ANTHROPOS

104.2009: 311–332

Speaking to the Ancestors

Religion as Interlocutory Interaction

Michael Singleton

Abstract. – Material from an indigenous manuscript, combined with fieldwork in Ubungu (Tanzania) and relating to what conventionally but questionably was styled "ancestor worship" could, less ethnocentrically and keeping closer to the empirical evidence, be more satisfactorily described as "speaking to the ancestors." Extrapolating from this case study, much of what still goes in Western circles, academic and otherwise, as "Primitive Religion," could be more credibly considered as interlocutory interaction. *[Tanzania, WaBungu, religion, personification, interlocution, interaction]*

Michael Singleton, professor emeritus at the Catholic University in Louvain, Belgium. – Studied theology and philosophy (Rome) and social anthropology (Oxford); was director of the Institute for Environmental Studies at the University of Dakar and founder of the Laboratory of Prospective Anthropology in the University of Louvain. – Did fieldwork in most regions of Africa. – Amongst his more recent books are: "Amateurs à chiens de Dakar. Plaidoyer pour un interprétariat anthropologique" (Louvain la Neuve 1998) and "Critique de l'ethnocentrisme" (Paris 2004). – See also References Cited.

1 Smallpox in Person

In 1976 *Anthropos* published an indigenous account of how, c. 1900, "Smallpox in Person" had made himself known and in no uncertain terms, to the WaBungu, a Bantu-speaking people established at the southern end of Lake Rukwa in Tanzania (Singleton 1976b). Consisting of a couple of paragraphs, the text had been excerpted from a Swahili manuscript, probably written in 1915 by Jusufu Kaswai, then working as teacher in the Catholic mission school of Tabora. In the late 1880s, the author had been redeemed as a young slave from the Congo by a White Father, Père Dromaux, who was also instrumental in his coming to the post of Galula founded in Ubungu in 1901. Unfortunately the first diary disappeared during the German occupation of the mission in March 1917. Employed as a teacher and catechist (*mwalimu*) at the mission, Jusufu had no particular theoretical bones to pick with the fancies of nineteenth-century scholars, lay or religious, as to the nature and function of primitive paganism. He was thus able to directly echo the language and the logic of precolonial indigenous actors confronted with a phenomenon of epidemic proportions such as smallpox.

His exquisitely calligraphed manuscript, filling an entire exercise book, addressed itself mainly to the threat which Islam then posed upcountry to German colonial rule as well as to the spread of civilized Christianity (Singleton 2002b). It had apparently been requested by Fr. Bösch, a young catholic missionary, recently arrived in Tabora, the capital of upcountry Tanzania. This Swiss White Father was to author a classic monograph on the Wanyamwezi (1930) thanks to informants of Kaswai's calibre. Writing thus at the behest of and for Europeans, Kaswai (who had spent a couple of years in a seminary at Trier in Germany), quite naturally chose to entitle the section on the epidemic with an abstractly anonymous and ethnocentrically essentialist expression: "The Disease of Smallpox" (*Ugongwa wa ndui*). But in his very first sentence, witnessing faithfully to what the locals had told him, he declares "Smallpox to be a person" (*Ndui ni mtu*). The threshold which separates ordinary

language from scholarly and scientific discourse is that which divides the effectively existential from the seemingly essential.

Despite its anecdotic appearance, Kaswai's phrase presents us with one of those rare pearls revelatory of what "religion" really was for Africans before their minds were radically and rapidly washed clean of ancestral identities by the steamrolling zeal of the first wave of evangelists. It is not necessary to subscribe to the theories of Frazer or Lévy-Bruhl on the mistaken science or the participatory mysticism of the primitive mind, to realize that it was highly unlikely the WaBungu would have already identified smallpox with something similar to what modern medicine deems to be a purely natural phenomenon. They knew, of course, that smallpox was a disease (*ugongwa*) but, rightly or wrongly, they could not leave it at that. They lived at a time and in a place when people related to one another and to the world at large by word of mouth and in keeping with models of and for action whose elements were taken from the realm where they felt most at home and at ease, namely that of everyday human relationships. The term will be explained further but for the moment their frame of mind could be more adequately described as "personalistic" rather than "animistic". The WaBungu did not so much want to know what smallpox was but who might be behind the epidemic and even who smallpox was in person. To articulate this immediately pressing rather than purely philosophical need, the WaBungu had at their disposition a whole arsenal of personalized terms, ancient and modern, enabling them to speak about their encounters with and experience of such events and entities as the smallpox epidemic in question. A priori, they could have told Kaswai that Smallpox was an ancestral shade (*mizimu*) or one of the "lesser divinities" (*miungu*). Alternatively they could have made reference to spirits in general using the Swahili *roho* (a word of Arabic and ultimately Semitic origin – cf. the Biblical *ruah*). More circumstantially they could have referred to the "possessive" *ngulu* spirits then invading Ubungu from Usafwa. They could even have conjectured that the disease had been manipulated by witchcraft (*uchawi*) or teleguided upon them by inimical sorcerers (*walozi*). But spontaneously and therefore highly significantly, Kaswai's interlocutors chose to say that whatever else it might be or be associated with, Smallpox (*ndui*) was primordially a person (*mtu*). For them Smallpox was fundamentally no less but no more than someone possessed of a mind and will of his own. Consequently and more importantly, Smallpox was an individual interlocutor with whom it was possible to negotiate some form of mutually suitable solution to a critical situation. Treating with Smallpox, the discussion would turn around making a worsening conjuncture at least slightly better. When dealing, as we will shortly see, with somebody more congenial than Smallpox, such as the shade of a departed chief, then it could even be talk of how to get the best of things.

We must be careful, however, not to automatically assume that people such as the WaBungu *grosso modo* shared our present understanding of what it means and takes to be human. Whom did Bantu speakers have in mind when they exchanged with a *mtu*? On the ambiguous if not mistaken grounds that fundamental concepts are substantially similar in all cultures, an earlier generation of ethnologists (especially those of ecclesiastical extraction), closely followed by the first generation of African philosophers and theologians, took to aligning *mtu* on what their scholastic mentors had decreed human nature essentially to be. At first sight, certain appearances pleaded in their favour. To specify the sex of the person met, a Bantuphone has to add either *dume* (male) or *kike* (female) to *mtu*. The old and the young, natives and foreigners could all be grouped as *watu* (the plural of *mtu* – also transcribed as *bantu*). By prefixing a *u* to the root *-ntu*, it was even possible to speak of humans in general. But that the resulting term *u(m)untu* corresponds to the Western idea of humankind and even to the metaphysical notion of human nature cannot be taken for granted. In terms of ethnographic evidence and epistemological considerations bearing on common sense language games, *umuntu* might more plausibly mean no more than "people in general" as distinct from "spirits" or animals. None the less it could seem at first sight (*dato non concesso*) that Bantu philosophy, in exactly the same way as perennial philosophy itself, abstracted from accidental aspects to focus on an underlying common substance, presumed to be ontologically identical in all individuals.

It is not our intention to prove here that "abstraction" understood as "the extraction of an essence from epiphenomena," far from being a transcultural process common to the human mind is merely medieval metaphysics by another name. We will simply state some facts and affirm our own position. The procedure is quite unknown in ancient China or pre-Columbian America. Darwinian generalization is one thing, Aristotelian abstraction is quite another. No living creature would survive for long in the struggle for life without recourse to generalities. But such common denominator realizations should not be confused with what some biologists

call "natural kinds" or with what some metaphysicians designate as "essential natures." Scientists have questioned the existence of biological species (Le Guyader 2002) above and beyond individual specimens (Guerci 2007). Some philosophers wonder whether substances are onto-epistemologically for real (Clark 1994). Phenomenologists especially, identify the really real with ongoing, individual relationships and treat the idea of solipsistic substances being related accidentally, as an ontological illusion (Marion 1997). However, though the nominalistic taking of situated particulars as the primordial fact could be far more philosophically plausible than seeing singularities as accidental avatars of shared essences, some form of categorical regrouping is crucial for concrete survival. Take the dangers faced by monkeys. On philosophic principle it could be the case that each snake and every eagle espied by a given monkey should be called by its unique proper name. But if monkeys had not learnt to howl high facing a threat from on high and low when confronted with a menace from below, very few would still be around to tell the tale! Likewise it was and is vitally necessary for the actors of any given human culture to decide which particulars encountered be treated as fellow humans and which be catalogued as either supra- or infrahuman. But this need to generalize does not entail that, from the moment men were men, they have been possessed of substantially the same idea as to what being human involves or as to who warrants being considered human. For the Asmat of Papua New Guinea, the inhabitants of neighbouring villages were already considered to be comestibles. For the Jaïn of India, on the other hand, insects merit as much respect as members of one's family. For some Westerners and not only Catholics, if abortion and euthanasia are intrinsically immoral, it is because man is metaphysically man from the instant of conception to the moment of death. For many (post)modern philosophers, on the other hand, "man" is at the most a purely conventional concept whose credibility stems not from any intrinsically identifiable features but from the cultural cause it was created to defend – such as preventing the reoccurrence of Auschwitz or treating a deeply handicapped infant more humanely than an intelligent chimpanzee. For their part, anthropologists have shown how human logics in Africa are far more complex and subtle than the simplistic body/soul dichotomy prevalent in the West. Echoing my own field experiences: if the WaKonongo of Tanzania had their own good reasons to commit infanticide (Singleton 2004), if growing old in Ukonongo meant becoming more and more human (especially if one were male – Singleton 2008), if a MuKonongo could readily be transformed into a lion (Singleton 1989), it was because the WaKonongo had little or no inkling of what I, as a typical European, understood by a divinely created soul, by *being* basically human as opposed to *becoming* increasingly more human or by the unbridgeable gap between human and animal natures (Singleton 2002a).

Nor is it the moment to suggest that Bantu philosophy, whatever its intrinsic merits (De Craemer 1977), relates as little to the praxis of ordinary Africans as Kantian idealism or Humean realism did to the common sense of men in the streets of Königsberg or Edinburgh. Our introductory remarks are intended merely to recall the perils of translation. Though paying lip service to the hackneyed cliché *traduttore traditore*, we often glibly assume that cultures simply give superficial shades of meaning to a natural base. The English speak of "man" and the French of "*homme*," the Arabs talk of "*insan*" and the Swahili of "*mtu*" but whatever the words used, we instinctively feel that they refer basically to one and the same thing. But "things" are not so simple! For one species of onto-epistemologists, words themselves are not only things but are largely responsible for the realization of the things they talk about. If there is no such thing as "being human", naturally "already out there now for real," simply awaiting cultural labelling, then, until proof to the contrary, *mtu* cannot be rendered, without further ado, as the Bantu equivalent of the Anglo-Saxon "man."

