etudes et Travaux no. 19.
- Olivier de Sardan, J-P. 1982, *Concepts et Conceptions Songhay-Zarma; Histoire, Culture, Société*, Paris: Nubia.
- Olivier de Sardan, J-P. 1984, *Les Sociétés Songhay-Zarma: (Niger-Mali): Chefs, Guerriers, Esclaves, Paysans*, Paris : Karthala.
- Olivier de Sardan, J-P. 2001, *L'Accouchement, C'est la Guerre; Grossesse et Accouchement en Milieu Rural Nigérien*, LASDEL, Etudes et Travaux no. 1.
- Sargent, C. 1982, 'The Implications of Role Expectations for Birth Assistance among Bariba Women', *Social Science & Medicine* (16): 1483-89.

- Sargent, C. 1984, 'Between Death and Shame: Dimensions of Pain in Bariba Culture', *Social Science & Medicine* (19): 1299-304.
- Sargent, C. 1989, *Maternity, Medicine and Power; Reproductive Decisions in Urban Benin*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Stoller, P. 1989, *The Taste of Ethnographic Things; The Senses in Anthropology*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Stoller, P. 2004, *Stranger in the Village of the Sick; A Memoir of Cancer, Sorcery and Healing*, Boston: Beacon Press.
- van Tilburg, M. 1998, 'Interviews of the Unspoken: Incompatible Initiations in Senegal Fieldwork', *Anthropology and Humanism* 23 (2): 177-89.

Agency in and from the margins: Street children and youth in N'djaména, Chad

Mirjam de Bruijn

Street children and youth occupy the so-called margins of African urban economies and society. Since the 1980s the number of NGOs targeting and working with these children has mushroomed and numerous publications about street children have appeared. This chapter investigates whether and how street children act out their agency in situations where they are defined as being in the (poor) margins of society. What do these margins mean for these children and youth? The article also examines the way street children have become a specific group and discusses how the society of which they are a part creates the margins to define its own existence. In this sense, the street children and their way of life serve as a mirror image of society. The margins of society have different meanings for the people and institutions living and working there. The margins offer a balance between normality and exception. With an unstable post-war economy and a large number of street children, N'djaména, the capital of Chad, presents a case study that is representative of many other African cities.

Introduction

The following is an excerpt from an interview with Mahamat Ali, one of the street children I met during a visit to N'djaména in 2003:

I was born around 1989 in N'Djaména, in the Klémat quarter. My parents are migrants from the Guera in the centre of Chad. My father is the Muezzin at the mosque in Klémat, my mother is a maid (*bonne*). I went to primary school but only

did the first class. My parents are very poor and I left them and my school in 1997. I live here in the Diguel market with our street-senior Mahamat Saleh who has a workshop for second-hand shoes. I collect worn-out shoes from the garbage piles all round town and sell them to Mahamat Saleh, also other objects of value too. That pays FCFA 500 to FCFA 1250 a day.¹ I live with Mahamat and twenty other young people. I live off the money I earn but sometimes I have to steal. I pickpocket on special market days. I do visit my parents but not very often. When I go there, I give my mother some pocket money. But I don't sleep at my parents' home. Sometimes I sleep at other places in town. I have some friends in Klémat. It is not easy here on the streets. I have washing problems and I only wash occasionally. I have no good place to sleep, it is often cold, and there are lots of mosquitoes. Another problem is the older children who steal our money and harass us because we are young. The police chase us, and if they pick us up they also steal our money, beat us and call us delinquents. But I am not! Of course I also use alcohol and sniff glue... It is my parents' poverty that forces me to live like this. They have no means of contributing to a life of dignity for me. My hopes are for a better future.

Mahamat Ali is one of probably 10,000 children and youth who live on the streets of N'djaména, the capital of Chad in Central Africa. He has joined the group that are depicted in development jargon as 'street children'. Street children have become emblematic for the situation of many young people in Africa and are being targeted by UNICEF and local NGOs.² As Nieuwenhuys (2001) and Perry (2004) have shown, children have become part of an international development discourse in which they are viewed in terms of children's rights; and the category of street children is defined by their deprivation and lack of these rights. The NGOs define the situation of these children as being at risk. Children are the victims of the circumstances in which they live and which make them among the most vulnerable in society: a life in the margins of society is characterized by poverty and misery. It is a way of life that is unacceptable and therefore needs to be changed, i.e. through aid. The opening interview with Mahamat shows that he and many other children living on the streets of N'djaména are indeed victims of the poverty in which many families live, but on the other hand he made his own decision to go onto the streets and make a living here. Mahamat does not appear to be doing too badly as his earnings would indicate. In the interview, Mahamat expresses clear ideas about his life and the way he perceives it. Although others put him in the margins of society and define his life as a-normal, he has created his own life in these margins. What NGOs and, with them, civil society define as the margins and a-normal life may not be so for the children who actually live on the street. For them, this is centre stage.

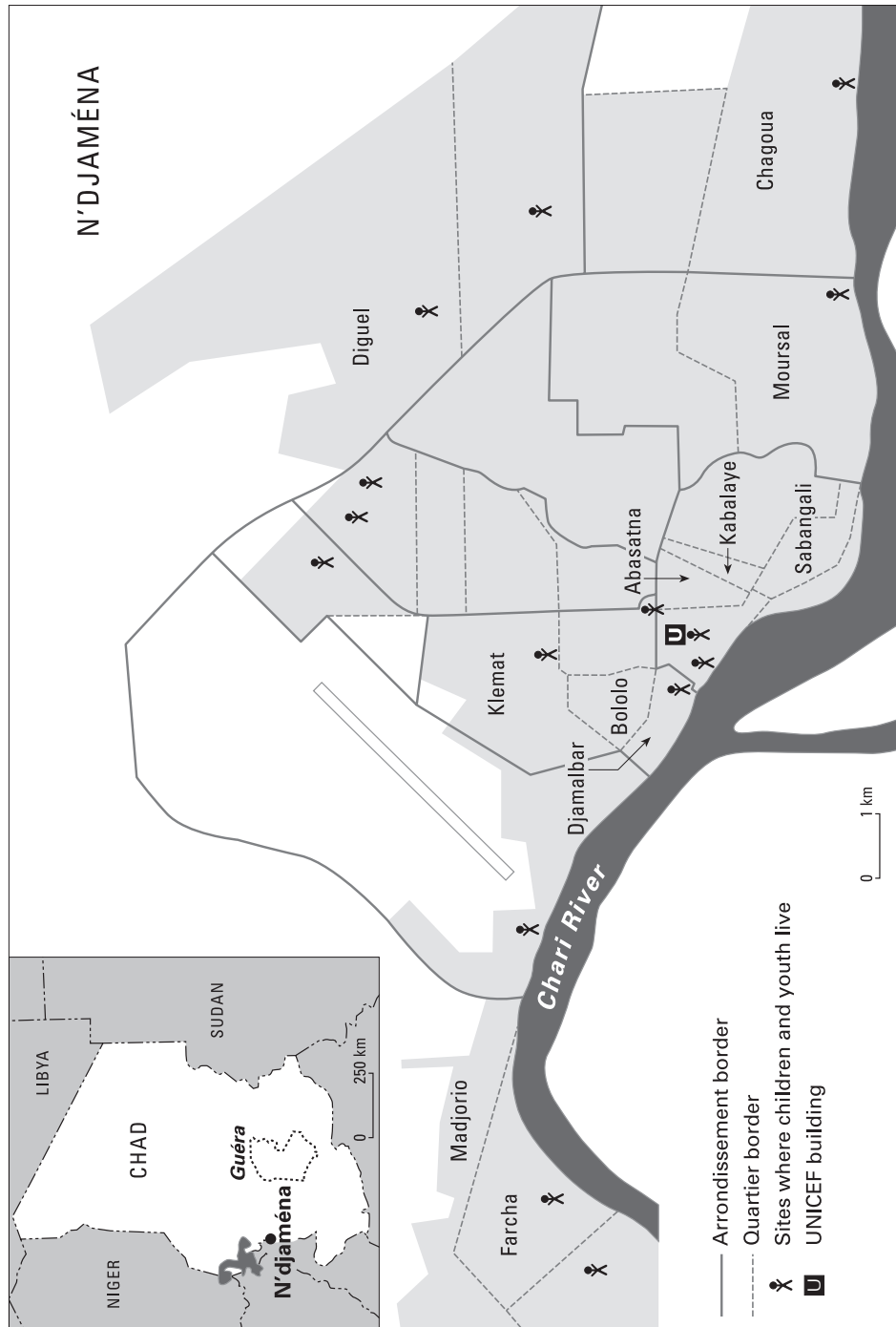
¹ FCFA 250 buys half a kilo of rice. A labourer receives FCFA 1000 a day.

² Non-governmental organization; the French acronym is ONG *Organisation Non-Gouvernementale*.

This chapter shows how the children and youth living on the streets of N'djaména create a living in the margins of the state, within the structural constraints of the politics and economy of Chadian society. The so-called margins have become the centre of their lives. The article also explores how the creation of the dichotomy margin-centre, a-normal-normal negotiates normality for the urban middle classes, including NGO personnel, who justify their position in society through the creation of the street children as a mirror image. Their views of society are situated in a dominant international discourse on childhood that seems unrealistic in the realities in societies where street children are in large numbers. Although this article stresses the normality of the world of the street child, it does not deny the misery and enormous difficulties the children and youth encounter every day.

Structural conditions: Development of N'djaména

The number of inhabitants in N'djaména has increased rapidly over the last fifty years from about 90,000 in 1960 to 800,000 in the mid-1990s. Today the number of inhabitants is put at 1 million, which means an annual growth rate of about 6%. This growth is partly attributed to the effects of the political turmoil that have plagued the country since 1965. Chad has been the scene of 'wars', banditry and rebellions of varying intensity, and today Chad is again involved in a period of deep political upheaval. In the literature the period from 1965 to 1990 is defined as one of civil war. There was relative calm after 1990 when President Deby came to power and declared his intention of turning Chad into a democracy with elections that would define who would be in power. However despite these politics and rhetoric, Deby could not stop rebel and opposition groups creating a situation of permanent unrest. This widespread and enduring turmoil has not encouraged investment in the countryside and a situation of general poverty and lack of development prevails. This structural economic and political situation has led to a continuous flow of migrants to N'djaména where they hope to find security and economic opportunities. The consequences of this migration (as can be observed in other West Africa towns and cities too) are an increase in the number of economically deprived who have not found the security and economic prosperity they expected and who cannot integrate into the mainstream urban economy. On the other hand, the presence of these people has changed the urban landscape with the emergence of large peripheral quarters and an ever-increasing informal economy (Cloutier & Sy 1993) that has become vital to the national economy (Bennafla 2002).



Map 11.1 N'djaména, Chad

N'djaména is on Chad's border with only a bridge separating it from Kousséri in Cameroon where products are cheaper and easier to obtain. Smuggling has become a lively business and women cross the river in wobbly canoes, coming back with sugar, soap and other precious products hidden under their clothes or packed up to look like children on their backs. However the river is well patrolled and the women are frequently arrested. N'djaména's informal economy has its own markets and products and the recycling of garbage such as bottles, cans and shoes is common. All the markets in N'djaména but also those as far away as Abéché have started to reserve space where recycled products can be sold. With new products being too expensive for the majority to even consider, poor people in N'djaména are happy with the new market in recycled second-hand products. In this 'world', the distinction between what is legal and what is illegal is blurred and people move easily from one world to the other.

Many of the families who live off the informal economy are poor and have difficulty keeping their families together (cf. Fall 2005). For these Chadians, the trauma of war may also have affected their situation (de Jong *et al.* 2001). Their problems are frequently related to what Marie (1997) has argued to be linked to changes in family structures and different expectations of life. In these changes young people and children may decide or see no other solution than to leave their families and find a home on the streets where they participate in the informal economy.

The current situation of street children in Chad can be explained by the structural constraints of the Chadian society that make them leave their homes; although society has developed in such a way that living on the streets is not an exception and for many people they feel that they no longer live on the margins of society but in the centre of things. Our findings³ about the street children and

³ Research was done in 2002 and 2003, with two staff members from NGOs who were well acquainted with the milieu of these children and youth. A nutritionist joined the group to consider health and nutrition questions, and a photographer and an anthropologist (the author) made up the team. We tried to get to know the children and youth at different sites around town but could not avoid being seen as aid workers. The two NGO staff did some of the interviews, and they were our guides when we visited the youth. Although working with NGO staff may be a complicating factor in such a research project, we had no other choice. They helped us to feel safe among the children and youth who were frequently not very open to outsiders as they felt they were too often the target of discussions that helped others forward and not them. Furthermore, some of these children and youth have hostile and violent attitudes and did not always appreciate the presence of a white woman. The results of the study were presented during a seminar in April 2003 in N'djaména, which provided an opportunity to observe the reactions of civil society to the street children and youth. Part of the research project became a search for money for both the NGOs with whom we worked. This brought us into contact with other NGOs with funding agencies and, for instance, the UNICEF

youth in N'djaména show that the majority of the children and youth on the streets are from migrant families in N'djaména, who have come from all over Chad, and decided to leave their families homes because of poverty, conflict at home, divorce, the death of parents, and so forth. Some children have expressed their wish for a better life as their main reason for leaving home. The reasons why and circumstances in which these young people left home do not differ much from those of young people in other capital cities in Africa, though the numbers may be higher in N'djaména (de Bruijn & Djindil 2006). No precise figures are available but from crossing town several times and taking the estimates of colleagues working for NGOs, they may number up to 10,000 or even 20,000. UNICEF estimated in 1995 that 200,000 children in Chad were living under very difficult circumstances and that about 3000 children were living on the streets of N'djaména in the mid-1990s (Rone 1995). However, the Chadian researcher and NGO employee Nodjiadjim (2000: 236) found much lower numbers – 1000 to 1500 children. Our own estimate is closer to that of the UNICEF staff we talked to in 2003 who put the number at 10,000 at least. But the number of street children fluctuates considerably. These children and youth are part of N'djaména's street life and participate in the street economy with children who live *off* the street, i.e. they work there but have a house where they sleep. Other street people are older people, migrants who have no house but sleep under 'tables' or in the market.

Agency and the margins

The structural constraints that the Chadian political and socioeconomic situation imposes on a large number of its inhabitants have created conditions that force many to live on the streets, on the so-called margins of the modern economy. This definition of the margins is of course ambiguous. Who defines the margins? Das and Poole (2004) have defined anthropology on the margins of the state in order to demand attention for the centrality these zones have in many people's lives. They define the margins as spaces of exception, not only

office in N'djaména. Although the actual research period only lasted three months, my stay in Chad was much longer (September 2002–May 2003) and since 2003 I have visited Chad every year, which has allowed me to revisit the places where the children and youth live and NGOs working with street children. In April 2005 I went to N'djaména to make a short film about street children. The first results of this team effort are summarized in an overview article of the research to date (de Bruijn & Djindil 2006). I am solely responsible for the analysis in this article even though it is based on the results of team research.

confined to territory but also to social relations and to the economy, i.e. as the exception to 'normal' conditions. But who defines what is normal?

These exceptional areas, Das and Poole (2004: 19) argue, are places of creativity and invention, though fraught with danger. In other words, these margins are just as much a part of society and the creative processes that go with the creation of society in the non-margins. Das and Poole link agency on the margins of society to suffering. Kleinman (2000: 239) states that agency is created in the spaces of suffering and violence. But instead of subscribing to these implicit ideas of marginality, we should question whether these marginal or exceptional spaces are perceived as places of suffering and misery by the people living there. Suffering and misery in Chad are not confined to the margins but are found everywhere. The margins may even provide a better living, though probably not according to the rules of law, but rather in what is labelled illegality and the shadow economy.

From a state-like perspective, street children and youth typically live in the so-called margins, in an economic space that is seemingly confined to the exception, but that may be more important for a considerable number of people than the non-exceptions. Roitman (2004: 197) describes such an economy as the 'bush economy', similar to the one she observed in north Cameroon. This bush economy, 'where young people try to make a life in illicit and illegality that they formulate as being their rights as answer to the exploitative methods of the state', comes close to what we have observed in Chad, and in N'djaména in particular. The state and the history of the state in Chad have created an urban economy of the streets where people and youth try to make a living out of nothing. The bush economy is not a normless space, on the contrary it is organized and guided by rules and norms, and access to resources – be they illegal or marginal – is crucial for the survival of the inhabitants of this 'bush'. Peluso and Ribot (2003) put so-called 'marginal areas of survival' on the agenda as being ruled and organized as well as the formal economy and social organizations. These marginal areas should therefore be analyzed in terms of access and regulations, and are seen as being central to people's livelihoods. The margins should be described in terms of norms and culture and the agency of the people who created this culture has to be taken into consideration.

Children at risk?

As the various articles in the book edited by Das and Poole (2004) show, the margins and the non-margins can be intertwined and do not have to be opposites. But creating this opposition often serves an ideological aim. In the discourse on street children and youth as expressed in policy circles, scientific studies and Chadian civil society, we recognize an often-unintended creation of

this opposition. It does serve a goal, i.e. for the development world it helps to define target groups, in scientific studies it assists in analyzing the situation of the children, and finally for Chadian middle-class civil society it negates the harsh conditions of Chadian daily realities and justifies their own well-being.

Much of the writing on street children has been inspired by NGO and development thinking that embraced children as a target group in the 1990s in the era of the convention of the rights of children. These ideas, that cannot be denied, are based on middle-class and idealistic conceptions of what a child should have and be. When more and more children left their homes due to difficult economic circumstances, war and social decline to live on the streets, the category of street children soon entered the development jargon (Nieuwenhuys 2001). They are deprived of all the rights children should have: the right to go to school, to have access to health care, and a family life. They are considered 'children at risk', victims of the societies in which they live, and opportunities should be created to allow them to escape this situation (cf. de Bruijn & van Dijk 2005). These children and youth living on the margins as victims of the economic and social situation in their country became a 'good' target group for NGOs. As Perry (2004) shows for Senegalese street children, targeting the street child finally resulted in the definition of this new social category of the 'street child'. The development world embraced them as 'children at risk'. In Chad the first references to street children were also in the 1990s when the civil war was ending and the country was opening its doors to NGOs and others who came to help in 'development'.

The scientific or social-science literature on street children is relatively new (Swart-Kruger 1996)⁴ and has developed around two opinions. The first view subscribes to the development paradigm that these children are 'children at risk'.⁵ Secondly, there is the literature that emphasizes the agency of these children and youth and tries to show how the margins of society have become their home and their identity. This view has introduced the term *culture de la rue* (Héroult & Adesanmi 1997), in which different social groups of people participate and where there is a social life with its own economy and its own

⁴ Cf. Kilbride *et al.* (2000), Various studies have appeared about street children and youth in West African cities: Dakar, Senegal (Diop 2000, Perry 2004), Nouakchott, Mauritania (Combiér 1994), Bamako, Mali (Douville 2003-2004), Niamey, Niger (Olivier de Sardan 1998, Gilliard & Pédenon 1996), Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso (Barry 1998-1999), Yaoundé, Cameroon (Mergue 1997), N'djaména, Chad (Gougnongbe 1997, Nodjiadjim 2000), Héroult (1997). These studies mainly refer to boys; girls on the street are still under-researched (Rurevo & Bourdillon 2003).

⁵ Cf. Douville (2003-2004), Gougnongbe (1997), Barry (1998-1999), Marguerat (2005).

geographical and social space in town.⁶ This line of reasoning is elaborated on in various recent studies where the agency of the street child and youth are put under the spotlight (cf. Moyer 2003). Both bodies of literature analyze the society of which street children are a part in terms of dichotomy, putting the children on the margins of the state and defining their situation at least as abnormal, though for the second body of literature it is a situation where creativity can indeed flourish despite the misery most of the children and youth experience. The question remains, however, as to how the street children perceive their social environment and how the so-called margins on which they live are also constructed in the different social worlds they participate in as people, as a category or as the mirror of the society they live in.

For the ordinary citizens of N'djaména, street children do indeed live on the margins and are defined as the exception, but in their opinions the children become a risk, instead of being at risk (de Bruijn & van Dijk 2005). Should children not live in a social environment that protects them? In the press, these children are referred to as criminals or as bandits, and in informal conversations they are defined as *les colombiens*.⁷ They are also seen as a problem for which there is virtually no solution. Their marginality in the eyes of ordinary people is reinforced by their dirty clothes and by the way they make a living, sleep in the open air and live off the city's garbage. The general opinion is that their parents are responsible for these children's deplorable situation. As the following quote from an article in a Chadian newspaper *Notre Temps* in 2002 put it: '*Ce qui suppose qu'il faut impérativement changer la mentalité des parents, en leur faisant comprendre une fois pour toute que faire des enfants implique forcément la prise en charge effective et sans condition de ces derniers et qu'autrement dit, c'est un crime que de mettre au monde et laisser sa propre progéniture à la merci de la nature*' (Djimasngar 2002).⁸ The NGO staff we worked with shared this opinion but also mentioned the general poverty in Chad as being a cause too. In the end, they hold the Chadian state responsible. By creating this opposition between civil society and the street children and by making the space of the street children normless, Chadian citizens are creating their own normative space and defending it. It helps them deny that their own situation is ultimately not much better than those of these children's families.

⁶ Luchini (1993), Découdras & Lenoble-Bart (1996), Biaya (2000), Hérault & Adesami (1997).

⁷ Associated with drug use and banditry.

⁸ 'This implies that we should change the mentality of the parents by making them aware of the fact that having children means that one has to look after them, it is simply a crime to bring children into the world and leave them to the mercy of nature.'

