

SYMBOLIC AND DIACHRONIC STUDY OF INTER-CULTURAL THERAPEUTIC AND DIVINATORY ROLES AMONG ALUUND (‘LUNDA’) AND CHOKWE IN THE UPPER KWAANGO (SOUTH WESTERN ZAIRE)

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SUMMARY

This article attempts to analyze inter-cultural ritual (therapeutic and divinatory) interaction between the aLuund and Chokwe of Southwestern Zaire. The fact that the aLuund turn to neighbouring groups for ritual and therapeutic assistance invites questions with regard to the nature of the unity of Luunda cultural order and identity, and the subject of the cultural praxis. A reflection is offered upon the ways in which cultural traditions and identities are generated and maintained, and processes of cultural exchange contribute to shape and activate the unity of the Luunda ritual world.

KEY WORDS: *Zaire, Luunda, healing, divination, ritual.*

1. Introduction

When one singularizes illness and therapeutic action for analytical purposes, and thereby detaches them from the wider socio-cultural frame in which they are cast, one runs the risk of reflecting the premises of western biomedical discourse, rather

than those of the people whose therapeutic and ritual systems are the focus of analysis. Elsewhere, in a lengthy analysis of ritual (therapeutic) praxis among the aLuund of Southwestern Zaire (cf De Boeck 1991a), I have illustrated that a holistic approach to illness and healing may prove fruitful to arrive at an understanding of particular ritual complexes and healing practices, highlighting the inter-ritual dimension by means of which the various rituals and ritual sequences are constantly involved in a mutual process of echoing each other. An holistic perspective also contributes to an understanding of the intricate interrelation between ritual praxis and the bracketing socio-cultural context in which it takes place. The ritual practice pervades everyday life, and links the ritual performance in a very direct and tangible way to the social and natural environment (and vice versa). Illness, health and healing should therefore be considered as forming part of a more encompassing order, and an analysis of the reality of healing rituals or divination should not be autonomized.

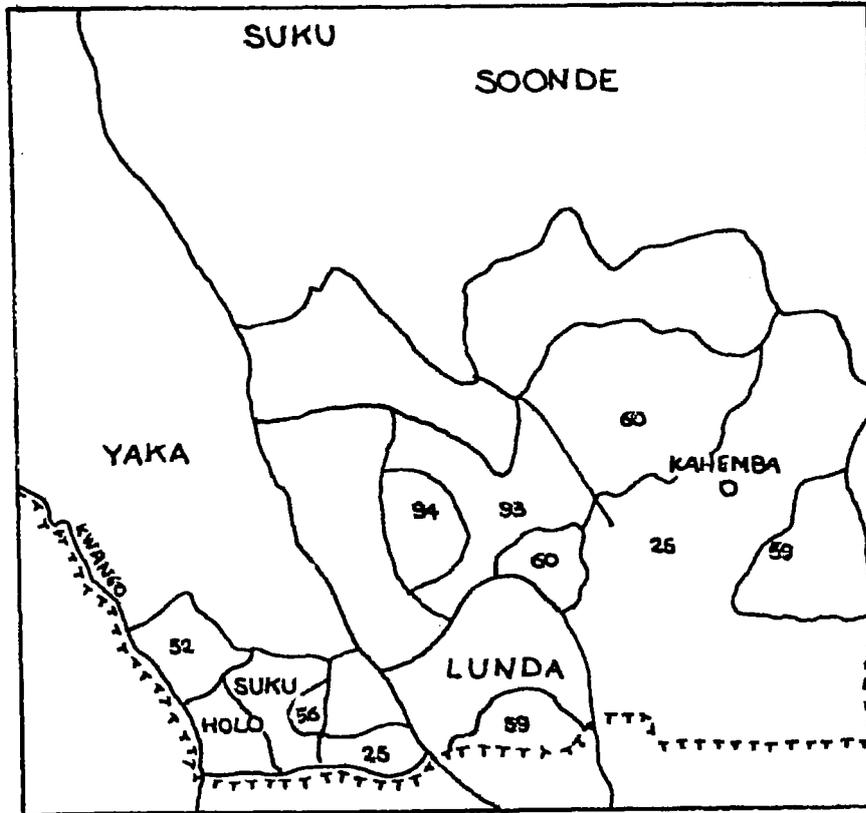
However, a perspective that presents Luunda ritual praxis and Luunda views on body, man, society and cosmos as a synthetic, coherent and integrated meaningful whole is not without problems of its own. What is the nature of this coherence? Does the Luunda cultural 'system' form an unproblematic coherent cluster, a seamless web, or does it hide inconsistencies or contradictions and include changes underneath the surface of its unity? The occurrence, in varying configurations, of related cultural elements among other groups in the area leads to the hypothesis that exchange of inter-community and inter-group ritual and therapeutic cycles and practices is obviously widespread in regional systems in the Central African savanna. Secondly, the existing data on these cultures seem to suggest that these processes of inter-cultural or inter-group exchange follow patterns that are far more complex and creative than hitherto assumed.

In this paper I endeavour to further the understanding of Luunda cultural order 'beyond naive holism', as Werbner (1977: ix) has called the study of a group as an isolated whole, and I attempt to do so more specifically in relation to medical pluralism and ethnic identity. The data presented derive from field research among the aLuund of the Nzofu group in the upper Kwaango of Southwestern Zaire (Bandundu region, in the administrative zone of Kahemba, some 1200 km to the south of Kinshasa). These people historically form a sub-group of the Ruund nucleus in Shaba. About three to four centuries ago various Luunda groups started to migrate in several waves from this Ruund heart-land towards the east, the south and the west (see e.g. Hoover 1978, Papstein 1978, Schecter 1976, Thornton 1981, Vansina 1965). The aLuund of Nzofu are allegedly the oldest Luunda group of the western migratory wave. According to a recent census (1989) the Luunda population of the Nzofu area numbers some 37.000 souls, whereas the total

population of the Kahemba zone, an area of some 20,000 km², is estimated at 170.000. Part of these are Chokwe, Minuungu and Shiinji. An important number of people included in this census consists of outsiders from the Kasai region or Kinshasa who have been attracted by the boom of Zairean-Angolan diamond-smuggling in the 1980s.

Most of them reside in the larger trading town of Kahemba.(1) Under the influence of the postmodernist debates that have characterised (Anglo-American) anthropology since the mid-1980s — putting the stress on hermeneutical, deconstructivist and dialogical perspectives — the monographic approach, i.e. the standard of classical modernist anthropology, has become more problematic than ever. In the 1980s a growing number of Africanists drew the attention to the fact that the notion of 'ethnic group' was in fact a problematic notion (cf Amselle & M'bokolo 1985, Amselle 1990, Chimhundu 1992, Sharpe 1986, Vail 1989). They showed how many of the so-called traditional ethnic groups and cultural entities studied by anthropologists were in part (post-)colonial creations and inventions, or local reactions to or effects of the workings of (post-)colonial rule (see also Ekholm Friedman 1991). Indeed, the very choice of the ethnic label 'Lunda' as it circulated under Belgian rule (and long afterwards) to refer to the Ruund core and surrounding peoples in Shaba, at a moment when the political and cultural importance of this Ruund nucleus was strongly declining, illustrates the consequences of ethnic categorization by the colonial authorities. In the 'Lunda' case the Belgian interference restored configurations of ethnic power relations which actually did no longer exist at the time of their interference. Without the policy of the Belgian administration during the first half of this century Ruund culture would not have been as prominent today as it is, and the Chokwe would probably have gained in importance (cf Bustin 1975).

Furthermore some of the authors mentioned above showed the emergence of ethnic groups to be part of processes of cultural and political self-identification, or processes of ideological and political domination of one group over another. This also involves strategies of political opportunism.(2) Again the Ruund case — in relation to the Chokwe for example — forms an illustration. I do not mean to suggest that the Luunda/Chokwe distinction in the Upper Kwaango is a colonial creation altogether. The presence of both groups in the area precedes the Belgian colonial occupation of the area, and the cultural dynamics of Luunda/Chokwe (antagonistic) reciprocity and exchange which is dealt with in this article clearly has pre-colonial roots. Nevertheless the colonial need for ethnic categorization



- 25: Luunda + Chokwe
- 52: Suku + Holo
- 56: Suku + Shiinji
- 59: Chokwe + Shiinji + Luunda
- 60: Chokwe + Luunda + Minuungu
- 93: Yaka + Chokwe
- 94: Yaka + Chokwe + Shiinji + Minuungu.