Such a priori affirmations of intercultural incompatibility gain in credibility when confronted with a posteriori evidence. Take, for instance, a key actor of the Bantu-speaking world, the *mganga*. In the early days of imperialism, the term was disparagingly translated as "witch doctor" or "charlatan," then more sympathetically as "native healer" and finally, today, by "tradipractitioner." But all these translations ethnocentrically assume that the *mganga* essentially belongs to the transcultural field of health and medicine and thus, albeit unknowingly and in an amateur fashion, was a doctor of sorts. Unfortunately, of late, harassed by medical anthropologists and ethnopharmacists, the *waganga* have taken to (re)presenting themselves as medical practitioners. However, in purely ethnographic terms, not only what they do but even what they say makes them at once far more and far less than "indigenous medics." WaKomando, the local village "exorcist" of the WaKonongo (my automatic corrector refuses the more apposite "adorcist"), once asked that should I pass through

Mpanda, I go and obtain some anti-*shetani* or spirit "medicine" (*uganga*) from Ngamila, a *mganga* who had a shop near the market place of this mushrooming new town. The self-taught and self-proclaimed "Doctor," having just had his *uganga* sampled by a team of pharmacists from the University of Dar es Salaam, on hearing my request for remedies to get the better of spirit possession, protested that he was a herbalist not a magician, healing by plants and not by incantations. None the less, on the roneotyped list of the forty or more *ugongwa* for which he claimed to have the necessary *uganga* or remedy, figured such non-medical issues as protecting cattle from theft or winning the affections of one's neighbour's wife! Ngamila concluded his list with a panacea to beat all panaceas: "whatever your problem (*shida*) come and see me and I will fix it" (Singleton 1976a)!

We might smile at this, to our mind, weird mix of real diseases and sometimes rather dubious difficulties but in his clients' eyes Ngamila was quite within his rights in thus ranging far from the strictly medical field and only doing the job they expected him to do. Initially I too mistook the *waganga* of my village for primitive physicians. But when they functioned as rainmakers for the community, as multipliers of game for hunters, as protectors of fields from warthogs sent by sorcerers, I began to realize to what extent relocating them in our biomedical sphere, no matter how well intentioned, was not only ethnocentric but ethnocidal (Singleton 2005). Bad translations can prove lethal! The least traitorous translation of *mganga* I could finally think of was "remedial clairvoyant": whatever the problem (physical health being just one amongst many), a *mganga* can clearly see what is the matter and come up with the appropriate remedy (*uganga*).

Mistranslation leads not only to anthropological but also to theological misunderstanding. The republication of the works of Jousse (2008) reminds us that what rabbi Yeshoua said in Aramaic was transformed almost out of recognition first by its Greek then by its Latin and finally English translations. The rather fad "Do this in memory of me" sounded originally as "what I have done, repeat it by way of gestic aide-mémoire" and the rather soppy "disciple whom Jesus loved" simply meant "the learner Yeshoua preferred" (Jousse 2008: 103, 489). One final cautionary tale. It being intrinsically impossible from the point of view of colonial law that *Homo sapiens* should really become *Panthera leo*, Africans who imagined themselves as "lion-men" (*simba mtu*) were either classed as infantile idiots or condemned as criminal offenders (Singleton 1989). But no African having in mind this peculiarly Western understanding of humanity and animality, there was no reason why in Africa a *mtu* should not find himself metamorphosed into a *simba*.

Consequently, whatever an expression such as *ndui ni mtu* might mean, it cannot mean that what the Western world describes as smallpox can also be what it defines as a human being. Since it was what the WaBungu said the phrase, "Smallpox is a person" can only rightly mean what they and not we understood by "being a person" – namely, someone with whom one could talk things over. A more adequate approximation to this meaning of *mtu* will be proposed in our concluding section. First, however, we will present ethnographic data which suggest that not only a phenomenon such as a smallpox epidemic was "personified" but that the spirits of the departed (which is not to say the deceased!) were also identified with personal interlocutors.

2 Chief Karolo of the WaBungu

On the morning of Saturday, September 9th, 1972, in search of information about the afore-mentioned Jusufu Kaswai, I found myself reading the episode from his manuscript concerning Smallpox to Mwene (Chief) Karolo (Charles) Ilonga, a former chief of the WaBungu, then residing in his compound at Mwambani, on a spur overlooking a sacred pool at the foot of a cleft in the Rukwa valley escarpment. Hardly had I begun when, much moved, he interrupted me declaring that he had participated as a small boy in the momentous events I was recounting. Karolo himself had met with Smallpox in the person of an exceedingly unkempt old man – just as others on the same occasion had encountered Smallpox in the person of a smart young man. Seventy years on, the venerable old chief relived in "gratuitous" detail the terrible episode of that day: "We were two or three children out herding goats and sheep near Ntembo village and resting in the shade of an *umbale* tree [*Raphia ruffia*?] when that dirty old man accosted us – a companion thought it was a relative of his but in fact it was Smallpox in person; after asking his way to Ntembo, he disappeared mysteriously as did the young man bearing a spear and beating a drum who had also requested to be accompanied to Ntembo by a certain Hila and his wife, Sahasyova, who was carrying a child on her back."

To be honest, unlike Kaswai's informants, Karolo himself did not speak to me of Ndui as a person but rather as a devil, *shetani*, insisting that

devilry had been rampant in the region before the coming of Christianity. Though a pagan at the time of his meeting with Smallpox, Karolo (Ilonga by his family name) had enthusiastically embraced the catholic faith as a young man – having had Kaswai as his mentor. On the eve of the First World War, he had worked as a recruiting agent for a Greek entrepreneur, Mr. Lucas, then in charge of constructing the difficult, Malagarasi swampy section of the Tabora to Kigoma railway. The Galula diarist noted on 02. 06. 1912 that 50 men had left to work on the railway. While on leave in Ujiji (a mid-nineteenth-century port on Lake Tanganyika just south of Kigoma, the railway terminal), Karolo had met the superior of Galula, Fr. Hörner, who upbraided him for leaving his wife Teresa and their child alone at home for so long. The priest urged Karolo to accompany him back to Galula. Declining an offer of Mr. Lucas to become the overseer of the work squad destined to build a hotel in Dar es Salaam, Karolo returned home to be made catechist two weeks later just as war broke out. "Padri Hörner saved my life," he said, "for those who stayed to work on the railway lost everything." His overseeing work on the railway was to stand him in good stead during colonial times. Karolo was particularly proud of having built the road down the escarpment from Mkwajuni to Mwambani in record time – three weeks instead of the six months programmed by the Public Works engineer. He had called upon each headman (*jumbe*) and their people to finish their allotted section. The District Commissioner could not believe his ears when told that the road was ready to be inaugurated.

While far from being more Catholic than the pope, Mwene Karolo was, understandably at almost ninety years of age, of an older, stricter generation. Still active in parish affairs, he had, I was told, recently obliged two young lay missionaries to exchange their miniskirts for something a little longer! No more fanatical or puritanical, however, than others of his generation and more concerned than most with the history and customs of his people, Karolo, as a local worthy, was not and had never needed to be a critically minded scholar. Keeping in mind with whom he happened to be speaking that Saturday morning in 1972 (a 33-year-old White Father cum anthropologist), it is interesting to note the topics which Karolo, impressively imposing but gentlemanly retiring, spontaneously chose to raise. I had long given up harassing people with my questions, preferring, observant participation apart, simply to prod my interlocutors in the direction they seemed to be taking themselves.

After mass on Sunday, the day following the long morning we had spent together, Mwene Karolo, in the company of his cousin, born the same day as he, and a man even older than they, reminisced in my presence with an ancient catechist from Mkulwe about the heroic days of the mission. The first catechist of Galula, Jakobo Kanyombwe, had been attacked one day by a Moravian missionary, Krupp, whom he had chanced to meet in front of this latter's tent. Despite Krupp's immense girth, Jakobo grabbed him by the waist but the German called his boys to the rescue and they beat up the Catholic catechist. As Jakobo's wife was accompanying him, she ran to tell Mwene Karolo of the incident. He in turn rushed off to inform Padili Mlefu (the "tall Father," the nickname given to Dromaux). The missionary sent an armed squad, led by a Brother, in pursuit of the Moravian but he had already fled back to base in Utengule (a key pioneering Protestant mission in Usafwa – Wright 1971). The affair (*kezi*) was apparently brought to the attention of the German officers in Langenburg (Tukuyu). Summonsed by them to choose between the Moravians and the Catholics, Karolo had opted without hesitation for Dromaux. While chief in Ubungu he had ordered a Moravian chapel to be demolished as the Protestants had built it elsewhere than on the plot he had designated. Kidabulo village in Ubungu was divided into two halves, one for the Catholics, one for the Moravians. The group of elders also talked that morning of another White Father, a German called "Amberg": probably Fr. Hamberger who took Jusufu Kaswai to the seminary in Trier hoping he would become the first "native priest" of the region. They visited the Vatican on their way to Germany, receiving a rosary from the pope.

In our ecumenical times and in an irenic age when at least in Europe Christianity is no longer a battle field, an effort of memory must be made to recall the extent to which both at home and abroad, Protestants and Catholics not only engaged in virulent polemics but could also come violently to blows. In the large mill town of Preston in the industrial northwest of England, my Catholic parents, though of pure English stock, remembered being whipped as Irish immigrants, on St. Patrick's Day and as young boys in the late 1940s we would present ourselves in gangs in front of Protestant schools so to provoke our counterparts to running fights. In the region of Sikonge where I learnt Swahili in 1969, Catholics and Moravians still had their respective and exclusive routes in the bush.

In the field of politics, former Chief Karolo can hardly be expected to have taken kindly to Nyere-

re's having abolished customary chiefs. "I hold my tongue during meetings" he told me, "not out of the fear which grips many but to avoid TANU authorities thinking I am still hankering after power" (the Tanganyika African National Union [TANU] being at the time Tanzania's one and only party). He regretted the coming of socialism but he was far from being the only one to do so of his generation. "In colonial times the District Commissioner would come at harvest time and let the Indian merchants squabble amongst themselves thus giving us a good price for our cash crops – now everything just gets more and more expensive." I dared not tell him or others with similar opinions (some elderly WaKonongo had expressed the hope that my coming signalled the return of the Europeans!), that I had expressly come to Tanzania to share in the *ujamaa* experience. Karolo like many of his age who had lived most of their lives under White rule – be it that of the White Fathers or the English administrators – begged to differ, to say the least, with TANU's derogatory talk of "blood sucking" expatriates (*wanyonyagi*): "Who taught us everything (*nani alituelimisha*)?" he expostulated. It is a fact that unlike the neighbouring colonies of Kenya and Uganda, dominated by White settlers, Tanganyika being a mandated territory, though lacking in imperial investment, had been run by Europeans who, as a rule, as Karolo said, had had "the people's interests at heart." Unfortunately too, in the early 1970s, through no fault of Nyerere's, materially things had gone from bad to worse.