Life on the streets of N'djaména

Who are the children and youth living on N'djaména's streets and how do they integrate the specific urban environment in their lives? The following section presents sketches of the settings in which the children and youth live.

Klémat

Coming off the tarmac Route de Mobutu and turning right at the BCAO bank building and crossing over a sandy road where the Catholic NGO office of SECADEV⁹ is situated, one comes to the Klémat quarter of the city. In the middle of it is an open space where the town's garbage is dumped. The men who collect domestic garbage from houses with their *pouss-pouss* empty their handcarts here too. And the city's few garbage trucks are also emptied in Klémat. In the middle of this open space there is a small lake. Klémat is one of N'djaména's older quarters and is home to various ethnic groups. However, one group is particularly visible in Klémat probably not in numbers but historically. People from the Guera in Central Chad were among the first to inhabit this quarter and at the height of the civil war the chiefs of the Guera lived in Klémat too. There is even a Catholic church here for people from the Guera. Klémat is a mixed quarter in terms of social class and the different strata of Chadian society, and more than a few expatriates live here in large detached homes. *Médécins sans Frontières* has had its office here since the conflict in Darfur spilled over into eastern Chad, which has resulted in the arrival of some 200,000 refugees. Just around the corner is the open space with the small lake and a huge pile of garbage. Although it would be easy to miss the human habitation in this space, for the close observer it is clear that the area is inhabited and 'used' by quite a lot of people. In one corner there are a few shelters and a hut, some chickens searching for food in the garbage around these huts, some clothes drying outside, the makings of a small hamlet with a pile of wood for sale, a bicycle repair place under a tree, and a pile of second-hand utilities. All of this gives the square the air of a small market place. This area is inhabited by a group of people who inscribe into the history of the quarter as being mainly from the Guera. A few old people live here too. One old couple that came from the Guera seem to be migrants who fled political troubles there in the 1980s. They live in a dilapidated hut with one of their young children, the only surviving one. Next to them a group of young men and youth have made their home and sleep under the shelters. Among them are also a considerable number of young people also originally from the Guera. The man repairing bicycles has the necessary tools and is assisted by one of the youths who he says he is trying to teach or at least help to become a craftsman.

The youth here all have their own short histories. Ahmadou Said for instance was 14 in 2003, and came to live here in 1998 after his parents, both of whom lived in N'djaména, got divorced. His three siblings still live with his mother but he could not cope with the divorce. He does not complain although he finds life hard in Klémat. His earnings of FCFA 150 to FCFA 1000 a day come from

⁹ *Secours Catholique au Développement.*

scavenging on the garbage piles, from begging and from stealing. He does not feel healthy (and he is indeed malnourished)¹⁰ but will never go to a hospital. He fears that the nurses might be related to the police. Raids and arrests by the police are frequent events in N'djaména, and being in prison is frightening. Abdelkader's mother died in 1992 when he was two years old. There were seven children in the family and after two years in school he had a fight with a girl and broke her teeth. Abdelkader was so afraid that he left home to avoid his father's anger. He now lives partly with his grandmother and partly in Klémat. He is also afraid of the police and of the older youths who from time to time are worse than the police. Moussa, aged 13 in 2003, lives in Klémat because this is a better life than at home, where all eight of his siblings died. His parents cannot take care of him. That is why he left home at the age of six. He speaks for all the youth in Klémat when he says that he gets pleasure from sniffing glue and taking drugs. 'With some glue in my head it is also easier to steal'! He regrets being on the street but he says it is the fault of this country where people are too poor to take care of their children. All three are relatively happy in Klémat, they respect their leader and claim to find protection in the group of youths they live with. They never go to hospital, nor do they have contact with any NGO. Some of them, as they saw us as being from an NGO, declared that they would like to join an NGO if it could help them to find a better life.

Diguel market

Mahamat, whose words opened this article, lives with other young people in Diguel market, one of N'djaména's three big markets that sell everything. The market also provides housing, and families and old people who cannot afford to live elsewhere live in the old and often dilapidated market storage houses. As they rent these places officially, with payment being arranged through the market officials, they are tolerated. It was however a strange experience to arrive at the market at 6:30 am and to see people waking up, coming out of these houses and after a while turning themselves into neat mosque visitors in white clothes. Saleh rents two of these storage houses and uses at least five of them, all of which are in bad shape. He is one of the oldest living on the streets of N'djaména. His story starts when he was a child of seven and left home without a clear reason for going to live on the streets. That was in the 1960s when the war was just starting in Chad. Living his whole life on the streets, he is considered as an elder and has earned a lot of prestige because of his age and experience. He is 'married' and has two children. One daughter lives with his sister in N'djaména and the younger one was born during our stay in N'djaména in 2003. His wife is also a woman of the street, and seems to be a little disturbed mentally. When the baby was born, another woman in this small community of

¹⁰ We did a nutrition survey among the children, the results of which are reported elsewhere (de Bruijn & Djindil 2006).





Photos 11.1, 11.2 & 11.3 Typical but contrasting street scenes in N'djaména

market dwellers took care of the child because she said she did not trust the mother to look after the child properly. Two years later when we visited Saleh again, the baby was with her mother and seemed to be doing well. They live off reselling old pairs of shoes that they find in the piles of garbage. About thirty young people bring their daily gatherings to Saleh who pays them for their efforts. He and his two helpers wash the old shoes and repair them. They are then sold to wholesalers who resell them in the east of Chad and in Sudan where people cannot afford to buy new shoes. This has created a market for good cheap second-hand shoes. Apparently Saleh delivers good quality as his improved situation in 2004 revealed. He told us that he had benefited from the situation in Sudan where the Darfur crisis had led to an increase in poverty and a higher demand for second-hand shoes.

Both sites show that the children and youth find ways of organizing their lives but they still depend on their own independent actions and efforts. The group around Saleh can be described as a social unit, with a hierarchy and its own *culture du marché*. However, in both cases the groups are very flexible and the children mobile. When I return after a year or even less, I find that some of the children and youth have found another group to live with. A group may gain its own identity over time but each child and youth has his own story. In the case of Diguel, they primarily relate to Saleh because he provides them with a safe place and a secure income, but they also unite around him. In the end, the children and youth find a group somewhere in N'djaména to live with and they

make a social and economic life for themselves to sustain them. It is not easy to become a member of a group and it may depend on one's own opportunities, strong character and robustness in relation to the older boys. The children and youth we met had all adapted to this difficult life on the streets and, for some, returning to a different life seemed impossible. Their character is formed and moulded to fit their lives on the street.

Nimery's account shows how difficult it is to become a tough street child/youth.

My father is a beggar; he is blind and lives in Mongo in the Guera in central Chad. My mother died around 1997. I have never been to school; my parents couldn't afford it. In 1996 I decided to leave Mongo to see if I could find work in N'djaména. But I have never found the work I dreamed of and as I have no parents here I was forced to live on the streets. My first days on the street were hell, everything was difficult, I couldn't stand the cold, or the mosquitoes. I had to sleep on the ground and there was simply no water to wash and I was very badly treated by the other youths on the streets. I was also picked up by the police several times and one time I was almost captured and made to join the army. I have been in prison for several short periods. This is bad because they will not give you food. But now I'm here in the *grand marché* in the centre of N'djaména and I have learned to cope with life. I eat everything now, everything I find in the garbage. My main occupation is collecting things. I wash them and sell them in the market, which brings me FCFA 300 to FCFA 400 a day. Of course I buy cigarettes and glue but also food. This work does not have a future; it only makes us sick. I hope to learn a real craft in the future.

Street life is the centre and the margins

These stories and sketches give an idea of what life on the street is like. It has its own economy, a sociality and cultural aspects that help define the children's identity. Within the given circumstances of those mentioned above, the decision to live on the street was probably the best option. For most of these children and youth, street life may not be so very different from life with their families.

The geographical situation of the places where these children live – in the centre of N'djaména where informal and illegal economic activity is possible – says something about their lifestyles. The sites where we worked are all in the centre of N'djaména (see Map 11.1) and, importantly, close to garbage dumps or in the middle of a richer residential areas where the children can do work for rich families. They also choose places where people gather and where there are opportunities to steal. Their economic activities are part of the informal, illegal economy that apparently is the counterpart to the other world, where the garbage comes from, and where the people for whom the children work or from whom they steal live. In these 'spaces' the children and youth develop livelihoods and create their own identity by referring to each other as their compan-

ions and friends; by linking up with the older street people and thus forming a 'family'; by preparing food in their 'kitchens'; by creating their own language (*jargon de la rue*); with their mentality linked to drinking, glue sniffing, etc. But not for all children is this social and cultural space a safe haven. All the younger children we spoke to expressed feelings of insecurity *vis-à-vis* the older boys who persuade them to hand over their money, sometimes using violence. Nevertheless, they were all convinced of having made the correct decision to live on the streets. They simply saw it as the best option at the time.

Non-confrontation with the 'normal' world

This world of the street children is not without critique and the abhorrence of the ordinary man in the street, of civil society at large, images we sketched above. Among the children and youth some were aware of these images. These ideas had also been picked up during their (few) years in school. Quite a number of these young people had attended school when they were still at home and, for them, schooling still symbolizes a better future. They are more than capable of analyzing their own situation, simply because they have discussed their position with each other and because they are part of a street world where elders also explain their situation.

A concern expressed by the children and youth was about their health and staying healthy. They realized that their lifestyle had health risks attached to it, and had seen companions die or have psychological problems. In times of need, they mainly resorted to the *choukous* or the street doctors. The hospital and official state doctors were beyond their reach: hospitals were too expensive and probably more importantly it was not part of their social world. Some of the young people we met last went to hospital when they lived with their families but since they had lived on the street they had relied on street doctors or the pills they could buy at the market 'pharmacies'. We experienced the 'hostile' environment of the hospital at first hand when we tried to get treatment for a street youth from the 'Monument' area on the banks of the Chari River behind the UNHCR office. Rachid had had an accident and we, as his protectors, went with him to the hospital and paid all his bills. The many mistakes made while he was being treated finally meant that he returned to the streets in a very bad way. And we turned, with him, to the street healers in our efforts to help him.

Further confrontations with the state service are also primarily negative, for example, with the police and with raids for the army when the Chadian government is in need of soldiers. Among the children and youth we met a few told us their stories about the war. They were picked up by car at night and taken to prison where they were tested for the army. Such recruitment methods were recently reported again in N'djaména due to the fresh rebellions in the

eastern part of Chad. Even without rebellions or an actual war, children are picked up by the police from time to time because they are simply considered a nuisance on the streets.

The world that wants to help these children out of this situation – the NGOs – shares the same geographical space with them but does not reach them, as the following account makes clear.

The sites where the children and youth live are often near NGO buildings. The UNICEF office is one of the city's tallest buildings and it is only possible to get in with an identity card (that the children naturally do not have). Behind the UNICEF building lives a group of about 12 street children. Their anchor is the tree next to the building, where they put their clothes and the cardboard they sleep on. Although the children are defined as an important *groupe cible* and thick reports have been written about their situation, it is not clear whether UNICEF's efforts to reach these children are working. The children next to the UNICEF building, who make a livelihood like all the others but whose main work places are the homes of rich families for whom they do all the dirty work, told us about their confrontation with UNICEF. 'They brought us mosquito nets but these were taken away by the older street youth. These people only pass by and never stop at our place'! A similar experience was described by a youth living next to a garbage pile in Monument on the River Chari. The children concluded that this man, apparently from an NGO that wanted to work with street children, came and made films, talked to them and brought along white people, and then disappeared as soon as he had his money. Later they saw him riding his big motorcycle in his good suit! They never wanted to be filmed again.¹¹

The number of NGOs working to improve the lot of street children has mushroomed since the 1990s. They are part of the international development world and have clearly adopted the discourse on the 'child at risk'. Solving the problem means, in their terms, that the children and youth have to be 'normalized'. This comes across in the actions they propose: they provide medicines and tell the children they should go to the doctor and live hygienically. In addition, they all have programmes to reintegrate these children into family life and, if this is not possible, they feel they should live in a neat house for orphans.¹² The discourse of these NGOs is shared by Chadian civilians who

¹¹ Despite these arguments they were never opposed to us taking their pictures and asking questions.

¹² The organizations working with street children include *L'Association pour un Réinsertion des Jeunes de la Rue* (ARJR), *L'Association d'Entraide pour l'Épanouissement et Développement de l'Enfant Démuni au Tchad* (AEDEDET), *L'Association pour les*

regard street children as a nuisance but at the same time consider them their own responsibility. They would like the situation to be better but understand that these children and youth are part and parcel of their world, though confined to the margins. They are in fact the counterpoint to which they can refer as the normlessness, as the opposite of their own situation. This space is thus reserved for these children and youth, whose problems the ordinary citizen can never solve.

It was amazing to realize by interviewing and observing these young people on the streets of N'djaména how capable they were of analyzing their own situation in relation to the state and civil society, but they do so in the same dichotomy that fits this society so well to keep to their own identity of neat citizens. They did realize that this was their mirror society in a way but that they could not be part of it. They learned this through experiences and confrontations. In the interviews we had with them, they defined themselves as being different, as living on the margins of society. Their identity as a street child was confirmed in their ideas about the future and where they could find a better life for themselves outside these margins. This perspective had developed in contrast with 'normal' Chadian society and the world of the NGOs, both of which define them as 'living on the margins' and as 'children at risk'. Some of the children expressed their wish to leave this world, realizing how difficult it would be for them: '*Je suis fatigué avec la vie dans la rue, les gens nous insultent bandits, voleur, etc. ça m'énerve*' (Abdallah, born in 1990); '*Je veux devenir un jour un maître enseignant pour apprendre les enfants à lire et écrire*' (Moussa, born in 1990).

Conclusion

Scheper-Hughes and Sargent (1998: 2) stated: 'Children are part of the "cultural politics" of every day life. ... The treatment and place of children (...) are affected by global political-economic structures and by everyday practices embedded in the micro-level interactions of local cultures. Thus the agency of the children, and of the poor, is acted out in between the confines and limits of the society in which they live'. The street children and youth in Chad live in a society where poverty denies many people a good existence but at the same

Enfants de la Rue au Tchad (APERT), *SOS Kinderdorpen*, *Médecins sans Frontières* (with a special programme for street children), many small Christian NGOs, some Islamic NGOs, like *Foundation al Makka al Mulkarama*, *International Islamic Relief Organisation* (IIRO), *Association des Musulmanes en Afrique* (AMA), *International African Relief Agency* (IARA), and *al-Dawa al-Islamiya* (Kaag 2006).

time allows street children an existence in the informal economy. The politics of poverty introduce a discourse in which civil society, in the form of citizens and NGOs, searches for an identification with a decent life. The street children have become the other, the extreme example of poverty and illegality in their world with which they do not want to identify, although they all know that street children and the economy in which they participate are part of Chadian political, economic and social life. To understand the lives of children we should therefore understand how society perceives them. In the 'children at risk' paradigm as formulated in civil society, the children are denied agency, whereas reality shows that they have many capabilities to deal with the situation. However not all children and youth are as capable, depending on their position in the street society. In the confrontation with the NGO world and civil society, the children may use the ascribed identity of street child that in fact gives them a vulnerable agency (see van Dijk, this volume) to negotiate their access to possibilities for survival. Some children do this better than others and for them the label 'street child' and the definition of being on the margins becomes part of survival.

Margins and non-margins exist in power relations and the confirmation of social hierarchies. As such, margins are the products of and produce agency. Civil society and NGOs define margins and so deny children agency in their society, and allow themselves an identity. At the same time, they realize that these marginal spaces are a reality for which they have defined strategies in an attempt to make them disappear. Their own involvement is their survival. The reality of these children's lives is part of the economy of Chad. The margins of these children and youth on the street are not normless, on the contrary a culture of the street or the market can be discovered. The children use the space that is left for them by 'normal' society and do so in a conscious way. They know that their life on the streets is better than at home. They did not choose this life of their own free will but being on the street has made them street children and they have discovered that this way of life is not an exception. They are very agentic persons and the ascribed agency of being vulnerable may fit their strategies for making a living.

The life of the street child is full of dilemmas for the children as well as for civil society. On the one hand the children have no option other than to live in a world of illegality and in the informal economy of post-war Chad, but they are at the same time confronted with a world that has internalized the development discourse of 'children at risk', one that they themselves also use in confronting people from this world. This dilemma is visible in the life of Homere, who has written a poem reflecting this dilemma, and with which I want to end this article.

Homere Nguerguino¹³ lived as a street child in N'djaména from the age of 12 to 20, because of the war. He has seen all the difficulties of life on the streets but claims he also enjoyed this life to a certain extent. He is now the director of an NGO that is trying to work for the street youth and has organized a solid-waste collection project with some of the older youths who have become neat house-fathers with rented houses. The revenue from their activities has allowed them to buy a piece of land where they are constructing a 'home' and work place for the street youth. They are also investing in a school for these children. For this construction work he has not received a lot of funding but they are constructing the home with the piecemeal aid they receive (from an Italian mission, various Dutch families, etc) and their own earnings. Homere is against excessive funding and sees the big NGOs in this field, like UNICEF, as stealing from those on the streets; 'they "use" the children as emblems but never seriously invest in their lives'. He has often invited people from UNICEF to come and visit sites but they have always refused. He, in turn, refuses their money. However, Homere has become a 'Chadian citizen' and is trying to develop a normal family life. A second baby will soon join his first child. He has also adopted an NGO discourse to use about the children and when visiting the children and youth he always tries to convince them to learn a job and to escape from their life on the street. In his view, N'djaména's street children are the victims of Chadian society.

Enfant de la rue

*Oh! Je suis enfant de la rue
Les gens m'appellent bandit, voleur,
Saoulard, délinquant, colombien,
Je suis enfant de la rue, je dors
Dans la rue sans drap ni
Couverture
Je mange dans les ordures
Je suis fier d'être enfant de la rue
Je vole, je mendie pour survivre
Je me droque, j'aspire la colle, je bois
De l'alcool pour oublier les soucis
Le dépotoir est mon royaume
Les morceaux de cartons sont mes nattes
Les morceaux de briques sont mes oreillers
Oh! Mon Dieu, sauve-moi de ce mauvais chemin
Père, mère, frères et sœurs, pourquoi m'avez-vous abandonné?
Je suis rejeté par tout le monde
Je suis mal-vu*

¹³ We met Homere at the beginning of our research into the life of street children and youth in N'djaména in November 2002. He has written texts about his experiences on the street when he was a young child and in 2005 we interviewed him on film as he recounted the story of his life.

Je suis expose a tous les dangers

J'ai besoin d'une éducation

J'ai droit a vivre

Oh! Quelle sale vie que je mène?

Je dors dans la rue

Tout, ce que je trouve dans les ordures comme

Nourriture, je mange

Je suis enfant de la rue

Je vole, je mendie pour survivre

Je me saoule avec de l'alcool, la colle pour

Oublier les soucis.

Je me drogue pour ne pas sentir les piqûres des moustiques

On m'appelle voleur, saoulard, drogué, délinquant

Je suis poursuivi par les forces de l'ordre

Je suis raflé par la police à tout moment

Je suis emprisonné, maltraité, torturé, dépouillé de mes biens par les forces de l'ordre

Je demeure toujours enfant de la rue

J'ai peur de vivre dans cette misère

On est organisé par groupe sans pères et mères, ni frères et sœurs

Je suis rejeté, personne ne m'approche parce qu'on me considère a un agresseur, drogué, voleur, colombien.

On m'appelle danger de la mort, colombien

Papa, maman, frères et sœurs, aidez-moi à devenir un homme de demain

References

- Barry, A. 1998-1999, 'Marginalité et Errance Juvéniles en Milieu Urbain, La Place de l'Aide Psychologique dans les Dispositifs de Prise en Charge des Enfants de la Rue', *Psychopathologie Africaine* XXIX (2): 139-90.
- Bennafla, K. 2002, *Le Commerce Frontalière en Afrique Centrale: Acteurs, Espaces, Pratiques*, Paris: Karthala.
- Biaya, T.K. 2000, 'Jeunes et Culture de la Rue en Afrique Urbaine (Addis-Abeba, Dakar et Kinshasa)', *Politique Africaine* (80): 12-32.
- Cloutier L. & A. Sy 1993, *N'djaménoise du Secteur Informel*, N'Djaména: CEFOD.
- Combier, A. 1994, *Les Enfants de la Rue en Mauritanie: L'Initiative de Nouakchott*, Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Das, V. & A. Kleinman 2000, 'Introduction', in: V. Das *et al.* (eds), *Violence and Subjectivity*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 1-18.
- Das, V. & D. Poole (eds) 2004, *Anthropology in the Margins of the State*, Santa Fe/Oxford: School of American Research Press/James Currey.
- de Bruijn, M. & N. Djindil 2006, 'Etat Nutritionnel et Histoire de Vie des « Enfants de la Rue » de la Ville de N'djaména, Tchad', *Psychopathologie Africaine* xxxiii (2): 183-212.