Figure 1. The distribution of various groups in the Upper Kwaango (zones Kahemba and Kasongo-Lunda) (after Boone 1973).

— exemplified in Boone's ethnic cartography (Boone 1973; cf **figure 1**) — contributed to the impression that one deals with static, solid and unchanging, permanent entities, thereby completely disregarding the constantly changing character of the groups' identities in time and space, as well as the vast twilight zone characterized by cultural interpenetration and exchange. Under the labels Luunda or Chokwe lurks a far more complex reality. The data on which the map in **figure 1** is based were collected in 1948-49. As M'bokolo (1985: 188) remarks: *'il est frappant de constater qu'Olga Boone reprend purement et simplement, comme cadre de référence des groupes qu'elle distingue, les unités administratives coloniales, chefferies et secteurs, telles qu'elles existaient en 1948-1949 [...]: on sait qu'à cette date, les découpages successifs réalisés par les autorités coloniales, dans le sens de l'agrégation ou du morcellement des circonscriptions africaines, avaient fini par durcir les frontières entre celles-ci et par grossir leurs différences.'*

Kopytoff (1987) introduced the concept of 'internal' or 'interstitial' frontier to take into account the twilight zone of ethnogenesis and explain from that perspective processes of state formation and the (political) reproduction and replication of traditional African societies, polities and ethnicities. In a description which perfectly fits (and was probably inspired by) the history of the so-called Luunda-expansion, Kopytoff presents migration — starting out from a regional central metropole and as a result of fission and segmentation of a core corporate group — as a process of social formation incompatible with the model of ethnogenesis implied by the classical notion of the 'tribe'.

The critique on classic models of ethnic formation and ethnogenesis, as well as on the concept of the 'tribe' and later the 'ethnic group' as monolithic entity, has contributed to the growing awareness of 'interaction' as an epistemological priority. I will therefore focus on the *interaction* between (mainly although not exclusively) Chokwe healers and diviners and the aLuund (rather than analyzing the divinatory or therapeutic practices and institutions themselves). In doing so my perspective will differ somewhat from the scope of other (inter-)regional studies. Most regional studies, whether focusing on economical relations and/or on ritual and kinship (e.g. Piot 1992, Smith 1976, van Binsbergen 1981, Werbner 1977) seem to start from a geographical perspective or to build on a view of the world as a segmentary system by which one imagines regional maps. The geographical perspective also characterizes Kopytoff's approach (1987). He uses the conceptual tool of the 'frontier' mainly in reference to geographical phenomena and social (political) history. In most regional studies concepts and images of 'central places', 'metropoles', 'regional cults', fission of corporate groups and segmentary systems are proposed as powerful tools to undertake cultural mapping. The approach is

legitimate and enables to address various important questions (e.g. with regard to the interaction of cult geographies with other social, political and economic geographies, or with regard to the value of centre/periphery images). The generation and interlinking of cultural patterns and systems is thus conceived of in its spatial ordering, corresponding to various different cartographic areas in the relations between specific cultures and societies. The image of the regional map is indeed a very powerful metaphor for analytical exercise, implying 'the existence of central points or areas (...) that will remain identifiable however much their features are replotted' (Strathern 1991: xvii). The potent image of the map thus not only presents cultural groups as durable, permanent entities, thereby illustrating and reinforcing the colonial mapping process of labelling and sometimes even creating ethnic groups, but it also suggests that processes of cultural reciprocity and exchange develop along particular trajectories and lead to a static organisation of transaction.

The cartographic image suggests boundary-drawing, exclusion, category discrimination, hierarchy and control. However, the relationship between the groups here described cannot be captured in these categories only. Starting from (ritual) praxis and experience instead of the fundamentally modernist and static model of the map, I present a more dynamic way to understand processes of cultural reciprocity. Luunda-Chokwe inter-cultural ritual (therapeutic) interaction will be considered by focusing on culture specific relations between patient and therapist, or model and praxis. This inter-cultural process of healing, i.e. the fact that the aLuund either turn to neighbouring groups in times of illness or misfortune and ritually depend on them, or adopt and borrow (aspects of) some of these neighbours' ritual practices, invites some questions as to the nature of the 'unity' of the Luunda cultural order and 'ethnic' identity, in this case with regard to the way in which (therapeutic or divinatory) ritual traditions and cultural models of illness and semantic creativity in therapy are generated, developed, reproduced and exchanged. Secondly it invites questions as to the *subject* of the cultural praxis and, more in particular, of healing. In other words: why is it that the aLuund credit the Chokwe (and other neighbouring groups) with a therapeutic force, instead of situating this force within their own cultural life-scene? These and some related questions allow to reflect upon the ways in which

- 1) Luunda traditions — or Luunda society and identity — are generated, maintained, perpetuated and strengthened, and
- 2) processes of cultural (in this case ritual and therapeutic) exchange between various 'ethnic groups' contribute to shape and (re-)activate the unity of the Luunda (ritual) world.

My aim is not to present an 'objective' picture of Chokwe culture and identity. As Herzfeld recently remarked: 'Le recours au stéréotype est inséparable des

situations où des identités sont en jeu' (Herzfeld 1992: 67). Having worked in Luunda communities only, my knowledge of Chokwe culture — e.g. through encounters with Chokwe healers and diviners — is coloured by this Luunda context. The assertions made about Self and Other are therefore assertions in terms of 'self-ascription and ascription by others' (Barth 1969: 14). This means that the view on Chokwe culture presented here is filtered through a Luunda looking glass. It is a view from a traditional political centre. Considering that the image of the (stereotypical) Other always discloses an argument about the Self, I have chosen to render this Luunda point of view on the other. Further research is needed to establish if and to what degree this image is shared, negated or manipulated by the Chokwe themselves.

After a brief outline of Luunda conceptions of health and illness, the remainder of this article will deal with inter-cultural ritual (therapeutic) interaction, and this from two different angles: first from a diachronic perspective, secondly from a more 'symbolic' perspective.

2. Illness as deconstruction, healing as construction: Luunda conceptions of health and illness in holistic perspective

To put it in a general way, aLuund conceive of the growth towards personhood (crystallized, for example, in the social role of the senior elder and family head for men, or motherhood for women) as a dynamic process of increasing intertwining of, and in, the related fields of body, social group and environment. This intertwining is realised in a performative way in the praxis (of ritual healing), by means of a complex semantic modulation of metaphorical and metonymical processes. They generate this connectedness in an innovative and transformative way in which this vital interjoining is given a renewed meaning. In Luunda terms these three relational fields (i.e. corporeal, social and cosmological) are closely interconnected, as in a web that consist of ever-changing knots.

2.1. Health

Stemming from this notion of (growth towards) personhood, and contrary to current biomedical notions which view health merely as the absence of organic dysfunctioning, the aLuund interpret health and individual well-being as resulting from specific relations in a much broader context. To be in good health depends on the relations *between* people, or between the individual, the group and the environment, and results from the vital integration of elements which also determine

the fertility of the social group or the land, the success in hunting, the material well-being or the continuity of the lineage. As such, being in good health is being whole (*-saanzuk*: 'to be whole', 'to be in good health'), i.e. being integrated, linked and 'knotted' in a meaningful way into these three relation fields, which together give form to the Luunda world. The pervasive Luunda metaphors of the knot (*lukat, puund, munuung*), of knotting, tying, entwining, interjoining and connecting lie at the heart of many Luunda rituals to accrue life, vitality, fertility and well-being.(3)

2.2. Illness

Luunda notions of illness and misfortune are related to this integrative notion of personhood and health. Yoder's remark with regard to the neighbouring Chokwe, that 'the interpretation of the meaning of illness can only be understood within the wider context of the forces at work in the natural and social world' (Yoder 1981: 9), equally applies to the aLuund. Like health, illness situates itself *between* people, or in the relation of the individual to the social group and the natural environment. The Luunda metaphor of the knot expands in various directions: the knot is life-giving to the extent that it creates liaisons and relations, and interlinks body, group and world to a vitalising and life-giving whole, but the knot can also tie up, cause suffocation, separation and inversion. Illness, or disintegrative acts such as sorcery or transgression of vital boundaries, are viewed as a 'binding' of the victim, a 'tying up' or blocking of vital connections and junctions, causing an entanglement of the knots which should connect body, social world and nature to one single vital unity. In other words: illness obstructs. It isolates individuals and groups, and hems them in. It 'ties' the victim 'with cords' (*udi wa kukasil*) into a disintegrative bond that counters the vital integration.

