

*Sangoma Science*

## BOOKS / INDEPENDENT PUBLICATIONS BY WIM VAN BINSBERGEN

(for van Binsbergen's literary work, see last page of this book)

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ABOUT THIS BOOK. The exploration of ecstatic religion, in North, South Central and Southern Africa, and the attending historical and transcontinental ramifications, have been constants in Wim van Binsbergen's work for half a century. He has graduated from detached researcher to initiated and certified local practitioner ('*sangoma*'), from empirical scientist to intercultural philosopher, and from Africanist to globalist. In the process, he has found that the various forms of ecstatic religion with which he had acquainted himself, constitute knowledge systems endowed with relevance, validity, and truth in their own right, not inferior to the North Atlantic academic knowledge system that is privileged by globalising modern science. However, although repeatedly making such claims, so far he has shunned from making the obvious next step: *articulating how* (from these heterogeneous and apparently contradictory approaches to the human life-world) *a pluralistic intercultural ontology might be constructed*. This book is a (none too conclusive!) attempt in that direction. Building on the approaches to ecstasy and veridical divination in his books *Religious Change in Zambia* (1981), *Intercultural Encounters* (2003, esp. Chs 5–8), *Before the Presocratics* (2012), and *Vicarious Reflections* (2015); and continuing the emphasis on spirituality of his recent books *Religion as a Social Construct* (2017) and *Confronting the Sacred: Durkheim Vindicated* (2018); the present argument is organised in several parts. Part I dwells on a topic relatively underexposed in the international social-science literature: the methodology of research into ecstatic religion through participant observation, with detailed reference to two recent South African studies. Part II takes up Edith Turner's claims as to 'the reality of spirits', against a background of both transcontinental ramifications and theoretical / methodological scrutiny. Part III raises the discussion above the individual level and above the exclusive Africa focus, notably towards cosmological ontology, contrasting two basic models: evolution or eternal return. To what extent may perspectives from outside the North Atlantic scientific domain (notably the South Asian concept of *kalpa*, 'aeon', as an alternative to evolution) lead to the desired intercultural ontology? This question is explored with special reference to Cremo & Thompson's iconoclastic book *Forbidden Archeology*, 1993). The penultimate chapter explores the remarkable parallels between Dan Brown's book *Origin* (2017), and the thought of Teilhard de Chardin. In conclusion, the kaleidoscopic, capricious, religiously-underpinned relation is affirmed between human thought and the universe – formulating a meta-cosmology and meta-theology in which nothing is what it has been agreed to be, and everything (even reality, the past, Being, the thinking I, and God), constantly oscillates towards its opposite and denial, under conditions whose elucidation is still largely beyond our grasp, but in which ritual appears to play a pivotal role. The argument is set against the background of the integrated long-range view of global cultural history, which the writer has helped develop over the past two decades.

# **ZANGOMA ZSCIENCE**

**From ethnography to intercultural  
ontology:**

**A poetics of African spiritualities**

**by Wim van Binsbergen**



**PIP-TraCS – Papers in Intercultural Philosophy and  
Transcontinental Comparative Studies – No. 20**

For over 40 years, Wim van Binsbergen held senior appointments at the African Studies Centre, Leiden – simultaneously with a series of professorships elsewhere, most recently as emeritus professor of the 'Foundations of Intercultural Philosophy', Erasmus University Rotterdam. His academic work has extended from cultural anthropology / development sociology, (proto-) history, and comparative mythology, to Mediterranean ethnography and archaeology, linguistics, globalisation studies, and intercultural philosophy. After decades of historical and ethnographic fieldwork in various parts of Africa, in the last two decades he has also turned to Asia. Moreover he has been active as a poet, as a diviner-healer in the Southern African tradition (*sangoma*; hence the title of this book), and as an adopted member of the Nkoya people of Zambia. Vindicating the place of Africa within global cultural history, and *a fortiori* within the global politics of knowledge, has been his principal scholarly concern in recent decades. Thus discharging what he feels to be his historic counter-hegemonic duty, he has systematically declined all prizes, honours etc. elicited by his large and path-breaking oeuvre.



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*Cover illustrations. General:* Hieronymus Bosch, THE GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS (right-hand panel, fragment), c. 1490-1510 CE, now held at the Prado, Madrid, Spain; this image evokes the unsettling oscillation between Being and Non-Being which is the red thread in this book's argument. *Back cover:* Wim van Binsbergen (centre left, with sun glasses, still a *thwaza* and not yet dressed in his *sangoma* finery) is welcomed by his fellow odge members on the threshold of the house in Matsilagabedi, 20 kms east of Francistown, North East District, Botswana), where the last leg of his initiation to full *sangoma* is in progress, August 1991; centre (with blue-striped headscarf and multiple bracelets) is the lodge's ritual leader MmaShakayile Elizabeth Mabutu.

*To my children (real and adopted) and grandchildren in the Netherlands, among the Nkoya of Zambia, in Botswana, and in Cameroon; I hope this book makes you proud of your background and helps you discover insights which otherwise you might well spend a lifetime searching for in vain.*

## **Part o. Preliminaries**





# *Table of contents*

About this book.....	4
PRELIMINARIES .....	7
Table of contents .....	9
List of figures.....	13
List of special topics .....	16
List of tables .....	18
Chapter 0. Preface and acknowledgments.....	19
0.1. Preface	
0.2. The ethnographer's truth and constituency, versus the philosopher's truth and constituency	
0.3. Editorial / orthographic conventions	
0.4. Acknowledgments	
0.5. Provenance of chapters	
PART I. THE METHODOLOGY OF STUDYING AFRICAN SPIRITUALITIES, NOTABLY SANGOMA, THROUGH ANTHROPOLOGICAL FIELDWORK.....	41
Chapter 1. Reflections on the work of Seamus Mbedzi Smith (pseud.).....	43
1.1. Introduction	
1.2. Use of the available literature	
1.3. Religious fieldwork, and contrasting backgrounds	
1.4. Social and political structure, and comparison	
1.5. Global continuity: An underlying assumption of the candidate's role as a complementary healer in the North Atlantic region?	
1.6. The uncertain concrete benefits of 'experiential' fieldwork	
1.7. 'Going all the way' in fieldwork	

1.8. <i>Sangomahood</i> : religion and / or therapy?	
1.9. The historical dimension	
1.10. Conclusion	
Chapter 2. Charles Lagrange's (pseud.) <i>Ripples in the water</i> .....	71
2.1. Introduction and recommendation	
2.2. Detailed assessment	
2.3. Discussion	
2.4. Conclusion	
PART II. THE APPARENT REALITY AND HISTORY OF SPIRIT: VIEWED FROM AFRICA, NORTH AMERICA, AND WORLDWIDE .....	III
Chapter 3. Edith Turner's promising but abortive struggle for a charitable intercultural epistemology.....	113
3.1. Introduction	
3.2. With Victor Turner, then without and beyond Victor Turner	
3.3. Vindicating the reality of spirits, against the dominant North Atlantic views	
3.4. Is the eye-witness account a sufficient ground to affirm the reality of spirits?	
3.5. Edith Turner: Merely against mainstream theology or also against mainstream anthropology?	
3.6. 'Going native' as a research strategy	
3.7. Can the fieldworker, even when 'going native', ever experience what the hosts are experiencing?	
3.8. The anthropologist as globalising hero	
3.9. Spirit traditions: Merely useful knowledge, or indeed valid knowledge?	
3.10. Translating spirit traditions to the modern world at large: Once more the anthropologist as hero	
3.11. Spirit traditions and globalisation: From periphery to centre, or the other way around?	
3.12. Re-Connecting Heaven and Earth through stones	
3.12.1. Discussion	
3.12.2. Summing up	
3.13. The truly global context of the <i>Chihamba</i> cult	
3.14. Transcendence in global cultural history	
3.15. Hear who is talking...: Once more the question as to the material grounds for affirming the reality of spirits – the current nature of my <i>sangoma</i> spirituality	

3.16. The healer: Agent or catalyst

3.17. Conclusion

PART III. TOWARDS COSMOLOGY: EVOLUTION OR ETERNAL RETURN .....215

Chapter 4. Cremo & Thompson’s book *Forbidden Archeology* as an invitation to intercultural cosmology.....217

4.1. Introduction and summary of the present chapter

4.2. Progress in history: A boy’s bluff

4.3. The project of the book *Forbidden Archeology*

4.4. Historiography as both a scientific and a mythical project

4.5. Assumptions informing the Received North Atlantic World-view today

4.6. Aspects of *Sangoma Science* from Southern Africa

4.7. Quantum Mechanics and the Theory of Relativity are rendering the Received North-Atlantic World-view obsolescent

4.8. Towards an affirmation of the materially creative and kaleidoscopic nature of all cosmological thought from whatever region and historical period; the pivotal role of religion in the universe

4.9. *Forbidden Archeology*: Conclusion

Chapter 5. An unexpected masterpiece: Dan Brown’s *Origin* considered in the light of Teilhard de Chardin’s work .....307

5.1. Introduction: *Origin* amidst Dan Brown’s novels

5.2. Where do we come from – Who are we? – Where are we going?’

5.3. Simulating the origin of life on Earth

5.4. Debating the origin of life on Earth

5.5. Enters Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

5.6. The origin of life on Earth, and divine intervention

5.7. At long last: Thinking about God and the universe

PART IV. CONCLUSION ..... 333

Chapter 6. Towards an ontology of universal and perpetual oscillation between Being and Non-Being..... 335

PART V. REFERENCE MATERIAL..... 353

Bibliography..... 357

Index of proper names other than those of authors ..... 451

Index of authors ..... 471



# List of figures

Figures are numbered consecutively per numbered chapter, and therefore are so easy to locate that page references are unnecessary here

- Fig. 1.1. Aspects of Buddhism as a folk religion (a) National and international (Chinese) pilgrims embarking on a bus at the Doi Sutep Temple, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 2020 (b) Waiting for one's turn to present pious gifts to the monk on duty, River temple, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 2020
- Fig. 2.1. *Also in Africa the supernatural figure with aquatic extremities may be found: Ivory cylinders carved with the image of the Yoruba god Olokun with mudfish feet, British Museum, London UK, 2014.*
- Fig. 2.2.. *The villages of Sidi Mhammad and Mayziya, omdat 'Atatfa, délégation 'Ain Draham, Tunisia, 1968: speckled areas indicate spots associated with chthonic spirits (jnūn)*
- Fig. 2.2a. *Cat killing mythical snake Apopis; from the Papyrus of Anhai, British Museum ndon, UK, 2004*
- Fig. 2.3. *The so-called swimmers' panel among the rock art of Tassili n'Ajjer, Central Sahara*
- Fig. 2.4. *A scene from the motion picture The Abyss (J.Cameron, 1989)*
- Fig. 3.1. *Edith Turner. ca. 2000*
- Fig. 3.2. *Victor Turner, ca. 1965*
- Fig. 3.3. *Isaac Newton in 1702 as portrayed by Godfrey Kneller*
- Fig. 3.4. *Frobenius' view of inroads of shamanism into Africa, second millennium CE and earlier*
- Fig. 3.5. *Selected royal capitals and trade routes in the region of the Upper Zambezi and the Congo-Zambezi watershed, 19th century CE; inset: location of map area on the African continent*
- Fig. 3.6. *Tentative reconstruction of the diffusion of Taro (Colocasia esculenta) as another indication of Sunda influence on the West*

- Fig. 3.7. Representaton of the Yoruba god Shango, at the Afrikamuseum, Berg en Dal, the Netherlands.
- Fig. 3.8. The red ochre graved block from Blombos Cave, South Africa, 70 ka BP.
- Fig. 3.9. Selected objects illustrating the Narrative Complex 8, 'The Stones'
- Fig. 3.10. The apparently anthropomorphic pebble from Makapansgat, South Africa, ca. 1.5 mill. years BP
- Fig. 3.11. A cult place for Heitsi Eibib in Namibia
- Fig. 3.12. a-c. The distribution and reconstruction of the historical genesis of the Narrative Complex 'The stones' (as symbolic of the Earth): (a) Narrative Complex 8a
- Fig. 3.13. a-c. The distribution and reconstruction of Narrative Complex 8b: the historical genesis of the Narrative Complex 'The stones' (as symbolic of the Re-connection of Heaven and Earth)
- Fig. 3.14. A proposed intercontinental, multicentred, multidirectional maritime network from the Early Bronze Age onward.
- Fig. 3.15. Manjaco weavings (as held at the British Museum, London, United Kingdom).
- Fig. 3.16. Prehistoric population movements across the Beringia region as main factor in the peopling of the Americas; © Tamm et al. 2007
- Fig. 3.17. Continuity of mitochondrial-DNA haplogroups between the Old World and the New World – the situation of the last few millennia is shown (after Forster 2004). With the exception of haplogroup X, all New World haplogroups are also represented in the old World.
- Fig. 3.18. Present-day carrying capacity of African soils
- Fig. 3.19. Images relating to the world history of spirit
- Fig. 3.20. Artist's impression of a nocturnal materialising phantasm of a giant bird, as invoked by Edith Turner
- Fig. 4.1. The youth periodical *Robbedoes* and the series *Illustrated Classics* of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Fig. 4.2. The *Borgerstraat SFL* (*Sint Franciscus Liefdewerk*) neighbourhood centre decades after the 1950s, when I frequented it.
- Fig. 4.3. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, c. 1950
- Fig. 4.4. Dust jacket of *Forbidden Archeology*
- Fig. 4.5. The grooved sphere alleged to be from Pre-Cambrian South African soil
- Fig. 4.6. Strange grooved spheres depicted in the work of René Magritte
- Fig. 4.7. Various manifestations of grooved spheres in real life.
- Fig. 4.8. Hellenistic to Early Modern depictions of the ouroboros cyclical snake
- Fig. 4.9. Geomancy in the Early Modern European context: A German edition of Abu Hali [ °Abū Alī ] ben Omar's *Punctier-Kunst* (Freystadt 1704).

- Fig. 4.10. (a) Birth horoscope by Johannes Kepler, 1586; and (b) a modern version of his own
- Fig. 4.11. The French astronomer and mathematician Laplace (1749-1829)
- Fig. 4.12. The author (2005) with sangoma regalia
- Fig. 4.13. Francistown sangomas demonstrate divination, 1989
- Fig. 4.14. A herbalist's (Mr Gumede's) surgery, Francistown, Botswana, 1989
- Fig. 4.15. The herbalist Mr Smarts Gumede throwing his oracular tablets in his surgery, Somerset East township, Francistown, Botswana, 1989
- Fig. 4.16. World model with 'distortive history' effects in the periphery
- Fig. 4.17. Model of Eudoxos spheres for the movement of the Sun (or the hippopede movement of a starlike planet)
- Fig. 4.18. The erratic path of a Servant of the Ancestors: Born in a century saturated with large-scale war, the author, occasionally a peace activist, yet belligerent, and of proven courage both in the field and in academia, finds himself surrounded by an abundance of soldiers among his real and adoptive ancestors and patron
- Fig. 5.1. Gauguin's painting 'D'ou venons-nous – Que sommes-nous – Où allons-nous'.
- Fig. 5.2. Schematic view of Miller's 1952 experiment (Miller 1953: 528).
- Fig. 5.3. Cuénot's 1951 'Tree of Life' as copied in Teilhard de Chardin 1955: 86
- Fig. 5.4. The Cathedral of the Sagrada Familia / Holy Family, Barcelona, Spain, (2018) as a pathetic, typically unfinished icon of the encounter of obsolete Roman Catholic spirituality with ornate Modernism
- Fig. 5.5. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin S.J. (1881-1955) in 1947 – the present author's year of birth (source: Archives des Jésuites de France)
- Fig. 5.6. The evolution of humanity according to Teilhard de Chardin: towards the Point Omega (Teilhard 1955: 212).
- Fig. 5.7. Teilhard de Chardin's vision of cosmic coherence through progressive complexity, all the way to the Point Omega (from Teilhard 1956).
- Fig. 5.8 Teilhard's most remarkable birth horoscope
- Fig. 5.9. Images of evolution: Scutosaurus and Sauroctonus, Late Permian geological period, c. 250 million years BP,
- Fig. 5.10. The theological dimension of Darwin's theory of evolution
- Fig. 6.1. Links of filiation and alleged possession around this book's protagonist
- Fig. 6.2. Aspects of Francistown, Botswana, as a ritual space

## *List of special topics*

A. CAIN AS EVERYMAN .....	23
B. HISTORICAL AND ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK AS A MODE OF KNOWLEDGE FORMATION. ....	27
C. THE SCIENTIFIC DOSSIER FOR AND AGAINST EXTRASENSORY PERCEPTION. ....	59
D. A SADDER AND WISER MAN? THE EFFECT OF SANGOMA INITIATION UPON THE <i>THWAZA</i> / ANTHROPOLOGIST .....	63
E. WHAT DID VAN BINSBERGEN REALLY MEAN WHEN DESCRIBING HIS PROCESS OF 'BECOMING A SANGOMA'? .....	79
F. WHY AQUATIC SPIRITS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA? .....	82
FFF. ON WHISTLING .....	82
G. DEMON-INFESTED SPOTS IN THE NORTH AFRICAN LANDSCAPE .....	95
H. ON POSSESSION .....	117
I. SANGOMAHOOD AS SHAMANISM. ....	140
J. GLOBAL BACKGROUND OF THE ZAMBIAN / ANGOLAN <i>BITUMA</i> CULT .....	147
K. MYTHICAL WAGTAILS AT TWO ENDS OF THE OLD WORLD .....	156
L. THE COMPARATIVE MYTHOLOGY OF THE THUNDERSTONE .....	160
M. 'WOUNDED KNEE' AS A POTENTIALLY TRANSCONTINENTAL EXPRESSION .....	174
N. <i>BITUMA</i> AMONG THE ZAMBIAN NKOYA AS AN AGRICULTURAL CULT. ....	182
NNN. ON BIER DIVINATION .....	184
O. HARALD VON SICARD ON AFRICAN ROYAL DRUMS AND THE ANCIENT ISRAELITE'S ARK OF THE COVENANT. ....	185
P. FEMALE PUBERTY RITES IN A LONG-RANGE, GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE .....	187
Q. A TUNISIAN FAQİR'S MUSICAL DIRECTIONS UNDER TRANCE. ....	201
R. CONSIDERATIONS OF MODERN DECENCY OVERRIDING TRANCE AMONG URBAN FEMALE ADEPTS IN A ZAMBIAN CULT OF AFFLICTION. ....	202
S. A DEAD ANCESTOR BORROWING HIS LIVING DESCENDANT'S BODY FOR THE FULFILMENT OF HIS OWN DESIRES? .....	205



T. HOW CAN HUMANKIND'S CORE MYTHEMES REMAIN MORE OR LESS RECOGNISABLE OVER TENS OF THOUSANDS OF YEARS? .....	227
U. MY OWN POSITION VIS-À-VIS SOUTH ASIAN RELIGIONS. ....	238
V. AN APT EXAMPLE OF THE SKEPTICAL ATTITUDE.....	247
W. ASTROLOGY AS A PSEUDO-SCIENCE.....	248
X THE POSSIBLE EFFECT OF GRAECO-ROMAN ANTIQUITY UPON OCCULT AND MAGICAL PRACTICES IN SOUTH CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN AFRICA .....	249
Y. IMMUTABLE LAWS OF NATURE .....	255
Z. MIRACLES .....	256
AA. MIRACLES AND <i>SANGOMA SCIENCE</i> .....	256
BB. PHILOSOPHERS APPROPRIATING THE NEW PHYSICS DEFENSELESS LIKE SITTING DUCKS? THE SOKAL HOAX .....	261
CC. THE HUMAN WILL AND PARANORMAL PHENOMENA.....	267
DD. THE SANGOMA IN THE PUBLIC URBAN SPACE OF BOTSWANA C. 1990 CE: FEARED OR DESPISED? .....	269
EE. THE BUDDING SANGOMA HAS HIS PICK OF AVAILABLE ANCESTORS .....	271
FF. PENTECOST-LIKE ILLUSIONS OF INTERLINGUALITY. ....	276
GG. THE SANGOMA OVERWHELMED BY TERRIFYING MYSTICAL MERGING WITH MWALL. ....	279
HH. HOW I VISUALISED THE SANGOMA'S APPARENT CAPABILITY AT VERIDICAL DIVINATION TWO DECADES AGO.....	284
II. WHAT IF TEXTUAL FORMULATIONS TODAY MIGHT BE PROJECTED BACK INTO THE REMOTE PAST AND TAKE THE SHAPE OF REALITY THERE?.....	292
JJ. WHAT KEEPS THE SOLAR SYSTEM GOING: GOD, OR SIMPLY MORE ADVANCED MATHEMATICS?.....	326
KK. SUBMITTING THE QUESTION AS TO THE UNIVERSE'S LEARNING CAPABILITY TO A VENERABLE ORACLE. ....	349

# *List of tables*

Table 3.1. Narrative Complex 8a-b 'The Stones': Conceptual composition, attestations in space and time, and sources.....	167
Table 4.1. Anomalous human remains in very old stratigraphic contexts, according to the authors of <i>Forbidden Archeology</i> .....	234

# Chapter o. Preface and acknowledgments

## o.1. Preface

The exploration of ecstatic religion, in North, South Central and Southern Africa, and the attending historical and transcontinental ramifications, have been constants in my research work for half a century. I have graduated from being a detached researcher to being an initiated and certified local practitioner (*sangoma*); from an empirical scientist to an intercultural philosopher; and from an Africanist to a globalist. In the process, I came to suspect that the various forms of ecstatic religion with which I had acquainted myself, constitute knowledge systems endowed with relevance, validity, and truth in their own right, not necessarily inferior to the North Atlantic academic knowledge system that is privileged by globalising modern<sup>1</sup> science. However, although repeatedly making such

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this book we shall struggle with more or less precise temporal and spatial indications involving the root 'modern'. The use of this concept is so ingrained in present-day global discourse that even if undesirable, it cannot be avoided. Without wanting to be dogmatic about this issue, let me propose a few useful definitions. By 'Early Modern' I indicate the period which, in Europe, began with and immediately followed the Age of Discovery (another unsatisfactory, blatantly ethnocentric concept, admittedly). I take it that the 'Early Modern' period drew to an end with the Enlightenment, a movement of thought and *belles lettres* roughly beginning in the early 18<sup>th</sup> c. CE. Modernity, characterised by the emphasis on scientific rationality, centralised bureaucracy, and the routinisation (as well as erosion) of Enlightenment values, came to an end with World War II, after which Post-modernity played havoc with all, or a mere selection, of the themes dominating the earlier periods. With European expansion in Early Modern times, most of these trends were exported especially to the local and expatriate elites in other continents, and gradually came to be at home, developed their own dynamics, there. Often, however, we shall follow present-day discourse in applying the term 'modern' (lower case) loosely, without a keen eye to periodisation. Thus in 'the modern world', 'modern society', modern is mainly synonymous for 'present-day'. In the expression 'modern science', which we shall frequently use, the emphasis is primarily on the specialist, academic, production of systematic knowledge as, indeed, an expression of Modernity. But although the New (early 20<sup>th</sup> c. CE) Physics of Quantum Mechanics and the Theory of Relativity created a sharp caesura, reducing much of 19<sup>th</sup> c. CE 'modern science' to an obsolete approximation within mere macroscopic boundary conditions, we may often also imply the New Physics when speaking of 'modern science' in passing.

claims, so far I have shunned from making the obvious next step: articulating how (from these heterogeneous and apparently contradictory approaches to the human life-world) a pluralistic intercultural ontology might be constructed. This book is a (none too conclusive!) attempt in that direction.

Building upon the approaches to ecstasy and veridical divination in my books *Intercultural Encounters* (2003, esp. Chs 5–8), *Before the Presocratics* (2012), and *Vicarious Reflections* (2015), and continuing the emphasis on spirituality of my recent books *Religion as a Social Construct* (2017) and *Confronting the Sacred: Durkheim Vindicated* (2018), the present argument is organised in several Parts.

In line with the *ambiguity* that forms the very backbone of this book, the title *Sangoma Science* can mean at least two things:

- the science that studies *sangomahood* as its object, with all the scientific trappings of aspired rationality, aspired objectivity, and aspired validity; and secondly
- the science that is embedded within *sangomahood*, and that is only within the reach of those who have been called to *sangomahood*, – to the extent to which they have not been sworn to secrecy, and to the (probably limited!) extent to which discursive written language of an academic format is actually capable of mediating the insights and methods of such a knowledge complex.

This stipulates a division of labour between the Parts of this book. My avowed aim is to proceed *From ethnography to intercultural ontology: Towards a poetics of the globalising exploration and representation of local spiritualities*.

In Part I we shall dwell on ethnography, putting ourselves on the standpoint of mainstream, fieldwork-centred anthropology, and reflect on the possibilities and pitfalls of constructing intercultural knowledge from that position. We shall critically consider two draft PhD theses dealing with *sangomas* in South Africa, written for South African universities. Partly because both thesis arguments lean heavily upon my own published work on the matter, I was invited to be their external examiner. So I found myself in the awkward situation of severely criticising work that was yet presented as an emulation of my own kind of anthropology. The two chapters are based on the examiner's reports I wrote in that capacity. While effectively concealing the candidates' identity, I have largely retained my texts' original format, complete with the meticulous, often pedantic and condescending, comments I made in that context. As a real-life introduction to the problems of *Sangoma Science*, I could not think of a better approach.

A dilemma presents itself here. For a fine-tuned methodological discussion, it is inevitable that concrete recent pieces of research are being reviewed in the arguments of this Part I. The texts in question were initially written by me as external examiner's reports of actual PhD theses. When the specific points in my assessment had been largely implemented, the candidates made the grade and my criticism lost its specific topicality. Repeating my argument here should have no bearing on the candidate's rightly deserved academic status, which is why I have concealed their identity to the best of my ability. At the same time the

methodological and theoretical points brought up in these discussions, in my opinion have been too valuable to be condemned to a grave of institutional archives. These points are essential in building up *Sangoma Science* – not in the sense of ‘the science pursued by *sangomas*’, but as ‘the science of what constitutes *sangomahood*’. I hope I can be forgiven for thus lending to my texts a second lease of life – especially since the academic work in question appears to be close to mine, and appeals to mine for legitimation. I could not miss this chance of clarifying my own intellectual and existential position.

Part II takes up Edith Turner’s claims as to ‘the reality of spirits’, against a background of both transcontinental ramifications and theoretical / methodological scrutiny. The circumstances leading on to this elaborate text<sup>2</sup> are sufficiently set out at the end of this Preface. Again the important thing about this argument is that Edith Turner and I appeared to be in general agreement as to the affirmation of the reality of spirits – whereas on second thought our theoretical position turns out to be miles apart, for excellent reasons which I have insisted to spell out in great detail. My own position is not that of affirming the reality of spirits, but of denying the reality of spirits whilst having to find a way out of the experiential, empirical and ethical dilemmas that position puts me in as a *sangoma*.

Having thus prepared the ground with ample attention for the theoretical and methodological problems of studying *sangomahood* empirically, in Part III my focus shifts from African to global. I shall explore, largely via the detour of extensive and profound reflection on work written by others (Cremo & Thompson, and Dan Brown, successively), what the characteristics are of the life-world which *Sangoma Science* constructs and to which it gives access. Here, spasmodically and (perhaps regrettably – but much to my own relief) without engaging in philosophical system building, I hope to suggest the outlines of an *intercultural ontology, implying a poetics of the globalising exploration and representation of local spiritualities*. What is the nature of time? What of historiography? What of natural laws? Can evolution be reversed? Can it suddenly stop in cataclysm, then be resumed and repeated, to stop in another cataclysm? What is the relation between the thinking I and the universe? What is the place of the idea of God in this connection? Can we ask whether God does exist? What if the very question is nonsensical, because it is in the nature of reality that it constantly oscillates between one position and its opposite, so that God, time, matter, mind, ancestors, healing, reality, scientific proof, both exist and do not exist at the same time? And perhaps the most important question of all (lest we resign ourselves to a barren *trivialism* where anything goes): *under what boundary conditions does such oscillation take place and produce one of its implied effects, notably affirming the reality of spirits? And under what boundary conditions can we pretend that it does not happen, so that we may more or less safely retreat within the probability boundaries of such conditions – and salvage the idea of modern science within such boundaries?* I am afraid that I shall not proceed much beyond asking such questions and indicating that they seem justified. As a poet and a simple ethnographer, I am not sufficiently equipped to act as a system builder when it comes to phi-

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<sup>2</sup> A 2007 symposium around Edith Turner, at Nijmegen University, the Netherlands, where she and I were among the speakers, including a session where I publicly interviewed her in reference to her published work.

losophical ontology. Nor can my layman's appeal to Quantum Mechanics and the Theory of Relativity, even though it comes a far way in justifying my insistence on the possibility of veridical divination, account for the fantasies in which I indulge in the final chapters of this book: reversed causality (in itself a respectable concept) invoked as a model to explain why apparently man-made objects might be found in geological layers antedating the appearance of humans on Earth by a factor  $10^3$ ; or a learning universe whose natural laws not only undergo, in their specific numerical parameters, an unmeasurably slight evolution across the millions of years, but of which it is also considered thinkable that it takes into account the outcome of divination or historiography today, and projects this, as a material new historical fact, back into the near or even remote past. Such thoughts are not serious enough to enter the lofty domain of science – they belong to the domain of poetics, as the operative word in the book's subtitle.

Thus in Part II, the ground will turn out to have been sufficiently prepared to pose once more, with Edith Turner, the question – central to *sangomahood* and its skeptics – as to the Reality of Spirits. Identifying as a *sangoma*, my surprising answer will be to both affirm and deny the reality of spirits, and thus to confront head-on both Edith Turner and my somewhat naïve academic admirers who thought to reproduce my own approach to *sangoma* in their own work.

Part III explores (with special reference to Cremo & Thompson's iconoclastic book *Forbidden Archeology*, 1993) in how far perspectives from outside both Africa and the North Atlantic scientific domain (notably the South Asian concept of कल्प *kalpa*, 'aeon', as an alternative to evolution), could contribute towards an intercultural ontology. How real is the material world, to what extent is it susceptible to direct, conscious, wilful influence from the human mind, and to what extent is it validly and definitely described and explained by modern natural science? Is it possible to apply a totally different world-view to the same complex of sense impression that we consider to be our reality? And even if that alternative world-view totally rejects the results of current scientific dating methods, as well as the overall principle of the evolution of life on Earth, but instead reverts to a periodical and cataclysmic model of eternal recurrence of sameness (as in Nietzsche's *Ewige Wiederkunft des Gleichen*), are we compelled to totally reject such a world-view in order to salvage modern science – or may we, in the pursuit of intercultural wisdom, and in accordance with the philosophical principle of epistemological charity,<sup>3</sup> conclude that even if contradictory, both world-views may be true and worthy of our respect? To do so would be the end of science and method as we know it – but such an end may be precisely what is needed if we do not want our intellectual endeavours be a mere reiteration of North Atlantic hegemonic condescension. *How can the truth of one cultural domain be tolerated in the presence of another cultural domain producing and underpinning very different truths?* How can we define the human existence, and reality, *in a world that appears to be a patchwork quilt of mutually unaccountable truth provinces, even truth enclaves?*

Part IV continues these themes of cosmology and evolution, pursuing the remarkable parallels between the book *Origin* (2017), by today's best-selling fiction author Dan Brown, and the thought of the French Roman Catholic priest and geologist Pierre Teilhard de

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<sup>3</sup> On epistemological charity, cf. Lepore 1993; Malpas 1988; McGinn 1977; Davidson 1984; Grandy 1973; van Binsbergen 2003. We shall come back to this concept shortly.

Chardin (1881-1955). That chapter was written immediately after I was suddenly hospitalised on New Year's Eve (31-12-2017), and was far from confident that I would ever regain my former usual productive energy (I did, though).

That piece finally leads on to the tentative outline (reticently indicated in chapter 5, continued more forcefully in the concluding chapter 6) of an intercultural ontology, which affirms the kaleidoscopic, capricious, religiously-underpinned relation between human thought and the universe – formulating a meta-cosmology and even a meta-theology in which nothing is what it has been agreed to be, and everything (even reality, Being, the thinking I, and God), oscillates between its affirmation and denial, under conditions whose elucidation is still largely beyond our grasp.

Having spent half a century on the investigation of the human existence from the perspective of an empirical study of religion, it is high time that I should further sum up (after my 2012, 2015, 2017 and 20018 books) what I think I have learned. The emerging insights boggle the mind. They play havoc with all established logic and with habitual ways of conceptualising humanity and God, deny any comfortable demarcation between our thinking I and the material realities that surround us, and install a dimension, both of the Divine and of Nothingness, simultaneously, at the very heart of our being. Other philosophers, from Dionysius and Nishida Kitarō to Derrida and Kierkegaard, not to speak of the Buddha, have reached somewhat similar conclusions usually at the end of less devious ways and less abstruse spiritual experiences than I will expound in the present book. Having already tried to elucidate the theoretical and methodological steps and obstacles on my journey in a considerable number of books I have published over the last two decades, in the present book (where such attempts are continued and hopefully brought to conclusion) I have particularly allowed fragments of autobiography to fill in the existential details, which often – why not admit it, at this age of retirement when I have nothing to lose any more in the sense of academic respectability? – were more decisive than the scientific considerations.

I do realise that with the present book, I have left far behind me the realm of empirical science, even of academia, and find myself in what should have felt as a haunted, inimical space, like what the enigmatic Cain may have experienced after the understandable homicide into which God seems to have treacherously, maliciously enticed him.<sup>4</sup> Yet this

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout this book we shall occasionally need the extensive scholarly, well-referenced treatment of scholarly topics, which more or less break out of the flow of the book's argument, yet are indispensable as substantiation of my argument. These special topics stand out by indentation, by a heading in small capitals, are numbered in capital Latin letters A, B, C..., and are listed in a special section at the end of the preface, above.

#### A. CAIN AS EVERYMAN.

Cain is one of the most enigmatic characters in the Jewish / Christian / Islamic tradition; and one (like Jacob wrestling with the angel at the banks of the Jabbok stream, Genesis 32:23 f.; and Job (in the Bible book of that name) relentlessly tried by unending misfortune) who particularly invites identification on the part of humans today. He may be considered an early and remarkably complex and complete, evocation of the contradictions of the human condition. The traditional, theological and scholarly literature around Cain is considerable, and outside our present

book is the product of serenity, not of distress, and scarcely of malice. The none too significant insights it propounds have been bought at very great mental, physical, social and financial costs, but they accord me a state of tranquility and fulfilment that, if it is not just a sign of approaching senility (as some of my readers will no doubt claim, perhaps with some justification), I have learned to recognise as the hallmark of truth, however evasive, and however unlikely.

Even so, there is a huge apparent contradiction here, which immediately becomes manifest with even the slightest glance at this book's immense and many-faceted bibliography. While I do not hesitate to radically question the scientific foundations of modern science in the Aristotelian logic of the 'where-P-there-not-not-P' type (Doctrine of the Excluded Third), yet I appeal to the same science in order to create an empirical context in which I can make my critical and radical moves (cf. chapter 4 below, where Cremo & Thompson use scientific dating methods to reject science, *in casu* geology). In a nutshell, this sums up the apparently trivialistic epistemology where my half century of research into religion and otherness (and simultaneously, my Rake's Progress as a poet) has taken me. In the last analysis, binary oppositions (which I claim to be recent inventions in cultural history; 2012,

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scope. A surprisingly representative overview of that literature is to be found in Anonymous, 'Cain and Abel'; further, e.g. Cook 1961 (according to whom it is the continued presence of Cain's putative descendants, the Kenites (cf. Mittmann 1977; it may have been these who introduced the cult of YHWH into Palestine – van der Toorn 1999), which rendered Cain's story relevant in Ancient Israelite times; Combs 1988 (suggesting that Earth is the unmentioned third partner in the exchange between God and Cain – not unlike the emergence of the Ancient Egyptian goddess Neith – associated with warfare and domesticity, but ultimately with the Primal Waters out of which the Land has emerged according to an early cosmogony – as the ultimate power forcing (like the *deus ex machina*) a conclusion to the trial of Seth and Horus; cf. Griffiths 1960; Kees 1923-1924; Papyrus Chester Beatty N1); Enslin 1967 (the illuminating parallel with Prometheus); Görg 1994; Sawyerr 1986 (the illuminating parallel with Hephaestus / Vulcan – also physically marked, and blacksmith – , cf. van Binsbergen, in press (d); Emerson 1906 (cf. the dubious Waddell 1930) on the Cain figure in medieval English narratives; Herion 1995; Jacobson 2002 (perspective on Empedocles); Mittmann 1977; North 1964; Robertson Smith 1927: 270 (the curse of Cain as a Semitic concept); Philo 1854; Schapera 1955; Spina 1992; von Bunsen 1865 (the theme of divine male twins is common worldwide (for the New World cf. e.g. Gusinde 1928; Metraux 1946; Ward 1968), but few are antagonistic – cf. Count 1952 – such as Cain and Abel, Romulus and Remus – as in Dumézil 1994 – , Osiris and Seth; Jacob and Esau); van Wolde 1991 (who applies a narratological perspective); Vermeulen 1991 (concentrating on the offspring of the two brothers); Walke 1986 (concentrating on Cain's offering); Wyatt 1986 (on Cain's wife). Antagonistic twins are suggestive of obvious cosmological opposites such as Sun and Moon (as in Ancient Egyptian cosmogenesis), Night and Day (Hesiod 1914), Heaven and Earth (the Separation of Heaven and Earth being the dominant cosmogony among Anatomically Modern Humans since the Upper Palaeolithic; van Binsbergen 2006c, 2006b, 2010i). The latter themes come back in the juxtaposition of Ham and Japhet (with Sem, 'Name', as a mere dummy third personage) in *Genesis 10* (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011) – which suggests that Cain and Abel in a way reflect a Bronze Age cosmology narratively projected back into remotest times. On the prehistory and *emic* nature of such oppositions as night and day, dark and light, Sun and Moon, see van Binsbergen 2018: chs 8 and 9. From the perspective of modern thought Cain (both marked and cast out) would appear, not so much as the scapegoat, but as the Other *par excellence* – sacred and rejected; cf. Schoffeleers 1991, with in the background the thought of Hegel and Levinas (cf. Steffen 2013).



2018) seem to be merely pacifiers used by the human mind to brace itself against the dazzling complexities of a reality constantly oscillating towards unreality and back. Scientific knowledge is not an ultimate truth, but neither an ultimate untruth – depending on the situation and the context, it is both; by the same token, God both exists and does not exist; and the claim of veridical divination (which is the returning chorus of my clamouring, in this book, for a different scientific logic) is both nonsensical, and unshakably true. Culture, *as a machine producing collectively underpinned self-evidences*, has been a comfortable way to live with such immense contradictions, by whisking them away from consciousness. *Sangoma Science* admits to these contradictions, plays havoc with them, yet does not give up the idea (for which every passionate scientist, including myself, has paid dearly in many different ways) that, even though oscillatingly, scientific truths are the best we have and worthy of all the integrity and truthfulness we can summon – even if they constantly slip through our fingers and turn into their own negation.

## **o.2. The ethnographer's truth and constituency, versus the philosopher's truth and constituency**

Why should my way, as that of an empirical social scientist turned intercultural philosopher, have been so much more devious than the thought procedures of those who have been philosophers from the start, and by their principal training? For nearly two decades I occupied a professorial position at the Philosophical Faculty, Erasmus University Rotterdam. Admittedly, I derived great inspiration from that condition. I was uniquely stimulated to thresh out (what few anthropologists ever do) the major philosophical problems inherent to my social-anthropological habitus, and I managed to play, for many years, a facilitating role for the benefit of African philosophy especially as the Editor / publisher of *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy / Revue Africaine de Philosophie*. The present book could not have been written without my Rotterdam philosophical adventure, since 1995. However, in typical anthropological fashion (I had for decades already, wholeheartedly, played the role of outsider as part of my professional identity of anthropological field-worker), from beginning to end I continued to be perceived by my philosophical collectives as a non-philosopher, a social scientist lost in their midst.<sup>5</sup> Where they would feel accountable to canonised thought traditions inbided through the academic study of philosophy, the reading of philosophical texts, and the emulation of philosophers acting as role models, my first accountability would be to whatever I learned, empirically, about

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<sup>5</sup> When I was permitted to contribute a chapter on Kant to a book based on an international intercultural philosophical conference that I had co-organised and co-chaired, and that was to be edited by my (still irate) Rotterdam predecessor Kimmerle and his presumed crown prince (but thwarted by my own appointment as Kimmerle's successor) Henk Oosterling (Kimmerle & Oosterling 2000), the editors had to disqualify my contribution (van Binsbergen 2000) by adding the subtitle 'A social-science comment' – in a book whose other contributors were exclusively acknowledged as philosophers (although some were, like myself, social scientists by training). An extensive and somewhat spiteful *post-mortem* of my philosophical adventure at Rotterdam is contained in the Introduction to my book *Vicarious Reflections* (2015).

a handful of specific other cultures than the West European one, as an ethnographer during prolonged, painful but intense fieldwork. I did not have the freedom of thought which my philosophical colleagues would claim as a matter of course (often inventing and stating blatant untruths about concrete social and historical situations in the process – for they were not empirically or methodologically accountable in the way every social scientist is) – by contrast, my hands were tied by the empirical data I had acquired in personal situations over long periods of time in intensive learning and interaction processes far away from home.

Therefore, from a philosophical point of view there is a fundamental problem with the arguments in the present book, which I can pinpoint but which (from my own point of view, which was social-anthropological long before it became philosophical, and poetical years even before it became social-anthropological) I do not seem to be able to remedy.

It is as if the writer who speaks through these pages, is not free to think along wherever the wind of his mind blows – as if his hands are tied in a way one would never expect from a philosopher. *What is the hidden constituency that is the implied point of reference for an attempt, like the present one, to think through the implication and consequences of particular ethnographic experiences, while remaining faithful to these experiences as primary givens – in other words, while realising that fully deconstructing them in meta-terms, as a philosopher may be expected to do, would destroy the whole point of the present exercise, and betray the intimacy of the fieldwork situation to which these insights are due in the first place? Why does the philosophising ethnographer make things so difficult for herself or himself, whereas as a modern, rather Post-modern, intellectual she or he has all the tools at her disposal to think away past the apparent reality which is socially constructed in fieldwork? Is it the determination to remain faithful, and not to commit violence (the violence of objectification / representation / writing / deconstruction), to a subaltern group, e.g. the African people within whose life-world these ethnographic experiences were generated in the first place? Is it interpretative charity, which precludes that that which is dear, even sacred, to some people we know, is completely deconstructed as worthless and despicable for the sake of a universalising, placeless discourse in the hands of theorists whose only chosen self-identity is that of being outsiders? Is it simply inability to clearly think through the problems at hand, perhaps as a result of defective training, defective reading, lesser talent that made one opt for a career in a soft science like anthropology rather than in philosophy and logic? I have for years sought in vain to capture this problem in words.<sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>6</sup> My awareness of this problem is ‘not new’, and does not merely spring from the peculiarities of the Department of Man and Culture at her Erasmus University Rotterdam around the year 2000 as expounded by me in van Binsbergen 2015. When my book *Intercultural Encounters* (balancing between anthropology and philosophy) was ready to go to the press, in the autumn of 2002, my German publisher LIT Verlag was disappointed: the book was rejected for full American circulation under the imprint of Transaction Press, because what (that press’ editors understood as to whatever) I had to say was considered to be ‘not new’. How could my own meta-anthropological interpretation of my very own, unique personal experiences in the field, struggling with an intercultural philosophy of largely my own concoction, be anything but new to the reader? Apparently because others, departing from an

A substantial *practical* difference should be appreciated between the truth of philosophers and that of empirical social scientists. More than anything else (more, admittedly and regrettably, than sound methodology, epistemology, and fundamentals of the philosophical tradition), anthropologists are taught to construct an empirically grounded rendering of the concepts, institutions, representations, practices – in short, of the life-world – of other people, their field hosts. What is the particular mode of knowledge formation constituted by historical and ethnographic fieldwork, through participation and observation? I have summarised the essentials in my *Intercultural Encounters* (van Binsbergen 2003h: 496*f.*) and have little to add to that statement:

#### B. HISTORICAL AND ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK AS A MODE OF KNOWLEDGE FORMATION.

'Anthropological participation in the context of fieldwork has a unique function of validation. Let us take as an example the learning of a foreign language through total immersion. Someone involved in such a process will produce speech acts, will submit these to native speakers for criticism and correction, and will thus gauge and improve his own skill in the local language. In the same (and overlapping) way participant observation furnishes a practical feedback to the implicit and explicit insights that a fieldworker may have gathered earlier in the same research through observations and conversations. Participating is, in the first instance, not an expression of exotism. not a form of *going native* or of risky loss of self, but simply an inductive and hence evidently incomplete form of empirical proof of a practical, interactive and reflective nature. If the fieldworker has actually arrived at some genuine knowledge and understanding of local cultural forms, then she is rewarded by the participants's affirmative attitude and an increased flow of subsequent information; and in the opposite case she is punished by the participants' rejection and a decrease in the subsequent flow of information. The more the fieldworker is defenceless, the more devoid of North Atlantic hegemonic protection, the more cut off from her home background, the stronger the social control that the participants can exert on her, and the more massive the flow of information and the greater, ultimately (provided the fieldworker can retain or regain her professional distance), the knowledge and insight gathered during fieldwork. The time-consuming and humble learning of a cultural orientation, including at least one of the local languages (local settings nearly always involve more than one language simultaneously), characterises anthropology as a form of intercultural knowledge on feedback basis. Moreover, knowledge production in participatory fieldwork takes place on both verbal and non-verbal levels, leading to the ethnographer's textual renderings of the participants's own texts, as well as to the ethnographer's textual renderings of observations of non-verbal behaviour. Because of this much wider, non-verbal basis, firmly rooted in participation, the knowledge acquired in fieldwork derives from experience (often, as Parts II and III [of *Intercultural Encounters*] indicate, a profound and distressing experience) in ways that have scarcely parallels in the procedures of intercultural knowledge production so far pioneered by intercultural philosophers - unless the latter do fieldwork among 'sages', but then their techniques of elicitation and recording are often hopelessly defective.

Therefore, whatever may be theoretically wrong with fieldwork as a method for the production of intercultural knowledge, it appears to be *in principle* far superior to the forms of intercultural knowledge of

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existing body of published philosophy and meta-anthropology, and projecting those givens superficially onto fieldwork, had thought and written ahead of me, far more unhindered by the burden of field accountability than I have always been. I was deliberately not working within an established or emerging field of '*Anthropology and Humanism*' (a journal then dominated by Edith Turner), 'Experiential Anthropology' or 'Anthropology of the occult', and least of all 'the ontological turn in anthropology' (Viveiros de Castro 1992, 1996, 1998; cf. Vulto 2019) and did not see any reason to critically and explicitly engage with the products of those industries. My reasons will be clearer from the present book, especially from my critique of Edith Turner in chapter 3.

philosophers, who tend to rely on texts, and usually on translated texts from foreign languages at that: I say “in principle”, because below I shall argue that this empirical advantage is largely forfeited by the epistemological naivety of anthropologists as compared to professional philosophers.

The role of researcher forces the anthropologist to adopt distance and instrumentality *vis-à-vis* the participants and their cultural orientations, but at the same time the internalisation of local cultural orientations works in exactly the opposite direction. Ethnographic fieldwork is a play of seducing and being seduced. It constantly suggests the possibility of such a boundary-crossing as the fieldworker desires, and in this suggestion the boundary between researcher and the researched, is not so much denied or perceived, but *constructed* in the first place. The researcher seeks to be seduced towards participation and knowledge: but the hosts also, in their turn, seduce through word and gesture in order to constantly shift and reduce the boundaries of access, knowledge, trust and intimacy (original footnote: cf. Kristeva 1983) around which every anthropological fieldwork revolves.<sup>7</sup>

From this methodological perspective, one hesitates to impute ideas and judgments to other people unless there is substantial empirical ground, reinforced still by a more general knowledge of the wider culture built up over years, and by a general knowledge of the local language in which that culture is encoded and transmitted.

By contrast, in my nearly two decades of daily association with professional philosophers who, especially in the North Atlantic region, claim to be dealing with interculturality, I have often been surprised to encounter little of this empirical reticence and prudence, and to see my own methodological (or rather emotional and social?) scruples as a social scientist often dismissed as philosophically irrelevant – or worse, as a sure sign of philosophical incompetence. In such philosophical contexts, empirical ethnographic data are not the anchorage and foundation of the argument but at best embellishments, easily replaced by others if more suitable. The awkward clinging on to ‘how things were in the field’ is of course totally absent, and the ethnographic host community is not in any way functioning as a reference group nor as some kind of self-imposed judge of truth and relevance. Much to my amazement, philosophers have turned out to find the world – especially the world of interculturality, a term they use lightly<sup>7</sup> – manageable, and endlessly pliable to the flight of their thinking, whose main impetus derives from philosophical intertextuality, not from interculturality in word, gesture and interaction. In such philosophical contexts, sweeping statements about entire cultures, continents and periods may be made on the basis of very scanty specific evidence, personal projections, defective language mastery, and half truths

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<sup>7</sup> In ways set out in the introduction of my *Vicarious Reflections* (2015), I resent it when philosophers, without any of the challenging, humiliating and desorientating sallies into uncharted transcultural territory that fieldwork entails, speak of intercultural philosophy in typical cases like the following: Suzuki (1914, 1927-1934, 1947, 1949) was a recognised specialist in Japanese Zen Buddhism, frequenting English-speaking North Atlantic universities; he wrote several books on Zen Buddhism in English, and since Zen Buddhism does not belong to the original culture of North Atlantic philosopher X, X’s writing secondarily on Zen Buddhism on the basis of Suzuki’s work is claimed by X and his colleagues to be an instance of intercultural philosophy. Yet X has entirely shunned the essential intercultural cycle of humble accommodation, observation, categorisation, interpretation, translation, and representation – leaving that entirely to Suzuki; the latter’s texts are his attempt to translate his Zen Buddhism towards the West; Westerners seriously seeking to engage in intercultural philosophy should try harder than merely appropriating Suzuki, and letting him do all the work.

typically gleaned from long obsolete texts that can no longer lay claim to being scientific.<sup>8</sup> Despite the availability of very extensive and well-grounded empirical studies by social scientists, usually in international languages, a similar off-hand manner tends to characterise philosophical discussions of the North Atlantic (post-)modern urban / industrial society, which is the habitat and the implicit existential and cultural referent of most philosophers writing today. This is a situation in which the production of philosophy naïvely but inevitably tends to reflect a hegemonic, North-Atlantic-centred ideological and political project, where the received positions of North Atlantic philosophy as established since the Enlightenment are self-evidently assumed to throw light on the rest of the world and of history, and, at the same time, are considered to be hardly in need of being critiqued and rethought in the light of these intercultural and historical alternatives. Hence my insistence that the social sciences are among the three most important advances of the twentieth century CE, still struggling in vain to be taken seriously in the lands of the humanities including philosophy (whose image of man, as individualist, volitionist, consciousness-centred, still in many ways reflects the social perception and ideology of 19<sup>th</sup> century CE European middle and upper classes); one hilarious consequence of this state of affairs is that fashionable Poststructuralist philosophers of the outgoing 20<sup>th</sup> century, like Foucault and Deleuze, appear to derive much of their appeal from the fact that, unhindered by systematic professional studies and readings, they have by their own impetus re-invented poor man's versions of the social sciences including social history and the History of Ideas, and have presented these as the latest achievement in philosophy.

Speaking from either side of such a considerable gap, in terms both of methodology and of professional identity and delusions, even these two fields (philosophy and the social sciences), despite their belonging to the same overarching Post-modern North Atlantic / global culture, constitute separate truth provinces between which, in principle, and in ways to be elucidated towards the end of the present argument, no systematic accommodation is possible – while 'wisdom' has largely become a dirty word in both professional domains.<sup>9</sup>

As the result of this professional predicament of the ethnographer / anthropologist having turned intercultural philosopher, the tentative intercultural ontology which it has been the object of this book to produce, can only emerge as a by-product, an afterthought, little articulated, whispered in passing like an apotropaic formula, and lacking the elaboration of philosophical system building. But I am afraid this is all I have to offer.

*If we need one succinct formula to answer the question as to the hidden constituency which clips the wings of the anthropologist's mind, it is: the intercultural accountability to the owners of the other culture which is being represented by the anthropologist.* The anthropologist does not think primarily on her or his own account – her thought is, in terms of

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<sup>8</sup> My 1998 Rotterdam inaugural in the chair of Foundations of Intercultural Philosophy immediately created havoc because I was sufficiently undiplomatic to imply that the work of my illustrious predecessor in that chair, a Hegel specialist, was occasionally suffering from the same ills; van Binsbergen 1999. Another case is that of Giles Deleuze's co-author Félix Guattari, see: van Binsbergen 2008b.

<sup>9</sup> van Binsbergen 2008, 2020.

the title of my 2015 book, *Vicarious Reflection*. In intercultural knowledge formation, humility, receptivity, patience, and reticence, must come in the place of the Faustian, implicitly hegemonic self-confidence of true philosophers. Without being able to follow and understand the original owners of an item of culture or knowledge in their own words and against their own cultural and historical background, any attempt to represent such an item is futile *hybris*, an hegemonic ambush. It is not in the first place for lack of thinking power or lack of familiarity with the Western philosophical canon that I have resigned myself to the manifestly clumsy, faltering thought processes that make up the present book; it is because, temporarily sitting in around the fire like the essentially ignorant visitor that I have remained, I cannot risk to wear out my welcome by imposing with my partially ignorant words, on those who have a birth right to sit there.

When I drafted my first account of 'Becoming a Sangoma', between two stages in my initiation as a *thwaza*, back in 1990, in Cape Town where I had flown from Botswana in order to greet Jack Simons and Ray Alexander who had just returned there from decades of exile, I wrote that the confusion created by my change of perspective was bringing me to temporarily relinquish all academic writing; instead, I proposed to work on a new literary book *Servant of the Ancestors*. So far, that book never materialised. But here it finally is, more literary than its philosophical trappings suggest, and completed only hours before I had to undergo major heart surgery that – in the proposedly comforting words of my friend Sanya Osha – might well have turned me into an ancestor myself. But it did not.




### 0.3. Editorial / orthographic conventions

This book now appears in a form that considerably deviates from the original drafted conception. Three chapters initially intended for inclusion here, have meanwhile been incorporated in my 2015 book *Vicarious Reflections*. As a result the reader will have to refer there for my general statements on African Spirituality, on Sandra Harding's intercultural epistemology of 'modern science as an ethnoscience', and for my extensive argument on wisdom.<sup>10</sup> Instead, the section on cosmology and evolution, pertinent concepts for the discussion of *Forbidden Archeology*, has been augmented with my recent piece on Dan Brown's book *Origin* (2017), where evolution and Intelligent Design are key words to highlight the parallels with Teilhard de Chardin's work.

In the present study, as in my other recent work, an effort has been made to render the world's specific cultural / intellectual traditions, as much as possible, in their original form including their original script, if any. This is not in order to pretend a philological competence I do not possess (in fact, I am aware that my adopted practice is prone to serious error disqualifying the argument in the eyes of regional philological specialists), but, on the contrary, to remind the reader – in the best anthropological fashion – of the fact that all regional traditions deserve to be met on their own terms; that all transcontinental rendering involves massive translation and interpretation and therefore is inherently uncertain and distortive; and that

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<sup>10</sup> To which meanwhile a new argument may be added: van Binsbergen in the press / 2020.

the habitual equation of global scholarship with a North Atlantic, early-21st-century-CE perspective (and orthography) amounts to a gross error of appropriative ethnocentrism. As a rule, the non-European original script will only be given the first time a name or term is being used. In this connection, the rendering of personal proper names from Ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome presents special problems due to the habit, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon contexts, of adopting rather distortive versions of the original names in modern scholarly and popular discourse; thus Isis instead of  ʒst / Ast / Alst / Arst, Chemmis instead of  ʒ-bit, Horus instead of  H̄r (Ancient Egyptian); Hephaestus instead of Ἥφαιστος Hēphaistos, Achilles instead of Ἀχιλλεύς Achilleus; Ovid instead of Ovidius, Homer instead of Ὅμηρος Homerus or Homeros. However, I cannot bring myself to Anglicise the name of my beloved Homeric heroine Helena, to Helen, and there may be other cases where I have stuck to my European classical education and have refused to adopt the English barbarisms. I am not to be blamed for the gross inconsistencies springing from this cultural practice; further see the *Index of Proper Names Other than those of Authors*, and the *Index of Authors*, at the end of this book.<sup>11</sup> Occasionally I have given technical terms in Hebrew or Arabic script, often I have made shift with the transliteration in Latin script.

This is a new installment in an already long series of scholarly and literary books published with my Shikanda Publishing House. Recent developments in ICT make this a perfectly rational and scholarly choice: once available on the Internet, the major search engines (especially the authoritative Google Scholar) will pick up any book and ensure that it receives the critical exposure it deserves without having to pass under the often intolerably oppressive and arrogant yoke of established academic publishing houses. Until the late 1980s I had a mutually beneficial relation with *In de Knipscheer*, a young but respectable literary publishing house (and in this context I also learned much of the practice of book publishing), but in subsequent years that publisher claimed it could no longer accommodate any poetry least of all my own. I shun peddling my work from publisher to publisher, and sought an alternative. On the academic side, for decades I have been happy with Kegan Paul International (London) and LIT Verlag (Munster / Berlin), but I effectively became a publisher myself when I honoured Pieter Boele van Hensbroek's (a publisher's son) request to succeed him, in 2002, as Editor of *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy / Revue Africaine de Philosophie*, which he had founded (with Ron Bwalya) in Zambia, and had directed / published ever since. On a capital of barely US\$2000, with almost no revenue from subscriptions, and with the ever rising costs of initiating, designing, hosting and maintaining the huge *Quest* website, in the first five years of my editorship *Quest* could benefit from a specific subsidy from the African Studies Centre Leiden, but after that date *Quest* had to run on entirely my own personal money. In the vicariously PC (Politically Correct), in other words bigotted, world of intercontinental cultural intervention, as a Europe-domiciled African undertaking *Quest* was considered insufficiently African to be fundable. When subsequently the South African academic publishing house UNISA Press took *ten* years to publish our

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<sup>11</sup> The same paragraph appears, for the same reasons, in van Binsbergen 2012b.

*Researching Power and Identity in African State Formation* (Doornbos & van Binsbergen 2017), idly sitting on the duly corrected final page proofs alone for over 5 years, and thus rendering the book obsolete even before it ever saw the light, I decided that the time had come to end the charade of publisher-dependence (which ensured neither academic quality nor international circulation), and to publish my own books (whose MSS were accumulating, and which needed each other for mutual corroboration) at a high speed no commercial publisher could ever rival, while retaining full academic-press standards of copy-editing and bibliography – albeit that every new book published meant a substantial financial liability for me personally. Apparently this avoids the question of peer review – but so does the fetishism of relying on established academic publishers which, in the lasst analysis, will turn out to be profit-driven. The respectability derived from publishing with established academic publisher is mainly a form of snobbish window-dressing. After all, much of the ccontents of my books already saw the light in peer-reviewed articles anyway. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, and with sufficient digital circulation no defective book can escape its proper fate.

#### o.4. Acknowledgments

In my recent books I have included lavish acknowledgments, and it would only damage their credibility if I would run of the same list again here. So let me refer the reader to these other, recent texts, and be more sparing in my praises here. My life-long indebtedness to my sisters and brother, to my teachers in school and university, and to my first wife the late lamented biophysicist Henny van Rijn († 2019, while the writing of this book was in full swing), goes without saying and needs scarcely be repeated here.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> With Henny I shared an important experience which obliquely has had a considerable impact on my becoming a *sangoma*. After we extensively acquainted ourselves with the small and close-knit community of Nkoya migrants in Lusaka, and after I had extended my University-of-Zambia-funded research into Lusaka churches so as to include the Nkoya's urban cults, in the middle of 1973 we moved to rural Nkoyaland (400 km west of Lusaka) in order to concentrate more fully on Nkoya culture and society. Settling in a satellite village near King Kahare's capital (our welcome was confirmed by the King's ancestors when he set out to hunt as a divinatory procedure), we found that, in this region where walking or cycling were practically the only means of locomotion, the nearest, small and unreliable outlet of modern medicine was in a nearby valley, 25 kms away. Our village neighbours suspected correctly that we were in the possession of modern patent medicine, and after a few weeks we found ourselves giving in to popular demand and running a rural clinic, with several dozens of patients gathering in front of our hut (thatched, leaking, 2 x 2 m, no mains nor running water) every morning and every evening. At 130 kms distance (a distance we could negotiate with our decrepit motor car, although petrol was in short supply) there was the Roman Catholic Mission of Mangango, whose only doctor was a fellow-countryman of ours. He repeatedly gave us medicine and basic advice to recognise and initially treat the ten most common diseases – a routine we kept up for months, until we were ourselves overtaken by severe illness, and had to give up our rural fieldwork. Cf. van Binsbergen 1979c. As a window on local needs and concerns, as an exercise in participation, and as a public-relations device, our clinic (where Henny, with her senior non-medical position in a medical research group in the Netherlands, did the lion's share of the work) could scarcely be surpassed by other field strategies. When I returned to Kahare in 1977 and 1978, I initiated the construction and funding of a self-help clinic (van Binsbergen 1978a, 1978b), which effectively – after predictable vicissitudes – was only completed by the



Of course, in a book called *Sangoma Science* I cannot fail to acknowledge, once more, my great indebtedness to my two spiritual leaders in this field, the Francistown lodge leaders Elizabeth and Rosie Mabutu (cf. van Binsbergen 1990b, 1990c, 1991a, 1993b, 1994a) – and the non-*sangoma* herbalist Mr Smarts Gumede, who taught me the details of *hakata* divination and allowed me to assist in his traditional surgery – and share the proceeds – as soon as I had been registered as a traditional healer. But let me pass on to minor protagonists in this connection.