- de Bruijn, M. & R. van Dijk 2005, 'The Image of the African Child: Produced by Whom and For What Purpose?', Paper presented at the AEGIS conference, London, 29 June - 2 July.
- de Jong, J. *et al.* 2001, 'Lifetime Events and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Four Post-conflict Settings', *JAMA* 286 (5): 555-62.
- Découdras, P-M. & A. Lenoble-Bart 1996, 'La Rue: Le Décor et l'Enfer', *Politiques Africaines* (63): 3-13.
- Diop, M. 2000, 'Les Enfants et les Jeunes de la Rue, Bâisseurs d'une Société Nouvelle', in: K. Wyss *et al.*, *Villes et Sursis au Sahel*, Paris: L'Harmattan, pp. 215-34.
- Djimasngar, N. 2002, 'Enfance Abandonnée', *Notre Temps* 104 (26/11-2/12).
- Douville, O. 2003-2004, 'Enfants et Adolescents en Danger dans la Rue à Bamako (Mali), Questions Cliniques et Anthropologiques à Partir d'une Pratique', *Psychopathologie Africaine* XXXII (1): 55-89.
- Fall, A.S. 2005, 'Bricoler pour Survivre; Perceptions de la Pauvreté dans l'Agglomération Urbaine de Dakar', PhD Thesis, University of Amsterdam.
- Gilliard P. & L. Pédenon 1996, 'Rues de Niamey, Espace et Territoires de la Mendicité', *Politique Africaine* (63): 51-61.
- Gougnongbé, A. 1997, 'Quand le Désir de Soigner Rejoint le Désir de Se Soigner, de l'Utilité du Traitement des Représentations Préalables sur l'Enfance chez les Éducateurs des Enfants et Jeunes de la Rue', *Psychopathologie Africaine* XXVII (3): 313-38.
- Hérault, G. 1997, 'Jeunes, Culture de la Rue et Violence Urbaine en Afrique; Invariants, Paramètres et Stratégies du Changement', in: G. Hérault & P. Adesanmi (eds), *Jeunes, Culture de la Rue et Violence Urbaine en Afrique*, Actes du Symposium International d'Abidjan, 5-7 May, pp. 1-9.
- Hérault, G. & P. Adesanmi (eds) 1997, *Jeunes, Culture de la Rue et Violence Urbaine en Afrique*, Actes du Symposium International d'Abidjan, 5-7 May, pp. 1-9.
- Kaag, M. 2006 (forthcoming), 'Aid, Umma and Politics. Transnational Islamic NGOs in Chad'.
- Kilbride, Ph., C. Suda & E. Njeru 2000, *Street Children in Kenya, Voice of Children in Search of Childhood*, London/Westport, Conn.: Bergin & Garvey.
- Kleinman, A. 2000, 'The Violences of Everyday Life: The Multiple Forms and Dynamics of Social Violence' in: V. Das *et al.* (eds), *Violence and Subjectivity*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 226-41.
- Lucchini, R. 1993, *L'Enfant de la Rue: Identité, Sociabilité, Drogue*, Paris/Geneva: DROZ.
- Lucchini, R. 1996, *Sociologie de la Survie: L'Enfant de la Rue*, Paris, PUF.
- Marguerat, Y. 2005, 'From Generational Conflict to Renewed Dialogue: Winning the Trust of Street Children in Lomé, Togo', in: J. Abbink & I. van Kessel (eds), *Vanguard or Vandals, Youth, Politics and Conflict in Africa*, Leiden: Brill, pp. 207-28.
- Marie, A. (ed.) 1997, *L'Afrique des Individus, Itinéraires Citadins dans l'Afrique Contemporaine*, Paris: Karthala.
- Mergue, M-T. 1997, 'Préface', in: Y. Balaam, *Enfants de la Rue et de la Prison dans une Ville Africaine (1975-1992)*: iv-x.
- Moyer, E. 2003, 'In the Shadow of the Sheraton: Imaging Localities in Global Spaces in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania', PhD Thesis, University of Amsterdam.

- Nieuwenhuys, O. 2001, 'By the Sweat of Their Brow? "Street Children", NGOs and Children's Rights in Addis Abeba', *Africa* 71 (4): 539-57.
- Nodjiadjim, L.A. 2000, 'Les Jeunes Habitent la Rue, et la Rue Habite les Jeunes', in: K. Wyss *et al.*, *Villes et Sursis au Sahel*, Paris: L'Harmattan, pp. 235 -56.
- Olivier de Sardan, J-P. *et al.* 1998, 'Entretiens avec des Enfants de la Rue à Niamey', Shadyc Working Paper, Marseille.
- Pantsers, W. G. Dijkstra, P. Hoebinnk & E. Snel (eds) 2000, *Rethinking Poverty, Comparative Perspectives from Below*, Nijmegen: Van Gorcum.
- Peacock, R. 1994, 'Street Children', *Africa Insight* 24 (2): 138-43.
- Peluso, N. & J. Ribot 2003, 'A Theory of Access', *Rural Sociology* 68 (2): 151-81.
- Perry, D. 2004, 'Muslim Child Disciples Global Civil Society, and Children's Rights in Senegal: The Discourses of Strategic Structuralism', *Anthropological Quarterly* 77 (1): 47-86.
- Roitman, J. 2004, 'Productivity in the Margins: The Reconstitution of State Power in the Chad Basin', in: V. Das & D. Poole (eds), *Anthropology in the Margins of the State*, Santa Fe/Oxford: School of American Research Press/James Currey, pp. 191-225.
- Rone, B.N. 1995, 'Analyse de Situation des Enfants en Circonstances Particulièrement Difficiles en 1995 en Milieu Urbain au Tchad', UNICEF.
- Rurevo, R. & M. Bourdillon 2003, *Girls on the Street*, Harare: Weaver Press.
- Scheper-Hughes, N. & C. Sargent 1998, 'Introduction: The Cultural Politics of Childhood', in: N. Scheper-Hughes & C. Sargent, *Small Wars, The Cultural Politics of Childhood*, Berkeley/London: University of California Press, 1-35.
- Swart-Kruger, J. 1996, 'Street Children are People Too', *Africa Insight* 26 (3): 202.
- Tchad et Culture 1978, 'Vivre à N'djaména', *Tchad et Culture* 106.

Negotiating the memory of Fulbe hierarchy among mobile elite women

Lotte Pelckmans

This chapter explores the ways in which the social background of migrants and their families inform their agency, identity and behaviour. It considers more specifically the extent to which the ascribed positions in the social hierarchy of Malian Fulbe society are an important means of identification for two migrant women. How did they transfer their ascribed rural elite status to the urban contexts to which they have migrated and what social remittances do they use? When people move, their memories travel too and new (geographical) places demand an active evaluation of the roles and behaviour people were socialized in. This article focuses on the conscious negotiations of the memory of hierarchy by two elite Malian women to demonstrate how the past co-shapes the present. Remembering and ideas about power distribution are constitutive elements in a person's motives and identity, and in human agency more generally.

Introduction

Migration is a very topical issue and the potential of migrants as economic agents is receiving increased attention in development circles. However, the focus on economic remittances is potentially overshadowing other issues that are equally important in understanding migrants' social organization, livelihoods and behaviour. Levitt (1998) counterbalances this spotlight on economic remittances by focusing on what she calls the 'social remittances' that are transferred between migrants and their home communities. The assumption that, with time, migrants would start transferring their loyalty and community mem-

bership from one country to another seems to have been abandoned in transnationalism studies. Instead, there is a focus on the fact that migrants are keeping a foot in both worlds; they do not automatically trade in their membership and network of one community for another but capitalize on both, depending on their situation. They use political, religious and civic arenas to forge social relations and livelihoods, and to exercise their rights across borders (Levitt 1998: 3).

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which the social background of migrants and their families inform their agency, identity and behaviour. More specifically, the question asked is to what extent the ascribed positions in the social hierarchies of Malian Fulbe society are an important means of identification in the lives of two migrant women in maintaining and even transferring their ascribed rural elite status to the urban contexts to which they have migrated.

The initial premise is that when people move, their memories of the social status group they originally belonged to are explored anew in contexts that may be threatening and in some cases force migrants into a more conscious evaluation of the roles and behaviour they were socialized in. This article focuses on the conscious negotiations of the memory of hierarchy by two female agents.¹ Their negotiations of ascribed versus achieved status in their social relations are used to demonstrate how the past co-shapes the present and how remembering is a constitutive element in a person's motives and identity, and of human agency more generally. It is the memory of hierarchy that partly constitutes the identity of these women, creating a certain continuity in their individual sense of 'self' as noble women at an ideological level.

The broader question is whether, why and how Fulbe social hierarchies are maintained and/or transformed in a context of mobility. When people move, their memories travel too. Their remembering to some extent allows for the conservation of social relations and role models in society. On the other hand, different claims on memory are likely to clash in contexts where new and individualistic discourses on how social relations should be designed are available and thus challenge the discourse on hierarchy, eventually even transforming it.

A more specific question arises. If memory travels with an agent, to what extent does the migrant's destination influence the intensity and importance of valuing certain memories over others? Is there a qualitative difference in the

¹ There is a whole body of literature on unconscious forms of remembering hierarchies that I do not discuss here (e.g. Evers 2002, Shaw 2002, Argenti 2004, Hardung 2002). The focus in this article is mainly on conscious and agentic ways of remembering hierarchies, without however underestimating the unconscious forms of remembering.

way things are remembered in different places? Is social distance likely to increase or decrease with geographical distance – in this case between rural central Mali, urban Bamako and Paris? How far is the traditional organization of Fulbe relations in rural areas challenged by the agency of migrants who might accept different models for social status ascription that are dominant in the new geographical space they reside in?

To answer these questions, an historical analysis of two migrant women's family histories and their social relations designed by the hierarchy in their home region is presented in the first two sections. The first section provides general background information on hierarchy in Fulbe society and the research problematic. As most migrants attach some degree of importance to their families' home country/region/village of origin, like the sisters discussed in this article do, the second section focuses on their parents, Ousmane and Kadidja. They were born in central Mali, a region that is part of the Sahel and has often been described as being on the periphery of the Macina Empire. The women's parents are both members of the royal lineages of different small Fulbe kingdoms in central Mali.

A description then follows of the women in this article: Fatma who is living in the Malian capital Bamako, and Mariam who lives in Paris.² Fatma and Mariam's conscious and unconscious appropriation of their family history in order to maintain – as far as possible – their ascribed elite status in the new geographical contexts in which they now reside is considered. The two women illustrate how they can be seen as agents negotiating change, reinvention and the maintenance of their memories of the past in their current lives.

Remembered social hierarchies in a context of mobility

The social organization of Fulbe kingdoms used to be hierarchically organized: each social group was attributed a certain social status that often corresponded to the kinds of activities and/or entitlements to certain professions. To date this hierarchical logic can be conceptualized as follows. Power and status are attributed to the noblemen who, in general, are part of the political or religious elite (de Bruijn & van Dijk 1995, Angenent *et al.* 2003). The parents of the sisters discussed in this article are part of the political elite in their respective home villages. Below these elite groups are the other freemen, i.e. traders, artisans and nomadic herdsman, and at the bottom of the Fulbe power pyramid are the former slaves.³

² For reasons of privacy, the names of the people discussed here have been changed.

³ In the Fulfulde language, these groups are called respectively: *Weheebe* (political noblesse), *Moodibaabe* (religious noblesse), *Diawaambe* (commercial traders/nobles),

None of the ‘freeborn’ have ever been enslaved: they are considered free and thus subject to codes of honour. These codes of honour are directly related to the social opposition between slaves and the nobility as there is a complex set of rules and norms for behaviour reserved for the free (*ndimu*). Slaves, or the non-free, are the opposite of noblemen (chiefs’ families, Islamic clergy and herds-men) who, because of their noble status, were not allowed to perform hard physical labour. The slaves used to do all the physical work and were not considered a part of the *ndimu* (nobility) or *pulaaku* (the Fulbe community). Noblemen, more so than others, are expected to behave according to the *pulaaku* rules, which are directly related to the behaviour of Fulbe men and women in public.

This behaviour is characterized by controlling physical human needs and psychological weaknesses as far as possible. Important aspects are maintaining an appropriate distance in certain social relations (mother- and father-in-law, the old and the young, etc), showing reserve at times, not being greedy or noisy, and being a good Muslim.⁴ Everything revolves around avoiding any kind of submission and dependency, not only to one’s biological but also social needs. Honour is an important aspect in maintaining hierarchies and hierarchical relations. Iliffe (2005: 1) defines honour as the ‘chief ideological motivation of African behaviour’. The maintenance of hierarchy and social status can be analyzed as the denial of honour of one group towards another. Slaves were denied noble honour by their respective masters and by institutionalized societal rules of conduct (*pulaaku*) and, as a result, developed their own slave honour (see Iliffe 2005: 119).

Some rules of conduct and hierarchical relations are remembered in the present-day Malian context. Ancestry, kinship and lineage belonging have always informed one’s position in society and are therefore a means of identity and status ascription. Despite the abolition of slavery in 1905 and decentralization from 1992 onwards – both important events in the promotion of equal access to citizenship – the memories of this rather rigid and hierarchical division of society inform people’s identity. De Bruijn and Pelckmans (2005) have shown how former hierarchical Fulbe master-slave relations inform politics and social power relations in contemporary central Mali. Klein (2005:

Nyeeybe (craftsmen, free), *egge-hodaabe* (herdsmen, noble-free) and *Riimaybe* / *Maccube* ((former slaves/non-free).

⁴ This complex of rules is known as *pulaaku*. The literal translation of *pulaaku* is ‘Fulbe community’ and each Fulbe community has its own sets of rules that may seem similar and also resemble the moral codes of the Tuareg, the Sonrai and many other Sahelian groups (Breedveld & de Bruijn 1996).

840) observed that in Fulbe society in Senegal today not only do some former slaves accept aspects of their own submission but former masters are more interested in the status that former large-scale slave ownership gave them than in the economic perquisites some former slaves convey to them.

The difference between people of different status positions is institutionalized in the manifold social rules of conduct: for example, noble women should mourn and grieve twice as long as former slaves in the event of death, and bride wealth for noble women is higher than for women of slave descent. Some of these differing rules of conduct are inspired by the Koran, others are specific to Fulbe society. Changes are however taking place, and rules of conduct are being contested, interpreted differently, or simply no longer practised. These are general transformations that are taking place not only within Fulbe society but also in different ethnic groups in Mali as a whole. As Lecocq (2005: 43) describes for contemporary Tamacheck society, there are 'changing perceptions of both free and slave descendants towards work and social(ly) appropriate behaviour'.

For noblemen, this meant a rupture in their economy and these days they are experiencing practical difficulties in maintaining their elite social status. For example, there are few options left for them to work or generate money in the rural areas, as they are impeded by noble rules of behaviour and conduct in which butchering, building houses and working in service are all looked down upon. Noblemen today pay for the labour of their former slaves, so there is a degree of monetarization in these social relationships but this does not change the essence of the hierarchical bond.

To understand how these memories of hierarchy are activated in new contexts of mobility and modernity, the possible ways in which hierarchies are remembered in urban environments are considered here. It has been noted that conservatism is a characteristic feature of migrant communities and migrants remain attached to their homeland in terms of their social relations through intense contact and social bonds. Marriage arrangements, remittances and religious affiliation keep many migrants well linked to their places of origin (Patel & Rutten 2003). Sy (2000) revealed in a study of the hierarchical relations in the Soninke community in Paris how different discourses converge and conflicts arise between migrants and their home community in a transnational context. His analysis of these conflicts shows that there is discrimination and exclusion between different status groups, especially in politics, marriage, religion, ritual, and economic relations (through housing, labour and land possession). Land, as an important instrument of pressure and power in rural areas, is likely to be replaced by housing, paid labour and community savings in the urban setting.

Intergenerational memories: Fulbe princesses and kings

Mariam and Fatma's father, Ousmane, was born in a small Fulbe kingdom in 1932 as the son of the last official king. Ousmane thus belongs to the royal chief lineage and all his children (including the two sisters) can be considered princes and princesses, or at least as the legal heirs to traditional political power in the village. However, Ousmane's descent is not purely royal as his mother was a *Taraado*, a concubine at the royal court who was taken as the village king's fourth (legal) wife. The king fell in love with her because she was so beautiful. After some years of concubinage, he decided to marry her and his slave thus became his wife.⁵ The children of such a marriage are considered to be noble and free and deep family alliances generally develop between both family groups.⁶

At the age of three, Ousmane was adopted by his maternal grandmother who took him to her small slave village outside the kingdom. Ousmane grew up there until his father sent him to Koranic school when he was seven. It was his grandmother who persuaded Ousmane's father to send his son to the French school⁷ and, in 1939, Ousmane moved to the nearest city to continue his studies. In a letter describing his life,⁸ he remembers how he suffered because his host's sister refused to cook for him and the other students living there. They only had one meal a day and Ousmane once did not eat for 48 hours. He even confessed to having stolen money in 1947 from the taxes of one of the slave villages surrounding his father's kingdom to get food for himself and the other students as he was the student leader and felt responsible for them. When the theft was discovered, his father sent money and the students were taken better care of.

Ousmane's life story is exceptional. He was the only villager who went to a French school; he learned to read and write and became the director of different schools across Mali. He married his first wife Kadidja in 1958 and they had eight children together. She was chosen for him according to traditional alliance

⁵ This was not unusual as the twentieth-century chiefs repeatedly married their slaves as fourth or fifth wives (an act that is officially permitted and described in the Koran).

⁶ For the king, these kinds of marriage alliances were important to obtain the (political) support of his slaves. In some cases however, the children of *Taraabe* are still discriminated against by 'pure' noble offspring.

⁷ One of the reasons for choosing Ousmane instead of one of the other princes at their court might be that because Ousmane was of slave descent, he was a 'less important' and 'less noble' child. In other regions of Mali (see Lecocq 2005: 55) and in West Africa in general, it was common practice to send slave children to the compulsory French schools as replacements for the chiefs' sons who the French mistakenly thought were educated by them.

⁸ I would like to thank Han van Dijk and Mirjam de Bruijn for allowing me to use the field material they gathered in 1992.

rules. Kadidja was a real beauty by Fulbe standards⁹ and the noble daughter of the chief of a neighbouring kingdom. As was expected from a 'traditional' noble woman of royal descent, Kadidja never worked or lived according to noble rules of behaviour.

In 1970, Ousmane married his second wife, with whom he also had eight children. She is from a royal lineage of yet another neighbouring kingdom. Although this second wife was noble as well, she translates her memory of noblesse into material well-being and high living standards, while working hard, being progressive and emancipated, and taking pride in doing good work. She teaches and also tries to improve girls' rights to education through her work with different NGOs. Ousmane retired in January 1988 and lives in Central Mali with his (much younger) second wife, who is still teaching there.

Travelling a great deal and working in education all his life has helped Ousmane to become the head of an intellectual and open-minded family. He was a pioneer of his generation and one of the first to openly embrace the new influences of colonialism, and the French. Paradoxically however, he also remains a Fulbe villager and king who distinguishes between noblemen and former slaves, and expects the social hierarchies to be respected. According to an old tradition of his father's, he continues to make an annual trip in the company of one of his sons to collect the levy that his former slaves are supposed to pay. Although often acting as a democratic, noble and modern intellectual who no longer adheres to tradition, in some instances he also behaves like a despotic king referring to his 'own slaves'.

Ousmane's first wife Kadidja, who was very noble and striking in appearance, was always much respected.¹⁰ She was known to be a real *pullo*: noble, gracious and confident. Even while living in Bamako with her children in her last years, she still 'practised' the memory she had of hierarchical relations: a stranger could not address her directly,¹¹ everything needed to be done for her, she had her own house slave, and would never perform hard physical labour herself.

While hardly any of their children offer daily prayers, Ousmane and his wives went to Mecca with Ousmane's brother in 2003. This trip was paid for by Mariam and Fatma, the two daughters described below.¹² Even having spent

⁹ This means being tall, light skinned, long haired and with a well-chiseled nosed.

¹⁰ Kadidja was recently taken ill while in her home region. She was airlifted to Bamako and passed away two hours later.

¹¹ She used the argument of her nobleness and the fact that noble women are not supposed to be addressed with direct questions to avoid being interviewed by me in Bamako in 2005.

¹² Mariam paid with money she earned through her own hard work as a secretary in France, and Fatma from her job as a civil servant at a Malian state company in Bamako.

most of their lives outside their home region, Ousmane and his wives still rely on the social hierarchies they are part of. They passed on the memories of hierarchy and a certain pride and elitist behaviour in their children's education, and all are clearly conscious of their noble status. All their children were for example given their 'own slave' and a cow at birth, according to noble traditions in the kingdom. Although this tradition has been passed down to their parent's generation, most of the youngsters from this family who are living in Bamako say that they will probably no longer practise it themselves.

Their parents encourage them to maintain links with their home region but Ousmane's children consider themselves to be modern, rich Bamakois (inhabitants of the capital Bamako). To a greater or lesser extent, all the children have become alienated from their co-villagers' habits: most of them do not pray five times a day, and they have more confidence in western than traditional medicine. Marriages within the village/home region continue to be arranged but the young in Bamako are simply refusing to have their partners chosen for them. They marry rich, intellectual and/or good-looking men/women from other ethnic groups, with whom they have fallen in love.

All sixteen children have studied, live in Bamako and actively contribute to the development of their village through personal financial input. They have jobs in Bamako on World Bank projects, at a travel agency, and as civil servants in the educational sector and in state companies. The fact that most of them have good jobs makes their fellow villagers call upon them to become their children's *jaatigi* (fixed host in a certain place). As *jaatigis* they are expected to accommodate students and seasonal workers from their home village for free.

This new generation of young urban intellectuals no longer cares for the supposedly perfect traditional marriage partner match: for example, that between two noble Fulbe cousins. On the contrary, most of these youngsters dislike the village mentality in which illiteracy, unemployment, poverty and different standards of hygiene predominate. In addition, the younger men do not appreciate the complete dependency of village wives who feel too noble to work and learn other languages. They criticize their older brothers' (co-village/rural) wives for this and also because these women still practise the memory of hierarchy by relying on their former slaves to assist them when marrying, giving birth, etc. The current generation of unmarried youngsters in the city say they no longer maintain ties with 'their slave' who was given to them at birth.

