

---

# Globalization and Virtuality: Analytical Problems Posed by the Contemporary Transformation of African Societies

Wim van Binsbergen

---

## ABSTRACT

In response to the need for further conceptual development in the field of anthropological globalization studies, this article concentrates on the concept of virtuality, arguing that this constitutes one of the key concepts for a characterization and understanding of the forms of globalization in Africa. The article first defines virtuality and globalization and provisionally indicates their theoretical relationship. The problematic heritage of a locality-obsessed anthropological tradition (as explored in the article) then provides the analytical framework within which virtuality makes an inspiring topic. The transition from theory to empirical case studies is made by examining the problem of meaning in the African urban environment. Finally, an ethnographic situation is invoked (urban puberty rites in present day Zambia) which illustrates particular forms of virtuality as part of the globalization process.

## GLOBALIZATION

Towards the end of the first international conference to be organized by the Dutch national research programme on 'Globalization and the Construction of Communal Identities', Ulf Hannerz stressed the need for further conceptual development, not just within the Dutch programme, but in globalization studies generally. This article is an attempt to take up that challenge. While situated against the background of a rapidly growing social-science literature on globalization,<sup>1</sup> my aim is not to review that literature in its impressive scope and depth; rather more modestly, and perhaps not inappropriately at this stage, I have let myself be inspired by a series of recent discussions and

- 
1. Cf. Fardon (1995); Featherstone (1990); Forster (1987); Friedman (1995); Hannerz (1992a); and references cited there. Some of the underlying ideas were expressed decades ago, for example by Baudrillard (1972, 1981); see also McLuhan (1966). That the world was becoming a 'global village' was a truism throughout the 1980s, but work by Toynbee (1952: 134–5) and Spengler (1993/1923) can be cited to show that the idea of a global confrontation of cultures, with global cultural coalescence as a possible outcome, has been in the air throughout the twentieth century.

*Development and Change* Vol. 29 (1998), 873–903. © Institute of Social Studies 1998. Published by Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 108 Cowley Rd, Oxford OX4 1JF, UK.

presentations within the programme and within the wider intellectual framework of Dutch anthropology.

This article concentrates on *virtuality*, which I have come to regard as one of the key concepts for a characterization and understanding of the forms of globalization in Africa. The first two sections of the article are taken up defining virtuality and globalization and provisionally indicating their theoretical relationship. The problematic heritage of a locality-obsessed anthropological tradition (as explored in the subsequent section) provides the analytical framework within which virtuality makes an inspiring topic. The transition from theory to empirical case studies is made by examining the problem of meaning in the African urban environment. Finally, by invoking a specific ethnographic situation (urban puberty rites in present day Zambia) the article illustrates particular forms of virtuality as part of the globalization process.

My own field-work career has oscillated between urban and rural African settings.<sup>2</sup> African towns have always been a context for cosmopolitan meaning which does not stem from the villages in the rural regions surrounding the town, but reflects, and is reflected in, the world at large. Yet I have decided to dwell here upon problems of meaning which — under the heading of virtuality — can only be formulated (even if their solution calls for a much broader geographical scope) when we look upon globalization from the vantage point of the African village and its largely internal processes of signification. Seeking to illuminate virtuality as an aspect of globalization requires that we set the scene by taking a closer look at the latter concept.

### The Globalization Process

Taken at face value, globalization is primarily a spatial metaphor, the socio-cultural implications of the mathematical properties of the earth's surface, notably the fact that from any point on that surface any other point can be reached, while (provided the journey is continued for long enough in the same direction) the point of departure will also be the ultimate destination: in other words, the entire surface will be covered. Yet it is important to also investigate the temporal dimension of the globalization metaphor: the compressing of time and of time costs<sup>3</sup> in relation to spatial displacement, as

- 
2. True to the Manchester/Rhodes-Livingstone tradition by which that career was largely fed.
  3. Notions on space-time compression in globalization are to be found, for example, in Giddens (1990; cf. 1991: 16ff.) and Harvey (1989). Some of my own recent work (van Binsbergen, 1996b) suggests that we should not jump to the conclusion that such compression is uniquely related to the globalization context. An argument leading through African divination systems and board-games right to the Neolithic suggests that such compression is an essential feature of both games and rituals throughout the last few millennia of human cultural history.

well as the meaning and the effects of such displacement. It is the interplay between the temporal and the spatial dimensions which allows us to pinpoint why globalization has taken on a substantially new form in the last few decades. Since the shape of the earth has not noticeably changed over the last few million years, human culture, or cultures, could perhaps be said to have always been subject to globalizing tendencies.<sup>4</sup> Before the invention of the telegraph, the railroad, and the aeroplane, however, the technology of time and space was in most parts of the world so limited that the effective social and cultural life-world tended to be severely bound by geographical propinquity. Most people thus lived in a world where localizing tendencies would greatly outweigh whatever globalization took place or came along. People, ideas, and goods did travel, often across wide distances, as archaeological and historical records demonstrate. If writing and effective imperial organization then created a continuous and more or less stable orientation across space and time, the conditions would be set for *early* or *proto-globalization*, characteristic of the communication technology of the mounted courier and the sailing boat. Where no such conditions prevailed, movement inevitably meant dissociating from the social setting of origin, and establishing a new local world elsewhere — a world usually no longer connected, through effective social interaction, with the one left behind, initially strongly reminiscent of the latter but decreasingly so — even in the case of nomadic cultures whose persistence in the face of spatial mobility has depended on their comparatively low investment in spatial attachment as an organizing principle.

If today we have the feeling that globalization expresses a real and qualitative change that uniquely characterizes the contemporary condition, it is because of the hegemonic nature of capitalist technology, which has brought about unprecedented levels of mastery of space and time. When messages travel at light speed across the globe using electronic media, when physical displacement is hardly needed for effective communication, yet such displacement can be effected within one or two days from anywhere on the globe to anywhere else, and when the technology of manufacturing and distribution has developed to such levels that the same material environment using the same objects can be created and fitted out anywhere on the globe at will — then we have reduced the fees that time and space impose on the social process to virtually zero. Then we can speak of globalization in the true sense.

Globalization is not about the absence or dissolution of boundaries, but about the dramatically reduced fee imposed by time and space, and thus the opening up of new spaces and new times within new boundaries that were hitherto inconceivable. Globalization as a condition of the social world

---

4. For a similar view see Friedman (for example, 1995), who chides anthropology for having relegated other cultures to the status of isolated communities.

today revolves around the interplay between unbounded world-wide flow, and the selective framing of such flow within localizing contexts; such framing organizes not only flow (of people, ideas and objects) and individual experience, but also the people involved in them, creating more or less enduring social categories and groups whose collective identity as supported by their members' interaction creates an eddy of particularism, of social localization, within the unbounded global flow.

## VIRTUALITY

### Virtuality Provisionally Defined

The terms *virtual* and *virtuality* have a well-defined and illuminating history, which in its broad sweep of space and time, its multi-lingual aspect and its repeated changes of meaning and context, reminds us of the very globalization process we seek to illuminate by the use of these terms. Non-existent in classical Latin (although obviously inspired by the word *virtus*, 'there'), these are late-medieval neologisms, whose invention became necessary when, partly via Arabic versions of Aristotle's works, his Greek concept of *δύναμις* ('potentiality, power, quadrate') had to be translated into Latin (Hoenen, 1947: 326, n.1; Little et al., 1978 s.v. 'virtual'). While the Scholastic/Aristotelian philosophy, with its emphasis on general potential to be realized in the concrete, gradually retreated from most domains of North Atlantic intellectual life, the terms found refuge in the expanding field of physics, where virtual velocity, virtual moment, virtual work became established concepts around 1800. This was a century after optics had formulated the theory of the 'virtual image': the objects shown in a mirror image do not really exist, but are merely illusory representations, which we apparently observe at the end of the light beams connecting the object, the surface of the mirror, and our eye. In our age of information technology the term 'virtual' has gained a new lease of life,<sup>5</sup> which takes its cue from the meaning given to the term in optics.

In the globalization perspective we frequently refer to products of the electronic industry, and the furtive, intangible projections of texts and images on electronic screens as an obvious example of virtuality. *Virtual reality* has now become a cliché of the postmodern experience: computer games and simulations which — with extreme suggestions of reality — conjure up, for the consumer, vicarious experiences in the form of illusions. As electronic media, like television and video, march on in contemporary Africa, it is also in that continent that we can make out this form of virtuality in the context of the globalization process.

---

5. IBM (1987) lists as many as fifty-six entries starting with 'virtual'.

However, the applicability of the concept of ‘virtuality’ extends further. Drawing on a notion of ‘virtual discourse’ which, while inspired by Foucault (1966), is in fact equivalent to that of performative discourse in analytical philosophy,<sup>6</sup> Jules-Rosette, in a splendid recent paper, reserves the notion of virtuality for a specific discursive situation: the ‘symbolic revindications of modernity’s broken promise’ (Jules-Rosette, 1996: 5), which play a central role in the construction of postcolonial identity: ‘When a virtual discourse becomes a master cultural narrative [e.g. *authenticité*, *négritude*], individuals must accept it in order to validate themselves as members of a collectivity’ (ibid: 6). This allows her to link the specific form of postcolonial political discourse in Zaire (for a strikingly similar example from Nigeria under Babangida, see Apter, 1996) to the macro-economic predicament of Africa today, of which the elusive magic of money then emerges as the central symbol.