I would not have enriched my life and thought with the *sangoma* experience if I have not done a year's fieldwork, 1988–1988, in the city of Francistown, North East Botswana, at the invitation of my old friend Richard Werbner, then already firmly established as a specialist on the Kalanga people of the rural North East District, and of adjacent parts of Zimbabwe. Richard soon came to regret his generous invitation when it turned out that I (a recognised authority on African religion, like he himself) had not been able to limit myself to urban public culture but had irresistibly been drawn to the layers of traditional culture that, under the intimidating gaze of apartheid-influenced 'White' dominance in Francistown at the time, had gone underground, and that thus provided the otherwise missing link between the city and the surrounding countryside. Richard became the first, and truly devastating, critic of my *sangoma* studies, and forced me to articulate, gradually, the kind of details of fieldwork and experience that constitute the bulk of the present book. It cost us our friendship.

Another such relentless critic has been my old colleague the late lamented Robert Buijtenhuijs, with whom I was closely associated (sharing an office, a department, and publications on religious innovation in Africa, and on urban sociology; but not a method nor a theory) in the first ten years of my work at the African Studies Centre, Leiden, from 1977 on. In particular, Robert did not buy the story of my 'becoming a *sangoma*', pointing out that the time frame had been too short to make possible any serious learning process, in which allegedly complex knowledge such as a local pharmacopaea and a bewildering divinatory interpretative catalogue had to be mastered. The *sangomas*'s admittedly unscientific argument that the ancestors were taking care of such limitations understandably failed to impress him.<sup>13</sup> It was not the first nor the last time we differed – in the course of

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late 1980s, thanks to a Netherlands Development NGO in collaboration with the Zambian Ministry of health and the Seventh Day Adventist Church (who regrettably – fearing satanical royal rites – insisted that, in return, the royal drums at King Kahare's court would henceforth remain silent). So when I co-opted into an African specialist role of diagnosis and healing, I had already considerable (albeit unqualified) experience with the dispensing of formal cosmopolitan health care.

<sup>13</sup> A similar reproach, based on an absolute rejection of the Southern African local practice on the basis of a projection of North Atlantic scholarly and medico-ethnic norms mistaken to be universal, was made by my dear Rotterdam colleague Douwe Tiemersma, in public response to my contribution at his valedictory symposium in Rotterdam, 2005. He claimed to find no fault with my representing *sangomahood*, with the following exception: the text on my website offering *sangoma* consultation warned the client that all spiritual benefits would be forfeited, and, to boot, serious spiritual sanction would be in stock, for those failing to pay up for their initial *sangoma* consultation. Such threatening language, completely out of step with the prevailing ideal of constructing a nice, cosy and reassuring alternative New-Age domain of medical care in the North Atlantic region today, Tiemersma considered absolutely disqualifying and destructive of all interculturality – on the basis, of course, of sheer ethnocentric myopia on his part. In fact my threat (which had been deleted years earlier, but for very different reasons) simply emulated standard *sangoma* procedure. Sacrifice, not being pampered, is the nearly universal refrain of ritual and healing. The terror inspired by *sangomas* in their original,

the decades of our exchanges he would, for instance, question whether an Africanist would have to *love* Africa (he was essentially a documentary historian, his fieldwork in Kenya and Chad had been limited to a few weeks of interviewing under highly controlled circumstances such as hotel lounges, and the only secondarily African languages he commanded were French and English); and towards the end of his career he would (spuriously) reproach both Peter Geschiere and myself for having played irresponsibly with the Marxist mode-of-production paradigm while this was *en vogue*, only to drop this approach overnight and without comment once it was no longer beneficial to our career ambitions; extensive use of the approach in my work on comparative mythology (e.g. van Binsbergen 2006a, 2006b) and on Nkoya history (e.g. van Binsbergen 2012a), as well as relatively early autocritical statements (van Binsbergen 1988a), were to prove him wrong. Nonetheless I wholeheartedly shared in the editorship of his retirement *Festschrift* (Konings, van Binsbergen & Hesseling 2000).

In the execution of that Francistown fieldwork I was greatly helped by a number of local assistants, among whom Edward Mpoloka and Ennie Mapangwane should be mentioned in the first place. That fieldwork was a heavy, sometimes unbearable, burden upon the members of my family who shared it with me: my wife Patricia, our children Vincent and Sarah, and for a limited period also Nezmja, my eldest daughter from a previous marriage; without their endurance and love I would never have been able to enter the world of Francistown *sangomas* and come out relatively unscathed. When Nezmja in 1990, shortly after my return from Botswana, bought me a massive, unscholarly coffee table book offering a challenging global overview of divination *Predicting the Future* (Lyons 1990), that opened my eyes to the potential of my Francistown data on divination – and the rest is history.

In the process, also Ellen Krijnen, my MA student from Rotterdam, made a contribution, both as student of the PWD (Public Works Department ) squatment in Francistown, and as our companion on a trip to the Matopos (Zimbabwe) headquarters of the Mwali cult, when the *sangoma* scene in Francistown had blown up in our face with the death of our main spiritual leader, Mrs Rosie 'MmaNdhlovu' Mabututu. In the eminently bewildering periods of my initiation into apprentice *thwazahood* and, a year later, into full *sangomahood*, I received much support and guidance from our adopted daughter Diketso Keamogetswe. Patricia and our children remained, slightly alarmed but loyal, witnesses to the development of my *sangomahood* in subsequent decades, persuading me to bring the practice, and the ideology behind it, more or less in line with Dutch middle-class aca-

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Southern African setting is far more powerful and devastating, and moreover operates in an environment where the cultural codes underpinning *sangoma* practice are (while admittedly defective: middle-class African patients first need an hour of resocialisation into the traditional world-view before *sangoma* therapy can begin) far more effectively installed than in the North Atlantic region. North Atlantic clients need to be reminded of what they may be toying with. What is more, the *sangoma* absolutely needs the authority which such sanctions inspire, for otherwise she or he would not be able to claim veridicity and effectiveness for the symbols handled for the benefit of the client. The threat was all I could do to instill such authority in the minds of my website visitors. In my piece entitled 'We are in this for the money' (van Binsbergen 2005) I have amply demonstrated that in fact the *sangoma's* real concern is not money, but the construction of enough authority so as to make *sangoma* procedures work *i.e.* triggering the client's own self-healing powers; the transfer of money is in the first place a means of avoiding the client's life-long spiritual dependence on a spiritual advisor.

demie and family expectations. Patricia's role went much further – of the two of us, she was the first to give in to the attraction of *sangomahood*, joining MmaNdhlovu's ritual circle, and while her commitment there soon wore out, yet over the decades she has been my partner in numerous incisive discussions in which she would insist on separating the chaff from the corn, the illusion, projection, and brainwashing, from whatever seemed to be of existential, spiritual and healing value; after all, in our Francistown days she had been the first of us two to join the *sangomas*, don their uniform, and dance and sing under the tutelage of MmaNdhlovu; she even obliged by fainting at the latter's funeral. It is with Patricia that by far my greatest debt lies, not only with this book, but with my life.

A similarly stimulating role was played, over the decades, by my old friend, the late lamented Renaat / René Devisch – who died while the present book was being finalised for publication. As founder and leader of the Louvain School of Anthropology in Belgium, and as a psychoanalysing anthropologist, Renaat was in an eminent position to help me explore the existential and healing dimensions of *sangomahood* and to explicitly acknowledge its authenticity – an endeavour he finally turned into an article for John Middleton with Joseph Miller's authoritative *New Encyclopedia of Africa, I-IV* (Devisch 2008).

I might still have been tempted to consider my *demarche* into *sangomahood* an unprofessional lapse unbecoming to an established North Atlantic anthropologist of religion, had it not been for the constant and wholehearted recognition, support, and constructive published criticism by my dear friend Sanya Osha, a Nigerian philosopher and literature scholar now working in South Africa, and member of the Editorial Board of *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy / Revue Africaine de Philosophie*, for many years. I have been that journal's Editor since 2002.

Yet in fact the original impetus to write the present book came not from all these personal and institutional associations over the decades, but from relatively superficial contacts with two young students of philosophy, who both – each in his own way – challenged me to substantiate, in the form of an explicit ontology designed to meet that challenge, my oral pronouncements concerning the implications of *sangomahood* for intercultural philosophy: Roderick van den Bosch, and Arthur Eaton. They have both long disappeared behind my social horizon, yet have left a legacy that makes me indebted to them. I am sure the result will disappoint them, but then – they were well trained as philosophers to begin with, not renegade social scientists like myself.

I have already acknowledged – albeit it perhaps not wholeheartedly – my debt to my colleagues in the Department of Man and Culture, Philosophical Faculty, Erasmus University Rotterdam. I remain insufficiently equipped for the formidable task my ambition set me in the present book, but without the inspiration and critical guidance from these true philosophers over the years, I would not even have an inkling of what I am missing.

However, in this book philosophy constitutes only one of several main strands in my method and argument. Part of the *poetics* I seek to develop, is simply an immanent critique of anthropology, and an attempt to bring to fruition the great inspiration I have received from various major schools in that blessed discipline: the late lamented André Köbben's (1925-2019) Amsterdam School to begin with (with the late lamented Douwe Jongmans as the principal teacher of fieldwork); the late lamented Max Gluckman's

Manchester School (to which my old friend and first teacher of anthropology, the late lamented Bonno Thoden van Velzen introduced me, to which I was further exposed during my years in Zambia in close association with the late lamented Jaap van Velsen, and of which Max's affinal kinsman Richard Werbner more or less made me, after the fact, a member); and the Louvain School, founded and for decades led by my dear friend the late lamented René Devisch, where over the decades I was a welcome guest and an eager absorber of such inspiration as that school's members had to share towards an anthropology that was *emic* rather than *etic*, philosophically and symbolically sophisticated rather than numerate, and that deeply engaged in the study of divination and healing. In the first three chapters of the present book these anthropological strands are clearly manifest, and they demonstrate my dedication to a profession which, although no longer my principal field, yet has fundamentally shaped my approach to facts, to scientific knowledge, and to people.

Several other main strands in my approach, and the attending personal influences, may be singled out here for acknowledgment:

- *Growing concern for the ethics and politics of transcontinental knowledge construction* – where the early example of my freedom-fighting senior friends the late lamented Jack Simons and Ray Alexander in Lusaka (later Cape Town) had a lasting effect, soon to be reinforced by the Marxist orientation that prevailed among social scientists in the 1970s-80s (especially within our Amsterdam Working Group on Marxist Anthropology, of which the ANC hero Klaas de Jonge has been a member, as well as Peter Geschiere and Simon Simonse – critically inspiring friends through the decades), and the example of my senior colleague at the Leiden African Studies Centre, the late lamented Robert Buijtenhuijs
- *The gradual development of an increasingly more sophisticated, integrated long-range perspective on Africa as part of the wider world*, in line with world-wide trends towards globalisation both in the academic field and in general, and facilitated by advances in genetics, archaeology, history, comparative linguistics, comparative ethnography, and comparative mythology. Here I derived considerable inspiration from collaboration, initially with Terence Ranger and Matthew Schoffeleers, soon with Peter Geschiere (with whom I established, and co-directed, the major WOTRO national research project on *Globalisation and the Construction of Communal Identities*, 1994-1999), Richard Fardon, and Rijk van Dijk. In this respect, although he has been only implicitly a student of globalisation, it was Michael Witzel with whom my greatest debt has lain, for reviving almost single-handedly the exciting field of comparative mythology, dragging me (from 2004 onward) repeatedly across the world as an invitee to conferences of the Harvard Round Table and the International Association for Comparative Mythology (of which I was to be a founding member, and for one and a half decades one of the directors), and extending to me the indispensable Asian experience and academic environments which, as an Africanist, I could never have acquired on my own. Apart from the study of a few specific African and Asian mythologies, my contributions to this field have included

- the demonstration of the ubiquity and immense antiquity of a mythical complex around speckledness / leopard-skin symbolism (2004, 2018, and in press (f));
- the formulation of my Aggregative Diachronic Model of World Mythology (2006a, 2006b, 2012b) tentatively accounting for the unfolding of world mythology from humble but reconstructible first traces in ‘Pandora’s Box’ – Anatomically Modern Humans’s collective cultural heritage as developed inside Africa prior to the Out-of-Africa Exodus (80-60 ka BP);<sup>14</sup>
- and my insistence (in the face of assertions to the contrary, by Michael Witzel and Cavalli-Sforza) on the essential continuity between African mythologies and those of the two other continents of the Old World (van Binsbergen 2007b / 2020, 2010, 2018: 531 f.; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011).

When, in chapters 3 and 4 below, I engage with the work of the Turners and with the Hindu view of time and the universe, comparative mythology (especially the comparative mythology of agriculture, and of stones) and a growing acquaintance with Asian cultures and their religions, constitute an indispensable background.

- *Another such integrative and globally comprehensive perspective relevant to the present book has been that of the Black Athena debate, to which I participated passionately for a few years from 1995 on, and where I have been privileged to develop and test my conceptual and analytical tools, and to sharpen my awareness of the global politics of knowledge. Unmistakably for those who know me well, Martin Bernal became a role model for me, as an example of an accomplished scholar in one field (Sinology and political science) who, out of a combined sense of responsibility and curiosity, sallied forth into a totally different field (Mediterranean Bronze-Age studies) and there initiated an important counter-hegemonic debate – despite the handicaps of his lack of specialist training, his belligerent personality, and the defectively reductive ‘sociology of knowledge’ of his personal invention (cursorily modelled after a template set by Marx and Mannheim). It was my work on the Black Athena debate that introduced me (myself a Mediterraneanist-manqué) to the Ancient Historian Fred Woudhuizen (with whom I completed a long and difficult, but also most stimulating project finally published, in 2011, as our *Ethnicity in Mediterranean Protohistory*, British Archaeological Reports (BAR) International Series No. 2256). In this connection I familiarised myself with major chunks of archaeology, and I developed some of the insights and methods relied on in the present book, e.g.*
  - the glottochronology of linguistic macrophyla based on statistical cluster analy-

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<sup>14</sup> BP = Before Present; ka = kiloyears, millennia, 1,000 years; Ma = megayears, 1,000,000 years; CE = Common Era; BCE = Before CE. A light year is not a time measure, but a distance: the distance covered by light in vacuum in one year, at a speed of just under 300,000 km / s.

sis (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 77f.; cf. van Binsbergen, in press (b);

- the tentative reconstruction of long-range history by a painstaking analysis of global distribution patterns of specific methodological or ethnographic traits – a recurrent theme in all my recent work, but theoretically and methodologically best substantiated in van Binsbergen 2020: ch. 12, on headhunting;
  - the general masculinisation of Old-World goddesses throughout the Bronze Age (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 142)
  - the selective reformulation of the seminal work of the Alsatian linguist and student of Bronze-Age ethnicity Joseph Karst (cf. van Binsbergen 2021);
  - my Pelasgian Hypothesis (van Binsbergen 2011d, 2012b, in press (e); van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011), which postulates a significant cultural package to emerge in Neolithic West Asia, to spread to the Mediterranean region in the Bronze Age, only to be selectively transmitted in all directions (including Europe, Africa, and South and East Asia, even Oceania and the New World) at the end of the Bronze Age;
  - and Stephen Oppenheimer’s Sunda Hypothesis, originally formulated to claim a proto-Indonesian impact upon the Ancient Near East, applied by Woudhuizen and myself (2011) to the Bronze Age Mediterranean including Ancient Egypt, and in the hands of Robert Dick-Read (2005) an important tool to assess the cultural relations between Asia and Africa in recent millennia (van Binsbergen 2019, 2020).
- Finally, in the sense of von Goethe’s *Wahlverwandschaften* (1809 / 1879: ‘personally chosen identifications’), the principal commitment towards the present book lay not so much in specific scientific disciplines, paradigms, theories, and methods, but in a life-long intimate engagement with my African hosts, whose languages and cultures I learned over the decades, who soon became my friends, and many of whom ended up as my adopted kinsmen. I have repeatedly (e.g. 2003) written on the dilemma of
    - a. engaging, in fieldwork, with the research hosts, in such trustful personal relationships as their community may stipulate, only
    - b. to be tempted to betray – through the familiar logocentric<sup>15</sup> violent strategies of objectification, dissociation, hegemonic imposition – that same identification when, after the fieldwork, scientific ethnography is to be produced in the context of an academic career.

The principal struggle of my life as an Africanist, and after, has not been to learn African languages and cultures and to feel at home in the African field (that came surprisingly naturally to me, although my Amsterdam fieldwork training did help a great deal); nor

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<sup>15</sup> The word ‘logocentric’ is used by Post-structuralist philosophers, especially Derrida, to denote the text-centredness associated with the emergence, ca. 5 ka BP, and the subsequent installation at the heart of society, of the package of writing, the state, organised religion and proto-science.

to secure and maintain an academic career at the institutional level (my ancestors, innate talents, skills and working power easily took care of that – even despite my own provocative personality); but to come to terms with the fundamental dilemma as signalled above, in an honourable, charitable,<sup>16</sup> loving way, – a way that would also do justice to the immense generosity extended to me by my African hosts over the decades, and to the hegemonic deprivation, exploitation and annihilation which Africans have suffered at the hands of representatives of other continents in recent millennia. This sustained awareness (of short-term indebtedness combined with an historical debt) made me a *feqir* dancing at the Jumiri (Highlands of Northwestern Tunisia) saintly festival of Sidi Mhammad and, more than fifty years later, still keeping his festival; a Nkoya court chronicler, a vocal partisan of Nkoya ethnic revival, and an adoptive Nkoya prince; and finally a *sangoma*. It made me covet, and secure, the Rotterdam Chair of the Foundations of Intercultural Philosophy, cleanse it of its condescending and ignorant token Afrophilia, and turn it – for as long as I was tolerated – into a tool for the study of the possibilities and impossibilities of interculturality; to adopt the journal *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy / Revue Africaine de Philosophie* and keep it going across more than a decade increasingly on just my own personal money; and to spare no effort (in the sense of institutional political manoeuvres, or insanely extensive commentaries on their successive thesis drafts, or personal humiliation so as to secure collaboration with my declared old enemies) for the benefit of my African and Asian PhD candidates. *Of that struggle, this book is merely the latest leg*. I hope it will not be the last one. Meanwhile, I have been greatly rewarded, from my first wife who brought me to Africa in the first place, and my eldest daughter Nezmia whose first language was an African one (Nkoya, forcing her parents to learn it!), to my African-born second wife, to my adoptive African relatives who have given me the home which my European blood relatives never accorded to me, and to a handful of African associates – including Sanya Osha (cf. 2005, 2017; Salazar, Osha & van Binsbergen 2002; Osha with van Binsbergen 2008), Pius Mosima (cf. 2016, 2018), and Pascal Touoyem – who turn out to understand, appreciate and propagate my work much better than I do myself. Finally, my sons Vincent and Dennis have facilitated, over the years, my accommodation to ever increasing computer and digital needs.

In the first fifty years of my life, when I still greatly relied on the cramped stance of posed imperturbability which helped me through my childhood, I knew no fatigue, and only serious infectuous diseases (pneumonia, cerebral malaria) could, rarely, bring me to reduce my usual pace. I find that in the past few decades this has changed dramatically, as I learned to allow the suffering of others and the deficiencies of my own body, of my mind and of my performance, to register with me more consciously and fully than ever before. A special word of thanks is due to the many medical and para-medical people who have helped me through a sheer interminable series of recent medical crises, and who made it possible for me to yet complete the present book and nearly a dozen others since my retirement in 2012. It is dangerous to

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<sup>16</sup> The word ‘charitable’ has a technical philosophical sense here, to be defined below; it has not hing to do with the condescendent transfer of wealth from rich to poor or from North to South.

mention any names in this connection (the one medical specialist overlooked may tomorrow be called upon to save my life), but I am slighting no one when I express special gratitude to the excellent first-line health care workers who made my 2017 moving from Haarlem to Hoofddorp an unexpected boon: the general practitioner Dr Verheijen and her team; my fitness trainer the physiotherapist Cecile Meyer; and the staff of the Drie Meren Apotheek dispensary. At the Leiden University Medical Centre teaching hospital, the thorax surgeon Dr de Weger, his team, and the untiring nursing staff, did a marvellous job replacing my aorta valve and ensuring my speedy recovery. For all this I am immensely grateful, although I realise that their efforts would have been in vain without the constant loving support from Patricia and our five children, with their partners.

If I truly believed in the *sangoma* life-world, I would now conclude with thanking my ancestors, who in the first twenty years of my life plunged me into the greatest existential misery, perhaps only to heighten the blissful contentment, sense of purpose, of skill, of fulfilment, of connectedness, and of being loved, that has been my great good fortune in recent years. I have been aware of guiding and protective hands, but whose? This book's principal message is that the specific answer does not really matter, because it immediately would oscillate into its opposite. But that seems to be the answer.

## 0.5. Provenance of chapters

Chapter 1 was originally written as an external examiner's report for a South African university, and was never published before. The same applies to chapter 2. Chapter 3 is an entirely rewritten and updated version of a long paper I wrote as a result of my participation in the Symposium 'Healing and Spirituality', organised by the Research Institute for Religious Studies and Theology (RST) and the Research Institute for Social and Cultural Research (NISCO), Radboud University, Nijmegen, the Netherlands, 30 January 2007. I am indebted to Eric Venbrux for inviting me to this stimulating event, and to Edith Turner for inspiring the present text – although she was obviously irritated by my interventions, and never bothered to respond to an earlier version sent to her. In addition to my own 15 minutes' oral presentation, which summarised some of my texts published to date,<sup>17</sup> I was asked to have a 30-minute public interview with Edith Turner. On the basis of a selection of her publications,<sup>18</sup> a considerable number of specific questions was prepared by me in advance. They were only put before Edith Turner orally, at the time of the actual interview. The interview took place after the four speakers had introduced their positions. The speakers were: Edith Turner (Anthropologist, University of Virginia), Wim van Binsbergen (Professor of Intercultural Philosophy, Erasmus University Rotterdam / Africa Studies Centre, Leiden University), Kees Waaijman (Professor of Spirituality, Radboud University Nijmegen) and Paul van der Velde (Chairperson Foundation for Psychotherapy and Buddhism / Radboud University Nijmegen) – with Eric Venbrux (Professor of Religious Anthropology at the theological faculty) in the chair, and welcoming words pronounced by the Dean of the Faculty. Chapter 4 was written after reading Cremo & Thompson's book in question, and was never published before. Chapter 5 was written early 2018 after reading Brown's book in question, and has since circulated on my website. Inevitably, the concluding chapter had to be written from scratch when compiling the present book. By and large, the ontological core message of this book only took shape as later asides to the various constituent chapters.

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<sup>17</sup> Notably, van Binsbergen 2003c, 2000, 2003b, as well as sections from the 2003a book.

<sup>18</sup> See bibliography at the end of this book.



**PART I. THE METHODOLOGY OF STUDYING AFRICAN  
SPIRITUALITIES, NOTABLY SANGOMA, THROUGH  
ANTHROPOLOGICAL FIELDWORK**



# *Chapter 1. Reflections on the work of Seamus Mbedzi Smith (pseud.)*

## **1.1. Introduction**

In Part I of this book we shall dwell on ethnography, putting ourselves on the standpoint of mainstream, fieldwork-centred anthropology, and reflect on the possibilities and pitfalls of constructing intercultural knowledge from that position. We shall critically consider two draft PhD theses dealing with *sangomas* in South Africa, written for South African universities. I was invited to be their external examiner. The following two chapters are based on the examiner's reports I wrote in that capacity. While effectively concealing the candidates' identity, I have largely retained my texts' original format, complete with the meticulous, often pedantic and condescending, comments I made in that context. As a real-life introduction to the problems of *Sangoma Science*, I could not think of a better approach.

Let us start with the draft thesis by Seamus Mbedzi Smith (a pseudonym). Based on fieldwork conducted in the Western Cape, South Africa, from 1999 to 2002, and against the background of a considerable theoretical, methodological and comparative ethnographic literature, this thesis by Seamus Medbzi Smith claims to make two main points:

1. the feasibility of an experiential variant of ethnographic fieldwork in anthropology; and
2. the complementarity of historic forms of healing (notably in the *sangoma* format) and biomedicine, in general, and particularly in South Africa today.

Meanwhile, in ways which the candidate's extensive introductory and concluding arguments scarcely stress, the thesis' lengthy argument (1.2 million characters) largely goes beyond these two explicitly claimed points, and particularly stands out

as

3. a detailed ethnographic study of contemporary *sangomahood* in South Africa, specifically the Western Cape. The fieldwork, experiential or otherwise, has provided the data and the insights towards such an ethnography. Here particularly glimpses of 'White' *sangomas*, a detailed and illuminating description of the spiritual techniques of *ukuvumisa* ('finding') and *umhlahlo* ('intuition'), of the intimate life of one *sangoma* lady Marangeli and her colleague Dr Lazarus, are valuable additions to the already considerable ethnographic literature on *sangomahood* in Southern Africa. Moreover, it is from this ethnography, that the empirical pointers are derived that help the candidate argue the complementarity as under (2)

The ethnographic style is crisp and shows the candidate as a mature, keen, sensible, witty, and loving observer. Well written, and most of the time full of warmth and respect towards the handful of protagonists, well organised, with an up-to-date bibliography, and addressing worthy objectives in a courageous and strikingly honest way, the thesis in its present form is an obvious and considerable achievement, for which the candidate, the supervisor (who remains anonymous here), and the institutions facilitating and presumably funding this research endeavour (equally anonymous), deserve to be congratulated.

However, such an assessment is, in my view, *not* the same as advocating that, on the basis of the present manuscript, the doctoral degree should be awarded immediately and without further revision of the thesis.

My reservations inevitably reflect on my personal involvement in the thesis' argument. The candidate is doing me the great honour of basing his topic and his methodology largely, though not uncritically, on an article I published in the *Journal of Religion in Africa* in 1991. My name must appear well over a hundred times in the thesis. Gratification of one's vanity is not the least reward of scholarship, but undeniably it stands in tension with the role of academic assessor as External Examiner. At a risk of being unnecessarily critical so as to avoid the accusation of partiality, I will try to assess the thesis both by its own avowed objectives, and by what I take to be the wider considerations and imperatives of scholarship. Here, I cannot just dwell on what I take to be 'good anthropology': as the candidate well realises, my 1991 argument – however inspiring to him as a budding anthropologist – meant in fact a critical assessment, and my own swan's song, *vis-à-vis* anthropology as I then understood it; I traded my chair in anthropology for one in philosophy in order to do justice precisely to the implications of my 1991 argument. Over the decades, my own thinking on the matter has developed considerably, crystallising in an extensive publication output of which remarkably little is reflected in the candidate's argument. In this later published work, I do revisit, repeatedly and extensively (for details *cf.* van Binsbergen 1999, 2003: Chs. 0, 5-8, 15), the 1991 argument, proposing thorough revisions which, if explicitly reflected in the present thesis, would have avoided some misunderstanding and unnecessary polemics. For me, the challenge of the present chapter is to steer clear

1. both of vain approval, and
2. of the temptation to engage here in the detailed scholarly debate which the candidate's interpretation and criticism of my work necessitates; such debate should ultimately take place in the appropriate scholarly venue of a professional journal, after the publication of the thesis in its final form.

In what follows, therefore, I will try to refrain from detailed criticism, and stick to more general issues. These far from exhaust the methodological and theoretical criticism I could level against the candidate's position, but of course, once the thesis is found to be worthy of detailed criticism and debate, that already in itself means that it is a defensible contribution to scholarship at PhD level. Such perfectly admissible moot points must be distinguished from the, in my view, academically unacceptable flaws that I will highlight and critique in the following paragraphs.

I must pick my way very carefully, lest I fail to do justice to the candidate's honourable reliance on my own work, to the expectations of approval which such cannot fail to kindle, and to the sense of brotherhood which he inspires in me, a fellow *sangoma* of European extraction. Even so, I fear that my assessment will greatly surprise and grieve the candidate, and I have gone to excessive lengths to make myself clear and to indicate possibilities of improvement. When I agreed to act as External Examiner to this thesis, not knowing that it claimed to be largely inspired by my own work, I did not expect such complications, and that is why this assessment has taken much longer than foreseen. I apologise for all inconvenience caused by this delay.

I have no objection against this report being shown to the candidate. To him I would like to add that it is not academic malice or ambition, but an obligation – both academic and spiritual – to get things straight and to let him reap the best possible result of his own achievements, which have brought me to the present, incisive and no doubt at times hurtful and excessive criticism. If also here he could detect the hand of the ancestors, I would be greatly relieved.

## 1.2. Use of the available literature

The candidate's affirmative but extremely selective treatment of my own work turns out to converge with his use of many other authors: these are usually<sup>19</sup> cited in approval, presented as a source of inspiration, but often very eclectically so (ignoring all details of more specific content), in a blanket format (e.g. 'NN<sub>1</sub> 1998; NN<sub>2</sub> 1995; NN<sub>3</sub> 1989') that very rarely extends to page references, as if the whole of a book or article deals with the issue at hand in that particular passage in the candidate's text, and with that issue and that issue alone. Most frequently, such references are invoked to support a particularly apt phrase or

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<sup>19</sup> With some exceptions, notably Gellner – although the candidate misses the obvious opportunity of testing Gellner's theoretical pronouncements against the latter's own, utterly *etic*, formal and model-centred, ethnography, notably Gellner 1969.

useful concept, which the candidate appropriates and uses in isolation. Rarely (but in the progression of chapters, more or more) does the specific content of a cited author's argument receive more than one or two lines, so that a sustained critical argument becomes possible. Notable exceptions include the treatment of Taussig on mimesis, Reis on *umhlahlo*, Geschiere and van Binsbergen on witchcraft (the candidate nicely reconciles the disagreement between these two authors), van Binsbergen on *sangomahood*. One would have preferred, often, a lesser scope and a greater depth of reading and of explicit discussion. For instance, the great Beninese philosopher Hountondji is very frequently invoked to provide one-liners on the essential pluralism and world-wide origin of knowledge – excellent ideas that I largely support, but also ideas that run so much against the current hegemony of North Atlantic knowledge that one needs to render, in detail, the specific argument that brings Hountondji to such knowledge claims. Moreover, some references in the thesis are simply wrong or non-existent.

*A bouquet of bibliographical errors.* Eg. van Dijk & Pels 1996 is nearly consistently referred to as van Dijk 1996; van Dijk, Reis & Spierenburg 2000 as van Dijk 2000 instead of van Dijk *et al.* 2000; *manikins* or *mannequins*, alleged to walk the catwalk in van Binsbergen 2001 (with 'website 2000' as the only reference to a *published* article; there are billions of websites) turn out to feature in Geschiere 1997, and so does 'African traditional medicine as being darkly twinned with witchcraft' although erroneously attributed to me; Sichone, in progress, does not feature in the bibliography as a source on the Lenshina rising (Zambia 1964), but neither does what is generally considered to be a *locus classicus* on this topic, van Binsbergen 1981. Archbishop Milingo from Zambia is repeatedly referred to, but again the *locus classicus* (Ter Haar 1992) is ignored. The phrase 'searingly personal' is first, in ch. 1, attributed to van Dijk [ & Pels ] 1996, but later to Ranger in the same 1996 book. I am painfully misquoted as considering African healing to be "singled out as the proverbial abode of witchcraft", but it is Africa *tout court* (an dunmistakably, an Africa as reflected in the othering, objectifying, or ignorant statements of non-Africans) and not African healing, to which I attribute this dubious qualification. Augé is consistently misspelled as Auge. Sometimes references are invoked in a highly inappropriate or nonsensical way.

This somewhat unusual style of referencing has an undesirable and (considering the very real qualities of this work) undeserved effect: when the author situates his own argument within the wider recent literature, this often appears more a form of embellishment of an already preset personal argument, than the development of an intersubjective argument largely based on senior other authors in the professional fields of anthropology, African Studies, and philosophy. The thesis would make a better impression, and its undeniable value would be more manifest, if this major defect were mended, as, I suppose, could be done within a few weeks of further editing.<sup>20</sup>

### 1.3. Religious fieldwork, and contrasting backgrounds

Turning now to matters of substance, we must assess whether the candidate's treatment of the three points outlined above (experiential fieldwork; complementarity between *sangoma* treatment and biomedicine; and the ethnography of *sangomahood*), invite any

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<sup>20</sup> In retrospect, I do realise that what I hold here against the candidate, are in fact defects to be found in much mediocre recent academic writing, including sometimes my own.

serious criticism and is capable of specific improvement. Here the matter of experiential fieldwork is the most controversial. In order to appreciate the various issues involved let me briefly contrast the backgrounds of the candidate, and the anthropologist (myself) whom he cites as the main inspiration for his ethnographic method, and contrast our respective approaches in religious anthropological fieldwork.

Approaching ethnographically the religio-therapeutic complex of other people outside the ethnographer's own habitual cultural horizon, has been common practice in anthropology for at least a century. Such an approach has usually been framed in terms of objectivity, methodological rigour, a careful insistence on the distinction between the outside investigator and those owning and living the complex as insiders. Often this distinction combined with the investigator's dismissal of the insiders' beliefs and practices as primitive, inferior *etc.* under conditions of racialism, colonialism, and postcolonial hegemony. But even apart from such political concerns based on subordination, exclusion and exploitation on a macro scale, there has been the methodological concern to produce ethnographical knowledge that is both reliable and valid, hence replicable, and hence capable of being used for comparative cross-cultural analyses detached from the person of the original ethnographer. At the back there is the distinction between *etic* and *emic* (*cf.* Headland *et al.* 1990):

1. Even if ethnographers proclaim that all ethnography should be emphatically *emic* (*i.e.*: seeking to understand local concepts, practices and relationships in terms the participants themselves understand and employ), yet
2. (considering that all ethnography essentially involves representation, and translation, into a medium – professional and specialised academic international language – that is unavoidably different from that of the original ethnographic situation) all ethnography is ultimately *etic*, appropriative, alienating, a meta-discourse over the top of the participants' heads, and hence unavoidably guilty of *the violence of representation*.

Involving shrines, rituals, specialists, beliefs, divination, healing, sacrifice, *etc.* the study of *sangomahood* unmistakably belongs to the field of religious anthropology, *pace* the candidate's protests (see below) to the effect that *sangomahood* is uniquely a therapeutic and not a religious idiom; like in most African contexts, it is impossible to separate the religious from the therapeutic here. In the sub-discipline of religious anthropology, the dominant paradigm has been to engage in ostentatiously *emic* representation of belief systems and ritual practices, while at the same time relegating the beliefs to an ulterior reality (the subconscious, the social, the political economy, conflicts between classes, genders, age groups, ethnic groups *etc. etc.*) to which the ethnographer / analyst claims to have access while that ulterior reality is not directly perceived by, not even knowable to, the participants. Hence established religious anthropology tends to be based on hegemonic epistemological inequality and condescension.

After establishing myself in religious anthropology since the late 1960s, and having studied ecstatic religion and therapy in various African settings (Tunisia, urban Zambia, rural Zambia, Guinea Bissau), I decided in the late 1980s that, for reasons of

- (a) charitable sociability,<sup>21</sup> and of
- (b) political solidarity,

I was no longer prepared to project such an analytical methodology upon *sangoma*-hood in Southern Africa. Instead I allowed myself to be sucked in by the local idiom, became a *sangoma*, wrote my 1991 piece 'Becoming a sangoma' to that effect, and gradually shifted fields from anthropology to philosophy – while continuing to develop my identity as a literary writer which was older than my identity as an anthropologist anyway. Later I realised there had been

- (c) a third, epistemological reason for my rejection of the dominant, reductionist paradigm in religious anthropology: the global validity of (at least some of the) knowledge produced under *sangomahood*.

This positioning, already idiosyncratic enough for a professional anthropologist, can only be appreciated (and also needs to be considered in a relative light) as reflecting the dilemmas of someone who has invested decades of his professional life in pursuing the dominant paradigm of religious (and medical) anthropology; who, as a specialist on Southern Africa throughout several decades but not only in that capacity, has intensely grappled with the political contradictions of the subcontinent; and who, as a leading Africanist on the national and international scene, has had to come to terms with the politics of knowledge production on Africa in a context of postcolonial hegemony.

These three considerations have emerged in the course of a life-long struggle with the nature and development of anthropology; it is this which justifies making an exception to the rules of the anthropological discipline, throwing time-honoured anthropological tenets overboard, and 'go native'.

But these exceptions do not apply in the case of the candidate, and offer no justification for, what in his hands, appears to be an unfounded and gratuitous step out of line – hardly advisable at the level of a supervised PhD thesis written by a budding professional anthropologist (whatever his actual age and further qualifications).

Born in the same decade as his External Examiner and fellow-*sangoma*, the candidate brings dramatically different things to his own research on *sangomahood*. He was born and lived in the United Kingdom, trained and worked there as an agricultural adviser specialising on community projects; on the side he trained and worked as a complementary ('alternative') healer, in which capacity he adopted, in typical New-Age fashion, a globalised (but largely Asia-derived) mixture of therapeutic and cultural traditions with typical (and far from unreasonable) assumptions of unboundedness, universal applicability, and an underlying unity informed by the fundamental global sameness of the human body and of the human mind. He went through Jungian therapy in the 1980s, and having given up his native denominational Anglicanism very early in life he now identifies as a Buddhist, having gone through a Buddhist initiation shortly before embarking on his

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. footnote on charity, above.



South African PhD fieldwork. He first set foot in Southern Africa (Zimbabwe) in 1992, and only six years later began to pursue the study of *sangomahood* in earnest, largely with a view on extending and reinforcing his healing skills, and only secondarily with a view on writing a doctoral thesis in anthropology. (By *sangoma* standards, one does not choose to become a *sangoma* – one is picked by the ancestors, who announce their election by unexplained illness and other misfortune. The thesis contains extensive autobiographical sections but they do not mention any specific training in anthropology except in the context of PhD-thesis supervision. There is no evidence of formal training in, or attachment to, the classic texts of anthropology, nor standard anthropological research techniques in the domains of kinship, religion, symbolism, beliefs, myths, *etc.* In fact, with a frankness that pervades the thesis (and that contrasts very favourably with the professional impression management habitual among anthropologists – often suggestive of far greater linguistic and cultural competence and greater knowledge of the details of people's lives than regrettably tends to be the case among the members of that discipline today), the candidate admits to substantial shortcomings in this respect. Of the many languages spoken in South Africa, the candidate only knows his native English, but given the apparent language proficiency of the other protagonists in his research (which does suggest their high level of globalisation), he managed to conduct his research exclusively in that *lingua franca*. Of course, we will never know what was 'lost in translation' in the process, considering that English was not the protagonists' native nor habitual medium of expression.

Attempting to emulate the method I have felt compelled to resort to myself, after nearly a quarter of a century of professional life as an anthropologist, the candidate skips a whole trajectory of learning anthropology and of justifying one's departure from classic methodological procedures in this field, and I contest his right to do so. *Quod licet Iovi non licet bovi*. Without paying his dues to anthropology, and before having studied what anthropology is really about and why, he opts for a form of anthropology that is one-sided and contentious (even if it happens to be my own). I feel the candidate should not get away with this.

Apart from resenting the candidate's arrogance of prematurely choosing a controversial position in a field in which he has not been formally trained,<sup>22</sup> I have no quarrel with the fact itself that he was admitted to the PhD trajectory without previous studies in anthropology. Anthropology was made, and sustained, by outsiders, including marginalised and / or deviant individuals of both genders. Moreover, everyday social life equips any member of society with a practical understanding of social, cultural and political processes at the micro-level – enough to engage in alien fieldwork situations. Life experience is a better teacher than books and lectures. The thesis shows that the intellectual and practical baggage which the candidate brought to his fieldwork has enabled him to do interesting and valuable fieldwork. However, it is the intellectual processing of the fieldwork data into a sustained, theoretically informed professional framework that makes a doctoral thesis in anthropology.

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<sup>22</sup> Ironically, this formula also seems to apply to my own philosophical habitus in the present book, with this difference however that I was first formally found to be eligible, in 1996, for a professorship in intercultural philosophy by an expert academic appointments committee.

Here, the candidate's efforts, however worthy of our sympathy and support, as yet fail to convince on a number of counts.

#### 1.4. Social and political structure, and comparison

A relatively simple point concerns the considerable disregard for the structure and dynamics of social relations, especially the wider social-structural and political framework in which *sangomahood* operates in South Africa today. The candidate has a perceptive eye for the immediate network relations in which his handful of protagonists operate, among close kin, teachers and adepts, colleagues and rivals. But beyond that, the world of Cape Town remains shady, its class structure, open and hidden conflicts, contestations for state power under the new dispensation of the Post-apartheid state, unarticulated. Why should it be that the central protagonist, the elderly *sangoma* Mrs Marangeli – whose Zulu ethnic background (in a Cape Town about as far away from Zululand as it is possible to travel inside South Africa) is only very gradually disclosed to the reader – should live in a predominantly 'White' suburb and hide her *sangoma* identity from her neighbours? Could it be that there is something in the politics of the public space, dominated by 'White', Christian, literate interests for several centuries in South Africa, that has systematically precluded the negotiation of African identities including traditional religion and healing from that space, and forced such expressions to go, more or less, underground (cf. for Francistown, Botswana: van Binsbergen 1993b, 2002b, 2004c). Why is it that at the same time a Member of Parliament manages to mobilise one of the country's central intellectual institutions, the University of Cape Town, for *sangoma* conferences where the exclusive African nature of this medical speciality is vigorously (though wrongly) proclaimed? What is the numerical extent of *sangoma* consultation as a first-line medical facility in various parts of Cape Town? Why was the *sangoma* tradition remarkably inconspicuous in the context of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* – the main ritual process of self-purification in majority-rule South Africa (cf. van Binsbergen 2004c)? In short, what is the place of sangomahood in the cultural politics of post-apartheid South Africa, and how does it relate to experiences under apartheid and to major ideological and political processes (for instance those crystallising around *ubuntu* and the *African Renaissance*; cf. van Binsbergen 2002b) after the attainment of majority rule? Is *sangomahood* the kind of 'therapy of the people' one might expect to gain ascendance once apartheid oppression by a 'White' minority has been lifted? Or is *sangomahood* rather to be identified as one among a series of neo-traditional fossilisations of cultural identity and specificity as were created, or at least furthered, precisely under the apartheid state, and therefore somewhat suspect under modern conditions?

The thesis contains some of the material on the basis of which one might begin to answer these questions, and these questions would certainly deserve a place among the points for further research, but as it is the candidate turns out to have little attention for what is yet one of the most fundamental processes in which the society he studies is involved, and therefore the inevitable backdrop to whatever micro-phenomena he investigates: *the rearrangement of local and global cultural power positions under majority rule, after apartheid*. More in general, he lacks a sociological (as distinct from a socially perceptive) eye, for

instance, he asserts that *sangomas* tend to have conflictive relationships including marriages, and that they tend to travel and move a lot, but fails to provide comparative data on non-*sangomas* so that a controlled comparison could be made. Just as he fails to provide a sociological explanation for the empirical generalisations he offers.

Similarly, the comparison between biomedicine and *sangoma* therapy, proclaimed to be one of the two main points of this thesis, must – at least in its present form – be faulted on methodological grounds. Where is the detached empirical analysis of biomedicine? Where is the fieldwork in hospitals, surgeries, training institutions, professional meetings of exponents of biomedicine, interviews with patients and doctors, to bring out fundamental orientations (and contradictions) of biomedicine beyond the obvious stereotypes with which every user of biomedicine is equipped as a member of his society and culture? In what socio-political macro setting of post-apartheid South Africa are the debates situated, and how are they empowered or disempowered? What is their interface with current politics of culture, in which *sangomahood* presumably plays a part? Or must we simply trust the candidate's superficial stereotypes, e.g.

'As the content of chapter Eight explores, [ Doctor Lazarus – one of the thesis' *sangoma* protagonists ], like other medicine men in the biomedical fraternity, is almost instinctively publicity-conscious. He utilises the press as an engine to drive his practice in ways which echo those of western biomedical specialists.'

Do Harley Street practitioners, a national medical elite, really advertise with television spots, and with billboards along the main highroads of the United Kingdom? The comparison between the two therapeutic spheres appears to be one-sided, since the biomedical sphere is empirically underrepresented. Moreover, contrary to the expectations kindled in the introduction, the thesis offers very little evidence of successful *sangoma* cures, certainly not in the case of the candidate himself, whose period of admitted great distress was over a decade before his initiation as a *sangoma*, and for whom therefore the apprenticeship (*ukuthwasa*) and the subsequent initiation, contrary to *sangoma* orthodoxy, was not in response to an protracted and unbearable suffering. Was the candidate's protracted illness at all a permissible stepping stone to *thwazahood*, by *sangoma* standards? Or was it in the first place a distancing fieldwork data-collecting strategy?

Speaking of comparison, the candidate does not explore the theoretical and methodological conditions for the comparisons he frequently makes, usually in passing: between South Africa and Zimbabwe (adjacent cultural areas but, as the thesis implicitly shows, with rather different healing traditions); but also all over Africa as if total globalisation (or a firm and widespread pan-African substrate culture?) were an established and accepted fact; and even with extensions into China. I am an outspoken and well-known champion of long-range comparison in space and time, and – admittedly – the extensive use of parallels with other parts of Africa in localising ethnographies is established scholarly practice which this thesis merely emulates. Yet the rigour associated with a PhD project demands that the conditions for comparison are explicitly stated and assessed.

## 1.5. Global continuity: An underlying assumption of the candidate's role as a complementary healer in the North Atlantic region?

It is my impression that not so much the comparative tradition in anthropology (of which the candidate appears to be unaware) but instead the candidate's avowed New-Age orientation is partly responsible for his tendency towards sweeping comparison and generalisation. It is in this vein that he can identify 'the West' as a region whose specific ills are diagnosed (in terms of lack of attention for the spiritual), and can be offered a remedy (*sangomahood*) within one paragraph; an excellent idea (with parallels in my own work), but PhD stuff? Occasionally, unpalatable chunks of New-Age idiom enter into the text, e.g. when a person pointing to her breast is said to point 'to [the] heart *chakra*' (not exactly accepted anthropological discourse; only a few lines down this is censored into 'to the heart'); or when (by a generalisation of the idiosyncratic New-Age idiom widespread among complementary healers in the North Atlantic region),

'Both Z and myself by this time were suffering from a variety of *aural* disturbances'... (my italics; needless to stress that neither the *aura*, prominent in New-Age diagnostics, is a recognised mainstream anthropological concept).

I submit that the text needs one more round of editing, either to take out what from the standpoint of a universalising academic discipline like anthropology would appear the local idiosyncratic idiom of a North Atlantic – or global – community not coinciding with the professional community of anthropologists, or to explicitly frame this kind of expressions in such a meta-analytical, personal context that they may become acceptable – but may also be taken relatively – as 'wisdom beyond anthropology'.

It is, I submit, as an exponent of a consciously globalised, translocal New-Age healing repertoire, more than as a professional anthropologist (let alone professional agricultural adviser) that the candidate has inserted himself into the healing scenes of Zimbabwe and Cape Town. Although he frequently characterises his fieldwork strategy with a phrase borrowed from me, 'going all the way', this means something totally different (but neither inferior, nor superior) in his case than in mine:

- in my 1991 case, braving the external and internalised pressures of a professional identity and stance cultivated throughout one's adult life, and acerbated by the pressures of an implicitly racist 'White' community in Francistown;
- in his case, making earnest with the unboundedness that was already implied in his semi-professional identity as a complementary healer, in the first place.

The candidate's sense of continuity between his own situation and that of his African healer friends and teachers seems primarily inspired by a sense of them being transcultural colleagues, more than by any theoretical anthropological notion he may have brought to the fieldwork – including the notion of 'experiential fieldwork' or 'mimesis'. It is important to establish this crucial point. It does not in the least disqualify the candidate's fieldwork, on the contrary: being only partially professionalised as an anthropologist, he did not bring to

the field the distortive juxtaposition of ‘analyst / observer’ versus ‘informants’. Instead he allowed herself to ride on a wave of transcultural affinity and recognition that, as a more recent product of globalisation, has rendered somewhat obsolete the altering fieldwork stance of classic anthropology which was a much earlier product of globalisation.

Having studied *sangomahood* as an anthropologist and having practiced it as a *sangoma* for decades now, I am happy to confirm that as a fieldwork strategy the candidate’s approach was successful and yielded valid, reliable, replicable data that ring true to anyone who knows the topic.

However, in the discursive rendering of the fieldwork into academic, anthropologising prose the candidate seems to overplay his hand.

## 1.6. The uncertain concrete benefits of ‘experiential’ fieldwork

The traineeship (*ukuthwasa*) as a *sangoma* certainly is a means of gaining access; of being allowed to share day-to-day and ritual events as a matter of course; of sharing in essential information; and of getting the right feel for what matters in *sangoma* circles, and what not.

It does not seem to be the only way, given the considerable openness surrounding *sangomahood* in Cape Town today, the frequent access (even one or two decades after the attainment of African majority rule) of ‘Whites’ to apprenticeship and graduation, the interest from the part of biomedicine and politics *etc.* When the candidate says,

I am certain, with van Binsbergen, that the method results in knowledge which would be inaccessible to the participant observer as “outsider”;

I am not sure if we mean the same thing: esoteric therapeutic knowledge, such as implied in the practical use of *sangomahood* for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes, or the kind of descriptive knowledge that makes up accepted ethnography? For acquisition of the latter type of knowledge, I am not so sure (any more?) that ‘going all the way’ is a unique, or even better, ethnographic method.

We may also admit that a considerable part of the thesis’s ethnography is not particularly enriched by the fact that the data were obtained while its author trained to be a *sangoma*. As the candidate repeatedly admits under the heading of ‘humble pie’, and as I have discussed at length myself (van Binsbergen 1998 and 2003: ch. 6), submitting to the training routine in many ways *precludes* posing the kind of systematic questions, and *precludes* pressing on after unclear or otherwise unsatisfactory answers, that would be taken for granted in the ethnographic routine. In principle, the training routine also tends to fixate one’s network position in the field, discouraging entries at other points in the field and precluding the additional perspectives that these may offer – but in the candidate’s case the contacts with a few other *sangomas* in addition to his teacher seem to have somewhat circumvented this danger. The *sangoma* lodge has this in common with the South Asian Hindu *ashram* (with which it is historically continuous) that junior members

learn *to go through the motions* rather than explicitly learn the underlying general principles of belief and classification informing the religious practices at hand – explicit verbalisation is rare, background knowledge and understanding is supposed to come through dreams or occult intimations from the spirits, and in fact, around a small core of standard practices, every member builds up idiosyncratic understandings of her or his own.

This state of affairs is incompletely acknowledged in the thesis. Much of the thesis' argument, while based on data that became available by the candidate's research strategy of 'becoming a *sangoma*', is in a format that, however respectful and sympathetic, is still highly objectifying. The candidate admits to taking interviews, even with his own *sangoma* teacher, even with his own father. The lavish use of acronyms (and not 'diminutives') to indicate the protagonists is one, unfortunate, example, which completely runs counter to the thesis' intentions, and should be changed so as to enable the reader to meet, and get to know, real people with real names (even though disguised as pseudonyms). Also the discussion of 'White' *sangomas*, of cultural politics around *sangoma* (to the rudimentary extent to which there is such a discussion), of the complementarity between *sangomahood* and biomedicine, is mediocre but standard ethnography (it lacks socio-structural depth) which could do entirely without the plea for 'experiential' ethnography that takes up chapters 2 and 7.

Perhaps the most objectifying, and in general weakest, passage in the thesis is where conspicuous *sangoma* attributes (strings of beads worn across the shoulders and crosswise under the breasts; beaded headbands adorned with gall bladders; and white cloths) are interpreted by analogy with the biomedical doctor's stethoscope, head-mirror, and white coat. At this point in the text the reader is already familiar with the fact that the candidate, increasingly identifying as the *sangoma* he has become through initiation and graduation (although not through actual practice), follows his inner voices not only as guidelines in personal life (which is his own business) but also in thesis writing (which inevitably invites outsider scrutiny and evaluation). The point is not that such intuitions are necessarily wrong (in the three cases cited here, however, the correspondences appear to be merely superficial and formal, without any suggestion of generic or historic connections), but that, again, they are not validated in the light of an explicit methodology, and therefore do not constitute meaningful statements in the sense of an empirical discipline such as anthropology – they cannot be verified or falsified since the conditions for such an assessment remain utterly unspecified. I stress that here the candidate's analysis is yet entirely *etic* (i.e. externally, analytically, objectifyingly) in the sense that no grounds are found, not even sought, in the participants' conscious perceptions to validate the candidate's symbolic interpretation; his experiential method thus becomes *a license to substitute his own (and in general: Western, North Atlantic) cognitions for those of the host society* – in the very anthropological tradition from which he claims to have broken away.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, in ways the candidate appears to be unaware of, anthropology does

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<sup>23</sup> The situation is not uncommon in medical anthropology, e.g. as exemplified in the work of the Dutch medical anthropologist, my friend and colleague Sjaak van der Geest. Apparently the Western doctor's most conspicuous material attributes, the stethoscope and the syringe, tend to be surrounded,

offer the systematic methodologies to underpin *etic* symbolic analysis of this kind, e.g. in Lévi-Straussian structuralism, or in the Louvain School's (of which he only cites one of the earliest works: Devisch 1985) stance of 'speaking like a Yaka' (or a member of any other host society). One gets the impression that, as a relatively untutored anthropologist (who however claims to be 'a not so naïve anthropologist' – cf. Barley 1986), the candidate does not quite realise what it is he is doing.

## 1.7. 'Going all the way' in fieldwork

Of paramount importance for an assessment of this thesis, therefore, is the following: the claim of 'going all the way', and the attending plea for 'experiential' fieldwork, risks remaining a license for unlimited self-indulgent navel-gazing, as long as it is not accompanied by an explicit theoretical and methodological exploration into the dangers and limitations of self-analysis through introspection.<sup>24</sup>

Let us bring the case down to its true proportions. *All* field anthropologists use their own experiences in order to make professional ethnography – they insert themselves, with greater or lesser reservations, into an existing community, and progressively formulate their insights on the spur of such inspiration, puzzles, doubts, fears, insecurities, as their personal life in the field produces in them. However, by an inveterate classic anthropological convention, most anthropologists (with an increasing trickle of Post-modern exceptions since the 1980s) have stuck to the disciplinary convention that such personal experiences (while frequently the topics of conversations in the corridors of anthropological conferences, and in the common rooms of anthropological institutes) are not permitted to enter into a professional anthropological text – they have to be dissimulated under a *veil of objectivity*. If they are shared by 'the others', i.e. the members of the host society, it is these others that will be reported on, not the fieldworker herself. Often the fieldworker's role consists in translating, objectifying, his own local personal experience (puzzlement, insight, fear, etc.) into an informal but testable working hypothesis concerning the behaviour and the cognitions of the members of the community under study, – a working hypothesis subsequently to be put before the participants, and to be committed to the pages of printed ethnography if and only if more or less confirmed. Completing this cumbersome methodological trajectory means that one takes an objectifying distance from the intimate sociability that informs the very field relations out of which ethnography is born (van Binsbergen 2003, 2015, 1979). However, refusing to complete this methodological trajectory has largely meant (at least in

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in the medical anthropologist's perception, by a deceptive sense of meta-cultural universality – as if they were no longer the Western imports they are in the first place, on the local scene, but are capable of carrying not only their technical materiality, but also the associated North Atlantic scientific and symbolic meanings, unscathed across cultural and continental boundaries. Incorporation of such objects into the practices and paraphernalia of local healers in Africa and Asia may add to this mistaken perception of cultureless universality.

<sup>24</sup> Far more than the candidate makes explicit, the concept of introspection has played a contested but pivotal role in the history of Western philosophy, from Socrates's *daimon* to Descartes's *cogito*, Kant, Wittgenstein and Sartre (cf. Dalmiya 1993; Oldewelt 1927; van Binsbergen 2003; Index, s.v. 'introspection').

the seven decades between Malinowski and the arrival of Post-modern ethnography) that one gives up the claim of anthropology as scientific, and instead resigns oneself to pursuing a genre of fiction writing, or of philosophy.<sup>25</sup>

These are central questions of ethnography, touching on textual authority, validity, epistemological and social charity between fieldworker and host community, aesthetics, the violence of representation, and the exercise of power and initiative at self-representation (of the members of the host community) versus condescending, alienating, and usually uninvited vicarious representation of others (by the ethnographer). They relate to essential questions of hegemony and intercultural communication in the world today, and cannot be adequately treated merely in passing, in the present context. However, contrary to what the candidate suggests, the fear of going native in anthropological fieldwork is not just hegemonic, as if it were a jealous and arrogant avoidance of 'the other' at all costs. That fear is also purely methodological: lest the anthropologist destroys the critical distance on which the classic conception of ethnography depends.

If the fieldworker refuses (or overlooks) to make this objectifying translation, to complete this cumbersome trajectory, and instead insists on introducing his own acting and conscious self as a protagonist in analytical ethnography, the result is *belles lettres* or introspective philosophy, not empirical anthropology. Anthropology, classic or postmodern or whatever kind, simply does not offer accepted methodological procedures under which self-analysis may be engaged in professionally, as part of the ethnographic exercise. For me this was a reason to largely opt out of ethnography and become an intercultural philosopher, which – in combination with my literary work – offers me more room to reflect on intersubjectivity and personal transference in intercultural encounters, also on the basis of my own experiences (or of whatever I manage to represent as such). I ate my cake, and no longer have it.

However, the candidate, relatively unhindered by the canons of professional anthropology, does not see the point. Mistakenly reading my piece on 'becoming a *sangoma*' as a recipe for the production of *sangoma* ethnography instead of for what it was intended: a critique of established religious anthropology, he decides to have his cake and eat it at the same time. He parades a selection of Post-modern ethnographers in order to argue, somewhat gleefully, that

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<sup>25</sup> My published literary writing amounts to a voluminous oeuvre, *cf. the last page of this book, and* <http://www.quest-journal.net/shikanda/PRESS/index.htm>. My literary work specifically on *sangomahood* has remained limited so far to the middle section of the 1991 piece (Dutch original 1990b), whose narrative forms may be literary, but which is certainly not *fictional* in the sense of containing aesthetic inventions deviating from (what I take to be) the literal truth. A greatly revised and expanded version of this piece has been included in van Binsbergen 2003: ch. 5. In order to lend rhetorical force to my claim that anthropology could not accommodate what I was doing with *sangomahood*, I threatened to write a novel instead, under the working title of *Servant of the Ancestors*, but (before the present book *Sangoma Science*) this never materialised – I merely published, shortly before my Botswana fieldwork in the late 1980s, a novel (*Een Buik Openen*, 1988) on my much earlier (1968) fieldwork into ecstatic religion in North Africa. The candidate's extensive discussion of the limitations of the literary alternative, therefore, is something of a red herring.



‘anthropology has simply overtaken van Binsbergen’

(which, in a lively and populous academic discipline, is more than likely, after one and a half decades, although the (far from main-stream!) authors he cites, and the way he does so, do not convince me for their Oedipal contradictions (for why trying to emulate me if I have already become obsolete?) – although the implication that once I was ahead of anthropology is certainly flattering!), and that, under this new dispensation, anything goes as anthropology, especially experiential introspection, even though unframed by a theoretical argument that explicitly and in detail engages with the standard critique customarily levelled against introspection in the social sciences and in philosophy.

Thus in the hands of the candidate, the aim of fieldwork is defined, rather incredibly, in the following terms:

‘I suggest that the task is to seek to experience what the others experience, what they see and feel’<sup>26</sup>

– the aim of ethnography would then be to report on that *vicarious* experience of the self, and trace its inner movements in a bid to grasp the hidden realities of the other. Once again, this is how fieldwork sometimes works in practice, but usually with the saving grace of the professional act of translation that, after the inspiration that may or may not be derived from introspection, seeks to make the dawning insight intersubjective and external, *by empirically exploring if the local others feel the same, and when, and how, and how we as anthropological outsiders or newcomers can be reasonably sure they do* (strictly speaking we cannot, but in an oscillating reality the theoretically arguable total impossibility of interculturality, yet under certain conditions (sociability? love? tenderness? sharing illness and death? sharing food and festivals and songs? sharing rituals and prayers?) dissolves into true intercultural encounter (which then becomes metacultural, pan-human), and we know what the other feels as clearly – though as fragmentarily – as we know what our own siblings, parents, children, and other loved ones, even we ourselves, feel.

If this cumbersome trajectory is not traversed, if this bridge to empirically grounded intersubjectivity fails to be constructed, then the result is not anthropology, and whatever awards it may invite, a doctoral degree in anthropology should not be among them. One wonders how a researcher like the candidate can be so naïve about self-analysis and the dangers of distortion and transference, on the one hand, yet (and rightly!) so conscious of well-known *post-hoc* revision of personal memories that he opts to present his ethnographic accounts as literal quotations from, or as textual reconstructions based on, his various types of text written during the fieldwork itself.