2.3. Healing

A healer or ritual specialist is referred to as 'the one who unties' (*diatooto!*) the patient from this negative bond, and who re-defines the patient's position in terms of a more positive liaison, in which personal health and well-being are essentially co-extensive with social and natural/ cosmological fields. Therapeutic efficacy is generated in an innovative and transformative process which disentangles the disintegrative knots in the ritual praxis and through the processual action of the performative event, and which metamorphosizes them to a new vital whole (cf De Boeck 1991c). The ritual search for health and fertility aims at the interjoining in practice of body, social group and natural environment. By means of procedures of inversion and of manipulation of paradoxes and ambivalences (incorporation and expulsion, manipulation of left and right, up and down, inside and outside,

inversion of the biological and social rhythm, of day and night, past and present, transfer of the illness from one body to another etc [cf also Devisch 1985]) the therapy works towards a (re)construction of this interjoining. Sickness and healing, as the Luunda understand it, provide a metaphor for the construction of a new or renewed socio-cultural order. As I said, the ritual praxis of healing is thus literally a 'making whole', in a practical experience of interconnecting. It achieves the meaningful creation of an integrative order, at least on a symbolic level.

3. Ritual (therapeutic) praxis and the return to the whole

One may of course ask oneself whether the anthropological understanding of ritual as a model for the return to the whole is not merely a yearning for 'holistic healing' and for the 'whole earth' (Fernandez 1986: 209), or 'a romantic longing for a mythical time and place where communality, coherence, connectedness, collective conscience, and efficacy characterized the social order' (Drewal 1989: xiii).

In my view the analytical inclusion of terms that derive from the Luunda world — and in particular Luunda metaphors of tying, knotting and interjoining — helps in a very substantial way to discern more exactly the complex nature of the revitalising power of ritual practice, and contributes to distinguish it from a western romantic notion of paradisiacal wholeness or a holistic ideal of *harmony*.

The various fields (corporeal, social, environmental) are not static entities. I view them as something I would describe as dynamic 'rope nettings', a web composed of a multitude of knots (to stick to the same image). Like the fields, the links themselves are open-ended, for it is not pre-established which ends have to meet in order to produce a knot which ties the fields together. As such, the nature of these nettings may be compared to the ever-changing and transformative character of what cellular biologists have called morphogenetic or formative fields (de Vries 1985: 76).

Health and healing are thus essentially connection-in-transformation. Therefore the experience of interconnectedness between the body, the social world and the cosmos, which is lived in everyday life and performatively concretized in ritual practice, is not that of a static unity or a harmonious equilibrium. The power of ritual resides in paradox. The interjoining is a very dynamic and paradoxical achievement in which the transformative integration between the fields is often arrived at by means of a transgression, inversion or disruption that is the very denial of this integration.

This paradoxical power of ritual — which, as Victor Turner showed, is so typical of mid-liminal symbolism (cf Turner 1977: 37) — appears clearly, for example, in the *yaang* fertility cult that treats women with reproductive troubles. In order to restore or to promote the fecundity of the afflicted woman the main ritual sequence centres on a strongly disruptive and transgressive moment: a symbolic copulation between the patient and the spiritual agency (*haamb*) that was the very cause of her affliction. The ritual performance violates in a very concrete way and on an immediate corporeal level the vital boundaries between human and natural worlds, between the world of the living and the world of the spirits, between victim and aggressor. The ritual sequence focuses on the penetration and violation of the patient's corporeal boundaries by the spiritual entity that caused her illness.

The reversibility of the trouble — i.e. that which causes the illness may also heal it — is in fact one of the most fundamental principles underlying ritual activity among the aLuund. In the example of the *yaang* cult the reversal from sterility to fecundity is achieved by means of a transgressive union of the patient or victim with the cause of her trouble, which illustrates once more the paradoxical character of the transformative power of the ritual logic. It is precisely because of the transgression of vital boundaries that the meaningful production of a new order is arrived at. By means of the disruptive performance the ritual practice negates this very same disruption and transforms it into an integrative force which links the various fields in a meaningful and fertile way.

The ritual dissolving of disruptive tensions simultaneously includes, however, the germ for these tensions to arise anew in various ways and in the different fields. The metaphors of tying, intertwining and knotting which the aLuund use in various instances perfectly capture this paradoxical dialectical dynamics. Being the expression of unification and interconnection, the knot also obstructs and ties up. As such, recurring societal tensions and contradictions (that refer to different social, political, economical positions, or to differences in gender and age) form an inherent part of the aLuund's ritual dynamics of integration and vice versa. As Giddens (1979: 144) points out: 'Contradiction only occurs *through* system integration, since the very notion of contradiction (...) involves that of system integration.'

In other words: Luunda culture is not a mechanistic or fully predetermined, integrated uniform whole. It is, on the contrary, a universe of practices whose coherence (often partial and problematic) allows us to recognize connections in the things that people do. These connections are generated in continuous processes of cooperation, conflict and relation between people in the everyday world as well as in ritual praxis, and do often derive from contradictory, multi-layered

and complex actions, practices, utterances and memories of people who share the same doxa (cf Bourdieu 1977: 164) or experience of a self-evident world. If one were to analyse, for example, the various roles and positions of the title-holder, the maternal uncle, the hunter, the mother, the post-menopausal woman, a.o. the larger male and female sub-systems and gender models, one would see how each of these roles consists of multi-faceted and often contradictory elements that bridge a tension between positive and negative, or constructive and destructive tendencies (cf De Boeck 1991a). In this sense the web of Luunda cultural order as I understand it is *not* a seamless web. On the one hand there are many inconsistencies, contradictions and changes *within* the coherent Luunda web or cluster. On the other hand the coherence of the web itself is one that derives from heterogeneity. It is made up of several — sometimes heterogeneous — clusters and (possibly contradictory) sub-systems. Some of those have found their origin *outside* the Luunda cultural order. Part of the heterogeneity of the clusters and sub-systems that are tied together into the Luunda cultural web go back to differences in historical background. The realities of therapeutic and divinatory practice in Luunda land seem to confirm this. Luunda cultural order is not a closed system. Part of the genius of the Luunda has been their readiness and capacity at absorption, negotiation and redefinition of outside influences. This openness has formed the motor of their enormous potential for territorial conquest, enabling them to establish and maintain themselves at the summit of the political structure.

The Luunda capacity at absorption of outside influences should make us aware that there is not such a thing as the timeless essence of Luunda culture. It also poses problems of historical contextualization between the various clusters that are incorporated within the Luunda system. After providing some historical background information in the next section, I will bring out some consistent themes by means of which social and ritual Luunda practices can be interpreted in terms of their synchronic as well as diachronic totality.

4. The historical background of inter-cultural exchange

The zone of Kahemba consists of a conglomerate of various groups (cf **figure 1**). Archival notes and other writings by Belgian territorial administration officers on demographic and cultural aspects of the area's population (Brau 1942; Cordemans n.d.; Roelandts 1935, 1936a/b; Struyf 1948) already testified to this. The eastern part of Kahemba zone is ruled by one of the two traditionally recognized paramount Chokwe title-holders, Mwamushiko (the other one being Mwachisenge, located in the Shaba region). The authority of the Luunda paramount title-holder Nzofu,

on the other hand, extends itself over the greater part of the zone's western half. The division of the area between the two political title-holders is reflected in the ethnic composition of the zone of Kahemba. The further one moves to the east, the more the Luunda population gives way to a purely Chokwe population (with a transitional zone in and around the town of Kahemba itself, consisting of a mixed Luunda/Chokwe population, with the additional presence of smaller groups of Shiinji and Minuungu). This distribution reflects the historical succession of various waves of conquest in the area (cf Struyf 1948). The first waves of Luunda migration from *kool*, the Luunda heart-land in Shaba, must be situated in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. When the aLuund arrived in Kahemba they encountered and chased Holo and Suku populations, as well as other groups like Pende, Hungana and Mbala. It seems that most of the Luunda conquest of the area took place very gradually, although sometimes violently. Especially the 'submission' of the Suku seems to have been a violent matter (Lamal 1965: 71). Historical charters that form part of the oral Luunda traditions at the Nzofu royal court, as well as some of the paramount title-holder's anthroponyms, are reminders of these wars between Luunda, Suku and Holo groups. Afterwards Shiinji and other minor groups such as the Minuungu infiltrated alongside the aLuund (cf also Van Roy 1988: 63).