Inspiring as this is, it is not necessary to limit the concept of virtuality to that of explicit, verbal discourse, and there is much to be said for a wider application, encompassing implicit beliefs, the images on which the electronically-inspired use of the concept of virtuality would concentrate, and object. Here we may allow ourselves to be inspired by a recent paper by Rüdiger Korff (1995) even if our emphasis is to be on the cultural and symbolic rather than — as in Korff’s case — on the technological and economic side:

Globalization is accompanied by virtuality. The financial markets gained autonomy by producing the goods they trade among themselves and thereby developed into speculators’ ‘Monopoly’. Virtuality is well shown by the information networks in which the hardware determined the possibilities for person to person interaction. This allows an anonymity in direct interaction. All personality features are hidden, and virtual personalities take over the conversation. Even the world of commodities is virtualized. While for Marx a commodity had two aspects, use- and exchange-value, today a ‘symbolic’ value has to be added. Traditions and cultures are created as virtual realities and states offer imaginations in their search for political subjects. This indicates a new stage in the dialectic of disenchantment and mystification. While capitalism disenchanting morality and substituted it with the magic of commodities and technology (*Verdinglichung*), today commodity fetishism is substituted by postmodern virtual realities. ... Appadurai (1990) mentions in a similar vein ethnoscapas, mediascapas, technoscapas, financescapas and ideoscapas. ... As with commodities, these ‘imagined worlds’ and virtual realities develop their own dynamics and start to govern their creators for whom it is impossible to distinguish reality from virtuality. Just like Goethe says in the *Magician’s Apprentice*: ‘Die Geister, die ich rief, die werd ich nicht mehr los’. (Korff, 1995: 5)<sup>7</sup>

- 
6. Cf. Austin (1962): statements which cannot be true or false, such as exhortations, or the expression of an ideal.
  7. On virtuality and related aspects of today’s automated technology, also see Cheater (1995); Rheingold (1991).

Ultimately, virtuality stands for a specific relation of reference as existing between elements of human culture ( $A_1, A_2, \dots, A_n$ ). This relation may be defined as follows: once, in some original context  $C_1$ ,  $A_{\text{virtual}}$  referred to (that is, derived its meaning from)  $A_{\text{real}}$ . This relationship of reference is still implied to hold, but in actual fact  $A_{\text{virtual}}$  has come to function in a context  $C_2$  which is so totally dissimilar to  $C_1$ , that  $A_{\text{virtual}}$  stands on itself; and although still detectable on formal grounds as deriving from  $A_{\text{real}}$ , has become effectively meaningless in the new context  $C_2$ , unless for some new meaning which  $A_{\text{virtual}}$  may acquire in  $C_2$  in ways totally unrelated to  $C_1$ .

Virtuality, then, is about disconnectivity, broken reference, de-contextualization, yet with formal continuity shimmering through.

### **Non-Locality as Given, Locality as an Actively Constructed Alternative, Virtuality as the Failure of Such Construction**

Applying the above abstract definition, we may speak of virtuality when, in cases involving cultural material from a distant provenance in space or time or both, signification is not achieved through tautological, self-contained, reference to the local, so that such material is not incorporated and domesticated within a local cultural construct, and no meaningful contemporary symbolic connection can be established between these alien contents and other aspects of the local society and culture.

That geographical nearness should be considered of key importance to any social structure was already stated by that pioneer of legal anthropology, Maine (1883: 128ff.). Kroeber (1938: 307ff.) reiterated the same point when reviewing the first decades of scientific anthropology. In Radcliffe-Brown's words (1940: xiv):

Every human society has some sort of territorial structure. ... This territorial structure provides the framework, not only for the political organisation ... but for other forms of social organisation also, such as economic, for example. The system of local aggregation and segregation ... is the basis of all social life.

Before the development of contemporary communication technologies (which include such inventions, already more than a century old, as the telephone and the motor car, and the even older railway) the coincidence between interactive, social space and geographical space could conveniently be taken for granted for practical purposes. If horse-riding and the talking drum represent the paroxysm of technological achievement, the effective social horizon coincides with the visible horizon. It is only the invention of modern technologies which has revealed this time-honoured coincidence as accidental and not inevitable. For complex reasons which indirectly reflect the state of communication technology by the end of the nineteenth century, anthropology in its formative decades concentrated on social contexts outside the industrial North Atlantic, where such technologies were not yet

available, so that social space and geographical nearness continued to be two sides of the same coin.

For the geographically near to become the local in the classic anthropological sense, we need to add an appeal to the *systemic nature of local culture*. This refers to the claim (usually highly exaggerated) that the elements of local culture hang together systematically, making it possible to reduce it to a manageable array of elements and informing principles, rather than the astronomical number of separate cultural events that take place, and material cultural objects that exist among the set of people involved, within a fairly limited space and time. Creolization (cf. Hannerz, 1987) then means, not that the systemic nature of local culture has been abandoned by the actors or destroyed by the onslaught of outside influences, but that it accounts for appreciably less than the entire culture: a considerable part falls outside the system. Such creolization can be argued to be merely a specific form of virtuality, as a departure from the systemic nature of local culture. If culture produces reality in the consciousness of the actors, then the reality produced under conditions of such departure is, to the extent to which it is virtual, only ... virtual reality.

This is ground covered by Appadurai in his well-known paper on 'The Production of Locality' (1995). A merging of two notions of locality ('geographical space of nearness, neighbourhood' versus 'social space of identity, home') was an ingredient of earlier versions of Appadurai's argument; fortunately that element was dropped in the final, published version, in favour of a view of locality not only as *social* space regardless of geographical contiguity, but also as problematic, to be actively constructed in the face of the standard situation of non-locality (Appadurai, 1995).

Under modern conditions of both communication technology and the social engineering of self-organization for identity, the socially local is no longer necessarily the geographically near. We need a concept of social, culture and identity space which (especially under conditions of 'zero time-fees', that is, electronic globalization) is carefully distinguished from geographical space — even though the latter is, like that other Kantian category, time, far less self-evident and unchangeable than Kant, and naïve contemporary consumers of secondary school physics, would tend to believe. In the same way as the Euclidean two-dimensional geometry of the flat plane can be demonstrated to be only a special case of the immense variety of *n*-dimensional geometries which modern mathematics has come to conceive, the insistence on geographical propinquity as a prime determinant of social relations is merely a reflection of the state of communication technology prevailing during much of man's history — in the hunting and herding camps and the farming villages that until only a few millennia ago were the standard human condition. As such it has been built into classic anthropology. Meanwhile, the distinction between social space and geographical space does not mean that the material technologies of geographical space have become irrelevant or non-existent in the face of the social technology of

locality construction: a prudent approach to globalization has to take account of both.

As advocated by Appadurai, we have to study in detail the processes through which localization as a social process takes place. The local, in other words, is in itself a problem, not a given, let alone a solution. We need to study the process of the appropriation of globally available objects, images and ideas in local contexts, which more often than not constitutes itself in the very process of such appropriation. Let us take our cue from the history of a major family of divination systems found throughout Africa, under conditions of 'proto-' globalization (with the intermediate technology of seafaring, caravan trade and élite-restricted, pre-printing literacy).

This history is basically that of localization processes involving astrological and numerological interpretational schemes as current in the medieval Arabian culture of North Africa and the Middle East, where they are known under the name of geomancy or *Âilm al-raml* ('the science of sand').<sup>8</sup> This process produced the interpretative catalogues for all African divination systems based on a material apparatus producing 2<sup>n</sup> different configurations, such as *Fa*, *Ifa*, *Sixteen Cowries*, *Sikidy*, *Four Tablets*: illiterate African versions so elaborate and so saturated with local African imagery that they would appear to be authentically, autochthonous African. In the same way it can be demonstrated that the actual material apparatuses used in this connection (tablets, divining boards, divining bowls), although ultimately conceived within an African iconography and carving techniques, and clad in awesome African mystery and imputed authenticity, are in fact extreme localizations of the intercontinentally mediated scientific instruments (the sand board, the wax board, the lode compass, and the square wooden simplification of the astrolabe) of Greek, Arabian, and Chinese nautical specialists and scribes. The example has considerable relevance, because here some of the main factors of globalization and universalism (notably literate scholarship, empirical research and long-distance seafaring), have rather ironically ended up as forms of the most entrenched, stereotypical African localization and particularism. The hardest analytical nut to crack is to explain why, and as a result of what ideological, social, economic, and technological mechanisms, such extreme localization seems to be more typical of sub-Saharan Africa than of other parts of the Old World in the second millennium CE. Whatever of the original, distant contexts still clings to these localized African precipitates (the overall format of the apparatus, immutable but locally un-interpretable formal details such as isolated

---

8. Even in that Arabian culture such schemes were already highly virtual in that their symbolism and iconography did not derive from the local society of that time and age, but carried (in clearly demonstrable ways, open to the patient scrutiny of scholarship rather than to the brooding fantasies of New Age) distant echoes of Hebrew, pre-Islamic Arabian, Old-Egyptian, Northwest African, Sumerian, Akkadian, Indian, Iranian and Chinese systems of representation.



astrological terms and iconographic representations) amounts to virtuality and probably adds much to these systems' charisma (cf. van Binsbergen, 1995b, 1995c, 1996a, 1996c).

Such extreme localization of outside influences, rendering them practically imperceptible and positioning them within the rural environment, although typical for much of Africa's history, is, however, no longer the dominant form which globalization takes in Africa. Present-day virtuality manifests itself through the incomplete systemic incorporation of cultural material which is both alien and recognized by the actors to be so, and which circulates not primarily in remote villages but in cities.