3 WaBungu Religion

If I have sketched out this summary portrait of Mwene Karolo, it is so as to enable the reader to add the necessary pinch of critical salt to the written as well as oral information he offered me. For during our conversation, perhaps suitably impressed by my respectful interest for ancestral ways, Mwene Karolo showed me two school exercise books. The first contained a 12 page manuscript which he had composed under the title "*Sheria ya Ndoa ya nchi ya waWungu*" (Customary Marriage amongst the WaBungu). We exchanged our thoughts about bride wealth (*mali*). The contamination of the customary wedding gifts by considerations of hard cash was somewhat of a burning issue at the time. Formerly the token exchange had consisted of fowls and/or hoes. Karolo lamented the introduction of money into the traditional transaction. The second, also from his pen, was an 8 page manuscript dated from 1956 dedicated to the "*Imani ya waWungu kwa mzimu yao na Ibada yao juu ya Mizimu*" (The WaBungu's Belief Concerning Their (Ancestor) Spirits and the Way They Worship Them). He had no objection to my reading it and copying down the more pertinent passages. I somewhat freely translate and incorporate them in what follows. The reader will find in an annex the more relevant passages in the original Swahili (Appendix 1).

The WaBungu, writes Karolo, knew about God (Mungu) whom they called *Umulungu*, *Umbambe, Unakaumba wa vindu vyosi: kilima cha Kwimba ni Mbingu ya waWungu* (God, the Creator who created all things: the mountain of Kwimba is Heaven for the WaBungu – or, alternatively, the Heaven of the WaBungu). Open-minded, highly intelligent, well travelled, and experienced in the ways of the world, Karolo none the less, to my mind at least, had allowed the conventional Catholicism of his age to feed back into his (re)presentation of Bungu customs. In particular, his new found monotheistic faith (but the WaBungu could have already been nominally familiar with monotheism owing to their contacts with Islamic traders and slavers prior to the arrival of Christian missionaries [Shorter 1972: 257, 286]) led him to relate ancestral spirits to God as intermediary intercessors. Monotheism, however, is a recent and rare phenomenon in the history of religions (Debray 2003). Moreover, one can instance Africanists who, as Catholic missionaries or converts to Catholicism can hardly be suspected of avowed agnosticism let alone aggressive atheism, have experienced great difficulties in identifying the supreme symbol of African religions with what nineteenth-century Christianity understood as God.[1] Karolo was far from being the only African I met who read back into his ancestral past the doctrinal formulas of the missionaries' faith. Another striking example of such *Hineininterpretierung* was the 77-year-old *mtemi* Katenga of Iswangalla, telling me 03. 11. 1972 that two small elephant tusks had formerly been placed in the chief's grave – *asiende mbele ya Mungu mikono tupu* – "to prevent him from entering God's presence empty handed!"

None the less, when all is said and done, despite his faith having retroacted theologically and linguistically upon his description of Bungu religion, what Chief Ilonga had written over the years and what he had to say during our lengthy exchange, rings ethnographically true between and even on the lines. His own information, he told me, had been acquired by questioning his father and grand-

1 Maurier et Rodegem (1975); Thiel (1977); Evans-Pritchard (1962); Singleton (1972).

father together with other practicing pagans about the beliefs and behaviour of yester yore WaBungu. Without being a "reactionary traditionalist," holding out against Christian civilization as some chiefs of the region had at least initially done, Karolo, having been elected chief or *mwene*, had maintained such customs as were compatible with his having been a mission teacher and with his continuing to be a convinced Catholic.

It was from the WaKonongo (famous smiths of the region), he said, that the WaBungu obtained such iron goods as spears and hoes (the *khonongo* with whom the WaKonongo were associated, was a heart shaped tool especially adapted to work in forest clearings). Amongst these implements figured large ceremonial hoes used in rain making ceremonies directed by the chiefs (cf. Appendix 2). Chiefly regalia also included a three-legged stool, an iron staff, capped with head-shaped node, a three-pronged spear or trident, the circular forehead, and arm ornaments (*vibangwa*) known throughout the whole of Eastern Africa, elaborated from the base of a large conical shell. These sacred objects were stored in a baobab tree near Maleza village and were only brought out on the day the new chief was enthroned. As their original emplacement had been submerged by the rising waters of Lake Rukwa, Karolo had transferred the remnants of three ceremonial hoes to Maleza which were still being ceremoniously tended to in the early 1970s on a spot he had marked with three stones.

Originating from Usagara in the east not far from the coast, the people who would end up by being labelled as the WaBungu, after a stay amongst the neighbouring WaKimbu (Shorter 1972), settled on the top of Kwimba, a tabletop mountain on the escarpment overlooking Lake Rukwa. The site, according to Bungu tradition, was untouched by human hands, no visible trace of hunter-gatherers as we would put it. Though Mwene Karolo had authored a history of the WaBungu reaching back some 200 years (Finch 1959), he declares in this present manuscript that before reaching Kwimba there is no precise information (*habari safi*) about their religion (*dini*).

Today's anthropologist would be tempted to remark that this absence of clear-cut "religious" data answers to the presence of something quite other than what the author had in mind by "religion." There being no term in the local language for what the first missionaries understood by "religion," they had had recourse to the Swahili-Arabic word *dini* to indicate what, as nineteenth-century Europeans, they identified as the field and function of religious belief and behaviour. Strictly speaking, however, this borrowing between one world religion (Islam) and another (Christianity) is already interculturally equivocal. For not only etymologically but even essentially, Islamic religion (*din*) is not Christian faith (*fides*). The habitual but ethnocentric translation of the Torah or the Sharia by "law" as if they were not the whole but merely a part of Judaism or Islam in the same way as Canon Law is but one aspect of the Church, constitutes a "good" example of how intrinsically irreducible socio-historic singularities can be sacrificed in the cause of supposedly substantial but possibly spurious similarities. A history of religions can only constitute a plausible enterprise if "religion" itself represents a univocal reality, significantly and solidly common to all human cultures (for an excellent, recent survey of theories of religion thus sectorally and substantially understood cf. Comba 2008). But this paradigmatic presupposition is far from being shared by all scholars and not only by those who severely restrict religion *stricte sensu* to a particular place and time in history (Veyne 1971). For it is empirically obvious that if such categories as economics, politics, and religion fit some of the facts of modern Western civilization, they become rapidly problematic in Western history itself and increasingly irrelevant to cross-cultural understanding. It is not merely a question of the "primitive" and consequently somewhat embryonic forms of religion *versus* their fully-fledged manifestations in the great civilizations of history. If the religious mind of the West finds itself at home in the highly sophisticated religions of Mesopotamia, it remains at a loss faced with the lack of its kind religion in such an equally "superior" civilization as that of Mohenjo-Daro in the Indus valley.

It is not surprising then that Mwene Karolo experienced difficulty in finding traces of what he had been led to believe as fundamentally "religious" in Bungu history. To (un)consciously save his ancestors for what he no doubt thought the only monotheistic future possible for a civilized people, he mentioned almost in an *a parte* that they too had believed in God the Creator. But the African "High God" being *otiosus*, Karolo's text turns almost entirely around the *mizimu*. Let us translate this term provisionally as "spirits of the ancestors." The distinction made by some but not all indigenous informants between the "spirits of their ancestors" and "ancestral spirits" is also a moot point amongst anthropologists. But if I am not mistaken, a consensus seems to be emerging whereby ancestral spirits can be traced back, at least by academic analysis, to human beings. Though the likes of Charlemagne acquire superhuman traits in the popular mind, his-

torically speaking they were simply outstanding individuals. Likewise despite their extraordinary features, the anthropologist must be wary of literally divinising African spirits who overtime have become adrift from their ancestral anchorage.

When the first Europeans arrived on the scene, they could not fail to remark upon the presence of small shrines (often in the shape of miniaturized huts), close to domestic dwellings or slightly apart in the bush (in this case usually dedicated to royal ancestors). Those who took the trouble to enquire more closely as to their meaning and function learnt that the shades of some of the departed had been (re)located there, so as to be able to receive the offerings of their descendents: a calabash of *pombe* (native beer) or some more consequent gift such as a hen or a goat. The phenomenon was basically interpreted as "the worship of ancestor spirits" expressed notably by ritual sacrifice, accompanied with invocations destined to obtain blessings from or to repair damage done by the spirits in question. Some observers, with the manes of ancient Rome in mind, spoke of the "defied souls of the dead." Missionaries hesitated between a diabolically inspired counterfeit religion and a providentially provided natural stepping-stone towards a series of what they then believed to be revealed supernatural truths such as the souls in Purgatory, the intercessory power of Saints, and eternal life in Heaven. This kind of interpretation appeared to be confirmed by the fact that conversion to Christian civilization seemed to spell the demise of ancestor worship and not only its taking cover, going underground, or being marginalized.

But though once widespread, this reading of the phenomena now seems to represent an ethnocentric escalation somewhat removed from the thoughts which a more realistic recognition of the data suggest. For, taken at their face value, the ethnographic evidence did not speak directly of religious ritual but simply of ceremonious conduct. To the extent they lend themselves to a "religious" interpretation, it is in a fundamentally sociological rather than a theological sense. By definition a theologian in general is interested in God and a Christian theologian in particular concerned with such realities as worship and the soul. But if an aspiration to enjoy individual immortality thanks to an immaterial soul had been at least implicitly at stake in the form of "primitive religion" represented by "ancestral beliefs," then why was it that not all the deceased but only the more noteworthy (namely male elders) and even those who had been more difficult to manage while still alive, actively became ancestors? If "ancestor worship" was potentially about the communion of the saved, spending eternal life in the purely spiritual contemplation of the Godhead, then why did the *mizimu*, the departed merely find themselves below, *kuzimuni* (village of the dead), amongst themselves, the bad as well as the good, not very far away from the village they had left behind, living more or less as they had done while on earth rather than under it?

I recently met a renowned Italian anthropologist. He had just been invited to assist at the transfer of his father's bones to a niche where his mother's remains were deposited. Moved, the supervising official allowed my friend to effect the operation himself. When I reminded my colleague of how in Madagascar descendants annually revisited the bones of their ancestors, he spoke in turn of second burial rites. Though not particularly practising, like most inhabitants of the papal peninsula, my interlocutor was psychosociologically steeped in Catholicism. He admitted, however, that the only thoughts, which on that occasion had sprung spontaneously to his mind, were how fitting it was that he, who as a child had been affectionately held in his father's arms, was now able to hold him thus in return. Not for a moment did he think of God or his father's eternal whereabouts and even less of his own immortal soul. Why is it then when dealing with "ancestor worshippers", a former generation of anthropologist felt obliged to raise such ethnocentrically eccentric religious issues?