At the risk of repeating and overstating the obvious, let me try to define what the rationale is of ‘total immersion in fieldwork’ (van Binsbergen 2003: Chs. 0, 1, 6, and 15; already discussed above): to test (through your own perceived behaviour in the host society and through the hosts’s intersubjective and overt responses to that behaviour in terms of approval or disapproval, of flow of information or exclusion from information, of acceptance or rejection), whether you have understood local idioms, conventions and practices

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<sup>26</sup> This sounds like a literal echo of Edith Turner’s, to whom we shall turn in chapter 3, below.

correctly. The rationale is the construction of grounded and intersubjective intercultural knowledge, *not through the idiosyncratic generation of vicarious personal experiences that are subsequently to be analysed through introspection, but through the submission to intersubjective scrutiny on the part of the members of the host society.*

At the back of this misorientation in the candidate lurks his lack of appreciation for what is perhaps anthropology's single most important concept: *culture*. Not that that concept is unproblematic! Anthropology's invention of the concept of culture in the second half of the 19th century CE, and its subsequent insistence on the equal values of 'cultures' for the sake of vindicating oppressed colonial subjects in the first half of the 20th century, left us by the middle of the 20th century with the images of reified culture, and of Africa especially as a patchwork quilt of discrete and bounded cultures, fragmented, eroded, and ready to surrender to North Atlantic cultural, economic, social-organizational, constitutional, political and military hegemony; by a familiar dialectic, the force that was once liberating, had become oppressive, *e.g.* in the well-documented use of the concepts of culture and ethnicity by the apartheid state. A fundamental critique of culture is therefore part of contemporary anthropology. Moreover, globalisation has often involved the situational and strategic denial of cultural specificity, difference, and boundaries – and their replacement by new ones. The Post-modern subject, certainly in a relatively highly globalised society like South Africa today, finds herself (or rather, constitutes herself) in the interplay between boundedness and unboundedness, historic identity and manipulative strategy, self-realisation and self-destruction, continuity and innovation. (Incidentally, this is where the candidate's exploration of the conditions for cross-continental and intercontinental comparison, in healing and otherwise, should have begun.) One part of this Post-modern identity construction is deceptively similar all over the globalised world, it appears to be continuous, displays common roots which go back to shared historic origins, or has converged recently under the impact of similar, or identical, pressures of the world economy, the media, world religions, science, formal education, literacy. This is where the European complementary therapist, who (or so, at least, I interpret his position) brings an implicitly unbounded New-Age conceptualisation to his South African fieldwork, cannot fail to be aware of continuities between his own outlook in life and therapy, and that of the *sangomas* whom he befriends. However, another part of Post-modern identity construction is culturally specific (and subject to conscious ethnic positioning and juxtaposing – in the specific case of South Africa all artificially reinforced by the apartheid state, and then again highly contested in the post-apartheid state), and experienced in specific historic frameworks (in South Africa: colonial conquest, apartheid, extreme class formation, residential segregation, *etc.*), *to such an extent that (under the prevailing, and converging, ultimately Cartesian and Kantian theory of sensory perception, cognition, mind, personhood and communication that underlies modern global scholarship in the social sciences), it is downright unthinkable that our lower-middle-class British middle-aged agricultural-adviser-cum-complementary-healer, simply through introspection, could have access to a full, or even merely representative, range of the experiences of his South African sangoma acquaintances.* In the anthropological idiom of an older but still tasty vintage we would simply have said: to the extent to which a person's experiences are culturally patterned, persons with different cultural backgrounds and upbringing will have different

experiences even if going through the same institutional complex, e.g., *sangomahood*.

We touch here on a fundamental philosophical problem, which in principle also contains the elements for vindication of the candidate's position, if he were to develop it explicitly and at length, rather than taking it for granted in passing, as in the current version of this thesis. The empirical social sciences, such as anthropology, in their methodologies and theories base themselves, largely implicitly and even unconsciously, on assumptions that in themselves do not constitute the subject matter of empirical social science, and that in the latter respect do not even constitute paradigms in the Kuhnian sense (Kuhn 1962, 1970b, 1974). Here the Cartesian heritage of mind-body dualism, and the more general North Atlantic philosophical tradition assuming the absolutely bounded and non-porous nature of the individual mind, form important presuppositions. These presuppositions are clearly obsolescent. In the first place, they are obsolescent in the sense that they are increasingly exposed and rejected by professional North Atlantic philosophers working in the philosophy of mind, of the body, of man and culture, society (e.g. Grosz 2017; Popper 1994; Vesey 1964; Johnson 1987; Driesch 1920; cf. Ngubane 1977), but also of nature and of natural science (Quantum Mechanics being very much a contested ground in this respect, to which we shall turn in later chapters of this book). But also in the sense that (as some sort of revenge of the peoples that were colonised by the North Atlantic region in the 18th-20th century CE) from all over the world (South Asia, China, Native America, Africa, the Arctic) philosophical, cosmological and religious traditions taking a very different stance on precisely these issues have, from the late 19th century onwards, come to penetrate common thinking, everyday life and complementary healing throughout the North Atlantic region – in recent decades particularly in the form of the New-Age movement (which, therefore, while a convenient and clarifying label, is certainly not a pejorative qualification). The most recent forms of globalisation, particularly through the Internet, have greatly facilitated and accelerated this development. This means that, with the New-Age orientation which he brings to the research, the candidate again turns out to be equipped to avoid the anthropologists' usual professional myopia, and see new things, and see them in the correct light. However, in a PhD context 'seeing new things' may be a bit premature, and seeing in itself is not enough – textual persuasiveness is of the essence. Therefore, let the candidate be reminded that an interesting philosophical case could be made as to the possibility of empathically 'knowing what the other experiences' through less crude, and less obvious means than merely on the basis of the knower's sensory perceptions of the experiencer, including the experiencer's own verbal accounts. Especially in the domain of *sangomahood* the evidence of extrasensory perception is overwhelming, and lends itself to detailed scientific scrutiny:

### C. THE SCIENTIFIC DOSSIER FOR AND AGAINST EXTRASENSORY PERCEPTION.

The literature on paranormal phenomena is very extensive. An arbitrary selection might include: Dietz 1932, 1948; Dietz *et al.* 1956; Dietz & Tenhaeff n.d. (1936) – which also contains an article on the extremely relevant topic of deception in mediumship. A useful overview, among many, is offered by Grattan-Guinness 1982. Numerous, methodologically main-stream, studies

report on successful parapsychological experiments.<sup>27</sup> The results of older, classic work in this field have been reviewed by Crawford (1919). As Rao (1979) summarises his overview of the evidence, in defence against the dismissive assessment by Moss & Butler (1978): *methodological standards in the research on extrasensory perception are not lower than those in other fields of social science, and the results deserve to be taken seriously*. In this connection the older, qualitative literature still contains much of value (e.g. Carington 1945; Dietz 1936; Tenhaeff 1958). Interestingly, in the newer literature an rapprochement can be seen between extrasensory perception and less contested forms of perception (Donovan 1997). Also it turns out that subjects' performance in extrasensory perception is positively related to their attitudes towards that phenomenon, and can be enhanced by meditation, by recent exposure to its positive advocates (Schmeidler 1970; Schmeidler & Murphy 1946; Osis & Bokert 1971), by experimenter's expectations, and other interactive conditions (Carpenter 1977; Taddonio 1976; Palmer 1971) – much as would be expected on the basis of a consideration of the triadic perspective advocated by Quantum Mechanics. Among philosophical approaches to extrasensory perception – which are seldom affirmative of its possibility let alone factuality – I mention Brier 1974; Braude 1980; Ludwig 1978; and Flew 1990, 1987. Rao (1978) gives an overview of the available theories to account for extrasensory perception.<sup>28</sup> Particularly with an eye on the possibility of extrasensory perception, there is an abundant literature to be considered, both of affirmations based on empirical research, and (more sparingly) of dismissals usually on the basis of philosophical and natural-science *a priors* (also cf. van Binsbergen 2003: ch. 7).<sup>29</sup>

One of the main insights which such research has yielded, however, is that extrasensory perception, however undeniable as a phenomenon, cannot be *willed* (see special topic CC below), therefore cannot be summoned within a narrow framework of time and place set by an investigator, and therefore is unsuitable as a source of scientific knowledge – however much we admit that scientific knowledge is not the only, and probably not even the highest, form of knowledge. Anyway, such '*partial knowing* what the *other* experiences through some sort of psychic osmosis' – i.e. semi-permeability of the boundaries of self and other – is still radically different, on several counts, from a knowledge claim to the effect that one '*experiences* what the *others* experience'. In the context of the assessment of this thesis, the important thing is this: such an appeal to a new model of perception that is anathema in that it runs counter to accepted (even if obsolescent) social-sciences presuppositions, can only be made if it is firmly embedded in a sustained argument spelling out the philosophical, theoretical and methodological basis for such a dramatic deviation from established disciplinary common wisdom. Either the candidate throws this line of approach entirely overboard, or he engages with it, in a new version of the

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Schmeidler 1982; Cavendish *et al.* 1976; Rhine 1935, 1954 / 1948, 1975 (which goes into the question of experimenter fraud, a common accusation in parapsychological research), 1977; Rhine *et al.* 1938, 1940; Rhine & Pratt 1972 / 1957; Woodruff & Rhine 1942; Palmer 1978; Kelly & Locke 1981.

<sup>28</sup> For my earlier attempt to deal with this extensive literature, see: van Binsbergen 2003: chapter 7.

<sup>29</sup> Anonymous, 'Telepathy'; Baggally 2012; Braude 1980; Carington 1945; Carpenter 1977; Cavendish *et al.* 1976; Dietz 1936; Dodds 1946; Donovan 1997; Flew 1990; Ouseley 1995; Hansel 1969, 1980; Horn 2009; Kelly & Locke 1981; Kennedy 2003; Krippner 1978; Long 1977; Luckhurst 2002; Moss, & Butler 1978; Murphy 1961; Osis & Bokert 1971; Palmer 1971, 1978; Rao 1979; Rhine 1935, 1954, 1975, 1977; Rhine & Pratt 1972 / 1957; Rhine *et al.* 1938, 1940; Rothman 1988; Schmeidler 1970, 1982; Schmeidler & Murphy 1946; Smith & Moddel 2015; Taddonio 1976; Tenhaeff 1958, 1974; Thouless 1967 / 1963; Tischner 2013; Woodruff & Rhine 1942.

thesis, far more explicitly, at length, and with sophistication.

The candidate insists on ‘recognising the other in ourselves’ as the fieldworker’s task, without realising that if the other is to be found out to be us, then our vicariously but crudely and naïvely (and uninvitedly!) representing that other in the shape of ourselves means not compassion nor charity, let alone humility, but instead hegemonic denial, arrogance and violence – the very things the candidate so very clearly, and rightly, seeks to avoid at all costs.

Without explicitly answering this challenge at the theoretical level, the claim for experiential fieldwork remains unconvincing. Perhaps chapter 7’s long and interesting, Taussig-based argument on *mimesis*<sup>30</sup> could come some way towards providing such a theory, but surprisingly that possibility is not explicitly pursued, or ineffectively dissolves into the anecdotal. On the contrary, the *mimesis* argument leads the candidate to consider the problematic South African journalistic / popular social category of the so-called *coconut* (‘Black outside, White inside’), the ‘Black’ South African who has presumably ‘lost his culture’, as if ‘a culture’ were something otherwise uniquely and intrinsically attached to a person, like some sort of organ (see my argument on ‘Cultures do not exist’, 2003: ch. 15). Here, incidentally, an implication becomes manifest of the candidate’s one-sided concentration on *sangomas* in South Africa: with the active display of ‘traditional culture’ that is these specialists’ stock in trade, the practically total concentration on *sangomas* as a research population (of very small size at that) means that the researcher is not forced to ask herself how much even that ‘traditional culture’ is a manipulated, nostalgic and re-invented, in fact *recent*, product, reflecting (as I argue elsewhere; van Binsbergen 1999, 2003: ch. 8) transregional and even intercontinental contacts through migration and trade as much (or even more so) as it does some presumably perennial and immutable ‘ancestral heritage’ of, e.g., ‘the Zulu people’ (also a category of less than two centuries’ time depth). Cults, like ethnic identities (cf. Chrétien & Prunier 1989), have a history, and often it is only a shallow and yet transregional history.

But even apart from the question of whether the fieldworker can at all, if only in part, experience what ‘the others’ are experiencing, the thesis leaves us with a considerable disappointment: when finally we arrive at what should have been the *pièce de résistance* of experiential ethnography, notably, the candidate’s description of his own trance. (Something that is, by the *sangoma* canon, impossible because during trance the possessing ancestor is supposed to completely overpower his host and to totally eclipse the latter’s consciousness – according to general professional consensus (which in itself may reflect merely a performative consensus on the part of professional ritual entrepreneurs) all that a *sangoma* can know about her or his trances is in retrospect and by hearsay only, based on the peers’ oral reports made after the fact.<sup>31</sup> My own experience with the matter,

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<sup>30</sup> But where is Girard – e.g. 1972 – in this connection? cf. van Beek 1988; where Auerbach? and where Plato – the *locus classicus* on *mimesis* –, for that matter?

<sup>31</sup> We hit here on the question of *authenticity*, which seems to be a perennial problem in the creation of an imaginary, invisible world in the context of religion world-wide. For Southern African *sangomas*

like the candidate's, is however that what the *sangomas* recognise as a true, convincing trance, does not really preclude a vague, disorientated awareness of one's immediate surroundings at the moment, and memories of that awareness after the fact; I will come back to this point below. What we get on this point in the thesis is a few lines of bland prose of considerable predictability. Is it the trance itself that (like the candidate's ancestral 'brooding') was not so impressive, after all? Or is it merely, more charitably, that words – least of all, his own words – cannot describe what was going on inside him, and between his and his fellow *sangomas* at that crucial moment?

Clearly, but contrary to the candidate's contention, having undergone the initiation does not put one in the best possible position to report on it in the form of ethnographic texts directed at one's professional anthropological peers and seniors; claiming otherwise amounts to an overrating of the redeeming and aesthetic potential of anthropological texts as a genre, and, concomitantly, to an undeserved depreciation of the same qualities

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– at least those of my acquaintance – *not* having any recollection of one's public behaviour and speech acts when in trance is considered a sure sign of the authenticity of one's trance, and hence of one's ancestral election. The public display of trance, even if genuine and authentic by whatever local or global standards, is always *also* performative (van Binsbergen 1981), and the trance cannot be so deep and so overwhelming as to preclude that the performer strictly sticks to the rules... We must not underestimate the extent of social control which the attending fellow-adepts, themselves not in trance at that moment, exert on the performer in trance. In many situations world-wide, the performer in trance is considered dependent upon the attendants (including the musicians) for safety, decency (when in trance clothing may become dishevelled and the attendants often interfere to restore decency), and for such action as safely concludes the trance and allows the performer to return to a normal state of consciousness without physical or mental harm. This conclusive phase often involves water, e.g. Hmuri trance attendants take water in their own open hand, then slap the dancer's hand upon their own wet palm, invoke the possessing saint, the Prophet, and Allah; or pronounce a silly obscene formula ('...*duke fi N.N.* [the *feqir's* name]...') referring to anal homosexual intercourse (as a metaphor of saintly possession?), after which the trance is broken. I suspect an underlying, implicit reference to cyclical element transformation: as if the trance is considered to be Fire, and can only be terminated by the proper antagonistic element, Water. The situation is structurally similar to that of the *sangomas's anti-cooking* (Werbner): applying to crucial joints of the body the whipped-up foam of *mptlelwe* vegetal powder, so as to cool down the heating effect of the ancestral spirit that seeks to incarnate in the *thwaza* (apprentice) or *sangoma*. The symbolism is much more widespread than trance dancing alone: thus among the Nkoya, when a heir is to be chosen for a deceased kinsman, a candidate can escape this ambivalent honour (for one never knows if the incarnating spirit will be suitable) by running to the stream at the bottom of the valley, and immersing herself or himself in the water – again killing the ancestral Fire with the adversary element. Further reflection would bring us close to the theme of *water divinities*, which we shall consider in the next chapter of this book. Thus, *while posing as a condition of total rapturous surrender to the invisible beyond all willful decision, in fact the trance performance is a subtle social process, with the public recognition of authenticity as its main prize*. Sometimes the attendants disgrudge this prize to the performer. For instance, during my fieldwork in North Africa (1968, 1970), when ecstatic sessions were staged in the context of local Islamic brotherhoods's veneration of local and regional saints (whose invisible spirits were considered the principal possessing agents), the village pariah would try to join the recognised adepts (whose trance was their only and ambiguous claim to higher status in the village society) in their trance dance and take the glowing coals in his hands as a sign of saintly presence – but the attendants would slap the coals out of his hands and disrupt his trance to a point of pain and agony by disturbing the flow of the music.

in literary prose, poetry, and philosophical argument. But even then, the most important and most fundamental things in life cannot be adequately expressed in words, and therefore should better be left unsaid. 'Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen' (Wittgenstein 1964 / 1921 / 1922: last entry).

## 1.8. *Sangomahood*: religion and / or therapy?

Another major point of confusion appears to me the therapeutic versus (at least in the candidate's mind) religious, nature of *sangomahood*. In his appreciation of *sangomahood*, the candidate seems to oscillate between two rather opposite positions:

1. *sangomahood* brings, in response to a profound predicament which cannot be resolved in any other way than by 'becoming a *sangoma*', , total change to the initiated person's personality and life;

### D. A SADDER AND WISER MAN?<sup>32</sup> THE EFFECT OF *SANGOMA* INITIATION UPON THE *THWAZA* / ANTHROPOLOGIST

The candidate sums up his own experience as:

'I argue that a richer, more evolved self, emerged from this experience.'

Which, incidentally, is far less than the total change claimed elsewhere in the thesis. Throughout the thesis the candidate chides me for remaining reticent about my own presumed experience of total change in regard of my own initiation and graduation to *sangomahood*. However, the truth is that, in my opinion, and considering the likelihood of transference and self-deception (on which, incidentally, I have written at length in my book *Intercultural Encounters*, 2003, especially in relation to my becoming a *sangoma*), and the general limitations of self-analysis, on this point, it is not for a person himself or herself to claim total change, certainly not a change for the better. As it happened, after a decade it turned out that what I had initially considered to be a substantial change in myself, was more a submission to infantile conflicts than a solution of them, and my *sangomahood* invariably failed me as a personal spiritual resource although it continued to work for others; cf. van Binsbergen 2003: Chs 0, 5-8. Incidentally, in those chapters, and in my 1998 piece, and precisely in order to make the present point about transference (yielding to subconscious pressure in conscious life) *I did give up* the reticence the candidate so repeatedly reads into my 1991 article; and the same openness characterises the present book. Yet even in the 1998 piece there was already enough of soul searching, crying bouts, disorientation, ambition, in short self-indulgence, to make that piece less than reticent.

2. *sangomahood* is just another spiritual therapeutic technique which can be picked up and applied transculturally and at will.

True to the widely intersubjective canon of *sangomahood*, the candidate (somewhat perfunctorily, it seems, given *that elsewhere in the thesis he admits to positively having aspired to sangomahood as a new spiritual and healing dimension* – a reason for him to come to Southern Africa as an agricultural adviser in 1992) claims that he cannot have *chosen* to become a

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<sup>32</sup> Coleridge, THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER (1798 / 1857).

*sangoma* (one is thus elected by the ancestors; in my estimate only one in a thousand persons in Southern Africa are claimed to be so elected), although of course, so he claims, he was free to choose to write a thesis about the process of becoming a *sangoma*.

Since he did not present herself as a client to me in my capacity as *sangoma*, and since I was asked to assess this thesis as an academician rather than as a *sangoma*, it is strictly speaking not for me to question the authenticity of his call; and even if I yet felt inclined to do so, a long and contradictory discussion of authenticity would have to precede such questioning. All the same, it is remarkable that in his discussion of ancestral election (which is invariably introduced by a prolonged period of mental and physical malaise known as 'ancestral brooding'), the PhD candidate dwells on the predicament of others so elected, whereas all he can muster as his own matching condition (for an *ukuthwasa* apprenticeship starting in 1999) was 'a difficult relationship with our mothers' (plural, for it is a condition he shares with his Zimbabwean healer-friend), and a period of disorientation and subsequent Jungian therapy undergone in England in the 1980s! Presumably it would be part of experiential fieldwork to require the local cultural system to be applied and followed to the letter; if such were done, choosing *sangomahood* as an additional transcontinental healing skill would be utterly unthinkable.

In the final version my own meta-reflection on 'becoming a *sangoma*' (van Binsbergen 2003, cf. 1991), I dwell at some length at the risk of transference in fieldwork, especially fieldwork of the 'experiential' kind. When the candidate does not hesitate to engage in extensive self-analysis as part of his professional discourse as a budding anthropologist, this suggests that he dismisses or ignores the danger of transference. But here it is, from someone who admits to having a difficult relationship with his own mother:

This was an extraordinarily moving moment for me, as my adopted black African mother carefully spent time preparing her son. Everything fell silent. There was magic in the air<sup>33</sup>.

Yes, magic indeed; but expressed in the most clichéd Disneyland fashion, as if the candidate is utterly unaware of the extensive dossier on magic and on infantile desire which anthropology and psychoanalysis have built up over the past hundred and thirty years. Or, as specifically a psychoanalysing anthropologist would have it, the mystifying, bewildering intrusion of the subconscious into the subject's conscious everyday life – transference, in other words, the stuff trance and ecstasy, among other spiritual expressions, and among other ingredients, are made of.

In very interesting ways that would pay further elaboration, the thesis (not unlike my own further work on *sangomahood* in van Binsbergen 2003: Chs 0, 6 and 7) implicitly offers glimpses of the way in which the *sangoma* apprentice is constantly spurred on by his seniors' gratification of infantile drives at recognition and praise, thus constantly opening the door to the subconscious by invoking the idiom of ancestral inspiration, manifestation, approval, for every little event that may occur in the apprentice's already stressful and regression-prone training period. Our PhD candidate cannot break loose from the (in my eyes, regressive) enchantment this creates in him, and although he is alive to his teacher's occasional cheating, he cannot allow himself to see these excessive verbal mystifications of current events for what they are: the common strategy of knowing elders manipulatively creating mystery for credulous children, who are thus coaxed into submission, into seeing the world the way the elders want them to see it. Yet such strategies do not rule out the possibility of genuine 'synchronicity'<sup>33</sup> – in bizarre ways, they even

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<sup>33</sup> Synchronicity is the term coined by the physicist Wolfgang Pauli and the psychologist Carl Jung (Jung & Pauli 1971) to describe a situation of so-called 'meaningful coincidence'; e.g. (an example cited with embarrassing frequency) during a psychoanalytic session a client describes her dreaming of a butterfly, and at that very moment a butterfly flies in through the open window of the room where the session takes place. The situation offers many clues for an explanation in terms of Quantum Physics. Cf. Main 2004; Arthur Miller 2010; von Franz 1980.



seem to enhance such possibility, as if the forces designated as 'ancestral' are really at work, independently from, yet welcomed by, the apprentice's manipulated illusions.



(a)



(b)

Fig. 1.1. Aspects of Buddhism as a folk religion (a) National and international (Chinese) pilgrims embarking on a bus at the Doi Sutep Temple, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 2020 (b) Waiting for one's turn to present pious gifts to the monk on duty, River temple, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 2020

More importantly, the candidate's tendency to emphasize (1) therapy over (2) conversion leads him to deny the religious nature of *sangomahood* – one of his contentions with me. The matter might be resolved by remarking that in the 1991 piece which he has used, I

identified mainly as an anthropologist of religion, whereas the candidate mainly seeks to identify as a healer, and only by extension, and secondarily, as a medical anthropologist. Also an explicit definition of religion might do the trick, were it not that religious anthropologists have tended to give up on the definitional aspect of their sub-discipline back in the 1970s. However, the one explicit definition of religion which the candidate musters derives from a philosopher (Mudimbe 1988)<sup>34</sup> and it would make *sangomahood* a perfect example of religion, in my eyes.

The crux of the matter, however, is the following. It is the candidate's very denial of the religious nature of *sangomahood* (while yet repeatedly, and puzzlingly, calling it 'a sacred commitment to healing' at the same time; my emphasis), that enables him to have his cake and eat it: in other words, clamouring for an experiential-fieldwork approach to *sangomahood without at the same time through the act of conversion to a local belief system opting out (as I did) of anthropology*. The underlying thrust of my 1991 article was epistemological (cf. van Binsbergen 2003h: chs 0, 7, 15): if religious fieldwork, which usually involves the participation in the host's ritual practices, can only approach other people's religion by a process of condescending deconstruction on the ground that 'African gods do not exist', then such a form of anthropological knowledge production is to be rejected as hegemonic, anti-pluralist, and destructive of intercultural charity, while the opposite necessarily implies adoption – or at least recognition – not only of the diagnostic and healing practices inherent in *sangomahood*, but also of the underlying beliefs. By denying the religious nature of *sangomahood* (although I have the feeling that this denial is based more on the formal models of what 'a' religion is,<sup>35</sup> than on a detached definitional exercise applied to *sangomahood* in South Africa today), the candidate can claim to engage in experiential fieldwork without any real threat to the mind set with which he arrived at the scene. He can then afford to remain a Buddhist and globalised New-Age complementary therapist, now enriched with additional therapeutic inspiration gleaned from *sangomahood*, and even seek to obtain a PhD degree in the very discipline, anthropology, that is (or so at least was my argument in 1991) destroyed by his, and my own, fieldwork stance. Speaking of total change, and of the reticence attending such claims... – *plus ça change [ ou bien, plus ça proclame de changer mais refuse de changer* – 'pretends to change but refuses to change'! ], *plus ça reste la même chose*, in other words, he does not even want to change at all.

## 1.9. The historical dimension

Finally, a note on history. I wholly concur, in principle, with the candidate's claims as to

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<sup>34</sup> It is not his only definition of religion, nor his most useful one; cf. Mudimbe 1997: ch. 1, and my philosophical critique of that book (van Binsbergen 2005).

<sup>35</sup> Formal models which the candidate derived from his Anglican Christian childhood, and from his bookish reading of Buddhism as 'beyond religion' – while ignoring the reality of Buddhist *folk* religion as the principal expression of hundreds of million people in Asia today; cf. Fig. 1.1.

the historical roots shared by *sangomahood* and biomedicine, and with his idea<sup>36</sup> of now peripheral knowledges that were once the wellsprings also of North Atlantic biomedicine. Yet such claims simply cannot be argued on the basis of local synchronic fieldwork, however experiential. All that fieldwork can do is inspire such ideas as interesting working hypotheses, as it did in the candidate's case just as in my own. After becoming a *sangoma*, I spent much of the subsequent decades to develop the theoretical, methodological, and empirical requirements for an historical analysis, painstakingly gathering the documentary and archaeological data, in a 'History of Ideas' project inspired by, but distinct from, my fieldwork. History of medicine and of science, conceived as Western or as global, is an immense field, touching on all the continents and all main regions of civilisation, and cutting across several disciplines, with its own modern classics such as the works of Joseph Needham and associates, Lynn Thorndike, Heiberg, Pingree, Neugebauer, and such journals as *Isis* and the *Journal of the History of Ideas*. After a trickle of dispersed scholarly articles, my own humble contributions to this field are now coming to fruition, with a number of books either already published, or lined up for finalisation and publication. I am certainly not alone in this kind of interest, but it is not as if the results of such and similar research are widely available for secondary scholarly circulation. In other words, the candidate's assertions on this point (and the assertions of those he cites) reflect, at best, good intentions and hoped-for results of current and future research, but not yet facts. Surely, merely an appeal, like our candidate's, to the

'efficacy and longevity of *sangoma*'<sup>37</sup>

is incredibly thin as an historical argument. We simply do not know how old the institution of *sangoma* is in Southern Africa. Its conceptual and linguistic core is obviously Nguni (*cf.* Berglund 1989, where the diviners' spirits are still ancestral and local – and not distant and cosmopolitan like in some other places in Southern Africa; van Binsbergen 1981), and from the south-eastern corners of the Southern African continent *sangomahood* spread first to (today's) Zimbabwe as a result of *Mfecane* during the second quarter of the 19th century CE, then from South Africa /Mozambique, and from Zimbabwe, into Botswana and Zambia especially in the course of the 20th century (in both countries the institution is still widely recognised, and often despised, as a recent alien innovation). A detailed analysis of *sangoma* practices and paraphernalia suggests very strong links with South Asia (van Binsbergen: 2003h: ch. 8; 2012d / 2017; 2020d), where especially the impact of South Asian mineral prospecting and Buddhist state models must be recognised (Thornton 2012 / 2019; Hromník 2021 / 2019). All this means that as an institution, *sangoma* dates from scarcely before the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> mill. CE, was subsequently consolidated in Nguni state formation, then fragmented and dissociated from expanding Nguni statehood, and spread as a healing cult from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> c. CE. This is very far from perennial.

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<sup>36</sup> Derived from Gudeman & Rivera 1990; and Hountondji 1997, n.d., and 2002.

<sup>37</sup> Is the institution as a whole meant? Or individual specialists, whom, even if plural, the candidate also tends to designate by '*sangoma*', dropping such a plural personal pronominal prefix Ba-, A-, Ma-) as Southern Bantu languages possess.

The long-range history of *sangoma* is not the only historical context where the candidate fails to convince. The Sinologist / Historian of Ideas turned student of Bronze-Age trans-continental connections and initiator of the *Black Athena* debate, Martin Bernal (not just the 1991 title as cited in the thesis but also and especially the 1987 title) cannot be claimed to be a source on 'the influence of Africa on Europe' – his work is, at the most, a plea to consider the possible contribution of the Ancient Near East, including Ancient Egypt, to Ancient Greek civilisation, which is something much more specific, and not necessarily the same. Although Bernal chose to identify as an Afrocentrist after launching his *Black-Athena* thesis, his knowledge of sub-Saharan Africa is negligible (although he picked up some Malawian Chewa as an adolescent, visiting the tea plantation of his millionaire grandfather Alan Gardiner, who was also England's leading Egyptologist in the early 20<sup>th</sup> c. CE), let alone that Bernal could ever be considered an authority on crucial issues of cultural history involving sub-Saharan Africa. Martin's only contribution to the study of sub-Saharan Africa was his very early (1980) linguistic paper on the disintegration of Afroasiatic – the linguistic macrophylum to which Semitic, Berber, Chadic, Omotic etc. belong, straddling Africa and Asia.

Also at the meso- and micro-level something is wanting in the candidate's sense of history. Only occasionally do we get glimpses, in this thesis, of what it means to be a *sangoma* in late apartheid or post-apartheid South Africa, even though the post-apartheid transformation of that country must be deemed one of the most significant historical processes to take place on the African continent in the last hundred years. And at the micro level, it is remarkable that the candidate treats *sangomahood* as if it were perennial and without specific, detectable history; at least, only such a static view would allow him to do, as it were, fieldwork by temporal proxy, and to treat the initiation experiences of senior *sangomas* among his protagonists (now in their seventies), decades ago under full apartheid, in exactly the same manner as he treats the rich observational and participatory data concerning the initiation experiences of himself and of his contemporary, the 'White' (!) middle-aged lady 'Chichi', well after the year 2000...

## 1.10. Conclusion

I have outlined what I consider to be important shortcomings of this thesis, many of which I consider to amount to internal contradictions and inconsistencies, resulting largely from what the candidate brought to the project as a New-Age complementary healer, a stranger to Southern African studies, and a newcomer to anthropology – in other words, resulting not from a lack of ability, maturity or talent (all of which are very obviously in place), but simply from the complexities of the task at hand (and from the laudable ambitions the candidate has set for himself) – and perhaps from too lenient an academic supervision.

Given the central place the thesis has accorded one of my *sangoma*-centred pieces (while all others, though available often for years, either in published form or on the Internet, are ignored), I find it impossible (in a manner that should appeal to the candidate as a champion of 'experiential' anthropology) to assess

this work in an objective and distancing manner, without reference to my own grappling with the study of *sangomahood* over the decades. It is quite possible that the incisive criticism presented in the preceding pages, reflects not the inadequacy of the candidate's work in the light of professional anthropology today, but simply, and much less damningly, his mature professional disagreements with me. Frankly, I am unable to make this distinction, and most probably I deserve to be ruled out of court for this reason.

If however the Examination Committee continues to uphold my suitability to act as the External Examiner of this work, *I recommend that, although the thesis does not meet the required standard, the candidate should be invited to do further work as necessary and to revise and resubmit for re-examination.*<sup>38</sup>

Coming from the very person whom the candidate clearly considers his main role model, and for whose approach he has so many kind words in his work, this must come as a terrible disappointment. It could have been avoided had I been involved in the supervision of this work at an earlier stage. If the Committee adopts my recommendation, and the thesis is to be revised prior to re-examination, I am prepared to be actively involved in the recasting of what is, potentially, an highly valuable piece of work which, after profound revision, is extremely likely to earn the candidate the doctoral degree, and to find a respectable publisher. I can only hope that by that time the candidate will have sufficiently recovered from the present disappointment to accept my assistance in the spirit of both academic and spiritual responsibility in which it is offered.

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<sup>38</sup> This rather generous recommendation was adopted by the Examination Committee, and after much revision the doctorate was finally awarded over a year later.



## ***Chapter 2. Charles Lagrange's (pseud.) Ripples in the water***

### **2.1. Introduction and recommendation**

Also the following chapter was originally conceived as an external examiner's report concerning a PhD thesis submitted to a university in South Africa. The purpose of including this text here is to offer detailed illustrations of the methodological and theoretical problems that adhere to the study of ecstatic religion and healing in Southern Africa, including *sangoma*. My original report offered an excellent opportunity for doing just that, but it was, of course, never meant for publication, having served its purpose when implemented in the candidate's revision of the work – which ultimately, and most deservedly, led to the desired doctorate. However, my report does continue to have a wider and more lasting relevance, and therefore it appears here in highly edited form. Let me stress again that I am greatly indebted to both Mr Smith (the doctoral candidate who is the protagonist of the previous chapter) and Mr Lagrange (the PhD candidate in the present chapter) for taking my own work so seriously, critically illuminating some of its central issues, and forcing me to further think through the epistemological dilemmas of *sangomahood*; I have certainly no axe to grind any more in relation to their work, and when in these two chapters I critically deal with their work, it is merely because serious criticism is a fellow-scientist's highest praise. Since I have to hide both the candidate's identity (giving him the pseudonym of 'Charles Lagrange' instead) and the title of the work (re-baptising it 'Ripples in the Water: Ritual specialists in Southern Africa'), I had to delete all page references to specific sections of the work. I have however left the references to specific chapters, and the literal quotations, since my own argument is irretrievably based on them. I have taken the opportunity of slightly editing some of my own initial formulations. I am profoundly grateful to the candidate for stimulating my own thoughts towards the present argument, and for enriching my personal understanding of Southern African religion by his insistence on the aquatic aspect which, in the semi-arid environments of my own *sangoma* training in Botswana, happened to be less central.

If I am highly critical of the thesis draft in the form in which it was submitted to me for

examination, this is not a matter of taste, nor of individual disagreement, but of expressing my international responsibility, as an external examiner, towards the quality of scientific research, towards the integrity of anthropology as a specific discipline, and towards the career of the candidate as a mature and exceptionally talented researcher who deserves to be guided to a point where his excessive investment in his thesis project can finally yield the splendid results that he is undoubtedly capable of. I will argue that the ambitious aims of the work have not yet been attained in such a convincing manner that the result, in the form of the submitted thesis, is already defensible and already qualifies for the conferment of a PhD degree. My pinpointing the essential shortcomings of this work will make clear, that – given the candidate's resources as a writer and a thinker – these shortcomings can be remedied within a few months, after which the thesis can be re-examined, probably with fairly positive results.

Specifically I advise that the thesis be rewritten in such a way that the library research is put in the centre, and the fieldwork is relegated to the secondary position where, in this case and regrettably, it belongs – e.g. to an Appendix. This also means that the largely field-work oriented discussions of chapters 1 and 2 will have to be greatly reduced, and purified of unnecessary metaphysical explorations, for which the candidate is clearly not equipped. My unusually extensive critique will enable the candidate to spot the weakest parts of his argument (I have no objection against his reading the present report), and either remedy these, or delete them. In this way most of the present work can be salvaged and the candidate's revision effort can be kept to a minimum. I am in two minds about the dream sections and observational material in which the genuinely extraordinary details of the candidate's experiences are presented. Clearly they belong in a different work, and that work may yet deserve to be written – but not, however, as part of the requirements for a PhD in anthropology to be academically examined.

## 2.2. Detailed assessment

In its present form the thesis is marred by many minor blemishes which may be corrected in the overall, more substantial revision process. Some of the works cited do not appear in the bibliography. Some of the names of authors cited are spelled wrong: Bordieu, Geshiere, Boudillon for Bourdieu, Geschiere, Bourdillon. Some sentences are syntactically incorrect to the point of making them meaningless, e.g.

'The differences between these two snake manifesting entities, although bearing a few superficial similarities, are clearly quite different'

'In his book *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* ( [Sundkler ] 1961: 238-240) he [ i.e. Bengt Sundkler – WvB ] commenced his celebrated chapter "New Wine in Old Wineskins" with *this encounter that he witnessed*, and it has served as the basis for many subsequent analyses exploring "the remarkable congruity" between Zulu diviners and Zionist prophets and their symbolic rituals and paraphernalia (e.g. Kiernan 1978, 1992; Turner 1969). During *this encounter that he witnessed*, Sundkler notes...' (my italics)

The table of contents does not differentiate between section levels and therefore is less effective. In the glossary, for many items listed the language is specified, but not for all. Of course these little blemishes – perhaps inevitable in a work of this length – have nothing



to do with my rejection of the thesis, but they help to create a general context of imperfection.

My real objections to the work address a number of connected issues in the conceptualisation of the subject matter, and in the researcher's self-definition in his approach to that subject matter.

The thesis is an unusual combination of

1. *A perceptive, and stimulating library study of representations and practices relating to water divinities in Southern Africa*, which takes up most of the chapters. This part of the work constitutes its most obvious and especially unproblematic claim to merit. It is firmly rooted in the splendid tradition of Southern African anthropology,<sup>39</sup> and makes a contribution to that field, particularly by systematising and offering a synthesis of the central role of water divinities in Southern African religious systems – a role hitherto underplayed or not even recognised at all. Of course, there is always room for critical remarks, even when my overall impression of this aspect of the work is very positive. The critical reader with expertise in Southern African religion and history may wonder why, in general, the secondary sources the candidate uses for the historical background tend to be rather old (1970s, mainly). Such a reader is left with one major question: *if there is this abundance of literature on Southern African water divinities, how then does this domain relate to the other aspects of Southern African religion which have been more centrally recognised in the academic literature?* The candidate plausibly explains why water divinities have remained underexposed until his present synthesis, but only an explicit, extensive discussion, within the present work, of the non-aquatic aspects could have answered the remaining, important question. Thus the impression would be avoided that *all* Southern African *sangomas* conclude their training with a dream about, or perhaps, the actual experience of, being 'taking under water' – this is certainly not the case, many others, perhaps even the majority, follow a different routine; some, for instance (*e.g.* van Binsbergen 2003), report a more direct empowering dream message from the High God and subsequently seek – with their mentor – such empowerment at a High God shrine, and there may be yet other variants. Additional treatment on this point would further enhance the value of the argument.
2. *The work's ulterior, ontological claim as suggested by the details of the fieldwork*. Although the library study can very well stand on its own, in the present organisation of the work it is claimed to be ancillary to an ulterior goal: *finding as much*

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<sup>39</sup> Although it is not necessary to exaggerate the extent of that tradition. The oldest Southern African entry in the work's bibliography is from 1874, and although this was not by far the first ever text to be published on the region, this scarcely justifies the candidate's claim (in a thesis draft dating from 2009 CE) of 'two hundred years of scholarship in Southern African religious beliefs'.

background as possible to understand such manifestations of the Southern African aquatic divinities as the candidate believes manifested themselves in his dreams, after having entered the novice status that is hoped to lead to ritual leadership as a sangoma. Under this aspect the work's argument constitutes a problematic account of 'field' interactions, in the course of more than a decade, between the researcher and mainly two protagonists, a young woman '[Mrs ] Makeba' striving to become a recognised and accomplished therapist in the socio-ritual complex under study, and a young man '[Mr ] Atta' who has already attained that status and extends his ritual and therapeutic supervision over both the researcher and Mrs Makeba. Judged by time-honoured anthropological criteria, the fieldwork is in general poor, and remarkably *non-dialogic*, since it is largely limited to dyadic interaction between the researcher and the two protagonists, and lacks a basis in *continuous interaction within a community* with which trust was established and whose feedback could check and endorse the work – which could have made it into an exercise in *participant observation*. Even so the fieldwork yielded an intriguing, complex portrait of Mr Atta (throughout the work), some adequate descriptions of rituals witnessed, and an interesting application of the study's general themes to the specific domain of a Zion Christian Church (ch. 8), bringing out (contrary to the usual stress on discontinuity with historic local religion on the part of the church leaders themselves) how much continuity there may be, in beliefs and practices, between traditional ritual leadership and Christian leadership in African Independent Churches (an accepted theme in Southern African religious studies; cf. van Binsbergen 1981; Comaroff 1985). English appears<sup>40</sup> to have been the unique language of field communication. This apparently disqualifies the protagonists on paper (their imperfect English is rendered relentlessly in the work and creates an undeserved pejorative impression of incompetence) but in fact, and inevitably, it disqualifies the researcher, shutting him off from the complex, multi-layered, largely language-based representations (in other languages than English, mainly regional ones) he is in search of. Although over many years the researcher participated in Atta's cultic lodge as a client / novice, he never lived there, and, beyond his description of his encounters with Mrs Makeba and Mr Atta, his account of the lodge community, its immediate social surroundings, and the identities and social experiences of the people involved here, remains extremely dim, almost as if this were a no-go area. An attitude reminiscent of what anthropologists of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century used to call 'the Miss Ophelia complex'<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> In Lagrange's work, I have found no systematic discussion of the essential question of languages of communication between researcher and hosts. Given his regional and family background I cannot rule out that the candidate has a certain command of the Shona language of Zimbabwe, but since he claims to have grown up in total ignorance of local African culture, this is yet unlikely. Whatever information is given on this point by Lagrange remains ambiguous. Incidentally, Shona, although a member of the large cluster of Bantu-speaking languages, is not mutually intelligible with the African languages prevailing in Lagrange's fieldwork area.

<sup>41</sup> Miss Ophelia is a prominent character in Harriet Beecher-Stowe's 1900, *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Or, Life*

seems to govern his 'participation' at the lodge – he dresses in 'sangoma finery' but indicates that the sanitary facilities are below his social entitlements as an occasionally visiting 'White' gentleman in South Africa.<sup>42</sup> Once having entered the ritual apprenticeship, the researcher cultivates the dreams whose experience, discussion and supervision is a recognised major aspect of that situation. These dreams are claimed to lead him to specific sacred (i.e. water-divinities-associated) places throughout Southern Africa, even to specific ritual leaders associated with these places, but again, the encounters with the people living near these places remain most superficial and seldom come close to standard participant observation in the accepted sense of *establishing trust and communication over an extended period of time by humble submission to a local community and its social forms*. These extensions even reach into the researcher's native Zimbabwe, but subsequently become limited to the narrow circle of the ('White'<sup>43</sup>) researcher's own close relatives and their Shona caretaker of long standing. Fieldwork therefore seems to have meant repeated short-term immersion, each time for a limited number of hours only, in the lodge environment, or scooping down on communities near sacred pools, raiding them for information, and leaving again before any level of trust and any insight in the social relations of these communities could have been established. Regular interviews were left to paid assistants. These devastatingly severe limitations of field access and participation may be somewhat understandable in the light of conditions of class and ethnic separation apparently still obtaining in certain parts of South African society even under majority rule (as established in 1994),<sup>44</sup> and they certainly reflect the conditions of life-threatening

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*Among The Lowly* (1900 / 1852). Her sympathies are certainly with the highly pigmented protagonists of the plantation milieu, but she cannot bring herself to put aside her fear of physical contagion *vis-à-vis* the somatic Other.

<sup>42</sup> When the researcher is suspecting (in terms of the *sangoma* belief system: with good reason) a supernatural attack from some of the lodge members, then witchcraft with body products, notably soil dampened with urine, comes up as a possibility

'Most of the members of Atta's *isibaya* would urinate outside as he had limited toilet facilities. *E v e n I had to resort to this o n o c c a s i o n .*' (my italics and spacing – the word 'even' gives away the candidate's self-perception as a privileged 'White' deserving privileged sanitary facilities and being frustrated by not getting them).

This is poor modern anthropology; and, written in the years 2000, under South African majority rule, it is poor etiquette and irresponsible socio-political discourse.

<sup>43</sup> I am using 'White' here not as a pretendedly objective somatic category (the ideological concept of race has in itself no scientific meaning, and a most regrettable socio-political history) but as an (unfortunate and regrettable) *emic* ethnic construct informing, in the subjective consciousness of the participants themselves, present-day social life in Southern Africa (as it does in the USA).

<sup>44</sup> Similar practical limitations, for instance, but inescapably imposed by the colonial political realities prevailing at the time, attended the urban research of such famous Manchester School researchers as Clyde Mitchell and Bill Epstein in the 1950s in urban Northern Rhodesia / now Zambia; but however great the impression they made with their pioneering works, such defective fieldwork by (effectively) proxy made them miss much of the real-life feel for the social situations they analysed so fruitfully. Cf.

hostility attending 'White' farmers in Zimbabwe under majority rule, yet they clearly fall short of the professional standards associated with the choice of fieldwork as the major knowledge strategy in anthropology. One fears that the candidate has not sufficiently replaced his earlier *habitus* as a professional nurse, for that of a professional anthropological fieldworker.

There is another point in which the candidate's defective stance as a fieldworker is brought out.<sup>45</sup> Ethics in fieldwork is of course a mandatory topic in an anthropological dissertation. However, in the present work this ethical perspective is conceived, uniquely and most surprisingly, *as the ethical merits or demerits, not of the fieldworker himself in contact with the host community, but of the field's protagonists other than the fieldworker, and of the host community at large.*<sup>46</sup> Even the library study on aquatic divinities in Southern Africa is primarily justified, by the candidate in terms of such an 'other person's ethic'

'If I was to accept that I had been called by these water divinities, or was connected to them in some way, it was imperative from my own moral standpoint that I did not plunge headlong into something that I might later discover was negative or evil.'<sup>47</sup>

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my chapter 'Virtuality as a key concept in the study of globalisation: Towards an anthropology of present-day Africa's symbolic transformation', in: van Binsbergen 2015: 85-168, a text mainly dealing with the interpretation of urban situations in Zambia.

<sup>45</sup> What I regret, in this thesis of many hundreds of pages. where every personal experience and dream is described with humourless, almost narcissistic detail, is that the candidate yet believes he can invoke limitations of space as the reason why, on several counts, crucial details on his fieldwork have been left out of the discussion.

<sup>46</sup> This is not the only occasion in the work where the candidate demonstrates rather unusual views of fieldwork. Thus he interprets Marcus' (1995) well-known notion of multi-sited ethnography in the context of globalisation as simply meaning that a fieldworker has more than one research site. Extending the fieldwork to more than one village, urban ward, shrine, church, formal organisation *etc.*, however, has been time-honoured practice in anthropology, and that is clearly not what Marcus had in mind. The point is that these various sites have to occupy *structurally significantly different* positions within the *globalised* world system. Dreaming about, and subsequently visiting, more than one sacred pool, and having a few interviews with the people living around near these pools, all seeking to gather understanding of the same rural and peripheral, historic religious complex, in my understanding does not constitute multi-sited fieldwork.

<sup>47</sup> We shall leave aside the question whether ethnographic texts generated, mainly, by colonial officers, researchers and missionaries, under oppressive and exploitative colonial conditions, could ever be considered (as the candidate is implying) to be sufficiently neutral and free from racialism so as to validly and reliably render the ethics of the Africans and the African institutions under study. In the prevailing 'White' colonial perception, African rites were aimed at ritual murder and perversion, and even standard local forms of divination were officially prohibited for that reason. The question as to how to cleanse 'the colonial library' (Mudimbe) from colonial prejudices and racist distortions fascinated anthropology in the decades immediately following the decade (1960s) when most African countries reached post-colonial Independence; *cf.* Leclerc 1972; Copans 1974; Asad 1973; van Binsbergen 1984a. Engaging, as a 'White' person, with African rites, divination and *sangomas* was, until one or two decades after territorial Independence, considered by 'Whites' to constitute an act of 'racial' betrayal, transgression, and potential suicide – as I was to find out the hard way when I publicly

Admittedly, such a statement (surprisingly ethnocentric and prudish from the perspective of anthropology as a global scientific discipline propagating cultural relativism) becomes more understandable once we realise that the construction of indigenous ecstatic religion (centring on *sangomahood*) as unspeakably evil, even diabolical, has been a dominant, ubiquitous aspect of the collective representations of 'White', middle-class, more or less Christian sections of the Southern African population – a framework of prejudice which the candidate had great difficulty shaking off, as is testified by the fact that his initial administrations of the ritually purifying *ubulawa* liquid / foam<sup>48</sup> even though taken in his own house initially had to be kept secret from his wife and little daughters.

After at first dismissing all pecuniary considerations on the part of his therapist Mr Atta,<sup>49</sup> in chapter 7 the earlier image of latter's integrity is torn to shreds, and what emerges is a ritually incompetent, financially corrupt criminal. What is surprising here is not that the protagonist is objectified and shown in his complex humanity, but that no attempt is made anymore

- to regard him from any other perspective than that of the Southern African 'White' middle class to which the candidate belongs,
- to self-critically examine the dynamics of the relationship between the candidate and Mr Atta (below I will speak about transference),
- let *alone* to suspend judgement.

Here the argument becomes surprisingly ethnocentric. Of course, issues of morality are central to Southern African initiatory religion, as they are to most societies, but here rather than hiding in the (somewhat bigoted, and historically compromised) 'White' value system, the candidate had done better to learn from Durkheim's insight in the ambivalent nature of the sacred (instead of dismissing, out of hand, Durkheim's views (1912) of the social as ultimate referent of the sacred, we will come to that; meanwhile, cf. van Binsbergen 2018a). One cannot be a *sangoma*, i.e. a leading therapist supervising the initiation of numerous others, without being thoroughly conversant both with the good and the bad. Anyway, such moral judgement on protagonists far from exhausts, and in fact obscures, the usual understanding of ethics in fieldwork, which revolves on the central question: *how to produce valid transcultural knowledge*

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became a *sangoma* in 'White'-founded and 'White'-dominated Francistown in the late 1980s – a quarter of a century after Botswana attained Independence.

<sup>48</sup> In the Botswana *sangoma* context, this foam is known as *mptlelwa*, as used in a rite designated 'anti-cooking' (Richard Werbner's translation): vigorously stirred in water, the powdered vegetal medicine produces a stiff white foam which has to be applied onto the main joints (knees, elbows, shoulders) of the *thwaza's* body, so as to reduce the heating effect attributed to the emergence of the ancestors.

<sup>49</sup> I have treated the pecuniary aspect of *sangoma* in some detail in a separate paper (van Binsbergen 2005), suggesting that the *idiom* of pecuniary interest clearly protects the client from excessive dependence upon the therapist, and often does not preclude existentially committed loving-care of the latter for the former.

without inflicting harm upon the persons involved both in the host society and in the global context in which the knowledge produced will circulate? Ethnography is a form of objectifying framing in text, in other words a form of textual violence, and on this point the candidate regrettably appears to know no restrictions. Not only Mr Atta (who failed to provide the desired ritual context for a successful final initiation of Mr Lagrange as an aquatic spirit medium) but also Mrs Makeba is objectified to the extreme, as if fieldwork is about raiding for data, then settling old scores of frustration and humiliating accumulated in the process, rather than about setting the humane conditions for a transcultural encounter on the basis of equality and feedback.

Thus, in connection with the general taboo on sexuality to which novices (in their symbolic role of mere foetuses) are subject (not unlike anthropologists in the field), we are told, in a manner that is unacceptably callous and casual especially where the candidate's principal research companion is concerned:

'Makeba breached this taboo and on our first trip to Zimbabwe she had a spontaneous abortion which caused her to haemorrhage. Although she was clinically dead by the time I got her to the local hospital in Masvingo, they were able to resuscitate her. She claims that during her near-death experience her ancestors were shouting at her to 'go back' (i.e. to stay alive).<sup>50</sup> She had failed to tell me she had been bleeding for two weeks prior to our departure for fear that Atta would throw her out of his *isibaya* [lodge] for breaching the sexual intercourse taboo. As he was so relieved she survived, he forgave her, but she had to do a cleansing ceremony on her return home which involved the sacrifice of a goat.'<sup>51</sup>

3. *The work's central ontological claim.* Whilst the researcher derives most of his, richly textured, knowledge of the religious domain of water divinities in Southern Africa from his library study,<sup>52</sup> from his more limited, personal encounters with that do-

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<sup>50</sup> What the candidate callously relates as a juicy anecdote involving his only fieldwork friend, resonates much more generally in Southern African life. Near-death experiences, or at least claims thereof, have been part and parcel of the modern African religious scene since the 19th century CE. Many religious innovators (including such prominent ones as Mwana Lesa, Mupumani, Alice Lenshina) based their legitimacy in the first place upon a claimed near-death experience, when during a temporary visit to Heaven they allegedly received their spiritual mandate, usually directly from the High God. Cf. van Binsbergen 1981.

<sup>51</sup> The same taboo on sexuality was imposed upon me as an *thwaza* (effectively a foetus or infant, not entitled to, nor capable of enduring, adult pleasures) in 1990, and I had to explicitly account for the birth of my second son in 1990 – who however had already been conceived when the taboo was imposed. However, breaking the taboo on other occasions, I was also fined a goat – which however my most generous spiritual advisor MmaShakayile unexpectedly over-compensated by throwing in, at no costs for me, a magnificent black bull to be sacrificed, in addition to my own three goats and a sheep, at my final coming out ceremony at the Mathilagabedi cattle post, 20 kms north-east of Francistown, in 1991.

<sup>52</sup> It is somewhat to be regretted that Lagrange, in his discussion of the fact that *sangomahood* appears to be inherited in the maternal line, does not realise that this is not just a Southern African phenomenon but simply a manifestation of a much more widespread phenomenon, first identified systematically by Fortes (1953): *where there is one prevailing line of unilineal descent which informs social, political and economic organisation, inheritance of religious office tends to follow the alternative, submerged line of descent.* I have seen this principle scarcely in operation in South Central Africa, where bilateral

main he derives the claim *that these divinities must have an objective ontological reality*. This is the thesis' ever-returning refrain; it is even claimed to be the work's main argument. In order to create a discursive context for this claim, the work includes excursions (in the form of short library studies) into 'the anthropology of dreaming' and into 'the anthropology of extraordinary experience' ('AEE'). The review on dreams is an interesting exploration of a field of intellectual exploration that, ever since Freud's *Traumdeutung / Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), has exerted enormous influence on global intellectual life and has, particularly, opened up recognition of the dream as, in Freud's terms, the 'royal road' to the subconscious.

#### E. WHAT DID VAN BINSBERGEN REALLY MEAN WHEN DESCRIBING HIS PROCESS OF 'BECOMING A SANGOMA'?

Now, when the candidate cites me as an exponent of this AEE approach, he puts me in the awkward position of having to attack a position with which I am being identified. However, the advantage is that this allows me to clarify my own position. This also applies to the candidate's central claim as to the objective ontological reality of the water divinities. No doubt there is an echo here from my earliest writings on 'Becoming a *sangoma*' (1991). *Sangoma* initiation involves effective brainwashing, through which the collective representations in question are imprinted upon the novice's mind, and – in the usual manner of all religion; cf. Geertz 1966 – appear to be ultimately real and true. Scholarly discussion entails the attempt to deconstruct such constructs, and to put them in a critical perspective, as in the present chapter, but also in my earlier work (2003, 2004), and my recent vindication of Durkheim's religion theory (2018a). My failure to affirm, before an academic audience, the objective ontological reality of ancestors that I yet work with as a *sangoma*, amounts to an agnostic or sceptical or perhaps bigotted and hypocritical position which I share with many religious leaders all over the world. Religion is not primarily about belief but about ritual practice (cf. Blackstone 1963). In that practice (and regardless even of whatever also seems to happen in ritual on a cosmic scale – we shall gradually come to that in this book's course) deeper layers of the conscious and unconscious psyche are being addressed and redressed by symbolically effective means. I am not in the least questioning the integrity of the candidate's account of his extraordinary experiences, but merely his naïvely realist interpretation of them. Also in my own work as a *sangoma* I am constantly confronted with exceptional experiences such as my own (and my clients's!) repeated impression (up to this day) to the effect that I am able to perform veridical divination and effective healing. However, I see these experiences not as proofs for the existence of gods or ancestors, but as indications (which sums up the purpose of the present book) that the true nature of reality is far more complex than the collective representations of non-specialist actors in the North Atlantic region would allow for; on the contrary, that reality – as already predicted in Quantum Mechanics – turns to us the very face with which we approach it. As I set out in the present chapter, I entertain the idea that our collective representations, and the rites based upon them, occasionally have 'the power to remove mountains' (*Matthew 17:20; 1 Corinthians 13:2*), i.e. the effect of producing, in the reality of the senses, effects that are not merely virtual and hallucinatory, but real – even if usually short-lived, and even if seldom produced at will. Here

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descent makes for the blurring and merging of kinship lines, but found it informing much of the recruitment patterns of male ecstatic specialists (*fuqra*) in rural North Africa – notably in the Hjumiri highlands, where such specialists make up 20% of the adult male population (van Binsbergen 1971a, 1980a, and in preparation (a)).

we can think of the highly contested ectoplasm materialisations<sup>53</sup> that played such a major role in the parapsychology of 1850-1940, of stony rains, *Poltergeist* (acoustic and light phenomena and stony rains, typically associated with living pre-pubescent girls), guiding and helping spirits, archetypes, so why not water divinities. However, to the extent to which such temporarily and unpredictably 'real' effects would depend on the pre-existence and participation of human consciousness preferably within a collective setting, this is very different from claiming (for such archetypes, spirits, and divinities) an objective ontological status of their own. Such dependence on human consciousness appears plausible: as humans, we are *the locus* (or, to remain on the safe side in a universe with estimated millions of inhabitable planets, *one of the loci*) in which the universe has become conscious of itself. I find it plausible that then our human consciousness can act as a focus for the immense powers manifestly enclosed in the universe, – powers of which our global natural science has so far learned apparently very little in a relatively short time (the barely five millennia

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<sup>53</sup> After the rise, in the North Atlantic region, of intellectual and elite spiritualism in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century CE – when its exponents sought to enter into contact, largely through material means, with spirits and departed humans – the production of so-called *materialisations* became an important and spectacular aspect of spiritualist séances; cf. Anonymous, *Materialization*; Bisson 1921; Von Schrenck-Notzing 1920, 1921; Geley & von Schrenck-Notzing 1922. Unheeding of the possibility of fraud, an early commentator, Sargent (1876), announced materialisation phenomena as the “Proof Palpable of Immortality”. In the Netherlands, materialisation phenomena constituted the main topic of the novel written by two prominent literary writers in the 1930s, *Heden Ik Morgen Gij* (Marsman & Vestdijk 1938 / 1960). Much of the early ‘psychical research’ (the original term for parapsychology), often by reputable and experienced scientists, was directed at the materialisation phenomenon. Cases of fraud were often detected, and (contrary to e.g. telekinesis and telepathy) materialisations have not secured a place among the respectable topics of today’s parapsychological research (which in itself is heavily under fire anyway from the so-called Sceptics; for an overview see a previous footnote), yet the vast literature – much of its from serious academics – suggests that more than a mere fraudulent illusion might be at stake. (But what is fraud any more, in a universe where Being and Non-Being continually oscillate into one another, and where every mind’s fantasy or whim may risk to be acted out, albeit with infinitesimally small probability, in material ‘reality?’) Meanwhile materialization has also come in use as a term for a particular, and in the context of the present book possibly relevant, phenomenon in the world of Quantum Mechanics and Relativity:

“We analyze the dynamics of the gravitational field when the covariance is restricted to a synchronous gauge. In the spirit of the Noether Theorem, we determine the conservation law associated to the Lagrangian [ no relation – WvB ] invariance and we outline that a non-vanishing behavior of the Hamiltonian comes out. We then interpret such resulting non-zero “energy” of the gravitational field in terms of a dust fluid. This new matter contribution is comoving to the slicing and it accounts for the “*materialization*” [ italics added – WvB ] of a synchronous reference from the corresponding gauge condition. Further, we analyze the Quantum dynamics of a generic inhomogeneous Universe as described by this evolutionary scheme, asymptotically to the singularity. We show how the phenomenology of such a model overlaps the corresponding Wheeler-DeWitt picture. Finally, we study the possibility of a Schrödinger dynamics of the gravitational field as a consequence of the correspondence inferred between the ensemble dynamics of stochastic systems and the WKB [ Wentzel-Kramers-Brillouin – WvB; cf. Anonymous, WKB approximation ] limit of their Quantum evolution. We demonstrate that the time dependence of the ensemble distribution is associated with the first order correction in  $\hbar$  to the WKB expansion of the energy spectrum.” (Montani & Cianfrani 2008; such technical terms as Noether Theorem, Lagrangian invariance, Wheeler-DeWitt picture, and Schrödinger dynamics, are not the point here and are easily documented from the Internet, e.g. from Wikipedia).



elapsed since the emergence of proto-science), that we cannot begin to estimate their true nature and extent (but there is the probability that religious knowledge systems all over the world have captured and retained insights into the nature of the universe that natural science has not yet been able to incorporate; it is here that the central claim of Mr Lagrange's thesis situates itself, but that is scarcely a valid or manageable topic for anthropology). If transitions from energy to matter and back are the order of the day in the universe (and modern physics leaves no doubt about that), it is not unthinkable that such transitions could also occur on the basis of human thought. In fact, considerable evidence to this effect has been available for decades from a professional physics source (Radin & Nelson 1989; cf. Radin 1997, 2009). However, given our considerable ignorance of the true nature and power of the universe, it is (as will be a central point of discussion in the subsequent chapters of this book) not totally unthinkable that the universe, as a whole or in part, contains intelligences independent from the human consciousness, and capable of material manifestation. Lovelock's (1979) Gaia hypothesis goes in that direction, and so does the conclusion of Hoyle's (1983; cf. Wickramasinghe et al. 2003) fascinating and courageous book *The Intelligent Universe*, written by one of the leading astronomers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Meanwhile, the researcher does not use his dreams as a key to self-knowledge, revealing otherwise hidden motives and enhancing his level of self-critique. On the contrary, resorting to what I can only call a *poor man's version* of Jung's analytical psychology, 'the deep' from which the dreams are claimed to be *messages* is not even an intersubjective, culturally constructed and maintained collective representation, but an impersonal and pre-cultural abyss, that allegedly has nothing to do with the drives, aspirations and pains of Mr Charles Lagrange but instead is claimed to reveal an objective ontological reality of water divinities, long recognised in Southern African cultures, but needing him to become their international academic spokesman... Whence does the researcher derive the right to occupy this, admittedly original, but in the first place *presumptuous* position? That right apparently derives from the installation, in the course of the last two decades, of a field of textual production known as 'the anthropology of extraordinary experience', where anthropologists on the basis of (usually solitary and uncontrolled) experiences they claim to have had during fieldwork outside their usual life-world, with introspection as their main research tool and credulity as a standard requirement for intersubjective professional communication, report on the doors of perception which their entering into an exotic culture has, allegedly, opened widely for them (but for few others). Extraordinary experiences are then everything that comes under the repertoire of parapsychology, New-Age perceptions of the world and of humans's place in it, – everything for which modern science (typically in the truncated, obsolescent lay version endemic among anthropologists) does not have an answer, and most of the time does not even recognise to exist.