Examples of this form of virtuality are to be found all over Africa today, and in fact (in a way which would render a classic, holistic anthropological analysis nonsensical) they constitute the majority of cultural expressions: from world religions to party politics mediating world-wide models of formal organization, development and democracy;<sup>9</sup> from specialist production of contemporary art, *belles lettres* and philosophy inspired by cosmopolitan models, to the production — no longer self-evidently but self-consciously, as a deliberate performance — of apparently local forms of music and dance during an ethnic festival like Kazanga in western central Zambia (van Binsbergen, 1992a, 1994); from fashionable lingerie to public bodily prudery demonstrably imposed by Christianity and Islam.

These symbolic processes are accompanied by, in fact carried by, forms of social organization which (through the creation of new categories and groups, the erection of conceptual and interactional boundaries around them, and the positioning of objects and symbols through which both to reinforce and to transgress these boundaries) create the socially local (in terms of identity and home) within the global. Such categories and groups are (in general) no longer spatially localized, in the sense that they no longer create a bounded geographical space which is internally homogeneous in that it is only inhabited by people belonging to the same bounded organization ('village', 'ward', 'neighbourhood'). We have to think of such organizations (whose membership is typically *geographically* dispersed while creating a *social* focus) as ethnic associations, churches, political parties, professional associations, schools, hospitals, and so on. If they are geographically dispersed, this does not mean that their membership is distributed all over the globe. Statistically, they have a fairly limited geographical catchment area commensurate with the available transport technology, but within that catchment area, the vast majority of human inhabitants are non-members — they do not, therefore, constitute contiguous social spaces.

The typical, although not exclusive, abode of such organizations is the town, and it is to African towns that we shall shortly turn for a case study of urban puberty rites, which will add a measure of descriptive and contextual

---

9. Cf. van Binsbergen (1995a) where a cultural relativist argument on democracy is presented.

substance to these theoretical exercises. However, virtuality presents itself in the case study in the form of an emulation of the village as a virtual image; so let us first discuss that unfortunate obsession of classic anthropology, the village.

## THE VIRTUAL VILLAGE

The classic anthropological image of ‘the’ African culture as holistic, self-contained, locally anchored, effectively to be subsumed under an ethnic name, was deliberately constructed so as to constitute a local universe of meaning — the opposite of virtuality. Since such a culture was thought to form an integrated unity, all its parts were supposed to refer to that same coherence, which in its entirety gave the satisfactory illusion of localized meaningfulness.

### Characterizing African Village Society

It is necessary to dwell on this point, since (as I discovered when presenting an earlier version of this argument) it is capable of producing considerable confusion. Although there are notable exceptions,<sup>10</sup> and although the research programme of which this collection is a first product is prompted by the determination to change that situation, it is true to say that most of the existing literature on globalization was not written by established ethnographers of African rural life. The typical focus for globalization studies is the metropolis, the self-evident access to international lifestyles mediated by electronic media, with a dominant presence of the state and the culture and communication industry. However, people born in African villages are now also being globalized, and an understanding of their experiences requires an analytical and descriptive grip on African rural social formations.

Not infrequently, Marxist studies of the 1970s and 1980s, including my own, are claimed to have demonstrated the deficit of earlier mainstream anthropology. This is largely a spurious claim. Modes-of-production analysis, as the main contribution of Marxism to contemporary anthropology, has done a number of essential things:

- reintroduce an emphasis on material production and appropriation;
- dissolve the assumed unitary nature of the local rural society into a handful of subsystems (‘modes of production’), each with their own

---

10. See the collections by Comaroff and Comaroff (1993) and Fardon (1995); also De Boeck (in this volume); Geschiere and Fisiy (1995); Meyer (1995); Pels (1993); and perhaps my own recent work.

logic of exploitation and ideological legitimation, and linked together ('articulated') within the 'social formation', in such a way that the reproduction of one mode depends on the exploitation of another mode; and finally,

- provide a theoretical perspective which could account for the persistence and relative autonomy (also as 'logics' of signification and legitimation) of these various modes and their articulations, even under conditions of capitalism and the colonial or post-colonial state.

This revolutionary reformulation of the classic anthropological perspective could therefore accommodate internal contradictions, multiplicity of fields of symbolic reference (notably: as many fields as there were modes of production), while the articulation process itself also generated a field of symbolism of its own (van Binsbergen, 1981), and outside functioning within the world system. However, it did not discard the essentially local nature of the social formation, nor its systemic nature even if the latter was no longer conceived as unitary, holistic integration, but came to be represented as a dialectic composite of contradictions between the few specific 'logics', each informing a specific mode of production. The Marxist approach did not render the notion of local integration obsolete: to the extent to which the articulation of modes of production under the hegemony of one dominant mode has succeeded, the resulting social formation is effectively integrated by its very contradictions.

So even from a Marxist perspective it appears to be true to say that African historic societies in the present millennium have invariably displayed cleavages in terms of gender, age, class, and political power, while containing only partially integrated elements deriving from and still referring, beyond the local society, to other cultural complexes which were often remote in space and time. Yet they have offered to their members (and largely in order to accommodate those very contradictions) a fairly coherent universe, in which the human body-self, interpersonal relations, the landscape and the supernatural all featured in one composite, comprehensive world-view, whose symbolism and ritual elaboration were to reconcile and conceal, rather than articulate, such internal contradictions as constitute the whole and render it dynamic.

In this context, the *meaning* of an element of the local society and culture (to attempt a definition of a word used too loosely in the argument so far) consists in the network of referential relations at the centre of which such an element is perceived and conceptualized by the participants; through this relational network the element is taken by the actors, explicitly or implicitly, as belonging to that general socio-cultural order, cognitively and emotively linked to many other aspects of that order — a condition which produces a sense of proper placement, connectivity and coherence, recognition, identity as a person and as a group, aesthetics, bodily comfort and even healing.

### **Yet the Rural African Community is Problematic, or: The Virtual Village**

In Africa, village society still forms the context in which many present-day urbanites were born,<sup>11</sup> and where some will retire and die. Until recently, the dichotomy between town and village dominated Africanist anthropology. Now we have to admit that, considering the constant movement of ideas, goods and people between town and village, the dichotomy has lost much of its explanatory value. In terms of social organization, economic and productive structures, goals and evaluations, town and village have become complementary, even converging options within the social experience of Africans today; their difference has become gradual, and is no longer absolute. However, while of diminishing value in the hands of analysts, the dichotomy between town and village remains relevant in so far as it informs African actors' conceptualizations of their life-world and social experience. Here the idealized image of the village stands for an imaginary context (no longer to be found in the real villages of today) where production and reproduction are viable and meaningful, pursued by people who — organized along the lines of age and gender divisions, and historic ('traditional') leadership — are turned into an effective community through an un-eroded kinship system, symbolism, ritual and cosmology. Vital in this set-up is that — typically through non-verbal means — ritual manages to construct the bodies of the members of the residential group as charged or inscribed with a shared meaning, a shared identity; while the body moves across time and space this indelible mark is carried to new contexts, yet remains.

Even in the village context the effective construction of community cannot be taken for granted. Central African villages, for instance, have been described (see van Binsbergen, 1992b; Turner, 1968; van Velsen, 1971) as the scene of an uneasy truce between strangers, only temporarily constructed into community — at the expense of kinship rituals which take up an enormous part of available resources and even so barely conceal or negotiate underlying contradictions among the village population. Such rituals of kinship (those attending pregnancy, birth, adolescence, marriage, and death) not only transform biological human individuals into competent social persons with a marked identity founded in the local community (or in the case of death transform such social persons in the face of physical

---

11. How many? That varies considerably between regions and between countries. The post-independence stagnation of African national economies, the structural adjustment programmes implemented in many African countries, the food insecurity under conditions of civil war and refugeeship, the implementation of rural development programmes — all these conditions have not been able to bring the massive migration to African towns to an end, even if their continued growth must of course be partly accounted for by intra-urban reproduction, so that even in African towns that were colonial creations, many inhabitants are second, third or fourth generation urbanites. Typical figures of village-born, first generation urbanites available to me range from an estimated 15 per cent in Lusaka, Zambia, to as much as 50 per cent in Francistown, Botswana.

decomposition); such rituals also construct, within that overall community, specific constituent identities, such as those of gender and age. They refer to, and to a considerable extent reproduce and perpetuate, the productive and social organization of the village society. Perhaps the central characteristic of the old (nineteenth-century) village order was that the construction of community was still so effective that in the villagers' consciousness their actual residential group self-evidently appeared as the realization of that ideal.

It is crucial to realize that in the twentieth century, even with reference to rural settings, we are not so much dealing with 'real' communities, but with rural folks' increasingly problematic model of the village community. Perhaps we could say that the village was becoming a virtual village. Rural ideological change in Africa during the twentieth century (van Binsbergen, 1981) can be summed up as a process of people actively confronting the erosion of that model, its becoming irrelevant and impotent in the face of political economic realities. Throughout the twentieth century, rural populations in Africa have struggled, through numerous forms of organizational, ideological and productive innovation combining local practices with outside borrowings, to reconstruct a new sense of community in an attempt to revitalize, complement or replace the collapsing village community in its viable nineteenth century form. In fact the entire ideological history of twentieth century Africa could be written from this perspective. Peasants have been constantly engaged in the construction of new, alternative forms of community on the basis of rather new principles as derived from political, cultic, productive and consumerist ideas introduced from the wider world. Many of these movements have sought to re-formulate the notion of the viable, intact village community in new terms and with new outside inspiration and outside pressure. Ethnicity, healing cults, prophetic cults, anti-sorcery movements, varieties of imported world religions and local transformations thereof, for instance in the form of Independent churches, struggles for political independence, involvement in modern national politics including the recent wave of democratization, involvement in a peripheral-capitalist cash economy with new symbols of status and distinction — these have been some of the strategies by which villagers have sought (often against many odds) to create and bring to life the image of a new world, and a continued sense of meaning and community, when the old village order was felt, or said, to be falling apart. That old village order, and the ethnic cultures under which it was usually subsumed, may in themselves have been largely illusory, strategically underpinned by the ideological claims of elders, chiefs, first-generation local intellectuals, colonial administrators and missionaries, open to the cultural *bricolage* of invented tradition on the part of these vocal actors (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Vail, 1989).