It would be rewarding to speculate on the reasons for what now seems to be the sheer nonsense made out of the data collected in situ. The point is not that God, the soul, or Heaven are meaningless but simply that they are in no way the meaning of the convictions and comportment relating to the *mizimu*. I suspect the misinterpretation could be due to the fact that few observers, even the most participant, rarely experienced in the flesh the fundamental fact of ancestral village life: namely, that the older one became in rural society, the more useful one proved to be for the common good and collective survival. Having cultivated with the Wa-Konongo (Singleton 1975) to the point of becoming pragmatically "self-reliant" (*kujitegemea* being what Nyerere requested of all living in Tanzania), having been deeply involved with the people of Mapili where I dwelt, to the extent of belonging to the council of the elders (*wazee*), adorcising the possessed and participating in witchcraft trials, having made myself mystically useful by celebrating mass to make rain and get rid of sorcerers, I think I can safely say that without the presence and assistance of the elderly, the struggle for life would have been materially, morally, and "meta-

physically" impossible. That on the summit of the demographic pyramid the senior citizens amounted to no more than a residual percentage, whereas in modern society the over sixties constitute a third of what has become a column, is neither here nor there. What counts is that everyone, including subaltern groups such as the women and the young, realistically recognized that gerontocracy guaranteed their chances of survival far more than any other form of social organization. Older people knew by experience which soil to till with profit and where the game took refuge; over time they had suffered loss of small children and overcome neighbourhood strife; on the points of returning to the village of the "living dead," they could obtain from these latter a reasonable price for the usufruct of the goods (such as the rain and the game, the fertility of the fields, and the fecundity of the women) of which the *mizimu* were the rightful if somewhat finicky owners. That times can change, that knowledge and consequently power and the right to greater rewards have now shifted in the direction of the rising generation, is one thing and a thing which can at least temporarily lead to intergenerational conflict (Singleton 2002c; Cambron et Delabie 2008). But another thing was the pre-colonial situation where the fittest on whom survival depended were the aged, living and departed.

Two more crucial considerations for our thesis emerge from my own experience. The first is that there was not much love lost between the generations – "love" in the sense of gratuitous fondness, unreservedly expressed. The reason being quite simple: there was too much vitally at stake to permit of intergenerational or even intersexual familiarity of the kind which informal societies such as Pygmy bands or hippy communes can foster (Douglas 1974). Amongst the WaKonongo, sons and daughters, even when adults and married, continued to respect their ageing parents and especially their father in a way which we no longer reserve even for our presidents and popes! They were given the best of what was available (reminding me of my grandfather's generation as breadwinners in the most literal sense of the term, being generously fed on meat while their wives and children at the most "enjoyed" token portions). People would go on bended knees to greet them and no one would ever dare contradict them openly. What many observers surprisingly failed to note was that this kind of ceremonious reverence bordering on obsequiousness was much of a kind with the ceremonial offerings made to enshrined *mizimu*. The slight and readily explainable differences between the marks of recognition addressed to living seniors and the formal respects paid to (some of) the departed elders do not warrant dividing the former from the latter in terms of this worldly profane politeness *versus* other worldly religious rituals. Why should the presenting of a calabash of beer to a living elder be described as merely "ceremonious" whereas the pouring of *pombe* into a potsherd representing the same elder (returned from the village of the living dead and enshrined in the homestead of his descendants) is categorized as religiously "ritual"?

4 Ancestral Religion as Binding Bonding

At this point of my argument I find myself in something of a quandary. Initially it was as a reader of contexts authored by the Africans themselves that I learnt to radically question my own culture's understanding of religion. Rereading the manuscript of Mwene Karolo forty years on merely dotted the "i"s and crossed the "t"s of a life spent in and around African religion. Critics might say that at this stage it would be more pedagogical to simply present Karolo's text with a strict minimum of contextualizing the commentary and let the reader make up his own mind as to its theoretical implications. If I might be allowed to mix metaphors, at the risk of putting the hermeneutical cart before the empirical horse by letting the conceptual cat immediately out of the bag, I prefer to present the reader from the outset with a pair of paradigmatic spectacles whose corrective lenses should enable him to see clearly the wood beyond the trees.

We have seen that the empirical anchorage of ceremonial courtesy towards certain departed elders makes the conventional category of ancestor worship as ghostly as the Flying Dutchman. Likewise the only sense in which what Karolo has to say about the *mizimu* could be dubbed "religious" is that indicated by one etymology of religion as *religare* or "being bound together" – another being the rather elitist, intellectualist alternative of *relegere* "a reading in of meaning." If only for etymological motives, I prefer to retain the term "religion" rather than substitute some other expression for it as Debray proposes (2005). As the reader will shortly realize, the WaBungu, in common with their counterparts throughout the African continent, networked with the more crucial and consequential of their departed elders. In establishing reciprocal but asymmetrical ob*liga*tions or binding links between villagers past and present (note the recurrence of *ligare*), the living counted on the "dead" to come up with the basic necessities of life: health and wealth, the rains and game, the fertility of women and the

fecundity of the fields. If this religious relationship, individual and/or collective, appears asymmetrical or somewhat one-sided, it is because what is offered (*do ut des*) – a calabash of beer or some animal or other (even, on occasion, a human being) – is more of a token when compared to what is required and obtained in return (health and wealth, etc.). "Health" (significantly *uzima* and thus associated with the *muzimu*), involves, as we have seen, far more than mere soundness of limb, and would be better rendered by "wholesomeness" or "being well physically, psychologically, socially, and ecologically."

The quintessential religion of ancestral Africa was, to our mind, most probably not much more and most surely not much less than the networked prolongation of exchange relationships involving personalized partners located just beyond the pale of that everyday dependence on the visible members of one's local community, which made life materially viable and minimally meaningful. In the absence of an orthodoxy magisterially managed by a clerical hierarchy responsible for the paternalistic production of a "popular religiosity," we are speaking of what can properly and quite simply be called the religion of the people (Singleton 1988). This is not to say that Africa was without idiosyncratically inspired individuals able to rival with their Christian or Islamic counterparts – the name of Ogotemmeli springs to mind as well as the anonymous furnishers of myths to scholars of the likes of a Frobenius or a de Heusch. But it is to say that they neither figured nor functioned in the way theologians do or did in such heavily institutionalized and jealously ideological systems of the size and shape of Roman Catholicism or Shiite Islam. Karolo's manuscript witnesses to the fact that if Africans could organize themselves religiously, they ignored religious organization if, by this, one means a spiritual, sacerdotal, and sacramental sphere, structurally and strictly apart from other walks of life such as politics or economics.

The network of exchange, which the West would conceptualize as involving human with supra-, para-, and infrahuman realities, is experienced by those actually involved, in terms of interlocution between actors who have a vested interest in offering what they can to their vis-à-vis. This (re)presentation of religion centred on profitable relationships enables us to make a more satisfactory sense of two confusing but partly correct clichés concerning Africa's philosophy and practice of the world. On the one hand, it was often asserted that in sub-Saharan Africa everything was religious and yet, on the other, that God was far from being part and parcel of religion. The first statement usually meant that everything was ritually mixed up with magic – from rainmaking to divine kingship via hunting and harvesting. In ethnographic fact everything was simply realized according to the spirit and structures of Maussian exchange. (Mauss himself had spoken of gift relationships, but it is better to reserve the term gift for the fact of purely gratuitous giving without any intention of receiving something in return.) The second affirmation states, that the supreme symbol of the African Weltanschauung though translated as "God," in contrast with his revealed monotheistic counterpart, was as singularly untouchable by humans as he was untouched by their lot. The remote High God, *deus otiosus*, was as unlike the God of biblical or koranic revelation, as Lévinas's "Infinitely beyond Totality" (2000; Singleton 2007). Whatever theologians of the negative way might opine, for ordinary Christians, God can be pressurized by prayer or influenced by saintly intercession – otherwise what would be the point of having masses said for the dead or deeming Mary to be the mediatrix of grace? The "God" of Africa could in no way be thus religiously obliged: he knew of no shrine, sacrifice, or priesthood. Invoked only *in extremis* and in desperation when every other source of human or "spiritual" succour had failed, he was also held responsible for misfortune and death when these could not be accounted for by malevolent witchcraft. Albeit paradoxically, from a purely phenomenological point of view, far from being at its centre, God in Africa was beyond all religion – a fact which, had they bothered to pay attention to it, would have comforted such Christian theologians as Bonhoeffer who pleaded for faith without religion or Kee who felt that the death of God did not spell the end of the gospel message (1971). Upstream in the same direction, our (re)definition of African religion would meet with the ontoepistemological approval of philosophers for whom the real *is* relational or "religious" (Marion 1977). For phenomenologists, things do not exist primordially in and for themselves, only eventually relating and superficially to other substances by circumstance or choice, in keeping with Aristotelian category of accidental relationship. African religion being from the outset "allo-logic" or other orientated rather "ego-logic" or solipsistic, would also have met with the blessing of a Lévinas who saw identity as *being* essentially the response to and not an eventual responsibility for the Other. But less of Western philosophy more of the native facts! Back to Karolo!

5 "Spiritual" Wheeling and Dealing

Shifting agriculturalists (as the peoples of this region were), no matter how attached they might be to a particular place, cannot stay there forever. Hence we are not surprised to learn that despite its being heaven on earth, those who had settled on the summit of Kwimba eventually decided to go down the escarpment and found the village of Iwungu at the southern extremity of Lake Rukwa. This time, however, they were not the first to arrive on the spot and had to overcome the occupants already established there, the WaSangazila. None the less, Kwimba still being in everyone's mind and the place where the former pillars of Bungu society were buried, Mwene Wangu II, the first ruler of Uwungu, took to sending his elders with offerings back to the mountain, there to present these gifts to the *mizimu* or ancestral interlocutors. While not exactly mountainous, the region is quite hilly and "chiefs were traditionally buried on the summit of conspicuous hills in the forest" where they were said to have established their villages (Shorter 1972: 107).

Perhaps because he had never himself accomplished the ancestral ceremonies he learnt about by word of mouth, Mwene Karolo understandably preaches for his chiefly chapel. Moreover, he gives the impression that the people as a whole attended ancestral ceremonies. In fact, according to other informants, notably Jakobo Kasalama who was born and bred in the neighbouring (Konongo) kingdom of Uzina, the *mtemi* himself rarely offered directly to the *mizimu*. He could be present at his ancestors' graves (*mazimbo*) but left things to a master of ceremonies (*mwijukuu*, grand child or grand nephew and consequently of an alternating, second generation). An aged, well-informed chief, Mgalula of Mpanda, in neighbouring Ukonongo, told me (19. 10. 1972) that the grandchildren, who went to *tambika* (make propitiatory offering) at the *mazimbo* (accomplish the ceremonies at the graveyard) were a boy, carrying the ceremonial hoe (*sonsyo*), and a girl, bearing *pombe* – both being dressed in dark blue (*kaniki*). In any case, ordinary people did not assist at the proceedings. On the contrary, they barricaded themselves indoors for fear of encountering the specialists charged with rainmaking who processed to the site accompanied by members (the men being called *watembo* and the women *walombwe*) of a "secret" society, the Ukala. The religion of the people (but it was more *for* the people) did not encourage popular participation but confirmed the strictly stratified structures of ancestral society (yet another reason for not projecting onto "primitive" religion traits characteristic of what Christian theologians call the "People of God"). One cannot insist too strongly on the fact that over and above the extended family, Africans had the possibility of belonging to voluntary associations or better still ceremonial guilds, all or most of which were closely associated with chiefly power and consequently with such crucial ceremonies as rainmaking. A black sheep would be sacrificed on such occasions, the twin rain stones placed in potsherd and water made to bubble around them by blowing through straws, libations of *pombe* made (and plenty drunk!) by the select, small group of attendants who would also sound one or two ceremonial horns. According to theological theory, Catholics who undertake a pilgrimage to some Marian shrine or other are primarily supposed to be making their gratuitous devotions and not simply filing requests. But it is highly unlikely that the delegation of WaBungu sent to Kwimba were intent on anything other than persuading the "gods" to deliver the goods. Yet another basic difference between our religion and theirs!