The slave past is reflected in today's hierarchical relations. To date, father Ousmane and mother Kadidja are part of the slave past as reflected in present-day hierarchical relations. This is in contrast with Ousmane's second and younger wife who in general cares more for material goods than social status,

but who however also has her own house slave and sends maids to her children in Bamako. They all had their own slaves working for them and expect to be treated as noble elite. Ousmane and Kadidja have passed on the memory of nobility and hierarchy to their children. In the following sections, the ways their interpretations of the past are consciously dealt with by their daughters Fatma and Mariam are described.

Fatma's negotiations between worlds: A Fulbe princess in Bamako

Fatma is the eldest of Ousmane's children by his first wife, Kadidja. When she was a child, she moved from place to place with her family until she went to secondary school, for which she had to stay in Bamako. Fatma was hosted in Bamako by a maternal uncle and was educated in the traditional elitist milieu of her mother's family. Mariam, in her turn, lived with Fatma when she was at the lyceum in Bamako. By then Fatma had already married and was earning a salary of her own. Both princesses spent only the annual two-month summer holidays during the rainy season in their village with other family members. They both mostly grew up in Malian cities.

Fatma has been living in Bamako for about 30 years now. As the eldest of Ousmane's sixteen children, she is the one who puts up most of the visitors from the home village/region. She is about 45 years old and has worked in an important state-owned company since she finished studying. She was married but separated from her husband about 10 years ago. She earns good money, owns the house she lives in, and rents out two shops attached to it.

The memory of nobility and superiority is clearly inscribed in Fatma's appearance and movements. Just like her mother, Fatma is a beautiful woman and is always dressed in the latest outfits from the Sublime Couture atelier. She is an upper-class single woman, who has all the basic luxuries of modern life: telephones, televisions, air-conditioning in her bedroom, fridges, water boilers, expensive perfumes and creams, magazines, etc. Of late, she has even joined the Rotary Club and is thus once more confirmed in her role as a noble benefactress.

She gets up early every morning to shower and be served breakfast by her maids and tea by one of the students living in her house. Then she gives food (and sometimes money) to the approximately twenty *taalibaabe* (Koranic students) who wait for her every morning outside her house. Then she leaves with her driver in her Mercedes for the city centre where she works. She mostly goes back home for lunch and has a short siesta in her air-conditioned room. She then drinks another black tea sweetened with artificial sweetener and continues working until about 5 p.m. At night she hardly ever leaves the house



Photo 12.1 Fatma's house in Bamako, Mali

but as she has a lot of phone calls and visitors – it is difficult to find her alone and unoccupied. She is in charge of her compound and commands everyone with undeniable authority and does not accept refusals, discussion or protest. Her will is law and she expects to get her own way. She hardly ever gets out of her chair once she arrives home: the youngsters living in her house bring her everything she needs.

Fatma provides accommodation for a lot of youngsters from central Mali and her home village who come to Bamako to work for about eight months and earn money during the dry season. In general they do not pay their hosts for board or lodging but they naturally show them great respect. In the rainy season they go back to their home village to cultivate crops and take all the money they have earned with them.

In 2005 Fatma hosted three workers; one of them a former slave from a neighbouring *Riimaybe* (former slave) village in her father's royal lineage. He is a direct descendant of Ousmane's former slave mother and stands up every time a (noble) family member comes near and offers them his seat. He was often asked to give massages to one of the students and Fatma commissioned him for

the hard physical labour on the compound. He is also the only one I ever saw dancing at weddings. The other noble male students in the house felt too noble and shy to do so as the *pulaaku* rules of conduct do not permit noblemen to dance in public. In 2005-2006, in addition to the workers, Fatma had four noble male and three noble female students permanently living in her house.¹³

Fatma has staff to help in her house who she pays and provides food and accommodation for. She has a *bonne* (maid) who is about 15 years old and does the cooking for everyone. This girl is a former slave and direct cousin of Fatma's father. Since January 2006, she has been assisted by another maid, a Dogon girl from central Mali. Both sleep under the stairs that lead up to the roof in the hall of Fatma's house and are paid an average city maid's salary.¹⁴ In addition to her maids, Fatma has the former slave given to her at birth. She lives in Douentza but Fatma regularly asks her to come to Bamako to assist her or family members in ritual events. Fatma also pays her personal driver a monthly salary and gives him a daily family dinner.

As well as these regular household members, there are a lot of occasional visitors who consider Fatma as their *yaatigi* (fixed host) in Bamako and come and stay on a temporary basis for periods of a few days to several weeks.¹⁵ Ousmane goes to Bamako once in a while for medical treatment and at least every two days there used to be an unexpected visitor: Fatma's traditional healer (*marabout*), her praise singer (*griot*), some former slaves, all coming to

¹³ Most of Ousmane's children migrated to Bamako (and further) for their education. Mariam's family is an exception in the village: a lot of the villagers have never been to school, will never obtain their primary-school certificate or DEF (*Diplome d'Etudes Fondamentales*) and remain illiterate. Most of the village youngsters (encouraged by their families) prefer to leave their home region from the age of 10-13 onwards to go on an 'adventure' to earn money. A lot of them are male but increasingly females are also leaving the villages too. In general, these travels and adventures are seen as a kind of rite of passage. The youngsters learn a lot about the real world as they face the hardships of coping with different languages, the difficulties of establishing new contacts and finding a job, the dangers of being robbed or misled by others and the problem of not having anywhere to sleep but on the streets. Most popular destinations are linked to networks already established by other family/village members from central Mali: Bamako, San and, internationally, Ivory Coast, Ghana and Equatorial Guinea.

¹⁴ She is paid about FCFA 7500 and the younger one, being an apprentice, is paid about FCFA 5500. (Between FCFA 6000 and 8000 is the average rate for maids in Bamako.) On top of this, Fatma covers their clothing, healthcare costs and board and lodging.

¹⁵ In the five months I was living at her house, Fatma hosted for example: a business woman from Benin, her sister Mariam (visiting from France), some youngsters from central Mali who came for name-giving ceremonies in the family, and a female cousin who came over three to four times for a couple of weeks from Mopti with her best friend. Note: these visitors were all women.



Photo 12.2 One of Fatma's maids preparing food

greet her and expecting money and/or assistance. Of course there were also the usual visits from family and friends. In conclusion, on days when there were no casual visitors or overnight guests, dinner was served for sixteen people,¹⁶ all paid for by Fatma.

Fatma divorced her husband, a teacher/director with whom she has three daughters. Sister Mariam remembers the reason for the divorce being that Fatma wanted to offer accommodation to her family members and take care of them but her husband disagreed as he wanted more privacy. They broke up because Fatma told her husband that living with her meant living with her

¹⁶ This includes 3 workers, 3 female and 4 male students, 2 maids, 1 friend, the driver, me and Fatma herself, making a total of sixteen people.

family, which he did not accept. This memory of her younger sister is an illustration of Fatma's (supposed) loyalty as an eldest daughter towards her family and co-villagers.

But of course it also provides Fatma with a dilemma concerning hospitality and generosity. She constantly has to choose who to take in and who to refuse. In general it is only the ones who are directly related to Ousmane who stand a chance of being hosted by his family members in Bamako. Directly related means having close family ties, deep friendships and/or the old traditional tie between former slaves and their masters, which cannot be broken from one day to the next. The former slaves Fatma put up were hosted exclusively because of their family ties with Ousmane's mother and because Ousmane virtually forces Fatma to accept them (on his behalf).

As Bouwman (2003: 238-39) remarks: 'Although sharing is so important that saving is impossible, there is a point at which proximity starts to count and at which "providers" will choose for those who are close to them in favour of those who are distant, in actual distance as well as through affiliation'. The newly arrived youngsters from Central Mali who are not accepted are hosted by other co-villagers who in general are less well-off and live in less-desirable neighbourhoods and smaller houses.

Fatma feels burdened by all these guests and complains a lot to her youngest sister in Paris about how everybody benefits from her generosity and hospitality except herself. At the same time, by drawing that much attention to this 'problem of her generosity', she also seems to be fishing for compliments. In fact, it seems to be her deliberate choice to constantly play the role of benefactress. In addition to being a member of the Rotary Club 'to help the poor' and investing a lot of money in her home village (in football outfits, an antennae, TV and DVDs), she also paid for her parent's trip to Mecca. She is always extremely generous with money in familial ritual events, she takes care of twenty Koranic students on a daily basis and the clients who come to greet, eat and have 'their share' are numerous.

According to her, the problem is that even if she would like to, she cannot refuse to host the people her father has sent to her. She says this is because she is of noble descent and on top of that she is the first representative of her royal family to be in Bamako. When I asked Fatma why she did not ask for money from those who are working, living and eating at her place, she replied that she could not because she is Ousmane's daughter:

It is a matter of education. However, I often revolt ... it is not easy as my father does not agree with me when I refuse. He attaches a lot of importance to unity and standing together. But in the city, life is much harder. On top of that, I am the eldest of all his 16 children. And one is obliged to take the students, they have to go to school. It is a good thing to do. This is the first year that the number of students has

decreased because there has been a lyceum in Central Mali now since 2004. (Author's translation of a conversation in Bamako, November 2005)

In the obligation to host, it becomes clear that noblesse is not always to Fatma's advantage. On the contrary, it can be constraining. *Noblesse oblige* is indeed an obligation that is sometimes hard, and not without sacrifice and pain. The generational differences come to the fore here: Fatma feels her father does not understand what city life is like but she does not contradict him out of loyalty.

Mariam's negotiations: Betwixt and between as a Fulbe princess in Paris

Mariam was born in Sikasso in 1970 and is the fourth daughter of Ousmane and his first wife, Kadidja. Educated in a Bambara and Senufo environment, she speaks Fulfulde (her parent's mother tongue) less well than her older brothers and sisters. Of all the sixteen children, Mariam thinks that she is the apple of her father's eye. Like her sister, Mariam went to Bamako for her education but then moved to France. The geographical distance and transnationality make the organization of her life, her memories and her agency *vis-à-vis* the home community more difficult to maintain compared to Fatma.

By moving from Bamako, where she was part of the urban elite culture, to France, Mariam's life changed completely. Since she is considered to be beautiful and intelligent, she used to make the most of her position as a little princess: she went to the cinema and the expensive swimming pools in Bamako, and let the men who fell in love with her pay for everything. She got holiday jobs by seducing the right men and using her female charms. It was only when she became ill in 1991 and by living in France that she learned to take care of herself and moderated her extravagant lifestyle. Because she had been ill for two years in Mali and nobody could find out what the problem was, she was sent to France. Once in Paris, Mariam appeared to have a rare cancer and was hospitalized for some months. She survived but will never be able to have children.

Mariam's motivation to migrate does not correspond with a lot of mainstream African migration to Europe as discussed in the media today. Her reason for migrating was health-related and not economically motivated.¹⁷ Nor was it inspired by a longing for a 'western paradise' or for the sake of adventure and a desire to explore the world. She was not 'forced to leave because of relations of

¹⁷ Economic motives, reuniting the family and adventure are the main reasons behind the migration of most Malians to France, see, for example, Manchuelle (1997). Timera (2001) calls for attention to the element of emancipation and self realisation that migration brings for youngsters.

expectations and exploitations' (Nyamnjoh 2005: 242). Mariam's case is instructive for the way in which a single woman deals with her different 'betwixt and between' position, constantly (re-)negotiating her belonging both in Mali and France.

Mariam lived for the first seven years of her time in Paris with a maternal cousin who had been living there for over twenty years with her husband and children. When she started working as a secretary, she was finally allowed to live on her own in an apartment south of Paris. She has now been living in France for 15 years, having moved there when she was 21. During the week, she gets up early to catch a train to Paris where she works as a secretary. Mariam is generally on the phone for at least two hours in the evening, while on the train, cooking and/or eating. She watches television and plays patience (the card game) on her computer.

Some years after she settled in France, Mariam realized it would be impossible for her to go back to live in Mali. Her story is about the way she has negotiated her belonging to her family back home on the one hand and being part of her new home country, France, on the other.

Mariam describes herself as being a very emancipated and straightforward person. However, it seems that a lot of her emancipation is neatly tied up with her pride and her preoccupation with upholding the family's honour. From the outside, Mariam looks like a perfect *pullo* but in her behaviour and the way she talks she is quite the opposite, being rather extrovert and candid. She seems to be constantly caught in an odd duality: she tries to combine being emancipated, spontaneous and open with being noble, controlled and honourable.

Mariam often feels quite lonely. She was never very lucky with men and has remained single. While she did not choose to go to France and live there, she does not regret her move to Europe. This is because she is still alive today thanks to the French healthcare system and the doctors who saved her life. Secondly, she lives more comfortably now and appreciates the fact that she is able to say and do what she wants, at least more so than she could in Mali.

However, living as an African migrant in France has made her change from a noble princess into a mouse in a big city, where she lives almost unnoticed. She does not earn a very high salary so any aspirations she might have had of belonging to elite French culture have been rejected as futile. Relatively speaking, Mariam is far less well-off than her sister Fatma in Bamako.

Mariam is less able to expose her noblesse and to enjoy her status as an elite woman. However, there are elements which clearly link her to the Fulbe hierarchies she is part of. At birth, Mariam was assigned a woman of slave descent from her father's home village, who from then onwards would be her own



Photo 12.3 A Parisian shop catering to the local African population

Diimaajo.¹⁸ Mariam says that she grew up with this *diimaajo* woman who she used to consider a special kind of friend but on an unequal basis, as the *dimaajo* would take care of her (fetching water, washing her clothes, etc) rather than vice versa. In return, Mariam was expected to provide her *diimaajo* with social security in the form of financial support and/or political assistance. Even while in Paris, Mariam receives phone calls from her *diimaajo* in Bamako, who from time to time asks her to send money when she is in need. Mariam never refuses to do so, that would be unthinkable. The woman has never visited Mariam but this is probably because former slaves simply do not have the money and contacts to go to Europe,¹⁹ and because Mariam sees no need in having her there. If she was still living in Mali, she assured me that her former slave would be by her side.

¹⁸ This is now a disappearing practice and as far as Mariam knows this is no longer done with newborns in her lineage.

¹⁹ One of her father's former slaves once tried to obtain a visa as he had served in Europe during World War II, and if he had not lost his papers, he could have officially lived in France with his family.



Photo 12.4 An advertisement in a Bamako telephone shop

When still living in Mali in 1990, Mariam was invited to adopt Fatma's six-month-old daughter, a gesture which accentuated the close ties between her and her sister. Mariam accepted the offer and her daughter is now sixteen years old. Because of Mariam's health problems, the girl has never lived with her mother in Paris (though she does visit from time to time) and was educated by her biological mother, Fatma. She stays however in close contact with Mariam and some time ago she informed Mariam that she was thinking of marrying an Asian man. Mariam does not mind who her daughter marries – a Malian, a Frenchman or an Asian – as long as he treats her well. When asked what she would feel if her daughter wanted to marry a former slave (*Dimaajo*) and/or a craftsman (*Nyeenyo*), Mariam nevertheless reacted vehemently saying: 'No, impossible, never!' and explained that a man marrying a woman below his status might be accepted, but *never* the other way around. Ascribed status

apparently remains of major importance in marriages among the Fulbe elite, even in the current globalizing context.²⁰

For Mariam to stay in touch with Mali, the mobile phone is very important. Her phone behaviour betrays her dire need to maintain relations with her homeland. At night after work, she is in constant contact with Mali and/or Malians in France. In November 2005 her father's home region was connected to the mobile phone network and at about the same time Mariam obtained her own email address and PC at home in France. Even Mariam's daughter is on MSN quite often at her hosts' home in Morocco so e-mail use is clearly becoming more widespread. However, the phone remains most important, illustrated by the fact that Mariam has two mobile phones and a fixed phone.²¹

Almost every other day Mariam phones her daughter who is studying in Rabat, Morocco, where she lives with Fatma's daughter and her husband who works there. Fatma phones Mariam at least three times a week from Bamako and Mariam spends about half an hour every day on the phone to her best (Malian) friend in France discussing their respective days. With all these phone calls, one might assume that Mariam would be spending her total monthly salary on her phone bill, but in fact she is usually the one being called.²²

In Paris, Mariam may be a grey mouse but when she goes to Mali, she seizes every possible occasion to show off her wealth, her beauty, her money, her generosity, and her concern for the family. She used to visit Mali every two years for three to four weeks at a time. However, since 2004 she has been going back for a month every year, the last time being in December 2005. In 1999 she made an extended trip and did not only stay in Bamako but visited her parents' home villages as well. She was a little disappointed with her father because he announced her arrival in the village long beforehand and she was obliged to hand out money (FCFA 200,000, about €300) to all the villagers (mostly former slaves) as they organized a big party for her. Everyone was singing and dancing

²⁰ This is also true for Bambara, Soninke and other ethnic elite groups: marriage protects the purity and exclusivity of one's social status. Sy (2000) describes how this 'last resort' is still violently defended in Paris by the village elders there and in Mali.

²¹ The same goes for her sister Fatma in Bamako: she has three phones: one mobile 'work' phone, one personal mobile phone, and a fixed phone.

²² She pays a monthly subscription of €30 and every two months she buys €20 credit for her second mobile phone. So every month she only spends €40 on phone calls, while she talks for hours every day. All possible special offers are used. For example, some of Mariam's Malian friends in France phone her for free between 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. every day, as they use the same phone company. Mariam's friends often ask her advice (by phone) about all kinds of matters: family, love, illness, etc. as they appreciate Mariam's frank and straightforward approach to life, something a lot of her friends and family members could certainly use.

and did everything to please Mariam, the 'lost' princess who had finally come home. In the future, if she goes back to the village she will ensure that she arrives unannounced so as to avoid these expensive welcome events.

Mariam always goes by plane to her home region as she is no longer used to travelling on old buses on bad roads. In Europe she never dresses in the 'African way',²³ although her Malian colleagues at the office in France do. When visiting Mali, she dresses in the latest Malian style by borrowing clothes from Fatma's wardrobe, but only for important 'traditional' occasions and family visits. At her sister's place she will walk around in shorts, in spite of her sister's comments. In Bamako, Mariam is often invited to expensive dinners in the latest fashionable restaurants and for such occasions she will wear European shoes and clothes.

She is a princess in Mali but fades into the background in Paris. Mariam's noblesse does not count in France and this is probably one of the reasons why Mali remains so important to her. However, the fact that she only takes part in Malian society in Mali for two or three weeks a year results in all kinds of anxieties. On the other hand, given her rebellious character and emancipated ideas, living in France allows her more room and the flexibility to be herself. This is however not self-evident for her Malian friends and family, who were already referring to Mariam as the *tuubab* (the 'white one') even before she left for Europe. Mariam herself would never accept becoming an outcast in Mali and simply being compared to a 'white African' with no sense of sociality and family responsibility. On the contrary, much in the vein of her sister's sociality, she has helped a lot of family members out and invested everything she can in them, thereby remaining loyal to her father's and her family's honour.

Some male acquaintances and family members, who from time to time have to be in Paris, invite Mariam out for dinner. Mariam kept telling me about one special dinner when an uncle invited her to go out for a business dinner at a very chic Asian restaurant on the Champs-Élysées with four other international businessmen. Taking part in African, French and Asian high society all at the same time was an unforgettable experience for her.

The transnational life of which Mariam is a part allows her more strategies and individual choices. However, this abundance of possibilities is less open than it seems: she continues to be tied up in a social network that both constrains and motivates her. Her spatial mobility did not offer her upward social mobility *per se*. By moving to France, Mariam lost her princess's throne. From being a noble Malian Fulbe princess in a well-to-do intellectual family, she became a sick, black immigrant woman on a low salary in a country in which

²³ Contrary to many of her other colleagues who only wear expensive African outfits in the latest *bazin riche* and *wax hollandaise* (both expensive materials).

her elite status is not even noticed. Amongst the French, her noblesse does not count as a legal entitlement to upward mobility. There is no audience for it. It remains, however, a structural element in which Mariam's agency is embedded, as she illustrates herself in the following incident.

At my office, there was a young man who was constantly teasing me and one day I decided to tell him frankly who he was talking to. I told him that back there in Mali I am a queen and I added that: 'I still have slaves there who do everything I want and prepare my food!' (She laughs remembering this.) The guy backed off and the next day someone else asked me whether it was true that I was a queen and whether I could explain a bit. (Author's translation of a conversation in Paris, February 2005)

Another example is the following. While interviewing Mariam on the ways in which migrants can or cannot upward their social status, I gave her the example of a former slave who has become a millionaire. Would he, upon return to his home village, be able to appropriate more rights and privileges than his fellow-men? Mariam vehemently responded:

If a rich *maccudo* comes and asks for my hand, whether he is a millionaire or the president, I will tell him what his place is and refuse him. It is the hands that chain the feet, the feet have never been able to chain the hands! (Author's translation of a conversation in Paris, November 2006)

Mariam too has to cope with visitor-related dilemmas, just like her sister in Bamako. In Paris Mariam often receives female visitors from Mali²⁴ but as a single woman she is not supposed to put up men. While fulfilling her social duties towards family members, she tries to avoid them as much as possible. She illustrates her frustrations with 'parasitic' family members and her emancipated way of dealing with it:

When one of my 'sisters' visited me with her two children, she only announced her visit the evening before arriving in Paris. We went shopping in the supermarket as I did not have enough food at home. The children were excited and wanted to try everything they did not know as it was their first time in Europe. I allowed them to take everything but at the counter I told my sister that she had to pay. On hearing this, my sister turned green and did not know what to do! (Mariam laughs.)