If the construction of community in the rural context has been problematic, the village still represents one of the few models of viable community among Africans today, including urbanites. It is the only model which is part

of a collective idiom pervading all sections of contemporary society. As such it features massively as a nostalgic reference in ethnic identity construction. Whatever alternative models of community are available, they are shallowly rooted and reserved to specific sections of the society: Christians or Muslims (the local religious congregation as a community, and by extension the abstract world-wide collective of co-religionists), cult members (the cultic group as a community), members of a specific ethnic group (where the ethnic group is constructed into a community, but typically constructed by emphatic reference to the village model as a focal point of origin and meaning), the élite (patterns of consumerism which replace the notion of community through interaction with the notion of virtual or vicarious global community through media transmission and the display of appropriate manufactured symbols — status symbols in clothing, transport, housing, and so on).

We are now ready to step into African urban life as an obvious locus of globalization, and explore virtuality there.

#### **THE PROBLEM OF MEANING IN AFRICAN TOWNS TODAY**

Globalization theory has stressed the paradoxical phenomenon that the increasing unification of the world in political, economic, cultural and communication terms does not lead to increasing uniformity but, on the contrary, goes hand in hand with a proliferation of local differences. It is as if myriad eddies of particularism (which may take the form of ethnic, linguistic and religious identities, consumerist lifestyles, and so forth) are the inevitable accompaniment of the swelling stream of globalizing universalism. Anthropologists have — in theory, that is — long ceased to define their research object primarily by reference to a more or less demarcated part of the global landscape assumed to be the habitat of a bounded, integrated ‘culture’ supposedly shared by a people, tribe or ethnic group. While the time-honoured technique of participant observation still favours their focusing on a set of people who are more or less tied together by enduring social relations and forms of organization, such a set need no longer be localized (for modern technology — not just fax machines and E-mail, but also simple telephones and rural buses — enables people to effectively maintain relationships across wide distances: as members of the same ethnic group, as employees of the same multinational corporation, as members of a cult, as traders) nor do the individuals which constitute that set (as a statistical conglomerate, or a social network of dyadic ties) necessarily and as a dominant feature of their social experience construct that set as an ideal community with a name, an identity, moral codes and values. Fragmentation, heterogeneity, alienation and cultural and organizational experiment are characteristic of the global condition, not only in North Atlantic urban society but also, for much the same reasons, in the rapidly growing towns of Africa today.

In essence, the aspect of globalization which we seek to capture by concentrating on virtuality, revolves around issues of African actors' production and sustaining of meaning. It is hoped that the notion of virtuality will equip us for the situation — rather more common than village anthropology prepared us to believe — that meaning is encountered and manipulated in a context far removed, in time and space, from the concrete social context of production and reproduction, where that meaning was originally worked out in a dialectical interplay of articulated modes of production; where, on the contrary, it is no longer local and systemic, but fragmented, ragged, virtual, absurd, maybe even absent. The study of such forms of meaning is of course doubly problematic because anthropology itself is a globalizing project, and one of the first in western intellectual history. African towns, with their usually recent history, heterogeneous migrant population, and full of social, political and economic structures apparently totally at variance with any village conditions in the surrounding countryside, are laboratories of meaning. What can the anthropologist, and particularly the variety of the rurally-orientated anthropologist unfashionably favoured in this article, learn here about virtuality?

To what extent has the contemporary urban environment in Africa managed to produce and nurture symbols which selectively refer to the state and the world economy, yet at the same time negotiate dilemmas of rural-derived identity and of urban-rural relations? It is here that one can begin to look for the stuff that African urbanism is made of. Is it true to say that these towns have engendered collective representations which are strikingly urban, and which offer partial and tentative yet creative solutions to such typically urban problems as incessant personnel flow, ethnic, class and religious heterogeneity, economic and political powerlessness, and the increasing irrelevance, in the urban situation, of historic, rural-derived forms of social organization (kinship, marriage, 'traditional' politics and ritual)? Mitchell's *Kalela Dance* (1956) still offers a classic paradigm, stressing how at the city boundaries elements of rural society and culture (such as a rural-based ethnic identity, a minority language, expressive forms of music and dance, specific ways to organize production and reproduction in localized kin groups) may be selectively admitted onto the urban scene, yet undergo such a dramatic transformation of form, organization and function that their urban manifestations must be understood by reference to the urban situation alone. Or, in Gluckman's (1960: 57) famous words, 'the African townsman is a townsman'. In other words, the African townsman is not a displaced villager or tribesman but, on the contrary, 'detribalized' as soon as he leaves his village. These ideas evidently circulated in African urban studies long before 1960 (see, for example, Gluckman, 1945: 12).

Statements of this nature have helped to free our perception of African urbanites from traditionalist and paternalistic projections; for according to the latter they continued to be viewed as temporarily displaced villagers whose true commitment and identity continued to lie with their rural

societies of origin. The stress on the urban nature of African urbanites even amounted to a radical political challenge, in a time when the colonial (and South African) economy was largely based on the over-exploitation of rural communities through circulatory migration of male workers conveniently defined as bachelors while in town (see Meillassoux, 1975; cf. van Binsbergen and Geschiere, 1985; Gerold-Scheepers and van Binsbergen, 1978). We can therefore forgive these authors their one-sidedness, but there is no denying that they failed to address the fundamental problems of meaning which the construction of a town-based culture in the (by and large) new cities of Africa has always posed.<sup>12</sup>

So what happens to meaning in town? It is particularly in the context of meaning that we see African towns as the arena where a migrant's specific, disconnected and fragmented rural-based heritage is confronted with a limited number of 'cosmopolitan' socio-cultural complexes, each generating its own discourse and claiming its own commitment from the people drawn into its orbit in exchange for partial solutions of their problems of meaning. Before discussing these complexes, it is useful to realize that, as a source of meaning, the historic rural background culture of urban migrants is not necessarily as fragmented as the multiplicity of ethnic labels and linguistic practices in the town may suggest. Ethnic groups have a history (Chrétien and Prunier, 1989), and while some ethnic groups can be said to be recent, colonial creations, underlying their unmistakable differences there is in many cases a common substratum of regional cultural similarities and even identities: continuities such as a patrilineal kinship system, emphasis on cattle, similarities in the marital system, the cult of the land and of the ancestors, patterns of divination and of sacrifice, shared ideas about causation including witchcraft beliefs, converging ideas about conflict resolution and morality. The result is that even urban migrants with a different ethnic, linguistic and geographical background may yet find that they possess a cultural lingua franca that allows them to share such historic meanings as have not been mediated through the state and capitalism. Sometimes specific routinized modes of inter-ethnic discourse (such as joking relations) explicitly mediate this joint substratum. Traditional cults and independent Christian churches in town, which tend to be trans-ethnic, derive much of their appeal from the way in which they articulate this historic substratum and thus recapture meanings which can no longer be communicated with through migrants' direct identification with any specific historic rural culture. Moreover, partly on the basis of these rural continuities, urban migrants creatively develop a new common idiom not only for language communication, but also for the patterning of their everyday relationships, their

---

12. Nor should we over-generalize. Mitchell's seminal *Kalela Dance* should be contrasted with the work of Philip and Ilona Mayer, which was far more subtle, and much better informed, on rural cultural material as introduced into the towns of Southern Africa (see Mayer, 1971, 1980; Mayer and Mayer, 1974).



notions of propriety and neighbourliness, the interpretation and settlement of their conflicts, and the evaluation of their statuses.

After this qualification, let us sum up the principal cosmopolitan complexes:

- *The post-colonial state*: a principal actor in the struggle for control of the urban space; a major agent of social control through its law-and-order institutions (the judiciary, police, immigration department); a major mediator of ‘cosmopolitan’ meaning through the bureaucratically organized services it offers in such fields as education, cosmopolitan medicine, housing, the restructuring of kinship forms through statutory marriage and so on; a major context for the creation of new, politically instrumental meaning in the process of nation-building and élite legitimation; and through its constitutional premises the object (and often hub) of modern political organizations.
- A variety of manifestations of the *capitalist mode of production*, largely structuring the urbanites’ economic participation and hence their experience of time, space, causation, personhood and social relations; involving them in relations of dependence and exploitation whose ideological expression we have learned to interpret in terms of alienation (the destruction of historic meaning); but also, in the process, leading on to modern organizational forms (such as trade unions) meant to counter the powerlessness generated in that process; and finally producing both the manufactured products on which mass consumption as a world-wide economic and cultural expression — in other words, as another, immensely potent form of ‘cosmopolitan’ meaning — depends, as well as the financial means to participate in mass consumption.
- *World religions*, which pursue organizational forms and ideological orientations rather reminiscent of the post-colonial state and the capitalist mode of production, yet tending to maintain, in time, space and ideological content, sufficient distance from either complex to have their own appeal on the urban population, offering formal socio-ritual contexts in which imported cosmopolitan symbols can be articulated and shared between urbanites, and in which — more than in the former two complexes — rural-based historic symbols can be mediated, particularly through Independent churches.
- *Cosmopolitan consumer culture*, ranging from fast food shops to hire-purchase furniture stores displaying the whole material dream of prospective middle-class lifestyle, and from video outlets and record shops to the retail shops of the international ready-made garment industry, and all the other material objects by which one can encode distinctions in or around one’s body and its senses, and create identity not by seclusive group-wise self-organization but by individual communication with globally mediated manufactured symbols.