The text gives the impression that Kwimba was abandoned by everyone in one fell swoop at the instigation of the chief, leaving the dead behind to fend for themselves. This might have been the case. But in my experience, shifting agriculturalists, rather than obeying the punctual orders of a chosen or charismatic leader to pack up their belongings and resettle together in some spot somewhat removed from their actual abode, simply move ahead rather haphazardly and almost unwittingly, in keeping with the varying needs of relatively autonomous, different family groupings. Though they are perhaps the most authentic of nomads in that they just keep going on, largely impervious to the past and surprisingly unconcerned about the future, being mainly intent on profiting fully from the present, people like the WaKonongo and the WaBungu do not behave as, for instance, transhumant Bedouins, moving backwards and forwards between seasonal encampments following fixed routes and strict orders.

After having overseen, then, the building of their new capital at Iwungu, the representatives of the people who now logically became the WaWungu, far from having definitively "weighed anchor" to use one of Ilonga's expressions (Shorter 1972: 194), knew that it was in their vital interest to keep in regular touch with those who had remained behind in the abandoned settlement (*hama*) of Kwimba: namely Mwene Wangu the First and other former worthies buried there. This pilgrimage, a return to the (re)sources, was made four times a year. The first took place in November when

the fields were being readied again for planting. The aim was to ask that rain be plentiful in view of the fresh agricultural year, to request blessings on the fields so that the harvest be abundant – in a word: that "the ancestral spirits ward off hunger (*mizimu inakingie njaa*)." For once the Christian calendar reflecting the climatic rhythms of Europe coincided with local conditions. All Saints and All Souls celebrated by the Church on the 1st and 2nd of November so as to baptize the Celtic new year and fertility festival of Samhain, fitted in nicely with the onset of the rains and the invocation of their ancestral proprietors in upcountry Tanzania. The second return visit marked the consummation of the first fruits – tokens of which were taken to the *mizimu* "to let them eat the new produce (*wale nyakula vipya*)." On the third occasion, at the end of the harvest, *pombe* or native beer was brought to the ancestors (*kusamaleza awazimu*) to thank them for having heeded the people's requests. (Karolo spoke of *ikuza*, which could be a reference to the cashing in of cash crops – an event, as we have seen, which he had at heart). The fourth and last was accomplished some time in September at the height of the dry season to invoke the protection of *mizimu* against disease and misfortune – polio (?) or dysentery (?), smallpox, pneumonia, hunger, locusts, and warfare (*sotoka, ndui, kukohoa, njaa, nzige na vita*). Like our winter, the dry season (*kiangazi*) was also the worse in terms of disease and death.

It was probably on this fourth occasion that before they left to fulfil their ceremonial duties at Kwimba, the chief of Uwungu convoked all concerned to assist at a salutary public sacrifice. The women were invited to attend bearing the rubbish (*takataka*) they had gathered from their dwellings in large potsherds (*vigai vya nyungu*). At 8:00 on the morning fixed, the Mwene and the whole population headed for a crossroads not far from the village (Figure 1). A completely white cock without any other marking whatsoever was produced (*inaletwa kuku jogoo mweupe kabisa asiyo na doa hata kidogo ni mweupe tu*). The phrase could hardly insist more strongly on the need for the fowl to be absolutely pure – the smallest black feather on an otherwise immaculate hen and vice versa could, I was told, jeopardise rainstopping or rainmaking rites. As any epistemologist will tell you, all paradigms, even the most scientific, have built in safety mechanism to explain away occasional failures, at least provisionally, in terms of purely empirical residues!

Once everyone is seated, the chief commences the ancestral liturgy (*ibaada yaani matambiko*) addressing himself to the ancestral spirits (*mizimu*) of Kwimba, i.e., of the chief and of all other elders. "You our forefathers found peace and prosperity in Kwimba, however, you left us who remain below (*duniani*) with many toils and troubles of all kinds; be that as it may, we come before you today with great respect and veneration, falling on ours knees before you, to implore greatly your protection and that you remove from us such mortal dangers as dysentery/polio and many other foul diseases which afflict people exceedingly. Moreover we implore you to protect us against locust, strife, and famine, that they not reach this land of ours, Ubungu. We beseech you that fertility increase greatly in our land, that people give frequently birth." On this occasion, commented Karolo, the chief requested many things so that his country enjoy health and wealth. While perhaps less sacred than other Bantu chiefs (so identified with well-being that any failing on their part meant death by ritual regicide), those of the region functioned far more as sacramental spokesmen (between the living and the "dead") than as primitive politicians.

I have deliberately translated *duniani* with the global but circumstantially ambiguous "below." Having likened Kwimba to if not identified with Heaven, Karolo speaks as if the living are not only down in the Rukwa valley but simply "on Earth" in a "Vale of Tears" as he would have heard everyday at mass. Though Karolo intended to echo the typical discourse traditionally delivered on such occasions by his forebears, when all is said and done, it is he who is speaking and at least partly under the unconscious influence of his Christian education. Translating *duniani* by "below," while not exactly reflecting what Karolo himself had in mind, probably renders more faithfully the ancestral frame of mind which would have been responsible for this kind of speech. The first WaBungu to colonize Iwungu might have fallen on difficult times and looked back nostalgically to what they imagined to have been and perhaps at least partly could have effectively been, the more favourable if not paradisiacal conditions on Mt Kwimba. But one thing is sure: according to the traditional understanding of their lot, the *mizimu* in *kuzimuni* (the village of the living dead, often located underground) did not find themselves in a Club Med and even less in a highly spiritual place, dedicated exclusively and entirely to the perpetual adoration of God! Whether even an omnipotent God could make mortals immortal is a moot metaphysical point. However, one thing for sure is that conceiving of afterlife in terms of a beatific vision, far from being evident to all cultures, is an ethnocentric effect peculiar to one cul-

ture in particular: the Greek. It was in Greece, that seeing took precedence over all other faculties; that "thanks" to slavery, theory triumphed over practice; that the intellect dictated right reason to instinctive imagination, to the will and to passions; that until spiritual pleasures won out definitively over material pursuits, the less attention paid to the demands of the flesh the more nobly human an individual became. Once again it is not for the anthropologist to decide which cultural conception of post mortem survival is the more credible. He can only point out the obvious fact that the more one thickens empirically these conceptions the more they become incompatible the one with the other. When the anthropologist is also an Africanist, he cannot but add that, ancestrally speaking, the afterlife Africans awaited had little or nothing in common with the hopes and expectations of conventional Christians in the nineteenth century.

One final point: speaking generally rather than reliving any particular occasion, Karolo gives the impression that as with the Christian feasts of Christmas or Easter, the kind of ceremony he describes took place at more or less fixed intervals on a regular, annual basis. But it is more than likely that such ceremonies were also enacted on ad hoc basis – persuading Smallpox, for instance, to remove himself elsewhere. In the aftermath of the First World War, the area was badly hit by the Spanish influenza and other plagues (notably that of locust), long before modern medicine or humanitarian aid were readily and massively available. Though I have no trace of the fact in my notes, I am almost sure that Karolo spoke to me of a specific way of dealing with Smallpox: victims would put their hands on a fowl which was then taken to a crossroads and told to make itself scarce in whatever direction it chose, provided it was not the one leading back to the village! In primitive religion, charity begins and ends at home and home is where one's ancestors, to the exclusion of one's neighbours, happen to be.

Recourse to the "spirits" of Kwimba could be had for conjunctural rather than recurrent reasons. Thus an entry in the diary of Galula for 24th April, 1912 notes that an important meeting has taken place at the chief's compound. It is said that a flag has been seen on top of the famous mountain and that a duck was born with four feet. What did all this portend? Is a sacrifice necessary? In any case fish had to be asked for as that year the River Songwe was only full of crocodiles. A propitiatory delegation was sent to Kwimba. It returned on 29th of the same month with the message that the chief should not leave his residence in Kadabulo, otherwise the river would dry up completely. Smallpox, says the diarist, is already affecting nearby Lupa coming from Kiwele and making many victims. According to the oracle (no doubt of Kwimba) it will pass by Galula (and in fact infant mortality was rife during the month of June). In so far as the fish were concerned, requests must be made to Umaliza who will return them to the river getting rid at the same time of the crocodiles. A further entry on 6th June the same year remarks that if there are no fish in the Songwe, it is because there are too many crosses and medals (i.e., Christian converts) in the region – a typical case of cultural change, in the eyes of traditionalists, causing climate change (and which forms a chapter of a forthcoming book; Singleton 2009).

After this introductory invocation, the chief takes the white cock in his hands saying: "You the ancestral shades of the chiefs of Kwimba together with other forebears [the author speaks of *wazee* usually meaning "elders" rather than of the *mizimu*] present yourselves before God to implore that He mercifully listen to all our supplications and execute our requests." He then skewers "the perfectly spotless, purely white cock" on a more than man-sized stick, sharpened at one end and planted upright in the earth. The cock figures as a vicarious sacrifice, standing in for the community, to protect all its members by taking upon itself in their stead all manner of sickness, death, famine, and strife. The vocabulary – *kusudi yetu, badala yetu*, "on our behalf," "in our place" – once again is probably reminiscent of a Catholic discourse about the redemptive self-immolation of Christ on the Cross, repeated sacramentally in the Sacrifice of the Mass. But there is no reason to doubt that such was the original significance of this type of pagan sacrifice – if only because, according to more than one contemporary theologian, this kind of pre- or para-Gospel scapegoat ideology got the "better" of what the Crucifixion event and the Eucharistic meal meant for the very first followers of Jesus (Mordillat et Prieur 1999, 2004). One thing for sure is that whereas the WaKonongo were not in a position culturally to understand the mass as a meal, there was no need whatsoever to explain that Christ had paid on the Cross the blood price demanded by God for redeeming mankind from its sinful impurities, thus guaranteeing it a minimum of blessings on earth.

The text insists that the cock is not slaughtered or sacrificed by human hand but being impaled while still alive, simply dies at the stake – *kuku yule hachinjwi lo anachomwa tu yu mzima kwa miti anakufa*. Perhaps Karolo wanted to distance the ceremony from the ritual cutting (*-chinja*) of the

throat by Muslims or to underline that the victim died of its own accord. Though *-choma* (in the passive voice: *chomwa*) can mean to burn, a holocaust is, to my mind, not intended here.

Meanwhile the faithful chant in Kibungu: "*Suraaa, efura ewalagye kuwandu awingi*" or in Swahili: "*Amina, magonjwa yawaendee watu wengine wengi*" ([Let us live in] Peace [and may] diseases abandon us [or leave us for many other people]). The women then throw the rubbish they have swept from their homes around the base of the stick as it stands in the centre of the crossroads saying all the while "Oh cock, we deposit on you all our evils." After which the people return home rejoicing.