Mariam used to spoil her (female) acquaintances who came to Europe but 'as my helping hand and hospitality have too often been abused, I decided to give up my "charity"'. This is difficult to do because it will only add to accusations of her 'turning completely white', i.e. being individualistic, selfish, greedy, etc. Secondly, she is struggling with her position *vis-à-vis* her home society: being a

²⁴ These include pregnant women who want a safe birth in a French maternity hospital, adventurous women who feel they have nothing to lose and want to marry a French *tuubab*, young students who have obtained an internship, and her beautiful, rich, younger sister who comes over every six months to go shopping.

princess means being privileged but with it also come obligations of sharing with parents, family and their acquaintances. As the name and honour of the family are sacred, she cannot afford to make any mistakes, especially as she is more vulnerable to gossip and accusations as a single woman in France with no male back-up. Some of the acquaintances who ask her for help have ended up in desperate situations, for example, sleeping in washrooms in filthy foyers. Mariam explains that they had simply sunk too deep to be helped by her.

Mariam is not asked to host her father's acquaintances as often as her sister is because hardly anyone from Central Mali migrates to Europe. Most co-villagers never manage to obtain the papers required and if someone arrived illegally in France, Mariam, as a single woman, would never be expected to host a man.

In 2003 and 2004, Mariam was virtually never alone as she always had visitors, sometimes only for a few weeks, sometimes for several months. In 2005 she was planning only to allow visitors in the summer and asked her father to arrange this as she was tired of all the family visits and wanted more privacy and rest. This turned out to be complicated and in the end she succeeded in reducing the number and length of the visits, but she could not stop them altogether.

Negotiating social status: A modern context for Fulbe hierarchies

Mariam is concerned with what she considers her older sister's over-generosity and is trying to mediate by phone with their father on Fatma's behalf so that Fatma can have her own (private) life. Mariam's interest in helping her sister Fatma is probably inspired by her own problematic, namely being the only direct family representative in Paris and therefore not being able to refuse hospitality to people coming to France.

Wanting to help her sister, Mariam told me, and not without pride, that she repeatedly pleads with her father to stop sending youngsters from central Mali to Bamako. As she stressed more than once, she always had a special position as the apple of her father's eye, and she is conscious of the fact that Ousmane listens carefully to what she has to say. This is one of the reasons why Mariam is the perfect person to mediate in family conflicts even by telephone from France.

Following Mariam's complaints in defence of her sister (and herself), Ousmane replied that it was impossible for their noble family to refuse to accommodate *Riimaybe* (former slaves) and/or others. Nor was it possible, according to him, to ask for money as they are the noble elite who are supposed to take pride in taking care of people without begging for anything themselves. It is a matter of honour. Mariam told her father that Fatma can and should host

students and pay for their board and lodging, but not for seasonal workers – generally former slaves – who never contribute a cent. However, to date, Ousmane refuses to agree with Mariam.

Neither of his princess daughters have outlived the hierarchies of Fulbe society in the rural context. Both women are financially independent, have studied, are single and live alone, but in their new context their loyalty and nobility are challenged and need more negotiation. Passed down by their parents and thereafter fictively maintained as the memory of nobility by the women themselves, this fiction gives them something to hold on to in their rapidly changing life situations in which few things are clear, certain or calculable. Actively remembering (pre-)colonial status ascription, hierarchies and the accompanying notions of honour seems to be their elitist means of survival.

These two lives show how, by migrating and remaining attached to ‘home’ and the ascribed customary status this entails, different memories and practices of hierarchy and social organization sometimes conflict with new models of behaviour in a modern and global context. Both women have negotiated their memories and rural and ethnic belonging. By so doing, they are trying to control the changes brought about by migrating. They remember their ascribed rural royal descent to obtain higher social status as elite cosmopolitan immigrants. However, they have equally denied and transformed their ascribed status by having studied, by living alone and protesting and discussing the family’s expectations of them.

Fatma has transformed her identity as a royal princess into that of an elite cosmopolitan woman and divorced hostess in Bamako, who is noble but still an individualist. Her negotiations over ascribed and achieved status are tense: her ascribed status makes her structurally embedded within the social relations of the home region (who she has to put up in her city home). She refuses however to be a mother-figure to these guests and is clearly living her own life whenever she can, exploring her individual possibilities as an independent agent.

Fatma, on the one hand, maintains the memories of her noblesse. She is seated on her princess’s throne and behaves accordingly, making sure that her will prevails. Indeed, she keeps the memory of noblesse and high status alive as an instrument for her status. She protects the honour of her parents (by paying for their trips to Mecca), her noble village and close family members (by hosting them and their children) and her ethnic group (by investing a lot of her free time in an association that promotes Fulbe culture).

Fatma’s migration to the city offered her new opportunities and chances, for example, the possibility to get divorced because she could be financially independent. She combined ascribed and achieved status, which can be enabling (i.e. she has a good job, nice clothes and a wide social network) and constrain-

ing (her money has to be shared, she has to accept guests and cannot refuse or upset certain contacts).

Fatma's case reveals the future-oriented elements in her memories too (cf. Werbner 1998: 11). She remembers and actively engages with her noble status to overcome the insecurity and uncertainty surrounding the reproduction of her elite status in the new urban context. The emergence of her family and their upward mobility as an elite group in the city entails uncertainties related to preserving their nobility from one generation to the next.

Werbner (2002: 731) in his analysis of minority elites in Botswana describes a typical urban elite paradox in which the figure of Fatma and Fulbe elites in Bamako can be recognized. 'Kalanga elites merge urban cosmopolitanism with assertions of their ethnic identity, linguistic difference, distinct cultural heritage and ties to their rural homes'. The paradox is that while belonging to an (inter)-national, modern citizenship, these elite groups draw upon their ethnic distinctions and pre-colonial status to appropriate post-colonial citizenship. For Fatma, the memory of the hierarchical relations in her home community is relevant and important for identification. It is these memories that appear to allow her to be the exception: she is a single, self-supporting and distinguished princess in urban Bamako.

Fatma, however, is also chained to her throne and her crown prevents her from exploring new horizons. Her noblesse constrains her personal liberty in many ways. For example, half of the money she earns goes back to the people she hosts. She is more or less forced into loyalty to her noblesse and the sacred name of her family. She always seems to be able to avoid showing her weaknesses and personal needs. It is generosity and hospitality that are most esteemed in Fulbe society and sharing is a moral obligation: Fatma cannot refuse students and former slaves who come to study and work. If we are to believe her sister, she even sacrificed her marriage for it. She is bound to a household full of people, whom she is obliged to protect, pay for and take care of, even if this is not to her advantage. It is a double-edged sword: 'just like masters who used to take pride in the ownership of slaves' (Klein 2005: 833), Fatma is proud of hosting a lot of people, but at times it becomes too much and she longs for more personal space. She 'suffers' from conflicting encounters between new forms of individualism and personal agency in the city and forms of solidarity and honour promoted by her ethnic group.

In addition to arguing that the memory of hierarchy is maintained by a minority elite as a conscious and useful strategy to becoming elite cosmopolitans, it is important to discuss the ways in which hierarchy and slavery have thus far been considered. A common way of analyzing hierarchical relations is to describe them in terms of the 'dominant' (the master) who denies agency to the 'subjected' (the slave). But I would argue that there is a dimension that is

generally overlooked: agency is not only denied by masters towards their slaves. The slave status is not the only one with structural constraints. What about *noblesse oblige*, the obligations and structural constraints which are forced upon noblemen and restrain their room for agency? The nobility is in a more privileged position of power as it is able to deny agency to its clients. However, the boundedness of noble elites to their dependents and a certain 'imprisonment' within their social status are just as much a structural reality for the elite who – like former slaves in this respect – cannot simply withdraw from their inherited status and the obligations that come with it. So the memory of hierarchy or mental slavery – as a Malian reporter called it – is not only with former slaves but also with the elite.

Mariam's case shows how she is co-shaping and, from a distance, changing the hierarchical structures that she is moulded by. These days a highly flexible techno-mobility allows migrants to be in touch with and belong to a certain social space independent of physical presence. By phoning, Mariam is better informed about what is going on than other family members in Mali and she has actively chosen to remain deeply connected to her homeland.

Mariam's identity is being transformed in both Mali and France. In Mali she goes by plane to visit her village as she has become too 'modern' to use local transport, although in France she uses the Metro as she does not own a car. In France she tries to use the memory of her royal ancestry to impress, and minimizes contact with people who underestimate her. Mariam's life history makes it clear that people are not totally free and tend to use the assets (ideas, social connections and networks, memory) available to them. She is an agent who negotiates between her in- and outsider status, shifting back and forth from an identity as a westernized rebel to memories of being an indigenous noble princess. The duality this entails is illustrated by the way she dresses, her high aspirations and potlatch behaviour that sharply contrast with her normality or even invisibility in Paris.

On the one hand, Mariam is a stubborn and emancipated exception in her family, an agent. On the other, her agency is coloured by and in general remains within the limits of the structural constraints of the nobility. She acts according to elite Fulbe rules of moral conduct. Over time Mariam has become more self-oriented: she is no longer willing to accommodate everyone, she no longer spends all her money on phone calls and does not help out everyone who makes demands on her. Mariam has moved more towards the French rules of sociality and engagement. Her distance seems to allow her more room for change than Fatma has, but she is far from free to choose and select which memories and duties not to apply. Mariam is betwixt and between two worlds and constantly negotiates the different geographical spaces, audiences and groups that she wants to belong to.

Memory and remembering her noblesse have gained extra importance in Mariam's transnational context, probably because of the increasing options open to her in belonging to different worlds that have made the need for negotiating between rootedness and a flexible citizenship more acute. Her mobile lifestyle forces her to negotiate between different concepts of society (Mali/France), which results in different agencies. Depending on the context and place to which she aspires to belong, these differing agencies are played out, and sometimes cross.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the changing social and ideological constructions of eliteness in the context of mobility. The two sisters' stories illustrate how their agency is embedded in the structuring social hierarchies of the home society and region, and vice versa. Power and hierarchy are important structures in which people operate and from which they develop their own agency.

Social status is to some extent constraining and is experienced as being structural, as it denies people their own agency. It is important not only to look at how the social status of former slaves constrains their agency, but also at how constrained agency is just as much a reality for the nobility. In this article, the issue of hosting suggests a subtle and subconscious denial of agency by former slaves towards their former masters.

On the other hand, claims to social status allow for agentive reflexivity and initiatives in (conscious) identity construction based on memory. Both Fatma and Mariam consciously construct an identity in which their noblesse and honour are central. Just like other minority elites, they benefit from an active celebration of the memory of their ethnicity. The cases presented argue for an approach in which negotiations of ascribed and achieved status are central to an understanding of the dynamics between structure and agency in contexts of hierarchy and mobility.

Fatma's negotiations of the memory of hierarchy are resulting in the reinvention and reinforcement of her ascribed status in an urban context. She maintains relations of authority, she subscribes to the role of an honourable benefactress and in her looks, speech, claims and behaviour she commemorates both consciously and unconsciously the noble blood running through her veins. Her impression management works well and in the neighbourhood everyone talks about *madame* and nobody would ever disturb her with unimportant issues. Fatma has successfully turned her noblesse into urban eliteness and a kind of cosmopolitan class.

Mariam's case would appear to be more complex. Claims on her nobility are not taken into consideration by a French audience but for most Malians in Mali,

the very fact that she is living and working in France adds to her magical allure as a princess. On visits to Mali, Mariam clearly resorts to an elite noblesse status – throwing her money around, being treated to expensive dinners, only travelling in her sisters' Mercedes and by plane, and paying for her parents' trip to Mecca. In France however, Mariam is just an unremarkable single woman and cannot use her ascribed status to negotiate her position. There she is forced to focus on her achieved status and on achieving status.

These migrant women seem to be keeping a foot in both worlds as they capitalize on their membership and networks in both the rural and urban areas depending on the situation. Both women have recreated hierarchy and are actively attached to the structural constraints this brings, while urban life in the modern world also forces and attracts them into other frames of reference that they have incorporated to varying degrees. The Fulfulde saying '*Ko bernde won, koide MaccuBe*' ('Where the heart is, the feet are slaves') might be an appropriate way of motivating both Mariam and Fatma's juggling of ascribed and achieved status as closely related to the different places they live. The achieved status is acquired in the city and the ascribed status is associated with rural life in their home region. Both women are living in the city to which their ascribed status and notions of power distribution and hierarchy are remitted. These social remittances make them constantly return to where their heart is – i.e. their home village – in their present-day negotiations of structure and agency.

References

- Argenti, N. 2006, 'Remembering the Future: Slavery, Youth and Masking in the Cameroon Grassfields', *Social Anthropology* 14 (1): 49-69.
- Angenent, C. et al. 2003, *Les Rois des Tambours au Haayre: Récitée per Aamadu Baa Digi, Griot des Fulbe à Dalla (Mali)*, Leiden: Brill.
- Botte, R. 2005, 'Les Habits Neufs de l'Esclavage: Métamorphoses de l'Oppression au Travail', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* XLV (3-4) 179/180: 651-66.
- Bouwman, A. 2003, 'Benefits of Belonging: Dynamics of Iklan Identity, Burkina Faso', PhD Thesis, Utrecht University.
- Breedveld, A. & M.E. de Bruijn 1996, 'L'Image des Fulbe: Analyse Critique de la Construction du Concept de Pulaaku', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 144 (36-4): 791-821.
- de Bruijn, M.E. & H. van Dijk 1995, *Arid Ways, Cultural Understandings of Insecurity in Fulbe Society, Central Mali*, Amsterdam: Thela Publishers.
- de Bruijn, M.E. & L. Pelckmans 2005, 'Facing Dilemmas: Former Fulbe Slaves in Modern Mali', *Canadian Journal of Cultural Anthropology* 39 (1): 69-96.
- Evers, S. 2002, *Constructing History, Culture and Inequality: The Betsileo in the Extreme Southern Highlands of Madagascar*. Leiden: Brill Publishers.

- Hardung, C. 2002, 'Everyday Life of Slaves in Northern Dahomey: The Process of Remembering', *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 15 (1): 35-44.
- Ilfie, J. 2005, *Honour in African History*, Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Klein, M.A. 2005, 'The Concept of Honour and the Persistence of Servility in the Western Sudan', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* XLV (3-4) 179/180: 831-52.
- Lecocq, B. 2005, 'The "Bellah" Question: Slave Emancipation, Race and Social Categories in Late Twentieth-century Northern Mali', *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 39 (1): 42-68.
- Levitt, P. 1998, '[Social Remittances: Migration Driven Local-Level Forms of Cultural Diffusion](#)', *International Migration Review* 32 (4): 926-48.
- Manchuella, F. 1997, *Willing Migrants: Soninke Labor Diasporas, 1948-1960*. Athens & Oxford: Ohio University Press/James Currey.
- Nyamnjoh, F.B. 2005, 'Images of Nyonggo amongst Bamenda Grassfielders in Whiteman Kontri', *Citizenship Studies* 9 (3): 241-69.
- Patel, P.J. & M. Rutten 2003, 'Caste-based Differences and Contested Family Relations: Social linkages between India and Britain', *Etnofoor* XVI (1): 75-96.
- Riesman, P. 1977 (1974), *Freedom in Fulani Social Life: An Introspective Ethnography*, Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press (1974).
- Shaw, R. 2002, *Memories of the Slave Trade*, Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press.
- Sy, Y. 2000, 'L'Esclavage chez les Soninkés: Du Village à Paris', *Journal des Africanistes* 70 (1-2): 43-69.
- Timera, M. 2001, 'Les Migrations des Jeunes Sahéliens; Affirmation de Soi et Émancipation', *Autrepart* 18: 37-49.
- Werbner, R. (ed.) 1998, *Memory and the Postcolony: African Anthropology and the Critique of Power*, London/New York: Zed Books.
- Werbner, R. 2002, 'Cosmopolitan Ethnicity, Entrepreneurship and the Nation: Minority Elites in Botswana', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 28 (4): 731-53.

The safe and suffering body in transnational Ghanaian Pentecostalism: Towards an anthropology of vulnerable agency

Rijk van Dijk

Pentecostal churches in the Ghanaian migrant community in Botswana often take a prominent position in negotiating the terms of support, morality and spiritual safety in the context of the burials of their members. This chapter shows how the death of a Ghanaian hairdresser can be used to investigate the dimensions of agency of these churches and the migrant community in view of the complexities that arose from this event as well as from the precarious position of foreigners in Botswana as a result of the government's localization policies. The death of the hairdresser brought into sharp relief the forms of vulnerabilities to which Ghanaian immigrants are exposed, ranging from poverty, illness and death, to notions of the tarnishing of their public image if deaths and other events are not dealt with in an appropriate manner. This contribution explores the religious meaning of vulnerability in these groups and moves away from perspectives based on 'livelihood' and 'trauma' to investigate how a less negative appreciation of vulnerability can be included as well/ By demonstrating their suffering and vulnerability, these churches argue their unity with the experience of the body social in the current predicament of Botswana society.

Introduction

In August 2003 a young hairdresser died in Gaborone, the capital of Botswana. This would not normally have caught my attention as an anthropologist conducting research in Botswana had it not been for the fact that the hairdresser was Ghanaian, a member of the community of hairdressers, beauticians and fashion designers that over the last two decades have migrated from Ghana to the prosperous Botswana in search of better economic opportunities. This migration of Ghanaians began in the 1970s with the recruitment of educated personnel from Ghana to serve in Botswana's rapidly expanding civil service. The spectacular growth of its economy also produced an affluent middle class which, since the early 1980s, has come to appreciate and highly value West African beauty styles. Ghanaian women, often dependents of their Ghanaian husbands, have successfully introduced West African styles of hairdressing, beauty and fashion to this urban Botswana milieu and their salons are now to be found in most corners of the city.

The young hairdresser who died had been working in one of these Ghanaian hair salons and news spread that it was AIDS that had killed him. This sent shockwaves through the entire Ghanaian migrant community of hairdressers. The AIDS pandemic in Botswana – a country with one of the highest infection rates in Africa but with a combination of relative prosperity and high death rate among the sexually active sectors of the population – turns the profession of hairdressing into a risky endeavour. Most Ghanaian hairdressers complain bitterly about the dangers of infection, a risk much higher than they were used to in Ghana, precisely because of the type of job they have. They feel particularly vulnerable because of the sharp objects (scissors, needles and so forth) they use in doing people's hair and the chemicals they need to apply to 'relax' the hair and make it fit for West African styling. The frequent use of these poisonous chemicals affects their own skin, making it 'grow thin' and therefore more vulnerable to wounds and the danger of blood-to-blood contact with customers. So, what the Ghanaian community had been fearing had indeed happened: one of their own hairdressers had died of AIDS. This was a stigma as well because the families and relatives back home in Ghana commonly perceive dying of AIDS as a bad death in the broadest meaning of the term (Radstake 2000).

The young hairdresser had no close relatives in Botswana to arrange his funeral. Neither the Botswana nor the Ghanaian state felt any responsibility in this respect. And being only vaguely connected to the wider Ghanaian immigrant community and its associations, the hairdresser's death developed into a complicated process of how the migrant community should deal with arranging a 'proper' funeral for him. The community was faced with the question as to

how some kind of ritual structure should be put in place to cater for such situations, how the relationship between the owners of hair salons and their workers should be negotiated, and how it could deal with the transnational and transcultural aspects that revolve around burials and funerals in a foreign country.

Translating this in terms of the study of agency, in this situation in which structures such as that of a family or a kinship system, a political system of the nation and citizenship or a system of associational life were absent, what kind of agency would appear to be relevant? What kind of agency was there in the absence of these structures to produce a make-do ritual context that was acceptable to all involved? How do we understand the kind of agency that, in this particular case of a deceased hairdresser, produced a context that guaranteed the arrangement of a proper funeral where none existed previously?

In Ghanaian society, funerals and the elaborate festivities they usually entail are one of the most important crisis rituals around which social capital is formed. In fact, a funeral requires such enormous investment on the part of relatives that most families cannot survive without elaborate structures of mutual support, reciprocity and risk-sharing to cope with the requirements of what counts as a proper burial. As De Witte (2003) has demonstrated, this involves notions of creating a 'future remembrance' of the deceased in such a way that it will strengthen not only the person's public memory but also the public profile of the family as well. And, importantly, funerals also require the involvement of religion in one way or another (*ibid*: 534, van Dijk 2002b). On the Christian side, notions of morality are involved as are ideas of spiritual safety (against witchcraft, for instance) and spiritual suffering that concern a person's well-being, illness and eventual death. Social security, which concerns the family's resources, interlocks with what Friedman and Randeira (2004) have called 'cultural security', i.e. the safety of one's identity and morality.

In the Ghanaian migrant community in Botswana, Ghanaian Pentecostal churches often take a prominent position in negotiating the terms of support, morality and spiritual safety in the context of burials of Ghanaian migrant members in the city. As outlined in an earlier publication (van Dijk 2003), Pentecostalism is marked by ideas of prosperity, success, entrepreneurship and spiritual protection. Many of the Ghanaian owners of hair salons have become prominent members of these Pentecostal churches, whereas most of their workers are not. Yet, in addition to concerns over material prosperity and spiritual safety, the Pentecostals are also involved with the public profile of the Ghanaian community and their churches regarding Botswana society in a wider sense with its increasingly tough identity and immigration policies. Euphemistically known as 'localization', these policies tend to create a vulnerable position for foreigners in the country as the economy, the labour market and business

initiatives should increasingly be put into the hands of the 'locals'. The death of the hairdresser therefore brought into sharp relief the forms of vulnerabilities to which Ghanaian immigrants are exposed, ranging from poverty, illness and death, to notions of immorality and the tarnishing of their public image if deaths and similar events are not dealt with in a proper manner. Compared to other immigrants, such as the much-despised Zimbabweans, Ghanaians still enjoy a high public profile but these images can be easily shattered, making them victims of xenophobic sentiments, which are on the increase in Botswana in any case (see Nyamnjoh 2002, 2006, Campbell 2003). For this contribution it is important to bear in mind the Ghanaian Pentecostals' understanding of the multidimensional character of the vulnerabilities they perceive, which range from the individual, the spiritual and the communal to the level of national policies of localization and the like.