These four cosmopolitan repertoires of meaning differ considerably from the ideal-typical meaning enshrined in the rural historic universe. While historically related, they are present on the urban African scene as mutually competitive, fragmented, optional, and more or less anomic or even — when viewed from a competitive angle — absurd. Yet together, as more or less *élite* expressions, they constitute a realm of symbolic discourse that, however internally contradictory, assumes dominance over the rural-orientated, local and historic repertoires of meaning of African migrants and workers.

The ways in which African urbanites, in their interactions and conceptualizations, construct, keep apart, and merge as the case may be, cosmopolitan and rural idioms, are ill understood for several reasons. Those who, as social scientists, are supposed to study these patterns of interaction are, in their personal and professional lives, partisans of cosmopolitan repertoires and are likely to be identified as such by the other actors on the urban scene. Much of the actors' juggling of repertoires is evasive and combines the assumption of rigid subordination with the practice of creative challenge and tacit symbolic resistance in private spheres of urban life where few representatives of the cosmopolitan repertoires have access. Whereas anthropology has developed great expertise in the handling of meaning in one spatio-temporal context (like rural African societies) whose wholeness and integration it has tended to exaggerate, the development of a sensitive approach to a fragmented and incoherent multiplicity of repertoires of meaning, each assaulted and rendered more or less meaningless by the presence of the other, had to wait until the advent of Postmodernism as an attempt to revolutionize, or to explode, anthropology.<sup>13</sup> Our classic predecessors in African urban studies worked on the assumption that the African urban situation was very highly structured — by what they called the 'colonial-industrial complex' imposing rigid segregation and class interests, by voluntary associations, by networks (cf. Epstein, 1958, 1967; Mitchell, 1956, 1969). In the contemporary world, such structure is becoming more and more problematic, and the town, especially the African town, appears as the postmodern social space *par excellence*. My greatest analytical problem here is that as a social space the town lacks the coherent integrated structure which could produce, like the village, a systematic (albeit internally segmented and contradictory) repertoire of meaning ready for monographic processing; but this may not merely be one researcher's analytical problem — it appears to sum up the essence of what the urban experience in Africa today is about, in the lives of a great many urbanites.

Postmodernism is not the only, and deliberately unsystematic, analytical approach to multiplicity of meaning within a social formation consisting of fundamentally different and mutually irreducible sub-formations. As a

---

13. Cf. Geuijen (1992); Kapferer (1988); Nencel and Pels (1991); Tyler (1987); and references cited therein.

paradigm that preceded Postmodernism by a decade in the circulation of intellectual fashions, the notion of articulation of modes of production is in principle capable of handling such a situation (see, for example, van Binsbergen, 1981; van Binsbergen and Geschiere, 1985). However, the emphasis, in this approach, on enduring structure and a specific internal logic for each constituent 'mode of production' renders it difficult to accommodate the extreme fragmentation and contradiction of meaning typical of the urban situation. The various cosmopolitan and local historic repertoires of meaning available in the Francistown situation, for instance, cannot convincingly be subsumed under the heading of a limited number of articulated modes of production (see van Binsbergen, 1993a). Yet while deriving inspiration from the postmodern position, my plea here is for rather greater insistence on structure, power and material conditions than would suit the convinced postmodernist.

The work of Ulf Hannerz (1980, 1986, 1989, 1990, 1992a, 1992b) is exemplary for the kind of processes of cultural production, variation and control one would stress when looking at African towns (or towns anywhere else, for that matter) from the perspective of the modern world as a unifying, globalizing whole. However, it is significant that his work, far from problematizing the concept of meaning as such, takes meaning rather for granted and concentrates on the social circulation of meaning, in other words the management of meaning (Hannerz, 1992a: 17, 273; taking his cue from Cohen and Comaroff, 1976). Hannerz's position here is far from exceptional in anthropology, where we theorize much less about meaning than would be suggested by the large number of anthropological publications with 'meaning', 'significance', 'interpretation' and 'explanation' in their titles. Nor am I doing much better here myself: I did offer, above, a homespun definition of ethnographic meaning, but must leave the necessary theoretical discussion for another paper, or book.

For Hannerz too, the African townsman is truly a townsman, and even the analyst seems to have entirely forgotten that 'many' (see note 11 above) of these urbanites, even now, have been born outside town under conditions of rural, localized meaning evoked today, and that this circumstance is likely to be somehow reflected in their urban patterns of signification. In certain urban situations rural models of interaction and co-residence tend to be more prominent than in others. We need to remind ourselves of the fact that urban does not necessarily mean global. For instance, as a fresh urban immigrant, one can take refuge among former fellow-villagers in an urban setting. The vast evidence on urban immigration in Africa suggests that the rural-orientated refuge in a denial of globalization tends to be partial and largely illusory; in other words towns, precisely in their display of apparently rural-derived elements, tend towards high levels of virtuality/discontinuity/transformation. Even so it remains important to look at meaning in African towns not only from a global perspective but also from the perspective of the home villages of many of the urbanites or their parents and grandparents.

Our first case study deals with an urban situation, and should help us to lend empirical and comparative insight in the applicability of the virtuality concept.

## **THE VIRTUAL VILLAGE IN TOWN: GIRLS' PUBERTY CEREMONIES IN URBAN ZAMBIA<sup>14</sup>**

### **Historic ('Traditional') Village-derived Ritual in African Urban Settings Today, and its Interpretation**

When central reproductive institutions of the old village order, including rituals of kinship, are already under great pressure from new and external alternatives in the rural environment, one would hardly expect them to survive in urban contexts. For in town, life is obviously structured, economically and in terms of social organization, in ways which would render all symbolic and ritual reference to rural-based cults reproducing the old village order hopelessly obsolete. Who would expect ancestral cults to take place in urban settings in modern Africa? What theory of change and continuity would predict the continued, even increasing practice of ecstatic possession ritual in urban residential areas, often in the trappings of new formally organized cults posing as Christian churches or Islamic brotherhoods, but often also without such emulation of world religions? Why do people pursue apparently rural forms when socially, politically and economically their lives as urbanites are effectively divorced from the village? The fact is, however, that rural symbolic forms are prominent on the African urban scene; as such they represent a conspicuous element of virtuality, since urban life is no longer informed by the patterns of production and reproduction that corresponded with these rural symbols in the first place.

Stressing the complementarity between a local community's social, political and economic organization and the attending religious forms, the Durkheimian heritage in the social science approach to religion, however dominant, provided no ready answers when applied to the study of historic

---

14. The following section is based on a text which I wrote in 1994 as a statement of intent for the WOTRO Programme on Globalization and the Construction of Communal Identities. Before long, as a result of a PhD conducted within the same programme, we may expect Thera Rasing's more detailed ethnographic and analytical answers to the questions raised in this section: meanwhile, see Rasing (1995). Of the vast literature on puberty initiation in South Central and Southern Africa, see also Corbeil (1982); van Binsbergen (1987, 1992b, 1993b); De Boeck (1992); Gluckman (1949); Hoch (1968); Jules-Rosette (1979–80); Maxwell (1983: 52–70); Mayer (1971); Mayer and Mayer (1974); Richards (1982), which includes a 'regional bibliography' on girls' initiation in South Central Africa; Turner (1964, 1967); White (1953).

(‘traditional’) urban ritual, at least in Africa.<sup>15</sup> For how can there be such continuity when African urbanites stage a rural ritual in the very different urban context? What would be the referent of the symbols circulating in such ritual? The relative paucity of studies on this point stands in amazing contrast with the prevalence and ubiquity of the actual practice on the ground. It is as if the absence of an adequate interpretative framework has caused anthropologists to close their eyes to the ethnographic facts staring them in the face. At the same time they have produced in abundance studies of forms of urban ritual in the context of world religions (especially studies on urban Independent and mainstream Christian churches), which of course do ‘feel right’ in an urban setting, where (far more directly than in the remote countryside) globalization made its impact on the African continent.

The relatively few researchers (including myself) who have documented urban ‘traditional’ ritual in modern Africa and sought to interpret it, have come up with answers which, while persuasive in the light of the analytical paradigms prevalent at the time, now seem rather partial and unsatisfactory.

- The most classic argument is that couched in terms of *socialization and the inertia of culture*: even if urbanites pursue new forms of social and economic life especially outside their urban homes, in childhood they have been socialized into a particular rural culture which seeks continued acknowledgement in their lives, especially where the more intimate, existential dimensions are concerned; staging a rural kinship ritual in town would be held to restore or perpetuate a cultural orientation which has its focus in the distant village — by which is then meant not in the intangible ideal model of community, but the actual rural residential group on the ground.
- A more sophisticated rephrasing of the preceding argument would be in terms of broad, largely implicit, long-term cultural orientations that may be subsumed under Bourdieu’s term *habitus*: girl’s initiation deals with the inscribing, into the body and through the body, of a socially constructed and mediated personal identity which implies, as an aspect of habitus, a total cosmology, a system of causation, an eminently self-evident way of positioning one’s self in the natural and social world; in a layered conception of the human life-world, it is at the deepest, most implicit layer that such habitus situates itself, largely impervious to the strategic and ephemeral surface adaptations of individuals and groups in

---

15. This embarrassment created by the dominant paradigm is probably the main reason why the study of African historic urban ritual is much less developed than the empirical incidence of such ritual would justify. Such studies as do exist have tended to underplay the historic, rural dimension in favour of the modern dimension (Mitchell, 1956; Ranger, 1975), or have drawn from other founts of inspiration than the dominant Durkheimian paradigm (van Binsbergen, 1981; Janzen, 1992).

the conjuncture of topical social, political and economic conditions prevailing here and now.