After 1850 the semi-nomadic Chokwe started to move up north from their original homeland in Central Angola in the direction of the Kasai and Kwilu areas. The motor of this migration was of an economic nature: they were greatly involved in the flourishing ivory trade of that time and followed the elephant herds in a northern direction. They also engaged in the collection and trading of wax and guns and were very active in the slave trade. At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century the great Chokwe expansion from the south and the east to the north and west (cf Miller 1969) reached the borders of the present zone of Kahemba (cf Struyf 1948). The Luunda population, which by that time was firmly settled all over the area, had no choice but to submit to the Chokwe pressure. They were forced out of the eastern part (where until today the Chokwe title-holder Mwamushiko keeps his court). The present Nzofu area, called the 'Mabeet' or 'Valleys', where my field research was carried out (part marked 'Lunda' on figure 1), became the refuge of the aLuund who fled from Chokwe pressure. Until now this area has remained the heart-land of western Luunda presence, but the Chokwe infiltration in Luunda land slowly continues.

In the north of the Mabeet area Luunda land borders on Yaka, Suku and Soonde territory in the administrative zones of Kasongo Lunda and Feshi. The traditional (unlike the administrative) authority of Nzofu extends over part of this territory. In the west the Nzofu territory extends across the Waamba river, where the Luunda

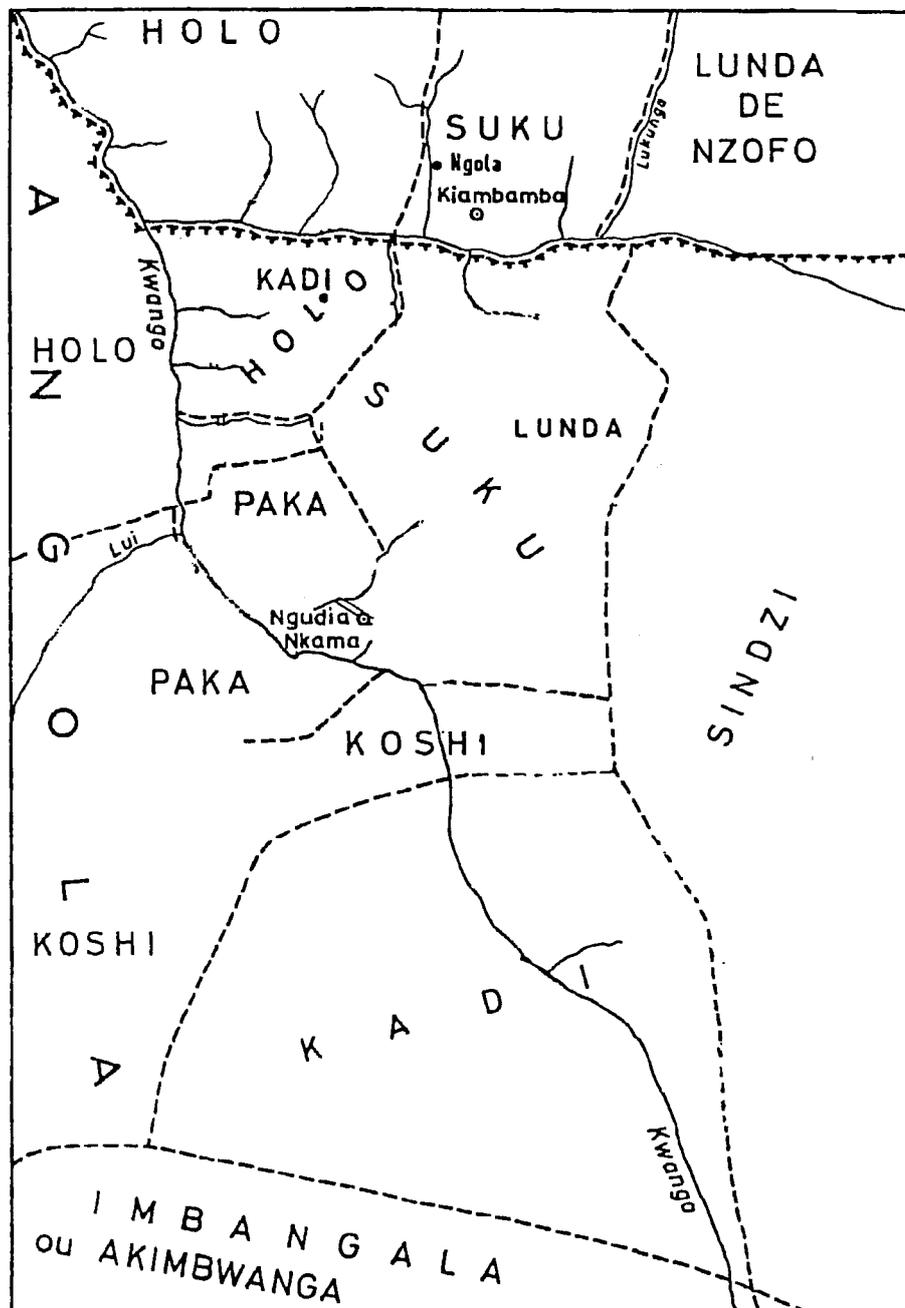


Figure 2. The distribution of groups in Angola (after Planquaert 1971:178)

population gradually mixes with Holo, Suku and Yaka. At the end of the eighteenth century, when the aLuund first arrived in the Mabeet, Holo and Suku were chased towards the extreme south-western part of the Kwaango (or across the border into Angola) (cf Miller 1988: 33). It is here, in the southernmost point of the Kasongo Lunda zone, that an important Suku title-holder, Chaambaamb (Kiambamba), a maternal nephew of the Angolan paramount Suku title-holder Ngudi a Nkama, resides. Some Holo continue to live in the Mabeet until now. One of them, Ngaandu, resides at the foot of what was formerly called Pic Sørensen, a mountain which dominates the Mabeet. There Ngaandu guards the kaolin that is used by important title-holders during their enthronement. Both Holo and Suku recognize the authority of Nzofu and pay tribute (*milaambw*) to him. A member of the Chaambaamb lineage permanently resides at Nzofu, where he represents this Suku title-holder.

At the other side of the border the authority of Nzofu is acknowledged over a large part of the Angolan province of Lunda Norte. The links between the Nzofu court and the Angolan hinterland are extensive. Most of the former Nzofu title-holders are buried in Angola. Nzofu is represented in Angola by an Angolan title-holder with the same name and from the same lineage but subordinated to the Zairean Nzofu. Through this court the aLuund keep in contact with Shiinji, Chokwe, Kadi and Imbangala populations in Angola (cf **figure 2**). Moreover, they have had long-standing contacts with those groups because of a centuries-old salt trade, and because they were part of the earliest northern slave trading routes between the Ruund nucleus and the Atlantic coast (Miller 1988).

In political terms, and from a Luunda point of view, the relationship between the aLuund and most of their neighbours can be characterised in terms of superior vs inferior, or in terms of 'lord' (*mwaant*) vs 'slave' (*kabiindj*). The aLuund form and control the political superstructure of the middle- and upper Kwaango. The 'royal' village (*musuumb*) and court of Nzofu is referred to as the 'knot' (*mpuund*), the central nodal point of a wide-ranging network that connects the numerous villages and hamlets that lay dispersed in the hills and valleys of the Mabeet and beyond. The organisation of the political territory or *ngaand* is marked by a pyramidal structure. Nzofu is situated at the apex, but he is represented by various sub-regional territorial title-holders, to whom Nzofu allocated large parts of the *ngaand*. These titles are distributed according to a system of perpetual kinship (which fictionally maintains the original blood ties between various title-holders) and positional succession (which identifies any person holding a position of authority with the original holder of the title) (cf Cunnison 1956). These two principles are consolidated in the Nzofu royal charter and genealogy which starts with the legendary quarrel between Luweej (Ruweej) and her brothers

(of whom Nzofu considers himself to be the oldest one) (4), because of her marriage to the Luba hunter Chibiind Yiluung (see e.g. De Heusch 1972, Hoover 1978, Turner 1955). These major title-holders administer their part of the *ngaand* and collect tributes themselves from the inhabitants, often small local notables. A part of these tributes (which may consist e.g. of palm-wine, first crops, game meat) is turned over to Nzofu. In this way political administration is linked to perpetual titles that are defined in terms of real, putative or fictive consanguinity. Over a large territory there exists a political network of men who are united by kinship. It is the existence of this particular system that explains in part the enormous potential for conquest that has characterised the aLuund. All political titles are integrated into a vast genealogy that focuses on the paramount title-holder Nzofu.