4. *An excursion into modern Southern African rock art studies. The latter have of course recognised the considerable role that water divinities occupy in the San iconographic repertoire.*<sup>54</sup> Here the researcher's argument is soundly based on part

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<sup>54</sup> Rock art studies that have recognised the role of water in the San world-view include: Ouzman 1995;

(i) of the thesis, and convinces me. The water divinities appear to belong primarily, not to the speakers of the Khoisan linguistic macrophylum, but to the speakers of the Nigercongo (including Bantu) macrophylum, and that is why we also find similar beliefs and practices in West Africa,<sup>55</sup> in abundance. *Even so one wonders whether the candidate does not overrate the importance of rainfall for the San; rather than comparing them with the pastoralists (who are argued to need rain less because they can always migrate – but so could hunters and gatherers like the San, especially before the massive encroachment on their territory by the colonial conquest) one would contrast both groups with agriculturalists, who are truly rain-dependent in the most literal sense.*

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Lewis-Williams *et al.* 2004; Ego n.d. The same emphasis, in rock art studies outside South Africa, can be found in Bahn 1978 and Harner 1973. Outside rock art studies, the role of water among the San world-view, religion and healing is treated in: Hoff 1997, 1998, 2007; Lawuyi 1998; Kendall 2008; Morrow & Vokwana 2008; Hoernlé 1923 / 1985; Prins 1996; Waldman 1989. Many of these studies also feature in Lagrange's work. My own observations in this field of rock art studies are to be found in my recent book on Durkheim (2018a), and in an excursion on Lascaux in my 2012 book *Before the Presocratics*.

#### <sup>55</sup> FFF. ON WHISTLING

West Africa also has parallels, *e.g.* among the Manjaco people of Guinea Bissau (van Binsbergen, field-notes 1981, 1982, 1983; van Binsbergen 1991 and 2003) of ancestral spirits speaking in a high-pitched, whistling voice. When, in an interview conducted in Francistown, Botswana, in 1990, 5,000 kms away from the Manjacos, I imitated the sound through which the spirits manifest themselves in West Africa, Ms Jane Sinombe recognised this spontaneously and with surprise as the voice (in which her father speaks in his role as the mouthpiece) of the High God Mwali. Ms Sinombe is the daughter of the High God high priest Sinombe, and herself the local (Nata, Botswana) hereditary incumbent of the 'Mother of Life' incarnation of the Heavenly Princess known elsewhere in Southern Africa as Inkosazana / Nomkhubulwana, who features prominently in the thesis. Further search may reveal Eurasian, even New World, parallels of this phenomenon of whistling spirits / gods. Thus even the Biblical God of the *Old Testament* is known to express himself through whistling (*e.g.* *Isaiah* 5:26, 7:18 – whistling to rally the nations as if they were flies or bees, like a honey-hunter – , *Zechariah* 10:8). Perhaps there is a hidden identification here between god and bee, the former (at least after the masculinising transformation during the Bronze Age, as referred to above) creating with his word, the latter being named, in Hebrew, *deborah* after their 'speaking' (whistling?), for which they are also highlighted in the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* (Budge 1969: I, 236 f.). The taboo on whistling inside the house, in North African popular religion, may be related to this. Hastings authoritative *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (1909-1921, I-XIII) has little to say on the symbolic or ritual significance of whistling, which (exclusively using the innate organic faculties of the human body) may have a cultural history going back to the Lower Palaeolithic; the entry lists whistles specifically for West Asian Babylonia, the Maori of Polynesia (who make them of the bones of slain enemies, IX, 9a), and the Nigercongo-speaking Mbala (Bambara?) people of Africa (IX, 9a); whistling for the wind, 'as an almost universal custom' in the context of widespread beliefs in wind gods, is treated in Hastings 1909-1921: I, 254b-255a and (as a form of imitative magic) IV, 776a. The hypothesis seems justified that whistling as a cultural practice has immense antiquity, giving rise to specific material musical instruments – from bear or swan bones – very early on (*cf.* Megaw 1960; Hitchcock 2013; d'Errico *et al.* 2003); and that when it surfaces in various ritual contexts all over the world, it may have retained something of an original archaic significance.

F. WHY AQUATIC SPIRITS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA?

Meanwhile I would invite the candidate to take the analysis a whole step further, and to address the essential question on which his entire approach would seem to be predicated: *why should there be aquatic spirits in Southern Africa?* Genetic, archaeological and linguistic evidence of an earlier vintage suggested that the ancestors of present-day Khoisan speakers have not always lived in Southern Africa, but that part of their ancestors lived in West Asia only 10 ka BP, and that, like Nigercongo speakers, Khoisan speakers were involved in a gradual migration into sub-Saharan Africa via the once fertile Sahara.<sup>56</sup> Two routes in particular present themselves, one via the Nile valley, the other more westerly across the Sahara – their location is suggested, for instance, by a painstaking distributional analysis of the spiked-wheel trap as a tell-tale sign of West Asian expansion into Africa (cf. van Binsbergen 2010b). So contrary to what the candidate suggests, this does not rule out Khoisan influence on the West African manifestations of the aquatic-divinities domain. Ostrich-shell beads are the main archaeological traces of Khoisan presence, and they are found all over Africa and over the arid zones of West to South Asia; they even found their way as grave goods into pharaonic tombs.<sup>57</sup> What is more, even though the candidate shares modern anthropology's stereotypical abhorrence of the concept of diffusion (yet a recognised and even central concept in such respectable disciplines as molecular genetics, archaeology and linguistics – all adjacent to anthropology; cf. van Binsbergen 2019, 2020), he cannot ex-

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. Cavalli-Sforza *et al.* 1994; pace Vigilant 1989. This contention, which I have repeatedly cited in my recent work, meanwhile appears to be in need of correction, in favour of a more limited regional origin (Morris 2002; Tishkoff 2007), although the 2014 work by Pickrell *et al.* does confirm West Eurasian ancestry:

'The history of southern Africa involved interactions between indigenous hunter-gatherers and a range of populations that moved into the region. Here we use genome-wide genetic data to show that there are at least two admixture events in the history of Khoisan populations (southern African hunter-gatherers and pastoralists who speak non-Bantu languages with click consonants). One involved populations related to Niger-Congo-speaking African populations, and the other introduced ancestry most closely related to west Eurasian (European or Middle Eastern) populations. We date this latter admixture event to ~900–1,800 y ago and show that it had the largest demographic impact in Khoisan populations that speak Khoe-Kwadi languages. A similar signal of west Eurasian ancestry is present throughout eastern Africa. In particular, we also find evidence for two admixture events in the history of Kenyan, Tanzanian, and Ethiopian populations, the earlier of which involved populations related to west Eurasians and which we date to ~2,700–3,300 y ago. We reconstruct the allele [ gene variants ] frequencies of the putative west Eurasian population in eastern Africa and show that this population is a good proxy for the west Eurasian ancestry in southern Africa. The most parsimonious explanation for these findings is that west Eurasian ancestry entered southern Africa indirectly through eastern Africa.'

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Cavalli-Sforza *et al.* 1994: 160, Fig. 3.2.2 for prehistoric Khoisan distribution in Africa; van der Zwan 1985 for the coinciding distribution of ostrich-shell beads of Khoisan manufacture; also the relevant footnotes on Khoisan in van Binsbergen 2019, 2020.

plain the presence of a somatically Eurasian collective representation (the fair-skinned, fair-haired maiden, often with a fish tail) in a sub-Saharan environment where, for all we know, somatic types have always – and for obvious environmental reasons having to do with the evolutionary advantage of protection against higher levels of solar radiation in tropical zones – tended to higher levels of pigmentation for both skin and hair. Substantial migration from Eurasia back into Africa (after the Out-of-Africa migration 80-60 ka BP, responsible for the spread of Anatomically Modern Humans all over the globe), from c. 15 ka BP on has been discovered by molecular genetics in the last decade (Hammer *et al.* 1998; Coia *et al.* 2005; Cruciani *et al.* 2002; Underhill 2004), and provides an excellent context for Eurasian-African continuities in the linguistic, cultural and religious domain. Given the African resources which the candidate has already at his fingertips, a comparative study of Eurasian water divinities with sub-Saharan ones is an obvious next step, and<sup>58</sup> it would reveal the North African / Mediterranean / West Asian region, and the Neolithic, as the most likely origin of water divinities that occupy a junior position in the Southern African pantheons. Under the hegemonic influence of the rise of a sky-orientated cosmology, this masculinisation, in other words relegation of female divinities to junior status, is a phenomenon that can be seen throughout the Eurasian Bronze Age (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: Table 6.4, p. 142 presents a general overview for Bronze-Age Eurasia,<sup>59</sup> but since the roots of the sky religion, like those of naked-eye astronomy, seem to lie especially in shamanic forms that date back to the late Upper Palaeolithic, the transformation must have started much earlier. Flood stories and the widespread collective representation of the Virgin ‘Mother of the Water’ as the primal creation goddess producing Land as her first child and lover, seem older than shamanism and seem to hark back to the older Upper Palaeolithic (van Binsbergen 2006b, 2006c).

The divine status of rivers and streams throughout the Old World, the representation of mermaids and mermen,<sup>60</sup> and the parcelling up of the landscape – both in Eurasia and in sub-Saharan Africa – in spirit provinces which are essentially aquatic,

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<sup>58</sup> As my recent own work and work in progress demonstrates; a full perusal of the index volume of Hastings 1909-1921 would also give a useful first impression, with over 300 entries on water in religion and ritual world-wide.

<sup>59</sup> This process was probably first formulated by the Egyptologist M. Murray (1921), who saw much of European folklore (traditional superstitions and cultic practices) as a transformed continuation of Ancient Egyptian religion. Half a century later when the Italian historian Ginzburg (1992) discussed similar topics, he lashed out viciously to Murray – apparently for no more compelling reason than a paradigm shift that had occurred in the historical study of European folklore.

<sup>60</sup> On mermaids, cf. Ashliman 1998-2011; Meyer 1995; Drewal 1988; Hardie 2009; Pekeur 2008. Anonymous, ‘Mermaid’, with all its obvious limitations gives a world-wide distributon, but misses out the major Eurasian aquatic-feeted or serpentine-feeted divinities such as Erichthonius, Oannes, and Fu Xi / Nü Wa.

are all aspects to be considered. It is possible that the Asian ancestors of Southern African Khoisan speakers left their West Asian homes without yet having experienced the decline of the aquatic cosmology and the relegation of its (typically female) gods to junior status; this would give the San a strategic position in Southern African aquatic religion, and would yet lead to revision of the researcher's otherwise convincing argument. The supreme cosmic snake, however, has a virtually global distribution and can be argued to have a much older background, in the original cultural package ('Pandora's Box') which Anatomically Modern Humans developed inside Africa between 200-80 ka BP, prior to their spread to other continents. So a further research task would be to disentangle, in the study of Southern water divinities, aspects that were brought by (Proto-)Nigercongo and / or (Proto-)Khoisan speakers in recent millennia, from aspects that have percolated throughout the Old World including Southern Africa for dozens of millennia.



Fig. 2.1. Also in Africa the supernatural figure with aquatic extremities may be found: Ivory cylinders carved with the image of the Yoruba god Olokun with mudfish feet, British Museum, London, UK, 2014.

### 2.3. Discussion

Although it is customary for an anthropological PhD thesis to be largely based on fieldwork (and this may explain why the fieldwork component, however weak, is not played down in the work), clearly the library research in this work is of greater quality than the

parts that report on fieldwork, or that derive from fieldwork. I suspect the library-based synthetic aspect of the work can more or less stand on its own, without being really dependent upon the fieldwork component. The principal weakness of the work lies not primarily in the defective nature of the fieldwork (even though it is more defective than most PhD fieldwork), but in the epistemologically and theoretically defective and politically naïve nature of the claims that are based on the *dreams* which the researcher yet presents as his principal proceeds from fieldwork.

Having done extensive fieldwork on ecstatic religion in Tunisia, Zambia and Botswana (besides lesser fieldwork excursions in many parts of Asia during the last two decades, also extending to ecstatic religion, notably in Sri Lanka and in Bali, Indonesia), and having actually and demonstrably *completed* (contrary to Mr Lagrange) training as a *sangoma* (notably in a Botswana Nguni-orientated *sangoma* lodge in 1991 as the beginning of a *sangoma* practice in which I have engaged ever since), I understand, and sympathise with, the problems of access and participation that underlie the researcher's account. My main objection to the work lies not in the fact that the candidate takes his one-stranded role as a client and novice as a source of knowledge and as a source of inspiration for further library research – contrary to what the researcher suggests, all fieldwork is defective, and all fieldwork is about cultivating the status of outsider. For instance, the following quote from Lagrange's work:

Katherine Ewing (1990, 1994) has observed how an anthropologist who fails to share his or her dreams in a society which regards dream-sharing as an important part of sociality and social ordering, is at risk of forever remaining an outsider. In such societies where dreams help shape identities and selfhood, failure to share dreams may lead to "non-identity".

Which fieldworker is not utterly familiar with the 'risk of forever remaining an outsider'? And which fieldworker would honestly and truthfully maintain that she or he has effectively shed the status of outsider and has become an insider? Are we not being deceived by the idyllic, Romantic, Rousseauian illusion of a local community as a composite of total insiders – in stead of admitting that most people, including ourselves, for most purposes, in most social situations, retain an element of outsidership – even in the most tightly knit and harmonious families, even in the ritually underpinned cultic groups of fellow adepts? In one of my first papers on the Nkoya people (1983, originally 1975), I described their villages as ephemeral conglomerates of outsiders – a bunch of individuals who usually were not born in each other's vicinity, and who are most unlikely to die in each other's vicinity, since all are individually involved in a continuous merry-do-round of geographic displacement (for residence, marriage, wage labour, rituals, kin assistance) within an area at least 100 kms wide. The passage was read with great approval by the picturesque Jaap van Velsen, a senior member of the Manchester School, director of the Centre of African Studies (the former Rhodes-Livingstone Institute) at the University of Zambia, and my local research mentor in the early 1970s. The Nkoya situation as described by me was neither pathological nor exceptional: most South Central African village communities would meet my description, and it is this quality which lend the special flavour of ephemeral, brittle, inconstant, fleeting, inchoate, social relationships with only emergent norms and constantly changing under an ongoing social process, that became so characteristic of the Manchester School (van Binsbergen 2007). African communities, perhaps all human

communities *tout court*, are communities of qualified individual outsiders; children, women, youngsters, the aged, criminals, orphans, migrant workers, represent particular forms of outsidership, but no one is ever truly in all respects an insider.

In this respect we must not exaggerate the extent to which the anthropological fieldworker is an outsider, too, and must not commiserate with her or him for that reason, for there are considerable benefits (in terms of freedom, privacy, social control, sexuality, a liberating alternative perspective on the outside world) to the fieldworker's specific form of outsidership. Whether we like it or not, the concept of fieldwork is based on the explicit cultivation of outsidership raised to the power 2, for no community we know of defines, within its own *emic* context, the role of optionally and instrumentally engaging with that community, pretending membership, fictive ties of kinship and the obligations these entail *etc.*, yet having as one's main task to temporarily gather knowledge on that community, to leave that community once the data are nearly complete, and to express that knowledge in a language whose sheer technicality prevents free circulation and critiquing of that knowledge within the community in question, even if that language would be in principle understandable there (which it often is not).

I cannot reproach the candidate for 'going native' – not so much (lamentably) in his appreciation of local sanitation as we have seen, but at least to the extent of adopting his host community's collective representations on aquatic spirits, and claiming objective existence for these spirits. In my own, early accounts on my 'becoming a *sangoma*' I tended to the same position, but I articulated that position in a quasi-literary form in order to mark that I was aware that such claims, although understandable as being counter-hegemonic given the hegemonic politics of knowledge in Southern Africa, yet could not be made within the discipline of anthropology proper (as I understood it then), as an empirical science. My own conclusion was, ultimately, to step out of the classic anthropological stance, and to trade my chair in anthropology for one in intercultural philosophy, where I could make my almost daily work of the contemplation of problems of transcultural knowledge production and of the epistemology of its truth claims. Although fairly mature in age, Mr Lagrange, does not have that choice yet. He is, with this PhD thesis, at the beginning of his professional maturity, and in that position *he should not be allowed to do what he is now doing: using the science of anthropology as a platform for essentially unscientific, because non-empirical, claims, that can neither be verified nor falsified.*

The existence of a field of textual production that calls itself 'anthropology of extraordinary experience' cannot be used as justification on this point. Disciplines change, new styles emerge with time, the Post-Modern Turn has greatly widened the range of experiment and of acceptability in anthropology, and has cast serious doubts on the universal (instead of local – *i.e.* North Atlantic – and relative) truth claims of classic anthropological work. It has also contributed to the growth of a discursive context in which there would be, at long last, far more room for the emotions, hidden drives, many of the covert and unarticulated, pre-language dimensions of social life and of the researcher's interaction with members of the host community. As the candidate rightly stresses in the beginning of the work, the anthropological discipline has been remarkably tacit and uncritical of the anti-Sceptical turn that the emergence of an 'anthropology of extraordinary experience'

represents.<sup>61</sup> But could this be because that emerging field is simply not taken seriously, and should not be? Anyway, under the circumstances it would be tempting for a PhD candidate to hide behind the existence of such a new movement apparently justifying what he himself is doing, but he ought not to get away with such a simple solution. Instead, he should have grappled himself with the huge epistemological and conceptual problems at stake here, and should himself have provided the critique that is otherwise largely lacking. And, if he finds he is not philosophically equipped to do so (very little indicates that he is), he should leave the question or treat it with appropriate distance and reticence, instead of making it into the backbone of his PhD thesis. Thus his treatment of the Post-modern approach in anthropology is utterly superficial, and does not refer to any of the thinkers (Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, Guattari, Deleuze, Barthes, Mudimbe, etc.) who have brought about the Post-modern turn in contemporary thought. Moreover, to his claim of the water divinities's ontological reality he does not bring the systematic consideration of cosmological and metaphysical images of the world on the strength of which such a claim could to be maintained, but simply relies on the commonsense, naïve realism that is one of the ideological foundations, not only (and regrettably) of modern anthropology, but also, by inversion, of the so-called 'anthropology of extraordinary experience', AEE.

Does this mean that there is no merit whatsoever in the candidate's very extensive account of his dream-life during his years as a novice? Is he completely mistaken about attaching an exceptional relevance to these dreams? At a level of experience he certainly is not, but even at the level of intersubjectively negotiable scientific argument these dreams do deserve to be taken seriously. Not, however, without much more discursive theoretical framing than the candidate provides. Notably, we need to look into the widely recognised and discussed problem of *introspection* (see footnote, above) as a research tool – after all, we only have the dreamer's word for the contents and details of the dream; and we know that dreams tend to be remembered fragmentarily and selectively. Then we need to rule out the effect of diurnal residuals – a common element in dream analysis. Despite some

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<sup>61</sup> Besides the few studies that Mr Lagrange lists, he might have hit upon a lengthy unpublished paper of mine that so far has only circulated on the Internet, since I have lacked the time to turn it into a publishable article (van Binsbergen 2007d; meanwhile it appears below in final form as chapter 3). Although the candidate can of course not be reproached for not citing an unpublished article, my argument is pertinent, since he himself takes for granted, and relies heavily on, Edith Turner's approach to the Anthropological of Extraordinary Experience, which is critically discussed in my paper. Apparently totally convinced of Edith Turner's claims and of their epistemological basis, the candidate states, with the pretended generosity characteristic of defective and ignorant thought:

'The fact that Edith Turner was able to participate in the 1985 lhamba [ sic ] ritual in a far more radical way, and *actually saw the removal of spirit substance that immediately led to the resolution of the patient's physical crisis*, does not mean that all the valuable sociological insights offered by her husband Victor Turner were no longer relevant.' (my italics)





The most revealing phrase here is: [ 'Edith Turner' ] *actually saw...*' In chapter 3 we shall try to ascertain what it was that she was 'actually' seeing, in a scholarly enclave of her own, impenetrable by the psychological and epistemological critique of eye-witness accounts ever since Immanuel Kant (1766) tried to expose the *Geistesheer* and mystic, his contemporary Emanuel Swedenborg.



exposure to psychoanalytic reading. Mr Lagrange shows little self-critique when discussing his dreams – he does admit the possibility that the dreams were made up or reinterpreted retrospectively (but rightly dismisses that possibility), but for instance when he wakes up with the words *tep tepi* on his lips, no one outside New-Age circles would think for one second that this is a direct and unmediated message from Ancient Egypt or from some even more ancient, prehistoric layer – everyone would know that a chance glance at *Discovery Channel* on TV, at the Internet or at a book store could easily have produced a subliminal impression on Mr Lagrange's mind, of a concept that – most significantly – was never so central in the interest of professional Egyptologists throughout the nearly 200 years of that discipline's existence,<sup>62</sup> but that was brought into popular media attention in recent years, with the (occasionally very intriguing, and sensible) publications of adventurers and science journalists such as Hancock, Bauval, Gilbert *etc.*<sup>63,64</sup>

New-Age notions also seem to inform the candidate's understanding of the local religious complex he seeks to describe, *e.g.* where he explains animal manifestations of ancestors in terms of high energy levels. (One almost expects a further analysis in terms of the *yoga* serpentine power of Kundalini (*cf.* Jung 2012; Woodroffe 1930; Mookerji 1986), but this does not materialise, probably because the candidate abhors transcontinental connections.) The candidate's suggestion is that this energetic discourse was volunteered by the informants but even if they did, one would like to see an analysis of what now only looks

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<sup>62</sup> Budge, who for reasons of affordable availability has become the main source for present-day Egyptological autodidacts, yet – despite all his vast learning – often is obsolete and unreliable, does give the expression *s.v.* 'tep', writing it as . Budge is probably the global source for the proliferation of statements on *tep tepi* / 'the beginning of time' in New-Age contexts, by Hancock, Bauval, *etc.* Gardiner, however, in his authoritative *Egyptian Grammar*, includes the  sign under D1 (1994: 449) but not at all in the specific sense as 'beginning of time', and scarcely as a meaningful sign in its own right, but mainly as a determinative 'head, chief, first'; in the latter, mainly figurative, sense (as German 'Haupt') does the sign also feature in Hannig's authoritative Egyptian dictionary (2000). In Hebrew, use of the word for 'head' to mean 'beginning' is commonplace, *e.g.* in the name of the first book of the *Pentateuch*,  *Berešit* / *Genesis*; or in  *Rosh Hashanah* 'New Year' – perhaps one of the sources of the otherwise enigmatic Biblical exclamation *hosannah*. The latter is relevant in the *sangoma* context of Francistown, Botswana because there one particular section of *sangomas* is called *Wosanna* – the section dressing in plain black uniforms and, rather than engaging in ecstatic songs and dances, and in diagnostic geomantic divination, manifests trance in the catatonic forms of a speechless stupor, apparently totally overwhelmed by the High God Mwali taking possession of their body and mind. Below we shall return to this question and adduce a Hittite connection.

<sup>63</sup> Hancock & Bauval 1996; Bauval & Gilbert 1994; Hancock *et al.* 1998.

<sup>64</sup> Lacking a general background in this field, the candidate is not at his best when making connections with the circum-Mediterranean Ancient World, and tends to fall into the New-Age trap of superficial appropriation. Thus, he claims:

'The mermaid could be described as a semi-daemon in the ancient Greek sense',

citing Cox Miller 1994 as his authority. However, 'semi-daemon' is not at all a standard concept in the study of Ancient Greek religion; *semi-* is not even a Greek prefix, but merely the latinisation of one. Ironically, the only context where the word semi-daemon has currency, is that of present-day video games!

as the intrusion into, or the imposition upon, the *sangoma* idiom, of modern, routinised physics notions imported (via the clichéd, adulterated discourse of New-Age circles) from the North Atlantic region. Of course, when seeking to make sense of their practices, present-day *sangomas*, who are far from shut off from modern education, media *etc.*, will reach for notions that are readily available to them; but we ought to analyse such apparently hybrid, globalised expressions as a product of the interface (in terms of class, religion, education, language) at which the fieldwork takes place. And how can we try to retrieve the more original, local notions that may have been there originally? Such modernist bricolage also seems to occur when, interpreting a purification or exorcising ritual, the subject's 'essence' (no Zulu or Xhosa term given) is equated, by the candidate, with DNA (another globalised term popularised and rendered meaningless by the modern media, where it has become something like 'innate essence' – far removed from its specialist biochemical and genetics meaning; or when the *serval* feline mammal (used in Africa as a shamanic attribute since at least the Egyptian New Kingdom)<sup>65</sup> is on the one hand described as a totem, whereas on the other hand its skin is used to adorn the *sangoma's* uniform – as if the usual taboo in regard of one's totem applies only to eating it but not to killing it and appropriating its skin; or as if (contrary to my own field impressions in Southern Africa, where I have found the concept of clan still very much alive in food taboos, drinking songs, interclan joking *etc.*) the original meaning of taboo in the context of clan classifications is no longer in the slightest sense operative (*cf.* Schapera 1952).

We need to realise how preoccupation with a research theme, a cultic initiation process, a person one is in love with *etc.*, simply and by totally normal psychological mechanisms, reorganises the experience of reality in such a way as to highlight what could be interpreted as relevant to that preoccupation, and to de-emphasise, obscure or repress what is not so relevant. The candidate recognises this phenomenon yet chooses to interpret it not as the expression of a mind-set programmed by *sangoma* training, but as an intimation of a hidden truth about reality:

The close association of the great Snake with beams of light that it emits from its head was demonstrated one day to me when Makeba accompanied me to the sea near Durban. She was terrified when she looked out to sea on the first evening and saw a bright sweeping light. She came rushing to tell me that the Snake was in the sea. It was, much to her relief, the beam from the lighthouse. While this episode may provide evidence for the view that such ideas are derived from an overactive imagination, the question remains: why is a bright light near water associated with a snake? Once she was reassured that there was another explanation for the light Makeba happily accepted that, but this did not in any way reduce her conviction that the Snake could have been the source of light.'

Neither does the candidate rely on theoretical insights regarding rumour (*e.g.* as a way to convey collective representations and to begin to create new ones; *cf.* Mullen 1972; Barnes 1993; Musambachime 1988). Given the fact (at least, this is what I gather from the thesis) that he did not personally and at close range witness any prolonged stay under water and safe return of a graduating novice *sangoma*, his interpretation of this central

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<sup>65</sup> Strouhal 1993: 107, Fig. 112, from Lady Cheritwebeshet's *Book of the Dead*, where its skin was depicted next to an *imiut* movable shrine symbolising birth and rebirth, and the relation of Heaven and Earth. The figure is reproduced in the present book as Fig. 3.17.5.

point relies entirely on rumours, such as inevitably grow around ritual specialists and the activities imputed to them. Understanding rumour as an inchoate social product rather than as a statement of truth would have helped him to steer away from the naïve literal interpretation of the water divinities, but since his fieldwork has no community focus he would not be able to accommodate community-based rumour in his analysis.

Instead, the text often gives the impression of belonging to the New-Age genre in which U[n]identified ]F[ly]ing ]O[b]ject sightings are being reported on. The candidate's self-account is full of *Aha-Erlebnisse* (from a childhood near-drowning to finding snakes and crabs on the road as an adult motorist) that, in standard *sangoma* therapist's fashion, take on a new significance (so that the therapist can use them to articulate the novice's progress as well as his dependence upon the therapist), but that in most cases must be rejected as mere coincidence. Thus the candidate rightly claims that in Southern Africa at the *emic* level,

[t]he repeated appearance of a frog (*isele*) or a Nile monitor (*uxam*) is a sign or omen (*umhloa*) of the candidate's impending call to the river which, whether it occurs in dreams or reality, is metaphorical of the process of becoming a diviner' (Hirst, 1990: 122),

and that, just like in Ancient Greece and in the *New Testament*, the thunder is *emically* taken in Southern Africa as an epiphany of the divine. However, since fogs, Nile monitors and claps of thunder are fairly common occurrences<sup>66</sup> in that part of the world, one cannot simply reverse the equation and use any chance encounter with frog, a Nile monitor or thunder as an objective indication that the water divinities are calling one. Good ethnography is characterised by proper attention to both the *emic* and the *etic* side of the social phenomena under consideration; the paired concept *emic-etic* helps us to distinguish the two stages in this operation, and it does not do to confuse them.

Epistemologically, the candidate's confusion of *emic* claims (in terms of collective representations) by *etic* claims concerning objective reality, could be interpreted, and perhaps even justified, in terms of the *epistemological or interpretive principle of charity*, to which I have already referred above. The position is inspired by a consideration of the following kind: 'if this is what my field associates seriously believe, who am I to question their belief and to claim that reality is completely different?' The boon, and price, of fieldwork is that one is continually drawn into considerations of this kind – but the hallmark of the professional anthropologist is, I suppose, that one manages – by hook and by crook – to pull oneself out of this pitfall, by reference to an intersubjective, paradigmatic disciplinary set of tools and conventions, even though this disciplinary position may leave much to be desired when considered, for instance, from an intercultural-philosophical or an ethical point of view. However, it appears that this is the only legitimate way to consider the problem *within* anthropology – if one wishes to go further than that, one leaves the realm

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<sup>66</sup> According to the current *IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* Nile monitors (*Varanus niloticus*) belong to the least endangered species and therefore encounters with them may be considered to be relatively common, and commonplace. Zambia has the highest incidence of lightning in the world, which suggests that the other parts of South Central and Southern Africa also have their fair share of lightning, and of the accompanying thunder.

of anthropology, and must no longer aspire to obtain a PhD in that discipline.

The significance however of Mr Lagrange's account (and this justifies its inclusion especially if purified from New-Age lapses) is that sometimes the coincidence is so great as to border on the incredible, and then simply cannot be dismissed as insignificant. There are instances, in the thesis, of massive synchronicity in the Jung / Pauli sense (Jung 1972), most tellingly in the sudden appearance of a whole swarm of bees (recognised as an omen in many cultures world-wide) in reality, when the immediately preceding conversation or dream or ritual also refers to bees; or, more incredibly even (*but I do not for a moment doubt the integrity of the candidate's account*) the appearance of pythons in several contexts relating to his family, once a sacrificial rite for that ('White' Zimbabwean) family had been performed along *sangoma* lines:

Six weeks later on the anniversary of my father's death the pythons made their appearance at the homes of each of my siblings who had participated in the ritual and lived in Zimbabwe. My elder brother who had hosted and performed the ritual walked into his bedroom one evening to find a python curled up on his bed; my other brother was woken by his dogs barking at midnight and had discovered the python curled up on top of his television set, while my sister who lives some six hundred kilometres south had a python stretched out on the curtain rail in the room that Makeba and I had stayed in on our visit.'

The same incredible coincidences also occur (although they could not be called synchronicity then) when the dreamer is shown places and persons that he does not know yet, and that days, weeks or months later turn out to be concentrations, in the landscape, of collective representations and rituals concerning aquatic divinities.

When I say: *incredible*, I mean: I believe Mr Lagrange's account as a statement of integrity, but that account implies that reality is differently organised, and has a different structure, from what is mediated in everyday North Atlantic Modernity (to which also mainstream anthropology belongs), on the basis of the mechanistic<sup>67</sup> physics of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century CE. We are nearing the realm of *Sangoma Science*.

Is anthropology the proper context to explore such challenging indications as to the unexpected nature of reality? I did not think it is, and that was among my reasons to opt out of anthropology. And with all due respect, when I see what anthropology in the hands of the candidate makes of these experiences, I can only conclude that he is insufficiently equipped to handle such questions (which are predominantly philosophical), but that this does not necessarily disqualify him from attaining a PhD in anthropology, provided the present work is substantially revised and pruned.

Meanwhile, his approach to these indications leaves much to be desired even from an anthropological standpoint. His research strategy has been to go to the library for richly textured comparative information, and to play the role of isolated, atomised, individual novice / client – without a noticeable host-community component – for the fieldwork

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<sup>67</sup> By *mechanicism* I understand the world-view (prevailing in Western science until the late 19th c. CE) based on the model of the clockwork: macroscopic, fully determined by material, easily perceptible mechanisms.

component. Perhaps this is the reason why he does not seem to have a proper theory as to what religion does to society. If he would have understood Durkheim's religion theory and would have taken it seriously, he would be much better off.<sup>68</sup> One<sup>69</sup> of the essential services which religion (as part of culture) offers society and its members is that *it creates a self-evident life-world* – an experience of reality that is taken for granted. Society, organisation of the individual personality, predictable social interaction, are largely predicated on the self-evidence that is thus being constructed through collective representations put into action through ritual (and articulated by participants' interpretative subtitling of ritual). Engaging in ritual activities means celebrating these self-evidences, and *therefore does not carry any ultimate implications* in regard of the independent ontological reality of the self-evidences thus constructed, mediated, and perpetuated. It means giving the craving, insecure child's mind in us what it needs most – the reassurance that it is not alone, but well cushioned and protected. In Medieval Europe, all manifestations of nature spoke of God's existence and his glory, and could be used as proofs of God's existence. In North African popular Islam, a pregnancy for which one has been waiting for some years (especially in young women who are overworked, underfed, and whose young husbands, so early in marriage, are often still too intimidated by their young wives overwhelming femininity to sexually make much of an impression upon them), domestic animals that produce twins, lamp oil and matches that last longer than expected – they are all sure and convincing signs of the local saints whose intercession was invoked precisely for such goals.<sup>70</sup> The list could be expanded by myriad more examples, including those from the world of Southern African aquatic divinities, and of the candidate's experiences with their cult.

Religion creates a self-evident reality regardless of ontological proof. Ignoring this insight into the reality-creating nature of culture / religion (which is the backbone of anthropology, as far as I am concerned) means that the candidate reaches immediately, and without

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<sup>68</sup> Now he only accepts it in the bowdlerised Geertzian form of 'model of, and for'... where the religious actor and the latter's conscious perceptions and motivations are put at the centre of religion, so that the entire element of constructing the social through eminently sacred, eminently overwhelming yet arbitrary symbols, is somewhat obscured; yet, taken to its consequences, also Geertz's approach (1966) remains essentially Durkheimian. And for excellent reasons (cf. van Binsbergen 2018 which offers a sustained vindication of Durkheim's religion theory).

<sup>69</sup> In my Durkheim book I identify, in addition, and more directly in line with Durkheim's original formulations, another service and argue it to be even more important: not just the production of self-evidence as lubricant for the ongoing socio-political process, but the imposition of unconditional, unnegotiable sacrality, which makes it possible that, of all human activities, ritual can be the context for the virtually unaltered preservation and transmission of vital cultural items – often across centuries even millennia. As the present book's argument unfolds, I shall identify yet a third and truly crucial condition effected by religion: it links the individual mind to the creative powers of the universe, thus constituting (and annihilating) reality in the most literal sense.

<sup>70</sup> However, there are also, in that part of the world as elsewhere, pregnancies that one is not particularly keen on, notably in the wife of a migrant worker who has been absent for rather longer than nine months. Here popular believe takes recourse, not to the saints, but to the concept of the *Bou-Mergoud* (Dubouloz-Laffin 1943), 'the Sleeping Child', still considered to have been fathered by the woman's legitimate husband, but remaining in the womb for much longer than the usual gestation period. Elsewhere in the Mediterranean region, Graeco-Roman mythology testifies to the common pretext of visiting male gods to explain unexplained and otherwise unwelcome pregnancies, especially in female royals.

grounds, for a naïvely direct claim that in principle disqualifies him from membership of a modern scientific discipline such as anthropology: he experiences the aquatic beings as real, and therefore these *must be* real. In its generality, the argument is false. It cannot be sustained within an academic dissertation – it does not even belong there. These objections address specifically Mr Lagrange’s claims about the ontological reality of the water divinities, in other words, the suggestion that

‘one can go beyond a cultural constructivist position that assumes the *construction* of multiple realities, and entertain the possibility that a more universal transcendental (or transpersonal and transcultural) reality may exist.’<sup>71</sup>

Throughout this chapter I advance a number of reasons why I feel that the candidate confuses what he takes to be demonstrations of such an ulterior reality, with clearly identifiable products of his own conscious and subconscious psychological processes, so that his claims remain utterly unconvincing.

Meanwhile, what the candidate’s apparently veridical precognitive dreams indicate, is that, in some cases, something else is the matter *in addition to* the candidate’s submitting to Southern African collective representations in regard of aquatic divinities. Several explanations could be advanced, but he only accepts the most radical one: the one according to which these aquatic divinities have an independent ontological status, are not figments of the imagination but real. Considering the considerable empirical evidence for telepathy,<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> To this he immediately adds:

‘However, I argue that while it retains some essential core symbolic or archetypal features, it is also subject to culture specific interpretation, symbolic manipulation and construction of meaning.’

But that does not take away the enormity of the initial claim.

<sup>72</sup> Above we have already indicated the remarkable research record concerning the undeniable yet contested existence of the telepathic phenomenon. It is my impression that on the spontaneous, pre-scientific level telepathy (making conscious contact with another conscious human mind without the conspicuous intermediary of the senses) is a common and everyday experience, but given the sensorialist bias of mainstream North Atlantic / global science (‘the senses are the only vehicles of communication between human individuals’) this experience can hardly be articulated in modern scientific terms. Numerous have been the mainstream attempts (cf. Anonymous, ‘Telepathy’, with a selection of dismissive assessments; Baggally 2012 / 1913), in the course of the last hundred years, to deny the occurrence of telepathy and to fault whatever scientific reports, attained by whatever qualitative or quantitative means, to demonstrate telepathic effects. Personally I find the extensive body of scientific evidence – often featuring levels of statistical significance and methodological strictness that would convince most statistically competent social-science researchers – impressive and rather convincing. The sceptical dismissal is often based not on accusations of fraud or error but on faulting the overall research design of telepathic experiments – but against the background of the fact that no research design in the social sciences (including psychology) has ever been found to be beyond fundamental methodological criticism. Luckhurst (2002) situates the emergence of the concept of telepathy in the late 19<sup>th</sup> c. CE. Formally he may be right that the term was coined then (notably by F.W.H. Myers in 1882, Anonymous, ‘Telepathy’); however, the sheer experience of telepathy was already noted in classical Graeco-Roman Antiquity (Dodds 1946, cf. 1951).

The claim of telepathy is common worldwide in shamanic and divinatory circles. In Southern Africa, the common, collectively held ideal is that the diviner (of either gender) knows beforehand that his prospective client is on her or his way to consult him, and knows the nature of the complaint even

telepathy would be a much more obvious explanation: these collective representations exist in the minds of the members of cultic congregations around sacred pools, and in the minds of diviners familiar with them, and all that is required then is that this information seeps through to the candidate's mind, which already is over-receptive as a deliberate result of the sensitising (not to say brainwashing) practices, pharmacological routines<sup>73</sup> and eager expectations, to which he is subject as a novice. Apart from the telepathic explanation, the idea (although in itself problematic, but again not without some serious empirical grounds) of precognition of future experiences could also account for virtually all the extraordinary experiences the candidate claims, without taking recourse to the simplistic ontological claim as to the independent autonomous existence of the aquatic divinities, God, the devil, ancestors or other supernatural beings which Modernity has come to consider (for better or worse) figments of the imagination. What is missing, however, in these otherwise attractive explanations is the sense of direction and of urgency, that emanates so clearly from the candidate's account: these are the very places he sees in his dream, and he is drawn to them, rather than to the individual minds of the cult adepts living around these pools.

#### G. DEMON-INFESTED SPOTS IN THE NORTH AFRICAN LANDSCAPE

At this point I am reminded of a situation I encountered over 40 years ago, during my first fieldwork, on popular Islam in the Ĥumiri highlands of North-Western Tunisia – spottily covered in this book's end bibliography. Here in the immediate vicinity of the agglomeration of the village of Sidi Mhammad, which was stretched out along a steep mountain slope from west to east, people recognised half a dozen of 'heavy places': spots in the landscape where it would be dangerous to pass alone or by night, because they were considered to be, more than usual for undomesticated natural space, to be infested with demons, جنون *jnūn* – while also the danger of encountering the deadly demon غرين *Ghirban* at mid-day was considered to be enhanced there.<sup>74</sup> Nobody in the village could explain to me why, of all places, these very spots had these connotations. Until I mapped them, set them out against the complex history of human habitation in the village since 1800, and found that all of them had been occupied by homesteads in previous generations, but that this had no longer been the case for the past half century. There were hardly any other such previously inhabited spots that were not considered 'heavy spots' at the time of my fieldwork. Emically, this state of affairs was explained by the negative supernatural forces these spots had; analytically, I was inclined to reverse the equation and to attribute the negative numinous connotations of these places to their recent abandonment. That abandonment in itself was readily explicable from the local dynamics of nominally agnatic [= 'reckoning descent in the paternal line'] residential groups over recent centuries, and the

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before the client has communicated this to him. This belief entails the principal test of a diviner's capability, and puts the practicing diviner / *sangoma* under severe pressure with every new consultation. I have often been under that pressure and have experienced it as agony – but as an agony that nearly always resolves itself in a divinatory performance that satisfies the client. It has been my impression that such agony does enhance the diviner's openness to extrasensory information concerning the client's predicament. Whatever the explanation, it is telepathy which needs to be explained – although an early enthusiastic, Savage (1903), made it the explanation, in its own right, of other paranormal phenomena, taking telepathy in itself for granted.

<sup>73</sup> Consumption of narcotics is often part of the *sangoma* routine, also at the Francistown lodge where I studied – although I myself as a *thwaza* or *sangoma* never took drugs, nor needed any to attain trance.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. the lemma 'THE MYTHICAL BEING ĠRBĀN IN THE LIGHT OF COMPARATIVE MYTHOLOGY', in: van Binsbergen 2015: 195-196.





fluences were claimed, especially pale green lights emanating at night from the few local saintly shrines of highest repute.

Perhaps I was not sufficiently immersed in Humiri society to spontaneously share the villagers's awe of these 'heavy spots'. But fifteen years later, during fieldwork among the Manjacos of Guinea-Bissau, the pressures of fieldwork (especially the social obligation to begin the day with an enormous intake of rum – brought by suppliants to the head of our compound, who was the region's principal land priest) I was no longer capable of maintaining my Western analytical gaze, and temporarily fell into a sorcery anxiety almost indistinguishable from that of my adoptive local family.

What anthropology should do in such cases is to present the socio-cultural explanation, which allows us to pinpoint if, and in what respect, an ulterior metaphysical explanation is needed. The candidate's claim is that such need exists in the case of the Southern African sacred pools, but in its present form his claim is unconvincing because he neglects the several social and parapsychological explanations that must be considered, and if at all possible ruled out, in the first place.

I take it that the significance of the candidate's dreams lies in the suggestion they contain to the effect that from the sacred spots in the Southern African landscape such influences emanate that they can produce veridical, objective images in the culturally prepared minds of humans residing in the very wide vicinity, up to hundreds of kilometres away from these sacred places. However, even such a suggestion does not in the least mean that the aquatic divinities venerated in those places have a tangible, real existence. Rather, we seem to have a case here of 'faith that can remove mountains'.<sup>75</sup> Since the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century CE, the world appears to professional physicists not as a separate autonomous reality in its own right, but as one of the interacting elements in a tripartite system, of which the experimentator, and the experiment, are the other two elements. If this could be more or less correct as a working hypothesis, we have a framework where any claim as to the independent, objective ontological status of any object out in the visible world would be unfounded; instead, we would have to see that object, in its momentary and situational phenomenality, as the manifestation of its complex interaction with observer and observation, *and see the apparent object implicitly as a product of that interaction*. From this perspective, it is not entirely unthinkable that a massively held collective representation (that of aquatic divinities) projected onto the South African landscape for a thousand years or more, and being the object of millions of ritual actions, has created – not so much aquatic divinities which then can go and live an independent, autonomous, material life of their own, but has at least created the sense impressions as if these aquatic divinities did in fact exist. The effect might be all the stronger, the more widespread and the older the collective representations in question are (and in a footnote above I have already endorsed the candidate's suggestion that the veneration of aquatic spirits may extend from Southern Africa to West Africa and even to Eurasia, spanning at least a few thousand years for the more specific forms with junior aquatic divinities, and perhaps up

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<sup>75</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:2:

'And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.'

to two hundred thousand years (the full age of Pandora's Box) for the more comprehensive, supreme forms underlying the Rainbow Serpent in Africa, Australia and South America). We may have a splendid case of virtuality<sup>76</sup> here: *the aquatic divinities are strictly speaking unreal, but they may produce an effect that is real*. The effect I am speaking of here is well-known not only from the world of parapsychology (under the chapter of *haunted places*), but also from comparative religion (where many holy places are considered, by local adepts, to be permeated with a particular heightened spiritual form of blessing / charisma; the cathedral of Chartres, France, is a famous case in point); and from *belles lettres*, where the *genius loci* / *the guardian spirit of the place* has been a recognised and celebrated theme ever since Antiquity (cf. Fauth 1977; Mohan 1987).

An argument somehow along these lines would have highlighted the significance which the candidate attaches to his remarkable dreams, in ways that invite sophisticated further argument in a number of complementary discussions, rather than falling in the believer's trap of considering them 'real' in a naïvely common-sense way.

Meanwhile I should point out that the candidate is in two minds about what he means by the objective ontological status he ascribes to the aquatic divinities of his dreams. The most obvious reading of his text would be that he believes that these are tangible, material, 'embodied', snake-like beings actually residing in the sacred pools of the Southern African landscape. However, there is also a passage where, much more prudently, he qualifies his claim as to independent ontological status, to mean that they are *archetypes* – Jung's broadly organising principles of the individual and the collective unconscious. In the latter case one would hardly claim a material existence for them – they would rather be a pattern of organisation making itself felt, in repetitive and predictable ways, in individual dreams in which the hypothetical collective unconscious may be claimed to manifest itself. Considering the candidate's exposure to Jungian therapy earlier in life, this is a promising line of argument, since it no longer necessitates the crude common-sense realism of the initial ontological claim of material autonomy of the spirits; but this perspective invites perusal of another massive body of scholarly literature: the critique of Jungian psychology and therapy – which is rather outside the scope of this thesis, and outside our candidate's competence. More than one would expect on the basis of the candidate's text, in recent decades Jung's concept of the collective unconscious has been vehemently attacked,<sup>77</sup> among others by American anthropologists, who considered the concept of the collective unconscious mystifying, crypto-fascist, even implicitly anti-Semitic – since Jung indicated that not only humankind as a whole, but also families, clans, nations, ethnic groups, would have a specific collective unconscious, so that by implication Jews, as such, would have a different collective unconscious from non-Jews. (Jung 1978: 99; much of the controversy between Jung and Freud was organised along the lines of this ethnic difference, with the non-practising, agnostic Jew Freud hoping that Jung, as a 'gentile', would make psychoanalysis, so far stereotypically perceived and dis-

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<sup>76</sup> Cf. van Binsbergen 1997, 1998, 2001, final version 2015.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Noll 1994, 1997; Ellwood 1999; Segal 2007; Wilmsen 1993.

missed as a Jewish perspective, acceptable to the wider world; Gay 1998). At the background is a discussion about the nature of culture: ever since Tylor (1948 / 1871) defined culture in a way that still has currency in modern anthropology, the dogma has been that culture can only be *acquired*, notably through a social interaction process, and can never be innate – although the notion of a collective unconscious seems to imply that there are images and representations that belong to the collective heritage of humankind (or of specific divisions of humankind) without being *deliberately learned through a social interaction process* – that they are innate, in other words. Snakes, night journeys, pools, light – as a symbolic repertoire easily interpreted in terms of the mechanics of procreation (intercourse, womb, amniotic fluid, birth) – are recognised candidates for inclusion among the items in the collective unconscious (e.g. Bodkin 1934), and so are the Jungian concepts *animus* and *anima* as perhaps universal organisation forms of the dynamics of gender and filiation.

In fairness, the possibility that specific images which anthropologists have habitually regarded as collective representations (i.e. consciously and deliberately invented by humans and transmitted through a social learning process) may yet have to be regarded in a manner that is less conscious, volitional and social, and that therefore Jung's archetypes may not be total nonsense,<sup>78</sup> is pressed upon us from at least two different directions:

- (1) state-of-the-art neurobiology (which maintains that, transculturally, many of the figments of human imagination can be predicted and explained by looking at the specific mechanisms of the human neural system including the brain; and
- (2) long-range comparative mythology, where certain mythemes (for instance that of the celestial snake, very relevant in the present context) are argued to have had a continuous existence for scores of millennia,<sup>79</sup> as if there were some stabilising force that keeps them from doing the obvious: dissolving into a state where they are no longer recognisable and continuous, but gradually dispersing into incoherent fragmentation, transformation, and oblivion.

The long list of human universals – at least universals shared by all Anatomically Modern Humans past and present for the past 200 ka – (Brown 1991) suggests that these mythemes

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<sup>78</sup> A prominent authority on rock art and Palaeolithic symbolism, Emanuel Anati (1999), repeatedly takes recourse to the concept of archetype in a more or less Jungian sense. However, much of his symbol interpretation is gratuitous and unconvincing. E.g. in Anati 1999: 159, that author interprets a rock art image of a shamanic figure without conspicuous breasts yet as female, on the flimsy grounds that a line connects the crotch of this figure with the crotch of a hunter which is also depicted (could not the line indicate a line of filiation, or even of identity, between the hunter and the other figure?); appeal is made to a triangular vulva symbol that however is nowhere to be seen; two dots in the image are insistently interpreted as 'action'. It is this kind of sweeping unaccountability that has given Jungian approaches, and even rock-art studies, a bad name.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Witzel 2012; van Binsbergen 2006a, 2006b, 2012b, where a bold attempt is made to reconstruct the mythological contents of what I have called 'Pandora's Box', i.e. Anatomically Modern Humans's collective heritage of a cultural package developed, managed and transmitted inside Africa before the Out-of-Africa Exodus, 60-80 ka BP.

find themselves in excellent company and that, perhaps, we have tended to overestimate the tendency to, and degree of, *cultural drift*, i.e. the tendency of items of culture to grow out of focus, disintegrate from the tight integration of local culture in which they initially find themselves, and erode and transform *sui generis*. Neurobiology claims to have a very different answer concerning the nature of the stabilising force assuring the continuity of mythemes across more than 100 ka, but neither can we rule out the possibility that some these mythemes may be somehow innate. The third possibility, argued in the candidate's work, is that these mythemes reflect independent, embodied, eternal beings that have a material existence out there in reality and that via the mythemes communicate with the human consciousness. Here we may be only at the threshold of what promises to be some of the most exciting fields of research of the coming centuries; but so far the candidate's contribution to this field is simply too flimsy, based on too meagre empirical evidence gathered through fieldwork, and too little theoretical and comparative reading.

Therefore, although it makes an enormous difference whether the candidate claims that the aquatic beings represent an ontological reality, or admits that they may be nothing but psychic organisation patterns at the individual and / or the collective level, in both cases the theoretical implications are equally problematic, and need to be considered in much more critical detail than is the case in the present version of the thesis.

There is a point where these psychoanalytical approaches can be merged with the orientation of the candidate as a fieldworker. Before one can plausibly use one's own forms of introspection (including dreams) as stepping-stones towards a scientific argument (and the candidate reminds us rightly that this is what Freud and Jung themselves have done,<sup>80</sup> as numerous other recognised scholars), what is required first of all is such a level of critical self-awareness, that the most obvious traps of self-deception are confronted and provisionally ruled out.

Where does anthropologically relevant autobiography end, and the fiction of personal myth begin? Clearly we are well advanced into personal myth when the candidate writes, as if he has a perfect personal memory of the event (which is simply impossible for psychological mechanisms that have been scientifically established beyond the slightest doubt):

'At the age of about 6 months I was left playing in the playpen in the garden under the "watchful" eye of a childminder. A cobra had slithered into my playpen and I was *intrigued with this new mobile plaything*. On seeing the snake the childminder fled in terror leaving me to the mercy of my new playmate. Fortunately our cat had joined me in the playpen and had kept the cobra at bay until one of my brothers had encountered [ sic ] the scene and came to my rescue. The maid was discharged of her duties [ sic ] and the cat assumed a legendary place in the annals of our home. This is not just an idle story but is relevant to the 'calling' that I was to subsequently have (footnote)' (my italics – WvB).

It is impossible for an adult to have *an authentic personal memory of being intrigued* as a six-months' old child – the account clearly follows a preset template, evidently largely informed by the fact that the narrative had fondly circulated in the family for years (including the almost

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<sup>80</sup> However, there is an important difference between their aims and the candidate's: these pioneers of psychoanalysis – who in recent decades have been under severe – albeit anachronistic – attack for being essentially unscientific, but that is not the point now – used their own dreams to gain insight into dreams, *specifically*, not to gain ulterior, universal insights into the true nature of reality in general.

hidden message of exploited African labour – the maid's – as devoid of labour rights and to be dismissed at will, as a defenceless scapegoat). Incidentally, almost identical miraculous tales have a wide circulation, featuring such protagonists as Heracles / Hercules, Alexander the Great (Plutarch 1914 / 2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE), an anonymous child saved by St Guinefort; a variation is the Faithful Hound Motif, Aarne-Thompson 178A, where the predator is not a snake but a wolf. Perhaps we are yet in the presence of an archetype, after all...Surprisingly, like with *tep tepi*, there is a possible Ancient Egyptian link here: in the latter iconography, the cat appears as the snake Apep's main adversary. Was Lagrange actually perceiving archetypes, à la Jung?



Fig. 2.2a. Cat killing mythical snake Apep; from the Papyrus of Anhai, British Museum London, UK, 2004

Not for the first nor the last time, autobiography gives way to a personalised myth in the candidate's hands. His footnote at this passage reads:

'Many *izangoma* report significant experiences with snakes in their childhood (see Atta's account – Appendix One).'

Reinterpreting a person's life history in the light of a ready template is nothing new – e.g. the Synoptic Gospels open with such an attempt, showing Jesus to be the Messiah promised by the Prophets; Jesus's childhood stories can even be demonstrated to be partly formed after a template provided by the famous *Jataka* stories of the childhood and previous incarnations of the Buddha, half a continent and half a millennium away. Miraculous birth is one such template, attending the lives of many great men from Moses and Sargon to Buddha, Alexander and Jesus. But good anthropology, like ambition, *should be made of sterner stuff* (Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Act 3, scene 2, 91–94).

Unavoidably, anthropological fieldwork is ridden with *transference*, in other words, sets a context in which the fieldworker's interaction with the research participants, and the fieldworker's self-perception, is numinously saturated with forms of infantile conflict springing directly, and timelessly, from the fieldworker's own life history as archived in the

latter's unconscious. My book *Intercultural encounters* discusses this condition, which was my second reason to take a relative view of the anthropological claims of fieldwork as a scientific method to produce reliable and valid transcultural knowledge. Part of the ethics of fieldwork, as I see it, is to identify such transference in oneself, and to critically compensate for it. However, this insight is certainly not part of the candidate's fieldwork method. Although in my opinion it is very obvious, from Mr Lagrange's overall situation as well as from his specific personal accounts, that his stance *vis-à-vis* Southern African landscape-centred religion is full of transference based on his own and his family's life history (as marginalised Zimbabwean 'Whites' of a century's standing), the idea of counterbalancing this state of affairs against his claim of the ontological status of the aquatic divinities does not noticeably occur to him. Born in the then Rhodesia in the mid-1950s as a fourth-generation member of an immigrant 'White' family, growing up on his family's farm near the Mozambican border with also an unmistakable but utterly unfulfilled longing for intimacy with the local African people, their landscape and their land spirits, yet instead being sent to school in South Africa under apartheid, while in 1975 (at the eve of the Zimbabwean War of Liberation, 1965-1980) his family had to leave the parental farm for threat of massacre and within a month their aged neighbours were actually massacred – while after the Zimbabwean War of Liberation the family was threatened with eviction and violence and their title to the land dismissed... There is enough pain and anxiety here to bring Mr Lagrange, or anyone else for that matter, to a point where

‘...I was becoming increasingly aware of a “presence” that was guiding me’,

and where we can begin to understand the candidate's specific form of radical application towards African land spirits later in life. In that application he affirms an African birth right that – from his personal perspective – his more highly pigmented fellow-Africans were denying him, under the new socio-political dispensation that was the result of the War of Liberation. Does it go too far to see in his spiritual quest an attempt to establish and cultivate a direct, personal, spiritual relationship with the land spirits while largely bypassing, even ignoring, the 'Black' African actors that are the owners of these collective representations and, as such, the historic rightful owners of the land? This is how I read a dream like the following:

*Lagrange's dream of pythons in the pool, at the time of fieldwork.* The dream started with me being in the back of my brother's pick-up truck while he was reversing it into the garage at his farm in Zimbabwe. As I hopped off the back my brother gave an apple to me and his son who was also with us. The apples were sweet and delicious and I noticed he had a large container of them. As we walked out of the garage I got a good view of the Zimbabwean bush and rock covered hills (*kopjes*). Someone told us they had just seen elephant not far away and they were going to see them, and we could hear them trumpeting in the distance. I walked towards the swimming pool located on the lawn and as I approached it I was amazed to see two large pythons swimming fast around the perimeter of the pool, one following the other. Their skin was shimmering and multicoloured and had zigzag and diamond markings.<sup>81</sup> The skin colour sparkled and changed colour as they

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<sup>81</sup> The dream iconography is strikingly reminiscent of the markings on the four divination tablets in use in South Central Africa, including Zimbabwe, among *sangomas* and comparable diviners; cf. van Binsbergen 1995a, 1996b.

swam, and every now and then their backs broke the surface of the water. I was aware that they were watching me as they swam. I rushed to tell my brother and his son, and warned them not to try and shoot them because they are a protected species. I knew the real reason was because they were our ancestors<sup>82</sup> but reasoned they wouldn't understand that. We got back to the pool and now the pythons were resting quietly, stretched out in the water, just looking at us. They were completely unthreatening. Suddenly it felt like I was underneath them at the bottom of the pool. There was a white goat and another animal with its mouth wide open standing on the bottom. A voice told me the animal was a hippopotamus. I then saw a small fox terrier dog sitting with them, seemingly very content. I was now out of the pool and was worried the pythons might try to strangle and eat the dog and I tried to call it out of the water. Suddenly another dog, my sister's Staffordshire terrier that recently died,<sup>83</sup> came bounding out of the pool to lick me and play. As we stood at the edge of the pool looking down at these beautiful creatures a big rumble of thunder [ another archetype – WvB ] broke out across the sky in my dream and I instantly woke up.'

My suggestion to interpret the candidate's field experiences in the light of the tragic family history, is done in good faith, and is inspired by selected elements in my own life history.

I know that, in the late 1980s in Botswana, my own eager acceptance of what was locally articulated as an ancestral calling to become a *sangoma*, had much to do with the desire to gain the symbolic equivalent of a birthright in Southern Africa, when suddenly and unexpectedly, moving from Zambia into the much more politicised social space of Botswana (and the socially and economically contested space Francistown and the Northeastern District, in particular) just prior to Mr Mandela's release from decades of imprisonment, I found myself being treated as an hereditary enemy of the African people, after living in that part of the world, on and off, for nearly 20 years, internalising a handful of its cultures and languages, and successfully identifying with the people concerned in such a way as to end up as the adopted son of a Zambian royal chief, and the adopted member of the village of Shumbayama, classificatory son, brother, father, father-in-law, and grandfather, of scores of uncontested Zambians.

If my suggestion makes any sense at all (and I apologise if it does not), claiming the ontological reality of the water divinities (i.e. land spirits) of Southern Africa is only a logical step, not so much because there is empirical proof for such a reality, but because only such a reality would bring Mr Lagrange's quest to find a legitimate, spiritual home in Southern Africa to full fruition, to an unassailable conclusion. If the water spirits were calling him time and again, what human forces, even if 'Black' African ones, would have the right to deny his birthright?

'Another person who compared my appearance to a[n aquatic being ] was the old diviner (Mrs K.) I met in Masvingo, Zimbabwe, who had narrowly escaped being taken under water. On being asked what *njuzu* looked like, she told me that they looked like me, with pale skin (...).'

'...My companions appeared awestruck at the sudden appearance of the rainbow, and Makeba excitedly exclaimed, "You see [, Charles ], that's *Inkosazana*. She is happy you are here!"'

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<sup>82</sup> The choice of the word *ancestor* seems to give the candidate away, as one craving for a recognised blood tie with the land even in the face of historical facts to the contrary. Unless we must assume that the mythical animals – like those in Native North American and in Australian Aboriginal life-worlds – are to be situated in some primordial time (*Tep Tepi*??) where myths are engendered and the somatic differentiation and dispersal of Anatomically Modern Humans – or even the mythical differentiation between animals and humans, for that matter – had not yet taken place.

<sup>83</sup> Note the implication that the dream is partly or wholly situated in the realm of the dead.

'...It was also while we were on this visit that I was to find out that Atta had stolen and sacrificed the white goat that I had offered to Inkosazana at the pool in December 1998, in order to try and attain [ the water divinity's ] gifts for himself [ sc.: instead of allowing the candidate to come into the full possession of the powers that the water divinity had in store for him... – WvB ]

This is not meant as an argument *ad hominem* against Mr Lagrange's claim of the reality of the aquatic divinities, but simply the application of the prominent anthropologist Firth's advice Lagrange himself quotes:

'Rather, Firth believes that we should concern ourselves more with the "knower than the known, with the social position of the claimant and claim rather than with the question of the objective reality of what is claimed"'

a reminder also to the effect that, if one can understand so well why he makes that claim given his own psychological economy, he needs to address such a critique explicitly before his point can ever be taken seriously. Simply pointing at the existence of the 'Anthropology of Extraordinary Experience', or citing Hume (1779) on believing, is no acceptable way out of this dilemma.