- Then there has been the *urban mutual aid argument*: economically insecure recent urban migrants seek to create, in the ritual sphere, a basis for solidarity so that they may appeal to each other in practical crises such as illness, funerals, unemployment, and so on; being from home, the traditional ritual may help to engender such solidarity, but (a remarkably Durkheimian streak again, cf. Durkheim's theory of the arbitrary nature of the sacred) in fact *any* ritual might serve that function, and world religions often provide adequate settings for the construction of alternative, fictive kin solidarity in town.
- The *urban–rural mutual aid argument* is a related argument deriving from modes-of-production analysis, which stresses the urban migrants' continued reliance on rural relationships in the face of their urban insecurity; since rural relationships are largely reproduced through rural ritual, urbanites stage rural-derived ritual (often with rural cultic personnel coming over to town for the occasion) in order to ensure their continued benefit from rural resources: access to land, shelter, healing, historical, political and ritual office.
- Having thus stressed the shared economic and ideological interest between townsmen and villagers, it is only a small step to the argument of *ethnic construction*. This revolves around the active propagation of a specific ethnic identity among urban migrants, which serves to conceptualize an urban–rural community of interests, assigns specific roles to villagers and urbanites in that context (the townsmen would often feature as ethnic brokers *vis-à-vis* the outside world), and effectively re-defines the old localized and homogeneous village community into a de-localized ethnic field spanning both rural and urban structures, confronting ethnic strangers and organizing those of the same ethnic identity for new tasks outside the village, in confrontation with urban ethnic rivals, with the urban economy and with the central state. In this ethnic context, the urban staging of 'traditional' rural ritual would be explained as the self-evident display of ethnically distinctive symbolic production. Again, however, any *bricolage* of old and new, local and global forms of symbolic production might serve the same purpose.

These approaches have various things in common. They assume the urbanites involved in rural kinship ritual to be recent urban migrants still retaining one foot in the village. They do not make the distinction (which, I argued above, emerged as a dominant feature of South Central African symbolic transformations throughout the twentieth century) between the actual rural residential group and the ideal model of the village community, and hence cannot decide between two fundamentally different interpretations of the ritual performance in town: does it seek to recreate a real village and by implication to deny urbanism? or does it seek to create *urban* community, as

(in South Central Africa, at least) a new form of social locality, open to world-wide influences and pressures, merely by *reference* to an inspiring village-centred *abstract* model of community?

Finally, these approaches ignore such alternative and rival modes of creating meaning and community, precisely in a context of heterogeneity and choice which is so typical for towns wherever in the modern world. If urbanites stage rural kinship rituals in town it is not because they have no choice. They could tap any of the four complexes of cosmopolitan meaning outlined above, do as Hannerz and the many authors he cites suggest, and completely forget about rural forms. If they do insist on selectively adhering to rural forms in the urban context, further questions can be asked. Do they retain firm boundaries *vis-à-vis* each other and *vis-à-vis* the rural-centred model, or is there rather a mutual interpenetration and blending? How to explain that these globalizing alternatives leave ample room for what would appear to be an obsolete, rural form, the puberty rite? How do these symbolic and ideological dimensions relate to material conditions, and to power and authority: do they reflect or deny material structures of deprivation and domination; do they underpin such power as is based on privileged position in the political economy of town and state, or do they, on the contrary, empower those who would otherwise remain underprivileged; to what strategies do they give rise in the inequalities of age and gender, which are symbolically enacted in the village model of community and in the associated kinship rituals, but which also, albeit in rather different forms, structure urban social life?

### **Girls' Initiation in the Towns along the Zambian 'Line of Rail'**

While the centrally-located farmers' town of Lusaka took over from the town of Livingstone in the extreme south of the country as territorial capital, a series of new towns were created in Zambia (then Northern Rhodesia) at the northern end of the 'Line of Rail' from the late 1920s, in order to accommodate the massive influx of labourers in the copper mining industry. As 'the Copperbelt', this is the most highly urbanized part of the country, and the site of famous and seminal studies in urban ethnicity, politics and religion. While imposed on a rural area where ethnic identity was primarily constructed in terms of the Lamba identity, the Copperbelt attracted migrants from all over South Central Africa but particularly from Northern Zambia; the Bemba identity (in itself undergoing considerable transformation and expansion in the process) became dominant in these towns, and the 'town Bemba' dialect their lingua franca.

If rural kinship rituals may seem out of place in town, they would seem even more so in the context of mainstream urban churches such as the Roman Catholic church. As a major agent of globalization, this world-wide hierarchical organization has sought to vigorously impose its particular

conception of cosmology, hierarchy, sanctity and salvation (through the image of a community of believers and of saints), in short its system of meaning, on the African population, and part of its project has been the attempted monopolization of the social organization of human reproduction and human life crisis rituals.

Throughout South Central Africa, the female puberty ritual is one of the dominant kinship rituals (even more so than the male counterpart); its remarkably similar forms have been described in detail in many rural ethnographic contexts from Zaire to Northern Transvaal. For almost a century, female puberty ritual has been banned as pagan and sinful in Roman Catholic circles in Zambia. However, even during my research on urban churches in Zambia's capital Lusaka in the early 1970s, I found women's lay groups within the formal organization of mainstream churches willing to experiment with Christian alternatives to female puberty training. Therefore I was not surprised to learn that by the late 1980s, these experiments had grown into accepted practice. Nor is the phenomenon strictly confined to urban churches; for instance in the area of my main Zambian research, in Kaoma district in the western part of the country, a limited number of women now claim to have been 'matured [the standard expression for puberty initiation in Zambian English] in church' rather than in a family-controlled rural or urban kinship ritual.

The situation in the urban church congregations, as highlighted by Rasing's recent research (1995), is of inspiring complexity. On the one hand there is a proliferation of lay groups, each with their own uniforms and paraphernalia, formal authority structure within the overall church hierarchy, routine of meetings and prayers, and specialized topics of attention: caring for the sick, the battle against alcoholism, and so on. Already in these groups the organizational form and routine, and the social embeddedness this offers to its socially uprooted members, would appear to be an attempt at the construction of social locality. The latter might be of greater interpretative relevance than the specific contents of the religious ideas and practices circulating there; the result is, to use this phrase once more, 'a place to feel at home' — but at the same time a place to engage in formal organization. At first sight such voluntary organizational form would appear to be an aim and a source of satisfaction and meaning in itself; that is how, for instance, I looked at the Independent churches which I first studied in Lusaka in the early 1970s, when my theoretical baggage was still totally inadequate to appreciate them beyond the idea that they were contexts in which to learn about bureaucracy and modernity. However, I am now beginning to realize that it is such formal organizations which create the bedding, and the boundaries, within which the uncontrolled flow of goods, images and ideas as conveyed by globalization, can be turned into identity.

Some of these lay groups specialize in girls' initiation. However, contrary to what might be expected on the basis of comparative evidence from my own field research (Lusaka in the early 1970s, western central Zambia in the



1980s/90s), the lay group's symbolic and cultic repertoire for puberty initiation has incorporated far more than just a minimal selection of the rural ritual, far more than a mere token appendage of isolated traditional elements to a predominantly Christian and foreign rite of passage. On the contrary, the women lay leaders have used the church and their authority as a context within which to perform puberty ritual that, despite inevitable practical adaptations and frequent lapses of ritual knowledge and competence, emulates the historic, well-described Bemba kinship ritual to remarkable detail, and with open support from the church clergy.

Selected analytical and theoretical questions to which this state of affairs gives rise have been outlined above by way of introduction. Meanwhile the complexity of the situation calls for extensive ethnographic research, not only on the Copperbelt but also in present-day rural communities in Northern Zambia; in addition, a thorough study must be made of the ideological position and the exercise of religious authority of the clergy involved, as mediators between a world-wide hierarchically organized world religion (which has been very articulate in the field of human reproduction and gender relations) and the ritual and organizational activities of urban Christian lay women. A secondary research question revolves around the reasons for the senior representatives of the Roman Catholic church to accept, even welcome, a ritual and symbolic repertoire which would appear to challenge the globalizing universalism of this world religion, and which for close to a century has been condemned for doing just that.

The crucial interpretative problem here lies in its *virtuality*: in the fact that the Copperbelt women staging these rituals, as well as their adolescent initiates, do not in the least belong, nor consciously aspire to belong, to the ideal village world which is expounded in the ritual. These rituals belong to a realm of *virtuality*, very far removed from the Durkheimian premise (1912) of a coincidence between religious form and local group. Here we have to assess the various orders of reality, dream, ideal, fantasy and imagery that informs a modern African urban population in the construction of their life-world. For while the kinship ritual emphasizes reproductive roles within marriage, agricultural and domestic productive roles for women, and their respect for authority positions within the rural kinship structure, these urban women are a long way removed from the model of rural womanhood upheld in the initiation, where it is formally taught through songs, through the supervising elders' pantomimes, wall pictures specifically drawn for the purpose, and especially by reference to clay models of human beings, their body parts, and man-made artefacts. Admittedly, many of these women still cherish their urban garden plots, but even if these are not raided by thieves around harvest time, their produce falls far short of feeding the owners and their families through the annual cycle. These women have hardly any effective ties any more with a distant village — those that exist are mainly revived in the case of funerals. In their sexual and reproductive behaviour they operate largely outside the constraints stipulated by the kinship ritual and the associated

formal training; as female heads of households, they are often without effective and enduring ties with a male partner; and they do not all even subscribe to the Bemba ethnic identity.