6 Religion as Interlocutory Interaction

Though in this case the vicarious victim is a cock rather than a goat, it would be hard to imagine a more clear-cut illustration of sacrificial scapegoating. As the French would say "*c'est trop beau pour être vrai!*" (it's almost too good to be true!). The advantage being, as with Kaswai's description of Ndui, that this instance stems from an innocent native hand rather than from an anthropologist with a conceptual chip on his shoulder. Not that Karolo had nothing in mind when he composed his account. We have sufficiently commented on what should be read between the lines. But his hidden causes do not jeopardize the manifest meaning of his text. To state that the villagers were *symbolically* purified of their woes, past, present, and to come, by the dust being sprinkled at the feet of the cock which had thus taken upon itself their troubles and was agonising on their behalf, could be something of an understatement. Attaching far more importance to what is symbolized, despite our protest to the contrary, we often tend to reduce the weight of symbols to that of simple signs. Whatever its imaginary impact is, the cock's death, we feel, does not really do away with difficulties. Taking a leaf from sacramental theology could help reempower symbolism. No matter what one might think of transubstantiation, even before the sacrifice of the mass resembled once again, in the wake of Vatican II, a Eucharistic meal, the simple fact of coming together for the celebration made for parishioners finding themselves *de facto* more together. Likewise the ceremonies described by Karolo can be seen as really effecting something by the mere fact of their taking place (*ex opera operato*) – even if this "something" was not much more (but is it of so little consequence?) than that vital reactivating of human energies of which Teilhard de Chardin spoke so often. Rainmakers, for instance, did not so much make rain as remake men – giving them confidence that despite the delay, the rains would return, and thus there was no reason to abandon hope. Rainmaking rites made far more for reinvigorating flagging spirits than for making the "spirits" open up their taps!

Finally and to borrow yet another element from our Christian inheritance, we have kept Karolo's best wine till the end: the eventful speaking to the ancestors, recoded theoretically as interlocutory interaction, could constitute a quintessential (re)definition of primitive religion. Undertaking an enterprise of this magnitude was not of course our informant's intention. Karolo simply wanted to record for posterity what he had been led to believe was the religious faith and liturgical worship of his forebears. Either because they or individuals of their entourage had been spoken to by the ancestors, or because the need had arisen for the living authorities to speak to these latter, the chief and other actors addressed themselves to the *mizimu* on a person-to-person basis about matters of mutual interest and common concern. Fundamentally this is what Karolo's text is about. Three basic issues are thus involved: personal relationships, talking things over, and interaction.

6.1 Personification

The WaBungu did not merely "act as if" they were dealing with personal interlocutors, they were really convinced this was the case. A crucial distinction must be made here between personalization and personification. Items can be personalized by putting their owners name or mark on them. Personalization is involved when the poet speaks metaphorically and fondly of Old Father Thames, for everyone knows that the Thames is simply a rather dirty old river. But when the WaBungu say *Ndui ni mtu* (Smallpox is a Person) and when they address themselves to their ancestors in person, they are doing much more, they are quite literally "personifying," i.e., making a person to be – *persona facere*.

It is not that, as childish animists, they imagine things such as cocks, trees, or epidemics to posses a miniaturized soul (*anima*). None the less if, ethnocentrically speaking, animism is treating things as persons and its contrary treating persons as things, then a case could be made for its being preferable to contractual capitalism with its unwittingly inhuman talk of "human resources!" On occasion, animists materialized the presence of their inter-

locutors in sculptured objects, masks, and impressive locations (*genius loci*). But while conscious that their "fetishes" were made by human hand, they addressed them in a sacramental fashion. It would be grotesque to suggest an animist animated his spiritual interlocutors à la Pinocchio! However, as we pointed out earlier, the personality produced was in keeping with local anthropo-logics and did not answer to our peculiarly Western understanding, be it ontological or otherwise, of human nature. Nevertheless, we are condemned to try to make sense interculturally. We cannot just content ourselves with Kipling's "never twain will meet." Even if their hard cores are incompressible, cultures partly overlap on their outskirts. Thus it would not be excessively ethnocentric, completely mistaken, or quite misplaced, to suggest that as *watu* the *mizimu* were endowed with a strict minimum of intentional identity. For most of the time and for most of the people concerned, it was sufficient to know that in dealing with the *mizimu* one was relating to entities who were able to fathom what was afoot (since in many instances they were responsible for it) and who, at the same time, were capable of reacting to proposals. Those who spoke to the ancestors were convinced their interlocutors were intelligently purposeful and susceptible to respond willingly to requests. Apart from such fundamental traits as innate intelligence, willpower, and changing humours, the rest was of relatively little importance. Questions of age and sex, size and shape, while not completely arbitrary or subjective nor without symbolic and other meanings, were not, as we would put it, essential to the functional identity of the *mizimu* and their likes. Anthropologists who queried their informants on such secondary scores asked questions which because they had never felt the need, few of their informants had ever raised. Hence they received a series of often contradictory answers which induced them either to conclude that the primitive mind really was confused or that they had arrived on the scene to late to get the clear and distinct picture existing before it was fractured by missionaries and their ilk – amongst whom I initially figured! The WaKonongo knew of a "regional or territorial spirit" (Werbner 1977) called Katabi. Harassed by my loaded questions, informants having variously described "him" as a "she," as being tall and one-legged or small and hairy, I was at first tempted to think that over time Katabi had lost what coherent identity he presumably once possessed. But I finally realized that the WaKonongo were not at all interested in what Katabi had to say of himself – what counted was what he could do for them or what he wanted them to do.

Though by definition and vocation as anthropologists we are programmed to present if not promote other cultures (Beattie 1964), we sometimes experience difficulty in recognizing that the Other really is radically quite other and not basically the same as ourselves albeit in a different (usually imperfect) shape and (often diminutive) size. Despite the Wa-Bungu saying loud and clear that Smallpox was a person, even anthropologically minded observers thought they heard them say that he was a spirit. It would seem even more difficult for (perennial) philosophers and (Tridentine) theologians to take people at their word. The former feel that primitive talk about ancestral shades, albeit as in "a cloud darkly," indicates that *La pensée sauvage* was already possessed of a sound speculative inkling as to the existence of intrinsically immaterial entities. The latter caught in native talk about *mizimu* a confused echo of and yearning for the divinely guaranteed existence of Holy Souls and canonized saints – their mission being to restore the original sound to its full supernatural strength. No one seemed prepared to entertain the possibility that the *mizimu* or *ndui* were neither deities nor demons, neither spirits nor angels, neither infantile metaphors nor mistaken science but personified phenomena and as such not to be confused with phenomena personified. Far from being figments of the imagination or worse, these hypostasized realities were in no way hypothetical or hysterical. For what can be more effectively relevant for rural society than its ancestral past, what can be more unwarrantedly disturbing than an epidemic? Morally and metaphysically, why should treating things as people be less plausible and practical than treating them as inanimate things? Is not the existence of sheer matter just as problematic as that of pure spirit? Such questions do not call for an absolute answer in terms of "intelligent design" but they do point to a relatively religious solution, couched in terms of relating to Others (be they human or more … or less) in a spirit of reciprocal respect – of giving as well as taking. Neither chance and necessity nor teleological theologism but a possible auto-poietic, third way explored by a school of thought initially inspired by Bergson and Teilhard de Chardin and more recently by Prigogine, Varela, Morin, Guerci or even Ruyer's Princetonian Gnostics.

Today rereading what Jusufu Kaswai and Mwene Karolo had to say so clearly and completely of ancestral beliefs and behaviour (and, of course, they were far from being the only intelligent informants to speak thus), two methodological musings spring to mind. Why did those who read them in the first place see in the text what was

not there? And what message are we in turn not likely to hear at present? Their blind eye answering to our deaf ear! The sceptic, heeding the likes of Freud, Pirandello and Parfit, will retort that since we do not understand ourselves, being misunderstood by others should be no source of surprise! Communication is not only a technically complex: seeking to state the truth and nothing but the truth has been dismissed as a chimera by epistemologically minded exegetes such as Gadamer (1975) and Ricœur (1986). None the less, when all is said and done, it would seem to me credibly clear that the WaBungu were clearly saying one thing and, at the time, nothing else. *Mizimu ni watu* – the ancestors are intelligent, self-willed interlocutors with whom it is possible to interact. The WaBungu (and one is inclined to say most of their contemporaries on the African continent) were not then saying what their scholarly, philosophically, and theologically minded expatriate listeners understood by souls and spirits. That they should, could, and would soon come to say more or less what many Europeans said in the first half of the twentieth century, is a totally different matter. For someone who hopefully intends even at this late hour on catching a faint echo of what Africans once said amongst themselves about religion, listening to the "spirit" of what Kaswai and Karolo literally wrote can be a rewarding experience.

6.2 Interlocution

The anthropologist cannot insist too strongly that what lay beyond the writings of Kaswai and Karolo was not so much the "oral tradition" of a Vansina as the "gestical communication" of Jousse (2008 [1974] followed by Ong 1988). "Oral" rings with an equivocal, ethnocentric echo. Verbal precautions to the contrary notwithstanding, not only is it likely to be seen as a staging post towards the written word (a *nec plus ultra* even for such an anthropologically-minded philosopher as Ricœur) but it is construed as communicating intellectual information. One has only to think of the way body language until recently tended to be seen either as an inferior form of expression or as the dispensable handmaid of the mind. Some people, it was thought, (and some peoples – the Italians, for instance!), did not seem able to make themselves understood without instinctively or instrumentally gesticulating. As of now, however, we are prepared to admit not only that we speak with our bodies but that what these latter have to say is not a disguised or diluted mental message. The recourse to speech is but part of a concrete whole, intent on making meaning and which is instrumentalized by individuals, incarnate in their own flesh but incorporated too in their social fabric.

Having said this, producing and listening to discourse is, of course, a fundamental feature of oral cultures. Western culture, having opted since classical times for the eye rather than the ear, talks of face-to-face communication, *de visu*, with a vis-à-vis. Hence our preoccupation with seeing things as they are in and for themselves. Our primordial question is "with what am I dealing?" only subsequently do we ask what can it do for me or me for it. On the other hand, where the audible rather than the visual predominates, people listen to rather than look at things. Hence the fact that Ndui and the *mizimu* do not put in appearance in order to reveal their inner identity but from first to last simply to tell people what should be done. Exegetes are now agreed that when Yahweh spoke with Moses on the mountain, He had no metaphysical intention in mind but peremptorily cut short philosophical enquiry by declaring that "Whatever I might be is my problem, meanwhile here are the Ten Commandments"! (LaCocque 1998). Likewise when a *mizimu* contacts someone it is as a who whose "whatness" is irrelevant since what to do is the sole point of his message – "offer me a hen and I will make it rain."