The cosmological imagery (in terms of sun, moon or rainbow) which is used to refer to Nzofu (and which forms part of a stock of political symbolism to be found throughout the whole of the savanna belt, see e.g. De Boeck 1992a, Devisch 1988, Reeve 1981, Studstill 1984) clearly illustrates how Nzofu is conceived of as the ultimate nexus within this web of relationships, as ‘the Lord who brings us together’ (*mwaant wakutuunga*), the great unificator.

The intricate web of relations creates an interdependence in terms of filiation and guarantees the continuity of the political organisation (i.e. the hierarchical authority of Nzofu) and the tributary network. Both enforce each other. On the one hand the relationship between aLuund and other non-Luunda groups is defined in terms of kinship. (5) On the other hand the authority of Nzofu (and the Luunda identity of political rulers) is kept alive through the paying of tributes (*-laambul*) by subordinates. More perhaps than Nzofu’s coercive (nocturnal) powers or his judicial role as ‘the ender who ends’ (*chipwiish wapwiish*), i.e. ‘the one who ends all palavers’ — symbolised by the double-edged royal sword, sign that he is impartial and may ‘slice’ a palaver both ways — it is the tributary network that assures the unity of his territory. (6) This tributary dependence links the various layers of the smaller segmentary authority structures into one integrated whole and enables the traditional political authority at the top of the system to draw non-aLuund into the system. In terms of the Aluund’s auto-definition as political rulers, those non-aLuund are considered to be socially and politically inferior, situated at the periphery of the Luunda political power (*waant*), of which they nevertheless form part.

5. Luunda (therapeutic) ritual and divination in a diachronic perspective

The ease with which the aLuund have incorporated those other groups into their political system is remarkable. This capacity at absorption has also greatly influenced Luunda ritual institutions. By way of illustration, let me confine myself to the relationship Chokwe-Luunda. The pronounced Chokwe spread in the Kahemba area left a strong mark on Luunda ritual institutions. This is clear, for example, with regard to Luunda and Chokwe cultures of healing. Both aLuund and Chokwe have ritual institutions and healing cults devoted to *mahaamb*, i.e. spiritual agencies capable of provoking illness and misfortune but also of promoting one's health, well-being and luck. The *yaang* fertility cult mentioned above is one of these ritual institutions. When compared to the aLuund the Chokwe distinguish between a far greater number of different *mahaamb* (cf Bastin 1988, Mesquitela Lima 1971). *Mahaamb* previously unknown to the aLuund were introduced by the Chokwe (and sometimes Shiinji, Imbangala and others) and adopted by the aLuund.

In other instances Chokwe ritual has simply replaced existing Luunda ritual practices. This is the case with the *mukaand* circumcision ritual. Until the 1930s and 1940s the aLuund had their own circumcision rituals which differed considerably from the Chokwe *mukanda* on certain points (cf Cordemans n.d.: 59-68). Nowadays this Luunda ritual is completely replaced by Chokwe circumcision practices (although some of the old Luunda elements are incorporated as well).

The same strong Chokwe influence is also apparent in the practice of divination (cf De Boeck 1992b). Diviners engage in an aetiological analysis and offer an expert diagnosis of the cause of affliction, misfortune or death, by means of a thorough and dynamic hermeneutic approach to the internal process and development of the problem. Finally they suggest to the consulting party which therapeutic path to take. Very often the diviner himself acts as a therapist (*mbuki*) to dissolve the trouble he has diagnosed. People travel long distances in order to consult a diviner, and it is not infrequent that the latter accompanies the consultants back to their village to treat the person for whom the divinatory session was staged. (The afflicted person is never present at the consultation itself).

A typical form of Luunda divination such as the *kasaand*, a form of sung divination, accompanied by a rattle, has completely disappeared in favour of Chokwe basket divination, the so-called *ngombo ya chisuka* (cf Rodrigues de Areia 1985). This divinatory form requires an elaborate initiation into the *ngombo* cult. (7) Nowadays,

basket divination has lost some of its attraction and is being replaced by the *ngombo ya madiya*, another form of the same *ngombo* divination cult which makes use of a mirror and which is also of Chokwe origin. Other forms of divination, which are used nowadays, originate from Imbangala and Kadi divinatory traditions, or betray Holo and Suku influences.

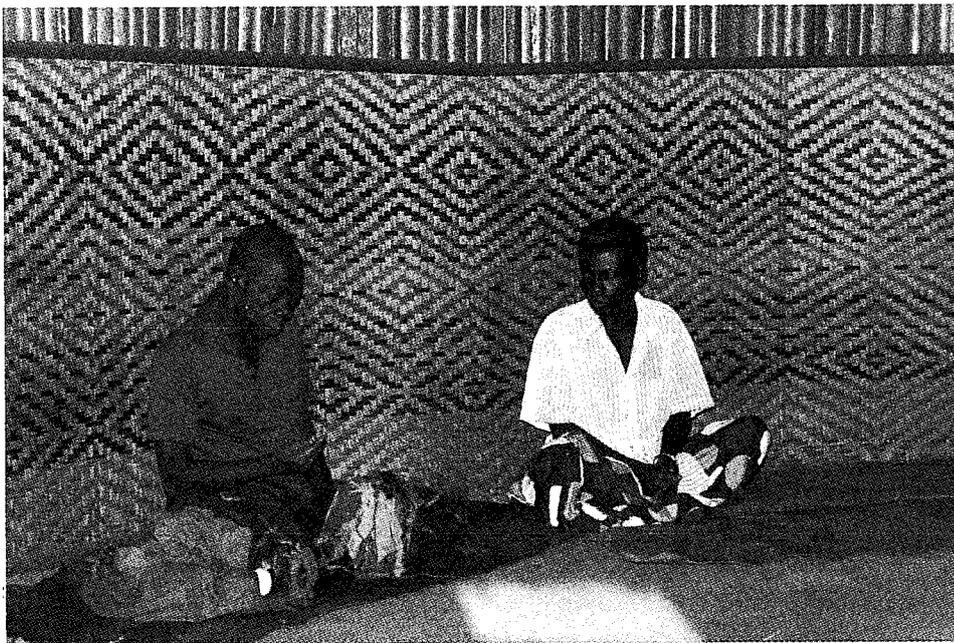
Not only have Chokwe divinatory institutions completely replaced original Luunda divination practices, the diviners themselves are almost invariably of Chokwe (or sometimes Suku) origin, and all are located at the periphery of the Mabeet area, i.e. in Chokwe, Holo, Suku or Shiinji land. Most diviners who are of Luunda origin carry out the divinatory consultation in Chokwe, even if the consultants are aLuund as well.

Finally, the *atubum* (sing. *kabum*) are travelling exorcists of Chokwe origin who clear the Luunda villages from sorcery, expose sorcerers and act as healers to those who have been attained or 'tied' by sorcerers.

6. Culture-specific elements as motor of Luunda-Chokwe exchange

In the Luunda aetiological grid illness, misfortune and death are caused by sorcerers, ancestors (or returning dead) and by *mahaamb*, spiritual agencies located in the bush and/or the forest (cf de Boeck 1991c). These three possible causal agents of illness, i.e. of the disruption of the vital web between the three relation fields of body, social group and natural environment, are situated at the margin of the life world aLuund consider as their own. They transgress the boundaries between centre and periphery, day and night or life and death. Sorcery practices that are common among the aLuund are often said to have originated among Chokwe (or Yaka), and very often Luunda elders travel to Chokwe ritual specialists in order to obtain the powerful substances (*nkaw*) needed for the fabrication of their ritual arms. In many instances aLuund have these ritual arms made for them by Chokwe. Chokwe diviners are referred to as the 'makers of the horn' (*ntaang ni mbiing*), i.e. of the ritual arms and protections used by the aLuund.

As I have mentioned above, the aLuund consider the Chokwe and other neighbouring groups as socially and politically inferior people with an almost sub-cultural identity of 'slaves' (*atubiindj*). The practices of Chokwe diviners, healers and ritual specialists among the aLuund seem to suggest, however, that the aLuund do not only locate illness, calamities, danger and evil at the margin, but also search for therapeutic or ritual good and healing at the periphery of their



*A Chokwe diviner (left) is consulted at the court
of the Luunda paramount (Nzofu, 1991)*

own societal order. In times of illness, misfortune or death they readily turn to those at the margin, solicit their help and adopt their rituals.

What is the motor of the dynamics that empowers the image of the potentially harmful, sub-cultural and marginal ritual specialist with a healing force? Why do healers, diviners and exorcists at the periphery become catalysts of healing in the centre? Why and how is the ambivalence of alterity transformed into therapeutic wholesomeness?