Trying to articulate what I believe to be the candidate's existential and spiritual problem (this may be overstepping my role as external examiner, but after all, I am a fully qualified and practising *sangoma*, invited as External Examiner partly on the strength of that particular quality, and such articulation is well commensurate with it) may even be greatly to his benefit, for it suggests the way in which the culminating initiation which so far he has been seeking in vain may yet be effected: *through much more comprehensive, existential, engagement with the 'Black' African people who cannot and must not be bypassed on the way to the spirits of the land*. So far his quest has been characterised by an individual and isolated grappling with selected collective representations of others. This seems to have amounted to a transcultural appropriation of cultural knowledges and practices, without being accompanied by committed and profound social engagement with the present-day owners of these knowledges and practices. Thus, when the candidate's family finally begins to engage in ritual directed at the divinities, we cannot deny that they have come a long way as compared to the 'Rhodies' ('entrenched "White" Rhodesians') they were forty years ago, but still they do this in isolation, using canned beer not home-brew, before, but not with, 'Black' Africans – almost as an act, not of submission, but of defiance.

The next day, the family were again called to congregate in the hut while more fervent praying and singing took place, and this time my brothers also had to beat the *ubulawu* [ the sacred foam / liquid ] and pray. We were then led outside to the tree where the cow was passively tethered. We had already made an arrangement with the foreman of one of my brothers who was willing to do the actual immolation, and he was waiting with the cow. My elder brother then addressed the crowd (the family, workers and many curious onlookers) informing them about my calling. He then prayed to our ancestors<sup>84</sup> and dedicated the cow to them. The act of immolation was swift and clean and the cow bel-

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<sup>84</sup> See the note on the use of this word, above. The concept (multi-interpretable, and manipulable) of ancestor brings to the fore the many layers of ambiguity involved when persons of European extraction engage in ecstatic *sangoma* rituals. When my wife and I introduced the concept in our families in NW Europe, we met with surprising support from our relatives. For over a thousand years, downright veneration of ancestors has not been



lowed as it fell, which led to much celebration and ululating from the *izangoma* as this was the most important sign of ancestral acceptance. The rest of the day was spent dissecting the carcass and placing the meat in the shrine to stay overnight for the ancestors to savour.<sup>85</sup>

Not appropriation but only social identification with the owners of these representations, their culture, and their community, can offer the breakthrough which our candidate, even apart from his PhD trajectory, seems to have been waiting for during so many years.

Finally, for the thesis's argument to be taken seriously another point needs to be considered explicitly and in much detail. Throughout the work, and especially in the numerous appendices, we are presented with *the claim that the ritual specialists privileged to serve the water divinities as diviners and healers, are taken under the water (of the sea or of pools) for a duration (from 45 minutes to 7 days or longer, even up to three months and nine days, as the work does not fail to specify in very precise terms) that would far exceed the human capacity to survive under water without technological aids – be they a simple breathing reed, detachable diving equipment, a diving clock, a large air-filled cavity under water, etc.* That this representation exists at the *emic* level, should not surprise us: comparatively, the same claim of a non-fatal prolonged stay under water has been made for mermaids (nymphs, nixes *etc.*) and their presumed human victims / charges / lovers throughout Western Eurasia since Antiquity, the West Asian myths surrounding Oannes / Dagon, the Israelite submerged prophet Jonas, the Greek shape-shifting (in emulation of cyclical element transformation; van Binsbergen 2012) gods Proteus, Nereus *etc.*, the aquatic connotations of major Mediterranean and West Asian goddesses such as Neith, Athena and Anahita (whose further specialisations in weaponry and weaving also fit into the pattern of the Southern African Inkosazana / Nomkhubulwana heavenly princess) while iconographic evidence to the same effect has been claimed to exist in the Tassili n'Ajjer rock art complex of the Central Sahara dating from the Neolithic.<sup>85</sup>

The candidate seems to be oblivious to one major dimension of this *emic* representation: *its parallel with physical death*, which marks the submersion representation as relating to the initiatory rite of passage (this theme in itself is mentioned in the work), notably to *sangomahood*, and links up with the themes of nakedness (although this is also a birth motif, as the candidate rightly acknowledges), drowning, maggots that must be eaten (as in the Land of the Dead), the theme of the Cattle under Water (which, as cattle of the –

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part of Christian or post-Christian European culture (although All-Souls rites, the tending of graves, masquerades, mendicant processions, naming practices, godparent practices, testify, as survivals, of earlier customs). In Lagrange's case, were real biological ancestors meant, mainly associated with the distant northern continent? Or, out of this collective, only those close lineal ancestors that in recent decades shared the same African environment and were buried there? Or is the reference, less strictly, and more numinously and vaguely, to the collective spirits of the nearby landscape, who by the very acts of invocation and sacrifice are implicated in the lives of the displaced 'Whites' that are deeply in need of these spirits's blessing and acceptance? The concept of ancestor tends to have a particularly flexible polysemy, which makes it eminently useful when accidental, acquired territorial claims have to be presented as innate, immutable and existential ones, and the other way around. In my first fieldwork, in North Africa, the dynamics of the veneration of local saints and shrines in *Humiri* nominal popular Islam turned out to revolve on these dynamics.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. the 'swimmers' panel depicted in Lhote 1959 and other such depictions more recently reported from the Central Sahara, which was well-watered at the time this rock art was made.

river-dwelling! – ancestors, occurs throughout Southern African ecstatic cults, but which comes back in Angolan and Zambian mythology, and also in that of the Mediterranean around the mythical figures of Hercules, Cacus, Geryon, *etc.* as well as in the Northern European fairy-tale of ‘Big Claus and Little Claus’ (Andersen 1952 / originally 1835).



Fig. 2.3. The so-called swimmers’ panel among the rock art of Tassili n’Ajjer, Central Sahara

Despite Bernal’s well-intended but questionable insistence on the African (rather than Asian)<sup>86</sup> continuities in the figure of the Greek goddess Athena, not she, but a more disreputable Greek goddess seems to offer the main indication of some continuity between the Southern African collective representations concerning ‘going under water’, and the Mediterranean. Parallel to the dominant account of Helena’s causing the Trojan war by eloping with Paris / Alexander (already in the Homeric poems), there are accounts (Euripides, *Helena*; Herodotus, *Historiae*, II) according to which Helena was totally innocent: foreseeing her fate, the shape-shifting sea-god Proteus had hidden her near his residence (the Isle of Pharos facing the later Alexandria, Egypt) and had fabricated an effigy of Helena to go to Troy. Hence at the end of the Trojan war Menelaus could collect Helena unscathed from Proteus, and without misgivings. Apparently it was on the same visit to Egypt that Helena, like Abraham’s wife Sarah, ended up in the Egyptian king’s harem, later to be reclaimed by her rightful original husband. The same happened to Sarah again *vis-à-vis* the Palestinian king Abimelech (*Genesis* 20:2 *f.*), and with the wife of Sarah’s son Isaac, Rebekah, and Abimelech (*Genesis* 26:8 *f.*); on all these occasions the husband dissimulated his role as spouse and merely presented himself as the wife’s brother (he was a close agnatic kinsman anyway). The great but controversial Semitist Cyrus Gordon (1962) has explored the conspicuous Greek-Israelite continuities emanating from these examples. These episodes are structurally reminiscent of Achilles’ being hidden in a harem in Skyros<sup>87</sup> for fear he would join the Trojan war, only to be

<sup>86</sup> For the Asian connotations of Athena, cf. Karst 1931; and my recent book on Karst: van Binsbergen 2021 (the index to that volume).

<sup>87</sup> The relevant sources are nicely summarised in: Anonymous, Achilles; Philostratus Junior, *Imagines* I; Scholiast on Homer’s *Iliad*, IX, 326; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* XIII, 162–180; Ovid, *Tristia* II, 409–412 (mentioning a Roman tragedy on this subject); Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* III.13.8; Statius, *Achilleid* I, 689–880, II, 167 *f.*

found out when showing unwomanly enthusiasm for weaponry shown to him by Odysseus – cf. the weaponry associated with the aquatic goddesses Neith, Anahita and Athena. Remarkably, Achilles (who especially in the Black Sea area was primarily venerated, not as a hero before Troy but as a sea god) is reputed to have been joined in matrimony with Helena after his death.



Fig. 2.4. A scene from the motion picture *The Abyss* (J.Cameron, 1989)

These various Greek and Biblical myths appear to be systematic transformations of an underlying pattern that may also have been the prototype of central elements of the Southern African belief in aquatic divinities; the more precise situation of that prototype in space and time remains a point for further research. Meanwhile a puzzling detail is the Southern African prohibition on crying, imposed on the relatives of those considered to be 'taken under water' at the end of their training for ritual leadership. Not only in the Mediterranean, but throughout Eurasia we are familiar with the theme of the crying god or goddess, creating through this act rivers, bees, humankind, etc. Why then the Southern African taboo on crying? Perhaps because it implies a forbidden confusion of the human and the divine category – but much further research is required on this point.

Prolonged total immersion without technological aids, that under normal circumstances would be absolutely fatal, but immersion under the protection of an immense aquatic water being is turned into a physically and spiritually rewarding experience, also constitutes the apotheosis of an excellent modern science-fiction movie, *The Abyss*, directed by James Cameron, 1989.

However, just like the candidate tacitly proceeds from *emic* to *etic* level (i.e. analytical distance phrased in a universalising scientific idiom) in his claim as to the ontological reality of the aquatic divinities, he makes the same tacit – and as far as I am concerned, intolerable – transition in his claim that humans going under water for a normally fatal duration of time is not just a metaphor for a state of transformative seclusion, but is a tangible reality at the level of realism in which anthropological discourse is normally cast, and in which it is normally understood. Opting out of that discourse may offer glimpses of bewildering aspects of reality such as are usually concealed from our consciousness – but also expells the candidate from the framework where PhD theses can be examined, and approved.

## 2.4. Conclusion

This chapter addresses a number of well-known problems in the study of ecstatic religion in Africa. In the first place, what Max Gluckman and his associates within the Manchester School identified as ‘the limits of naïvity in social anthropology’ (subtitle of Gluckman 1964). Although participant observation in fieldwork has established itself as the standard method of knowledge formation in anthropology since the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. CE, there are many other sources of information on the cultures and societies of Africa, within a wide range of disciplines from genetics and soil science to comparative religion and comparative mythology; and these sciences, auxiliary though they may appear from the standpoint of anthropology, have the advantage that they are not so severely limited in space and time as fieldwork is – the latter typically executed by one person within a period seldom exceeding a few years and within a space that can be adequately covered on foot, horseback, motorbike, or in a motorcar, within a few days. At the beginning of his career, one of the most significant modern African intellectuals, Valentin Mudimbe, identified what he called ‘the colonial library’ (the sum total of scholarly insights gathered on Africa under colonial conditions) as a principal factor in the marginalisation and subjugation of Africans, but in subsequent decades he moved more and more to a position where he acknowledged the unique accumulation of valid knowledge under colonial conditions, and advocated their critical use towards a self-reflective African science today, in the hands of primarily Africans. This contradiction presents itself clearly in the Lagrange case: his fieldwork left much to be desired, but the saving grace of his thesis was the minute perusal of the very extensive body of earlier writings on Southern Africa largely produced under ‘White’ minority rule. Also in the following chapters we shall see that the path to greater insight into African ecstatic spiritualities lies in such comparative and historical research as is per definition outside the reach of the fieldworker, and which only diligent library work and theoretical reflection can open up (against the background of much critical awareness of the ideological and hegemonic pitfalls involved).

Another illuminating perspective relevant in the Lagrange case is that for which I have elsewhere (van Binsbergen 2015) coined the term ‘vicarious reflection’. The term was deliberately ambiguous, implying

- both the humble, sympathetic and reticently sensitive, expert philosophical reflection into areas and problematics where the original, African owners of a problem or a predicament would be less inclined or less equipped to venture, for any number of reasons (being preoccupied by even more serious problems; being underprivileged in the fields of education, library resources, publication venues, funding; being politically, ideologically, or socially prohibited from publicly confronting these topics, *etc.*)
- and the hegemonic, arrogant, callous tendency for Northern scholars to assume a position of leadership and monopoly in the contemplation of the problems of the South.

Mr Lagrange’s dilemma is as tragic as it is familiar. In terms of political economy and history he is both part and parcel of Southern African life, scion of a ‘White’ farming family that has

lived, worked, and displayed entrepreneurial activities in the region for a century – and yet in many respects debarred<sup>88</sup> from the status of being African because, somatically and politically – given the history of deprivation and violent struggle somatically highly pigmented people had to go through in the last few centuries – that identity has increasingly come to be reserved for 'Blacks' and unavailable for 'Whites'. Fed from African soil, with African landscapes burned onto his retina, yet survivor of the devastating violence to which 'White' families have often been subjected (though never at the same scale as 'Black' families suffered at the hands of 'Whites' in the same region in the course of the last two centuries) Lagrange deeply resents the outsidership that history has imposed upon him, and clamours for the affirmation of an African birth right. As a European-born researcher, who graduated to the status of an adoptive son of an African king and a certified *sangoma*, I understand Lagrange's predicament and have much sympathy for it – yet under the circumstances, such a chip on one's shoulder may well make it extremely difficult for one to do good fieldwork and to summon the kind of integrity and humility required for that purpose, and then the alternative of comparative library research appears a blessing in disguise. Lagrange's fieldwork and ethnography were mediocre – his library research however has brought to light and synthesised essential riches of the older scholarly literature on Southern Africa, and convinced us once more that the road to further insight lies not so much in more fieldwork, but in more comparison, synthesis, and theory. Focussing on aquatic spirits in the Southern African universe, and affirming their enormous significance more than any commentator has done before, Lagrange has rendered Africa and scholarship a great service that convincingly compensates for the inevitable, almost congenital, shortcomings of his fieldwork.

A third dilemma (cf. van Binsbergen 1979b / 2015b) concerns the contradiction between analytical distance versus substantial identification as a fellow-believer, that invariably attends all good fieldwork across cultural and linguistic boundaries... In fieldwork one has no option but to go with the flow of the social and ritual process within the host community – the relatively extended time frame (at least several months, preferably years, and several return performances), exposure to village life under conditions comparable to those of one's hosts, and the indispensable acquisition of local language forms, etiquette, pastimes *etc.*, have no other purpose than to be able to go with the flow. In fact, the whole point of fieldwork is to create a context where, on a day-to-day basis, one is subjected to the local forms of social control, as a test meant to ascertain to what extent one has already managed to internalise local speech forms, etiquette, body language, the public expressions of belief, *etc.* If the research is focussed on religion and ritual, then one is lucky if one is allowed to go through the motions along with the hosts, to act at least as a believer – and in the process the fieldworker often internalises some or most of the tenets of the local world-view. Such accommodation to local beliefs is a form of sociability, it is socially and methodologically desirable, and in fact humanly inevitable – it means that the relationships one enters into in the field are no longer merely instrumental but

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<sup>88</sup> Not necessarily though. One of the great early leaders of South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle, Robert Sobukwe, liberatingly and generously defined 'an African' as 'every person who considers Africa her or his home'. In that respect both Mr Lagrange, and I myself, may proudly identify as Africans – and we do.

become real forms of interpersonal, existential encounter. Adopting the local beliefs (even if selectively, situationally and temporarily) simply amounts to the application of the *principle of charity*: if this is what the people I engage with, believe in – who am I to distance myself from such beliefs? The real dilemma arises when one leaves the field and writes up one's results for a distant academic audience – which constitutes a totally different context of social control. In the original fieldwork situation *sangomas* are considered to spend any amount of time underneath the surface of the sacred pool, and come out as fully-fledged diviner-healers. In a scientific gathering, affirming such local self-evidence is not permitted for an academic producer, and one is forced to use the sleight-of-hand of distancing indirect speech: 'is believed to, alleged to, claims to....' thus dissimulating personal local belief for the sake of universalist academic credibility. Such a demarche is often felt as betrayal of the intersubjective intimacy built up in fieldwork; but then, unwillingness to make the transformation from local fieldwork discourse to universalist academic discourse disqualifies the researcher to such a point where the whole purpose of the fieldwork as knowledge formation will be forfeited.

I have personally struggled with this dilemma ever since I wrote, as an established Africanist and academic administrator of Africanist research, in 1990, the first draft of my widely circulated piece 'Becoming a *sangoma*'. Beginning academics such as Seamus Mbedzi Smith and Charles Lagrange have used, in good faith, my published work as licence to ignore the essential difference between the discourse in the field and the discourse in the conference room. The present book should put an end to their mistaken dreams to the effect that (unless in a logical universe accepted to be constantly oscillating between reality and irreality; we shall come to that in more detail in the final chapters of this book) one can have one's cake and eat it at the same time. Whosoever insists upon publicly affirming, lock stock and barrel, the validity of the truth claims that make up the belief system of African diviners and healers, *ipso facto* opts out of the comfortable, remunerative, respectable framework of routinised academic production, and becomes an intellectual nomad between worlds, an outsider, a pioneer, a prophet – and often, predictably, a martyr. She or he however may expect to be in reasonably good company: my own.

So much about two beginning academics who, partly by somewhat mistaken reference to my own work, believed that the affirmation of *sangoma* truths was their principal duty as academic producers. Let us now, for the next chapter, turn to far better known work of a far more senior academic producer: Edith Turner's affirmation of *the reality of spirits* as studied by her in fieldwork in Zambia and Alaska.

**Part II. The apparent reality and history of  
spirit:**

**Viewed from Africa, North America, and  
worldwide**





# *Chapter 3. Edith Turner's promising but abortive struggle for a charitable<sup>89</sup> intercultural epistemology*

## **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter reflects, and greatly develops, the questions I prepared for my public interview of Edith Turner at the Symposium 'Healing and Spirituality', Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands, 30 January 2007. When we reached that point in the Symposium's programme, the parallels had already been brought out between Edith Turner as an experiential anthropologist of religion seeking to vindicate the reality of spirits as she felt she had come across it during fieldwork in Zambia and Alaska; and myself, who, as an established anthropologist of religion, in 1990 had crossed the line to become a practising Southern African diviner-healer (*sangoma*), and who has kept up this practice also after having exchanged, in 1998, my Amsterdam chair in anthropology for a Rotterdam one in intercultural philosophy. In the light of these parallels the important differences of opinion between interviewee and interviewer were initially played down. After all, the idea was primarily to highlight Edith Turner's work and thought as the distinguished guest, to give her a chance to speak at length, rather than to engage in a polemical discussion. Moreover, since the symposium was held in a theological faculty, I as interviewer felt that (whatever the recent transformations of Dutch, and international, theology towards

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<sup>89</sup> As explained above, charity in the context of epistemology has nothing to do with the bestowal of benefits upon the underprivileged, nor with the Christian charity (*ἀγάπη agapē*) that is presumably Edith Turner's ideal as a devout Christian, but with the principle (ultimately yet reflecting the *caritas* of Early Christianity) that a concept, statement or representation which is true or relevant for others, contains the invitation to me to take such a concept, statement, or representation seriously as at least potentially true and relevant.

empirical studies and religious anthropology) from their perspectival distance the theologians present would mainly perceive the similarities between the two anthropologists, and would be less interested in a methodological and epistemological discussion that might go largely over the top of the audience's heads.

During the interview, summaries of the questions I had prepared beforehand were in front of me, in handwriting. The present chapter was produced when I wrote these notes out, in the weeks after the Symposium, inevitably with the power of hindsight, and with full library and bibliographical resources at hand. Of course, the actual interview could never have accommodated some of the extensively argued and referenced questions below, nor would Edith Turner have had the time to answer them extensively. Yet, far from trying to cook the books, I am here presenting more or less what I had in mind at the time of the interview. If I took the trouble to write all this out, it was primarily for the benefit of my interlocutor, who with her typical sense of integrity and unlimited capacity for absorption and comparison, specifically asked for a copy of my text – to which however she subsequently never responded. Unfortunately, the reader may be getting far more accomplished questions than were actually posed by me during the interview but he will remain deprived of Edith Turner's answers – more than half of the dialogue. Edith Turner's extensive and illuminating responses were taped by Eric Venbrux as the conveyor of our Symposium, and may still be on file somewhere at Radboud University, but no transcript has been available to me.



*Fig. 3.1. Edith Turner. ca. 2000*

### 3.2. With Victor Turner, then without and beyond Victor Turner

We have known Edith Turner as the lifelong companion of the famous anthropologist of religion Victor Turner, only to emerge from publicity obscurity with the joint book she and Victor wrote on *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (1978), and it has mainly been after Victor's death in 1983 that she has asserted herself as a highly original anthropologist of religion in her own right.

Victor Turner's work<sup>90</sup> must be initially situated within the framework of the Manchester School of anthropology, founded and for many years led by South-African born Max Gluckman (1909-1975), and centring on the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute for social research in formerly British South Central Africa, of which Gluckman was the director in the early 1940s.<sup>91</sup> After a bibliographic exercise on the Northern-Rhodesian anthropological literature, Victor Turner's first major book (*Schism and Continuity*, 1957 / 1968) was entirely in the Manchester tradition: a study of Central African inchoate social process conceived as micro-political microhistory; here ritual was relegated to just one relatively short chapter (1957: 288-317), and exclusively analysed from the ostentatiously sociologistic perspective of its alleged politically integrative function. Clearly, the ritual core of Vic's project could hardly be accommodated within a Manchester framework, Max Gluckman (a secularised Jew, like so many modern great intellectuals, including Marx, Freud and Einstein) declaring habitually and with considerable complacency that he was 'tone-deaf for religion'. This propelled Vic to a position of social and geographical outsidership among his Manchester peers (he became a professor of anthropology at Cornell University, in upstate New York, USA – like two other heroes of mine: another remarkable Briton in intellectual exile, Martin Bernal, and that proverbial Russian exile, Vladimir Nabokov), and allowed him to become one of the great innovators of the study of ritual in the 20th century. A large number of publications have paid tribute to Vic's significance for the anthropology of religion, extending into such fields as theology, science of religion, drama studies, etc.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Victor Turner's work ranks among the great classics of 20<sup>th</sup> c. CE religious anthropology, and has given rise to a great many studies and commentaries. Among his last works I mention: *On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience* (Turner, V., & Turner, E.L.B., 1985), and *The Anthropology of Experience* (Turner, V., & Bruner 1986), – obviously is a line continued by Edith Turner after her husband's death. Punning on Joseph Conrad's famous title *Heart of Darkness* (1899 / 1971) which evokes a distant, sinister and extremely depressing encounter with the African interior around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. CE, Edith Turner published (2006) *Heart of Lightness*.

<sup>91</sup> For a sketch of the bibliography and History of Ideas that formed the background of Victor Turner's work, especially the Manchester School, see for instance Werbner 1984; van Teeffelen 1978; van Binsbergen 2007, and the abundant bibliography cited there; my 2006a photo essay also offers a lively introduction.

<sup>92</sup> A small selection: Alexander 1991; Ashley 1990; Babcock & Mac Aloon 1987; Boudewijnse 1990; de Boeck & Devisch 1994; Deflem 1991; Eade & Sallnow 1991; Eade & Coleman 2004; Jules-Rosette 1994; Kapferer 1996; Nichols 1985; Olaveson 2001; Shorter 1972; Schoffeleers 1977; St John 2001; Weber 1995; van Binsbergen 1981: *passim* (see index of that book s.v. Turner).

Edith Turner's first research site was in Africa (among the Ndembu of North-western Zambia, where she worked with Victor in the early 1950s). Here she returned in 1985, three years after Victor's death, and it was in that context that she and I first had contact. Subsequently, she concentrated on a totally new research site, Northern Alaska.



Fig. 3.2. Victor Turner, ca. 1965

### 3.3. Vindicating the reality of spirits, against the dominant North Atlantic views

The central theme of Edith Turner's work of the last decade or so has been to affirm *the reality of spirits*.

Here there is room for some confusion. Does she mean

- (a) 'the reality as known to, as experienced by, spirits'? This already implies (b) but is a more limited question than (b):
- (b) that our own reality as experienced with our senses and as the scene of our daily action and interaction, comprises *spirits*, so that the latter, too, can occasionally be experienced by the senses, and by the effects spirits exert on human minds and bodies, and on other aspects of our visible reality?

It has been my impression that what Edith Turner has meant is (b).

Clearly, Edith Turner has come to her unusual position mainly as a result of her exposure, during fieldwork, to the spirit beliefs of the host societies, far away from her British or American home.

In her writings, she identifies as a practising Roman Catholic, but, as she says,

'When I say the Creed at Mass I say, "I believe in all religion", then I take communion' (Turner 1997: 69).

Across the mists of half a century that separate me from my own native Roman Catholicism, this statement at first was not clear to me ('so what, she says the Creed, then takes communion' – as a former choir-boy I merely seemed to remember that there were other sections of the mass in between, was their omission from her account perhaps the point?). Only later it dawned upon me that the point was the following: Edith Turner was deliberately (from a Roman Catholic viewpoint: *heretically!*) altering the wording of the Creed (which stipulates belief in God, and in the Holy Catholic Church / Roman Catholicism being implied to have the monopoly on the proper belief about God) so as to agree with her own conception of the plurality and convergence of the religions of humankind; and subsequently, in defiance of the divine punishment that was supposed to follow such a *mortal sin*, she partook of communion, in order to put into ritual action (through the pursuit of a sacrificial meal – the primordial form of *communitas*<sup>93</sup> according to Robertson Smith (1927) – the sense of unconditional, total inclusiveness which she had just expressed in words – the words of a reformulated Creed.

As a catch phrase, '*the reality of spirits*' has certainly been very effective. At the 2007 Nijmegen Symposium Edith Turner told the audience that her short article with the same title (Turner 1992a) was reprinted at least five times. Now a major argument for her affirmation as to the reality of spirits, is that she claims *to have seen* 'spirit matter' *with her very own eyes*. This was in 1985 in Zambia, when after more than three decades she came back to the old Ndembu research site, and was once more present at a *Chihamba* ritual of possession.<sup>94</sup> <sup>95</sup> at the height of the ritual, she saw a big lump of what she identified as

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<sup>93</sup> The term 'communitas' designates a heightened sense of sociability, first explored by Victor Turner (1969) as the principal dimension of ritual, and later also central to Edith Turner's work. For V. Turner's final statement on the matter, see: Perdue & Turner 1978. I am one of several authors (e.g. Sallnow 1981; Babcock 2001; MacGaffey 2004) who have reflected on Victor Turner's use of the term, and have recognised it to be, in many respects, a reformulation of Durkheim's (1912) *effervescence* – the height of ritual excitement, when religion takes on subjective reality, the boundaries between the participants fade, society emerges beyond the separates individualities, and when even Kant's transcendental categories are socially constructed (Durkheim 1912; Olaveson 2001; van Binsbergen 1981a, 1999a, 1999b, 2018a).

<sup>94</sup> Cf. V. Turner 1962; E. Turner 1986, 1992b.

<sup>95</sup> H. ON POSSESSION

The concept of possession amounts to the external, *etic*, scholarly rendering of *emic* (local, indigenous) systems, enormously widespread in space and time, in which a particular, locally recognised, altered state of consciousness is locally attributed to the overwhelming influence of an external agent, often of an invisible, spiritual nature (cf. Oesterreich 1930; Schmidt & Huskinson 2010; Stone 2012; van Binsbergen 1981: ch. 2.) Possession phenomena play a considerable role in the *New Testament*, and Jesus sets out to exorcise the spirits supposed to cause them (*Matthew* 4: 1 f., 8:28 f., 10:1, 10:8; *Mark* 6:7, 16:7; *Luke* 9:1, 10:17). Possession phenomena attracted scholarly attention fairly early (e.g. Kerner & Schelling 1836). From c. 1900 CE, presumed possession agents may sometimes be thought to be not belonging to our Earth but to be extraterrestrial (Baldwin & Di Benedetto 1999; Flournoy 1900; Swan 1998). The standard mainstream scientific view is that possession is the locals's illusion, and that in fact other forms of behaviour are at stake: often imitations acquired through a formal or informal learn-

*ectoplasm* (using the standard parapsychological and spiritualistic term of the first half of the 20th century)<sup>96</sup> separate from the patient's body, which event, in Edith Turner's interpretation, marked the beginning of that patient's physical and mental recovery.

Now I am not in the least doubting Edith Turner's integrity nor her sophistication, nor should I underestimate the formative effect of a life-long, close association with one of the greatest anthropologists of our time, yet – if I am not mistaken – Edith's original training was in nursing,<sup>97</sup> not in the methodology of the social sciences, nor in epistemology. We

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ing process, or 'hysteria', or pharmacological poisoning, or cerebro-neural disorder. In the particular, oscillating world-view underlying the present book's perspective (to be expounded in the final chapters), it would be naïve, premature and unnecessary to totally reject the *emic* view. If the world constantly oscillates between a state of Being to one of Non-Being, and back, than the invisible agents to which supernatural intervention is attributed, in all probability may admittedly start out as mere figments of the human imagination, but may occasionally (as a result of human ritual actions and thoughts but through mechanisms as yet unclear) oscillate into a genuine, though virtual, state of being and in that capacity may take on effective agency of their own – which does not prevent them from oscillating back to some kind of default state in other words evaporating into their original Non-Being once their intervention has subsided. The argument as to the merely illusory nature of possession then becomes irrelevantly facile and futile. I am afraid that the same kind of argument applies to the validity of astrology, the possibility of veridical divination, and other hobby horses of Sceptical denunciation: such devastating criticism is always based on the assumption of a non-contingent universe consisting of neat yes / no distinctions – on the Aristotelian postulate of the Excluded Third. But admittedly, we may be right that in some situations oscillating contingency seems to be manifest, but that does not in the least explain why modern, global natural science and engineering (especially in its more classic, pre-20th c. CE, forms and applications) entirely based on the Aristotelian postulate, are in most cases so emphatically and uncontestedly right that they may put a man on the Moon, make substantial progress in the cure of cancer, or operate the Internet with its trillions of connections and constituting parts. In the common everyday experience, contingent oscillation is the great and amazing exception, far from the rule – and as long as we have not made much progress towards identifying the boundary conditions (which probably include ritual) under which it occurs, our insight in this aspect of reality remains merely theoretical and nominal.

In the context of ecstatic religion, *possession* by some overwhelming outside agent (usually deemed to be invisible) is often the *emic* local interpretation of *trance* behaviour; cf. Goodman 1989 / 1990, 1994; Guenther 1999 (San); van Binsbergen 1981 (terminological discussion with special reference to South Central and North Africa). St John 2001, 2010 discusses aspects of today's global pop music scene from a trance perspective. Trance is also one of the more obvious contexts in which (typically veridical) divination is produced. I realise that in the present book I have not dwelled at length on the nature and manifestations of trance, nor on my own relatively extensive experiences in this field. It is not very clear to me whence this reticence originates – perhaps I have shunned from the kind of self-indulging ego tripping which generally attends experiential anthropology; but on the other hand, such restraint is far from manifest in other parts of this book.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. von Schrenck Notzing 1913 / 1920 / 1923, 1914; Geley & von Schrenck-Notzing 1922.

<sup>97</sup> My point here is patently weak and questionable, especially against the background of the academic conventions prevailing in the United Kingdom more than half a century ago, when Edith Turner did her studies. Then (perhaps more than today) the UK academic field differed markedly from that at the European continent; in the latter context, one would never take anyone seriously in a particular field

must realise, I feel, two things:

1. in the first place, there is (between Pythagoras' and Empedocles' shamanism<sup>98</sup> and Socrates' *daimōnion* (Hager 2001), via the immensely influential impact of Judaeo-Christian-Islamic notions of spirit,<sup>99</sup> to Hegel's *Geist* / Spirit,<sup>100</sup> Freud's *Unbewusste* / Unconscious,<sup>101</sup> Poortman's (1978) insistence on spirit as *subtle matter*, and present-day philosophy's attempts<sup>102</sup> to shed the Cartesian mind-body dualism that meanwhile has become – in present-day North Atlantic culture outside the circles of professional philosophers – a dominant collective representation and thus also informs most of current anthropology) hardly a topic that, across the centuries, has attracted more attention, and more specialist conceptualisation and theorising, in North Atlantic culture, than the question of the existence and nature of spirit, and its relation to the everyday reality we seem to perceive with our senses; so with Edith's strongly affirmative statements on the existence of spirits, we risk blundering in where angels fear to tread...
2. and in the second place, *eye-witness accounts*, even though they make up the bulk of our information on paranormal events,<sup>103</sup> yet are notoriously suspect.

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merely on the basis of a first degree, moreover, PhD trajectories on the continent tended to comprise rather many more years and to remain much closer, in subject matter, to the original undergraduate track. But let me admit: in most academic careers, and especially in the course of a long life such as Edith Turner's, a researcher learns far more after the conclusion of one's formal education, than before. Numerous are the examples of accomplished, leading anthropologists who were originally trained in rather different disciplines – Nadel in musicology, Malinowski in mathematics and the natural sciences, Fardon in economics, etc. And look who is talking: I was trained as an anthropologist, sociologist and linguist, yet subsequently made specialist contributions to the fields of philosophy, comparative mythology, Ancient History / archaeology... As far as Edith Turner is concerned, the real point is that, at her advanced age in the years 2000s, she does not manifest any of the sophistication in the fields of epistemology and of the history of philosophy that are implicitly expected when officiating on such a ponderous question as 'the reality of spirits'. All she manifests is dogged, infuriatingly naïve common sense, seasoned with a touch of (post-) Christian *credo quia absurdum*.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Dodds 1973; Kingsley 1994, 1995; van Binsbergen 2012.

<sup>99</sup> The range of spirit-related beliefs and practices in these three world religions is so extensive that it is impossible to mark this field with a few isolated references. Hastings 1909-1921 (s.v. 'spirit', 'spirits', etc.) would be a suitable place to start. The standard work on *Spirituality* by Kees Waaijman, one of the participants in the original Symposium were the present chapter was initiated, is very broad and covers much of the Christian ground but at the expense of appearing to dissimulate its essentially Christian inspiration.

<sup>100</sup> Hegel 1977 / 1807; Fulda 2001; Heidegger 1980, 1993.

<sup>101</sup> Freud, 1953-1974; Freud 1963 / 1940 contains some of this author's most seminal texts in this connection.

<sup>102</sup> E.g. Feigl et al. 1958; Pétrement 1973; Ane 1966; Popper 1994; Hart 1998; Griffin 1998; Salami 1991; Sheets-Johnstone 1992.

<sup>103</sup> As a major force behind the movement of experiential anthropology / the anthropology of consciousness, Edith Turner is likely to have affinity with Jack Hunter's journal *Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal*.

We will come back to eye witness accounts shortly, and will first attend to spirit as the central theme in Edith Turner's work.

I think we can agree that modern religious anthropology is largely predicated on the following assumption: *outside the urban sections of the North Atlantic region today, the life-world of a large part of humankind is informed by local people's belief in gods, spirits, demons and less personalised spiritual forces, as it was in the past; these postulated entities have no objective ontological status in reality, they simply do not exist, so the task of religious anthropology and adjacent fields of science is to understand what is producing and sustaining these figments of the imagination.* In this connection we may refer to Geertz's (1966: 4) famous definition of religion:

'Without further ado, then, a religion is:

- (1) a system of symbols which acts to
- (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by
- (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and
- (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that
- (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.'

Against this background, it is pertinent to ask Edith Turner what she means by spirit, and why, in her later years, she has started on a crusade to vindicate spirit notions that are taken for granted in many cultures around the world but that, so far, are rejected by the dominant scientific world-view in the North Atlantic, including mainstream anthropology?

Let me make at once clear that her and my own views on these points converge to a considerable degree. One can hardly be a certified and practising *sangoma* if one altogether rejects and contests the reality of spirits at all possible levels and in all possible forms. It has been a major line in my work of the last few decades, and especially of my book *Intercultural Encounters* (2003), to deplore the hegemonic, Eurocentric rejection of other people's religious views that is inherent in present-day religious anthropology, and to explore the intercultural-philosophical space for an alternative.<sup>104</sup> Yet there is an unmistakable dilemma here, which I have explored in some of the other chapters of the present book, and elsewhere. For under present-day conditions, one cannot demand one's scientific peers's respect as an empirical scientist and at the same time unconditionally affirm (as Edith Turner seems to do) the reality of spirits.

### **3.4. Is the eye-witness account a sufficient ground to affirm the reality of spirits?**

Now on to the decisive weight attributed to eye-witness accounts. Parapsychology started well over a century ago, in the early 1880s, with the *Society of Psychical Research* (originally British, soon followed by an American organisation of the same name; cf. Grattan-Guinness 1982), which already developed complex techniques to test and if necessary expose eye-witness accounts of allegedly paranormal events; and from there we have seen a continuous tradition right up to today's 'Skeptics', who have been determined, ever

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<sup>104</sup> Cf. van Binsbergen 2003a, 2003b, 2004e, 2007a, 2007b, 2008c, 2009b, 2013b.



since their powerful movement's foundation a few decades ago, to eradicate any trace of superstition, credulity and what they call 'pseudo-science'<sup>105</sup> in the North Atlantic world, and especially academia. Concentrating around a journal like *Skeptical Inquirer*, or the website *'Skeptic: The Skeptics Society and Skeptic Magazine'*,<sup>106</sup> these Skeptics constitute a movement of mainly natural scientists, including a fair number of Nobel prize laureates; they are far removed from the philosophical tradition of Scepticism, whose antecedents go back to ancient Greece, with Pyrrhonism and Sextus Empiricus.<sup>107</sup> The modern Skeptic's point (note the affected 'k') is the denial and exposure of unwarranted paranormal truth claims – attempts at denial and exposure which in themselves are highly problematic, because undertaken in the light of a somewhat naïve affirmation of established, mainstream natural science truths and methods believed to be *exhaustive and eternal*, – whereas it is common experience that scientific truths and methods are usually soon exposed as one-sided and premature, and are meant to be ephemeral and provisional, to supersede each other in the shortest possible time. The philosophical scepticists' point is the denial (disconcerting for scientists, yet rather persuasively argued) of the possibility of *any* truth claims.<sup>108</sup> In a later chapter of this book I make an attempt to argue the weak basis of the modern Skeptics' position even from a point of view of state-of-the-art natural science, notably from the viewpoints of Quantum Mechanics and the Theory of Relativity.

Outside the study of paranormal phenomena, for instance in forensic and judicial contexts, the social science of eye-witness accounts has developed into a major speciality.<sup>109</sup> With participant observation as their principal ethnographic method, anthropologists are supposed to be trained observers (although few anthropology curricula actually include protracted formal training in observation). However, the snag is that anthropologists use their own body and mind subjectively as their main, usually even their only, measuring instrument, so that much depends on the validity and reliability of the individual anthropologist's *introspective* interpretation of (typically unique and solitary, often nocturnal,

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<sup>105</sup> The expression 'pseudo-sciences' was made popular by Karl Popper (1959 / 1935) in the sense of systematised and formalised fields of knowledge that, however, produce essentially non-falsifiable statements. But by the strict standards of such a methodology, a large percentage of statements within the humanities and social sciences would have to be relegated to the same 'pseudo'-category – for in those fields of research, the appearance of proof may sometimes be achieved, not by hard empirical methods underpinned by quantitative and statistical analysis, but by persuasion, sleight-of-hands, intimidation, political correctness, rhetorics, authority, institutional power, blackmail, bribes in the form of a appointment or publication, faithfulness to an established paradigm. Moreover, there is the great danger of anachronism here: as I argue below at somewhat greater length, much of what we call 'pseudo-science today, e.g. astrology, did not start out as such, but on the contrary, formed the original core out of which today's 'true' science grew.

<sup>106</sup> at <http://www.skeptic.com/index.html> .

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Annas & Barnes 1985; Audi 1988; Pappas 1978; Popkin 1979; Putnam 1981; Sextus Empiricus 1917 (a text from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE); Wittgenstein 1969.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Klein 1981; Popkin 1979; Strawson 1985; Dancy & Sosa 1992, s.v. '(modern) scepticism'.

<sup>109</sup> From a vast literature, I only cite: Loftus 1979; Rosen 1977; Grindal 1983.

often stressful) observations she has made with the senses. Introspection is likewise (cf. Socrates,<sup>110</sup> Descartes (1897-1909 / 1641), Freud (1961-1973) and William James (James 1890, and especially 1902) a common philosophical technique – but then equally suspect as anthropological introspection. *When introspection is being used as a method to construct valid knowledge, who will rule out the elements of projection, wishful thinking, transference?*

<sup>111</sup> This applies *a fortiori* in the domain of the spiritual and the invisible, which in most people tends to be associated with deep-seated cravings for meaning, acceptance, reprieve, deliverance – ultimately going back, in part, to formative childhood experiences. Finally, modern North Atlantic thought (not just philosophy) has been based, for better or worse,<sup>112</sup> since Immanuel Kant, on the assumption that we do not and simply cannot experience the world as it really is, but only have knowledge of our mental *representations* of the world, such as have formed in our minds as a result of our attempts to interpret our sense impressions under the overarching *a priori* categories (such as number, cause, time *etc.*) that our thinking imposes – without such *a priori* categories being in themselves products of our thought; in other words, we seem to be condemned

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<sup>110</sup> Plato 1975. In this connection reference should be made specifically to Socrates' claim of an internal moral voice, his *daimonion*, claimed to direct his actions and opinion. Also cf. Derrida 1987; Hager 2001, with further literature.

<sup>111</sup> We have already covered this ground above. Cf. van Binsbergen 2003h, index, s.v. 'transference' and 'projection'. Meanwhile note that I use the concept of transference in a manner deviating from classic psychoanalytical usage: not to denote the impact of a therapeutic agent upon the patient and the other way around, but the manifestation, in the patient's consciousness, of hidden conflictive matter emanating from the unconscious.

<sup>112</sup> If, on the one hand, I dare chide Edith Turner for naïve and apparently untutored common-sense thinking, who am I to question, on the other hand, the very edifice of modern Western thought? Yet my point must be made – it is, implicitly, the backbone of this book's argument. Although one of the founding fathers of anthropology, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) scarcely left his native town of Königsberg, had no direct personal experience of other religious creeds and practices, and led a sheltered, solitary life, in which he had to miss even such ecstatic experiences as shared sexual love may yield, and (to judge by his dismissive early discussion of Swedenborg's mysticism) most probably had no personal experiences with the altered states of consciousness involved in ecstatic religion. In other words, his epistemology is predicated on a restrictive, mutilated, almost bigotted, experience of reality as compared to the many 'doors of perception' (Huxley 1954) more or less ajar for the average middle-class adolescent in the North Atlantic today. Mysticism, trance, ecstatic religion, perhaps such exceptional states as may be pharmacologically induced, the experience of beauty in *belles lettres*, music, dance, and the graphic arts, and above all the experience and longing for interpersonal, intra- but even transcultural, even interspecies, even universal, *love* constitute vast areas of experience in which the knower is persuaded to admit to a condition of knowing based on direct, immediate, unveiled contact with the object-to-be-known, not necessarily, or only partially, filtered through a veil of sensory perception and personal conceptualisation. The Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* may admittedly identify one philosophically inspiring, undeniable condition of self-aware existence, but it does not exhaust the full range of human self-aware existence – for the entranced subject engaged in ecstatic ritual, while temporarily lowering or even suspending her or his critical sense of rational cogitation, seems (and on this point I claim myself to be an experiential witness) to be engaged in aware existence of an overwhelming sense of reality and relevance. Poets and mystics have testified of similar heightened forms of knowledge in which their Ego did not fully dissolve but was actively experiencing, knowing, loving, existing. Must we submit to Kant's bigotted, mutilated, impaired, almost diseased, form of human existence in order to salvage the aporias of modern thought? Of shall we try to – have our cake and eat it?

forever to live *by mere appearances alone*.<sup>113</sup> We could go further and claim that awareness of the deceptive nature of our sense impressions has been a constant of Western thought from very early on (Plato's theory of the Ideas, as for instance expounded in the famous Allegory of the Cave).<sup>114</sup> And if we add that in the Buddhist tradition the whole of the sensory world is deception,  $\text{M\AA R}$ , *Mara* – in other words Death; or that among Edith Turner's Ndembu research associates as well as among my Nkoya ones (both belonging to closely related cultures in Western Zambia), and among many peoples throughout Africa, the visible world is considered only one particular fragment, and not necessarily the most revealing or transparent fragment, of reality, we are reminded that doubt about the senses is not just a modern North Atlantic passing affectation.

Against this background, reaffirming the reality of spirits on the basis of an appeal to 'what is seen with one's own eyes', is inherently problematic. *What is it, then, that makes Edith Turner so sure of her observational claims? Is there some other, inner reality, with which we may communicate in ritual, trance and possession, and which has better credentials than those of the senses? And is it possible that Edith Turner has more direct access to this underlying, inner reality than many other people, including most other anthropologists?*

This is not a rhetorical question, as if I were implying that she could not possibly have seen what she claims to have seen, or that that must have been some hallucination without any ground in empirical reality. Below it will become clear that I am not doubting Edith Turner's observation, but her interpretation.

### **3.5. Edith Turner: Merely against mainstream theology or also against mainstream anthropology?**

In one of Edith Turner's papers (1997) she specifically addresses theology, and attempts to enrich what she depicts as a relatively rigid – in her words, *rationalistic* – theological perspective, with her own, more lively, spirit-affirming, anthropological discourse. Now, the exchange on which the present argument is based took place in a theological faculty in 2007, and my question is: *is her quarrel not as much with mainstream anthropology, which may be just as rigid and 'rationalistic', as far as the kind of phenomena is concerned that she seeks to do justice to?*

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<sup>113</sup> Cf. Kant 1964; cf. the evocative title of Oosterling's (1996) major review of continental philosophical history since Kant, *Door Schijn Bewogen* ('Moved by Appearances').

<sup>114</sup> Plato 1975: *De Re Publica* (VII, 514A–520A).



Source: [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/50/Sir\\_Isaac\\_Newton\\_by\\_Sir\\_Godfrey\\_Kneller%2C\\_Bt.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/50/Sir_Isaac_Newton_by_Sir_Godfrey_Kneller%2C_Bt.jpg)

*Fig. 3.3. Isaac Newton in 1702 as portrayed by Godfrey Kneller*

'Rationalistic' does not seem to be the proper word here. There is nothing irrational or anti-rational about recognising the existence of spirit. The whole edifice of European Medieval philosophy – eminently rational<sup>115</sup>, yet at the same time utterly theistic – is there to prove this statement. Admittedly it is established usage to designate such topics as witchcraft, sorcery, intuition, telepathy, healing, astrology, divination, belief in spirits and in God, as belonging to the realm of the irrational – regardless of the (usually quite rationalistic) ways in which such beliefs are articulated and turned into action.<sup>116</sup> However, most of these beliefs and actions are not irrational in the sense of being predicated on the absence or denial of rationality – on the deliberate celebration of irrational absurdity. Material divination for instance may be based on premises (such as the existence of gods or ancestors capable of influencing the fall of dice and other random generators when

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<sup>115</sup> Cf. Cohen (1993: 415): 'To be rational is to be guided by legitimate reasoning'. Largely relying on his own work to date, Cohen distinguishes nine modes of rationality (covering a wide range from logical and mathematical rationality to practical life and action), and offers bibliographic references to the vast literature on this point, including the scientific revolution of Early Modernity (Kepler, Galilei, Newton) and, with a greater time depth, the efforts of such philosophers as Plato, Kant, Hume, Popper, Hempel, etc.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Dodds 1973; Duerr 1981 (a collection that includes, in German translation, many famous Anglo-Saxon anthropological essays on the topic). And we recall Evans-Pritchard's (1972 / 1937) and Gluckman's (1955) classic anthropological arguments on the rationality in African witchcraft beliefs. For more recent approaches, cf. Risjord 2000; Bond & Ciekawy 2001; Kapferer 2003.

operated) that appear to be *false* or *at least ungrounded* from the point of view of current North Atlantic science, yet divination often proceeds along strictly rational paths – and it is this very proto-scientific insistence on intersubjective procedure that, to the practitioner and his clients, lends credibility to the divination's outcome (van Binsbergen 2013).

If, in Sandra Harding's (1997) analysis, modern mainstream global science claims to be rational,<sup>117</sup> objective, universal (although she adduces reasons why we may yet consider such science, to some extent, local, in other words an *ethnoscience*),<sup>118</sup> then it stands to reason that any intellectual producer clamouring for radical corrections, even departures, from such science is accused of irrationality.<sup>119</sup> There is an interesting play upon words here. On the one hand the doggedness with which the scientific (including medical) establishment exposes and persecutes alternative approaches such as homeopathy and is very quick with the verdict of pseudoscience and quackery, does not particularly smack of rationality but rather reminds one of the cornered responses of an obscure sect. Most scientists accusing others of irrationality have little systematic training in the philosophy of science, logic, or the History of Ideas, and would be relatively unqualified judges of other people's rationality – and of their own rationality. Academia has always been a field of contestation and conflict, and all the more so, since the exponential growth of science, from a gentlemen's pastime in Early Modern times to a moderately well (but differentially) remunerated salaried profession, in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. CE, brought in the vicious competition, the shameful lack of ethics, and the offensive codes of behaviour, of the market place.<sup>120</sup> On the other hand, one of the most striking characteristics of the numerous, best-selling producers of pseudo-sciences in our time and age is *their em-*

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<sup>117</sup> On rationality as a hallmark of specialist thought, cf. Mele & Rawling 2004.

<sup>118</sup> By addition of the prefix '*ethno-*', anthropologists in the mid-20th c. CE sought to distinguish between (a) cultural items that were peculiar of a particular social group as identified in space and time (an *ethnos* or people or ethnic group), and (b) the supposedly universal categories and classifications of modern science. Thus ethnosciences like the ethnobotany of the *sangomas* or the ethno-astronomy of the Ancient Hawaiians could be distinguished from the supposedly universal and culture-free science, botany, astronomy, or modern global science. This rather obsolete usage of *ethno-* is akin to the distinction between *emic* and *etic* (Headland *et al.* 1990; van Binsbergen 2003) that still has considerable currency in the social sciences and in intercultural philosophy. There is an analogy here with the linguistic distinction between *phonemics* (speech sounds as deliberately, consciously, produced, and specifically perceived – more or less as *Gestalte* – by competent speakers), and *phonetics* (the speech sounds as recorded by an inanimate machine and reduced to their natural-science properties). Harding's use of the term *ethnoscience* is meant to subtly criticise scientists's assumption as to the culture-free universality of their pronouncements, without totally denying science's orientation towards rationality, objectivity and indeed universality. I have tried to take her analysis a few steps further (2007f / 2015b: ch. 13).

<sup>119</sup> In the background is a Hegelian strand: the Spirit which increasingly realises itself throughout history, is for Hegel the *rational* Spirit. In this respect, clamouring for alternative science may not so much be a challenge of a particular local elite group of knowledge producers with their own biases and interests – it may be an act of defiance against the entire world history, and as such, admittedly close to heresy.

<sup>120</sup> Unfortunately, these are not just rhetorical accusations, but echoes of my very own career vicissitudes in the last two decades, as set out in the introductions of some of my recent books (2015, 2019, 2020).

*phatic, ostentatious display of rationality* – they take considerable pains to embellish their works with apparently professional bibliographies and acknowledgments, diagrams, footnotes, and usually their books are sufficiently well-written (and copy-edited!) to bring the rationality inherent to intellectual language use to their texts – however nonsensical and fantastic the premises may be on the basis of which these texts have been written. The paradox is as old as scientific endeavour: Extispicy and astrology – now textbook examples of pseudo-science – were the oldest forms of *genuine proto-science*, in Early-Bronze-Age Mesopotamia; we have numerous texts in our possession that document them and these texts (generally build around *conditional statements*: if the Goddess Venus is in conjunction with the God Jupiter, then....”) have the hallmarks of specialist, professional, rational, careful scientific expositions. Also throughout the globally widespread family of geomantic divination (which is closely associated with astrology; van Binsbergen 1995, 1996, 2012, in press (g) ) the professional tone of rationality prevails, and serves to inspire potential clients with awe and belief.

What then is so irrational about modern texts setting forth alternatives to mainstream scientific paradigms? The sacrilege lies not so much in any irrational format of the challenges, for these go out of their way to produce an impression of rationality; but in the challenge in itself, as if attacking the very fortress of self-claimed rationality can only be irrational; to opt for that position amounts to a recipe for heresy (Christian reformers have always started out as recognised enemies of the faith, in the first place), not for the growth of scientific truth.

This is not the place to enter into a knowledge-sociological assessment of the many factors in the recent rise of alternatives to established global science. Let us merely mention a few obvious factors:

- the global popularisation of knowledge and knowledge production through the democratisation of secondary and tertiary education in the course of the 200<sup>th</sup> c. CE;
- the digital revolution, especially the massive digitalisation of academic libraries world-wide, has meant general, democratic, low-threshold access to scientifically relevant texts and sources which until a few decades ago were only accessible to the academic specialist;
- the clamouring for recognition of local and regional knowledge traditions which have been marginalised and disqualified by the onslaught of global / North Atlantic science as an aspect of North Atlantic colonial and imperialist expansion – such clamouring, in other words, as a local response to hegemonic encroachment
- nor is this only about the salvaging of local knowledge traditions: since any process of hegemonic encroachment amounts to symbolic and often actual, physical violence, the turn to alternative science is also to be understood as an act of knowledge-political resistance to counter the general dependence and powerlessness which, along with enhanced levels of material consumption, tends to be the general, world-wide result of social change from the early 20<sup>th</sup> c. CE onward.

- the growth of a massive and remunerative market for texts propagating some form of alternative science
- As Foucault (1972 / 1980) has already pointed out, in the course of the last two centuries science has replaced organised religion as the main source of legitimacy in society – especially in the North Atlantic, Russia, and its cultural dependencies overseas; this makes the producers of science – even if it is only alternative, yeah pseudo-science – the proper priests of our time and age; the production of alternative science, such as is massively done in the New-Age movement, is in a way answering to a prophetic calling cut to the measure of Post-modernity.

As we can see, most of these motivations are surprisingly rational; meanwhile the determination to produce valid truths about humanity and the world at large is usually not the knowledge producer's main motivation, regardless of whether the product is canonical science, or some alternative or pseudo imitation.

New Age, and other forms of apparently irrational production of alternative science, have repeatedly been studied and criticised in modern decades. Already a quarter of a century ago, Gross, Levitt & Lewis brought together a collective volume on *The Flight From Science And Reason* (1996). Similar publications include Ferguson 1982; Hanegraaff 1996, 1999; Callewaert 2007; van Wersch 1990; York 2003; Tolboll 2009; Sokal & Bricmont 1997, cf. Sokal 1996.... Especially the New-Age appropriation of shamanism as a more or less spiritual expression has been studied and criticised, e.g.: Aldred 2000; Wood 2007; Sanson 2011; Glass-Coffin 1994; Hunt & McMahon. 1988; Zinser 1987.



But let us return to the argument around Edith Turner. When we wish to define the school of thought with which she is contending, 'sensorialist' appears to be an appropriate term, designating an approach that insists that the senses of our physical body are absolutely the only means through which a person may gather potentially valid knowledge about the world external to that person; this is the term I used in my book *Intercultural encounters* (2003: chapter 7). In combination with rationality, the macro-experiences (i.e. visible to the naked eye and audible to the unaided ear of humans) of everyday life as mediated through the senses, help us produce a manageable 'Newton' world (i.e. one following classic mechanics rather than 20<sup>th</sup>-century Quantum Mechanics and Relativity) – a macro-world fit for elementary human survival:

- one in which elementary classic laws of physics apply (within the broad error range characteristic of the rudimentary macro-level of measurement);
- one, therefore, in which arrows can be shot and reach the animal victim at more or less the intended spot so that the hunter's quest for food may be successful;
- one in which time can be kept within a margin of error of a few days to a few seconds, so that planting time may be determined, shooting of an arrow be timed, etc.

In my opinion, these *practicalities* once were the cradle and the nursery of rationality. There is no reason to assume that also the vast non-practical aspects of the human existence can or should be subjected to rational arrangement. Myth, story-telling, ritual, literary and pictorial imagination, usually have to follow a recognisable logic in order to be intersubjectively communicable, part of that logic is even language-imposed through the rules of syntax specific to a particular language or language group, but that logic is never consistent, and is hardly ever the logic of rationality and nothing more. The same could be the case for the universe at large, whose order – for all we know, and for all scientific and theological claims to the contrary – may be apparent and lacking all logic and rationality. However, we need to tread very carefully here. Ancient and Medieval European philosophy saw in the cosmic order a major argument for the existence of a rational and personal divine being. After the Enlightenment, God may have died and its place taken by science, but despite the ensuing ‘Mechanisation Of The World Picture’ (Dijksterhuis 1989 / 1950) *we are still confronted with the truly amazing puzzle that the mathematics which we humans think up as mere invention, thought play, of our own, yet turn out to match in great detail the structure of the world as ascertained by modern physics, astronomy, chemistry etc.*<sup>121</sup> – even to the extend of enabling us to make detailed predictions, and working technological applications of that mathematical science. Hence Carnap’s (1956, cf. 1967) insistence on [Den] *Logische[n] Aufbau der Welt / The Logical Structure of the World*.

There is much to say for a strategy which reserves the term ‘irrational’ (Barrett 1958) for modes of thought and behaviour *that deliberately choose not to employ* the framework of rationality, for reasons of tradition, heroism, honour, vitality, artistry, absurdity, or whatever.<sup>122</sup>

As background to my question concerning Edith Turner’s distancing herself, not only from mainstream theology but also from mainstream anthropology, let me add the following. Almost in the manner of an Islamic *silsila* (i.e. a listing of an unbroken chain of spiritual authorities from generation to generation), Edith Turner cites (E. Turner 2006c) a whole intellectual genealogy of over sixty publications since the middle of the 20th century CE (e.g. Turner 1964; Deren 1953), that may all be claimed to pursue the rehabilitation of spirit as a given *reality*, and the strategic role of the anthropologist in reclaiming that reality. She may agree that this does not mean that this type of approach<sup>123</sup> has become mainstream. In fact, it is so little mainstream that I, who have worked along similar lines in Africa and Europe from the early 1990s, who have an excellent Africanist library at my disposal as well as the Internet, and who strives to be meticulous about keeping my

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<sup>121</sup> This is in fact the Anthropic Principle: associated with the names of such prominent cosmologists as Barrow, Tipler, and Wheeler (1986), and stating that we humans have been constructed to perceive the universe in a particular way, since we have been built as a product of that very structure – a modern agnostic version of the Biblical claim that Man was built in the image of God (*Genesis* 1:26).

<sup>122</sup> Also cf. Davis 1996; Sperber 1982.

<sup>123</sup> Often known as ‘experiential anthropology’ – obviously owing a considerable debt to her and Victor Turner’s 1985 book *On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience*.



reading and references up to date, was mainly aware of the older of these titles, but missed many of them from the mid-1990s on.<sup>124</sup> The protagonists of experiential anthropology constitute a somewhat esoteric group concentrated on mainly two journals (*Anthropology of Consciousness*, and *Anthropology and Humanism*, the latter is very much Edith Turner's own journal in every possible respect); and also in this sense of limited scope of venue, these protagonists are not exactly mainstream (yet). In the wake of Edith Turner's work, the journal *Anthropology and Humanism* grew into a venue where the affirmation of the encounter with the reality of spirits has become common-place (e.g. Badone 1995; Badsteubner 2003).

Most importantly, there is a controversial conception of fieldwork and experience, which places this group of anthropologists outside the mainstream of the anthropological profession, even though they are clearly involved in a centripetal movement, constituting an imminent paradigm shift that may well succeed in overtaking the centre in the near future. Incidentally, by repeatedly expressing my sympathy for this approach it should be clear that I do not consider 'mainstream' synonymous with 'profound' or 'true'.

Let us dwell a bit on that group's controversial conception of the anthropological craft.

### 3.6. 'Going native' as a research strategy

'Going native' is the old colonial and dismissive term for a specific method of knowledge production: the foreign subject completely gives up participation in his or her culture and society of origin, and instead immerses herself totally in the host culture and society, in such respects as dwelling, food, language communication, ritual participation, professed values and beliefs, recreation, sometimes also sexuality, etc.

In Zambia's rural areas soon after Independence (1964) one could occasionally meet the odd European 'White' who had ostentatiously 'gone native': having married one or more local wives, having secured land by close friendship – usually facilitated by tribute in money and liquor – with the local chief, living in a dwelling intermediate between traditional and European architecture, surviving largely on local staples (*ncima*) and local liquor (especially the high-percentage *kachasu*), operating a regional network of commerce with the help of more or less informal sexual partners and the associ-

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<sup>124</sup> This state of affairs has been rather to the detriment of my 2003 book *Intercultural encounters*, which otherwise would have engaged in, and benefited from, productive debate with many other kindred authors, instead of having to struggle virtually all by myself with the formidable problem of doing justice to people's beliefs in religious anthropological research. However, the advantage of this isolation has been that thus, without the comforting but potentially blinkering reassurance of a peer support group, I was forced to thresh out all by myself the epistemological, ontological and knowledge-political implications of whatever my fieldwork experiences were bringing me to say; and, in the professional role I subsequently acquired as a more or less professional philosopher, to thresh them out more explicitly and incisively (painfully too, inevitably – with relentless self-criticism) than I see the USA experiential anthropologists normally do. And, I should add, to thresh them out far more than their actual presentation during the Nijmegen 2007 Symposium suggested (when pressures of time and sociability dictated otherwise). Anyway, one major result of the Nijmegen 2007 seminar has been to finally make personal contact with this movement.

ated in-laws, and pathetically seeking the incidental company of fellow-Europeans in a bid to hear them affirm the incomparable advantages and merits of such a stance – even though (or especially, *because?*) it left the dilemmas and inequalities of ‘White’-‘Black’ relationships in South Central Africa in the middle of the 20th century dramatically unresolved. I must confess that for some years this strategy theoretically appealed to me, as a young (but married) expatriate caught in the oppressive forms of social control exerted by the ‘White’ expatriate community, stimulating my day-dreaming.

As an anthropological research strategy, total immersion has produced the kind of insights that Edith Turner was divulging at the Nijmegen 2007 Symposium, and that resonate so clearly with the work of an increasing number of other ‘experiential’ anthropologists mainly in the United States of America (*cf.* Turner 2006c for an extensive list), as well as my own work (*e.g.* van Binsbergen 1991a, 2003h).<sup>125</sup> What begins as classic anthropological fieldwork, at some point drops the studied distance between observer and the observed; the anthropologist’s learning of local concepts and actions sheds its instrumentality and becomes existentially shared, validated and rooted into the anthropologist’s own life and person, so that she no longer *acts as if* she were a local believer and practitioner *etc.*, but simply *acts as, in other words becomes*, a local believer and practitioner.<sup>126</sup> Local beliefs and actions are appreciated and adopted by the researcher, no longer because of their exchange value in some foreign and distant academic environment, but simply because of the value which the local research associates attribute to them – so out of social and cognitive charity. The established canons of scientific, distancing objectification are cast overboard, and the operative intention becomes: ‘living with the people by their own standards’, rather than ‘studying them by the imposed alien standards of a distant academic discipline and higher-degrees board’.