Very clearly this urban puberty ritual is concerned with the construction of meaningful social locality out of the fragmentation of social life in the Copperbelt high-density residential areas, and beyond that with the social construction of female personhood; but why, in this urban context, is the remote and clearly inapplicable dream of the village model yet so dominant and inspiring? Is the puberty ritual a way, for the women involved, to construct themselves as ethnically Bemba? That is not the case, since the church congregations are by nature multi-ethnic and no instances of ethnic juxtaposition to other groups have been noted so far in relation to this urban puberty ritual. Is the communal identity to be constructed through the puberty ritual rather than that of a community of women? Then why hark back to a rural-based model of womanhood which, even if part of a meaningful ideal universe, no longer has any practical correspondence with the life of Copperbelt women today — women who do not till the soil; who, in their daily life including its sexual aspects, do not observe the rules of conduct and the taboos to which they were instructed at their initiation; and who in many cases will not contract a formal marriage with their male sexual and reproductive partners. Or is the social construction of womanhood, and personhood in general, perhaps such a subtle and profound process that foreign symbols (as mediated through the Christian church) are in themselves insufficiently powerful to bring about the bodily inscription that produces identity — so that what appears as virtuality, as a lack of connectedness between the urban day-to-day practice of womanhood today and the ideological contents of the initiation, might mark merely the relative unimportance of the details of the women's day-to-day situation (including the fact that this happens to be urban), in the face of an implicit, long-term habitus?

## CONCLUSION

Perhaps, after the earlier theoretical explorations, this case study will set some descriptive basis for a further theoretical elaboration of the concept of virtuality in a context of globalization in Africa today. The kinds of problems pinpointed in this article continue to strike me as both relevant and tantalizing, and I realize that my own commitment to the study of globalization is largely fuelled by my hope that somewhere in that sort of perspective those analytical problems which haunt me (cf. van Binsbergen, 1981: Ch. 6) may come closer to a solution. This article makes only a small step towards such a solution, and in the process reveals how difficult it is to capture, in academic discourse whose hallmark is consistency, the contradictions which exist in reality.

This article has concentrated, as forms of virtuality, on phenomena of dislocation and disconnectedness in time and space, and has all but overlooked forms of disembodiment, and of dehumanization of human activity. As Norman Long remarked during a recent conference,<sup>16</sup> under contemporary technological conditions new questions of agency are raised. Agency now is more than ever a matter of man/object communication (instead of primarily man/man communication). This means that the formal organizations stressed here, if based on such agency, are no longer what they used to be. The images of Africa as conveyed in this article are rooted in years of anthropological participation in African contexts, by myself and others, yet the mechanics of the actual production of these images has involved not only human intersubjectivity (both between the researcher and the researched, and between the researcher and his colleagues), but also days of solitary interaction between me and my computer. There is also virtuality for the reader, of the self-reflective kind so much cherished by our postmodernists. Anthropology may be among the more sympathetic globalizing projects of the West, but that does not prevent it from being infested with the very phenomena which it tries to study with detachment.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Earlier versions of this article were presented on the following occasions: at two meetings of the WOTRO (Netherlands Foundation for Tropical Research) Programme on 'Globalization and the construction of communal identities': in the form of an oral presentation at the Bergen (Netherlands) conference (15–16 February 1996), and as a paper at the programme's monthly seminar, Amsterdam (6 May 1996); at the one-day conference on globalization, Free University, Amsterdam (7 June 1996); and at the graduate seminar, Africa Research Centre, Catholic University of Louvain (8 November 1996). For constructive comments and criticism I am indebted to all participants, and especially to (alphabetically) Filip De Boeck, René Devisch, Martin Doornbos, André Droogers, Mike Featherstone, Jonathan Friedman, Peter Geschiere, Ulf Hannerz, Peter Kloos, Birgit Meyer, Peter Pels, Rafael Sanchez, Matthew Schoffeleers, Bonno Thoden van Velzen, Rijk van Dijk, Wilhelmina van Wetering, and Karin Willemse. Most of all I am indebted to the editors of this volume, for their encouragement, advice, and criticism.

#### REFERENCES

- Appadurai, A. (1990) 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy', in M. Featherstone (ed.) *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*, pp. 295–310. London/Newbury Park: Sage.
- Appadurai, A. (1995) 'The Production of Locality', in R. Fardon (ed.) *Counterworks: Managing the Diversity of Knowledge*, ASA decennial conference series 'The Uses of Knowledge: Global and Local Relations', pp. 204–25. London: Routledge.

---

16. WOTRO Programme on Globalization and the Construction of Communal Identities, conference, Bergen, The Netherlands (15–16 February 1996).

- Apter, A. (1996) 'IBB = 419: Nigerian Democracy and the Politics of Illusion'. Paper presented at the conference 'The struggle for civil society in Africa', University of Chicago (31 May–2 June), and at the 'Panel on hybrid democracies', 1996 Annual Meeting, American Anthropological Association, San Francisco.
- Austin, J. L. (1962) *How to do Things with Words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Baudrillard, J. (1972) *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Baudrillard, J. (1981) *Simulacres et simulation*. Paris: Galilée.
- van Binsbergen, W. M. J. (1981) *Religious Change in Zambia: Exploratory Studies*. London/Boston: Kegan Paul International.
- van Binsbergen, W. M. J. (1987) 'De Schaduw waar je niet overheen mag stappen: Een westers onderzoeker op het Nkoja meisjesfeest', in W. M. J. van Binsbergen and M. R. Doornbos (eds) *Afrika in Spiegelbeeld*, pp. 139–82. Haarlem: In de Knipscheer.
- van Binsbergen, W. M. J. (1992a) 'Kazanga: Etniciteit in Afrika tussen staat en traditie', inaugural lecture. Amsterdam: Free University. (Shortened French version (1993), 'Kazanga: Ethnicité en Afrique entre État et tradition', in W. J. M. van Binsbergen and K. Schilder (eds) *Perspectives on Ethnicity in Africa*, special issue on 'Ethnicity', *Afrika Focus* (1): 9–40; English version with postscript (1994), 'The Kazanga Festival: Ethnicity as Cultural Mediation and Transformation in Central Western Zambia', *African Studies* 53 (2): 92–125.)
- van Binsbergen, W. M. J. (1992b) *Tears of Rain: Ethnicity and History in Central Western Zambia*. London/Boston: Kegan Paul International.
- van Binsbergen, W. M. J. (1993a) 'Making Sense of Urban Space in Francistown, Botswana', in P. J. M. Nas (ed.) *Urban Symbolism*, pp. 184–228. Studies in Human Societies, volume 8. Leiden: Brill.
- van Binsbergen, W. M. J. (1993b) 'Mukanda: Towards a History of Circumcision Rites in Western Zambia, 18th–20th Century', in J.-P. Chrétien et al. (eds) *L'invention religieuse en Afrique: Histoire et religion en Afrique noire*, pp. 49–103. Paris: Agence de Culture et de Coopération Technique/Karthala.
- van Binsbergen, W. M. J. (1994) 'Dynamiek van cultuur: Enige dilemma's van hedendaags Afrika in een context van globalisering', *Antropologische Verkenningen* 13(2): 17–33. (English version (1995), 'Popular Culture in Africa: Dynamics of African Cultural and Ethnic Identity in a Context of Globalization', in J. D. M. van der Klei (ed.) *Popular Culture: Africa, Asia and Europe: Beyond Historical Legacy and Political Innocence* (Proceedings Summer School 1994), pp. 7–40. Utrecht: CERES.
- van Binsbergen, W. M. J. (1995a) 'Aspects of Democracy and Democratisation in Zambia and Botswana: Exploring Political Culture at the Grassroots', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 13(1): 3–33.
- van Binsbergen, W. M. J. (1995b) 'Four-tablet Divination as Trans-regional Medical Technology in Southern Africa', *Journal on Religion in Africa* 25(2): 114–40.
- van Binsbergen, W. M. J. (1995c) 'Globalization *avant la lettre?* The Case of Islamic Geomancy and its World-wide Spread, ca. 900–1995 CE'. Paper read at the conference on 'The global oikumene and the spread of knowledge', organized by the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Stockholm (9–12 September).
- van Binsbergen, W. M. J. (1996a) 'Black Athena and Africa's contribution to Global Cultural History', *Quest — Philosophical Discussions: An International African Journal of Philosophy* 9/2/10(1): 100–37.
- van Binsbergen, W. M. J. (1996b) 'Time, Space and History in African Divination and Board-games', in D. Tiemersma and H. A. F. Oosterling (eds) *Time and Temporality in Intercultural Perspective: Studies presented to Heinz Kimmerle*, pp. 105–25. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- van Binsbergen, W. M. J. (1996c) 'Transregional and Historical Connections of Four-tablet Divination in Southern Africa', *Journal of Religion in Africa* 26(1): 2–29.
- van Binsbergen, W. M. J. and P. L. Geschiere (eds) (1985) *Old Modes of Production and Capitalist Encroachment: Anthropological Explorations in Africa*. London/Boston: Kegan Paul International.