6.3 Interaction

But even when the initiative for interlocution stems from the living, the aim is interaction and not disquisition. If I might be allowed to plagiarize Tennyson, faced with Smallpox it was not the WaBungus's to reason why but to simply do so as not to die. While based on the presupposition that persons are involved, the interlocutory interaction which identifies ancestral religiousness, is not intended to further clarify the characters of those concerned but is meant to foster immediate action.

During my stay amongst the WaKonongo I not only attentively observed but participated personally in the management of the possessed (Singleton 1977). Half the women of Mapili, the hamlet where I lived, were possessed half the time by the *majini* and *mashetani*, the nominally Islamic spirits which had replaced the *migabo*, their ancestral counterparts. Being first and foremost my parishioners and not the object of an anthropological monograph, the WaKonongo would not have understood nor taken kindly to my remaining academically aloof from an issue which disconcerted some but concerned them

all. As the possessed had been excommunicated by the Tanzanian parish priest, my first contacts with them were as distant as they were delicate. It would have been obviously counterproductive for me on arrival to insist that I be allowed to attend a séance. I thus contented myself at first with quietly questioning those willing to talk about their being possessed by spirits. How did the spirits learn Arabic? How, being spirits, did they eat the chicken and rice offered to them? What did they look like and where were they when not actively possessing people? However, I almost immediately abandoned harassing the women with my questions for two main reasons. On the one hand, because they had manifestly never spontaneously thought about such issues and, the other, my raising them was inducing the creation ex nihilo of a Konongo onto-theology! As WaKamando, the female adorcist and "mother superior" of the possessed, protested to me, dealing with spirits is "a job like any other and has nothing to do with religion" (*sio dini, ni kazi tu*). It is true that this pious wife of a former catechist was reacting against her exclusion from the Church by the parish priest on the grounds of her having slid back into satanic superstition. The fact, none the less, was that the spirit guild functioned far more on group psychotherapeutic than on religiously sectarian lines.

When I finally managed to attend the ceremonies of adorcism, it became absolutely apparent that in the heat of the action no one ever questioned the spirits about their identity but only their intentions. Having obtained the spirits' name *viva voce* (unlike the voices heard in their heads by paranoiacs, those of the spirits can be taped for all to hear), the adorcist and other participants (myself included) sought without further ado to know who had sent them or whether, as occasionally happened, they had come of their own accord. But these were mere polite preliminaries. What counted above all was to learn from the spirit's mouth what had to be done in order to remedy the victim's plight. Being in possession of the jinni's name, we knew whether it was male or female. A jinni could eventually declare other identifying features as when the spirit possessing WaKamando herself certified he had come straight from Mecca and could thus send packing the female one of dubious origin we were then dealing with. But these were strategic and not substantial features. What the *majini* or for that matter any other spirits were in and for themselves was the least of the possesseds' concern – their principal preoccupation was to come to satisfactory terms with the concrete situation the spirits spoke to. Typical instances being intergenerational conflict (the imposition by parents of an aged but rich bridegroom on a young daughter intent on marrying an eventual Prince Charming) or marital tension (a first wife being set upon by a spirit sent by a jealous second fiddle).

People's religion is nothing if not pragmatic. The missionaries thought they had won out over idolatry, when in order to obtain rain their converts finally stopped sacrificing hens to futile not to say diabolic fetishes and took to paying for a sacrifice of the mass to the Blessed Virgin. But if they did not openly tell me so as peasant farmers the WaKonongo clearly made me understand that they were not so much interested in who exactly made it rain – ancestral spirits or Christian saints – but by the need for it to rain.

Concluding the commentary of our historic texts with these references to contemporary contexts enables us to discuss a point left in abeyance: the disappearance of ancestral religion as described by Kaswai and Karolo and the appearance of modern religions (not to speak of the apparent irreligion of postmodernity). Change, like conflict, can take place at a rather superficial but also at a far deeper level. As our rainmaking illustration suggests, the adoption of a new frame of explicit reference can belie an unconsciously unchanged, underlying continuity. As long as peasants are peasants their religiosity is likely to remain fundamentally "pagan" or rural, even should mass conversion to Christianity or Islam have taken place culturally. This could mean that despite its resulting in part from elitist orthodoxy, "popular religion" continues to be basically the religion of the people. Ordinary Catholics call upon Padre Pio in the same frame of mind and for the same existential reasons that everyday Muslims avail themselves of a miracle-working marabout or as the WaBungu once took off to the territorial shrine of Kwimba.

However, far more radical shifts can occur. They rarely do so (at least not mainly and even less exclusively) for the motives invoked by elite actors – such as rallying to Revelation or subscribing to reason. Thus in the Congolese region of Kikwit we studied in 1986 (Singleton 1986) if the kind of ancestral religion portrayed by Karolo was in its dramatic death throes, it was not because Christianity had finally got the better of it, but simply because the elders, living or departed, could no longer pragmatically pretend to the respect their forebears of previous generations had empirically merited. "Times change": translated into theory this common place implies that a change in "chronologics" involves a "religious" revolution, i.e., a radical transformation of relationships. When the past

and those closer to it are no longer convincingly perfect, when the rising generation manage better than their elders, then the asymmetrical obligations constitutive of religion as psychosociologically defined change polarities: younger people being now more able to cope with ever increasing innovations (be they mechanical or moral), merit at least as great if not a greater share of produce, power, and prestige than their old-fashioned "betters," overtaken by events beyond their control. Ancestor worship declines with the growing sociological senility of senior citizens and not because everyone has finally seen the light, be it natural or supernatural.

Appendix 1: The Key Portions of the Swahili Text

Tukitazama katika hadithi ya WaWungu ginsi walipowashinda Wasanganzila na vile walivyouacha mji wa Kwimba wakuja bondeni, na wakijenga mji wao mku ikaitwa Iwungu, mbona Mwene Wangu wa II, Mtawala Uwangu alikuwa akiwatuma wazee wake pamoja na sadaka zake kwenda katika kilima cha Kwimba kuwatolea mizimu sadaka kwa Kaburi la mwene Wangu mkuu mtanda Kwimba na kwa makaburi ya watu wengine – 1. *Mwanza wa kuanza mashamba mwezi November;* 2. *Wakati wa kuanza kula vyakula vipya (kutomola);* 3. *Baada ya mavuno (Ikuzo);* 4. *Katika ya kiangazi (mwezi September).*

Kabla hawayaondoka wazee wa matambiko kwenda kwimba (the Mwene gives his instructions) "Enyi mizimu ya Kwimba, wamwene na wazee wenu wote, wababu wetu na baba wetu mliofika huko Kwimba ambako nyingi mnayo furaha kubwa na raha zote ziko huko kwenu Kwimba, ila sisi tuliyobaki hapa duniani mumetuachia taabu nyingi na matata ya kila namna, basi tunakuja leo mbele yenu kwa heshima kubwa na tunaagnuka mbele ya migu yenu tunaomba sana mtukinge na mtuondoke vifo vikali sotoka na magongwa mengine mabaya yanayouwa watu kwa wingi mno. Pia tunaomba mtukinge na taabu za nzige, vita na njaa zisifike katika nchi yetu hii ya Uwungu. Tunaomba uzazi niendelee sana katika nchi yetu, yaani watu wazaani sana." Mwene wakati ule anaomba mambo mengine mengi kwa kuiomba nchi yake ipate raha na amani.

Enyi mizimu ya waMwene wote wa Kwimba na wazee wenu, mwende mbele ya Mungu mkatuombua apate kusikiriza kwa huruma maombi yetu hayo yote tuliomba na atufanyizie kama tulivyotaka. Na sasa tunamtoa huyu kuku wetu huyu mweupe asiye na doa lolote na sasa hivi tutamtungika katika mti huyu mkali kusudi yetu ni kuwa huyu kuku ndiye atakuwa kinga yetu yaani magonjwa, vifo, njaa na vita, vimfikie huyu kuku badala yetu. Baada ya hongo Mwene anamwaapiza kuku anasema: wewe kuku chukuwa taabu zetu zote, na kufa kwako unakufa pahali petu sisi. Basi wanawake takataka chini ya mti ule. Haya kuku, mabaya yetu yote tumakuachia wewe "basi watu wote wanarudi kwa shangwe mpaka mjini."

Appendix 2: Graves and Shrines

In and around Gua I noticed one or two "ancestral shrines" of the kind depicted in Fig. 1, located at strategic points such as *crossroads* (the italics as it is a question of narrow paths and not of highroads!). Once in the bush, people walked in single file which meant that the crowds gathering for ceremonies where tracks met could never have been very large. Even in the villages of the region, a haphazardly dispersed habitat did not make for main streets. On the floors of these shrines lay such offerings as: prickly cucumbers, twigs, and shards of a broken calabash bowls. Note the whitened snail shell ornament on the roof of the shrine, called *konokono* (the usual word for snail). It appears to have functioned as a poor man's *kibangwa*, imported conus shells being rather rare and reserved to an elite. According to Père Robert (1930: 17) the *konokono* was a kind of primitive sacrament, creating the real presence of spirits such as Katabi. This type of shrine, knee-high, with spindly twigs supporting a rough and ready cone thatched roof, was (had become?) rare in the region. The only one I came across in Ukonongo and which was of similar shape and size to the one in the photo, stood in the courtyard close to a hut and housed a *jinni* who had possessed the lady owner of the compound.

On 12 September 1972 on the way to visit Chief Famba who had taken refuge in the bush with half a dozen other families to avoid being press-ganged into an *ujamaa* village, I passed by the *mazimbo* or grave site of *mtemi* (chief) Mwan'Ilelo or Ilegilo (Fig. 2). Originally from across Lake Rukwa in Mpimbwe, Ufipa, he had settled in the area with the or his WaKamba. The spot was also in the bush – apart from the fact that the population of the huge region had been regrouped in the late 1920s in a couple of clearings to combat sleeping sickness, shifting agriculturalists inevitably find themselves increasingly removed from the burial places of their forebears. The cemetery was about 15 paces square containing three smaller, knee-high "ancestral shrines" and the larger royal grave, thatch roofed and round in shape as traditional dwellings had been. There was also a small rectangular roofed

Fig. 1: Crossroad shrine.