To give a tentative answer to these questions I will start from Victor Turner's well-known exclusive/inclusive bi-polar image. Turner (1974: 185f) distinguishes between ancestral cults and earth cults or between politico-jural rituals (organized by political leaders of conquering invaders and focused on structural positions, power divisions and classificatory distinctions within and between social groups) and fertility cults (representing and assuring the continuity and unity of ritual bonds between those groups). Turner represents these two types as mutually exclusive alternatives. It has been pointed out, however, that inclusive and exclusive defining roles may very well be combined (cf Werbner 1977). With this in mind Turner's ideal typology can be helpful to interpret the nature of Luunda political rule and social organisation, in order to discern culture-specific Luunda and Chokwe elements that can serve as a possible explanation for different notions of subject formation, images of affliction and aetiology.

6.1. The Luunda political structure and socio-cultural context

The nature of the paramount title-holder's role and rule is marked by dual (masculine and feminine) entities of opposing complementarity that are also at play in Luunda society at large (see below). The Nzofu title is inherited along strictly patrilineal lines, from father to son, in contrast to most of the sub-regional or local titles, that are handed down from mother's brother to sister's son. The paramount title-holder Nzofu represents and imposes the hierarchical structures of social organisation, vertical and linear public order and social control, and embodies the mythical ancestral order (*wiinshaankulw*) prior to the origin of society but also source of this social order and of cultural ritual and political Luunda institutions. The public order is thus dominated by a strongly ideological masculine discourse, based on male (gerontocratic) authority. Women are situated at the periphery of this public social order and are subjected to the male social control which is realized, for example, in the elder's authoritative speech (*wiingaandj*), and expressed in metaphors of verticality and linearity such as the sun in zenith (cf royal symbolism mentioned above), the rain, the crowing rooster, the root of the tree, the river's source upstream, the bush (considered to be a higher location

in comparison to the — female — gallery forest), the rainbow or the flash of lightning.

Next to this male (political, public) model of masculine dominance and female subordination there exists a second, female (more private and body-linked) model in which men are considered to be dependent on female nurturing powers. In and through the specificities of the female body, in the intimacy of the household space where they prepare food, and in their connectedness with the earth and the seasonal changes (because of their work in the fields — an exclusive female task) women are identified with a vital, unifying, regenerative and nurturing role. The vital life-force (*mooy*) springs from a uterine source of life, impersonated by a maternal ancestor in the maternal line. The (re-)generation of life and the 'knotting ahead' from one generation to the next (*-puund kulutw*) to assure the unity and continuity of the descent group is realised by the women (most notably in the mother's matriline). Within the daily life-scene as well as in healing ritual, food and the culinary process provide many metaphors of growth, birth, life-transmission, regeneration and female fecundity. Linked to these processes of cooking and cultivating, female regenerative powers are also metaphorically associated with the setting sun, the moon, the course of the river-flow downstream, the forest and the underworld (*kaluung*). As such women have part in cyclical processes of gestation, birth, growth, decay and death which escape to the control of the more linear and politically oriented male authority.

In this way the Luunda gender relations are characterised by a fundamental asymmetrical dependence. The same asymmetry is also characteristic of the Luunda descent system, which combines the matriline of both one's father's and mother's side. The uterine line is the more overt or dominant one, whereas the agnatic line is more submerged. The complex association of agnatic and uterine elements gives rise to a dysharmonic structure of patri- or virilocal residence but with matrilineal descent. Agnatic ties thus define one's immediate residential belonging, individual status and social privileges, but lineage membership is predominantly reckoned in the mother's matriline. Ego's dual membership (agnatic belonging to residential household units [*majiikw*] that are segments of the lineage, and uterine belonging to the lineage [*vumw*] itself) is mirrored in the two poles of authority that play an important role in Ego's life: the father (*taatukw*) as family head (*leemb wijiikw*) and the mother's brother (*mantw*) as head of the lineage (*leemb wivumw*). The dual complementarity between agnatic and uterine principles is also expressed in the beliefs concerning the transmission of life.

The office and function of the paramount title-holder is strongly marked by these opposing complementarities. One of the royal praise-names, 'bridge' (*chaw*),

indicates that the royal body politic embodies a constant attempt at mediation in order to reach a necessary integration between these convergent and divergent forces. Not only the title-holder's role is marked by political and hierarchical characteristics but also by more regenerative and mediating ones, by both typically agnatic and vertical/linear as well as uterine and more cyclical principles. To his people Nzofu appears both as father and as maternal uncle. As such the Nzofu title-holder seems to combine between an 'exclusive' and 'inclusive' ritual identity. Among the aLuund no distinction is made between political title-holders who hold the political and judiciary rights as well as the right to tribute, and owners of the land lacking such important political functions. Nzofu unites the function of political territorial ruler (*mwiin mangaand*) with that of the owner of the soil (*mwiin mavw*). In this capacity of *mwiin mavw* he also assumes the responsibility of more cyclical and regenerative elements in Luunda culture, and enables the fertility and fecundity, the social and biological reproduction and the material welfare of the community as a whole (including non-aLuund).

The double nature of his rule is apparent in the way he is greeted. When greeting the paramount title-holder one can, for example, use the formulae *ku waant* ('to the political power'), *ku makub* or *ku chikit* ('to the [leopard]skin', the leopard being one of the royal totemic animals), *kwingaand* (the political and territorial unit over which he rules), but also *ku diivw* ('to the earth'). The superimposition of both *ngaand* and *diivw* (plural: *mavw*) sums up the twofold nature of his rule.

To recapitulate: Luunda society is characterised by multiple tensions. These tensions or built-in 'structural turbulences', as Turner (1980: 141) has called them, situate themselves on all levels and in all fields of Luunda societal life and world-view: in the relation between political superstructure and the community of commoners, in the relationship between man and woman, in the organisation of kinship and the structure of the lineage, or in the cosmological time-space, as in the opposition between day and night, sun and moon (see again the royal symbolism: the title-holder is compared to both), bush and forest, the river's source and mouth, upstream and downstream.

These all-pervasive tensions make that the unity of Luunda cultural order has to be actively constructed, it is not given as such. All Luunda ritual (initiation, enthronement, hunting ritual or therapeutic ritual) aims at the dissolving of these tensions and the generation of a vital integration between the complementary opposites. By means of semantic and performative manipulations the interjoining and knotting between the relation fields has to be established and corroborated time and again.

In the same way the Luunda individual has to realise him- or herself in an active and dynamic way through an increasing knotting between himself and the relation fields. For a Luunda man, one way of realising this increasing insertion into the social order lies in developing his oratorical capabilities (*wiingaandj* or *mweenz a kuloond*). In Luunda political culture speech is highly important. Rhetorical speech is viewed as an act of intertwining meaning: the stringing of words into sentences is conceived of in terms of knotting or weaving (which is an exclusively male task). Significantly, the word *muloong* denotes both a palaver and the spool or spindle of the weaving loom, which men use for the fabrication of raffia tissue. The word *muloong* also means 'line' or 'row'. Like the raffia fibres are put in line by the act of weaving, so the words are ordered and put in line through speaking. Speech engages in reciprocal relationships, for speech among the aLuund is essentially colloquy, it is 'the passing on of words'. A dispute between people may be referred to as 'leprosy' (*mak*): like leprosy separates the toes from the foot or the fingers from the hand, so a dispute separates between members of the same family, lineage or village. In the palaver speech reunites what is separated, it 'heals the dispute' (*-wuk muloong*). The conflict and dissension, by means of which the body of the social group fell apart, is 'healed' and dissolved, the social tissue is restored through the interweaving of words which allow 'to eat and drink wine together'. Reconciliation is indeed expressed through images and acts of commensality, in a mutual 'opening up' of the (social) body (*-buluk*: to reconcile; of the related verb *-bulul*: 'to open up'). Speech is thus interjoining, the realising of vital and unifying knotting.

6.2. The Luunda/Chokwe contexts in comparison

Contrary to the Luunda cultural order, Chokwe culture seems to carry this unity in itself as an intrinsic, endogenous quality. The Chokwe cultural model is familiar with some of the (male/female related) polarities that characterise Luunda world to such a high degree (cf Nange 1981), but these polarities are not of such a conflicting nature. They do not give rise to such outspoken tensions, mainly because the Chokwe cultural model is far more matrilineally oriented, rooted in one — uterine — source of life. In my view the Chokwe individual is intrinsically united with this uterine source of vital life-force and energy, and not by means of external manipulations. For the Chokwe the vital knotting, the doxic unity between subject, social group and cosmos does not result from an artificial synthesis by means of ritual and semantic manipulations. It is something that comes in a natural way and that goes without saying. The Chokwe healer, diviner or ritual specialist embodies this unity in a spontaneous way.