This chapter seeks to explore how the hairdresser's death can be used to investigate the dimensions of agency in view of the various forms of vulnerability in this particular situation. The young hairdresser was not connected to any of the Ghanaian Pentecostal churches, yet the owner of the salon where he worked was, and she displayed great acumen in involving the Ghanaian community and her church in arranging a 'proper' burial. Fraught as this issue was with concerns over the public image of the church, of the salon owner and the Ghanaian community as a whole, it brings into relief the concept of agency in the way it has often been studied in terms of the means by which persons and groups cope with, attempt to minimize or deflect vulnerabilities of all kinds. This relationship between agency and vulnerability has been developed particularly in the context of livelihood studies dealing with poverty, hunger, risk and other insecurities (see Wisner *et al.* 2004, Bankoff *et al.* 2004). This perspective presents agency as being in the service of pursuing greater security and legitimacy or a better standing or profile in society at large. It assumes on the one hand that people and groups *a priori* perceive vulnerability as an undesirable state of being, as something that needs redressing, to which aim agency is devoted. It excludes, however, the possibility of a less negative appreciation of vulnerability. Particularly in the field of religion in Africa, the meaning of vulnerability may include very different connotations of gain, bliss and strength, in other words may foster a pursuit of vulnerability instead of avoiding or minimizing it. A second problematic is that, in the common understanding of agency and vulnerability, little is explained or elucidated of the nature of the kind of agency involved. When people appear capable of redressing a vulnerable situation, the nature of that agency is often left undiscussed or unexplored.

This contribution argues that agency may be characterized by certain attributes and adjectives in the way people, groups or institutions exemplify their capacity to effectuate changes in their social situations. While differences can

be made between, for example, 'hard' and 'soft' agency, and male or female agency depending on the local understanding of the nature of actions taken, this contribution posits the possibility of vulnerable agency; a kind of agency that proclaims and pursues vulnerability as a desired outcome of action. This chapter aims to demonstrate that, in the case of the death of a hairdresser, the agency of the Ghanaian Pentecostal church was effective precisely because it claimed vulnerability as a desired state of being, given the contextual predicament of its presence in Botswana.

Ghanaian pentecostalism as a security circle?

In exploring the relationship between religion and vulnerability, we find that much of the literature on vulnerability deals with either formally organized systems of the negotiation of risk – such as those put in place by nation-states and civil-society institutions like public insurances – or with the coping mechanisms by which people, for instance through kinship systems or (religious) associations, negotiate risk (Beck 1992, Boholm 2003, Chambers 1989, Douglas 1992, Douglas & Wildavsky 1982, Eriksen 2005). In Africa this literature falls into two major streams of thought; one that perceives of vulnerability as being largely dependent on internal and cultural repertoires of thought and praxis, while the other sees vulnerability as largely external and exogenous to local societies, for instance in terms of natural hazards such as drought. Douglas (1992) and Douglas and Wildavsky (1982) perceive culture as the paradigmatic point of departure for the understanding of how vulnerability is perceived in a particular society. The second perspective, however, assumes an objective, external and positivist perception. The two approaches meet where coping is concerned. Often culture reappears as that mysterious black box containing the specific ways by which societies and groups (re-)arrange agency to deal with what threatens their existence (Boholm 2003). While their starting points are different – one assuming a technical objective notion and the other adopting a culturally constructed notion of vulnerability – both proceed to explore the various social and cultural ways in which people cope with vulnerability, turning agency into a responsive matter. In addition to the rural livelihood studies that often focus on ecological vulnerabilities and the securities concerning food and self-sufficiency that societies try to put in place, urban studies devote considerable attention to the functioning of associational life as a means of such coping behaviour (Tostensen *et al.* 2001, Lourenco-Lindell 2001).

Of particular interest are associations that cater for misfortune and death (so-called burial societies or small savings schemes and small credit facilities) which in the deteriorating economies of many African countries have gained

tremendous importance in minimizing economic vulnerability. Membership of these various associations is often perceived as something that exists alongside or in addition to the relations that kinship systems may prescribe. Particularly in urban situations where access to money, however little, is more available than in rural areas, those who can afford it tend to become part of one or more of these associations which do not presuppose kin relations. Yet in many cases, ethnic bias can be found in the membership of these associations whereby ethnic identity serves as grounds for the kind of mutual trust that is required to ensure that a savings club or a burial society is capable of living up to expectations and promises.

In all of these associational forms, trust and confidence remain a difficult matter, as there are few sanctions that guarantee a proper functioning of these bodies. Embezzlement can easily occur (another aspect of agency, albeit little highlighted as such) and there are few means of getting one's money back once somebody has disappeared with whatever a savings club or a burial society has possessed. The issue of trustworthiness has made the field of religion more important as a domain where 'relative strangers' can be bound to adhere to a set of common principles and agreements (see, for Ghana, Lyon 2000). While the relationship between religion and (socioeconomic) trust has been little studied in the African urban context, a few studies have indicated that membership of a religious body may provide people with a context in which they expect relations of trust to be established; relations that become almost akin to that of those within the family in the way people can be held to live up to promises, expectations and agreements (Maxwell 1998, van Binsbergen 2000, Englund 2001, Oruwari 2001, Durham & Klaitis 2002, Gwarzo 2003).

Perhaps an important reason for the limited number of studies of this important domain of creating social trust is that it is complicated in terms of understanding the different registers of security, safety and vulnerability that religion brings together. In Ghana and the wider West African region, it is not uncommon to establish contracts and other arrangements through the help of shrines where certain deities are worshipped by a well-recognized priesthood (*okomfoo* in Twi, one of Ghana's most widely spoken languages) (see, for instance, Parish 2003). Those who wish to establish a business or some other type of relationship may turn to these priests and ask for specific ritual performances in which the partners to the relationship participate but have the specific purpose of requesting the deities to sanction and supervise the contract or arrangement (Rosenthal 1998). For example, if somebody wants to migrate to Europe with the help of a 'contact man' and is required to pay a substantial amount of money to make this possible, it is not uncommon for both to attend a ritual, eat a cola nut at the shrine as a sign of their union and request the deity to ensure that the migrant's passage will be successful. The contact man is thus held responsible

for his promises. If the traveller fails to pay or the contact man does not deliver the ticket or other papers, the deity will sanction, intervene or cause harm. This system of supernatural sanctioning, for example, also exists in the context of the smuggling of young girls from Nigeria to Europe where they end up working in the sex industry (see Van Dijk 2001a).

The important point about supernatural and spiritual sanctioning of such relations is a notion of agency of the person in which vulnerability plays a major part. It is on the basis of an agency that is vulnerable to the effects of the supernatural world that a kind of security is created. The basic notion is that, while living in a visible world of immanent and this-worldly affairs, every person has an identity and an agency in a spiritual world where forceful powers with ambiguous meaning exist. They can either work for good or for evil; they may generate success and prosperity, but they may also cause misfortune, illness and death. Relations in this-worldly affairs impinge on and influence the realm of the unseen, and vice versa. Hence, in every relationship, in every form of social interaction, a person is to be aware of the fact that powers of the one may affect the affairs of oneself, and the other way round. Witchcraft (*bayi* in Twi) is just one of the many manifestations of this interlocking relationship between the various seen and unseen worlds in social interaction. At one level the vulnerability of a person is related to the harmful effects of spiritual powers, which often appear in bad luck, misfortune, illness, death, unemployment, poverty and so forth requiring an agency that is responsive, accommodating, mediating or negotiating such forces and experiences.

The issue of safety, protection or negotiation of such vulnerability is often seen as the main reason why, after the introduction of missionary Christianity in Ghana towards the end of the nineteenth century, an Africanized form of Christianity soon developed. These African Independent churches, as they are called, combine in syncretic fashion African elements of ritual and symbolism with aspects of Christianity such as the Bible, hymns and attire. Of particular importance was the way these groups developed into spirit-healing churches by maintaining and including African healing traditions that focus on the domain of the supernatural by offering protection or restoration of the adverse effects a person has experienced in the form of illness or misfortune. These healing churches have become very popular, partly because they address issues of African spirituality and security that the mainline mission churches have failed to deal with or considered only as superstition. These churches, usually founded and led by a healing prophetic figure, came to cater to rural-urban migrants who settled in Ghana's rapidly expanding cities and were in search of a kind of homecoming in an otherwise estranged urban environment. Many of the spirit-healing churches' ritual repertoires referred to and resembled those the migrants knew from their rural places of origin and thus were capable of providing a kind

of homecoming, including the spiritual domain as well. In other words, the cults of the priesthood and the symbolic transformation they underwent in the urban areas in the form of prophetic healing churches have produced a particular type of security within the city. In defining the type of spiritual security that emerged here, Werbner (1989: 226) wrote:

... the cult members are a security circle for each other. They are mutually harmless and bound together by a covenant and an ethic; they are purified, and under the same powerful protection of a shrine or spirit.

This refers to the fact that, within the confines of the church or the cult, notions of safety among the membership are very important, while there is at the same time a kind of common collective shield against forces from outside that might cause harm and misfortune. The membership cannot, in principle, bewitch one another but the benevolent powers can be mollified to render protection and good fortune on the basis of common ritual and worship.

From the Africanization of Christianity with their form of security circle came the Pentecostal churches that have become so important in the Ghanaian diaspora. These Pentecostal churches, the most popular form of Christianity in Ghana, began to grow in number and size in the early 1960s when, after Ghana's independence, a vibrant middle class started to emerge in the cities. These urbanites, who were increasingly less inspired by syncretic healing churches, found an ideology in the new Pentecostal churches that proclaimed the modern, successful person. Combined with a modern style of worship, ritual and public profiling, this produced a much more appealing cosmopolitan outlook and identity. While Ghana's economy initially flourished in the post-independence years, when the cities opened up to trade and exchange with the Western world of consumption and luxury items, the 1970s brought a dramatic decline in economic prospects. Many Ghanaian began to migrate to other (West) African countries in pursuit of better opportunities and, if they failed, began to try their luck in Europe and the United States.

Out of the missionary type of Pentecostal churches, the new charismatic churches developed which perceived overseas Ghanaian migrant communities as a place to set up branches of their organization (van Dijk 2001b, 2002a, 2004). By adding words such as 'global', 'international' and 'world' to their names they indicated to the urban classes that their entrepreneurial style of running a church made them fit for seemingly effortless travel around the globe. In the 1980s it became difficult for Ghanaians to travel to Europe due to a toughening of immigration laws but the Pentecostal churches continued to grow rapidly in number, both in Ghana and the diaspora. The international scope of their activities, in terms of satellite congregations in places such as London, New York, Amsterdam, Hamburg and even Tel Aviv set these Pentecostal

churches apart from the spirit-healing churches that remained very much confined to a particular and local cultural setting to which so many of their rituals and symbolism were deeply related. While the transnational character of the new Pentecostal churches meant much for their public appeal and became significant for the many functions the churches came to hold in Ghanaian transnational relations (for instance, in arranging overseas marriages or funerals), there were other elements as well that account for their spectacular rise in popularity.

The most important of these are Pentecostal notions concerning vulnerability and the security they envisage. On the one hand, notions of spiritual and material security (though not dichotomized as such) relate to time, culture and the past. They come together in the ritual practice of deliverance, which can be regarded as an inspection of a person's or a society's past and history as a way of dealing with the (mis)fortunes of life. On the other hand, Pentecostalism propagates a notion of suffering and vulnerability that serves security in other ways than protection or deliverance. This is about being 'slain in the spirit' and the notion that, through suffering and an openness/liability to spiritual vulnerability, power and fortune are gained. Part of the Pentecostal ideological message is therefore that not all vulnerability needs to be avoided but that instead the agency of the true believer should exist in the pursuit of a vulnerable position, particularly *vis-à-vis* the heavenly forces and the powers of its leadership. In other words, there is a need to be afflicted to become a faithful follower of the creed, much as it requires a traditional healer to become 'wounded' in the process of becoming an accepted and trustworthy professional (see Reis 2000).

Pentecostalism and vulnerability in the affirmative

Through the practice of deliverance, members are made aware of the fact that certain rituals performed in the past or any other cultural manifestation in which a person participated entailed powers and spirits of no other than helpers of the devil. It is through the ancestors and generational curses (*nnomee*) that misfortune, illness and death besiege the true believer. In the past, things may have been concocted that are still effective in the present and that may block success and prosperity. This implies that in creating or forcing a 'breakthrough', first of all a breaking (*ogyee*) and severing of the bonds with such powers from the past have to take place. Every church has its deliverance hours and deliverance teams whereby, through a process of question and answer, an inspection of a person's past can take place. In this interaction, the precise nature of the vulnerability of the person for the adverse influences of such powers is established, and an ecstatic moment will usually follow when the person becomes spiritually freed from these ties. Of particular importance are those crisis rituals such as at

childbirth or during funerals when people can be exposed to practices involving the presence of ancestral spirits and that require applying or drinking certain liquids or the pouring of libation in their honour. In this respect, Pentecostalism entails a kind of cultural critique of the way most churches aim to replace these kinds of crisis rituals with Christianized versions. During funerals, birthing or marriage ceremonies, Pentecostal pastors take the lead while a variety of other elements are brought in line with what can be expected from a Pentecostal ritual (no drinking of alcoholic beverages, no lustful dancing, no calling on ancestral names etc.).

At a higher level, the ideology of deliverance also implies a message for the nation as a whole in the sense that a return to cultural traditions of the past is seen as a way in which African nations can claim self-esteem and a specific identity is critiqued by these churches. The past is not a rich resource for national pride but instead is an impediment to progress and prosperity. The nation should be Christianized and protected from the state and the dark forces that have ruled its past. Thus, many churches devote special hours to 'prayers for the nation' and have become active in the public domain in Ghana as well as in other countries in Africa. Some have their own radio stations and television shows, produce booklets and magazines and have become effective in influencing state policies in different ways.

In terms of the security circle, deliverance is of particular relevance in the form of an 'entry ticket' to what the church has to offer and may concern concrete and material matters. Most churches develop elaborate systems of giving and reciprocity, demand ten per cent of the net income of their confirmed believers, organize special 'harvest' times (large collections of money for specific purposes) and have committees that arrange weddings, funerals and counselling. Considering their spectacular growth and the wealth these churches display in the buildings they erect, the bourgeois lifestyle of their pastors, the entrepreneurial activities they develop and the jobs they generate, many are attracted to these churches on the basis of hope and aspirations for a better future.

However, to become part of the gift-giving system, the forms of reciprocity and the associations attached to the church, deliverance is required and involves spiritual vulnerability in the affirmative. Nobody wants to give or receive something from somebody or wants to become part of an association, mutual help or support programme of whom a dis-connectedness from the past has not been accomplished (see van Dijk 1999, 2002b). 'Never trust whatever the Devil gives you' is one of the often-heard slogans, indicating that although a gift might be enticing, it might still contain powers that cannot be trusted and are harmful. Hence gift-giving and participation in a church funeral association or marriage committee is safe within the confines of the church and within a com-

munity delivered from its past, whereas similar relations across that boundary could lead to suffering and misfortune.

Participation in these forms of security requires being 'slain in the spirit', as well as moments of material and spiritual suffering. Becoming dis-connected from an ancestral past and becoming free from haunting generational curses that are implied in family relationships and their bonds and obligations involve moments of pain and suffering that revolve around the notion of vulnerable agency. This agency is, as it were, Janus-faced in the sense that while ancestral spirits can take possession of a person by force, so can the heavenly powers. This is why, in Pentecostal ritual, being touched by the Holy Spirit through the laying-on of hands by the pastor commonly results in people falling to the ground, bursting into tears and weeping while writhing on the ground. Healing and a breakthrough in unfortunate circumstances require this kind of 'breaking' that demonstrates that the 'infilling' with the superior power of the Holy Spirit is not without risk. Yet the risk and vulnerability for what these formidable powers can do is the only secure way by which other people within the church can rest assured that a true disconnection, a severance of ties with ulterior powers has been effected. This kind of vulnerable agency therefore acts in much the same way as the shrines where the arrangement of contracts and their spiritual supervision can only proceed on the basis of notions of the vulnerability of the person in seen and unseen domains of power. It is more than just a kind of initiation ritual that would settle the relationship with the church and its forms of reciprocity once and for all. Weaknesses reoccur, constantly requiring repetition of the experience of 'being slain in the Spirit' on a regular basis.

The need for this repetitive notion of the way in which a vulnerable agency relates to safety and suffering simultaneously relates to competition, rivalry and jealousy. Competition between individuals, between companies and even between churches is stiff in Ghanaian society and is exacerbated by the vagaries of the uncertain socioeconomic conditions in Ghana where structural adjustment programmes have reduced the state's capacity to intervene and change things for the better. Competition and rivalry between individuals often takes the shape of witchcraft and translates into forms of rivalry between organizations. It is based on the notion that where one gains another may lose. In the spiritual domain, the superior powers of the one will lead to others losing out so that envy and jealousy become directed at this-worldly affairs.

Pentecostal churches, knowing that their success, their claims of progress and prosperity, and their business activities may generate negative feelings that easily become translated into spiritual and material problems create spiritual walls of protection. These can take the form of what are called 'prayer towers' in which 'prayer warriors' engage in intercessions so as to make sure that what goes on inside the church is not affected by feelings of envy and bitterness that

may come from outside. Prayer is the single most important instrument through which vulnerable agency is negotiated. One spiritual force, the Holy Spirit, must forcefully take possession of the individual and the group as a way of protecting other evil forces that may appear in the guise of envy and bitterness. Every gift-giving occasion, every 'harvest', every meeting in which donations are collected therefore requires extensive prayers. The gifts, money coming from outside the church, may carry powers that could inadvertently cause harm, carry intentions and messages that need to be 'neutralized' before they can be accepted (van Dijk 2005). The churches organize 'prayer camps' where people stay and engage in a combination of prayer and fasting in the hope of improving their personal situation. Churches also organize these prayers for the nation in an attempt to improve the situation of the nation as whole. Prayers will provoke a breakthrough and may keep afflicting spiritual forces at a distance.

The centrality of prayer is so pervasive that Pentecostals are often blamed by members of other churches for 'over-spiritualizing' everything they encounter, as a friend of mine put it. Pentecostals do not deny that ecstatic prayer is the means by which to engage with the outside world, as an expression of their agency, their control of the situation, as well as a celebration of the way in which they have become the subject of the agency of the Holy Spirit. Lengthy prayers for healing and counteracting evil powers at night during extensive vigils and fasting may help strengthen prayers. This works towards the representation of an identity and a morality. These prayers tend to be a kind of litmus test in that they demonstrate a person or the church's openness towards the heavenly powers. If prayers for healing and prosperity prove not to be effective, it may mean that one has not been open towards being 'slain in the spirit' and that something is blocking the forceful infilling with these benevolent powers. It is, for instance, in this sense that Pentecostals perceive of water baptism as a potentially highly risky event: evil powers reside under the water, such as the well-know *Mami Wati* spirit, while at the same time the infilling with heavenly powers must be able to protect the person while he/she is submerged. If this infilling is insufficient, *Mami Wati* may have the chance to 'take possession' of a person's soul and identity.

This notion, namely that a specific kind of vulnerable agency is required to safeguard identity and morality, is of relevance to churches in the diaspora too. In many Ghanaian migrant communities in Europe, the United States and elsewhere, Pentecostal churches play a particular role in the transnational relations of migrants. The pastors of these churches often operate as persons of trust in the arranging of weddings, funerals and birthing ceremonies that involve transnational connections between Ghanaian communities in various parts of the world with families 'back home' in Ghana. As other authors have also noted,

Ghanaian cultural life has increasingly become transnational and the global spread of Ghanaian Pentecostal churches serves this interest in functional ways.

Yet, in studying Ghanaian Pentecostal churches in the Netherlands and, more recently, in Botswana, I have noticed that the way in which culture (its identities, its rituals and ceremonies) is spiritualized, little room is left for cultural traditions of the diverse ethnic groups that are represented in the Ghanaian migrant community. The four Ghanaian Pentecostal churches that have been in Gaborone since the early 1990s cannot be seen as being guardians of traditions that relate to the life-crisis rituals of the Akan- or Ewe-speaking groups that have migrated to Botswana. They do not pursue the uncritical continuity of these cultural traditions from Ghana in the diaspora situation but maintain a critical distance. Funerals, marriages and birthing ceremonies are not conducted in the way Ghanaian cultural traditions prescribe and the churches remain critical of a range of aspects which they often want to replace with Christianized versions. In Pentecostal ceremonies, for example, no alcoholic beverages are offered and there is no pouring of libation to the gods of the family. Prayer assumes a dominant place in most of the rituals, particularly if they involve the giving of money, food and drinks or presents.