We have already spoken of such cognitive charity above, but it will do no harm to dwell upon it a bit longer. It is one of the concepts which modern epistemology has forged so as to come to turn with the widely observed fact that different, culturally constructed life-worlds hold very different truths about reality. Lepore (1993: 365) summarised the principle of charity as follows:

‘Davidson thinks – and this is one of his most characteristic doctrines – that *ceteris paribus* a sentence of the form ‘L-speakers hold S true in circumstance C’ licenses the corresponding T-sentence ‘S is true (in L) iff C’, but only if a ‘constitutive principle’ of intentional ascription is presupposed; namely, that truth-conditions must be assigned to formulas of L under the constraint that most of the sentences held true by a speaker of L are true (by the interpreter’s own lights). This is the principle of charity. It is supposed to be *holistic* on the intended interpretation, which is that ‘most of the sentences’ means a lot of them. It is primarily on the grounds that the principle of charity is constitutive of intentional ascription, but not of the ascription of physicalistic properties, that Davidson denies the possibility of psychophysical laws. And it also has striking consequences for epistemology; if it is right, then the refutation of scepticism requires only the weak premise of belief coherence.’

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<sup>125</sup> Another relevant text in this connection is the PhD thesis – expounding the merits of ‘going native’ as an intercultural knowledge strategy that earned my former University of Zambia student and close friend the South African philosopher Johnny Nchabeleng (1982) a Leiden doctorate under supervision of the prominent Dutch philosopher van Peursen.

<sup>126</sup> I have first explored this stance in an early paper on the Nkoya ancestral cult, 1981, now being reprinted in van Binsbergen in press (a): *Our Drums Are Always On My Mind*.

Such charity is not the condescendence of making allowance for the other's shortcoming by pretending to agree to something that is evidently false, but the true *caritas* of admitting the other's potential, independent access to truth even if this is a different truth than one holds oneself; it is the prerequisite of a present-day world that is at the same time globalising (with the implied unification of world-views, media, expressions *etc.*), yet retains its pluralistic nature. Other writers such as Malpas (1988) and McGinn (1977) have further tailored the charity concept for contexts of interpretation and belief; it has inspired me in my explorations of wisdom as a paradigm for intercultural philosophy (2009).

One of Edith Turner's articles (E. Turner 2003b) opens with the assertion that

'in the past, in anthropology, "going native" spelt academic doom.'

She goes on to assert that this is why Victor and she herself insisted on avoiding this stance at all costs during the 1950s Ndembu fieldwork in Zambia, whatever the temptations (the extreme attraction of the spiritual forms that appeared to manifest themselves in Ndembu rituals; and the lure of *communitas*, promising that, by letting go, the stranger fieldworker could merge with the locals into one grand 'We'.<sup>127</sup> Of course, the discoveries Edith Turner believes she made in subsequent fieldwork, and the converging work of people like Paul Stoller, Michael Jackson, R. Jaulin, Wim van Binsbergen,<sup>128</sup> and quite a few others, could only be made to the extent to which these anthropologists in the field ignored the prohibition on going native. They did not do so without encountering severe criticism. As Edith Turner told me, Stoller was viciously jeered when he presented an account of his experiences before an American Anthropological Association annual meeting. In 1991, and despite sympathetic reactions from the majority of the audience, I experienced a similar treatment (in even more articulate, dismissive words) on the part of the convenor of the long-standing Satterthwaite Annual Colloquium for African Religion and Ritual, in 1990 – it cost us what until then had looked as the greatest friendship of my life.<sup>129</sup>

Accounts based on varieties of 'going native', and presented with fair helpings of introspection and anecdotes, are often dismissed as belonging to a genre of anthropological text production labelled 'Post-modernism' – although in many ways such accounts have

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<sup>127</sup> When Vic and I were in correspondence in 1979, he intimated additional, practical factors: their research budget was very limited, and for many months they could not use their motor car but were tied to one spot.

<sup>128</sup> Stoller & Olkes 1987; Jackson 1989; Jaulin 1971; van Binsbergen 1991, 2003b; Turner 2006c contains many more similar writings, especially of more recent vintage.

<sup>129</sup> Although my interlocutor's violent reaction was apparently inspired by my infringing on a paradigmatic tenet of the anthropological discipline (my 'becoming a sangoma', in other words, going native), in fact it was also at least in part triggered by a territorial defence reaction: I was writing about religion in North-eastern Botswana, which was supposed to be his prerogative, and although as a friend he had generously suggested that I should move my fieldwork to that area and had facilitated my arrival there, it had never been his intention that I should be writing on religion – although he had known me as a religious anthropologist for nearly two decades. Further, *cf.* van Binsbergen 1991, 2003: ch. 6; for a discursive criticism of the Ego-centred development in religious anthropology, with special attention to Stoller, *cf.* Olivier de Sardan 1988.

been endemic to the anthropological profession from the very beginning. Such a label is not totally inappropriate, nor necessarily pejorative. The core of Post-Modernism (Lyotard 1979) is the deconstruction of the Modernist project, exposing the latter as some sort of Hollywood scenario artificially and violently imposed upon (an otherwise chaotic, contradictory and multicentred) reality: a Grand Narrative, sustained by an almighty and invisible Narrator (here: the modernist anthropological author), who mistakes for objective reality his own delusions of order, control, clear-cut and impermeable conceptual and social boundaries, and his own, only apparently non-problematic, access to a privileged point of view – to a vantage point that renders him nearly omniscient. The Post-modern anthropologist realises that she must give up all these, so clearly arrogant, pretensions, must admit that her knowledge construction in the field is utterly precarious, and that her best bet is to join – on their own, local conditions, and regardless the tenets of a North Atlantic / global scientific discipline – those who are already locals, and who are hence already in the know. However, to make this step simply requires, among other things, a receptive humility that, in principle, has always been implied in anthropological fieldwork – even though in colonial times some of the recognised masters of the anthropological discipline (Malinowski, Griaule)<sup>130</sup> in their dealings with their local research associates may have shown less of this attractive human trait. While in the field, the anthropologist's 'going native' may still be forgiven – usually she works alone there and her supervisors could be unaware of the details of whatever field strategies she chooses to adopt. In the field most anthropologists have little problem dancing, singing and praying along, going through the motions in imitation of local believers. The test (van Binsbergen 2003: Chs 0 and 15; cf. 1979) comes after fieldwork, when the stance of 'going native' is either dropped for the production of yet another Grand Narrative (*i.e.* the coherent and distancing ethnographic account), – or honesty, loyalty, and cognitive charity are allowed to prevail, and the beliefs and action once adopted in fieldwork, are not betrayed overnight under the compelling gaze of academic peers and supervisors – on the contrary, they are allowed to persevere in the final account, and to be taken seriously in the published ethnographic texts the fieldworker produces.

Honesty, loyalty and cognitive charity – which politically-correct, present-day anthropologist would like to do without them? Their emotional appeal informs much of my own experiential accounts (van Binsbergen 1991, 2003h), as it informs my later work in intercultural philosophy – where it has won me recognition from the part of African colleagues. Yet, the professional ban on 'going native' has had a very good reason, even beyond safeguarding intradisciplinary power relations and paradigms. It has reminded us that, even though our own person – inserted in a socio-cultural context (the foreign field of research) where we are, initially, ignorant outsiders – is to be our main research instrument, and even though it is in human nature to respond sociably (by the merging of actions, ideas and even bodies) to the often extreme physical nearness of other persons in fieldwork, the purpose of fieldwork is not just to end up as a knowing insider and live

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<sup>130</sup> On Malinowski: Clifford 1986; Gellner 1998; Malinowski 1967. On Griaule: Clifford 1988; Copans 1973; Lettens 1971; van Beek 1991, 2004.

happily forever after in the field, but to constantly dissociate from the field, ultimately leave it, and write an anthropological treatise. If we do 'go native', we may end up knowing more, and being more accepted locally, but probably at the price of defeating the scientific purpose why we came to the field in the first place. This may be a good thing – humans should not attempt to study their fellow humans with the same objectifying, distant method that, in the natural sciences in the course of the last few centuries, produced such impressive insights and such Faustian knowledge and destructive technological control over the non-human world. Yet to the extent to which, after fieldwork, we are to remain within the anthropological profession and its institutional arrangements (university departments, disciplinary organisations, the scholarly format of text production), the texts we produce will continue to have a claim to being scientific. Post-modernists (*cf.* Clifford & Marcus 1986; Clifford 1988) tried to cut the Gordian knot of this dilemma by declaring ethnography primarily a literary text genre, whose authority *i.e.* whose claim to the production of valid and reliable scientific knowledge was merely supported by stylistic and narrative means – in other words by performative sleight-of-hand that would imply the denial of all such authority. But such a position marks Clifford as an armchair anthropologist; it does not have the feel of sustained fieldwork, where one struggles, and suffers (lack of comfort, sleep, intellectual pastimes such as reading and writing, privacy and home friends, in other words lack of vital intimacy; a constant sense of local incompetence, ignorance, and lack of control; and usually health threats) for the sake of *knowledge* – which hard-earned knowledge, once acquired through sweat, blood and tears, one should not allow to go discredited as a mere literary invention and nothing more.

So here is the real problem of 'going native': *solitarily, and almost unconditionally, one follows the host society to the knowledge it has to share, but having relinquished the professional distance that implies an entire methodological package in the field, how can we ever be sure that the knowledge collected under conditions of 'going native' is valid and reliable, and is not full of the effects of projection and transference that usually attend non-scientific attempts to take in new knowledge domains?* Edith Turner, while investing her claim as to 'the reality of spirits' with an appeal to her self-claimed ethnographic authority, does not stop to answer this central question, and thus leaves us empty-handed.

### **3.7. Can the fieldworker, even when 'going native', ever experience what the hosts are experiencing?**

Another problem with 'going native' lies, not so much with the claim of access to privileged knowledge, but with the claim of access to privileged *experience*. If the fieldworker, the participant observer, goes it 'all the way', the claim is often that she will not only go where the locals go, see what has been there for the locals to see, and share home truths that all insiders know as a matter of course, but no outsiders do; but that literarily, she *will experience what the locals are experiencing*. This claim is there, in so many words, in Edith Turner's own writings (E. Turner 2006b), as in much other 'experiential anthropology'. Here she disagrees with Clifford Geertz (E. Turner 2003b; Geertz 1986: 373), who dismisses such a claim, considering it impossible for an anthropological fieldworker to experience

what her local research associates are experiencing. Now the quality of his work, both ethnographically and theoretically, made Geertz (1926-2006) one of the leading anthropologists of his generation, which is also the generation of Edith Turner. As an anthropologist he was something of an exception, not only in that he wrote about Islam across the entire Old World from Morocco to Indonesia (Geertz 1968), but particularly in that he had a fair awareness of current philosophical thought, and especially underwent the inspiration of phenomenology, through Paul Ricoeur. If by experience we understand, not, of course, the sheer stage directions of any social or ritual event (the observable movement of human bodies and other objects through space over time), but the participant's evolving individual reflexive consciousness of that event, then it is clear what Geertz's position is based on. For, to the extent to which consciousness is culturally informed and therefore is particular in space and time, the visiting anthropological fieldworker will experience any event in fieldwork in a manner that is systematically different from that of her local research associates. Of course, the essential thing about culture is that it is learned, and therefore, as months and years go by, the overlapping between the locals' experience and the researcher's experience will somewhat increase. However, the fieldworker is usually already an adult, who brings to the event deep-seated conscious and especially unconscious mindsets and sentiments that were produced in her own home society and condemn her for the rest of her life to a substantially different experience. Like any other fieldworker, I could adduce to this point anecdotes from my own fieldwork in various places,<sup>131</sup> but even if I do not, the message is, I think clear. Edith Turner's claim as to the reliable vicarious experience of the fieldworker is *prima facie* so unacceptable that it needs far more substantiation than she is offering.

### 3.8. The anthropologist as globalising hero<sup>132</sup>

I am surprised to see Edith Turner use a short-hand expression like 'field people' as a designation for the host community among which an anthropologist conducts her fieldwork. Elsewhere she describes how anthropologists in their annual meetings may produce a sense of *communitas as if they were 'field people'*.<sup>133</sup> Edith Turner seems to mean this, not as condescending expressions, but as endearing ones. We know that anthro-

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<sup>131</sup> In van Binsbergen 2003h, projection and transference in fieldwork are discussed as major reasons to doubt the method of participant observation as a tool for valid intercultural knowledge construction.

<sup>132</sup> The implicit reference is to the Manchester-School anthropologist the late lamented Bruce Kapferer, 1988, 'The anthropologist as hero — Three exponents of Post-modernist anthropology', *Critique of Anthropology*, 8, 2: 77-104. We are referring here not so much to the hero as protagonist in myth especially in battle, but to an archetype to which considerable significance has been ascribed in psychoanalysis, e.g. Rank 1909; Jung 1991.

<sup>133</sup> 'Field people' to be taken, clearly not in the sense of 'people who like to do fieldwork' but of 'people among whom fieldwork is being done'. It is scarcely in keeping with Post-modern codes of representing the other when we define, as happens in this expression, others in function of the role objectifyingly imposed upon them by Ego; but then, Edith Turner was born and educated, and her personality was largely formed, long before Post-modernity, and deserves our leniency on that basis.

pologists like to think of themselves, and ostentatiously present themselves to colleagues and the general public, as having been enriched, and positively re-socialised, by the example of the people they have gone out to study; I am such an anthropologist myself. But is there no danger here (notably: of condescension, appropriation, projection), when the personal subjects who make up a particular socio-cultural community, *are primarily defined by the instrumental and perspectival fact that they happen to be studied by a (usually North Atlantic) anthropologist in an artificially and one-sidedly constructed situation called 'the field'*? 'Field people' is a hopelessly egocentric expression for an anthropologist. Medieval thought saw the whole of the non-human natural world as created in order to fulfil a particular purpose for humankind, sheep to give wool, ants to remind us of the virtues of hard work and thriftiness, etc. Similarly, and more recently, male sexism, objectifyingly, saw the whole of female humanity as an extension of male desires and real or invented needs. I am afraid the expression 'field people' is uncomfortably close to these historical examples, in that it refers to a set of people not for what they are in themselves and by self-definition, but for what they are to the anthropologist who happened to come along and who can spare a few months or years to stay. In itself the expression may be harmless and reflect what, in a recent past, could be considered common anthropological parlance. But it is an anachronism by the standards of today's thought.

And there are other indications that the type of religious anthropology Edith Turner is advocating, is implicitly shifting the focus of research

- from human subjects in socio-cultural communities in their own particular time and place,
- to anthropologists, and anthropology, as the vicarious receptacles of humankind's cultural and spiritual wisdom.<sup>134</sup>

Are we not encountering a similar move when (as addressed above) the experience of the anthropologist in the field is taken to be identical to that of the hosts, and therefore may be conveniently analysed through introspection *under the pretense of producing valid and reliable knowledge concerning the hosts' experience*? Or when (as throughout Edith Turner's project) anthropology becomes redefined as the proper arena for the dissemination and contestation of a particular conception of the world – one in which the reality of spirits is centrally recognised? Are we not forgetting then that, overlooking the range of socio-cultural expressions of humankind since the Lower Palaeolithic (at least 3 million years Before Present), and overlooking the sheer variety of such expressions across the

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<sup>134</sup> Cf. my 1981 paper on Nkoya ancestral veneration, now being reprinted in my book *Our drums are always on my mind*.

There is a marked tendency, among anthropologists in the Post-modern era, to interpret the maxim by the 18<sup>th</sup> century British poet Pope (Epistle II, line 2, in: De Fontanes 1821)

"The proper study of Mankind is Man"

as meaning

"The proper subject matter of anthropology is the anthropologist."

globe, the institution called 'anthropology' is, in space and time, an extremely limited expression, weighed down by the inheritance of North-Atlantic colonialism and racism, and still (with its unmistakable centre of gravity in the United States of America) largely under the influence of today's (but rapidly waning) North-Atlantic world hegemony – even if trying to counter and compensate that influence? Or is perhaps Edith Turner's main point that, in a globalised world, anthropology is in a truly unique position as foreshadowing the kind of intercultural fusion of knowledges we will need more than anything else in order to survive as a species and to know reality in all its aspects (including those aspects so far not recognised by North Atlantic science):

'The anthropology of religion too will gradually become a science belonging to the alliance of all the planet's peoples, not excluding even Serbs, Hutus, Ghadafi, Farrakhan, Russian communists, or Middle Eastern males. We can put ourselves at the service of the planet-the way it is, not the way it ought to be.' (E. Turner 1997: 71).<sup>135</sup>

The point is not without some appeal to me, although in my opinion the defects of anthropology are too obvious for such a noble task, which I would then be inclined assign (equally naïvely, no doubt) to intercultural philosophy.<sup>136</sup>

### 3.9. Spirit traditions: Merely useful knowledge, or indeed valid knowledge?

In one of Edith Turner's papers,<sup>137</sup> she contrasts the cyclical cosmology of the Inuit and many other cultures (where human death and the decomposition of the human body is only one phase in an eternal cycle of the transformation of matter, in other words, in a food chain) with the vertical cosmology of the Judaeo-Christian-Islamic tradition and of, not unrelated, capitalism.<sup>138</sup> Their different implications for environmental survival are only too obvious: the cyclic view leads to respect and preservation, the vertical view to waste and destruction. The point is surprisingly shallow: the image of the Native American (and of so-called 'Indigenous Peoples' in general – a confusing and essentialising category anyway) as close to the Earth and as providing a cosmological and moral alterna-

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<sup>135</sup> Edith Turner's text was written before the violent death of Colonel Ghadafi at the hands of fellow-Libyans in 2011; and also written, apparently, at a time and in a milieu where – at least from a USA mainstream imperialist position – one could still entertain doubts concerning the claims to full membership of the human family, as laid by 'Serbs [ a South-east European nation ], Hutus [ an ethnic division in Rwanda, East Africa, accused of genocide on their Tutsi fellow-Rwandans ], Ghadafi, Farrakhan [ 'an American religious leader, activist, and social commentator' – *Wikipedia* ], Russian communists [ the power base of the former Soviet Union, ousted in 1989, proverbial public enemies of Americans during the decades of the Cold War ], or Middle Eastern males [ a section of humanity not famous for their woman-friendly attitudes ].

<sup>136</sup> van Binsbergen 2003h; for critique of this position, cf. Boele van Hensbroek 2003.

<sup>137</sup> E. Turner 1997: 78 f.

<sup>138</sup> Weber 1905 / 1976; Tawney 1926. Perhaps interestingly, the same food-chain imagery is pervasive in modern Africa in the context of witchcraft beliefs and the exercise of political power: who is to eat whom? Cf. Geschiere c.s. 1995. It is, in Bantu-speaking Africa, also the standard imagery to apply to accession to socio-political office: one 'eats' (*kulya* / *kudya* etc.) a title or a position.



tive to present-day urban and industrial waste-making, has been a facile cliché of New-Age beliefs and writing. Apparently, the knowledge enshrined in local spirit beliefs is *useful knowledge* (it is the ideological part of modes of production revolving on hunting, gathering or early horticulture), even though North-Atlantic science refuses to support such local knowledge in spirit terms. However, Edith Turner's project goes much further than that, and makes the claim that local spirit knowledge deserves to be universally recognised, in other words, that such spirit traditions amount to *valid knowledge*. Now, attributions of usefulness are based on a set of (ideally intersubjective) evaluations in the light of socio-cultural-political desirabilities informed by a particular spatio-temporal position and the interests that position implies; they are, therefore, inherently relative – matters of taste, perspective, situation, in other words, *culture*. Valid knowledge however is something rather different – unless we opt for the scepticist position that relegates all knowledge claims to the performative domain of rhetorics.<sup>139</sup> Methodologically, the hallmark of valid knowledge consists in the intersubjectively recognised procedures by which that knowledge has been produced. Existentially (and Edith Turner would feel more at home here), the hallmark of valid knowledge is that it coincides with what is, with Being. *Therefore, if Edith Turner's project is to recognise, as universally valid knowledge, the spirit traditions from outside the North Atlantic intellectual tradition, she must tell us what she means by this claim, and especially by what criteria she goes about establishing the validity of that knowledge?*

### 3.10. Translating spirit traditions to the modern world at large: Once more the anthropologist as hero

Suppose Edith Turner would succeed in affirming, in a methodologically satisfactory way, the validity of spirit traditions outside the North Atlantic intellectual tradition. That would still leave us with a major problem of translation and format. These spirit traditions are phrased in a local idiom that, even if it is English on the surface (as in Edith Turner's Alaska fieldwork), yet conveys concepts and relations that are not yet in a format suited for more or less unedited circulation outside the local horizon within which they are at home: not only because the language in which they are phrased, but also (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1962) because of their content, because of their particular indigenous format (notably their conceptual and logical fuzziness and inner dialectics), and because of their merging with local non-verbal bodily expressions and with local notions beyond words. If the spirit discourse represents valid knowledge in the local field, how do we ensure that it may continue to constitute valid knowledge after undergoing the format change that would enable its circulation in a globalised, universalising context like that of the modern media, the Internet, and intercontinental scholarship?<sup>140</sup> The problem is all the more pressing,

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<sup>139</sup> In the Aristotelian sense; Aristotle 1862: *De Arte Rhetorica*, pp. 310-410; *Anaximenes Rhetorica: Ad Alexandrum*, pp. 411-456. Further: Aristotle / Kennedy 1991; Kennedy 1998; Perelman 1982; Salazar 2002; Salazar, Osha & van Binsbergen 2004.

<sup>140</sup> Having affirmed, and attempted to demonstrate, the validity of *Sangoma Science* especially its

considering<sup>141</sup> the formal-organisation format in which much of life is organised today, not only in the North Atlantic region but increasingly all over the world. Religion, education, health care, the judiciary, economic exchange, recreation, political life, is now in the hands of formal, bureaucratically implemented organisations, whose structures of command, and whose internal and external legitimation, all depend on the formal written word, increasingly in a digitalised form. This development could scarcely be foreseen a century and a half ago, certainly not for Africa (then still awaiting European colonisation; cf. van Binsbergen 1993a, where specifically the social-structural implications of the conquest of Africa are briefly considered), scarcely for Alaska (then still a remote Russian possession). It has rendered our social life experience very different from what it was for people in Enlightenment Europe (18th c. CE), and from the experience of most people still close to local spirit traditions. In Alaska as in Zambia, and anywhere else, the formal organisation has continued its conquest of the world: colonialism, capitalism and later forms of globalisation have allowed that conquest to extend to all continents of the world.

If in this modern context, spirit beliefs are to be vindicated as valid knowledge, they must be recast in the international language and discursive / presentational format manageable within the formal organisation – only in such a format can these beliefs and the forms of spirituality that cluster around them, become the subject of a formal institutional course of action (be taught, funded, staffed, researched, rewarded, and becoming the subject to library acquisition, publication, web publication, etc.).<sup>142</sup>

It is implied in Edith Turner's project that anthropology is in a unique position to effect such translation and format transformation, which we might summarise as 'North Atlantic domestication', or nicer perhaps, 'institutionalisation'. Yet, apart from mediating – personally, and with passion rather than analytical distance – the spirit beliefs she encountered in her fieldwork before professional and lay audiences in the North Atlantic, *Edith Turner does not explicitly address the problem of format translation and global mediation*, and again leaves us out in the cold.

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claims in the field of divination and clairvoyance, this question is at the heart of chapter 7 in my *Intercultural encounters* (van Binsbergen 2003h). There I imply that the transformative format change from local to global is not necessarily doomed to fail. Now I tend to be am more sceptical about this, more aware of the hidden hegemonic distortions threatening such a transformation.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. van Binsbergen 1993a, 1998a, 1998b, 2004c.

<sup>142</sup> This, incidentally, was the link, at the original Nijmegen Symposium where the present chapter originated, with the papers by Kees Waaijman (on spirituality in modern institutional health care) and by Paul van der Velde (on the difficulty of mobilising Buddhist concepts and practices for modern psychotherapy): if we want spirit ideas, however inspiring and valid, to be inserted, to be recognised, and to work, in a modern environment, we must make sure that these ideas undergo such a *translation and format change* as makes their reception in a formal organisational environment possible, without – if such is at all possible – destroying their content and meaning in the process. A similar problem arises in the UNESCO context of extending recognition, protection, and support to local cultural expressions.

### 3.1. Spirit traditions and globalisation: From periphery to centre, or the other way around?

My previous point was about the possibility of survival and transformation of spirit traditions *in a context of today's globalisation*. Now, I want to turn this around, and explore the effects of globalisation on the ethnographic situations of the Ndembu and the Inuit, as Edith Turner has described them. Globalisation is a confusing and multifaceted term; I understand by it: the profound socio-cultural transformation resulting from dramatic advances in the technology of information and communication (*cf.* van Binsbergen *et al.* 2004). This, of course, did not start with the computer and communication satellites, as Vic Turner's own – somewhat nostalgic and clichéd, not to say botanising – characterisation of the Ndembu situation in Zambia in the early 1950s demonstrates:

'In many parts of Zambia the ancient religious ideas and practices of the Africans are dying out through contact with the [W]hite man and his ways. Employment in the copper mines, on the railway, as domestic servants and shop assistants; the meeting and mingling of tribes in a nontribal environment; the long absence of men from their homes – all these factors have contributed to the breakdown of religions that stress the values of kinship ties, respect for the elders, and tribal unity. However, in the far northwest of the Territory, this process of religious disintegration is less rapid and complete; if one is patient, sympathetic, and lucky one may still observe there the dances and rituals of an older day.' (V. Turner 1968: 2)

Even more globalised would have been the situation of the Ndembu in 1985 (from what little I gather it was scarcely different from that of the Nkoya at the time, which I have known first-hand). And from what I have read of Edith Turner's Inuit accounts, these are people effectively incorporated in a globalised, English-speaking society, with television, snow scooters, air links, military bases, churches, political organisations ultimately linking up with the centres of USA power, whilst preserving – or so it appears – elements of historic, local spirit traditions.

So far, taking Edith Turner's cue, we have discussed these peripheral spirit traditions as if, in essence,

- they were both local and ancient,
- they have to be protected against the onslaught of the globalising, secularising and rationalising modern world,
- yet they deserve to be recognised and received by the modern world because of the valid knowledge and the therapeutic wisdom they constitute;
- experiential anthropologists venturing out into these far-away places, are to play a key role in the identification, transmittance and global recirculation of these spirit traditions.

Much of this could have been taken from my own writings. Yet I would now like to introduce the alternative model, according to which some of what we take to be spirit traditions in the sense expounded above, may not so much be elements of peripheral societies ready to invade, or to be mediated at least to, the North Atlantic and the global world at large, but, quite the other way around, *in itself is a demonstration of the global world already having invaded peripheral local communities – signs and products of (proto-)globalisation*.

Let me elaborate. The concept of spirit is, per definition, surprisingly volatile and non-localised, for something that is yet supposed to be at home within the narrow horizon of the village, the clan and the ethnic group. Did the cults serving such spirits spring from the local soil in remotest Africa, Asia and the Americas – *or did they merely end up there*, whilst originating from recognised centres of cultural and religious transformation and innovation? In recent work I have explored the comparative world history of shamanism, as an aspect of global leopard-skin symbolism, the global long-range history of myth, and the global history of the cosmology of the cyclical transformation of elements.<sup>143</sup> Before the 2010s, my personal encounters with forms of ecstatic religion practically indistinguishable from shamanism had all been confined to the African continent: Tunisia, Zambia, Botswana.<sup>144</sup> So I was surprised to see Frobenius – whom I have come to take more seriously than most Africanist do today – set aside (Frobenius 1954) shamanism as an Asian trait, which relatively recently (mainly in the course of the Common Era) had invaded Africa along various routes, each associated with a specific, named cult. The appearance of shamanism in the Ancient Near East from the second millennium BCE, as spotted by Assyriologists,<sup>145</sup> is related to this movement. At the background is a general 'Back into Africa' movement from Central Asia to the West and South West, which has effected a massive genetic, demographic, linguistic and cultural influx from c. 15,000 Before Present.<sup>146</sup> The Frobenius model (which I have redrawn in Fig. 3.4) turned out to fit my own Africanist research excellently.

In this connection, let us not forget how Buddhism and Islam in Asia, and Islam in Africa, are now being considered as vehicles for the spread of spiritualist, shaman-like religious forms way outside the overpopulated centres of learning where these world religions are at home; even the very term *shaman* in N. Asian languages has contentiously – and by recent insights, erroneously – been explained in this connection (as a loan from South Asian *çramana*, Buddhist spiritual leader; Karst 1931: 564), although as we shall see the institution of shamanism<sup>147</sup> is very much older than any world religion.<sup>148</sup> In Africa,<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> van Binsbergen 2006a, 2006b, 2010g, 2012b, 2019a, 2020d.

<sup>144</sup> Meanwhile, field excursions in Sri Lanka and Bali, Indonesia, and library studies of the Ancient Near East and North America, have been added to this list

<sup>145</sup> *E.g.* in the art of the traditional healer, and in mythical motifs *e.g.* the *Descent of Inanna* which – among other dimensions, *cf.* Buccallati 1982 – recounts a shaman's descent into the underworld; Ritter 1965; Jacobsen 1976; Starr 1983; van Binsbergen & Wiggermann 1999. Oppenheimer (1966: 37) also sees extispicy as part of the 2nd mill BCE intrusion of shamanism in the Ancient Near East. In recent work (2020: 210n) I have advanced compelling reasons why this pattern of spread may be considered partly indebted to Sunda expansion from South East Asia, and thus part of the more general 'Back-into-Africa' movement from 15 ka BP on.

<sup>146</sup> *Cf.* Cruciani *et al.* 2002; Coia *et al.* 2005; Underhill 2004; Hammer *et al.* 1998.

<sup>147</sup> I. SANGOMAHOOD ASSHAMANISM.

Hermann (1970: 6f) touches on a relevant question earlier raised by Frobenius: are there true shamans in Africa? Hermann's answer is affirmative, since a fundamental, widespread and very ancient shamanistic trait (seeking to restore life by a proper arrangement of a dead body's

bones) is also found among the Kabylans of Algeria, and the San ('Bushmen') of Southern Africa. I encountered a related belief in Francistown (where even though the dominant population is Bantu speaking and clearly continuous with the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, San influence is considerable, both culturally, genetically and demographically): the *sangomas* overseeing my first goat sacrifice, in my own yard in the Summer of 1989, insisted that I should very carefully collect and guard the victim's bones after the sacrificial meal, since these were the obvious items on which enemy attack would focus.

In my opinion, *sangomahood* may be considered as a particular form of shamanism (cf. Winkelman 1990, 2002, 2004.) In the *sangoma* case, as often in sub-Saharan Africa and the Southern hemisphere in general, we are dealing with a particular form of shamanism where – cf. possession – the shaman is supposed to be visited by the empowering agent rather than going out to visit the empowering agent in the latter's abode. In a remarkable study, the Sanskritist / comparative mythologist Michael Witzel (2011) makes a similar global distinction between Southern and Northern shamans – the latter type corresponding more closely with the shamanic type case of Siberian ritual specialists as first described by Witsen (1692 *etc.*), Harva / Holmberg 1938, *etc.* In the background however is Witzel's regrettable tendency (repeatedly criticised by me, e.g. van Binsbergen 2006b, 2006c, 2010i) to essentialise the North / South distinction, associating the latter half of the globe with more primitive, less developed features such as a circular conception of time, and a lesser development of the notion of personhood. In the recent literature the definition of shamanism keeps receiving much attention (Basilov 1999; Porterfield 1987; Walsh 1989). I.M. Lewis, one important author in this field (e.g. 1971), in 1999 posed the important question 'is there a shaman cosmology?', in a contribution to the collective work on *Shamanic Cosmos* edited by Mastromatteo and Rigopoulos, 1999. In the classic, Northern variety of shamanism, the cosmos is layered in (a) underworld, (b) ordinary world of living humans, and (c) Heaven, – and the shaman is supposed to actively travel between these layers, often along the cosmic axis, and thus to bring spiritual resources back to her or his fellow humans. However, in the Southern, especially African, varieties of shamanism, this layered vision may be collapsed (at the detriment of the celestial layer) and it is not the shaman who is supposed to travel, but the supernatural agent empowering her or him. Dispensing with the celestial level may have dating implications, for my research into comparative mythology and into the Upper Palaeolithic life-world such as it is reflected in the oldest reconstructed vocabulary, that of \*Borean, suggests that the upward gaze and the invention of Heaven only emerged less than 15 ka BP (van Binsbergen 2012, 2018, 2020). Most interesting is an archaeological study (Grosman *et al.* 2008) of the skeleton of a 12 ka old shaman found in Israel, buried with a leopard, 50 tortoises and a human foot; contrary to the loose and unsystematic use of the concept of shaman which is endemic in archaeology (cf. Kirchner 1952; Clottes & Lewis-Williams 1998; Price 2001a, 2001b) and comparative religion, Grosman *et al.*'s study takes the trouble to convincingly spell out in detail why we are justified to consider the buried person a shaman:

'We argue that this burial is consistent with expectations for a shaman's grave. Although the term shaman derives specifically from the Tungus people of Siberia (...), [ a moot point – WvB ] shamanistic figures are well-known from hunter-gatherer and small-scale agricultural societies world-wide. The shaman's primary role is to mediate between the human and the spirit worlds (...). Shamans act as messengers, healers, and magicians, and serve both the community and its members. Although shaman graves are highly variable, and thus, there are no standard criteria to identify a shaman in the archaeological record, a number of generalizations about shamans can be surmised from cross-cultural research: (a) shamans are associated with spiritual, magical, and healing powers; (b) shamans engage the help of spirits in animal form; (c) shamans are keepers of specialized knowledge; (d) shamans are ascribed high status within their communities; and (e) the status of shamans is reflected in their special treatment at death—their burials often contain artifacts reflecting their role in life (*i.e.*, remains of particular animals and contents of healing kits) (...). Ethnographic records describe a variety of ways to bury a shaman (...), but because shamans are al-

Christianity has similarly imported an highly elaborate spirit idiom whose transformations into apparently historic, local African spirit traditions of the interior we can only rarely trace in detail, but whose vast expanse is suggested by the sheer frequency with which Heavenly Queens, Angels and Holy Spirits turn up in African syncretistic cults and African Independent Churches.<sup>150</sup> We touch here on a topic which Victor and Edith Turner have studied at length at the local level, among the Ndembu, under the heading of 'cult of affliction',<sup>151</sup> but whose transregional dimensions are especially important to us, at the present juncture.

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ways considered privileged persons, who therefore enjoy a different kind of afterlife from other members of their group, unusual features of their graves mark their special status. This is clearly the case with the burial discussed here. The elaborate and invested grave at Hilazon Tachtit confirms the special status of the buried individual and her high standing within the community. Moreover, although pathologies are not universally characteristic of shamans, there are numerous cross-cultural accounts of physically disabled individuals being ascribed healing and spiritual powers (...). The goods accompanying the burial are also typical of shaman burials. Tortoises, cow tails, eagle wings, and fur-bearing animals continue to play important symbolic and shamanistic roles in the spiritual arena of human cultures worldwide today [...]. It seems that the woman in the Natufian burial was perceived as being in a close relationship with these animal spirits. Shamans are universally recorded cross-culturally, in hunter-gatherer groups and small-scale agricultural societies (...). Nevertheless, they have rarely been documented in the archaeological record [...], and none have been reported from the Paleolithic of Southwest Asia. Perhaps, it is not surprising if clear evidence for a shaman comes from the Natufian, as the profound social and economic changes associated with the transition to agriculture [the Neolithization process (...)] surfaced during the Natufian and undoubtedly entailed equally substantial ideological changes (...). Whether the changes in the spiritual outlook preceded and triggered the economic changes (...) or *vice versa*, an inseparable interplay is clearly observed between ideological and socioeconomic change across the forager-to-farmer transition. The unique grave at Hilazon Tachtit Cave provides us with rare concrete evidence for those processes in their initial stages at the termination of the Paleolithic on the eve of the Neolithic transformation.' (Grosman *et al.* 2008; I have deleted as immaterial in the present context the references to secondary literature – WvB)

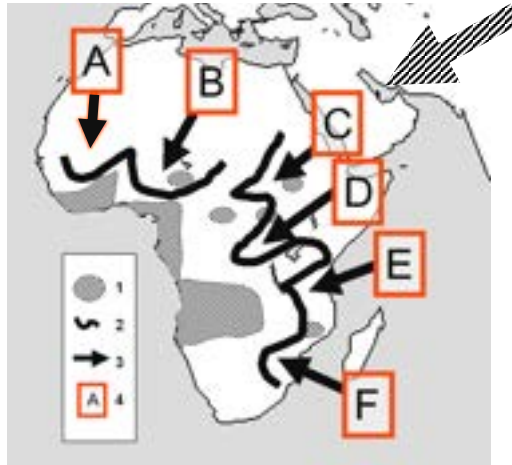
Considered to have entered the Ancient Near East including Egypt in the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> mill BCE, shamanism from there exerted considerable influence upon Greek spirituality (Dodds 1951; MacLennan 2006). The extent of Asian spiritual influence upon ecstasy and trance in the West has also received some attention (*e.g.* Langen 1963).

<sup>148</sup> This point argued in detail in van Binsbergen 2012: 256 *f.*, leading to the conclusion that shamanism emerged in West to Central Asia during the Upper Palaeolithic (c. 20–15 ka BP).

<sup>149</sup> Christianity in Africa: At the beginning of the Common Era as far as North and North-eastern Africa is concerned; from the 16<sup>th</sup> c. CE onwards for West and East Africa under Portuguese influence; and from the 19<sup>th</sup> c. throughout the continent, regardless of colonising and missionising European motherland.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. Janzen 1985; Comaroff 1985; Comaroff & Comaroff 1991; Jules-Rosette 1975; Shorter 1977; Eboussi-Boulaga 1981; Schoffeleers 1992; Mulago gwa Cikala Musharhamina 1986.

<sup>151</sup> V. Turner 1957: ch. X; V. Turner 1962 – with special emphasis on the *Chihamba* cult.



LEGEND

1. Main areas of figurative and plastic arts in Africa

2. Frontier of advance of ecstatic cults

3. Inroads of shamanism according to Frobenius (1954: 295 f.)

4. specific ecstatic cults entering in historical times:

A. Jegu

C. Zar

E. Pepo / Mpepo

B. Bori

D. Mandva

F. Shave / Mashave

I have added the cross-hatched arrow upper right: influx of shamanism in the Ancient Near East

Fig. 3.4. Frobenius' view of inroads of shamanism into Africa, second millennium CE and earlier

C.M.N. White, the anthropologising district officer in North-western Zambia whom the Turners must have known in the 1940-1950s, in a remarkable paper sketched the emergence, in that region, of the conception of non-ancestral, even non-tribal, spirit cults without any moral concerns, as an alternative to historic local cults that were tied to a local descent group or ethnic group, and centring on morality such as the discharge of kinship obligations (White 1949). From 1972 on I followed up his initial analysis, in both oral-historical and ethnographic fieldwork among the Nkoya people and in comparative library research, and I could identify a fair number of cults (such as *Bituma*, *Moba*, *Mwendapanchi* etc.), which in broad East-West movements swept over the South Central African countryside from the later 19th century onward (van Binsbergen 1972, 1977, 1981). Elsewhere in South Central Africa similar cults, with the same parameters as far as time and space are concerned, were identified, such as *Mashave* and *Mpepo* – they feature in Frobenius' analysis as rendered in Fig. 3.4. These *new* cults of affliction by and large followed the trails of long-distance trade and labour migration, and in fact could be regarded (van Binsbergen 1981) as the ideological elaboration of such transregional movement. A number of specific features:

- their essentially non-local nature (venerating vague, non-local, non-personal and non-moralising entities that were supposed to spread 'like wind', i.e. *mpepo*);

- the fact that anyone could catch such a spirit without any moral infringement being involved, in other words guiltlessly, more like a contagious disease;
- and these cults's spread through a chain reaction, in such a way that any patient was to become an adept and might end up as local cult leader recruiting further adepts in turn;

– all this helped create and spread a *new model of the person* in which individual, market- and commodity-orientated action could be liberated from the connotations of sorcery it historically used to have in the local socio-cultural context. The change may be understood in terms of the concept 'limited good' of the anthropologist Foster (1965): as long as the local actors continue to view their social world as a microcosm closed into itself, all advancement in terms of status and wealth of one of the members was likely be seen as going at the expense of the others – as a form of malice and sorcery; but once this microcosm is shattered by the inroads of long-distance trade, state formation, and the penetration of capitalism, and more and more people will derive status and wealth from the outside world in a process of incorporation and proto-globalisation – then it becomes imperative to liberate such status advancement from the onus of malice and sorcery it had in the past. This is precisely the response offered by these new cults. In my opinion (based on a quarter of a century of sustained participatory and comparative research in both Africa and Asia), the ecstatic ritual and the paraphernalia in these cults, although greatly transformed and localised in the meantime, are in large part not indigenous to South Central Africa but ultimately derive from the Indian Ocean coast, with considerable impact of South Asian ecstatic cults and other religious forms from the contexts of Buddhism and Hinduism. As a result of my Botswana fieldwork from the 1980s onward, I have had occasion to apply the same model (a mercantile economic context, geared to commodity trade and facilitating transoceanic South Asian influence) to Southern African cults of affliction, especially to the *sangoma* cult (van Binsbergen 2003h: ch. 8, and 1999j / 2005).

Incidentally, the transregional and European, by implication possibly Christian connection was admitted by Vic when he wrote (Turner 1962: 74):

"There are several features in *Chihamba* which indicate that the rites may have been influenced by contact with Europeans, probably Portuguese, or with Europeanized Africans from western Angola. The miming of capture and of the slave caravans – with symbolic slave-yokes; the recurrent cross motif; and the ritual importance of *cassava* [ *Manihot esculenta*, a South American food crop, whose whiteness is the main material referent of '*Chihamba* the White Spirit' – WvB ] – a plant of comparatively recent introduction into Central Africa: all these suggest that borrowing has occurred, though probably not later than the period of Chokwe slave raids (cf. the song on p. 31 [ of Turner 1962 – WvB ], 'she has been caught by the Chokwe' [ an highly mercantile ethnic group neighbouring the Ndembu ]) in the 1880's. It is likely that the use of *musamha*[-]*njita* as a 'war-medicine' [ the Ndembu word means just that – WvB ] became prevalent at this epoch.



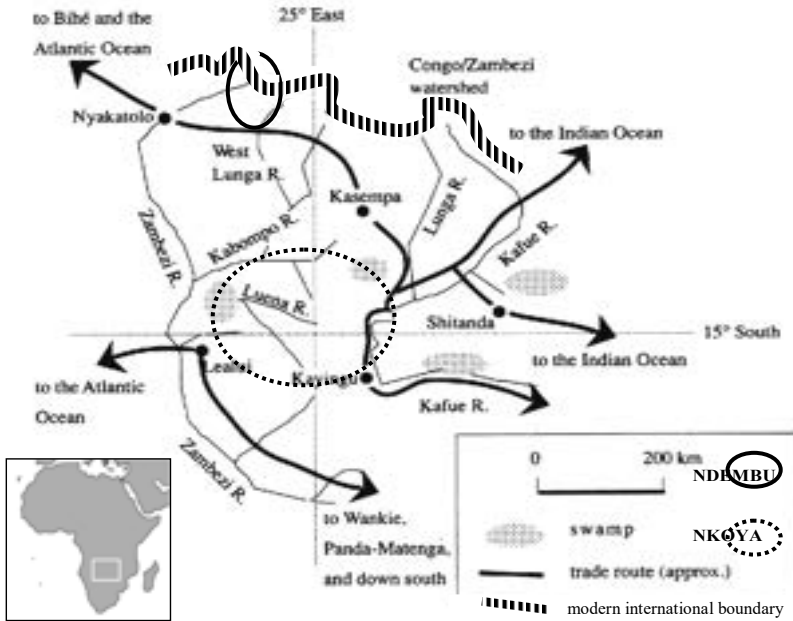


Fig. 3.5. Selected royal capitals and trade routes in the region of the Upper Zambezi and the Congo-Zambezi watershed, 19th century CE; inset: location of map area on the African continent



Vic's argument here revolves on the *Chihamba* cult. Interestingly, the root *-hamba* appears in various Bantu languages including Swahili (it is also a Nkoya personal name) with the meaning of either 'plant' or 'travel, journey'; but it is not listed under Guthrie's or Meussen's reconstructions of Proto-Bantu, and may well hail from outside the original (though recognisedly heterogeneous; and probably transcontinental; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 77f.) Proto-Bantu context.<sup>152</sup> Such a root would seem to be particularly

<sup>152</sup> Among the world's languages today, the root *hamba-* is remarkably rare (Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008, all databases), in a way that is scarcely illuminating in the present context. Buryat (a Mongolian < Altaic language) has *hambān*, 'convenient time'. In the Afroasiatic context, there is: \*Proto-Agaw / Central Cushitic (Agaw): \**Ha(m)bab-* 'flower' 1, 'to blossom' 2, 'to perfume the milk jar with the smoke of sweet-smelling herbs'. Mafá = Matakam, a Central Chad Afroasiatic language, has the remotely relevant form *hambat mavar* 'eat uncooked food'. And in Kiranti, a Sinotibetan language, we have *hamba*, 'wherefrom', while the form *hamb-* is also in use as an interrogative in other Sinotibetan languages. Below we shall come back to this point, and adduce the rather pertinent Austronesian > Indonesian semantics

apt for a cult which, in my interpretation (and by implication also in Vic's) celebrates long-distance movement of people and objects, including food crops ultimately hailing from Meso America – and centring on a vegetation god full of comparative mythological reminiscences, associated with West Asia and much further afield, even South East Asia / Oceania and Meso America (cf. Siecke 1914; Hatt 1953; Jensen 1939). However, in the PhD work of Wastiau (1997), *hamba* appears as a generic term for 'sacred / rite / holy object' in the Bantu languages of North-western Zambia, and of Angola. Likewise, the theonym Nyambi, now so widespread in Atlantic Africa and obviously continuous with West African theonyms such as Nyame, according to Wastiau only spread to Angola in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century CE, the god in question having the same birdlike connotations as among the Nkoya, and like among these people, of ambiguous gender.<sup>153</sup>

The field of comparative mythology shows (also cf. van Binsbergen 2012: 100, n. 59) trans-continental continuities relating to Neolithic conditions of food production. In many parts of the world we find the myth of the *dying junior god or goddess whose body turns into food crops*. A type description of this mytheme is to be found in Jensen's and Niggemeyer's 1978 / 1938 description of the Moluccan < Indonesian vegetation goddess Hainuwele, which gave its scholarly name to this complex. As Jensen puts it:

'One of the characteristics of this equatorial culture area (*Kulturkreis*) is the myth of the ancestor who was killed and torn apart and from whose buried remains food plants would grow.' (Jensen 1948: 83; my translation)

From the Ancient Near East (Ancient Egypt, Syro-Palestine and Mesopotamia; with later ramifications to Ancient Greece) we may mention the martyr cults of Jesus of Nazareth (cf. John 12:24: 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit'), Thammuz / Dumuzi, Ba'al, Attis, Adonis,<sup>154</sup> the child Dionysus torn apart by the Titans, and as their oldest variant, Wsir / Osiris  as killed by Swtj / Seth .<sup>155</sup> The interesting thing is that many of these ancient deities have ritual dramas attached to their myths, similar to *Chihamba*. The same mytheme is attested (Mackenzie 1923; Bierhorst 1988) in Meso and North America (whence many of the world's present-day food crops derive). In Meso America, the maize god Hun Hunahpu descended (cf. a food crop's seed as planted in the Earth) to the realm of the death god, was defeated by him, and was scattered in the form of the maize crop; similar myths are told among Native Americans in California and the Ama-

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of *hamb*- as 'slave',

<sup>153</sup> A few pages down I shall focus on the theonym Nyambi, and its possible association with yams and with the Sunda expansion.

<sup>154</sup> Frazer 1906 (with an unexpectedly positive review by the then leading British Egyptologist Gardiner, 1915 – Martin Bernal's maternal grandfather).

<sup>155</sup> Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, 1935-1935; Frazer 1914 (with Ancient sources); Jacobsen 1970 (with Mesopotamian sources).

zon basin (Atkins 2003; ch. 2). The same mytheme is found in Oceania, Japan<sup>156</sup> and South Asia (Dewi Sri, 'the Rice Mother'; the Moluccan Hainuwele (Jensen 1978); Willis 1994: 117). If the mytheme is rephrased so that the demiurge's dead body produces not just crops but the entire world, its distribution becomes even wider including Ancient Germanic mythology (the giant Ymir); Ancient Mesopotamian mythology (Marduk's female arch-enemy Tīamat, cf. Leviathan); Chinese (盤古 Pangu); and Na Atibun of the Gilbert Isl., Micronesia, Oceania (Cotterell 1989; Willis 1993).

Also sub-Saharan Africa has several cases interpretable in these terms: the cult of Cassara, among the Manjacos, Guinea Bissau (van Binsbergen 1984, 1988); the cult of *Chihamba* the White Spirit, among the Zambian Ndembu (V. Turner 1962); the cult of Bituma among the Zambian Nkoya, in the context of which permission is granted to eat the year's new maize (van Binsbergen 1981);<sup>157</sup> and the cult of M'bona, a martyred vegetation god in

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<sup>156</sup> Notably, the goddess 保食神 Uke Mochi alias 大宜都比売神 Ogetsu-hime-no-kami; Anesaki 1964; Willis 1994: 114.

<sup>157</sup> Bituma (cf. special topic N, below) was at the heart of my Zambian research into ecstatic religion from 1972 onward, and featured prominently in my 1981 comparative study. In my recent book *Religion as a Social Construct* (van Binsbergen 2017: 394, 147) I summarised my findings on Bituma in the following terms (slightly edited):

#### J. GLOBAL BACKGROUND OF THE ZAMBIAN / ANGOLAN BITUMA CULT

*Bituma* was the first ecstatic cult I studied in South Central Africa (van Binsbergen 1972, 1981). Its founder, S[h]imbinga, hailed from Angola and propagated the veneration of the white waterlily (*Nymphaeaceae* family), often confused with the (taxonomically very remote) lotus featuring in Ancient Mediterranean myth (e.g. Homer, *Odyssey*, IX; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, IX, 347; and *Fasti* I, 416, 423; perhaps also Biblical *Job* 40:21 f.) of contested botanical identification – cf. Anonymous, 'Lotus Tree'; and in South and East Asian Buddhism (*Nelumbo nucifera*). The main other features of S[h]imbinga's cult were:

- the belief (with Mediterranean / Christian parallels, but also with widespread parallels in Africa, cf. van Binsbergen 1981a) that he had risen from the dead;
- each cult leader was in possession of a debarked forked pole (called 'a hill'; the pole was inserted in a slight elevation in the ground) hung with strings of white beads;
- the leaders were donning white robes;
- they held nocturnal ecstatic healing sessions with drum orchestra and chorus; their principal song was 'We are going to the Moon'. Another Bituma cult song was: 'We pay homage to the cult leader / You went into the grave, Venerable Simbinga'.
- and they were subjected to food taboos especially concerning the first fruits of originally alien food crops such as cassava and maize.

Although the white lotus was also venerated in Ancient Egypt as a cosmogonic symbol associated with the child Horus (and from Egypt may have been transmitted, like so many other traits, into sub-Saharan Africa; van Binsbergen 201c), in the most recent millennia its main associations are Buddhist. In East Asia, the White Lotus cult was an element of conflict and rebellion through much of the Common Era. The Moon, understandably (as the Earth principal satellite dominating the night sky anywhere in the world), features in virtually every mythology of the world, but much rarer are myths that speak of

the South Shire valley, Malawi (Schoffeleers 1992). Below we shall have occasion to dwell

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travelling to the Moon as a place of possible human inhabitation. [ Only in 1969 CE did the first human set foot on the Moon; Western science fiction had anticipated this event already for decades, following in the wake of the French writer *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1657), and the Roman writer Lucianus in his *Vera Historia* (originally in Greek; 2nd c. CE / 1954). But in my opinion, these fantasies and anticipations cannot have had an impact on the eastern Angolan villager Simbinga in the 1930s CE. ] In Nkoya mythology, the Moon features, not as a place for human settlement but as a celestial pendant / pectoral jewel coveted (like the Moon and the Sun in so many of the world's mythologies; van Binsbergen 2010) by a princely child (as once by the Ancient Roman emperor Caligula, at least in Camus's (1944) reading...), or as a person whose four wives represent, and attend to, his four phases. In the Graeco-Roman Ancient World, the Pythagoreans were reputed to believe that after death the human soul will soar upwards to go to the Moon (Picard 1960: 18) – perhaps another example (cf. special topic X below) of the probable afterlife of Ancient Mediterranean, including Graeco-Roman, magico-religious beliefs in latterday sub-Saharan Africa – made possible as a result of south-bound Pelasgian expansion from the Late Bronze Age on. [ Although the general 'Africa for the Africans' orthodoxy among Africanists (cf. van Binsbergen 2019) makes it anathema to contemplate possible Northern borrowings in latterday Africa, yet ever since my extensive comparative and historical research into geomantic divination world-wide – 1995, 1995, 2012, in press (g) – , I have come to attach considerable importance to the idea of such incidental and fragmented afterlife of Ancient Mediterranean beliefs and practices in latterday sub-Saharan context; the indications are numerous, including the attestation of pantheons reminiscent of the Ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt and the Graeco-Roman world in both West Africa and Southern Africa (Lange 2004, 2011; Brown 1926; detailed forms of divination and magic, and their paraphernalia; adulterated and barely recognisable fragments of Judaism, Christianity and Islam buried deeply in African 'traditional' religion, etc. ) Perhaps the Southern African prominence of the mythical combination of snake / dragon and pool motifs, so conspicuous in the Ancient Mediterranean (Fontenrose 1980 / 1959: *passim*) and the Ancient Near East including Egypt (serpentine aquatic figures such as Tiamat, Apep, Leviathan, Yam) is another example of such afterlife – although the equally defensible hypothesis of a general Old-World substrate of aquatic divinities going back to the Upper Palaeolithic (cf. chapter 2 of the present book) would be more attractive since it avoids the potentially hegemonic claim of extensive African borrowings from the Northern hemisphere. ] The most prominent myth of Moon-travelling that comes to mind is that of the Chinese Moon goddess 嫦娥 *Chang E*, who as 'the returning maiden' is also implied in Hexagram 54 歸 易經 *Yi Jing*; cf. Yang & An 2005. Given the extensive intercontinental communications and the specific evidence of cultural influence from South and East Asia upon sub-Saharan Africa during the last few millennia (van Binsbergen 2019, 2020), it is not unthinkable that expelled representatives of a South or East Asian Lotus cult, or of its African offshoots, ended up in Angola. Given the widespread and powerful symbolism of the lotus / waterlily (although highly conspicuous in Hindu and Buddhist South and South East Asia, it is even venerated – probably as an echo from South or East Asia – in a puberty-initiator context in Melanesia, e.g. Blackwood 1935), and the syncretic tendencies of West African ecstatic religion (*Vodun*), it is quite likely that further research will reveal more connections. These may not be exclusively of a cultural-transmission type. It was found that the tuber of the waterlily has hallucinogen properties (Dobkin de Rios & Mundkur 1977), which may have been part of a very ancient pharmacopaea transmitted through very old and widespread shamanism, or could have been rediscovered time and again by parallel invention. White-robed healer-priests of a necromantic cult, therefore reminiscent of *Sangomas* and *Bituma* priests, occur in popular Buddhism in Nepal and surroundings (Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008, 'Sinotibetan etymology', s.v. *nakō-sele*, Dumi / Kiranti / Nepali language clusters). For the rest the global associations of the white robe are numerous and heterogeneous, ranging from the North American 'White' racist terrorist organisation the Ku Klux Klan, to the Bible (*Revelation* 6:9 f.); Muslims especially when on the *Hajj*; and to common representations of Jesus (e.g. as reported in modern African apparitions, such as that of the Zambian prophetess Alice Lenshina at the outset of her prophetic career). A further comparative exploration of this element in Bituma seems promising but it falls outside our present scope.

on some of these cults in more detail. Relevant for Africa in this connection are also the phytogeographical studies by Jeffrey, especially 1971, which suggest direct trans-Atlantic transmission of maize from the New World to West Africa.

A well-known figure in Buddhist South East and East Asia is the Bodhisattva saintly Buddha-like figure who, rather than being satisfied with the individual release from the eternal cycle of births and rebirth and the attending suffering, at the threshold of the Nirvana stops to return in order to assist the other souls to realise their Buddha nature. I suspect that in a wider perspective such a figure is another version of the saviour – a central figure on the salvation-orientated cosmologies that we find in the Ancient Near East (Widengren 1949), Graeco-Roman Antiquity (where σωτήρ *sōtēr*, 'Saviour', was the epithet of the god Heracles but also of several Ptolemaic and Seleucid king (Grottanelli 1982), in Christianity (and to some extent, in the Jewish משיח *Mešiah* tradition; Hooke 1963), and especially the Americas – where this figure is connected with maize as a food crop.<sup>158</sup> In the older literature, such a saviour figure is often treated under the German designation of *Heilbringer*: 'Bringer of Salvation'.<sup>159</sup>

I suggest considerable trans-Atlantic continuity between myths from the New World and the Old (cf. Ehrenreich 1905). But the relevance of phytogeography (the scientific study of the geographic distribution of plants) to the illumination of transcontinental connections in human prehistory is not limited to the Atlantic Ocean (cf. Laufer 1907a, 1907b, 1929); an extensive debate has been waged for decades concerning the origin of maize in West Africa: did it (as is commonly believed) come from the Americas *after* Columbus' discoveries c. 1500 CE, or had it by that time already found its way to Africa, either directly across the Atlantic, or crossing the Pacific from America and subsequently using Asia as a spring board towards Sub-Saharan Africa? (Jeffrey 1971a, 1971b, 1975, cf. Dick-Read 2005; Mangelsdorf & Oliver 1951). The detour via the Pacific in pre-Columbian times seems to deserve serious contemplation.

Elsewhere (2019a) I have reflected on the possible relevance of another major tuber crop, Taro (*Colocasia esculenta*) as an 'index fossil' highlighting the trail of Sunda (South, East and South East Asian) influence across the continent from an epicentre in South East Asia (cf. Fig. 3.6).

Perhaps a similar argument may be made for yams. Earlier (van Binsbergen 2015: 18–25, 'The theonym Nyambi', and continued there on pp. 25 f. for the wider mythological complexes to be identified shortly, in the next paragraph) I have engaged in tracing the comparative trans-continental antecedents of the theonym Nyambi, which as the High God name plays such an important role among the Nkoya of Zambia, and (in various transparent phonological varia-

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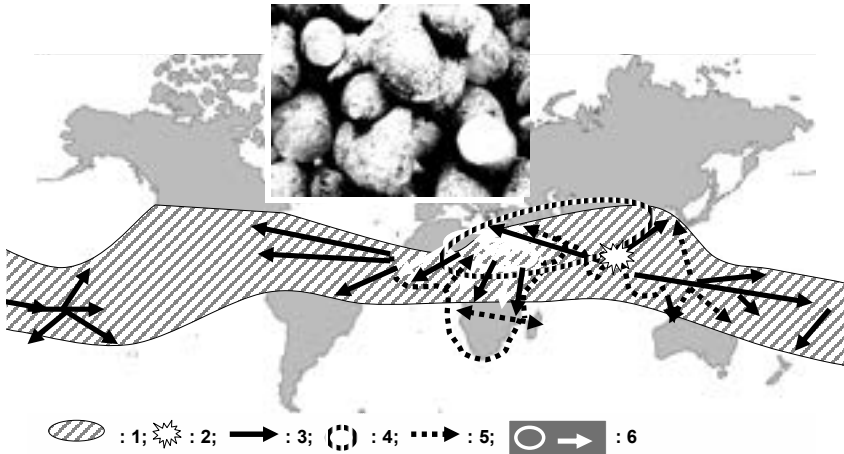
<sup>158</sup> Cf. Kock 1956; Metraux 1957; Lanczkowski 1970, 1974; Lips 1959–60; Penard 1907; Schoolcraft 1856 (the inspiration for Longfellow's *Song of Hiawatha*, 1856); van Deursen 1931; von Bunsen 1880; Warren & Ferguson 1987; Hindley 1885. Judaeo-Christian influence in the Hiawatha tradition has long been suspected; perhaps Hiawatha = ? \*hyaw-[at]JA = ? 'Yahweh' / יהוה? In New Zealand, in the Maori language, the sweet potato is called *kumara*, and it seems to be subject to a cult somewhat comparable to the above saviour perspective (Locke 1921).

<sup>159</sup> Hermans 1970; van Deursen 1931 (highlighting the North American attestations, e.g. the religious innovator Hiawatha; Kock 1956. The concept also had some appeal for the archdiffusionist William Perry.

tions, e.g. Nzambi, Nyame) throughout Western Africa. In 2015 I linked up the Nyambi name with essentially three widespread packages of transcontinental continuity,

- (a) West Africa / West Asian goddesses having to do with warfare and weaving (Neith, Athena, Anat, Anahita, etc.)
- (b) the Nkoya, and common / proto-Bantu lexical root \*-amb-, 'to speak – as if Nyambi were a cosmogonic god creating through word of mouth – like the Israelite YHWH (e.g. van der Toorn 1999), the Babylonian Marduk (Heidel 1942; King 1999 / 1902), and the Ancient Egyptian Ptah (cf. Finnestad 1976; van Binsbergen, in press (d), and extensive references there), but surprisingly very few other creator gods in global comparative mythology; I am inclined to consider the 'speak' etymology of Nyambi a mere popular etymology, locally imposed upon a much older name of distant foreign origin – or to consider it a mere academic invention on my own part. Creation by words alone suggest a society in which the crucial *logocentric package of writing, the state, organised religion and proto-science* has already gained great dominance – so one would expect similar logocentric creator figures in other such situations comparable in space and time (such as the Ancient Mediterranean, Iran, India, China, Meso America) but not among the Nkoya who until the British conquest and effective Christianisation from 1900 CE on, were illiterate.
- (c) a very widespread complex of spider-like cosmogonic goddesses (Athena, Neith, Anat, Anahita, Anansi etc.), encompassing sub-Saharan Africa, North America, and Oceania – while a topologically rather different mythological spider complex (rather associated with category (a) above) surfaces in a belt ranging from Western Europe to Japan and South East Asia.