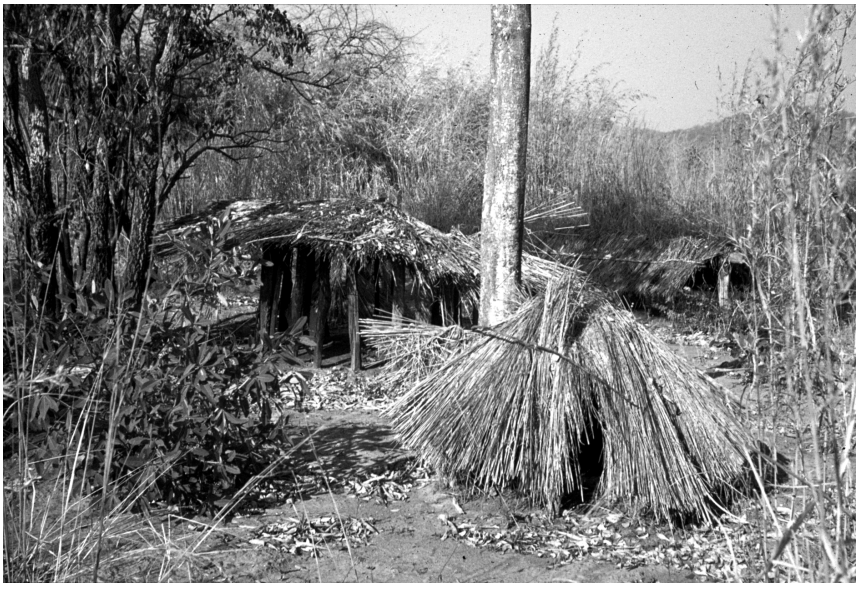

Fig. 2: Cemetery.

construction along the lines of the contemporary style hut. The *mtemi*'s grave (Fig. 3) was about one and a half meters high, the cone shaped roof was supported by wooden staves, the interstices not having been filled with mud, three ceremonial hoes could be seen hanging from the walls (Fig. 4); they were identical in size and shape with the one shown to me in Inyonga by the aged Ngugu, the last chief of the konongo kingdom of Igombe. He had consented to the hoe and other regalia being carried during the procession of the Blessed Sacrament but had died shortly afterwards in September 1972. No death being natural in Africa, one can imagine his untimely passing away did not go without comment. On the grave floor stood a calabash and the bottom of a broken earthen wear pot (of the kind used for cooking or for holding drinking water) no doubt to receive libations of beer; close to the potsherd were two croquet-sized balls – earthy in colour and perhaps in consistence but they could also have been hardened fruits. They reminded me of what I knew about the pairs of rainmaking stones formerly in common use throughout the region and which one of our principal Konongo informants, Jakobo Kasalama, explicitly located at ceremonies conducted in the chiefly cemetery (the *mazimbo*); suspended on a cord stretched from wall to wall at ceiling height was a handkerchief-sized piece of

Fig. 3: Chiefly grave.

black or dark blue cloth (*kaniki* – which served traditionally as a chiefly shroud). In and around the three smaller shrines other broken pots were to be seen – a fact which had already struck the White Fathers in 1878 (cf. Anonymous 1884: 279).

Mwene Karolo was to tell me that the black cloth in the grave at Gua was associated with rain clouds; "everything to do with the *mtemi* should be black," he added, for this same meteorological motive. On 11. 10. 1972, an old Mkonongo informant, Mwana Sisya confirmed this association: the corpse of a chief was draped in a black shroud "on account of the (rain) clouds – *wa ilunde*." According to the above-mentioned Konongo Chief Mgalula, on his instalment the *mtemi*, seated on the three-legged stool of office, was draped in dark blue *kaniki*, styled *ilunde*, worn under the toga like *iwale* a chequered cloth of black, white and red squares. Another old Chief, well over eighty, Lugusha who had reigned in Ngulu from 1922 to 1941, also told me on 02. 11. 1972 that during the rainy season he had always dressed in black and sported a dark hat. On the third day following the election of a *mwene*, a black sheep was slaughtered and the new Chief's hair and nails enclosed in its skin which was then buried in his compound (*ikulu*). But it was apparently dug up to be taken and plunged in a lake together with the Chief to show "he ruled land and sea."

Figure 4: Mtemi Ngugu's ceremonial hoe and conus shell *kibangwa* (match box size). The hoe, lacking its left "ear" (people likened the hoe to a human face), was curved at the extremity of its long spike enabling it to be hung on a branch during rain making ceremonies. The workaday konongo hoe though of similar shape possessed only finger's length spike.

Fig. 4: Ceremonial hoe and conus shell.

The last Chief of Gua, *mtemi* Malamba said that the hoes were normally kept somewhere safe from sight "at home" (those of the WaBungu being stored in a baobab according to Mwene Karolo). If they had been left hanging in Ilegilo's tomb it was because his inheritors (*mrithi*) had fled. According to Malamba, native beer, *pombe*, was poured into the broken recipient in October (the month in which the rains usually returned) and people drank there on this occasion a whole *debe* (4 gallon tin) of beer. The ceremony was called *mapongo* (perhaps from *poa* meaning literally to be cool and metaphorically to enjoy health and wealth) and aimed at winning the deceased chief's blessings for the coming year.

References Cited

Anonymous
1884 A l'Assaut des pays nègres. Journal des missionnaires d'Alger dans l'Afrique Equatoriale. Paris.

Beattie, John H. M.
1964 Other Cultures. Aims, Methods, and Achievements in Social Anthropology. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Bösch, Fr.
1930 Les Banyamwezi. Peuple de l'Afrique Orientale. Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung. (Collection Internationale de Monographies Ethnologiques; Bibliotheque Anthropos, 3/2)

Cambron, E., et **D. Delabie**
2008 Où veulent-ils en venir? Cheminements des communautés interclaniques en milieu coutumier. Idiofa: Édition Kimvuka ya Lutondo.

Clark, Stephen R. L.
1994 Is Humanity a Natural Kind? In: T. Ingold (ed.), What Is an Animal; pp. 17–34. London: Routledge. (One World Archaeology Series, 1) [1988]

Comba, Enrico
2008 Antropologia delle religioni. Un'introduzione. Roma: GLF editori Laterza. (Percorsi, 104)

Debray, Régis
2003 Dieu, un itinéraire. Matériaux pour l'histoire de l'Éternel en Occident. Paris: Odile Jacob. (Poches Odile Jacob, 120)
2005 Les communions humaines. Pour en finir avec "la religion". Paris: Fayard.

De Craemer, Willy
1977 The Jamaa and the Church. A Bantu Catholic Movement in Zaïre. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Douglas, Mary
1974 Natural Symbols. Explorations in Cosmology. London: Penguin.

Evans-Pritchard, Edward E.
1962 Zande Theology (1936). In: E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Essays in Social Anthropology; pp. 162–203. London: Faber and Faber.

Finch, F. G.
1959 The Story of the Wawungu by Mwene Karolo Ilonga II bin Sasawata (translated from a Swahili by F. G. Finch). *Tanganyika Notes and Records* 52: 75–93.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg
1975 Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr.

Guerci, Antonio
2007 Dall'antropologia all'antropopoiesi. Breve saggio sulle rappresentazioni e costruzioni della variabilità umana. Milano: Cristiano Lucisano Editore.

Jousse, Marcel
2008 L'anthropologie du geste, Paris: Gallimard. [1974]

Kee, Alistair
1971 The Way of Transcendence. Christian Faith without Belief in God. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

LaCocque, André, et **Paul Ricœur**
1998 Penser la Bible. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.

Le Guyader, Hervé
2002 Doit-on abandonner le concept d'espèce? *Le Courrier de l'environnement de l'INRA* 46: 51–64.

Lévinas, Emmanuel
2000 Totalité et infini. Essai sur l'extériorité. Paris: Librairie Générale Française. (Le livre de poche, 4120)

Marion, Jean-Luc
1997 Etant donné. Essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation. Paris: Presses universitaires de France.

Maurier, Henri, et **F. M. Rodegem**
1975 Les dieux de nos pères. *Cultures et Développement* 7/3–4: 663–680.

Mordillat, Gérard, et **Jérôme Prieur**
1999 Jésus contre Jésus. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.
2004 Jésus après Jésus. L'origine du christianisme. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.

Ong, Walter J.
1988 Orality and Literacy. The Technologizing of the Word. London: Routledge. [1982]

Ricœur, Paul
1986 Du texte à l'action. Paris: Éditions du Seuil. (Essais d'herméneutique, 2; Collection Esprit, 2)

Robert, J. M.
1930 Fipa Customs. [Typescript volume]

Shorter, Aylward
1972 Chiefship in Western Tanzania. A Political History of the Kimbu. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Singleton, Michael
1972 Theology, "Zande Theology," and Secular Theology. In: A. Singer and B. V. Street (eds.), Zande Themes. Essays Presented to Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard; pp. 130–157. Oxford: Blackwell.
1975 Prêtre ouvrier = prêtre *ujamaa*. *Spiritus* 61: 427–436.
1976a Medicine Men and the Medical Missionary. *Cultures et Développement* 7: 33–52.
1976b Smallpox in Person. Personification or Personalization (Africa)? *Anthropos* 71: 169–179.

1977 Obsession with Possession. An Apostolic Anthropologist Analyses His Spiritual Experiences in Africa. *Pro Mundi Vita Dossiers* (Africa Dossier) 4: 1–34.
1986 Une recherche en éco-santé au Zaïre. *Prelude* 1: 36–46.
1988 Popular Religion in Africa. The People and Their Religion. *Pro Mundi Vita Studien* 6: 29–36.
1989 Mazombwe l'homme-lion. De la metamorphose magique à la manipulation génétique. Bruxelles: CIDEP. (Cahiers du CIDEP, 2)
2002a L'animal autre. In: J. Duchêne et al. (éds.), Entre l'homme et l'animal. Une nouvelle alliance; pp. 159–208. Namur: Presses universitaires de Namur. (Epistémologie et éthique du vivant, 2)
2002b Conversion to Islam in 19th century Tanzania as Seen by a Native Christian. In: T. Bierschenk et al. (eds.), Islam in Africa; pp. 147–166. Münster: LIT. (Yearbook of the Sociology of Islam, 4)
2002c Devenir vieux – ailleurs et autrement (notes de lectures). Louvain: Université catholique de Louvain, Département des sciences de la population et du développement. (Documents de travail, 16)
2004 Infanticide. Notes de lectures anthropologiques à usage ethique. Louvain: Université catholique de Louvain, Département des sciences de la population et du développement. (Documents de travail, 20)
2005 L'ethnomédecine est-elle ethnocidaire? In: L. Pordié (dir.), Panser le monde, penser les médecines. Traditions médicales et développement sanitaire; pp. 53–68. Paris: Édition Karthala.
2007 Le pillage identitaire de l'Afrique ancestrale. In: P. Ngandu Nkashama (coord.), Itinéraires et trajectoires. Du discours littéraire à l'anthropologie. Mélanges offerts à Clémentine Faïk-Nzuji Madiya; pp. 263–283. Paris: L'Harmattan.
2008 La carte d'identité senior – à renouveler?. In: R. Reis (dir.), Solidarité intergénérationnel; pp. 295–314. Lisboa: Universidade Aberta.
2009 Histoires d'eaux africaines. Paris: L'Harmattan.

Thiel, Josef Franz
1977 Ahnen – Geister – Höchste Wesen. Religionsethnologische Untersuchungen im Zaïre-Kasaï-Gebiet. St. Augustin: Verlag des Anthropos-Instituts. (Studia Instituti Anthropos, 26)

Veyne, Paul
1971 Comment on écrit l'histoire. Essai d'épistémologie. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.

Werbner, Richard P. (ed.)
1977 Regional Cults. London: Academic Press. (A. S. A. Monograph, 16)

Wright, Marcia
1971 German Missions in Tanganyika: 1891–1941. Lutherans and Moravians in the Southern Highlands. Oxford: Clarendon Press.