- De Boeck, F. (1992) 'Of Bushbucks without Horns: Male and Female Initiation among the Aluund of Southwest Zaire', *Journal des Africanistes* 61(1): 37–72.
- Cheater, A. P. (1995) 'Globalization and the New Technologies of Knowing: Anthropological Calculus or Chaos', in M. Strathern (ed.) *Shifting Contexts: Transformations in Anthropological Knowledge*, ASA Decennial Conference Series 'The Uses of Knowledge: Global and Local Relations', pp. 117–30. London: Routledge.
- Chrétien, J.-P. and G. Prunier (eds) (1989) *Les ethnies ont une histoire*. Paris: Karthala/Agence de Coopération Culturelle et Technique.
- Cohen, A. P. and J. L. Comaroff (1976) 'The Management of Meaning: On the Phenomenology of Political Transactions', in B. Kapferer (ed.) *Transaction and Meaning: Directions in the Anthropology of Exchange and Symbolic Behavior*, pp. 87–107. Philadelphia, PA: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
- Comaroff, J. and J. Comaroff (eds) (1993) *Modernity and its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Corbeil, J. J. (1982) *Mbusa: Sacred Emblems of the Bemba*. Mbala (Zambia): Moto-Moto Museum; London: Ethnographica Publishers.
- Durkheim, E. (1912) *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Epstein, A. L. (1958) *Politics in an Urban African Community*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Epstein, A. L. (1967) 'Urbanisation and Social Change in Africa', *Current Anthropology* 8(4): 275–95.
- Fardon, R. (ed.) (1995) *Counterworks: Managing the Diversity of Knowledge*, ASA decennial conference series 'The Uses of Knowledge: Global and Local Relations', London: Routledge.
- Featherstone, M. (ed.) (1990) *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*. London/Newbury Park: Sage.
- Forster, H. (ed.) (1987) *Post-modern Culture*. London/Sydney: Pluto Press (first published under this title, 1985; earlier published as: Foster, H. (ed.) (1983) *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Post-modern Culture*. Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press.)
- Foucault, M. (1966) *Les mots et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Friedman, J. (1995) *Cultural Identity and Global Process*. London: Sage (first published 1994).
- Gerold-Scheepers, T. J. F. A. and W. M. J. van Binsbergen (1978) 'Marxist and non-Marxist Approaches to Migration in Africa', in W. M. J. van Binsbergen and H. A. Meilink *Migration and the Transformation of Modern African Society*, pp. 21–35. Leiden: African Studies Centre.
- Geschiere, P. L. with C. F. Fisiy (1995) *Sorcellerie et politique en Afrique: La viande des autres*. Paris: Karthala (series Les Afriques).
- Geuijen, K. (1992) 'Postmodernisme in de antropologie', *Antropologische Verkenningen* 11(1): 17–36.
- Giddens, A. (1990) *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gluckman, M. (1945) 'Seven-year Research Plan of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute of Social Studies in British Central Africa', *Rhodes-Livingstone Journal* 4: 1–32.
- Gluckman, M. (1949) 'The Role of the Sexes in Wiko Circumcision Ceremonies', in M. Fortes (ed.) *Social Structure*, pp. 145–67. London: Oxford University Press.
- Gluckman, M. (1960) 'Tribalism in Modern British Central Africa', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 1: 55–70.
- Hannerz, U. (1980) *Exploring the City: Inquiries towards an Urban Anthropology*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hannerz, U. (1986) 'Theory in Anthropology: Small is Beautiful? The Problem of Complex Cultures', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 28(2): 362–7.
- Hannerz, U. (1987) 'The World in Creolisation', *Africa* 57: 546–59.

- Hannerz, U. (1989) 'Culture between Center and Periphery: Toward a Macroanthropology', *Ethnos* 54: 200–16.
- Hannerz, U. (1990) 'Cosmopolitans and Locals in World Cultures', in M. Featherstone (ed.) *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*, pp. 237–51. London/Newbury Park: Sage.
- Hannerz, U. (1992a) *Cultural Complexity: Studies in the Social Organisation of Meaning*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hannerz, U. (1992b) *Culture, Cities and the World*. Amsterdam: Centrum voor Grootstedelijk Onderzoek.
- Harvey, D. (1989) *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Hobsbawm, E. and T. O. Ranger (eds) (1983) *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hoch, E. (1968) *Mbusa: A Contribution to the Study of Bemba Initiation Rites and those of Neighbouring Tribes*. Chinsali: Ilondola Language Centre.
- Hoenen, P. (1947) *Philosophie der anorganische natuur*. Antwerpen/Nijmegen: Standaard-Boekhandel.
- International Business Machines Corporation (IBM) (1987) *Dictionary of Computing Terms*. Poughkeepsie, NY: IBM.
- Janzen, J. M. (1992) *Ngoma: Discourses of Healing in Central and Southern Africa*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- Jules-Rosette, B. (1979–80) 'Changing Aspects of Women's Initiation in Southern Africa: An Explanatory Study', *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 13(3): 389–405.
- Jules-Rosette, B. (1996) 'What Money Can't Buy: Zairian Popular Culture and Symbolic Ambivalence toward Modernity'. Paper presented at the international conference on 'L'Argent: feuille morte: L'Afrique Central avant et après le disenchantment de la modernité', Louvain (21–2 June).
- Kapferer, B. (1988) 'The Anthropologist as Hero — Three Exponents of Post-modernist Anthropology', *Critique of Anthropology* 8(2): 77–104.
- Korff, R. (1995) 'The Urban Revolution: Civilisation in the Concrete Jungle?'. Paper read at the EIDOS (European Interuniversity Development Opportunities Study network) conference on Globalization and Decivilization, Wageningen (14–16 December).
- Kroeber, A. B. (1938) 'Basic and Secondary Patterns of Social Structure', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2: 299–309.
- Little, W., H. W. Fowler and J. Coulson (eds) (1978) *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary: On Historical Principles*, revised and edited by C. T. Onions, etymologies revised by G. W. S. Friedrichsen (3rd reset edn), 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Maine, H. S. (1883) *Ancient Law*. London: John Murray (first published 1861).
- Maxwell, K. B. (1983) *Bemba Myth and Ritual: The Impact of Literacy on an Oral Culture*. American University Studies, series XI (Anthropology/Sociology), vol. 2. New York/Frankfurt am Main/Berne: Peter Lang.
- Mayer, P. (1971) 'Traditional' Manhood Initiation in an Industrial City: The African View', in E. J. de Jager (ed.) *Man: Anthropological Essays presented to O. F. Raam*, pp. 7–18. Cape Town: Struik.
- Mayer, P. (ed.) (1980) *Black Villagers in an Industrial Society: Anthropological Perspectives on Labour Migration in South Africa*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Mayer, P. and I. Mayer (1974) *Townsmen or Tribesmen: Conservatism and the Process of Urbanization in a South African City* (2nd edn). Cape Town: Oxford University Press (first published 1961).
- McLuhan, M. (1966) *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. London: McGraw-Hill.
- Meillassoux, C. (1975) *Femmes, greniers et capitaux*. Paris: Maspero.
- Meyer, B. (1995) 'Translating the Devil: An African Appropriation of Pietist Protestantism: The case of the Peki Ewe in Southeastern Ghana, 1847–1992'. PhD Thesis, University of Amsterdam.

- Mitchell, J. C. (1956) *The Kalela Dance: Aspects of Social Relationships among Urban Africans in Northern Rhodesia*. Rhodes-Livingstone Paper No. 27. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Mitchell, J. C. (ed.) (1969) *Social Networks in Urban Situations*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Nencel, L. and P. Pels (eds) (1991) *Constructing Knowledge: Authority and Critique in Social Science*. London: Sage.
- Pels, P. (1993) 'Critical Matters: Interactions between Missionaries and Waluguru in Colonial Tanganyika, 1930–1961'. PhD Thesis, University of Amsterdam.
- Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. (1940) 'Preface', in M. Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard (eds) *African Political Systems*, pp. xi–xxiii. London: Oxford University Press.
- Ranger, T. O. (1975) *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa, 1890–1970*. London: Heinemann.
- Rasing, T. (1995) *Passing on the Rites of Passage: Girls' Initiation Rites in the Context of an Urban Roman Catholic Community on the Zambian Copperbelt*. Leiden: African Studies Centre; Aldershot: Avebury.
- Rheingold, H. (1991) *Virtual Reality*. London: Secker and Warburg.
- Richards, A. I. (1982) *Chisungu: A Girls' Initiation Ceremony among the Bemba of Zambia*. London/New York: Tavistock (Intro Jean La Fontaine; first published 1956).
- Spengler, O. (1993) *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umrisse einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte*. München: DTV (first published 1923, München: Beck).
- Toynbee, A. J. (1952) *Beschaving in het Geding*. Bussum: Kroonder.
- Turner, V. W. (1964) 'Symbols in Ndembu Ritual', in M. Gluckman (ed.) *Closed Systems and Open Minds*, pp. 20–51. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd.
- Turner, V. W. (1967) 'Mukanda: The Rite of Circumcision', in V. W. Turner *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, pp. 151–279. Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press.
- Turner, V. W. (1968) *Schism and Continuity in an African Society: A Study of Ndembu Village Life*. Manchester: Manchester University Press (reprint of 1957 edn).
- Tyler, S. (1987) *The Unspeakable: Discourse, Dialogue, and Rhetoric in the Post-modern World*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Vaill, L. (ed.) (1989) *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*. London: James Currey; Berkeley/Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- van Velsen, J. (1971) *The Politics of Kinship: A Study of Social Manipulation Amongst the Lakeside Tonga of Malawi*. Manchester: Manchester University Press (first published 1964).
- White, C. M. N. (1953) 'Conservatism and Modern Adaptation in Luvale Female Puberty Ritual', *Africa* 23(1): 15–25.

**Wim van Binsbergen** is chair of the theme group 'Globalization and Socio-cultural Transformations' at the African Studies Centre, PO Box 9555, 2300 RB Leiden, The Netherlands. He has been Professor of Ethnic Studies at the Free University Amsterdam since 1990, and has recently been appointed to the chair of Foundations of Intercultural Philosophy, Erasmus University, Rotterdam. His latest book, *Sub-Saharan Africa, Ancient Egypt and the World: Beyond the Black Athena Thesis* is currently at the press. Besides his many scholarly works, he has also published extensively as a poet and novelist. His globalized symbolic production includes a practice as a Botswana-licensed traditional healer.