This fundamental Luunda/Chokwe difference clearly shows on the level of the body politic. Whereas the Luunda setting is characterised by hereditary chiefship (along a patrilineal line) and a strongly centralised polity, the Chokwe are much more acephalous. Although the Chokwe traditionally had some important courts (especially in Central Angola), the nature of these courts was different from the Luunda courts. Actually the Chokwe office of *mwanangana* originates from Luunda kingship institutions (cf Miller 1969). In the seventeenth century the aLuund first met with Chokwe groups near the head-waters of the Kasai and Kwilu rivers in Central Angola. The aLuund superimposed their political system on top of existing Chokwe lineage structures. Gradually these Luunda title-holders were integrated and lost their own distinctive Luunda identity. By the end of the nineteenth century the courts of the major *mianangana* had almost completely disappeared (cf Bastin 1978: 119), except for a few lords such as the Kahemba Mwamushiko, who moved his court from Angola to Zaire. The Chokwe *mianangana* were essentially owners of the land, i.e. the accent lay on the 'inclusive' character of their role, and far less on the 'exclusive' political aspects. The rules of perpetual kinship and positional succession which give Luunda political rule such strength did hardly apply among those Chokwe title-holders, who never achieved close political integration in the form of a single kingdom or political territorial unity. Rather the relationships between those title-holders were developed along less formal lines. Also, the *mwanangana* titles were inherited according to Chokwe succession rules, i.e. matrilineally from mother's brother to sister's son, contrary to important Luunda titles.

The foregoing implies that on the political level, the Chokwe are not confronted with the problem of translating an asymmetrical male/female interdependence in terms of society's social organisation and political power, whereas in terms of the Luunda cultural order the degree of interlinking and/or tension between gender-related oppositions within the Luunda community must always be measured by the degree in which the political institution manages to ritually encompass and/or mediate between the dual oppositions in a successful way.

The essential difference between Luunda and Chokwe with regard to the nature of the unity of their cultural orders also shows in the different stress that is put on rhetoric capacity. Among the aLuund the art of speech is closely linked to the judiciary role of the royal court. Rhetoric skill (*wiingaandj*) is the prerogative of the judge (*ngaandj*) and elder. Among the Chokwe, on the other hand, speech seems less important than the development of various forms of (representational) art and statuary, which often expresses the Chokwe cultural essence in an iconic image. Remarkably enough sculpture and carvings are completely absent among the aLuund (cf Crine-Mavar 1968, Lema 1982: 79). When the aLuund are in

need of cult objects, statues, masks and the like they most often buy them from neighbouring groups, especially Chokwe (cf Lema 1982: 13), or they copy them, as in the case of the circumcision masks. It is obvious that the numerous Chokwe masks (*chihoongw*, *chikuunz*, *kaleelwa*, and others) that are adopted by the aLuund in the *mukaand* circumcision rituals actualise in a performative way the Luunda societal conflicts (between matrilinearity and patrilinearity, between agnatic and uterine principles, or between man and woman), conflicts that lie at the basis of the disruption, the *dénouement* of the vital web, and as such are one of the main factors causing illness and misfortune. It has too often been disregarded that the *mukaand* circumcision is not only an important rite of passage but also forms a comment on the socio-political organisation of the society, in what Turner has called the 'politics of a non-political ritual' (Turner 1968). In circumcision tales that reflect the masculine ideology, the circumcision masks are said to have risen from death. Their origin is traced to the burial place in the bush, a place with outspoken masculine connotations. As such the masks represent social control over the female domain and express male authority (it is no coincidence that in a number of situations the masks and the paramount title-holder have to observe the same ritual prescriptions). At the same time every circumcised man but also every adult woman knows that this tale is a fraud, and that the masks were fabricated by men in order to gain control over this ritual institution which — as all aLuund agree — was originally invented by the women. The way in which women discovered male circumcision and applied it to their children forms the subject of another *mukaand* tale. The female invention of circumcision and the masculine usurpation of this female knowledge through the invention of the circumcision masks forms a poignant comment on the societal order and the nature of relations between the two gender categories.⁽⁸⁾ On the one hand it asserts the public (coercive) authority of men. On the other hand the tales stress the male dependence on female powers: manhood is actually given to them by the women.

The interaction between Chokwe and aLuund is characterised by a similar ambiguity. The aLuund project the structure of Luunda male/female relationships onto their relationship with the Chokwe. In the practice of the inter-cultural marriage between Chokwe and aLuund the latter relate to the former as 'wife-takers' to 'wife-givers' or, to put it in other words, as man to woman. It is my impression that marriages between a Chokwe man and a Luunda woman are rare, at least in the Kahemba area (unfortunately there is no literature available on this topic).

The same asymmetrical interdependence which exists between man and woman among the aLuund (male public authority and social control on the one hand, and male dependence on female nurturing and regenerative powers on the other hand) also characterises their relationship with the Chokwe. Marginal and

'woman-like' as they are on the socio-political level, the Chokwe embody for the aLuund the doxic relatedness with the vital, uterine life-source, and precisely because they are like women they are capable of bringing therapeutic good from the margin to the centre (while escaping in part the control from the centre). It would take us too far to analyze the therapist's ritual and symbolic role in detail. Let me merely state that in healing ritual and especially in fertility cults among the aLuund the therapist, and even more so the Chokwe therapist, always appears as a mediating female, maternal and avuncular figure (cf De Boeck 1991a: 370f; see also Devisch 1989 for similar therapeutic symbolism among the Yaka). Similarly, the diviner inherits his ritual knowledge and power along matrilineal lines.

7. Therapeutic self-recognition through otherness

What does the foregoing learn us with regard to the reason why the aLuund attribute a healing force to the (socially and politically peripheral) Chokwe, rather than locating this power within the centre of their cultural order?

The example from the boys' circumcision ritual shows how, through the masks, which function as mirrors, Chokwe cultural representations intrude upon the aLuund. As such the Chokwe, or the image the aLuund have of them, function as 'trickster-healers' (Kopp 1976). Through the Chokwe masks presented to the aLuund the latter are confronted with their own cultural premises. By forcing a recognition of the problematic aspects of Luunda societal order upon the aLuund, the Chokwe, in their role of tricksters, also become healers: they are capable of mediating between apparently opposed terms, on the boundaries of various relationships (cf Lévi-Strauss 1974: 248f). It is in this capacity of mediator that the trickster is able to seize contradictory experiences and to initiate a ritual transformation which dissolves these contradictions.

Within the Luunda context the Chokwe exemplify the essential qualities of the trickster, who is basically 'a figure from the margin yet somehow of the centre' (Pelton 1980: 3). The Chokwe healer or diviner, like the figure of the trickster (or — significantly enough! — the Luunda paramount title-holder), occupies a mediating, bridging position halfway between the poles of complementary opposites. As Lévi-Strauss (1974: 251) rightly remarks, the trickster retains something of that duality because of his mediating position. It is precisely this fundamental mediating and therefore ambivalent and equivocal character of the trickster that provides the Chokwe therapist with the force to heal from the margin and to

transform disruption into vital knotting and unity. As a trouble-maker, capable of making evil emanate from the margin (through sorcery for example), he is also a healer of trouble, capable of activating the therapeutic principle of reversibility (i.e. that which causes the affliction may also heal it). That is the trickster's power: he is able to interlink because he can also disrupt.

Images of Self and Other are dialectically interwoven: they cannot exist without one another. The power of healing does not only lie with the healer himself but also with the differences created by the coming together of healer and patient, or of auto- and altero-definitions, in an 'interplay of Otherness' (Tausig 1987: 460). The differences created by this coming together constitute the creation and the articulation of an implicit socio-cultural knowledge and image-making. In my understanding, Luunda cultural patterning tries to conceal its own problematic existential conditions by means of the image it produces of the 'marginal' Chokwe. To the aLuund, Chokwe are indispensable as healers of kenosis, they heal the aLuund's threatening loss of self. Within the code of Luunda political power and ideology the social and political inferiority of the Chokwe is a necessary condition for the bringing into being of the aLuund's self-identification as political superiors. The Chokwe, however, reflect this image from the periphery back to the aLuund, and they do so in a trickster-like way, playing on the qualities of conjunction and disjunction that are characteristic of the boundary. In this way they confront the aLuund with a mirror-like image of themselves.