Now that we are considering, as a context for the Ndembu Chihamba cult, vegetation cults and their possible transcontinental ramifications, it is tempting to also implicate the name Nyambi in such a perspective. In several West African contexts, the local variant of the Nyambi name is practically indistinguishable from the local designation of the *yam* (*Dioscorea*, another tuber crop with a fair number of varieties). Phytogeographers and phytogeneticists identify three regions as possible origin of the edible yam: West Africa, South East Asia, and tropical America (Alexander & Coursey 1969; Coursey 1972; Fullagar *et al.* 2006; Malapa *et al.* 2005). Since Sunda effects may be attested all along the Indian Ocean and Atlantic Ocean coasts of Africa (van Binsbergen 2019, 2020), it is quite conceivable that yam (like, incidentally, the Bantu language cluster, in my opinion; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 77, and van Binsbergen, in press (c); cf. Trombetti 1905, 1922-1923) originates in South East Asia and from there was brought to West Africa by Sunda diffusion – and that the name *nyame* / Nyambi was preserved in the process. In that case the theonym Nyambi might ultimately have an origin in South East Asia / the Indo-Pacific region. What makes this all the more likely is the attestation, in Southern New Guinea in historical times, of yam festivals where — much like the famous yam festivals in West Africa – the tubers are ceremonially counted under the constant shouting of 'Nyambi! Nyambi!' (Evans 2009): the crop's local designation? The local yam god's name? (cf. van Andel *et al.* 2014; Santoro 2007; Evans 2009; Johnson 2002).



1 Approximate distribution of taro as a major food crop today;  
 2 probable origin of Taro;  
 3 subsequent diffusion (based on Lee 1999);  
 4 Extended Proto-Neolithic Fertile Crescent (Sahara-China);  
 5 Sunda model for W Asia and Africa;  
 6 Back-into-Africa movement, from 15 ka BP onwards: mtDNA types R and M1

Fig. 3.6. Tentative reconstruction of the diffusion of Taro (*Colocasia esculenta*) as another indication of Sunda influence on the West

The global distribution patterns are suggestive of a multicentred, multidirectional<sup>160</sup> global maritime network of which I believe to see many other empirical traces (van Binsbergen 2012c, 2019a, 2020d, and especially – with an extensive theoretical discussion – 2012g cf. 2012: Fig. 2.17, also reproduced below, as Fig.3.14). *Since several African food crops have originated in the Americas, one is tempted to hypothesise that not only the food crops but also their attending myths crossed over from the New World into Africa, and not necessarily (as claimed by Dick-Read 2005; cf. Jeffreys 1971a, 1971b, 1975) via the Pacific / Indian*

<sup>160</sup> It is partly by virtue of such a network, partly of Sunda origin, that far reaching cultural and linguistic affinities may be found on a global scale. Thus already in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century CE prominent linguists proposed continuity between the apparent language isolate of Sumerian (first deciphered in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> c. CE), and the languages of Polynesia (Stucken 1927; Rivet 1929; I am indebted to Vaclav Blažek for calling my attention to Rivet's work). Above I mentioned in passing Trombetti's views on the Asian origin of the Bantu cluster – converging with my own statistical / glottochronological findings. Several more examples have come to light in recent years, e.g. in the work of Robert Dick-Read (2005), and in the 2012 Leiden international conference 'Rethinking Africa's transcontinental continuities in pre- and protohistory' (van Binsbergen 2019); and in van Binsbergen and Woudhuizen's (2011) work on astounding Austronesian (in other words, Sunda) etymologies that may be plausibly proposed for some of the most important personal names (of gods and heroes) in the Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean – even though (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011) in the Ancient Egyptian material the Uralic continuity seems more convincing, and seems to cover partly the same set of data.

*Ocean detour, but also more directly across the Atlantic.*

At this point, where we are contemplating possible continuity between American and African mythologies of vegetation gods and cults, we may remember that parallels between sub-Saharan Africa and the pre-conquest New World (especially North America) are numerous; the index to Hultkrantz 1980 lists – probably to most readers's surprise – many examples already in the field of religion alone. In the field of Flood myths such parallels are striking – just like the fact that more than half of the hundreds of Flood myths that have been recorded all over the world, hail from the Americas (van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008). Also the mythical complex of snaring the Sun (or the Moon) displays such transcontinental continuities – and in this case also Oceania joins the equation (Luomala 1940; cf. van Binsbergen 2010m, where the comparative context is discussed of, among other myths, that of stealing the Moon – or the Sun). The lightning bird is a well-known mythological figure in East and Southern Africa, but it has also been recorded for Meso America (Thurber & Thurber 1959). In my studies of geomantic divination (e.g. 2012) I have repeatedly stressed American / African parallels in the field of divination, games, female puberty rites, basketry, fish traps, etc. Already in 1887 Henshaw noted (e.g. Henshaw 1887: 12, Fig. 8) the striking resemblance between perforated stones (probably used for adding weight to agricultural implements) in California (USA) and the Khoi people of Southern Africa. Also the use of stilts, especially in ritual contexts such as male initiation rites and masquerades impersonating the ancestors, displays distributional continuity between America and Africa (Lindblom 1927, 1928). Hitherto I have tended to the long-range, maximum dating archaeological explanation of a common origin between the cultures and languages of both sub-Saharan Africa and the New World in the Upper Palaeolithic of Central Asia, where the initial Out-of-Africa dispersal of Anatomically Modern Humans passed through prior to ramifying into the New World and (by virtue of the Back-into-Africa migration, from c. 15 ka BP on) back into Africa. However, I am now inclined to consider some of these parallels to be too precise to have survived a time lapse of 15 ka with all the cultural drift and localising transformation to be expected in such a very long period, and I am inclined to contemplate much more recent direct exchanges notably across the Atlantic Ocean, when in the course of the Bronze Age a multicentered, multidirectional maritime network may be supposed to have been in *statu nascendi*.<sup>161</sup>

*All this makes it extremely unlikely that the Chihamba cult is a purely local Ndembu invention, to be primarily explained by the details of Ndembu social-and political organisation; the cult would rather appear to be a peripheral adaptation and transformation of a major and*

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<sup>161</sup> Even so, I am still thinking, for the African / American parallels, of pre-conquest situations (prior to 1450 CE) to which European expansion in the Age of Discoveries could not yet make a contribution. Meanwhile, the fact that some items of Native North American culture, although apparently 'traditional', yet may have a post-conquest / post-Columbian background, is already suggested by Hickerson's (1962) work on the Ojibway's Midewiwin medical society. Also some Flood myths as recorded in North America may have undergone the post-conquest influence of *Genesis* although the majority would appear to be independently and originally North American. In van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008 we even make the point, suggested by sophisticated statistical analysis, that there may even have been an original American input towards the Flood myths of the Old World.



central mytheme whose distribution all over the Old World suggests an origin at least going back to the early Neolithic, and perhaps considerably earlier.

If this is the case, one wonders what could be the ontological status of Edith Turner's claim as to the reality of the *Chihamba* spirit. The ramifications of the *Chihamba*-like cultic idiom extend worldwide – not, as in Christianity and Islam, because of a relatively recent, conscious, cultivated and formally organised sense of unity in the veneration of the same spiritual beings, but as a result of the fragmentation of an, initially shared, collective representation in the process of worldwide localising transformation. Suppose the spirit venerated in proto-*Chihamba* (which may go back to a Meso American prototype several millennia ago) was initially 'real', capable of being experienced with the senses; would that still be the case for the *Chihamba* spirit surfacing in Zambia several millennia later – much like the Virgin Mary, according to her Roman Catholic adepts, is supposed to be able to make an appearance in visions both on the Iberian peninsula (Fatima, Portugal), and in Western France (Lourdes), Italy, Poland, the Roman Catholic Low Countries, in Meso and South American settings and on the Philippines? Is it perhaps not so much the initial origin of the cult going back to some initial 'real' spirit, but the ritual action of latter-day followers, that creates the spirit and renders its subjective local manifestations possible?

Or was I right when, over three decades ago, at the end of my Introductory chapter to my book *Religious change in Zambia*<sup>162</sup> I proposed that cults are to be considered *frozen accounts of cultic and socio-political history and nothing more* (van Binsbergen 1981: 74; italics added):

'Among other things, religion seems to be a means for people to expose themselves to their collective history in a coded, de-historicized (fossilized?) form. And the scientific study, in other words the decoding, of religion is an undertaking which, among other disciplines, belongs to the science of history, not so much because religious forms have a history, but because religion is history.'

In that case, *the truly global history of the Chihamba cult in itself might well be its actual, and unique source of sacrality*, without requiring the spirit venerated in that cult to be 'real' at all. We would then have to find another explanation for the materialisation phenomena which Edith Turner claims to have witnessed, – an account which I accept as honest in itself, yet as insufficient reason to conclude to the reality of the *Chihamba* spirit.

We cannot thresh out this question at this stage in our book's argument. In the concluding chapter, I will try to weigh the evidence and trains of thought of the various counter-paradigmatic forms in which reality has presented itself throughout this book's chapters, and then perhaps we will end up in a position to make more definite pronouncements.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> For an appraisal of that book in the wider context of modern religious anthropology, cf. Morris 2006: 164f.

<sup>163</sup> When discussing, below, the remarkably crucial mytheme / Narrative Complex of 'The Stones', one thing might have received explicit attention: that in early Christianity, the *primus inter pares* among Jesus's disciples, originally named Sim(e)ōn, was later renamed  $\text{Κεφα}$  (*Kepha*) / Petrus / Peter, 'Stone,

### 3.12. Re-Connecting Heaven and Earth through stones

For a further understanding of the *Chihamba* cult in its long-range context, *i.e.* across vast expanses of space and time, let us now explore to what extent this cult may be considered to be informed by a number of comprehensive mythological scenarios, which I discovered (van Binsbergen 2006c, 2006b) in an analysis of sub-Saharan African cosmogonic myths. I called these scenarios 'Narrative Complexes' (NC), and initially identified about twenty of them,<sup>164</sup> whose emergence and spread I subsequently sought to identify, in space and time, against the background of the two fundamental processes we have already indicated above, notably:

- the *Out-of-Africa Exodus* of a trickle of Anatomically Modern Humans, ca. 80–60 ka BP, *i.e.* after this (our!) variety of humans had emerged and had lived and developed in Africa for about 120 ka, since 200 ka BP,<sup>165</sup> and
- the *Back-into-Africa Movement*, from Asia, from c. 15 ka onwards, which thus came to add, to the older genetic and cultural material already available in the African continent, new varieties of genetic and cultural material which, since the Out-of-Africa Exodus, had further spread in Asia and had in the meantime transformed and innovated there.<sup>166</sup>

One major Narrative Complex, typically associated with the handful of millennia immediately preceding the Neolithic (*i.e.* as from c. 15 ka BP) is predicated on the idea of the *Separation of Heaven and Earth* as the central cosmogonic event (extensively discussed in the mythologies of the Ancient Near East and of Ancient Greece; *e.g.* Staudacher 1942). *Worldwide, the Separation of Heaven and Earth turns out to be the central mythical theme, and the hallmark, of the mythologies that came to dominate the minds and expressions of Anatomically Modern Humans from the Upper Palaeolithic onwards.* This 'vertical' cosmogony (with its emphasis on the axis Heaven–Earth) was preceded, by a handful of millennia, by an alternative cosmogony whose fragmented and scattered substrate traces we still find in most of the world's mythologies: a cosmogony of the *Separation of Water and Land*, whose most conspicuous expression is that of the virginal Mother of the Waters, giving birth to her only Child, Land, who immediately became her lover.<sup>167</sup>

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Rock', as the 'foundation' on which Jesus, with a folk-etymological pun (not necessarily authentic – it may have been a later interpolation), allegedly sought to build his church (*Matthew* 16:38). The symbolism of the Re-connection of Heaven and Earth is so applicable here that almost inevitably the Narrative Complex in question must have informed this passage in the *New Testament*. Strikingly, and even more ominous than his birth horoscope, the same complex is implied in the given name of *Pierre* (the French word for 'stone', Peter) Teilhard de Chardin; *cf.* Fig. 5.8, below.

<sup>164</sup> Later, when I extended my analysis to Flood myths world-wide, I had to double that number.

<sup>165</sup> *Cf.* Forster 2004; Oppenheimer 2004a, 2004b.

<sup>166</sup> The relevant references were already presented in a footnote above.

<sup>167</sup> *Cf.* van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011; van Binsbergen 2010, 2012. Anonymous, 'Pelagian creation myth', lets the Mother of the Waters be impregnated, not so much by a human or anthropomorphic

The Narrative Complex of *the Re-Connection of Heaven and Earth* revolves on a considerable variety of means by which the re-connection is enacted or symbolised:

- temporary or permanent material linkages are supposed to have effected the re-connection (e.g. through rope, leather thongs, ladder, staircase, tower, tree, mountain – or their symbolic representations e.g. in the form of an altar); or more flimsy and momentaneous, ephemeral connections are contemplated in the sense of lightning, meteorites, the rainbow, rain, Aurora Borealis;
- man's life's necessities (cattle, fire, seeds, implements) and other items of culture (medicines, flint circumcision knives, drums etc.) may be simply cast down from Heaven in a once-for-all divine gesture;
- or the connection is supposed to be invested in a particular supernatural being (especially a demiurge, who is often conceived as the High God's child);
- or in mortals of a particular, exalted class (such as shamans, priest, kings);
- or the connection may be invested through particular institutions relating to divinely installed office, such as the kingship or the priesthood. In their task of maintaining or restoring the connection between Heaven and Earth, these human specialists are often equipped with special paraphernalia and special knowledge, which endow them with incomparable power – which, when institutionalised, forms the beginning, perhaps, of social hierarchy. Thus rain-calling is a major specialist ritual-political function in the world-view that is informed by this Narrative Complex.

The re-connection between Heaven and Earth is seldom so totally successful that it manages to let people forget what they are missing since the Separation of Heaven and Earth (which is sometimes conceived as their eviction from Heaven), and how insignificant the later gifts from Heaven are, by comparison. On the contrary, in post-cosmogonic times there is a lingering antagonism between on the one hand the people on Earth, and on the other hand whatever comes from Heaven – so if the High God's Child manifests himself (or herself) on Earth, he or she tends to be killed by the people; even the High God herself or himself may fall under the same threat – as in myths circulating in Western Zambia, concerning the first man, Kamunu. The High God Nyambi finds his own existence more and more threatened by Kamunu's unpredictable and treacherous action, and in the end Nyambi flees to Heaven along the thread of a spider, while attended by a wagtail bird (cf. van Binsbergen 2010, 2012: 39, with extensive references, excerpted here; also cf. Thiel 1973, 1983):

#### K. MYTHICAL WAGTAILS AT TWO ENDS OF THE OLD WORLD.

Much to our amazement, there are uncanny parallels between the myths concerning primordial times in East Asia and in South Central Africa, which might be explained by relatively recent transmission / diffusion, but which are more convincingly attributed to an Upper Palaeolithic shared substrate of language, culture and mythology – and then to be explained as the communalities deriving

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god, but by the wind, insects, beans – the latter is a granulation element which would be relevant in a context of the reconstruction of the earliest history of agriculture.

from a shared linguistic macrophylum, Eurasianic / Nostratic.<sup>168</sup> In a Western Zambian myth<sup>169</sup> the creator god Nyambi (with widespread West African counterparts and near-namesakes), when still walking on Earth, feels threatened by the First Man, named Kamunu ('Man Person'), and flees to Heaven. (Incidentally, according to the Jacottet version<sup>170</sup> Nyambi, in that case not the creator god but a demiurge, had been thrown out of Heaven to begin with – which makes him (with his spider / solar connotations), in this respect at least, akin to Hephaestus,<sup>171</sup> to the Finnish Iron god,<sup>172</sup> and to the South Asian war god Skanda who was too hot to grow up in a normal way but had to be hatched

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<sup>168</sup> Long-range comparative linguistics have identified the Nostratic / Eurasianic macrophylum (comprising the phyla Indo-European, Altaic, Uralic, Dravidian, Kartvelian, Chukchee-Kamchatkan and Eskimo), extending more or less contiguously west-east across the Old World, from the Iberian peninsula to the Aleut Islands and even crossing into the New World with the Eskimo phylum). Whether Afroasiatic (Semitic, Egyptian, Berber, Chadic, Omotic, etc.) should be included in this macrophylum, is a moot point, with some North Atlantic linguists (such as Bomhard and Kerns) subsuming Afroasiatic under Nostratic, whereas the leading Russian school of long-range linguistics and its worldwide associates (Leiden, the Santa Fé Institute etc.) within the Tower of Babel community opt for the recognition of Afroasiatic as a macrophylum in its own right – at the same level as Sinocaucasian, Austric (comprising Austronesian and Austroasiatic), Amerind, and language clusters now only found in Africa (Nigercongo > Bantu; Nilosaharan; and Khoisan). If, with the prominent long-range linguists Kaiser & Shevoroshin (1988), we agree to consider these African language clusters as forms of 'Super-Nostratic' which are in many ways continuous with the more centrally recognised Eurasianic phyla listed above, we have identified a substrate linguistico-cultural cluster, to be dated to the outgoing Upper Palaeolithic, and informing a large part of the Old World not only of a shared basic vocabulary but also of shared mythical representations – such as those concerning the spider and the wagtail bird.

<sup>169</sup> References in my original: Jacottet 1899-1901: II, 116 f.; Bouchet 1922: 22 f.; Mackintosh 1922: 367 f.; van Binsbergen 2010: 180.

<sup>170</sup> And also according to a myth I collected among the Nkoya people in 1973 from the prophet / witch hunter / village headman Lubumba, Njonjolo valley, Kaoma district, Zambia. Here the demiurge is kicked out of Heaven because of his invention of sorcery, but his name is not disclosed. Since missionary influence from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century CE has led to the adoption of the name Nyambi for the Christian creator High God, it would have been difficult for Lubumba to implicate a mythical character by the name of Nyambi in such a diabolical capacity. Neither could he lay the blame with the principal Nkoya demiurge, Mvula ('Rain'), child of Nyambi and absolute indispensable for agriculture. However, considering the unmistakable South Asian influence upon the Nkoya culture, music, mythology (notably the key myth of Kapesh Kamungampanda; van Binsbergen 2010) and kingship (van Binsbergen 2019, 2020), it is not impossible that Lubumba's myth should be situated in a context where the impact of Christianity is still minimal, and South Asian influence still considerable. Lubumba's version may be argued to have parallels with that of Nahusha, the Indian god Indra's third enemy; Nahusha acted in Indra's place, but became corrupt, concentrated on sexual enjoyments, and was enticed by Indra's wife to engage in such acts of hybris and sacrilege as to be turned into a big snake for the duration of 10,000 years. That Nahusha's transgression are interpreted as sorcery is understandable from the Nkoya viewpoint, which allows us to understand the myth without recourse to Christian themes.

<sup>171</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, I, 568 f, 18, 136 f.; *Homeric Hymn to Pythian Apollo*, 310 f.; Quintus Smyrnaeus, *Posthomerica*, II, 549 f.; Plato, *De Re Publica*, 378 d; (Pseudo-)Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, I, 19; cf. Atsma 2000-2008, s.v. 'Hephaestus'.

<sup>172</sup> Note that, in the *Kalevala*, the parallel revolves on the birth, not of Fire but of the conceptually related Iron (Lönnrot 1866; Tamminen 1928). Also in Yoruba religion, West Africa, the God of Iron, Ogun, is considered the first to come to Earth from Heaven, but in that context the move is not presented as a punitive expulsion.

by Ganga and nurtured by the Pleiades or Krittika<sup>173</sup> – also cf. カグツチ Kagutsuchi, the Japanese god of Fire, to whose destructive force even the genitals of his mother イザナミ Izanami were not safe). In his return to Heaven, Nyambi is attended to not only by a spider (which has remained Nyambi's implicit animal identity) but also by a wagtail bird (*Motacilla capensis*).<sup>1</sup>

A characteristic concept of the *Narrative Complex of the Re-Connection of Heaven and Earth* is the *demiurge* (i.e. vicarious or junior creator god) who (like the Greek god Hephaestus, who is a type case) falls from Heaven, and who, at various superimposed symbolic levels, takes the shape of meteorite, demiurge, or food crop. Often humans can only reap the benefits of the heavenly gifts sent down from Heaven, on condition that they are prepared to kill the demiurge, who then undergoes a transformation and becomes a suitable food crop. I suspect that it is not by accident that the Narrative Complex of the Re-connection of Heaven and Earth, informing these symbolic ramifications, emerged just prior to the early Neolithic – the latter being the period in which food production through agriculture and animal husbandry came to be established, after several million years in which humans had had to rely exclusively on hunting and gathering.

In the early 2000's, when making a long-range comparative and historical analysis of the speckled symbolism of the leopard skin throughout the Old World and part of the New World,<sup>174</sup> I was struck by the persistence and near-ubiquity of a number of basic mythical ideas. As compared with featureless infinite extension, the point / speckle / stain captures the attention and triggers thought – it is the original form of difference, the locus where human thought engages an hitherto undifferentiated reality.<sup>175</sup> The fact that we are really confronted here with a 'fait social total' (Mauss 1924 / 1950) of immense historic significance is clear (as amply set out in my various accounts of the analysis, see previous footnote), not only from the global ubiquity of speckled symbolism, but also *the persistence with which the same lexical root represents the idea of speckledness throughout most of the major linguistics groups (macrophyla) of the world, in other words, manages to retain both the underlying semantic and the associated lexical forms throughout a linguistic differentiation process extending over more than 20 ka!* This suggests not only

- immense importance and enshrinement in ritual (otherwise there may not have been an effective mechanism to preserve and transmit this formal system so recognisably across immense expanses of space and time), but also
- extreme antiquity of this notion of speckledness: at least as old as the reconstructed parent language (traces of which are found in the reconstructed lexicons

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<sup>173</sup> Dowson 1928 s.v. 'Skanda', pp. 152, 300 and passim; Keith 1917; Willis 1994: 84.

<sup>174</sup> As explained in chapter 8 of my book *Intercultural Encounters* (2003) the analysis was prompted by the pronouncement of the High Priest of the Mwali High God oracle at Nata, Northern Botswana, to the effect that the leopard skin was the traditional attire of 'my kind of people'. My long-range exploration of leopard-skin symbolism, ultimately successful, was intended to find out what he meant. Cf. van Binsbergen 2004, 2018: 531f., and in press (j).

<sup>175</sup> Cf. van Binsbergen, in press (f) and my piece on leopards and Deleuze: van Binsbergen 2004f. Further van Binsbergen 2012: *passim*; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 412f., and *passim*.

of all these macrophyla) designated ‘\*Borean’ and dated at, roughly, 25 ka BP, in Central to Eastern Asia.

While the leopard / jaguar is the main animal incarnation of the notion of speckledness (but cf. hawk, partridge, grouse, trout, snake, etc. – all of which have speckled skins or feather coats, and feature as such (both semantically and lexically / phonologically) in the periphery of leopard-skin symbolism), it attracts various other semantic and symbolic connotations, including: the star-spangled sky, the connection of Heaven and Earth, the demiurge, the child of the High God, subaltern status, victim, female, trickster, outsider, criminal, evil. If we may thus surmise that the fascination with speckledness as a central cosmological and symbolic element goes back to at least Central Asia 25 ka BP (*and happens to be merely projected onto the leopard, rather than springing specifically from the contemplation of the leopard’s speckled coat*), this means that already millennia before the actual emergence of agriculture the symbolic complex of speckledness contained several of the major thought operations involved in agriculture as a human invention:

- the selection and handling of eminently *granulated* natural products,
- which are committed to symbolic death through ‘burial’ (sowing) or harvesting
- but which are at the same time instances of rebirth at a miraculously escalated scale, for - by a metaphor amply exploited in the *New Testament* Biblical context – the grain revives as a plant producing many grains, for food and sowing.

This makes it an attractive thought that the dying and surviving corn god may not just have been a *by-product* of the invention of agriculture, but quite the reverse: that the invention of agriculture may have been a by-product of a cosmology in which the symbolism of speckledness and the Separation of Heaven and Earth had already been major ingredients for millennia. Incidentally, this may also cast a new light on the widespread myth of the culture hero (usually conceived as a demiurge, child of God and descending from Heaven; or in attenuated form, as a royal of divine lineage) who brought, not just culture in a general sense, *but specifically seeds and agriculture*.<sup>176</sup>

When I first formulated (van Binsbergen 2006a, 2006b; cf. 2010i, 2012b) my Aggregative, Diachronic Model of World Mythology on the basis of sub-Saharan African cosmogonic material, I found it useful to distinguish the Narrative Complex ‘the Stones’.<sup>177</sup> Sometimes I

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<sup>176</sup> This myth is attested for South Central Africa, among the Nkoya (van Binsbergen 1992: 214, i.e. *Likota Iya Bankoya* 151; also in a Lozi Flood story recounted in Kamuwanga (2007: 35), the carrying of seeds in the Flood-rescue boat is specially mentioned); the Bemba (where early kings appear with seeds in their hair – perhaps an echo of South Asian mythical representations of the vital river Ganges as descending via Śiva’s hair, e.g. as found in the famous reliefs at Mahabalipuram, Tamil Nadu, India); and for the Ovimbundu of Angola (Chatelain 1894: 265). Oannes, the mythical aquatic culture hero which a Hellenistic source (3rd c. BCE) put at the beginning of what we now call Sumerian culture (c. 5 ka BP), also instructed his human pupils in the knowledge of agricultural seeds (Cory 1832). I suspect that this mythological, specifically cosmogonic, aspect of seed is the background of the common use of seeds for games (notably the *mankala* board-game) and divination, all over Africa – e.g. the Chokwe basket oracle (Angola, Zambia; closely related to the Ndembu basket oracle discussed by V. Turner 1961) contains several types of seed (Rodrigues de Areia 1985; van Binsbergen 1977b).

<sup>177</sup> Relying, for most of the few million years of their existence, on hunting and gathering, stone

was inclined to deny mythological references to stones the status of a separate Narrative Complex, and to rather subsume them under a more comprehensive Narrative Complex entitled 'The Earth as Primary'. But although stones may feature mythologically in ways that suggest that they symbolise the Earth, often they are presented as far more mobile and dynamic than would accord with such an identity. Stones often appear to represent, not so much Earth, but *Heaven-on-Earth*, and then might form a special application of the Narrative Complex of the Re-connection of Heaven and Earth. This double-layeredness of the stones's symbolism complicates matters and does pose analytical difficulties, but it is typical of mythological material, and an inevitable result of the fact that the overall world-view within which these Narrative Complexes operate, primarily belongs to the world of imagination, not of logically coherent empirical facts; and moreover is not constant and static, but tends to undergo major changes including unsystematic, erratic drifts, over time. Typically, the results of the later transformations are superimposed upon the earlier forms but do not eclipse the latter entirely. One such major change is the transition, already alluded to above, from

1. an essentially horizontal world-view where the dominant direction of the human gaze is horizontal, to
2. one that is much more vertical and that constitutes, in fact, 'The Discovery of Heaven' (Mulisch 1992).

In (i) the Separation of Water and Land is the main cosmogonic moment, and land is basically the only feature of reality that is clearly delineated – Heaven, ocean and underworld largely merge and form (as waters above, waters aside, and waters below) what was left of the Primal Waters after the Separation of Land and Water. However, when the standard human gaze is diverted to a vertical upward position,<sup>178</sup> no longer the Separation of Land and Water but the Separation of Heaven and Earth becomes the central cosmogonic event. It is in this transition, I think, that 'the Stones' as Narrative Complex become redefined, from (static, horizontally orientated) symbols of (the emergence of) Earth among the Primal Waters, to (dynamic, vertically orientated) symbols of the Separation of Heaven and Earth. In the latter capacity, their prime symbolic identity is no longer terrestrial but celestial.<sup>179</sup> It merges with that of the demiurge, the material necessities for human

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throwing (ritualised in venerated stone heaps all over the Old World, and sanctified as a mandatory stage in the Muslim *hajj* pilgrimage) must have been a perennial self-protective and hunting action for the vulnerable, somatically / functionally unspecialised human species. As such it may have had considerable evolutionary significance. The neurobiologist Calvin (1982) poses the question 'Did throwing stones shape hominid brain evolution?'

<sup>178</sup> A stance which I associate with the emergence of naked-eye astronomy, and of shamanism – the typical shaman's journey is vertically along the celestial axis, into the Underworld and into Heaven.

<sup>179</sup> Meteorological events were considered to testify to the relation between Heaven and Earth, so that even Aristotle, *Meteorologia*, I: 2, claimed that

'We have already laid down that there is one physical element which makes up the system of the bodies that move in a circle, and besides this four bodies owing their existence to the four principles, the motion of these latter bodies being of two kinds: either from the centre or to the centre. These four bodies are fire, air, water, earth. Fire occupies the highest place among them all, earth the lowest, and two elements correspond to these in their relation to one another, air being nearest to fire, water to earth. The whole world surrounding the earth, then, the affections of which are our subject, is made up of these bodies. This world necessarily has a certain continuity with the upper motions: consequently all its power and order is derived from them. (For the originating principle of all motion is the first cause. Besides, that element is eternal and its motion has no limit in space, but is always complete; whereas all these other bodies have separate regions which limit one another.) So we must treat fire and earth and the ele-

life (cattle, circumcision knives, etc.) thrown down to Earth by the High God, and the incidental but often formidable outbursts of divine presence on Earth in the form of lightning, rain, and the rainbow. Lightning may be reified as thunderbolts or sinews as the essential attributes of the sky god (e.g. Zeus, with the κεραυνός lightning bolt, which he is reported to use in many mythological contexts;<sup>180</sup> Indra with the *vajra*, with which he killed Vṛtra and the latter's mother Danu, 'Drought';<sup>181</sup> and Thor's hammer Mjölmir); when threatened in divine combat, these celestial gods temporarily see such attributes weakened or stolen.

In Ancient Greek mythology, celestial / Olympian Zeus with his thunderbolt and sinews embodies this model – as Dionysus' mother Semele was to find out: she was completely singed under his fiery presence when, at the treacherous advice of her rival Hera, she had requested that her divine lover reveal himself to her in his true shape; as a result, Dionysus's gestation period had to be completed by sowing him into Zeus' thigh, from which he was born as a displaced member of the *archaic mythological category of the 'leg child'*, otherwise rare in the mythologies of Western Eurasia. An extensive discussion of the 'leg child' as an important mytheme in comparative mythology is offered in my recent book on Durkheim (2018: 408f.).

In the material world, 'thunderstones' are manifestations of the sky god's, or his child's, descent from Heaven:

- in the form of a meteorite, as venerated e.g. in Ancient Egypt in association with the ithyphallic god Min (𓅓𓏏𓏏), represented as a divine standard carrying two thunder stones; or, written phonetically (with the 'god' determinative), in the *Pyramid Texts*:



'thunder stones' was also the heading under which prehistoric stone tools were classified and venerated by the inhabitants of Western Eurasia in historic times;<sup>182</sup>

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ments like them as the material causes of the events in this world (meaning by material what is subject and is affected), but must assign causality in the sense of the originating principle of motion to the influence of the eternally moving bodies.' (tr. E.W. Webster)

<sup>180</sup> Wainwright 1930; Cook 1914-1940; Parke 1967. The deep impressions in the crypt of the Erechtheum at Athens are considered to be its imprint; Dinsmore 1961.

<sup>181</sup> On this point there is such a striking parallel with the legendary cattle-stealing 'like a true Indian of the Vedic period' Nkoya King Shihoka Nalinanga (van Binsbergen 1992), whose name means 'Snake Child of [ or Mother of ] Drought' (cf. Vṛtra), that we must consider this another indication of strong South Asian influence on Nkoya culture. Cf. van Binsbergen 2019, 2020.

<sup>182</sup> L. THE COMPARATIVE MYTHOLOGY OF THE THUNDERSTONE

The comparative mythology of the thunderstone is as complex as it is illuminating. Cf. Blinkenberg 1911: 13-27 (general); Daniel 1975 (early Europe); Mead 1937 (Lapps of Scandinavia); the god Tešub / Tarḫun(t) (Hurrians, Hittites, Ancient Near East, depicted with a triple thunderbolt and a (usually double) axe (e.g. Smith 1919: Fig. 10, after p. 80). A Chinese depiction of the thundergod comes rather close to this model, also with celt-like bolt, and axe, as attributes (Smith 1919: Fig. 16, after p. 136). Incidentally, 伏羲 Fu Xi, a shamanic type of Chinese god with Central Asian connotations later paired to the creatrix and Flood goddess 女娲 Nü Wa, is also a thunder god. This rapprochement between China and the Ancient Near East, across many thousands of kilometres of Eurasian Steppe, should not surprise us in the light of an extensive literature that has stressed Chinese / West Asian archaeological, cultural and linguistic continuities, especially facilitated by the invention of horse riding and the spoked-wheel chariot in the Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011; I have specifically and at length argued this China / Ancient Near East connection in *Before the Presocratics* (2012: chapter 7, pp. 215-254); further: Balfour 1903



- or as (double) axes symbolising meteorites, as in Ancient Crete and in the iconography of the Yoruba god Shango, in West Africa and the West Indies;
- or as stone knives made of obsidian or flint symbolically or factually associated with lightning, meteorite impact and volcanic activity (and often with circumcision);
- also fire itself, as the routinised embodiment of lightning, is a High God prerogative descending to humans on Earth, and the one facilitating such a transfer (like the tragic Prometheus of Greek mythology – but he has many implicit counterparts throughout the Old World, including Africa) shares the typical fate of the demiurge: punished, bound, immobilised, symbolically killed, and finally released for greater glory.

Since the largest meteorites survive their journey through the Earth's atmosphere and arrive on Earth whilst still preserving (the remnants of) their material form, they are eminently suitable to bring out the celestial symbolism of stones. In some mythical traditions, e.g. those associated with the Indo-European linguistic phylum, Heaven itself is made of stone, where light and water have been closed in and from which they need to be liberated (Reichel 1913; cf. the *Vṛtra* character of South Asian mythology). Stone(s) may be prominent in cosmogonies, e.g. in the Japanese cosmogony as recounted in the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi* classics the primal gods Izanagi and Izanami begin creation by dropping the Japanese archipelago's islands into the water. And see how, for instance, the *meteoric* ('celestial and weather-related') nature of stones comes through in Ancient Greek conceptions of the *heros* Heracles:

'...he is a mighty hunter and makes rain, when it is needed, by rattling an oak-club thunderously in a hollow oak and stirring a pool with an oak branch — alternatively, by rattling pebbles inside a sacred colocinth-gourd or, later, by rolling black meteoric stones inside a wooden chest — and so attracting thunderstorms by sympathetic magic.' (Graves 1988 / 1948: 124 f.) – Graves also mentions Heracles' association with common stone circles – lithic installations found all over the Ancient Mediterranean and Western Europe [ among other places – WvB ]. He associates (Graves 1988) such circles specifically with the rowan tree (*Sorbus* [ previously *Pyrus* ] *aucuparia*), however, in North Africa also other shrubs are typically found in their neighbourhood, such as hawthorn and myrrh ] ; an important dis-

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(West Africa); Bernal 1987: 169 (Ancient Egypt); Fontenrose 1975: 312 f., with application to the Greek hero Cadmus / Kadmos who killed Drakon with what may be interpreted as a thunderstone; Kadmos is also reputed to sow stones and harvest humans (Atsma 2000–2008, s.v. Kadmos). But also the Inca creator god Viracocha (Peru, South America) holds thunderbolts (Cotterell 1989: 174; the author of the Kon-Tiki Hypothesis of American-Oceanian continuity, the Norwegian diffusionist anthropologist Thor Heyerdahl, believed he could perceive significant influences, not only from South America upon Oceania but also from the Western Old World upon Peru). A Maya god of similar iconography is depicted in Smith 1919: Fig. 12, after p. 84; that author argued South Asian / Meso American continuity mainly on iconographic grounds, including Ganesha-like divine images from America whereas as far as we know (but see Menzies 2003 for a loosely substantiated contrary claim – and the counter claim in van Binsbergen 2012g) no elephants ever roamed the Americas during the period of human history and prehistory (Smith 1933, where also a Meso American god holding thunderbolts reappears). The Yoruba thunder god Shango holds the double axe as a representation of lightning (Cotterell 1989: 239). The stealing of the thunder god's weapons (i.e. his thunder stones) is an established mytheme (no. A162.3.1. in Fontenrose's adaptation of Aarne & Thompson famous motif index). Since thunder and lightning mythology may be agreed to have already been available in Pandora's Box, I suggest a case could be made for the ubiquity of *drums* as, emically, evocation of the thundergod's voice. We cannot go here into a discussion of the related mytheme of the thunder bird, likewise of near-global distribution; for a first overview, see Hastings 1909–1921, index volume, s.v. 'thunderbird'.

cussion of the various connotations of Heracles may also be found in Fontenrose 1980 / 1959.

Because of their historic superimposition, inevitable semantic intertwining and mutual interference, it is difficult to tell the two main types of meteorological connotations (*i.e.* chthonic vs. celestial) of stones apart – and there may be other types which so far have not yet entered the orbit of my analysis. Let us anyway make a provisional inventory (Table 3.1). The maps that follow the Table represent attempts to capture these various dimensions and to trace their distribution in space and time – all in preparation of a proper comparative framing of the stone elements in the Chihamba cult.

Thus stones emerge as a major form of Re-connection of Heaven and Earth, and this accounts for what the British anthropologist of religion Marett (1900) called ‘the vast array of facts relating to the worship of stones’. I must regrettably refrain here from a discussion of precious stones or gems. These have been subjects of veneration and elaborate symbolism since earliest historic times, and have been extensively treated in delightful so-called lapidaries (books expounding the secret science of precious stones – a famous one is that of the Spanish King Alfonso el-Sabio, 13<sup>th</sup> c. CE.)



Fig. 3.7. Statue of the Yoruba god Shango, at the Afrikamuseum, Berg en Dal, the Netherlands.

The linking of meteorites and stones is found in many places in the world; *e.g.* in Chile one must pick up a stone when sighting a ‘falling star’ (Burke 1986).

Since (given the central role of a large, angular rock) it is my contention that the global continuities of the Zambian *Chihamba* cult as studied by the Turners can only be appreciated in the light of a full analysis of the Narrative Complex 8, ‘The Stones’, I feel compelled to interrupt the flow of this, already complex, chapter by presenting these worldwide connections against their bibliographic background. For this purpose I shall first offer a tabulated overview in Table 3.1, followed by a more detailed and discursive discussion of particular sub-complexes surrounding this Narrative Complex which appear to be particularly promising for an understanding of the *Chihamba* cult.

region	(a) Narrative Complex 8a: the Stones are symbolic of Earth	(b) Narrative Complex 8b: The Stones are celestial, as symbolic of the Re-connection of Heaven and Earth
		NB: if the transcendence implied in (b) wears off, everything under (b) may also in practice be subsumed under (a)
<i>general</i>	<p>Earth mythology (Andrews 1998; Vitaliano 1973)</p> <p>Earth magic (Hitching 1976)</p> <p>Earth divination (Pennick 1979)</p> <p>stone-throwing, herms (Haberland 1880)</p> <p>stone worship (Carus 2010)</p> <p>The veneration of stones or columns is also intelligently discussed by Gamble 1993 ch 16</p>	<p>Earth and Gods (Smith 1969)</p> <p>veneration of meteorites (Burke 1986; Farrington 1900; Chamberlain 1982; Brennan 1983; Hastings 1909-1921, Index vol. XIII, s.v. 'meteors, meteoric stones'; Anonymous, n.d., 'Meteorites in History and Religion'; includes the various palladiums of Ancient Greek world e.g. those at Troy, Emesa, Ephesos, as well as the Needle of Cybele at Pessinunt, in Phrygia, Asia Minor)</p>
<i>sub-Saharan Africa</i>	<p>throughout sub-Saharan Africa there are places, usually marked by unusual rock formations, that are considered the site of cosmogony in the sense that there the original animals and people emerged from the Earth (Wheeler-Voegelin &amp; Moore 1957; Berezkin 2010; van Binsbergen 2006)</p> <p>Earth shrines invoke this cosmogony</p> <p>fertility stones (Nubia: Bell 1919; Kaka people, Cameroon (Powell-Cotton 1933)</p> <p>Mother Earth (McCall 1982)</p> <p>Earth and ancestral cult in Africa (Tangan 1991; van Binsbergen 1981: ch. 3; 1988; Zwememann 1990; Oruka 1993; Lentz 2000; Lentz &amp; Sturm 2001; MacGaffey 2004)</p> <p>perforated stones, probably particularly as weight in agricultural implements (Henshaw 1887; Dart 1929, 1932, etc.; Henshaw also points out the continuities with Southern Africa</p>	<p>cosmogonic sites where animals, people, implements, seeds etc. are claimed to have fallen down from Heaven (van Binsbergen 2006)</p> <p>African meteoric beliefs Lagercrantz 1964</p> <p>thunderstones and rain stones, also in the form of (double) axes, also in West and East Africa, associated with creator god Nyam(b)e/i or thunder god Shango (Huntingford 1950; cf. the Aegean region and the Caucasus (Evans 1901; Goss 1977; Moshinsky 2001)</p> <p>stone altars;</p> <p>mills and grinding stones as evocations of the celestial revolution and the celestial axis;</p> <p>divination tablets and other apparatus for cleromantic divination with implicit connotations of rain stones; mankala board game counters reminiscent of grains or raindrops;</p> <p>cf. bored stones, especially in Southern Africa, which (although later venerated) likewise were implements (digging-stick weights);</p> <p>stone knives of circumcision explicitly singled out (e.g. Kuba cosmogonic myth; Vansina 1978) as thrown from Heaven;</p> <p>stone heaps feature as shrines for the demiurge, from Namibia (Heitsi Eibib) to West Africa (the Dogon divinity Sigui; de Gunne 1988), but in fact throughout the Old World from Namibia all the way to Tibet (Harrer 1971)</p> <p>stele in Ife (Segy 1955) and Ethiopia (Jensen 1936)</p> <p>rain stones (see elsewhere in this table)</p> <p>divine royal stone axes, Ashanti (Akesson 1950)</p> <p>Earth and God (Armstrong 1982)</p> <p>thunderbolt stones, West Asia (Balfour 1903)</p>
<i>Ancient Egypt</i> (cf. Bonnet 1971 / 1952)	the Earth God Geb; the Osiris bed	<p>benben stone, pyramidion</p> <p>pyramids</p> <p>djed pillar</p> <p>steles</p> <p>stone hollowed-out libation basins</p> <p>Min, associated with thunderstone / belemnite hieroglyph</p>

		<p>the stone knife of circumcision</p> <p>Ammon / Zeus and meteorites (Wainwright 1930)</p> <p>Tut-anḥ-Amun's green scarab pendant made from desert glass created by a meteorite fireball (Anonymous, <i>Meteorites in history</i>; Viegas 2006)</p>
<p><b>Bible world / Ancient Near East / Islam</b></p>	<p>Moses (<i>cf.</i> Indra) liberates water from the rock (<i>Exodus 17:6</i>; <i>cf.</i> Vṛtra)</p> <p>stoning as standard form of capital punishment (Hirzel 1967) but is this an appeal to the Earth, or to a moral link between Heaven and Earth? Stoning is also one of the possible origins of the herms / stone heaps</p> <p>Phoenician cult stones (Stockton 1974)</p> <p>stone altars (Olyan 1996)</p>	<p>the locality Bethel as place of therapeutic incubation and worship (Jacob's dream, <i>Genesis 28:11 f.</i>) (Barton 1912; Wilkinson 1988)</p> <p>other instances of <i>betyls</i> / <i>baitylia</i> (Fauth 1977; Durand 2005; de Moor 1995)</p> <p>steles</p> <p>altars made of earth and later especially stone, both for the cult of Jahweh and for the cults of Ba'al, Astarte, <i>etc.</i> (<i>cf.</i> Olyan 1996); this converges with the theme of the herms</p> <p>mills and grinding stones as evocations of the celestial revolution and the celestial axis; this may also apply to the prehistoric Sahara, <i>cf.</i> the entry 'round stones' below</p> <p>the stone knife of circumcision</p> <p>sacred boundary stones (Maunder 1904; Hinke 1913)</p> <p>black meteorite at temple Baalbek (Hitti 1946 – thus also the Ka'aba; <i>cf.</i> the Black Stone of Earhaddon (Luckenbill 1925)</p> <p>stone child, Kumarbi epic, Hurrians (W. Asia), <i>cf.</i> Kronos</p> <p>stone veneration (Smith 1921)</p> <p>grooved stones Iraq proto-Neolithic (Solecki &amp; Solecki 1970)</p> <p>lithoboly in the Islamic <i>hajj</i> (Houtsma 1904) – Shaitan (the name in itself seems to derive from an ancient Caucasian mother goddess!) is known in Islam as 'The Stoned' (Carnac Temple 1928); Chauvin 1902; Buhl 1974</p> <p>The cult of the sacred tree and stones</p> <p>Jachin and Boaz pillar: James 1966: 32<i>f.</i>, <i>cf.</i> the Egyptian <i>djed</i> pillar</p> <p>gaming stones, Cyprus (Swiny 1980)</p>
<p><b>Aegean region, Graeco-Roman Antiquity</b></p> <p>(for specific mythologies, <i>cf.</i> Pauly / Wissowa 1894-; Ziegler &amp; Sontheimer 1979; Tripp 1974; Atsma, n.d.; Pausanias (see Frazer 1898; Farnell 1907, 1921; Apollodoros (see Frazer 1970 / 1921))</p>	<p>Queen Omphalē (Earth) owner of slave Heracles (≈ celestial pole, demiurge); she also owned a dragon stone which made her omniscient (just as Gaia / Ge is the major divinatory power in the Ancient Aegean)</p> <p>Sisyphus vainly rolling his <i>stone</i> upward in punishment since he betrayed the connection between Heaven and Earth, and therefore is enslaved to Earth</p> <p>oracular gods as transformations of the original source of all knowledge, Earth</p> <p>Black Stone, aniconic for Aphrodite of Paphos, as Great Mother Earth</p> <p>Rhea, Gaia, giving birth to (children disguised as swaddled) stones; the omphalos at Delphi is venerated as such a stone which Rhea gave to</p>	<p>Sisyphus in vain rolling his stone upward in punishment as a reminder that he betrayed by (b) and is enslaved to (a)</p> <p>Kadmos sowing stones</p> <p>Deucalion and Pyrrha sowing stones (in imitation of the demiurge's descent to Earth)</p> <p>the transregional parallels suggest that when Hermes is venerated in stones by the roadside this is not primarily a variant of the Earth cult, but an evocation of the celestial demiurge</p> <p>veneration of stones (Clinton 1996)</p> <p>veneration of meteors (Dalberg 1811)</p> <p>the double axe (see above)</p> <p>steles</p> <p>altars made of earth and later of stone</p> <p>oracular gods (Heracles, Dionysus, Hermes, Athena, Apollo) as demiurges</p> <p>Ouranos' and Kronos' children replaced by stones; one of these stones hurled (<i>cf.</i> Hephaestus) out of Heaven to become the Delphi omphalos</p>

	<p>Kronos in replacement of one of her children, whom he was in the habit of devouring; it was hurled out of Heaven – much like Hephaestus, Zeus's crippled son, god of fire, smithing and artful handicraft (Burke 1986: 219<i>f</i>)</p> <p>Medusa's stony eye for divination</p> <p>Perseus turns Atlas into stone: the mountain range of that name</p> <p>Lapiths as stone people, representing the Land in absolute distinction from ('violent battle with') the Primal Waters = Centaurs (<i>cf.</i> their horse-like connotations, <i>cf.</i> Poseidon)</p> <p>sacred boundary stones (Marett 1901; also <i>cf.</i> above, Mesopotamia)</p> <p>stone cult (Fauth 1977)</p> <p>stoning as sanction among the Ancient Greeks (Voelkl 1977)</p>	<p>Black Stone, aniconic for Aphrodite of Paphos, as demiurge (divine seed fertilising the sea)</p> <p>Kadmos killed Drakon with a stone</p> <p>at Delphi, Apollo covers Telphusa's source with a shower of stones rainmaking by rattling pebbles or meteoric stones in gourd or chest</p> <p>Delphi omphalos claimed to be thrown to Earth from Heaven</p> <p>Palladion at Troy, Artemis at Ephesos, Cone of Elagabalus in Emesa, Pessinunt 'Needle of Cybele', were meteorites (<i>cf.</i> above)</p> <p>the cult of stone phalli in the context of Hermes and Dionysus</p> <p>Italic veneration of stones: Rose 1935</p> <p>out of pebbles Eurytus, student of Philolaus, formed geometrical figures that represented animate beings (Burnet 1934 / 1892; Delatte 1936)</p> <p>divination with stones (Bouché-Leclercq 1879: I, 184)</p> <p>Heracles cult a context for evoking meteorological phenomena (Graves 1988: 124<i>f</i>, 132)</p> <p>omphalos (Roscher 1913, 1918)</p> <p>millstone as metaphor of the universe (de Santillana &amp; von Dechend 1969)</p> <p>Ammon / Zeus and meteorites (Wainwright 1930)</p> <p>On the scholarly attention for stones in Graeco-Roman Antiquity and the European and Arab Middle Ages, <i>cf.</i> Lecouteux 2012.</p>
<p><b>selected other)</b></p>	<p>Vrtra as stone mountains confining the water cows, S. Asia <sup>183</sup></p> <p>Uršanabi's (= Utanpištim's boatsman) stone images destroyed by the demiurge Gilgamesh; de Liagre Böhl 1958 / 1941</p> <p>Azilian painted pebbles, South-western Europe (Breuil 1955)</p> <p>Earth cult British Isles (Bord 1982)</p> <p>Earth cult West Java (Wessing 1988)</p> <p>Kyrgyz, C. Asia (Ashymov 2003)</p> <p>perforated stones of California (Henshaw 1887, with Southern African parallel)</p> <p>erection and veneration of megaliths among the Naga 'tribes' of India (Hutton 1922a, 1222b, 1936)</p> <p>stone axes are unconvincingly claimed to constitute an isogloss across the Pacific and into the New World (Imbelloni 1928). <sup>184</sup></p>	<p><i>lingam</i> (phallic stones especially associated with Śiva) cult S. Asia (Sellon 1865)</p> <p>throughout the Old World (and part of the New World) cleromancy, although often in a context reminiscent of (a), yet in its aleatory throwing seems to imitate (b) the fall of the demiurge from Heaven</p> <p>tall buildings rising to Heaven are not evocations of (a) but of (b):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• pyramids (Ancient Egypt),</li> <li>• <i>stupas</i> (S. and E. Asia)</li> <li>• other similar buildings (Meso America)</li> <li>• the underlying model of the world mountain, in the above, as in the symbolism of Meru (S. Asia, E. Africa); <i>cf.</i> Borobodur (Java &lt; Indonesia &lt; S.E. Asia)</li> </ul> <p>stone heaps as evocation of the demiurge (throughout the Old World, from Tibet (Harrer 1971) to Namibia (Heitsi Eibib shrines), N. Africa (Doutté 1903; van Binsbergen 1971a: <i>mzara</i>); in Kurdistan marking place of murder (Maunsell 1894; Liebrecht 1879: 267<i>f</i>; Haberland 1880)</p> <p>Bronze-Age megaliths (menhirs, cairns, <i>alignments</i>, stone circles – <i>e.g.</i> sacred to the Barley Mother goddess –) in Atlantic Europe and Africa, as well as in the circum-Indian Ocean transregion (Lewis 1971)</p>

<sup>183</sup> When the Francistown *sangomas* in one of their principal trance songs call themselves 'the cows of the ancestors' this may be an echo of this South Asian symbolic complex.

<sup>184</sup> However, since most of the Pacific was only populated in recent millennia, and is now inhabited, by

	<p>worship of stones in China (Jia &amp; Li 2010)</p> <p>Layard 1942: Stone Men of Malekula (&lt; Vanuatu, Oceania)</p> <p>The Italian archaeologist Anati (1999: 136 f) discovered Har Karkom, 'Mountain of God', allegedly a Palaeolithic shrine dating from c. 35 ka BP; its statuettes were allegedly formed by the prehistoric retouching of natural anthropomorphic flint formations</p>	<p><i>betyl</i> in the Levant and the Maghreb (Brett 1997; Lhote 1955)</p> <p>steles</p> <p>thunderstones and rain stones in Western Eurasia and Africa (Cole 1910; Simonsen 1992; Spire 1905; Sanders 2002; Schapera 1971), also in the form of (double) axes and of prehistoric stone axes; also cf. bored stones, especially in Southern Africa, which (although later venerated) likewise were implements (digging-stick weights)</p> <p>altars made of Earth and later especially stone, semi-ubiquitous (Dogon, West Africa, de Grunne 1988; Southern Nigeria, Talbot 1926: ii, 333 f); India (Nagano &amp; Ihari 1993)</p> <p>mills and grinding stones as evocations of the celestial revolution and the celestial axis</p> <p>stone veneration, semi-ubiquitous (British Isles: Ducie 1888, Nolan 1983, Walhouse 1878; Burl 1976, 2000; Atlantic Europe: to be described under the heading of megaliths; North Africa: van Binsbergen 1971a; West Asia, Fuccaro 2004; West Africa: Palmer 1932, Parkinson 1907, Talbot 1926)</p> <p>The sacred nature of these stones allows them to serve in ordeals, both in North Africa (Montet 1909; Demeerseman 1964; Der-menghem 1978) and in West Africa (Paulme 1951).</p> <p>veneration of meteorites or (Burke 1986) impact-generated glass objects (the Black Stone in the Holy Ka'aba, among others), West Asia; lithoboly as part of the <i>hajj</i> (Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca)</p> <p>Lapp divination by <i>seide</i> stones, N. Scandinavia; their thunderstones (Mead 1937)</p> <p>Thor's stone hammer</p> <p>meteorites venerated and ritually buried throughout N America (including Greenland); also in Tibet, India, Mongolia and Australia.</p> <p>Lévi-Strauss (1988) misses the demiurgical dimension when linking jealousy, meteors, and excrement, throughout the mythologies of both Americas</p> <p>Manitou stones, N America (Bender 2000)</p> <p>Oneida Stone, N. America (Beauchamp 1891)</p> <p>Mesoamerican mushroom stones (Kohler 1976)</p> <p>Mesoamerican stone veneration (Megged 1995)</p> <p>North American Native Americans: burial of the Winona meteorite (Anonymous, 'William Lawrence Campbell'; Anonymous, 'Meteorites in History and Religion')</p> <p>sacred stones (Earhart 1969) and stone circles (Gusinde &amp; Chiye Sano 1960) in Japan</p> <p>sacred <i>Semes</i> stones, Santo Domingo, Caribbean (Fewkes 1891)</p> <p>sacred boundary stones West Asia</p> <p>aniconic worship especially of Śiva, S Asia, through <i>lingam</i> stones</p> <p>stone heap as burial form in N. Africa (Ben-Ami 1998)</p> <p>Tasmania (Meston 1934)</p> <p>China: Needham c.s. 19959, vol III; Feuchtwang 1974</p>
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Austronesian speakers, such an isogloss may not so much count as evidence of the transmission of material culture, but merely of a linguistic phylum; moreover, by today's standards the diffusionist ethnologist Imbelloni (1885-1967) does not seem to have the proper linguistic authority for this kind of claims.

		<p>stones as evocation of cosmogonic sites, South America (Santos-Granero, F., 1998), sub-Saharan Africa and insular South East Asia  sacred teaching stones of Australian aboriginals (Anonymous, 1988, <i>The teaching stones</i>; Black 1942)  Earth cult pre-Modern British Isles (Bord 1982);  phallic stones of Hawaii (Gay 1991)  small oblong stones pierced at one end used in female puberty rites, Native Southern California (Hays-Gilpin 2003).</p>
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Table 3.1. Narrative Complex 8a-b 'The Stones': Conceptual composition, attestations in space and time, and sources

### 3.12.1. Discussion

*Stones as raw material and implements.* Stone as raw material is used for all varieties of stone tools from Palaeolithic to Neolithic, and more recently (vases, other vessels, statues, their bases, weights, anchors, axes, adzes, talismans, coffins, steles, rune stones, boundary stones, bee-hives, reliefs) and architecture. Most of these uses fall outside our present scope. Stone-tool industries have constituted the main and ubiquitous record of human presence and activity ever since the Lower Palaeolithic – especially since the other materials used for implements (bone, antler, wood) are far more perishable and seldom survive in the archaeological record. When stone tools began to be supplanted by metal ones by the end of the Neolithic, some stone implements had been so embedded in cultic practice as to survive in their original form. This is particularly the case for stone knives used for circumcision (e.g. among the Basongye / Kuba of Congo, Central Africa) and for human sacrifice.

*Stones as documents.* In the pre-script phases or perhaps (Gimbutas 1991; Marshack 1972; Jackson 1984) proto-script phases of the Middle and Upper Palaeolithic and the Neolithic, stones constituted the obvious durable material on which to leave permanent marks. Rock art is found all over the world and its study constitutes a thriving discipline which I cannot begin to summarise here (cf. Kühn 1955; Lewis-Williams 2002; I extensively discuss and criticise modern rock art studies elsewhere van Binsbergen 2018: ch. 8, cf. 2012; and van Binsbergen with Lacroix 1999). Hence the engraved blocks of the Franco-Cantabrian Middle and Upper Palaeolithic, and the painted pebbles of the Azilian period have particularly attracted scholarly attention.<sup>185</sup> The oldest attested example is the engraved ochre block from the Blombos Cave, South Africa, 70 ka BP (Henshilwood *et al.* 2001; my Fig. 3.8).

<sup>185</sup> Tosello 2003; Utrilla *et al.* 2004; van Binsbergen with Lacroix 2000, van Binsbergen 2018: 277 f.; Breuil 1955; Couraud & Lorblanchet 1986; Orliac 1997.



Fig. 3.8. The red ochre graved block from Blombos Cave, South Africa, 70 ka BP.

*Round stones in the Palaeolithic.* Round stones abound throughout prehistoric Africa.<sup>186</sup> In historical times they have been widely reported, e.g. among the Zulu (Fleischer 1948); the Tallensi (Fortes 1940); the Nandi (Hollis 1909); and in Sudan (Driberg 1933). In another chapter we will come back to these spherical stones in the context of *Forbidden Archeology*.

*Rounds stones used in divination and ordeals.*<sup>187</sup> The sacred nature of these stones leads to their use in lithomancy, i.e. divination by means of stones. In line with the general human inventiveness of pressing objects into divinatory use, lithomancy too takes numerous forms. In the Arabian tradition it is known as *d'erb bel h'aqa* or *terjim* and described by Ibn al-Kalbi, in his *Kitāb al-Aḡnām* (*Book of Idols*, 2nd c. Hijra / 8th c. CE).<sup>188</sup>

Significantly, the Ancient Greek trickster-god Hermes, whose stone steles abound all over Graeco-Roman Antiquity, is associated with *psephomancy* – divination with pebbles; according to the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* (Hesiod (/ Homer) 1914), his elder brother Apollo instructed him specifically to specialise in that oracular technique. Such sacred stones are found both in West Africa (Paulme 1951) and in North Africa. In the latter region the shrines built around saint's tombs (or secondary shrines derived from such tombs) often contain round stones (*kūra*) of up to c. 15 cm diameter, considered to have been among the saint's proofs of miraculous power (*karamāt*) when still alive; when a dispute in the local community is to be settled, plaintiff and defendant are

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<sup>186</sup> In general: Clark 1955; Willoughby 1985; and e.g. (circum-)Saharan West Africa: Mauny 1948; Milburn 1989.

<sup>187</sup> The literature on ordeals is extensive; cf. Anonymous, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. Ordeal; Bühler 1866; E.H. 1926; Frymer-Kensky 1983; Hastings 1909-1921, s.v. ordeal; Heimpe 1996; McCarter 1973; Kandamakumbo, 1938; Owen 1988; Simmons 1956; van der Toorn 1988; Vansina 1971. But apart from North African popular religion (also cf. Akrimi 2007) most ordeals do not make use of stones as a specific apparatus. Other apparatus is however reported, including the cauldron, the sifter / sieve, the axe (once exclusively in stone), wooden or ivory tables and other lots, shells, nut shells, playing cards, etc. All four Empedoclean elements are used for the administration of ordeals, but water seems to be favourite.



<sup>188</sup> Wellhausen 1927; Fahd 1966.



taken to the shrine and made to take the stone on their shoulder – the one guilty of perjury will be unable to support the weight of the stone. Descriptions of this custom abound in the extensive literature on North African saint veneration; in that literature they are often considered to derive from canon-balls dating from the period of Ottoman rule in North Africa (15-19<sup>th</sup> c. CE), but against the comparative background of the wide distribution of such stones in circum-Saharan archaeological contexts, a less presentist explanation seems to be preferable. The Israelite two stones constituting the האורים והתומים *Urim* and *Thummim*, 'which were most probably two stones and gave a yes or no answer' — Reiner 1960: 25) fall in the same category.

'S'il y avait des pierres capables de guérir tous les maux, d'arrêter le cours des fleuves ou de détourner les tempêtes, il s'en trouverait bien aussi qui, portées au cou ou mises sous la langue, pouvaient-elles servir d'instruments de divination conjecturale (lithomancie). On racontait, par exemple, que les Mysiens, pour savoir si la récolte de l'année serait abondante, se servaient de petites pierres<sup>189</sup> noires, qu'une espèce de pavot [poppy] produisait en guise de graines. Si l'année doit être stérile, ces objets restent immobiles dans les endroits où on les a jetés; mais, s'il doit y avoir une récolte abondante, ils bondissent comme des sauterelles." (Ps. Plut. *De mon. et futv. nomin.*, 21, 2) Ce dernier procédé rappelle la lithobolie déromantique dont il sera question plus loin; Bouché-Leclercq 1879 :1, 184.