These four Ghanaian churches opt for a membership that does not consist only of Ghanaian migrants. All churches have a mixed membership, similar to the composition of Botswana society at large which, being a country of immigrants, is made up of many different nationalities. In view of this national and cultural variety, it is important that the churches appear to be 'universal' in the way they conduct their rituals. They are intended to be uniform, not culturally specific and in their transcultural nature relevant to every group within their membership. All members, irrespective of their national or cultural background, share in the common danger of ulterior evil powers and it is this commonality in a perceived vulnerable agency that helps to constitute the transcultural practice of deliverance as a universal panacea. The pastors do not spend much time exploring the specific cultural traditions of their membership when marriages, funerals or healing are concerned. For a true Christian, they reason, it should be clear that certain African traditions are backward and are based on ignorance or may provoke the danger of inviting the Devil and his deities to be present through such things as the pouring of libation or the use of local and cultural healing substances. Raising critical awareness of such things is what matters most, meaning that not all customs are abandoned but that there is an expectation that members will critically select what to include and not to include. Culture is no longer taken for granted. So when I joined a Ghanaian pastor at a *lobola*, the bride-wealth payment of a Botswana-Zimbabwean couple, the couple decided not to offer alcoholic drinks after the ceremony, while the pastor was invited to open the ceremony with prayers and a Bible reading and to be

involved in the negotiations over the bride-wealth almost as if he were one of the family elders, leaving no doubt about the fact that, despite the authority of the family elders, the couple had met him to be 'counselled' beforehand.

Still the question remains as to whether this proclaimed uniformity in Pentecostal ritual and rhetoric makes these Pentecostal churches part of local Botswana society. Or does their disinterest and even critical distance from local cultural traditions make them more vulnerable to being perceived as strangers who resist integration?

Over the last couple of years, and probably related to increased government attention to localization, Pentecostal churches (and not only Ghanaian ones) have come under public attack for being nothing but foreign money-makers, interested in becoming established in Botswana for the sole purpose of profit-making. This ties in with the tougher localization policies that are now restricting the labour market and certain sectors of the economy to locals only. Hair-dressing and tailoring are sectors that have been localized, meaning that business initiatives can only be taken by locals and the employment of foreigners is restricted through a system of licensing. Botswana has enjoyed spectacular economic growth rates, in large part due to the exploitation of its diamond mines, but this slowed towards the end of the 1980s, sentiments of socio-economic uncertainty began to spread and the disparities between rich and poor have become increasingly visible (Good 2005). Add to this the consequences of the AIDS pandemic and one begins to understand why Durham (2002) talks about the uncertainties confronting Botswana's middle classes. In addition, elites of 'internal' ethnic minorities in Botswana have been vying for a greater political say in the nation's economic policy, adding to sentiments of inequality and uncertainty in the public domain (see Werbner 2002, 2004 for an extensive elaboration of the minority issue in Botswana).

For the Ghanaian Pentecostal churches, with their preponderance of foreign members, it is important to find a way to make their presence in Botswana society acceptable to the general public. Here again, the notion of a vulnerable agency in the affirmative is highly relevant for understanding their claim that 'we are all weak and feeble in the eyes of God', irrespective of nationality, and that Ghanaians – like the rest of Botswana's population – are vulnerable to the vagaries of the health and well-being of the economy. While presenting a notion of shared and common vulnerability, it may help to generate a greater feeling of security and comfort. If the Pentecostals, though foreign, share common needs with the local population in the present predicament, who can be against them?

By organizing events such as an AIDS awareness week and AIDS counselling, as some of the Pentecostal churches have done, they signal to all this concern of common vulnerability; a concern that would definitely help to build more secure grounds for the existence of the church in this society. This is also

why vulnerable agency in the affirmative played a role in understanding the way in which the same church dealt with the death of its hairdresser (who died of AIDS, as so many young people in Botswana do) and in the most destitute of circumstances.

Cultural construction of a vulnerable agency?

If we take the lead from Friedman and Randeira (2004) that cultural vulnerability is about morality and identity and if we accept the notion that an anthropological perspective of vulnerable agency should include an exploration of the negotiation of its meaning, the death of this hairdresser offers a case in which the negative, as well as the affirmative, can be explored. The owner of the salon where the hairdresser worked is a member of one of the Ghanaian-led Pentecostal churches and in terms of securities and reciprocities it was a logical step for her to seek support from her church. The problem, however, was that the hairdresser had not been a member of the church, had not participated actively in church systems of giving and donations, had never taken part in deliverance sessions and thus remained a relative stranger and outsider. Also, the hairdresser was not a member of the Association of Ghanaian Nationals in Botswana, which tends to act as a burial society for those who contribute to its funds. Only a very few hairdressers have in fact joined this association as they tend to count on the moral responsibility the owners of the salons should take for them and also because the association may need to know too much about their identity, residence permit and the like. The owner of the hair salon felt a responsibility *vis-à-vis* the family of the deceased regarding arranging a proper funeral for the young hairdresser. From the Ghanaian perspective, the arrangement and creation of a respectful and uplifting future remembrance was tremendously important and in this particular case the full responsibility for this rested with the owner. While it was thus important for her to seek the involvement of the church, the church was facing the dilemma that the deceased had had no relationship whatsoever with the church and the fact that he was Ghanaian might easily lead to accusations of being biased, of favouring Ghanaians over others, local Botswana in particular. After all, if he had been a local worker, the salon owner would probably not have considered approaching her church.

On the other hand, the church could not afford to appear insensitive to the predicament of one of its prominent members who was under the cultural and moral obligation to organize a proper funeral. Nor could it decline or ignore the kind of moral responsibility it felt to show that it would care for the needy. With Gaborone being a small urban society, the public profile of the church would certainly have suffered if people – especially their fellow countrymen – felt they could not approach it in times of death and suffering. If they could not even take

care of their own people at such a time, what could be expected of the church if a situation emerged involving any other nationality?

Interested in being relevant to Botswana and Ghanaian societies, a church leader explained that the church emphasized that it had a morally responsible role to play in common concerns about death and suffering so as to underline its readiness to act on behalf of all, irrespective of nationality in a domain where other structures appeared to be absent. It decided to put up a tent on the church's parking lot where the memorial service could be held and where members of the church, the Ghanaian community and others could be invited to donate money. In this way, it demonstrated that no favouritism was involved as the service and the funeral party were not held inside the church, but the church accepted it as its moral duty to find space for the arrangement of a proper funeral. In future it could do the same for people of any other nationality.

To underline this distance from the church, a pastor from another Ghanaian Pentecostal church was invited to lead the prayers, thus reasserting the idea that the church was only providing for an 'enabling environment' where the ceremony could take place.

Yet for the salon owner, the whole event was still related to the church and she upheld a moral image of living up to expectations, of organizing a funeral in the way custom requires, of arranging the donations of money, and of inviting all social relations from the community of hairdressers, Ghanaians and others to take part. The whole session was videoed and some time later the salon owner left for Ghana to present this videotape along with some of the deceased's hair-clippings (as is customary) to his family back home. The video would definitely demonstrate how well the prestige-producing reciprocities surrounding the hairdresser's death had been organized. And for her, the donations from the church and from members of the community were crucial in helping to meet the funeral expenses, not only because funerals have become such an enormous investment if done in a stylish and prestigious manner (see de Witte 2003, van Dijk 2002b), but also because she had very few other resources available to her.

The funeral ceremony is separate from the burial and can take place at a different time. Corpses may be kept in refrigerated places so that the deceased's immediate family can take the time they need to make proper arrangements, notify relatives and friends who may be living overseas, have outfits made, book a hall and a band, and buy food and drink, all to ensure that the funeral party will be long remembered. The funeral is celebrated separately from the actual burial and this is why the funeral party can be repeated at different places around the world depending on where the deceased used to live or where prominent family members happen to be living. If a person dies in the diaspora, it is not uncommon for a party to be held in the migrant community and for this party to be repeated in Ghana (although this is not reported to have happened in

the case of the hairdresser). The idea is that the family, and in this case the salon owner, should end up being able to covert all their expenses. Death requires and presupposes different registers of agency, not least business initiative. Profit may be generated through elaborate moments of money donations during the funeral proceedings. It is therefore important for everyone to create a wide network of reciprocal relations so that at the time of death as many gifts as possible can be collected. Churches have thus become pivotal in this element of social capital: they help to negotiate a person's vulnerable agency in terms of social and reciprocal relations because the church creates many moments for gift-giving when everybody can participate and at which every giver will be noticed by the others. Churches organize groups such as funeral committees to assist members in the preparation of such events and take responsibility for organizing church donations towards the people concerned. These groups may also act at a transnational level if a member marries someone from overseas or if a member in a branch of the church in the diaspora dies. However in this particular case, the owner of the hair salon lacked most of these supportive networks as her hairdresser simply had not invested in them and because the church did not want to become too deeply involved in the predicament of somebody with whom it had had virtually no relations.

In the aftermath of the hairdresser's funeral, members as well as others spoke well of the church, particularly of the way it had avoided putting inappropriate pressure on its membership to donate money. Pressures can easily emerge and people often express a kind of uneasiness, if not vulnerability, towards these kinds of pressures, although they know that in theory a system of reciprocity is supposed to work whereby eventually they can also 'cash-in' if they need to. In Botswana society today there are simply too many funerals taking place on a daily basis to risk the depletion of church-based reciprocal systems. Creating the kind of distance as it did was seen as playing on cultural constructions of vulnerable agency at two distinct levels. One is at the level of identities where there is rising xenophobia and a sense of uncertainty, and where there are also the pressing issues of localization and all it involves, with the Botswana state checking on papers and licences, controlling the labour market and the presence of foreigners. Uncertainties revolve around questions such as whether Ghanaians feel they can continue to stay in the country, whether the Ghanaian-led churches are allowed to maintain their operations and to what extent they are under pressure to localize as much as possible to comply with government policies that require foreign bodies to become locally owned and/or managed. The churches have reacted not only by adopting locals onto their governing boards and various church-based welfare committees that service social capital in offering support to the membership in times of need. The churches have reacted to this mounting identity-vulnerability by claiming that all – Ghanaians

and others alike – share the predicament of Botswana’s social and economic ills. In this sense, the death of the Ghanaian hairdresser served that interest by creating commonality.

At another level, the church negotiated what can be termed as a cultural vulnerability of moral agency. It upheld Ghanaian standards of a proper and respectful funeral while also negotiating Botswana public feelings about the money-making these churches are allegedly involved in. Money-making during the hairdresser’s funeral was not done in the interests of the church but instead for the hairdresser, his family and the salon owner. It also made it clear that the church was not insensitive to its members’ needs, that it allowed space for a fitting funeral even in a situation where the deceased had not been part of the church or its systems of reciprocity. Instead of being damaged or having its image tarnished, the foreign Ghanaian Pentecostal churches only seem to have gained in the way this situation was handled.

Conclusion

This contribution has aimed to demonstrate that the relationship between religion and vulnerability cannot be explored in exclusively functionalist terms. While in modernist terms it can be argued that the category of ‘religion’ as opposed to the ‘state’ is gaining in importance in many African societies for the ways in which it caters to vulnerability in material terms – as Africa’s failing states increasingly lack the capacity to cater for the needs of their citizenries – the question remains as to what people understand by such vulnerability, also in religious terms. And to what extent is religion able to provide for a kind of agency that is pro-active in a given situation? What is argued here is that churches and religious ideologies may impact on notions of agency where vulnerability is concerned.

The Pentecostal ideology offers a range of ideas and practices concerning the understanding of agency and vulnerability in material and immaterial terms. Vulnerability exists not only in materialist terms of socioeconomic conditions but, in the propagation of Pentecostal ideology, a vulnerable agency is assumed and expected to exist. The true Pentecostal believer is an agent that engages vulnerability in that there is heavenly bliss in suffering (Werbner 1997), while at a higher level of aggregation the institutional agency of the Pentecostal church again underlines an engagement with vulnerability, in this case for the purpose of emphasizing a commonality with the predicament of society at large. In the situation of Ghanaian Pentecostalism in Botswana, the anthropological exploration of the meaning of vulnerable agency that I propose – the issue of being migrants and strangers – involves notions of cultural security. The material conditions of finding and keeping work in Botswana relate to the extent

to which the state's and the general public's ideas of morality and identity affect the position of the migrant and the stranger. The Botswana state's policies of localization have certainly created public awareness about the presence of strangers in its society in the image of profiteers and money-makers bent on siphoning off the wealth of the Botswana nation.

Being confronted with these issues of cultural security, Ghanaian Pentecostal churches have not hardened their identity, shielded themselves from Botswana influences and participation but instead have cleverly reacted by presenting an image of common vulnerability. While this may have been less of a premeditated strategy and more a matter of course given the transcultural and inclusivist character of transnational Pentecostalism, its effect has been a well-designed reaction to the occurrence of death. The death of a young Ghanaian hairdresser was analyzed to determine how a Ghanaian church dealt with the issue from the perspective of cultural security and agency. Moralities and identities were involved in handling this case, allowing an anthropology of vulnerable agency that is capable of distinguishing the different layers of meaning and understanding of the vulnerable positions of all of those involved: the hairdresser and his 'future remembrance', the Ghanaian salon owner facing responsibilities towards the Ghanaian community, Botswana localization policies, and the Ghanaian church and its public image.

This chapter offers a critique of Boholm's attack on the cultural explanations of risk, insecurity and uncertainty (Boholm 2003). She particularly questions the anthropological, cultural position that advocates that what is to be considered risk and uncertainty depends entirely on cultural settings and assumptions, and calls this a kind of black-box interpretation of differences in perceptions of risk and vulnerability. She calls for a middle ground between the anthropological conceptions of the culturally constructed notions of vulnerability and the more technical and positivist perceptions that are often derived from decontextualized rational calculations of external circumstances (such as natural hazards and the like). Yet the point she misses is that, from an anthropological perspective, vulnerability is not only about danger, lack, uncertainty and coping mechanisms. An anthropology of vulnerability cannot assume *a priori* an understanding of its cultural meaning but must take as a paradigmatic point of departure an exploration of the construction of that meaning on the part of Western academia too. This would allow for the possibility of vulnerable agency in the affirmative, as a welcome and desired state of being that, in the case of religion, could uplift the believer and attribute status and power to the person or community. Whereas I certainly agree with Boholm that an anthropology of uncertainty, as she calls it, cannot live by an exploration of cultural constructions alone and she wants to move away from that perspective, the construction of vulnerability and risk in the negative remains unchallenged.

Hence, it might be too early to dispose of an anthropologically informed enquiry of the meaning of risk and vulnerability if in the Western academic exploration some taken-for-granted assumptions continue to go unquestioned. An anthropology of vulnerable agency should certainly explode a widely held preconception of the concept and make room for a multilayered understanding of both the affirmative and the negative, which in this particular case of Ghanaians in Botswana relates to vulnerability in terms of social safety as well as social suffering.

References

- Bankoff, G., G. Frerks & T. Hilhorst (eds) 2004, *Vulnerability. Disasters, Development and People*, London: Earthscan.
- Beck, U. 1992, *Risk Society. Towards a New Modernity*, London: Sage.
- Boholm, A. 2003, 'The Cultural Nature of Risk: Can There Be an Anthropology of Uncertainty?' *Ethnos* 68 (2): 159-78.
- Campbell, E. 2003, 'Attitudes of Botswana Citizens toward Immigrants: Signs of Xenophobia?' *International Migration* 41 (4): 71-109.
- Chambers, R. 1989, 'Vulnerability, Coping and Policy: Editorial Introduction', *IDS Bulletin* 20 (2): 1-7.
- de Witte, M. 2003, 'Money and Death. Funeral Business in Asante, Ghana', *Africa* 73 (4): 531-59.
- Douglas, M. 1992, *Risk and Blame*, London: Routledge.
- Douglas, M. & A. Wildavsky 1982, *Risk and Culture*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Durham, D. 2002, 'Uncertain Citizens. Herero and the New Intercalary Subject in Post-colonial Botswana', in: R. Werbner (ed.), *Postcolonial Subjectivities in Africa*, London: Zed Books.
- Durham, D. & F. Klaitz 2002, 'Funerals and the Public Space of Sentiment in Botswana', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 28 (4): 777-95.
- Englund, H. 2001 'The Making of a Home Villagers' Association in Lilongwe, Malawi', in: A. Tostensen, I. Tvedten & M. Vaa (eds), *Associational Life in African Cities. Popular Responses to the Urban Crisis*, Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.
- Eriksen, T.H. 2005, *Risking Security. Paradoxes of Social Cohesion*, Inaugural Lecture, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam.
- Friedman, J. & S. Randeira (eds) 2004, *Worlds on the Move. Globalization, Migration, and Cultural Security*, London/New York: I.B. Tauris & Co.
- Good, K. 2005, 'Resource Dependency and its Consequences: The Costs of Botswana's Shining Gems', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 23 (1): 27-50.
- Gwarzo, T.H. 2003, 'Activities of Islamic Civic Associations in the Northwest of Nigeria; with Particular Reference to Kano State', *Afrika Spectrum* 38 (3): 289-318.
- Lourenco-Lindell, I. 2001, 'Social Networks and Urban Vulnerability to Hunger', in: A. Tostensen, I. Tvedten & M. Vaa (eds), *Associational Life in African Cities. Popular Responses to the Urban Crisis*, Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.
- Lyon, F. 2000, 'Trust, Networks and Norms: The Creation of Social Capital in Agricultural Economies in Ghana', *World Development* 28 (4): 663-81.

- Maxwell, D. 1998, "‘Delivered from the Spirit of Poverty?’: Pentecostalism, Prosperity and Modernity in Zimbabwe", *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28 (3): 350-73.
- Nyamnjoh, F. 2002, 'Local Attitudes towards Citizenship and Foreigners in Botswana: An Appraisal of Recent Press Stories', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 28 (4): 755-75.
- Nyamnjoh, F. 2006, *Insiders and Outsiders. Citizenship and Xenophobia in Contemporary Southern Africa*, London: Zed Books.
- Oruwari, Y. 2001, 'New Generation Churches and the Provision of Welfare. A Gender Study from Port Harcourt, Nigeria', in: A. Tostensen, I. Tvedten & M. Vaa (eds), *Associational Life in African Cities. Popular Responses to the Urban Crisis*, Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.
- Parish, J. 2003, 'Anti-witchcraft Shrines among the Akan. Possession and the Gathering of Knowledge', *African Studies Review* 46 (3): 17-34.
- Radstake, M. 2000, *Secrecy and Ambiguity. Home Care for People Living with HIV/AIDS in Ghana*, Leiden, ASC Research Report 59.
- Reis, R. 2000, 'The "Wounded Healer" as Ideology. The Work of Ngoma in Swaziland', in: R. van Dijk, R. Reis & M. Spierenburg (eds), *The Quest for Fruition through Ngoma. The Political Aspects of Healing in Southern Africa*, Oxford: James Currey.
- Rosenthal, J. 1998, *Possession, Ecstasy, and Law in Ewe Voodoo*, Virginia: University Press of Virginia.
- Tostensen, A., I. Tvedten & M. Vaa (eds) 2001, *Associational Life in African Cities. Popular Responses to the Urban Crisis*, Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.
- van Binsbergen, W.M.J. 2000, 'Creating "A Place to Feel at Home": Christian Church Life and Social Control in Lusaka, Zambia', in: P. Konings, W. van Binsbergen & G. Hesseling (eds), *Trajectoires de Libération en Afrique Contemporaine*, Paris: Karthala.
- van Dijk, R. 1999, 'The Pentecostal Gift: Ghanaian Charismatic Churches and the Moral Innocence of the Global Economy', in: R. Fardon, W. van Binsbergen & R. van Dijk (eds), *Modernity on a Shoestring*, London/Leiden: SOAS/ASC/Anthony Rowe.
- van Dijk, R. 2001a, "'Voodoo" on the Doorstep. Young Nigerian Prostitutes and Magic Policing in the Netherlands', *Africa* 71 (4): 558-85.
- van Dijk, R. 2001b, 'Time and Transcultural Technologies of the Self in the Ghanaian Pentecostal Diaspora', in: A. Corten & R. Marshall-Fratani (eds), *Between Babel and Pentecost. Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America*, London: Hurst Publishers, pp. 216-34.
- van Dijk, R. 2002a, 'Ghanaian Churches in the Netherlands: Religion Mediating a Tense Relationship', in: I. Van Kessel (ed.), *Merchants, Missionaries & Migrants: 300 Years of Dutch-Ghanaian Relations*, Amsterdam: KIT.
- van Dijk, R. 2002b, 'Religion, Reciprocity and Restructuring Family Responsibility in the Ghanaian Pentecostal Diaspora', in: D. Bryceson & U. Vuorela, (eds), *The Transnational Family. New European Frontiers and Global Networks*, Oxford: Berg.
- van Dijk, R. 2003, 'Localisation, Ghanaian Pentecostalism and the Stranger's Beauty in Botswana', *Africa* 73 (4): 560-83.
- van Dijk, R. 2004, 'Negotiating Marriage. Questions of Morality and Legitimacy in the Ghanaian Pentecostal Diaspora', in: R. van Dijk & G. Sabar (eds), *Uncivic Religion*.

- African Religious Communities and their Quest for Public Legitimacy in the Diaspora*, Thematic Issue *Journal of Religion in Africa* 34 (4): 438-67.
- van Dijk, R. 2005, 'The Moral Life of the Gift in Ghanaian Pentecostal Churches in the Diaspora. Questions of (in-)dividuality and (in-)alienability in Transcultural Reciprocal Relations', in: W. van Binsbergen & P. Geschiere (eds), *Commodification: Things, Agency, and Identities*, Munster: Lit Verlag.
- Werbner, R.P. 1989, *Ritual Passage, Sacred Journey*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Werbner, R.P. 1997, 'The Suffering Body: Passion and Ritual Allegory in Christian Encounters', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 23 (2): 311-24.
- Werbner, R.P. 2002, 'Citizenship and the Politics of Recognition in Botswana', in: I.N. Mazonde (ed.), *Minorities in the Millennium. Perspectives from Botswana*, Gaborone: Lightbooks Ltd.
- Werbner, R.P. 2004, *Reasonable Radicals and Citizenship in Botswana. The Public Anthropology of Kalanga Elites*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Wisner, B., P. Blaikie, T. Cannon & I. Davis (eds) 2004, *At Risk. Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability and Disasters*, London: Routledge.