The paradox of self-recognition through otherness, and the shock it generates, forms the dynamics of the therapeutic process. The healing force emanates from this dialectical combined action of alterity between healer and patient. No other figure embodies this better than the diviner. In fact the universe of the diviner is that of the trickster.⁽⁹⁾ The diviner is the ultimate mediator: he mediates between life and death, between humans and ancestors, between periphery and centre, between the forces of the day and those of the night, between victim and aggressor, between healing and harming. The diviner blurs the distinctions, crosses boundaries and thereby is capable of disclosing the patterns of existence, of ordering inchoate and contradictory experiences and events into a comprehensive diagnosis, exposing the causal chain of events which led to the affliction, misfortune or death.

The diviner as trickster-healer is the paramount *mwaant's* alter ego. Of both the diviner and the political title-holder it is said that they are 'boundless', i.e. they are capable of crossing boundaries and combining between otherwise distinct realities. Both are 'bridges'. The similarities between diviner and *mwaant* are multiple. Both observe the same food prescriptions and other ritual prescriptions, e.g. when travelling or crossing a river. Both are buried in specific ways that

differ from the burial rites for common people. Both follow specific initiations to 'open their eyes' (*-soonz mees*) in order to discern the powers of the night. Both have visionary capacities. Both speak 'without shame' and are impartial in their judgement. Like the paramount a diviner is respected but also feared. Both have their *malal*, a private space and kitchen area where they eat, unobserved by others. The installation of the title-holder's *malal* takes place during his enthronement, in a nocturnal ritual which symbolically brings about the bridging of various complementary opposites, the ritual joining of feminine cyclical symbols of life-transmission to male political symbols. This bridging is indicated by the word *malal* itself, for the verb — *lal* quite simply means 'to bridge'. The installation of the *malal* forms a key moment in the title-holder's ritual transformation from individual to boundless and omnipresent institutional body, capable of mediating between day and night, sun and moon, high and low, inside and outside, centre and periphery, sky and underworld, human, animal and spirit world. The diviner's initiation, as well, focuses on the joining of male and female or agnatic and uterine elements. The diviner's capacity at scrutinizing the past originates in the ritual joining of (male) head and (female) heart, of seeing and feeling, of reasoning and intuition. The diviner is said to be like a *mwaant* for his consultants, but like a title-holder he also appears as nurturing mother-figure to his clients.

Yet diviner and title-holder are different in many respects as well. Whereas the *mwaant* himself forms the centre of society, the diviner, the 'lord of the divination' (*mwaant wa ngoomb*) is referred to as 'the *mwaant* of the bush'. The title-holder forms the central point of the *ngaand* or political territory, the diviner is 'seated in the middle of the bush' through which 'he leads the dead'. The bush links the diviner and the title-holder, in that it is a masculine, 'higher' space, which also points back to the ancestral origin of the Luunda political institutions. At the same time the bush belongs to the outside as opposed to the social space of the village. It is the space where sorcerers meet, where the dead are buried and *mahaamb* spirits dwell. The diviner is also a figure who partly belongs to the periphery from where danger emanates. The diviner (and even more so the *kabum* or travelling exorcist) shares in the dangerous associations of the outside and as such may even form a threat to the political centre.⁽¹⁰⁾ Yet he is not to be confused with, for example, the sorcerer. As the aLuund say with regard to the relationship between diviner and sorcerer: 'the pig resembles the wild boar, but you must not think that they are brothers'. The diviner is not, like the sorcerer, the Irreducible Other. Rather he is the Mediating Other. Unlike the *mwaant* he does not embody the ultimate knot in which the essential 'bridging' is realised and the conditions for societal renewal and the transmission of the vital life-flow is shaped. Being a jester king he is, on the contrary, the instance who makes the (re-)integration of seemingly contradictory opposites possible as mid-liminal

Seer of trouble. Holding a mirror to the Nzofu title-holder, the diviner is a constant reminder of the fact that the vital integration achieved in the Luunda political body is an artificial creation, unlike his own powers that spring from one — uterine — source and thus come to him in a natural way. In this respect the diviner reveals that the figure of the *mwaant* is perhaps more of a trickster than the trickster-healer himself. The irony of that final Chokwe comment lurks at the back of the implicit cultural knowledge that is generated and shared in the encounter with the aLuund.

Notes

1. I carried out my research in the Nzofu area from 1987 to 1989 and again in 1991. I gratefully acknowledge grants made available to me by the 'Onderzoeksfonds' of the Catholic University of Leuven and by the Belgian 'Nationaal Fonds voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek'. An earlier version of this article was presented at the Workshop on Ethnicity in Africa, Leiden, December 1991. Parts were also presented at the workshop on 'Magical Power Figures in Central Africa' (Brussels, January 1992) and at the Ninth Triennial Symposium on African Art (Iowa City, April 1992). I like to thank W. van Binsbergen, R. Devisch, D. Hersak and A.F. Roberts for their comments and suggestions.
2. The recent growing success of some sort of 'Luunda' nationalism and 'ethnic' awareness illustrates this. In recent years some groups of (real, putative or fictive) Luunda origin in the Kwaango have started to stress their Luunda heritage as a strategy for the promotion and the empowering of the prestige of their own traditional 'chiefs' ('chef coutumier') or as a means in a broader politics of ethnicity. In doing so they try to draw the attention and gain the recognition of the regime, in a conscious attempt at political Luunda revaluation and at the expense of neighbouring political rivals of other 'ethnic' signature. Nzofu is clearly an example of this. In this respect it is pointed out at the Nzofu court that the aLuund cannot remain 'behind the *kyaambvu*', who is the neighbouring Yaka paramount title-holder (but of Luunda origin). The *kyaambvu* has always been considered an important traditional 'chef' by the regime. Yet his importance has in part been a creation of the colonial authorities, who regarded him as the main stabilising factor in the area (Bailleul 1959). Therefore the colonial administration recognised him as 'grand chef coutumier', in contrast to Nzofu who was treated as one among many other Luunda 'chefs'. Luunda traditions, however, consider the *kyaambvu* to be the 'younger brother' of Nzofu. Pelende Khobo is another example of a traditional political instance in the Kwaango who stresses his alleged Luunda heritage by way of political strategy [cf Matadiwamba Kamba Mutu 1988).
3. I have developed this in greater detail in de Boeck 1991a. (On the revealing etymology of a pool of Bantu verbs related to knotting, tying and uniting see Faik-Nzuji Madiya 1988:5).
4. This is contrary to the Shaba versions. In the Nzofu version of this Luunda founding myth Luweej is presented as the granddaughter of Yaal a Maku, who is considered to be the first *mwaant yaav*. The Shaba versions differ slightly in this respect.

5. The way in which the Chokwe-Luunda relationship is conceptualized forms an example of this. The aRuund of the Shaba nucleus consider the Chokwe to be descendants of a daughter of Luweej, namely Kamoong a Lwaaz. In the (presumably Chokwe) Kahemba version of Struyf (1948: 371) Luweej is a daughter of Kamoong a Lwaaz. The version I was given at the Nzofu court runs parallel to the Shaba version. Since Luweej is a sister of Nzofu, the aLuund of the Nzofu area define the relation between themselves and the Chokwe as one between mother's brother and sister's son. Nange (1981: 9-12) gives two versions of the relation between aLuund and Chokwe. In the first version (of Luunda origin) the Chokwe are considered the children of the aLuund. The Chokwe version does not establish a direct relationship between the two groups.
6. In many instances the policy of the Belgian colonial administration with regard to traditional authorities seems to have consisted in undermining this system of tributary payments, which they did not favour, for reasons that are not hard to understand. The promotion of minor local chiefs as well as the increasing demands that were made on traditional authorities in terms of tax collection had a negative effect on the power base of those traditional authorities (cf Bustin 1975: 124f on the effect of colonial policy on the *mwaant yaav*'s power base; see also M'bokolo 1985: 193, Vellut 1972: 62f).
7. Fragments of the *kasaand* songs survive as they have come to be incorporated within the standard stock of songs and sayings used by *ngombo ya chisuka* diviners.
8. In this respect the way in which the origin of the *mukaand* is conceptualized shows many striking similarities with the tales of the origin of *mwiingoony* and *chiwiil* initiation rituals (cf De Boeck 1991b).
9. Significantly the figure of the trickster is also referred to as 'Seer of troubles' in Koongo society (cf Janzen 1982: 258).
10. The royal court will, for example, try to avoid that a divinatory séance takes place when the Nzofu lineage is possibly involved. If necessary, the court will coercively block the proceedings. A *ngoomb* involving the title-holder or one of the members of his family can never be made public.

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