Epilogue

Theorizing agency in and on Africa: The questions are key

Francis Nyamnjoh

When I agreed to write an epilogue for this impressive collection on the social and historical trajectories of agency in Africa, the intention was not to discuss the various contributions – a job masterfully done by the editors in their introduction – but rather to draw inspiration from them to highlight further research questions for debate and reflection, especially those from a standpoint sensitive to the African predicaments described in this book and beyond.

How does one meaningfully conceptualize and research agency in Africa? What basic assumptions must one make? These essays have led me to pose questions pertaining to the theorizing of agency research in and on Africa. What accumulated personal and collective prejudices must one check against to ensure that the trade of researching agency in Africa is sufficiently conscious of context and the interplay of both local and global forces, and adequately participatory to yield innovative results? How often do we reflect on the relevance of our research for the lives of those whose agency we seek to understand? In other words, are the issues we seek to research of importance to those who ‘innocently’ allow us into their lives, and to what extent have they consciously or unconsciously shaped our theoretical and methodological trajectories? Does it make sense, and, if so why, to ensure that African scholars and indeed the African communities whose agency is of interest are actively involved from the outset in the research design and implementation? And what, in concrete terms, is required of various actors in the knowledge production and dissemination chain to accomplish this? Is it useful or not to have a negotiated and nuanced understanding of agency based on the literature (orthodox and alternative) and, even more importantly, on the life situations and social positions of Africans in and beyond the confines of a place called Africa?

How does one research agency beyond the bandwagon of intellectual and political fashions or ‘correctness’ of the times? The current tendency is for researchers to assume that the only agency which matters is that of the purport-

edly autonomous individual actor, whose assumed autonomy is defined fundamentally in opposition to local and national communities. But this same literature is silent on the impact of external or global forces on internal or local agency. To what extent can individuals, even where creditable with agency, move beyond the bounds of state and sub-national structures with the support of exogenously induced ideas of social change and development by objective and benevolent outsiders?

Is it possible that such enthusiasm to celebrate without problematizing the rights of the choice-driven individual *vis-à-vis* local state bounded structures overlooks some perennial hierarchies and power dynamics within and between states that make agency possible for some only at the best of times? Do African scholars, governments and advocacy groups, for example, have a point when they vehemently argue against the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO and related institutions for crippling the agency of African states, institutions, communities and individuals with draconian neo-liberal policies and stubborn insensitivity to alternative ways of thinking, seeing and doing? If so, how does a researcher on agency meaningfully factor in these concerns without, of course, throwing the baby out with the bath water?

What do Africans, in their world views and dynamism, perceive agency to consist of for the individual, group, institution and community? How do these African perceptions of agency cope with social change informed by unequal encounters fed by local and global hierarchies of humanity dictated, amongst other factors, by race, place, culture, class, status, gender and age? If unequal encounters are possible and if African ideas of agency have not necessarily always coincided with competing ideas of agency by others encountered by Africans from positions of relative weakness, how have these dominant others set about imposing constrictive perceptions of agency informed by the arrogance and ignorance of power and privilege on Africans, in principle and in practice, and with what consequences? And how does one design and implement research in such a way that these unequal encounters are captured in their fullness and depth, highlighting the limits and possibilities of agency for the one or the other at the level of individuals, whole communities and cultures? Even more importantly, who decides, and when, that it is time to move on from using the past to explain the present and inform the future? This is especially relevant in a context where the wounds of the past are still so fresh, a context where Africa remains a scar on the conscience of the world, to quote British Prime Minister Tony Blair. And what power dynamics and interests are at play to belie the apparent objectivity/neutrality of such choices in scholarly, political, cultural, social or economic circles?

If one assumes an interconnected world of ever-accelerating techniques of inclusion and exclusion, how realistic is it to seek to understand African agency

in isolation from the agency of non-Africans, the not-yet-Africans or the Africans-plus?¹ If not, what are the various forms (individual and institutional) and vehicles (political, cultural, economic, social, etc.) that such non-African, not-yet-African or African-plus agency assumes, and with what consequences for Africans and their agency? If the comforts of power tend to blunt one's sensitivity to the predicaments of others, how do researchers, who are relatively better placed than the Africans they study, ensure that the assumptions natural to their social positions and cultural palates (race, ethnicity, class, status, gender, generation, etc.) do not influence the research process and its outcome? In a continent starved of basic research funding within universities and research institutions, and where the bulk of research-related activities are funded and controlled through consultancies by NGOs and grants by foundations with pre-conceived ideas of what is relevant rather than in critical scholarly research, how does one provide for the type of critical predicament-oriented research that does justice to agency as a scholarly theme?

Which approaches to agency are likely to yield the best results? Is it those wherein the research is designed with agency as a primary focus, or those in which structure and agency are seen in interplay? But then, is this question worth posing in the first place for those to whom agency is as much a possibility open to individuals as well as to the groups, communities and structures that they produce, reproduce and transform? When does it become necessary to talk of domesticating or harnessing agency? Are certain cultures and material conditions more predisposed to the one than the other? What experiences and possibilities does Africa have to share in this regard?

What methodologies or methodological cocktails and buffets would best suit the sort of accounts craved to ensure a comprehensive understanding of African agency in all its social and historical complexities and trajectories? If it is not sufficient to be passionate about researching agency in Africa without being equally compassionate about the individuals and communities studied, how does one avoid this methodologically? Is it by emphasizing intersubjectivity and conviviality between the researcher and the researched? Is it by ensuring that researchers take up community membership amongst the researched beyond the participant observation of anthropologists that lasts only as long as it takes to complete their research and unturn-native. And shouldn't the merits of ethnography be pushed beyond anthropology to influence other disciplines that inform policies on Africa disproportionately, despite their tendency to celebrate economic, political and cultural snapshots that reproduce problematic images of

¹ A coinage to refer to those in and outside of Africa who claim African and non-African identities (for example, Africans in the diaspora, and European and Asian diasporas in Africa).

Africa? In this regard, shouldn't a systematic effort be made to review methodology courses in view of the fact that the data one collects and the interpretations one brings to bear on agency or whatever other phenomenon can only be as rich as one's research questions? How can one make a culture of the fact that agency research in and on Africa can only be as good as the questions interested researchers are willing and ready to ask, and how open-minded and ready are they to go beyond rhetoric?

If agency is almost always negotiated, what are the local and global structures that Africans have, at different points in time, negotiated or at least attempted to negotiate themselves out of or into, and with what outcomes? What are the current structures Africans would want to negotiate themselves into or out of, and with what prospects and challenges?

If agency in and on Africa is not homogenous, as both African and external agents (re)acting on, in and to or interacting with Africans are differently positioned in tune with the hierarchies that govern their worlds, how does one avoid a monolithic discourse on agency and Africa without falling into sterile relativism? Similarly, what form would empowering African agency take in knowledge production *vis-à-vis* non-African structures and scholarly agents? Who defines which literature available to African researchers, in a context of unequal global flows and the exchange of knowledge products, is credible? Are African scholars involved as co-producers with equal say or as research assistants, 'shoe-shine' collaborators, and other passive presences to be acknowledged in footnotes and appendices or simply ignored? What would guarantee the sort of collaboration that minimizes prejudices, stereotypes, ignorance and opportunism both ways?

It is true that even when we as scholars are predisposed to addressing these weighty questions, constraints of time and money may prevent us really squaring up to them. However, this should not subtract from the fact that in researching agency in Africa, it is only proper for us scholars to be conscious of (and even to question) our instinct by training to seek to ensure that established scholarly traditions and expectations are maintained. In a world heavy with economic, cultural and political hierarchies informed by, for example, race, place, class, gender and age, such instincts beg a few questions: Whose traditions? Whose scholarly yardsticks? Why traditions and yardsticks? Hence the importance of yet other questions: Who has the power to define, enforce and manage these traditions, tastes and standards? How feasible is it to promote scholarly or research traditions and ideals when they are at variance with dominant economic considerations or with the ambitions of dominance of those who have the means and power to determine the rules of the game with scant regard for participatory democracy? If he who pays the piper calls the tune, then the research and scholarship most likely to inspire investment are those familiar to

the paymaster's race, place, class, gender or generation; those into which s/he has been schooled to the point of second nature and which, instinctively, s/he expects every piper worth the name to internalize and reproduce. Yet pipers are just as shaped by their race, place, class, gender and generation as those who pay them. Inviting them to internalize and reproduce tunes at variance with their own traditions and tastes is to devalue and marginalize their own human experience. Over time, in the interests of convenience and material comfort, many a piper yields to the whims and caprices of the wallet and reproduces the research and scholarly expectations of their paymasters. This, in a way, makes all research and scholarship (non-African and African alike) a very conservative industry where, despite rhetoric to the contrary, the emphasis is less on creativity than mimicry, and less on production than reproduction.

Thus, socialized into these hierarchies, researchers of Africa and African researchers operate in scholarly contexts where it is normal to minimize the scientific and creative capabilities of the African mind. Increasingly, for reasons of political correctness, this is true in practice even when it remains unstated. It is hardly surprising then, on the one hand, that African social scientists continue to face an uphill task convincing their non-African counterparts about the maturity and validity of their scholarship. Similarly, it is not surprising that non-African counterparts face a Herculean task to convince African social scientists about the integrity of their research ventures in the context of such inequalities and prejudices. Perhaps the time has come to pay greater attention to changing not only what is produced as knowledge on Africa but, even more importantly, the institutional cultures within which that knowledge is produced, in view of encouraging greater and more genuine collaboration between African, non-African and African-plus scholars. This book and the questions it has inspired provide the kind of background context for the journey to begin the process of redressing the inequalities, prejudices and tensions that continue to stand in the way of meaningful research on agency in and on Africa and on African agency.

List of Authors

Inge Brinkman was awarded her PhD in African Studies at Leiden University, the Netherlands. She then worked at Cologne University where she studied violence and exile based on fieldwork with refugees from southeast Angola. From 2001 to 2004 she was engaged in research at Ghent University, Belgium, on the relationship between nationalism, religion and popular culture in northern Angola. She is now a researcher at the African Studies Centre in Leiden. Her publications include *A War for People* (Köppe, 2005), *Singing in the Bush* (Köppe, 2001) and, with Axel Fleisch, she edited *Grandmother's Footsteps* (Köppe, 1999).

Seghers.Brinkman@skynet.be

Mirjam de Bruijn is an anthropologist at the African Studies Centre in Leiden. Her research has a clear interdisciplinary character and an important theme is how people live and shape society in high-risk environments in both rural and urban areas. She has done fieldwork in Chad, Mali and Cameroon, where her research has developed around different themes: mobility and translocality, social (in)security, processes of in- and exclusion, and human rights. She recently started research on the relationship between mobility, social hierarchies and communication technology. Her publications include *Pastoralists under Pressure* (Brill, 1999), *Mobile Africa* (Brill, 2001) and *Climate and Society in Southern and Central Mali* (ASC, 2005). She is head of the 'Connections and Transformations: Society and Technology in Africa and Beyond' research group at the African Studies Centre.

bruijnm@ascleiden.nl

Malcolm Draper coordinates the sociology programme on the Pietermaritzburg campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. His broad research approach is both historical and environmental, focusing on how nature and culture shape one another over time, as well as how identity formation fits into these processes. He also researches the history of ideas of conservation and sustainable agriculture in South Africa and is interested in the clash of world-views between rural people living off the land and elite policy makers. These interests have come together in a collaborative project with Marja Siedenburg and Harry Wels entitled 'Farm Dwellers, the Forgotten People? Consequences of Conversions to Private Wildlife Production in KwaZulu-Natal' under the

umbrella of the South Africa-Netherlands Research Programme on Alternatives in Development (SANPAD).

draperm@ukzn.ac.za

Jan-Bart Gewald is a social historian of Africa at the African Studies Centre in Leiden. His research has covered topics as diverse as the ramifications of genocide in Rwanda and Namibia and the socio-cultural parameters of trans-desert trade in Africa. He has also conducted research on pan-Africanism in Ghana, spirit possession in Niger, Dutch development cooperation, Africa in the context of globalization, and social history in Eritrea. He is currently researching the socio-economic implications of the motor car in Zambia, having been awarded funding by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) for a five-year inter-institutional multidisciplinary research programme entitled 'ICE in Africa: The Relationship between People and the Internal Combustion Engine in Africa'. His publications include *Herero Heroes: A Socio-political History of the Herero of Namibia 1890-1923* (James Curry/David Philips/Ohio University Press, 1999) and, with Jeremy Silvester, *Words Cannot Be Found: German Colonial Rule in Namibia, An Annotated Reprint of the 1918 Blue Book* (Brill, 2003).

gewald@ascleiden.nl

Gertie Janssen is a medical anthropologist and is currently doing a PhD on women and their birthing practices in southwestern Niger. She is researching why women prefer solitary childbirth in a situation where conditions are poor and people normally rely on a great deal of mutual support in their daily lives. The project is being carried out with the support of Leiden University Medical Centre (LUMC). She has worked extensively in applied reproductive health care settings in Zimbabwe, Niger, Eritrea and Botswana and has conducted research on basic health care in Namibia. With Gil Yaron and Usutuaije Maamberua, she published *Rural Development in the Okavango Region of Namibia: An Assessment of Needs, Opportunities, and Constraints* (Gamsberg Macmillan, 1992).

g@gewaldjanssen.demon.nl

Otrude Moyo teaches at the University of Southern Maine. Her scholarship addresses comparative social welfare policy connecting themes on families, their work, livelihoods and well-being, inequality and socio-economic concerns, extending to transnational issues related to African immigrants and refugees in

the realm of the community and international social work. She completed her PhD in Social Policy at the Heller Graduate School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University with an interdisciplinary concentration addressing work, inequality and social change. Her forthcoming book is entitled *Trampled No More: Voices from Bulawayo's Townships about Families, Life, Survival and Social Change in Zimbabwe* (UPA). She is currently working on an ethnographic study comparing African immigrants and refugee experiences in the US, the UK and the Netherlands.

omoyo@usm.maine.edu

Julie Ndaya is finalizing her PhD on the dynamics of identity transformation among Congolese women, focusing on religious social movements in Congo Kinshasa, the Netherlands and Belgium. It will be defended at Erasmus University in Rotterdam in the second half of 2007. She is also working in an advisory capacity for various organizations and has organized seminars and discussions on the current situation in the DRC, especially during the 2006 elections. Her recent publications include 'Entre le Marteau et l'Enclume. Ou la Dialectique être Proche / Faire des Analyses dans la Recherche du Terrain' in *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy/Revue Africaine de Philosophie* (2006) and 'Sterk zijn als een Verse Doppinda: Cultuur Speelt Belangrijke Rol in Hulpverlening Seksueel Geweld' in *Phaxx* (2005).

Ndaya@ascleiden.nl

Francis Nyamnjoh has a PhD in the Sociology of Communication from the University of Lancaster and has taught sociology, anthropology and communication studies at universities in Cameroon, Botswana and South Africa. He is now Associate Professor and Head of Publications and Dissemination with the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) in Dakar, Senegal. He has published widely on globalization, citizenship, the media and the politics of identity in Africa. His most recent publications include *Insiders and Outsiders: Citizenship and Xenophobia in Contemporary Southern Africa* (Zed Books, 2006) and *Africa's Media, Democracy and the Politics of Belonging* (Zed Books, 2005). From 1996-2003 he served as vice-president of the African Council for Communication Education (ACCE).

nyamnjoh@yahoo.com

Lotte Pelckmans is an anthropologist. She is currently doing her PhD research on the dynamics of social hierarchical relations in transnational Fulbe society,

focusing on modern translations of hierarchy in different contexts through the practice of remembering, with case studies from rural and urban Mali and urban Europe. The central research question is whether, why and how typical Sahelian social hierarchies are being maintained and transformed in a globalizing world following the formal abolition of slavery. She is attached to the Research School of Asian, African, and Amerindian Studies (CNWS) and to the African Studies Centre in Leiden. With Mirjam de Bruijn, she published 'Facing Dilemmas: Former Fulbe Slaves in Modern Mali' which appeared in the *Canadian Journal of African Studies* in 2005.

lpelckmans@ascleiden.nl

Marja Spierenburg was awarded her PhD in Anthropology from the University of Amsterdam in 2003 and is now Assistant Professor in the Department of Culture, Organisation and Management at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. She has researched land reform and resistance in Zimbabwe and is currently working on cooperation between environmental organizations, development NGOs and state agencies in relation to transfrontier conservation initiatives. Her earlier publications on natural resource management and spirit possession include *The Quest for Fruition through Ngoma* (James Currey, 2000) which was co-edited with Rijk van Dijk and Ria Reis, and *Strangers, Spirits and Land Reforms, Conflicts about Land in Dande, Northern Zimbabwe* (Brill, 2004).

mj.spierenburg@fsw.vu.nl

Wouter van Beek is an anthropologist at the African Studies Centre in Leiden and has recently been appointed Professor of Religious Anthropology at the University of Tilburg in the Netherlands. He has done extensive research on two West-African groups, the Kapsiki/Higi of north Cameroon and northeastern Nigeria, and the Dogon of central Mali. His main research themes are religion, ecology and, more recently, tourism (as both his study areas are on the tourist circuit in West Africa). He has published widely on both groups and undertaken comparative work on religion in Africa, as well as on religion in general. His recent publications include an illustrated monograph, with S. Hollyman, entitled *Dogon; Africa's People of the Cliffs* (H. Abrams, 2001) and 'The Escalation of Witchcraft Accusations' in G. ter Haar (ed.), *Imagining Evil. Witchcraft Beliefs and Accusations in Contemporary Africa* (Africa World Press, 2007). His current theme links local religions, such as those of the Kapsiki/Higi and the Dogon, to the wider dynamics of religion in the world, like fundamentalism.

vanbeek@ascleiden.nl

Wim van Binsbergen is Professor of Intercultural Philosophy at Erasmus University, Rotterdam, and a senior researcher at the African Studies Centre in Leiden. His research interests include religion in Africa (traditional African religion, Christianity and Islam); intercultural philosophy, especially epistemology; African and Ancient Mediterranean history; Afrocentricity; ethnicity; ancient and modern statehood; and globalization, commodification, virtuality and mediatization. His magnum opus is entitled *Intercultural Encounters: African and Anthropological Lessons towards a Philosophy of Interculturality* (Lit Verlag, 2003). His other recent publications include *The Dynamics of Power and the Rule of Law* (Lit Verlag, 2003), *Situating Globality: African Agency in the Appropriation of Global Culture* with Rijk van Dijk (Brill, 2004) and, with Peter Geschiere, *Commodification: Things, Agency and Identities: The Social Life of Things Revisited* (Lit Verlag, 2005). Wim van Binsbergen is the editor of *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy*.

binsbergen@ascleiden.nl

Rijk van Dijk is an anthropologist at the African Studies Centre in Leiden. He has done extensive research on the rise of Pentecostal movements in urban areas of Malawi and Ghana and is the author of *Young Malawian Puritans* (ISOR Press, 1993). He co-edited *Modernity on a Shoestring* with Richard Fardon and Wim van Binsbergen (EIDOS, 1999), *The Quest for Fruition through Ngoma* with Ria Reis and Marja Spierenberg (James Currey, 2000) and *Situating Globality: African Agency in the Appropriation of Global Culture* with Wim van Binsbergen (Brill, 2004). His current research focuses on the transnational dimensions of Ghanaian Pentecostalism, in particular in relation to the migration of Ghanaians to the Netherlands and Botswana.

DijkR@ascleiden.nl

Harry Wels has a PhD in Organizational Anthropology and is an Associate Professor in the Department of Culture, Organisation and Management at the Vrije University in Amsterdam. His research focuses on rural transformations and development policy in Africa, investigating, for example, political and social transformations in rural areas of Senegal and Morocco. He has published extensively on issues of organizational cooperation in southern Africa, including 'Formidable Fences. Organisational Co-operation and Boundary Bullies in Zimbabwe' in N. Paulsen & T. Hernes (eds), *Managing Boundaries in Organizations. Multiple Perspectives* (Palgrave, 2003) and *Private Wildlife Conservation in Zimbabwe. Joint Ventures and Reciprocity* (Brill, 2003). With Hans van

den Breemer, he edited *Towards Negotiated Co-management of Natural Resources in Africa* (Lit Verlag, 1999).

h.wels@fsw.vu.nl

Thomas Widlok is a senior researcher with a language documentation project for the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen, and also holds a teaching position in the Department of Anthropology at Durham University. He has carried out extensive field research in Namibia since 1987 and published the monograph *Living on Mangetti. 'Bushman' Autonomy and Namibian Independence* (OUP, 1999). He co-edited, with Wolde Gossa Tadesse, *Property and Equality* (Berghahn, 2005) and *Symbolic Categories and Ritual Practices in Hunter-Gatherer Experiences* with K. Sugawara (African Studies Center, Kyoto, 2001). His research focuses on comparative hunter-gatherer studies, land ownership and the anthropology of space, morality and equality.

Thomas.Widlok@mpi.nl