Such ritual use of stones appears to be extremely old and may have been among the early ingredients of shamanism (cf. Furst 1977).

	
<p>a. A Middle Palaeolithic Neanderthaloid / Mousterian <i>bone</i> (therefore <i>not</i>: stone) artefact from Bacho, Bulgaria, which I propose to represent lightning (the zigzag motif has been digitally enhanced by me; after Stringer &amp; Gamble 1993: 189, Fig. 92)</p>	<p>b. Phallic stones from Hohefels, Germany, Upper Palaeolithic (source: <a href="https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Stone-phallus-from-the-Hohle-Fels-Cave-28-kyr-old-Credit-J-Liptak_fig3_310767154">https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Stone-phallus-from-the-Hohle-Fels-Cave-28-kyr-old-Credit-J-Liptak_fig3_310767154</a>)</p>

<sup>189</sup> We hit here upon a typical semantic pitfall of comparative research into culture and mythology: in several languages, including English and French, the same lexical item covers both anorganic 'stones' (conglomerates of silicium compounds) and organic 'fruit kernels, pips'. This must be considered an exceptional situation, against the background of the wealth of lexical and semantic material for most of the world's language as presented in Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008. For most phyla and individual languages from \*Borean downward, in regard of the semantics 'stone' (anorganic, named *petros* in Greek, *saxum* in Latin), no ready confusion with fruit kernels is in evidence. Considering however the pivotal role of grains in the emergence agriculture, the English and French situation is remarkable and invites further research.

	
<p>c. Ancient Greek <i>herm</i> with a representation of Apollo (left) and Hermes</p>	<p>d. Aged ritual specialist handling a perforated rain stone, Southern Sudan (courtesy Simon Simonse)</p>
	
<p>e. Stone funerary statue from Mbamba, Angola, Afrikamuseum, Berg en Dal, Netherlands, 20<sup>th</sup> c. CE</p>	<p>f. Patterns on pebbles from Mas d'Azil, France, ca. 9.5 ka BP, with (bottom) one close-up</p>
	
<p>source: <a href="https://warehouse-13-artifact-database.fandom.com/wiki/Omphalos_Stone">https://warehouse-13-artifact-database.fandom.com/wiki/Omphalos_Stone</a> g. The <i>omphalos</i> / navel stone at Delphi, Greece</p>	<p>h. Meteorite on display in the Museum for Natural History, Cambridge MA, USA</p>

Fig. 3.9. Selected objects illustrating the Narrative Complex 8, 'The Stones'

*Stones used as tokens in games.* Stones<sup>190</sup> are often used for tallying (Lagercrantz 1970) and in games, e.g. in the extensively documented *mankala* family of games whose oldest attestations go back to the West Asian Neolithic and Bronze Ages (Lee 1982; Rollefson 1992; Swiny 1980) and which in historical times is found to be distributed throughout Africa, Eurasia and destination areas of forced African migration.<sup>191</sup> Another example is the game of *kudoda* or *nhodo* game from Zimbabwe (Ellert 1984: 128; cf. Matthews 1964) which in fact is reminiscent of the geomantic family of divination systems.<sup>192</sup>

This is a relatively easy game to play but does demand a very high degree of manual dexterity and is therefore played most often by youngsters. The players scoop out a small hole in the ground about 10 cm in diameter. A number of small stones (*matombo*) and one large stone or tree nut are all that is required for this game which involves throwing the stones or tree nuts into the air and catching various combinations before they fall to the ground and back into the hole. The large stone or tree nut, which is central to the game is called the *mudodo*. (Ellert 1984: 128).

*Round pierced stones.* A substantial literature has been devoted to bored stones from the Palaeolithic on. Inspired by a Chinese artisan and his flywheel, the pioneer French prehistorian Henri Breuil suggested the same Palaeolithic use for such stones: facilitating the use of a primitive lathe. Dart, the famous discoverer of the *Australopithecus* as an early Hominid, repeatedly returned to this topic throughout his long career. Initially Dart (1929) brought such bored stones in relation with metal smelting, where perforated stones could have served as so-called *tuyères* for the conduct of air. Goodwin (1947-1952), who gave a great deal of attention to this question, brings up a number of possibilities (pipe for smoking, arm ring, *tuyère*, device to draw metal thread, animal husbandry – as a weight to break in oxen – , and especially weight for a digging stick), and traces the distribution of these objects beyond Southern Africa: South Central Africa, even Ethiopia. Some of such stones serve as representations of ancestors (as described by the blind ethnographer Stayt, for the Venda: 1931: 242 f.). In the same South Central African region, there might be a relationship between a specific type of round bored stone at

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<sup>190</sup> In English, 'stones' can mean both objects of a lithic nature and origin, but also solid kernel of a fruit. Both are commonly used in games and for divination. E.g. the nicely carved *abbia* stones from Cameroon (Quinn 1971), whose heterogeneous designs feature more or less as a Eurasian deck of cards, are cut out of nut shells. But of course they fall outside our present exploration of the Narrative Complex 8 'The Stones'.

<sup>191</sup> Cf. Murray 1952; Becq de Fouquières 1869; Tornay & Tornay 1971; van Binsbergen 2012, 1997 / 2011, and extensive references there.

<sup>192</sup> Cf. van Binsbergen 1995b, 1996d, 2012b, 2013b, and extensive references cited there. New-Age pseudo-science writers (a shockingly extensive group of producers of would-be best-sellers) have not failed to appropriate the very widespread and very old forms of geomantic divination (Pennick 1992a, 1992b, 1979; Skinner 1980, 1986). Also Colin Wilson and Flem-Ath (2001: xxii-xxiv) justify their fantasies about Atlantis (part of an interminable series of Western pseudo-scientific writings since Plato) in part by reference to the 'priestly science of geomancy' as a form of ancient wisdom on which their own idiosyncratic reconstruction of 'the ancient world-view' is allegedly based. The literary essayist Colin Wilson's predilection for the occult was demonstrated by three voluminous books on the topic.

Great Zimbabwe<sup>193</sup>, to which Bent attributes an astronomical significance (*cf.* Bent 1902: 170, 202) but which in fact (van Binsbergen 2012d, 2019a, 2020d) is a symbolic representation of the female genital in the South Asian tradition, in the context of the Śiva cult. Dart (1932, *cf.* 1929, 1948), writing on this type of stones in Southern Africa, did note their phallic nature, but failed to make the connection with the Śiva cult – although he came to be more appreciative of transcontinental relationships (Dart 1951) than most writers of his generation. When small bored stones are used as beads there appears to be an association with metallurgy. However, ten Raa (1966) reports on ‘The use of digging sticks, bored stones and stone balls among the [ pre-metallurgic ] Sandawe’ – a people of hunter-gatherers in Tanzania, whom specialists today consider to be rather closely related, culturally and linguistically, to the San of Southern Africa.

*Stones as representations of gods.* Under this heading much of the global distribution of stone symbolism could be subsumed. Aniconic stones, especially of a meteoric or volcanic origin, appear as palladiums (local group symbols and rallying foci) in West Asia (see Table 3.1). In South Asia the phallic *lingam* is the representation of the major god Śiva. In many Neolithic and Bronze Age archaeological contexts, especially those of the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions, stones were found that were fashioned into an anthropomorphic shape and that are reported as ‘stone idols’ in the older literature (*cf.* Kühn 1955: 74, 80; Gimbutas 1982, 1991a, 1991b, 1965).



source: Bednarik n.d.

*Fig. 3.10. The apparently anthropomorphic pebble from Makapansgat, South Africa, ca. 1.5 mill. years BP*

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<sup>193</sup> Bent 1902; the literature on Great Zimbabwe is voluminous and cannot be done justice here. *Cf.* Garlake 1973, 1985 / 1982; Hall 1907; Chirikure & Pikirayi 2008; Huffman 1984, 1987; Vogel 1994, 1995; Caton-Thompson 1931.



Source: [http://www.klausdierks.com/images/Namibia\\_Damara\\_Brandberg\\_Hungorob\\_4.JPG](http://www.klausdierks.com/images/Namibia_Damara_Brandberg_Hungorob_4.JPG) with thanks.

*Fig. 3.11. A cult place for Heitsi Eibib in Namibia.*

*Stones as representations of ancestors and of other humans.* From stones as anthropomorphic representations of gods it is one step to stones as humans and as ancestors. Under this heading much of the rest of the global distribution of stone symbolism could be subsumed. The oldest non-controversial attestation of this type of cultural use of stone is the small (3,5 cm) pebble from Berekhat Ram (Golan Heights, West Asia), generally accepted to be deliberately shaped by human hands c. 400 ka BP (Goren-Inbar 1986; Goren-Inbar & Peltz 1995). Bednarik (1998) claims that the human face on a pebble from Makapansgat, South Africa (Fig. 3.10) is man-made, and about four times older than the Berekhat Ram item. For stones as representations of ancestors and as humans in Africa in historic times, cf. Summers 1957; Hart & Fry 1993; Allison 1962, 1968 (Elkoï, Nigeria); Crawford (1957) speaks of African standing stones bearing human and phallic forms. Outside Africa, stone statues are typical expressions of the complex literate cultures of Eurasia and Meso America, but they are also found in Oceania: in Malekula (Vanuatu; Layard 1965 / 1945), and in Rapanui / Easter Island (Chile). A specific form of this cultural application of stones is as representation of ancestors. This notion is, for instance, implied in the Cameroonien (specifically Kaka) women's custom of constantly sucking on stones in order to enhance their fertility (Powell-Cotton 1933). The permanence of the ancestors and their time-honoured institutions (including female puberty rites) is also expressed in the Bemba (Zambia) proverb that constitutes the title of the splendid book by one of my

students, Thera Rasing's (2001) *The Bush Burnt, The Stones Remain* – a metaphor on transience vs. permanence, flesh vs. bones, individual life vs. ancestors, perhaps even nature vs. culture. Some stones in this category depict not the full human body but parts, e.g. female breasts in the enigmatic *zemes* from the Caribbean;<sup>194</sup> or a *betyl* with the representation of a human head in the Sahara (Lhote 1955) – reminiscent of the herms (stone steles representing the Ancient Greek god Hermes, often with a head and / or an erect penis) that abound in Graeco-Roman Antiquity. Very widespread, from South Asia to Siberia, Oceania and sub-Saharan Africa, are the phallic stones representing the male reproductive organ. Huntingford (1950) speaks of the 'hagiolithic ('holy-stone') cultures' of East Africa, which may be continuous both with the lithic artefacts of Great Zimbabwe and with the South Asian *lingam* / Śiva complex. The herms belong to a very widespread category of stone installations which I described elsewhere (van Binsbergen 2012) in the following terms:<sup>195</sup>

M. 'WOUNDED KNEE' AS A POTENTIALLY TRANSCONTINENTAL EXPRESSION

'Wounded Knee' [ – in North America a historically charged toponym in South Dakota, USA, – scene of a major USA massacre of Native Americans, 1890 – is ] in Southern Africa the name of the principal Culture Hero (Heitsi Eibib) of the Khoisan speaking peoples, whose possible Asian ancestry we touched on above. Amazing continuities (...) link Heitsi Eibib to the rest of the Old World and especially to Western Eurasia. His main cultic manifestation is the herm or stone pile – such as is found throughout Eurasia from Atlantic European and North African megalithic arrangements to the *betyls* of the Levant and the stone piles of Mongolia and Tibet. Designated by a West Semitic word subsequently adopted into West European intellectual discourse, the *betyl* / *baitylia* ('house of a god') is a class of West Asian and Mediterranean shrines whose main or only feature is a rock. They have been described by various scholars, both for the Ancient Mediterranean<sup>196</sup> and much further afield.<sup>197</sup> Ducie (1888) describes three so-called mare [ i.e. female horse ] stones, megaliths, one of which is adorned with human teeth; a megalithic shrine likewise called 'mare stone' (*ħjāret al-Fras*) was identified by me, among many others featuring as minor Islamic shrines, in the highlands of North-western Tunisia (van Binsbergen 1971a, 1985a, 1985b, in preparation (a); this is shrine XI in Fig. 2.2 above). The link with psephomancy (divination by means of pebbles) and geomancy is, among other indications, brought out by the fact that many divine and heroic shrines in the Ancient Graeco-Roman world operated cleromantic oracles (cf. Farnell 1895-1909, 1921; Graves 1964; Bouché-Leclercq 1879) and also by the ancient report according to which Eurytus, a pupil of Philolaus, used pebbles so as to form geometric figures representing beings (Delatte 1936: 582 n. 2). (...) In addition to these, admittedly heterogeneous and multidimensional, stone aspects of Heitsi Eibib, even his affliction of the lower extremities may reflect transcontinental continuities, after all: the wobbling gait as a result of ritual mutilation of the lower extremities (i.e. 'wounded knee') or the groin, in the context of initiation especially into royal office (Graves 1964, 1988), constitutes a recurrent feature of Eurasian cultures and may well be originally a Pelasgian trait; a case in point is, again, Erichthonius or Erechtheus, the first

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<sup>194</sup> Cf. Quevado 1891; Fewkes 1891; Rouse 1992. There is some connection with my argument on food crop cults in sub-Saharan Africa in that the Tainos's principal gods are Yúcahu (god of cassava and of the sea), and his mother Atabey, goddess of fertility and fresh waters .

<sup>195</sup> Also in my original, the text passage is preceded by the illustration shown here with its original caption.

<sup>196</sup> Schmidt 1893; du Mesnil du Buisson 1966; Rose 1935; Fauth 1979b; Suhr 1967; Marwitz 1979.

<sup>197</sup> [ Original footnote ] Lhote 1955; Cadenat 1955 (mention of a betyl in the shape of a human head); David-Neel 1970; Hedin 1934.

Athenian king, who had to be carried around in a basket<sup>198</sup> because – just like the Chinese culture hero Fu Xi and (by some interpretations) the legendary Mesopotamian culture hero Oannes – he was snake-footed.'


*Stones as megaliths.* Cupules (*i.e.* cupmarks) constitute an ubiquitous aspect of prehistory ever since the Middle Palaeolithic (*e.g.* the Mousterian context of La Ferrassie, Dordogne, France – van Binsbergen with Lacroix 1999; van Binsbergen 2018: 277 *f.*, with extensive references – and even the Lower Palaeolithic Acheulian of South Asia – Bednarik 199; Kumar 1996; Kumar *et al.* 2003). Their internal structure both affirms and (because of its hollowing-out) denies the stone surface, and in that respect they may constitute an evocation of the relation between Heaven and Earth, and a rudimentary template for thought. This is also how they appear at La Ferrassie: as elements constituting an *unmistakable* Neanderthaloid stellar map (van Binsbergen with Lacroix 2000; van Binsbergen 2018: 277 *f.*). Also here there is the link with the star-spangled sky hence with the speckledness / granulation, *cf.* the leopard skin.

*Stone as raw material* is used for artefacts: all varieties of stone tools from Palaeolithic to Neolithic, and more recently (vases, other vessels, statues, their bases, weights, anchors, axes, adzes, talismans, coffins, steles, rune stones, boundary stones, bee-hives, reliefs) and architecture.

### 3.12.2. *Summing up*

Let us wrap up this excursion into the comparative mythology of stones as symbolic of the Re-connection of Heaven and Earth. Veneration of stones as an aspect of the Earth appears to have been part, as Narrative Complex 8a, of the heritage of Anatomically Modern Humans ever since before the Out of Africa Exodus (c. 80-60 ka BP); however, in one of the subsequent Contexts of Intensified Transformation and Innovation (CITI), notably CITI VI which has its epicentre in Central Asia c. 15 ka BP and which was also the epicentre of the Back-into-Africa movement, this Narrative Complex was redefined so as to highlight, no longer Earth as such, but the newly emerging theme of the Re-connection of Heaven and Earth: Narrative Complex 8b, which is in fact an aspect of Narrative Complex 2 ('The Re-connection of Heaven and Earth'). This henceforth became the context for crop and fertility cults, notions of demiurges descending from Heaven (often to their own detriment but to humankind's benefit), humans seeking to ascent into Heaven or build into Heaven,<sup>199</sup> combined with meteorological notions linking Heaven and Earth, such as meteorites, rain, and the rainbow. This Narrative Complex was brought to the New World, *e.g.* with the Beringian peopling of the Ameri-

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<sup>198</sup> [ Original footnote ] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, II, 552 *f.*; Hyginus (1872), *Fabulae*, 166; Pausanias, *Descriptio Graeciae*, I, 24, 7; Herodotus, *Historiae*, VIII, 41. Note the remarkable parallel with the Ugandan queens, which I discussed above [ *i.e.*, in the 2012 original text ] with reference to the Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic sign  *nbt*.

<sup>199</sup> As in the Tower complex surrounding Flood myths, *e.g.* Genesis 11, the Tower of Babel and the Nimrod character; also see van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008, van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: ch. 6, pp. 123-190.

cas from Central and North-eastern Asia. Likewise, it spread overland to South East Asia, and from there in seaborne fashion to Oceania, and presumably also to regions in West Asia, Africa and Europe as part of the Sunda expansion. The same Narrative Complex was taken from Asia to Africa in the context of the Back-into-Africa movement. In the regions where Narrative Complex 8b spread, it tended to cause a feedback reaction confronting, transforming, and innovating the ancient cult of the Earth which had been the heritage of Anatomically Modern Humans ever since the Out of Africa Exodus – and (inside Pandora's Box) even long before. This protracted global process made it possible for myths and rites with a strong agricultural, meteorological and demiurgical content to occur, in rather similar forms, throughout Africa, in continuity with West Asia, other parts of Asia, and Europe, and even quite parallel to cults with the same overall orientation in the Americas.

The American connection is probably not just based on a shared remote origin in Upper Palaeolithic Central Asia. The proposed systematic connections of *Chihamba*-like cults throughout the Old World do not rule out the possibility that specific New World mythical elements may have been superimposed upon this Old World substrate when, along with the new food crops of cassava / maniok (*Manihot esculenta*) and maize (*Zea mays* L. ssp. *mays*), they travelled across the Atlantic Ocean from Meso America at Early Modern European initiative.

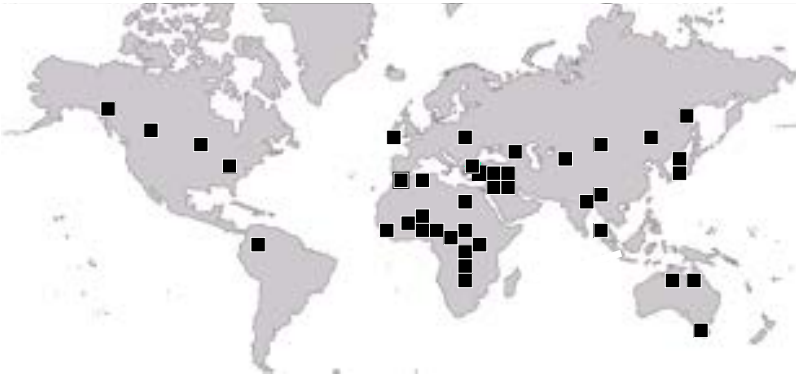
In addition to the correspondences in the ritual and its material attributes, an indication of a Caribbean influence on Atlantic African crops cults lies in the name of the spirits venerated; thus on the West African 'Slave Coast' (Benin-Nigeria), a demiurgical thunder god associated with stone axes / thunderbolts – hence fully comparable with Cassara in Guinea Bissau and Chihamba in Zambia – is reported by the name of *Jakuta* (which Balfour, or his interlocutors, around 1900 explained as 'hurler of stones'; Balfour 1903); whether this is a local popular etymology or does have some valid grounding in local linguistics, the name is surprisingly close to that of the cassava god of the Caribbean Tainos (who were involved in Columbian contacts from the very beginning in 1492 CE), notably *Yucahú* (Balfour 1903; Rouse 1992: 13f.).

It seems increasingly likely that some limited trans-Atlantic seafaring took place in pre-Columbian times; however, we do not even need such a contentious claim (classic anthropology, and American identity, are based on the assumption of the absence of transculturality; van Binsbergen 2019, 2020) in order to allow for the exchange of (already essentially similar) mythical, ritual and agricultural elements between Meso America and West Africa from early Columbian times onward, which would have made for further convergence between the American and the African forms.<sup>200</sup>

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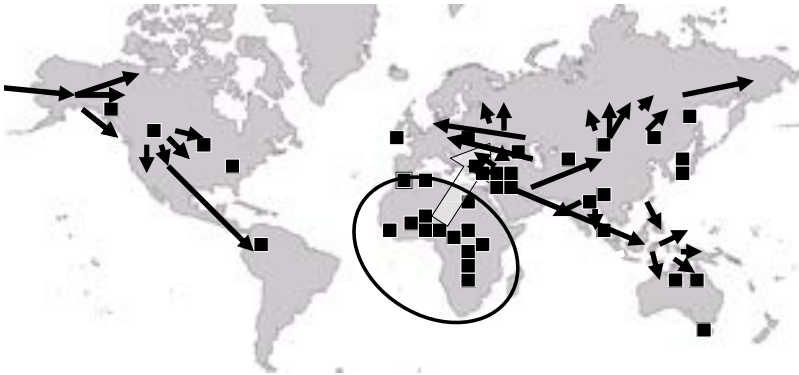
<sup>200</sup> When proceeding, in the following analysis, from global distribution to a tentative reconstruction of global cultural history, I am relying on a methodology that informs much of my recent transcontinental comparative work; an extensive demonstration and discussion of this approach (applied to the cultural practice of headhunting) in van Binsbergen 2020: ch. 12.





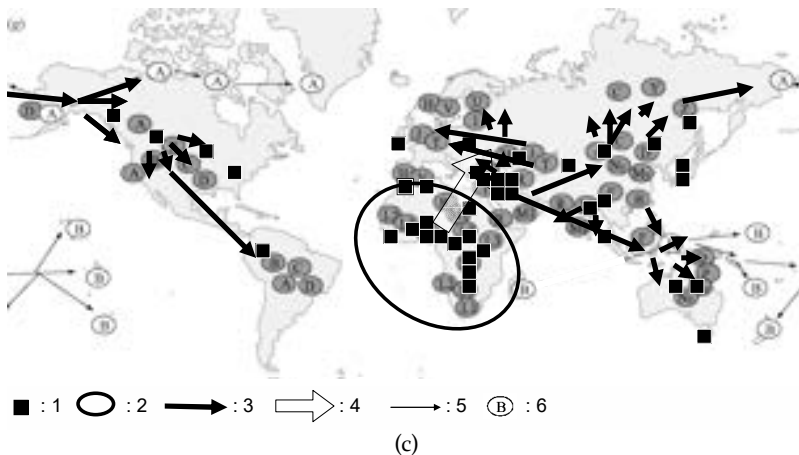
■ : 1

(a)



■ : 1 ○ : 2 → : 3 ⇨ : 4

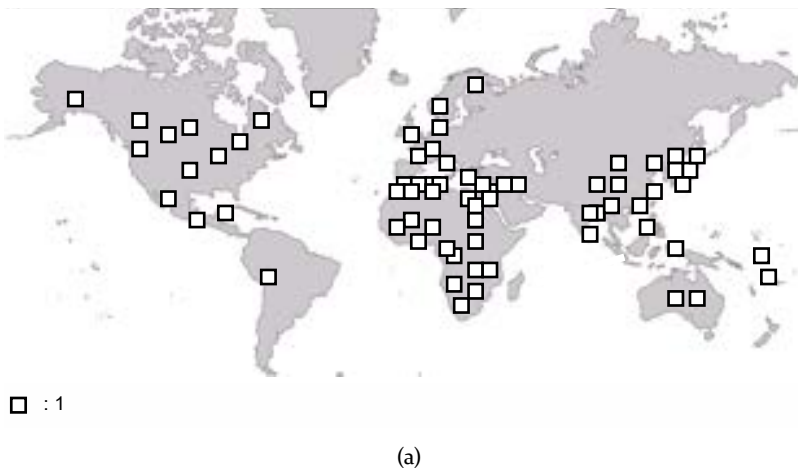
(b)

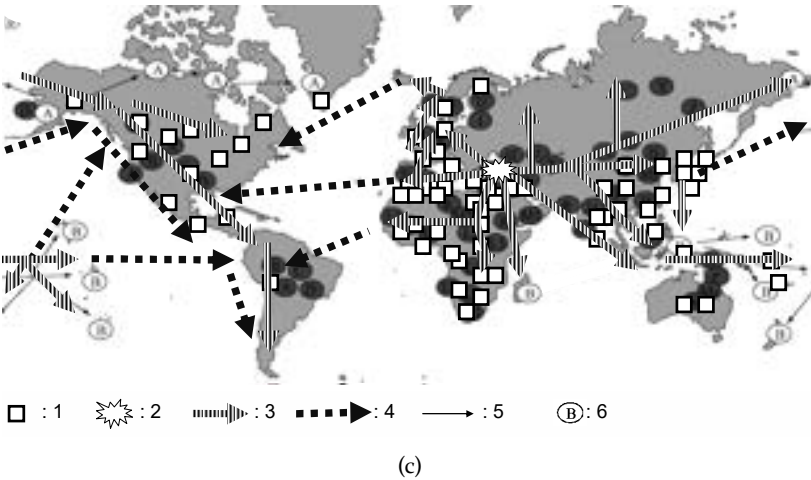
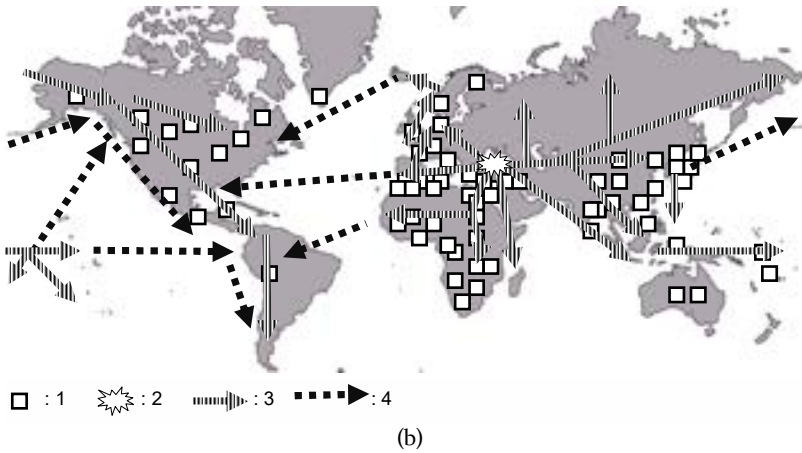


LEGEND

- 1 attestation of Narrative Complex 8a (stones as symbolic of Earth)
- 2 'Pandora's Box' (> 80-60 ka BP)
- 3 proposed demic diffusion
- 4 proposed cultural diffusion from Pandora's box up North and North East, from as soon as Anatomically Modern Humans reached W Asia, North Africa and Southern Europe
- 5 patterns of demic diffusion in recent millennia according to Forster 2004
- 6 recent (< 2 ka BP) global distribution of haplogroups according to Forster 2004

Fig. 3.12. a-c. The distribution and reconstruction of the historical genesis of the Narrative Complex 'The stones' (as symbolic of the Earth): (a) Narrative Complex 8a





LEGEND

- 1 attestation of Narrative Complex 8b (stones as symbolic of Re-Connection of Heaven and Earth)
- 2 proposed epicentre of global distribution
- 3 proposed demic (and cultural) diffusion
- 4 as 3 but conjectural
- 5 patterns of demic diffusion in recent millennia according to Forster 2004
- 6 recent (< 2 ka BP) global distribution of haplogroups according to Forster 2004

Fig. 3.13. a-c. The distribution and reconstruction of Narrative Complex 8b: the historical genesis of the Narrative Complex 'The stones' (as symbolic of the Re-connection of Heaven and Earth)

### 3.13. The global context of the *Chihamba* cult

This then, I propose, is the global cultural historical background, against which cults like *Chihamba* need to be situated in order to be properly understood, beyond the presentist and localist narrow horizons typically constructed in fieldwork-based anthropology from the 1930s onward – including the Ndembu fieldwork by the Turners.

The literature illuminating what I believe to be the global mythological connections of Ndembu *Chihamba* cult is abundant.<sup>201</sup> The global cultural and specifically mythological connectivity on which such an analysis of *Chihamba* is based, may invite the scorn of fieldwork anthropologists pursuing a neo-classic paradigm (cf. Amselle 2001, who amply displays such scorn – and while principally directed at me he also extends it to the prominent French historian of Africa Cathérine Coquery-Vidrovitch), yet it has considerable intersubjective backing as the emerging paradigm of long-range comparative mythology.<sup>202</sup>



Source: van Binsbergen 2019, 2020d. The solid, thick black lines indicate the proposed outlines of the 'Sunda' network; lesser density of hatching indicates lesser certainty. For sections of the proposed network, hatched lines are used to indicate interior regions of suspected Sunda influence: the Mozambican / Angolan corridor, the Bight of Benin / Western Grassfields corridor, and the Mediterranean connections with the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, not all of them being maritime trajectories yet all having a marked Sunda association

Fig. 3.14. A proposed intercontinental, multicentred, multidirectional maritime network from the Early Bronze Age onward.

A closer look at *Chihamba* may bring us yet further. Although the root *-hamba* (with the meaning of 'plant' or 'journey') occurs in many Bantu languages, especially along the Indian Ocean, it is not part of the proto-Bantu corpus (Meeussen 1980 and n.d.; Guthrie n.d.), and it may well be a loan from Austric, and then having presumably travelled west

<sup>201</sup> So I can only mention the barest selection here: Bianchi 1971; Cotterell 1989; Frazer 1914; Griffiths 1980; Jacobsen 1970; Oldenburg 1969; Otto 1966; Saunders 1961; Tedlock 1985; Willis 1993; Young 1954.

<sup>202</sup> Cf. Witzel 2001, 2012; van Binsbergen 2006b, 2006c; van Binsbergen & Venbrux 2010.

on the wings of westward Sunda expansion, of which the colonisation of Madagascar has been the most tangible result.

There is a marked affinity between Bantu and Austric – not only in syntax (noun classes), but also lexically. That an Austric-Bantu linguistic relationship is far from an illusion, is suggested by the very word that inspired by Wilhelm Bleek (1827-1875) to name the Bantu linguistic family by that particular name: Bantu *-ntu*, 'human', cf. the virtually identical Austric *-taw* 'human' (Adelaar 1994);<sup>203</sup> moreover, lexicostatistical analysis of reconstructed protoforms has shown that Bantu converges with both the Austric and the Amerind (misc.) macrophyllum as early (ca. 15 ka BP) offshoots from \*Borean (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 77f.)

To this we may adduce the Austric, specifically modern Indonesian, lexical item *hamba*, 'slave'; in South Central Africa the slave's prime characteristic is that, having (involuntarily) *travelled* far, he consequently lives away from his kin hence without socio-political rights and resources.

Among the Zambian Nkoya there is no greater insult than to say to a person: 'climb in a tree so that you may see where you came from' – implying him or her to be a slave from afar (and perhaps a monkey, but these are very rare in Nkoyaland). People have been known to commit suicide just for having this said to them.

North Western Zambia (where the Ndembu live), and Western Central Zambia (where the Nkoya live, culturally and linguistically closely related to the Ndembu) are approximately equidistant from the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, where the transcontinental trade routes fizzle out to mere local capillaries (Fig. 3.5). Although from the late 18th century on, trade contacts in North-western Zambia (including the Ndembu region) were increasingly with the Atlantic west coast, throughout the second millennium CE the influence from the Indian Ocean ('Swahili') was pervasive all over South Central Africa.

Also the material form of *Chihamba* would seem to link it to elsewhere in Africa and West Asia. In *Chihamba* the cult object (associated with death and rebirth, crops, and evoking the connecting between Heaven and Earth in the form of rain) is (cf. Fig. 3.19.1, below) *an angular, roughly prismatic, object about the size of a human body, and covered in white cloth*. White cloth as a major element of an ecstatic cult shrine is a recurrent element, in Western Zambia (where it also dominates the *Bituma* cult; cf. van Binsbergen 1972 and 1981), and in Zimbabwe / Botswana / South Africa, in the context of the *sangoma* cult (van Binsbergen 2003h: chs 5-8). In the times of the long-distance caravan trade such cloth was the standard, expensive offering for ancestral shrines, especially royal ones. There is also a transcontinental connection. In Ceylon and surrounding islands in the Indian Ocean, where<sup>204</sup> there is considerable demographic, musical, ludic and cultic continuity with sub-Saharan Africa,<sup>205</sup> white cloth plays a major role in initiation, adoption, and wedding

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<sup>203</sup> It may be relevant in this connection that the Polynesian (< Austronesian) word for 'God' is *atua* (Macdonald 1923), whose meaning might be 'superhuman being'

<sup>204</sup> As my recent research indicates; cf. van Binsbergen 2019, 2020 and in press (a). .

<sup>205</sup> Largely from the times of European expansion, 16<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century CE – but probably also from the preceding millennia without European interference, cf. Rowlands 2012.

ceremonies (Chitty 1992: 56, 107; Ibn Battuta 1929); it is possible that this is an African effect on India, but given the relative paucity of cloth in Africa where in recent millennia most calico was transcontinentally imported, and given the abundance of cloth in India, I suggest it is the other way around.

This is also the context in which I have primarily discussed *Bituma*: as a cult of affliction associated with long-distance trade and psychosomatic illness; this is how the cult manifested itself to me in the first instance, during fieldwork in Lusaka suburbs 1972-1973. However, *Bituma* did have the aspect of an agricultural cult as well:

#### N. BITUMA AMONG THE ZAMBIAN NKOYA AS AN AGRICULTURAL CULT.

When Henny van Rijn (my first wife) and I travelled to Chief Kahare's area, Kaoma District, Western Central Zambia, for the first time, in May 1973, our earlier experiences with the *Bituma* cult in town, and our network relations with senior leaders in the cult, qualified us to participate in the cult's festival for the new maize harvest. *Bituma's* founder Simbinga (a Luvalé prophet from Angola) had imposed strict conditions on the consumption of maize, the main other American import crop next to cassava. Emulating widespread African royal prerogatives according to which the new harvest cannot be eaten before the king gives official permission to do so (an arrangement that is still revived every year during the Nkoya's Kazanga Festival), the *Bituma* cult forbade its adherents to consume the new harvest, until after a senior *Bituma* priestess had ritually given dispensation to the adherent by spitting chewed maize cobs from her own mouth into the adept's – a ritual my eldest daughter's mother (born around the corner in the same Amsterdam popular neighbourhood as I was myself) underwent without hesitation, and to her considerable credit.

We may extend our comparison even further afield. In South Central Africa the colour *white* is primarily associated with death, and secondarily with Europeans. Victor Turner (1966) has stressed how this colour is part of a symbolic triad with red and black, and in this context the reference of the colour white is, in his opinion, primarily to milk and nurturation. Perhaps in continuity with the latter, throughout the Old World we find the colour white (and animals of that colour, especially aquatic birds) associated with primary gods of creation,<sup>206</sup> who in the most recent millennia usually have ceded their central place in the pantheon to mythologically more elaborate, new, typically male, celestial creation gods;<sup>207</sup> typically, when this happens, the colour white changes meaning from *cosmogonic* to *solar*. Slight traces of such creation gods may be found in Africa. Yet the evidence is too scattered, and the alternative explanation (in the form of the participants making the explicit link with the white colour of American food crops once processed) is too obvious, than that we might convincingly interpret Zambian cults like *Chihamba* and

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<sup>206</sup> E.g. Janus, Ganesha, Basajaun, even the biblical Noah; cf. van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 20, 137 f., 140n, 356, 359 f., 370, 374 f., 379, 393. Only the smallest trickle of European travellers (mainly Portuguese) had reached South Central Africa by the late 18<sup>th</sup> c. CE, and (even though Simbinga hailed from Eastern Angola, where 'Whites' were more numerous), I dismiss the possibility that the colour 'white' in the *Bituma* context refers to these aliens. Islamic / Swahili traders appear to have been slightly more numerous, but they tended to be fairly pigmented. White in South Central Africa is predominantly the colour of death – including shrouds, and calico offerings to the ancestors.

<sup>207</sup> Above we have already referred to this widespread phenomenon of masculinisation in the Old World Bronze Age, see van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: Table 6.4, p. 142.

*Bituma* along the lines of *primary* creation gods. But certainly, as celestial stones, they have demiurgic implications.

Striking parallels may be found for the angular form, the cloth-swathed appearance and the demiurgical connotations of the *Chihamba* shrine. In the first place, after the Separation of Heaven and Earth as the moment of cosmogony, the subsequent restoring of the connection between Heaven and Earth (through lightning, rain, the rainbow, a ladder, tower, rope, objects being thrown down *etc.*) is a dominant theme in relatively recent (Neolithic) mythologies of the Old World, and this trait also marks the mythologies of sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>208</sup> The theme is often elaborated in the form of a mythical character who, as son of the Sky God, *i.e.* as demiurge, embodies the connection between Heaven and Earth; *usually he is a vegetation god*, and usually his fate is tragic – like that of Osiris (killed by his brother), Tammuz (killed and locked in the underworld), Dionysus (torn apart by Titans who first lured him with toys), Jesus of Nazareth as God's son and as the incarnation of the *Logos* (Philo; the *Gospel of John* in the *New Testament*), scarcely later gnosticism's conception of the divine spark entrapped in matter seeking to liberate itself, and finally the tragic figure of the martyr Ḥusayn in early medieval Islam. In West Africa, the Dogon essentially treat the same material in their agricultural myths and rites – and the alleged celestial origin of their mythical, celestial, protagonist has given rise to a large body of literature, professional and amateur, on the merits or illusions of Dogon astronomical knowledge.<sup>209</sup> In South Central Africa, close parallels to the Ndembu demiurge Kavula ('Rain Person') whose ritual drama is *Chihamba*, are found, in the first place in the Nkoya demiurge Mvula ('Rain') who is at the heart of Nkoya cosmology and mythology, and further, for instance, in the, allegedly murdered, Mwana Lesa figure of 19th century Central Zambia (Smith & Dale 1920),<sup>210</sup> and the Mbona martyr figure of Southern Malawi (Schoffeleers 1992).

Ethnographic parallels with the *Chihamba* shrine extend far across Africa, and beyond. Among the Manjacos of Guinea Bissau (Crowley 1990; van Binsbergen 1984, 1988, 2017) there is an annual festival celebrating the descent from Heaven of the demiurge Cassara, son of the Sky God Nasinbatsi ('King of Heaven'), and the scourge of witches. The festival marks the community's annual cleansing from witchcraft prior to the vital rice-planting season. Cassara is dead when he reaches Earth, and the festival commemorates his exploits in a ritual drama. His shrine is a funerary bier richly adorned with the funerary cloths (replete with Sunda reminiscences) for which the Manjacos are famous (although they are seldom publicly displayed, and ideally forever buried at funerals some are dug up, stolen, and sold). The bier's poles rest on the heads of young male bearers in trance, and their movements identify witches, in a form of divination that is also (like elsewhere in West

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<sup>208</sup> Cf. van Binsbergen 2006b, 2006c; a detailed tabulation of general Old World, including sub-Saharan African mythological themes may be found in van Binsbergen 2007b, 2020d: 583f. .

<sup>209</sup> Griaule & Dieterlen 1965; Temple 1976; van Beek 1991; Mudimbe 2004; Adams 1983.

<sup>210</sup> This figure inspired, but is not to be confused, with the murderously efficient 1920s witchfinder of the same name, alias Tomo Nyirenda, cf. Ranger 1975, Fetter 1971.

Africa and the Africa-influenced Caribbean) found in the context of mortals's funerals.



Very similar weaving techniques, patterns, and types of thread I encountered during fieldwork among the Manjacos, Guinea Bissau, 1981-1983. There is an obvious parallel with Indonesian court textiles.

Fig. 3.15. *Manjaco weavings (as held at the British Museum, London, United Kingdom).*

#### NNN. ON BIER DIVINATION

There is a considerable literature available on bier divination.<sup>211</sup> The oldest form may be found in Ancient Egypt and Ancient Phoenicia, where divine statues used to be carried around on a bier so that divinatory pronouncements could be based on their accidental movements (Bouché-Leclercq 1879: II, 186; Smith 1929). It is my impression that ultimately we are dealing here with a Pelasgian trait, of a West Asian origin, which spread to West Africa across the Sahara mainly as a result of the Sea Peoples aftermath (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011): dispersal of groups formerly located in the Nile Delta.

Except for the Ndembu emphasis on the colour white which is not found among the Manjacos, the correspondences between *Cassara* and *Chihamba* are very striking. In this connection we should remember that the Upper Guinea Coast occupied a central place in the trans-Atlantic contacts (food crops, slaves) from the very beginning (Rodney 1970). I take it that the two cults are historically related. Incidentally, the Cassara shrine is virtually indistinguishable from the Great Father shrine among the Ndjuka communities established a few centuries ago by Maroons (runaway slaves).<sup>212</sup> Halfway between the Man-

<sup>211</sup> Bastide 1968; Crevaux 1884; Delafosse 1912; Herskovits 1953; Herskovits & Herskovits 1934; Holas 1952; Rattray 1927: 164; Thomas 1962; Wiedeman 1909; Hastings 1909-1921, Index vol XIII., s.v. ordeal: bier, lists pp. IX, 51a, 51b, 532b.

<sup>212</sup> Cf. Thoden van Velzen & van Wetering 1988, front cover photograph. I am indebted to these dear, late lamented colleagues for several discussions on this and related points, although they would have been loath to follow me in making the present long-range connections. The former was my first face-to-face teacher of anthropology, offering a seminar on Caribbean ethnic relations, 1964-1965; the later was my col-





jacos and the Ndembu live the Yoruba of Nigeria, whose elaborate ritual culture includes the divinity and the mask of Egungun, God of Death. Angular because of its internal scaffolding of sticks over which richly woven cloth (cf. Manjacos, Sunda) is draped, the Egungun mask is variable but often consists of richly textured and gaudily coloured cloth in which Arabising elements often seem to prevail. The mask represents the epiphany of benevolent spirits of the dead into the realm of the living, and – with its gift-giving to children – reminds one of the St Nicolas 'mask' in North-western European folklore.<sup>213</sup>

By a very far and wavering shot, I wonder whether the Mongolian, Buddhist *zor* portable shrines of a paper-covered scaffolding, again the centre of a ritual drama (Chen Ganglong 2006; also among the Buryats of Lake Baikal, cf. Anonymous, Buryats), may not be the far Eastern outlier of a widespread and ancient (in origin Neolithic or Upper Palaeolithic – proposedly 'Pelagian') complex whose West Asian and North-West African representations might include the superficially Islamised *zar* cult in Egypt and the Sudan, first attested in the Arabian peninsula as late as the 19th century CE. I also wonder whether the Israelite Ark of the Covenant (which emulated Ancient Egyptian portable shrines being carried around for, among other purposes, divination – much like among the Manjacos and the Ndjuka), their Tent of Assembly, and even the cloth-covered Holy Ka'aba at Mecca, may not all be remotely connected ramifications of the same tradition.

O. HARALD VON SICARD ON AFRICAN ROYAL DRUMS AND THE ANCIENT ISRAELITE'S ARK OF THE COVENANT.

Harald von Sicard, whom I greatly admire as a pioneer tracing the global ramifications of the unilateral *Luwe* mythical character with only one side to his body (von Sicard 1967; cf. van Binsbergen 2012b, 2010i),<sup>214</sup> in a much more contentious publication (1952) argued historical continuity between royal drums in South Central Africa, and the Ark of the Covenant of the Ancient Israelites. This idea (although forcibly dismissed – like most of von Sicard's work – by mainstream historians and anthropologists of South Central Africa) may further illuminate the range of variation of portable palladiums as well as their possible continuity in West Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, now that further evidence has made us somewhat more prepared to accept the presence of West Semitic / Israelite emigrants all over African soil (Williams 1930; Parfitt 1992; 'Jews and Judaism in Africa', n.d.; van Warmelo 1966; and the more recent work of Dierk Lange). Meanwhile all these connection may belong to the closing phase of the much more comprehensive 'Back into Africa' movement from Asia since c. 15,000 Before Present.

Connected with the same West Asian tradition may also be the Ancient Egyptian portable  *imiut* shrine associated with *Wsr* / Osiris : a death-and-rebirth magical assemblage consisting of a bowl with sacrificial blood, and a vertical pole draped with cloth, a leopard skin or a cow skin, and thus together the perfect evocation of the Earth, the celestial

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league at the Free University from 1990 on.

<sup>213</sup> Author's fieldnotes, Cotonou, Benin, September 2002.

<sup>214</sup> Cf. von Sicard 1968-1969: 793; Bezemer 1904: 385; Schoffeels 1991; a further discussion including the global distribution of the mytheme of the unilateral being is given in van Binsbergen 2010i: 199, Fig. 9.10. An interpretation, in terms of Hegel and Levinas, of symbolic vulnerability such as expressed by asymmetry e.g. having only one side to one's body, is offered by Steffen 2013; and Schoffeels 1991.

pole and the star-spangled celestial vault of Heaven (Stricker 1963- ; Köhler 1975). And so might be the stones covered in swaddling cloths that, in Ancient Greek mythology, Rhea or her daughter Gaia gave their respective husbands to devour instead of their children, until the youngest son violently put an end to this practice. Aniconic (*i.e.* ‘imageless’) stones, which may or may not be swaddled in cloth, and may or may not have meteoric connotations (again the connection between Heaven and Earth!) feature as representations of the divinity (*e.g.* in the Śiva cult of South Asia) and as palladiums (communal sacred central identity symbols) of communities all over West Asia (*cf.* *betyl*, *baytilia*; Fauth 1977) and South Asia. Sidereal meteorites’ iron offered humans some of the first opportunities to use iron, long before the technology of iron smelting was invented. And to this day the sacred daggers (*keris*) of Indonesia, ancestral heirlooms imbued with a demiurgical power of their own, are to be forged from sidereal iron displaying a tell-tale layered pattern. With the typical polysemy of religious symbolism, the textiles which cover the ritual object representing the demiurge may have other connotations besides swaddling cloths or funerary shrouds: they may also represent the husks covering the demiurge in his capacity of agricultural seed, and the decorations on the cloth may be evocations of the star-spangled sky, or (as explicitly recognised in Nkoya symbolism) the placenta, and the *labia minora* envelopping the penetrating erect penis.

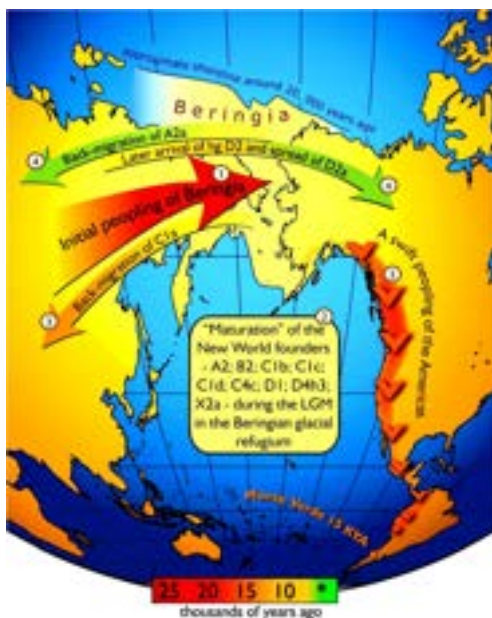


Fig. 3.16. Prehistoric population movements across the Beringia region as main factor in the peopling of the Americas; © Tamm et al. 2007

Ever since the (liberating yet myopic) discrediting of diffusionism in the second quarter of

the 20th century CE, the professional anthropologist's gut reaction (*cf.* Amselle 2001) has been to dismiss the idea of any possible historical connection between such scattered Old-World attestations as were paraded above, and instead to appeal to postulated parallel workings of the human mind. However, the fact that in many other respects (genetics, linguistics, archaeology, comparative mythology) empirical research of the last few decades has repeatedly brought out converging and historically continuous transcontinental patterns throughout the Old World *including* Africa (van Binsbergen 2012, 2019, 2020), makes such insistence on the presentist, localist anthropological credo increasingly unconvincing, not to say embarrassing.

Thus we can confidently show the 'world of the spirit' among the Ndembu to be part of a *world history of spirit*. As an Africanist I am less equipped to make a similar argument for Edith Turner's second fieldwork site, North Alaska, but it is implied in the same overall genetics argument (now generally agreed on by specialists) which sees the New World as primarily peopled from Central / North-eastern Asia from Upper Palaeolithic times onward (Fig. 3.16). This is in line not only with comparative mythology but particularly with long-range historical linguistics, which, since the 1980s, came to distinguish a 'macro-family' of Dené-Sino-Caucasian speakers extending from East Asia (the Sinotibetan phylum) via the Bering Strait to Arizona and New Mexico (Na-Dené speakers such as Apache and Navajo), with western outliers in West and South Asia (the Caucasian languages, Burushaski) and even in Western Europe (Basque-speakers on the border between France and Spain). Such spilling-over of Central Asian populations to the New World, in combination with the Back-into-Africa movement from the same time and place, makes, incidentally, for considerable parallels – already referred to above, and *cf.* van Binsbergen 2012 – between Native American and sub-Saharan African culture (*e.g.* in such relatively ancient and entrenched, even submerged fields as female puberty rites, games and divination, magic, animal symbolism, matrilineal kinship organisation, mythology, basketry). After the Ndembu, Edith Turner may have been more at home in North Alaska than she realised.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> P. FEMALE PUBERTY RITES IN A LONG-RANGE, GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Female puberty rites form a good context to make a point stressing the paramount importance of long-range perspectives in the analysis of culture. Classic, fieldwork based anthropology used to be confined within narrow horizons of space and time – essentially, the space which a single researcher could effectively cover with intensive participant observation, augmented with scraps from regional and historical literature. Here the main analytical stock in trade was structural functionalism: good ethnography was to show how the various parts of the one culture under study constituted an integrated, mutually reinforcing whole. This brought a prominent Americanist such as M.E. Opler (1972) to situate the Apache's girls' puberty rites within the orbit of their agriculture, division of labour, and residence patterns – as if the life crisis rites were primarily the resultant of such local socio-organisational dynamics. However, Apache female puberty rites belong to a wide-spread class of life-crisis rituals found in many parts of the world, and (as I have pointed out repeatedly, *e.g.* 2012: 260 *f.*) they are very similar to those found in sub-Saharan Africa, especially in South Central African cultures such as that of the Nkoya, with which I have had a close association for half a century now. Such apparent coincidence (which is far from limited to life crisis ritual, but extends to divination, gaming, basketry, myth, fishing techniques) begins to make sense once we realise that in the Upper Palaeo-

What is important here is not whether the precise details of my proposed long-range symbolic, ritual and mythological ramifications of the *Chihamba* cult will stand up to elaborate empirical testing and further peer review; no doubt they are in need of extensive correction. The overall point of transregional, even transcontinental connections of this cult, however, is certainly valid. *And that implies that the Chihamba cult is likely to represent, in its latter-day and peripheral form, notions of spirit (i.e. transcendence and mythological drama) that have a long, transcontinental history of cultural, mythological and religious innovation; so much so, in fact, that one would hardly expect the implied spirit, built into this traditions from thousands of kms away and millennia ago, to materialise tangibly and on the spot, as Edith claims.*



Fig. 3.17. Continuity of mitochondrial-DNA haplogroups between the Old World and the New World – the situation of the last few millennia is shown (after Forster 2004). With the exception of haplogroup X, all New World haplogroups are also represented in the Old World.

So local spirit traditions may be argued to belong to a world cultural history, and to derive much of their form, contents and meaning from these global connections.

Now for the final step for my argument on spirit traditions and globalisation in connection with Edith Turner's claim as to the reality of spirits.

### 3.14. Transcendence in global cultural history

I have suggested that,

- whereas today we may try to bring about (e.g. as anthropologists, comparative mythologists, or comparative religionists) a flow of spirit-centred beliefs and prac-

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lithic of Central to East Asia, the peripheral branches of Proto-Austic, Proto-Amerind and Proto-African languages (i.e. Nigercongo, Nilosaharan and Khoisan) into which \*Borean had disintegrated, were existing side by side sharing, to a considerable extent, both a common ancestral language and a common culture of hunting and gathering.

tices from peripheral communities (such as the Ndembu and the Inuit, the Nkoya and the Southern African *sangomas*) to the global centres of the world,

- the more likely flow for such beliefs and practices is from *global centres to peripheries*.

This is so, partly because world religions at global centres command incomparably greater power than peripheral spirit traditions to capture appropriate media, to function as socially and symbolically attractive reference groups, to mobilise powerful classes, to spread and proselytise, to attract and appropriate resources from forceful and enduring socio-economic-political systems. In my opinion, there is moreover an intricate relation between:

- on the one hand, a particular kind of world-view (including spirit beliefs) that may be characterised as 'transcendence-centred', and
- on the other hand, the capability of certain historic communities (*e.g.* Ancient Egypt, Sumer, Bronze-Age China) to rise to the position of global centres, and to retain that position, in the course of centuries and millennia (or, as is the more likely course of history, to pass on such a position to other, adjacent communities that are largely the heirs to the original ones).<sup>216</sup>

It is common for human cultures to have beliefs concerning 'spiritual', non-sensorial forces as part of, and in interplay with, the sensorial world – as *immanent* forces which under certain conditions may be considered to detach from matter and thus be more fully *transcendent*, only to return to their original, more immanent state under normal conditions. Full transcendence,<sup>217</sup> however, which can be *thought to reside, permanently and by its very nature, outside, and independently from, the here and the now*, is a deviation from humankind's common cultural form. Such transcendence is a major mutation of human thought. It only emerges and is only perpetuated under specific, exceptional historic circumstances. I consider such elaboration of transcendence as the highly productive, and historically absolutely decisive, effect of the emergence, in the Ancient Near East c. 5,000 years ago, of a peculiar socio-cultural logocentric package comprising

- *writing,*
- *the state,*
- *organised religion, and*
- *proto-science.*

Admittedly, some measure of transcendence has always been implied in even the most primitive language of early Anatomically Modern Man – for the essence of language is that one is able to refer to what is beyond the here and the now, *i.e.* to have more or less stable words and syntactic forms that are valid not just for the one situation in which they

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<sup>216</sup> *E.g.* from Sumer to Babylonia to Assyria to Western Anatolia (with the empire formation under Tigrat Pileser III, Sargon II in the first quarter of the first millennium BCE), to Ionia and other parts of the Aegean region to Rome to Western Europe *etc.*

<sup>217</sup> Not to be confused with the Kantian *transcendental*, which refers to an *a-priori format or condition of thought* (such as the notions of number, of causality, of space and time) which forms the prerequisite for thought but does not constitute in itself the contents of a substantive idea.

are used for the first time, but that continue to be applicable, beyond that here and now, to myriad other situations involving the same speakers and listeners, and even others. However, it is only with the emergence (very late in the several million years of human cultural history, and only in a handful of – mutually interdependent – places: Elam, Sumer, Egypt, probably<sup>218</sup> also involving an important historical connection with China) that it became possible to, transcendently, define and control, through written decrees, written wills, laws and trade records, vicariously and through virtualisation, situations separated from the here and the now by tens, even hundreds of years and by tens, even hundreds, sometimes even thousands, of kilometres. Enshrined in institutions, and rendered eminently predictable and sanctioned while essentially independent from the specific cognitions and motivations of the individuals involved in the here and now, I have reserved the term 'routinised transcendence' for these four 'logocentric' revolutionarising factors in global cultural history in the last handfull of millennia. There are, admittedly, indications<sup>219</sup> that shamanism (as a much older knowledge tradition than our writing-state-priesthood-science logocentric package; and therefore not inherently transcendentalist in its own right) prepared the way for this knowledge mutation: that the roles of king, priest and scientist were historic elaborations of the role of shaman – emerging in Asia c. 20,000 years BP, from there spreading all over the world, including Africa, Upper Palaeolithic Europe, and the Americas, and thus laying a *global substrate of common, immanent spirit beliefs*. However, it is particularly (perhaps even, in the last analysis, *exclusively*) in *literate* contexts that full virtualising transcendence can be sustained, and can generate such socio-political power that the state (as a departure from the power based on the here and the now, *i.e.* from male physical power, women's reproductive capacity of the womb, and the socio-cultural relationships underpinning their interaction) becomes possible, with organised religion and proto-science as its two, closely intertwined, manifestations.

There is also an economic angle to this: typical of the specialist domain of writing-state-priesthood-science, is that it is essentially *non-productive*, hence *parasitical* upon more materially productive and reproductive sectors of the same society.<sup>220</sup> So, *a considerable level of surplus production is needed for the domain of routinised trans-*

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<sup>218</sup> Argued at length in: van Binsbergen 2012b: chapter 7, pp. 215-254.

<sup>219</sup> A few are discussed in van Binsbergen 2012b: 256 *f.* In fact, that book's central thesis (the existence of a near-global prehistoric cosmological substrate revolving on transformation, cyclicity and elements) is an argument for the claim made in the rest of this sentence: *shamanism preparing for, but not in itself constituting, transcendentalism*.

<sup>220</sup> This is not to say that the transcendent or logocentric package is inherently incompatible with production. On the contrary, the state (from its first appearance in the Ancient Near East and Egypt, 5 ka BP), the priesthood (*e.g.* the productive workshops associated with the earliest Sumerian temples; or medieval 'religious regimes' – Bax 1987, 1988 – based on the Christian church's land-lordism) even science (*e.g.* the production of anthropology with the aid of underpaid and underacknowledged local assistants), have been known to constitute contexts for the exploitative organisation of production in its own right and to support and reproduce themselves on that basis – but by appropriating specific pre-existing modes of production that do not inherently spring from these institutions's own transcendent nature.

*cedence to establish and perpetuate itself* – which<sup>221</sup> may be an important reason why in Africa, with its comparatively old and famished soils, the domains of writing-state-priesthood-science, although initially highly successful in a little corner of Africa (Ancient Egypt), and repeatedly (re-)introduced in many parts of the continent<sup>222</sup> has always remained extremely precarious, defective, short-lived.

Even today, true transcendence (*e.g.* the idea of natural death that is due to divine providence and not to human malice; and the idea of the state and political / institutional office as the embodiment of universal values not to be personalised for particularist advantage *i.e.* through corruption) tends to be relatively rare and relatively non-viable in sub-Saharan Africa. It is in literate, politically developed centres with organised religion and (proto-) science that 'spirit', as a separate category, is likely to develop into a category of transcendence in its own right, and it is from here that transcendent, and particularly elaborate, spirit beliefs have tended to spread out to conquer the rest of the world.



1 areas where agricultural soils are too exhausted to feed the present number of occupants  
2 capacity < 1 persons per 10 ha  
3 capacity 1-10 persons per 10 ha  
4 capacity 10-50 persons per 10 ha  
5 deserts  
30 March 2006, © De Volkskrant, source: IFDC

Fig. 3.18. Present-day carrying capacity of African soils

<sup>221</sup> I owe this suggestion to my sometime Leiden colleague Han van Dijk.

<sup>222</sup> *E.g.* Carthage, Ethiopia, Roman and Christian North Africa before the advent of Islam, while at many African royal courts after the late 1<sup>st</sup> mill. CE, literacy was in the hands of Muslim scribes.

This is not to say that *all* spirit traditions in the world necessarily and directly hail from the Ancient Near Eastern writing-state-priesthood-science logocentric package – far from it; but it is to draw attention to the fact that, with that package, *particularly powerful and impressive spirit beliefs have emerged which in many ways have had a considerable impact far outside their original setting, despite localising transformation when arrived at their peripheral destiny.* For instance, detailed studies of African magic and divination suggest that a considerable part of what is posing as traditional African today, is in fact a localising (as we shall see in later chapters) transformation of magical and religious forms found in West Asia and Europe, Ancient Egyptian and Ancient Graeco-Roman religion, in Islam and Christianity.

This may help to define Edith Turner's project somewhat more precisely. The peripheral spirit traditions that she has been championing in the North Atlantic world today, appear to be forms of spiritual thought that have retained more of an older shamanistic inspiration,

1. either because they have *never* been touched by the more transcendence-orientated global centres where the logocentric package writing-state-priesthood-science has been dominant for several millennia,
2. or (and this I consider more likely) because, *after* having been remotely touched by such centres, and having initially been influenced by these centres's transcendence-orientated spirituality, *they have localised and transformed this loan to a more immanentist form, largely detached from writing-state-priesthood-science, and back to the here and now.*

Regardless of whether in fact (1) or (2) reflects the actual historical sequence, such peripheral spirit traditions remind us of ways of constructing and managing our life-worlds (*in other words: our spiritual technologies*) that – *perhaps precisely because of their immanentism, which keeps them (by contrast with transcendence) down to earth as a viable locus for local spiritual technologies still in touch with materiality* – may well constitute useful knowledge, even valid knowledge, to complement such knowledge as is available in these global centres (under the familiar logocentric package). So, *in lieu of Edith Turner's affirmations as to the reality of spirits from North-western Zambia and Northern Alaska, I am offering an alternative model, according to which some of what we take to be local spirit traditions, including those in N.W. Zambia and N. Alaska, may not so much be elements of peripheral societies ready to invade the North Atlantic and the global world at large, but, quite the other way around, are in themselves signs of the global world having invaded peripheral local communities – they are signs and products of (proto-)globalisation.*





3.19.1. The Kavula / Chihamba shrine (Turner 1962)



3.19.2. Bier divination among the Ndjuka Maroons of Surinam, second half 20th century (© Thoden van Velzen & W. van Wetering, cf. their 1991 book, where this photograph appears as cover illustration)



3.19.3. Egungun Yoruba spirit of the dead (courtesy <http://www.egbaegbado.org/egba4.htm>)



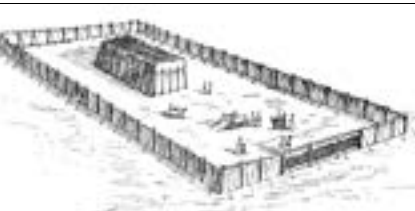
3.19.4. Adept ridden by a Zar spirit in the outskirts of Cairo, modern Egypt © Nilsson (courtesy <http://nnilsson.free.fr/zar3/zar-3.htm>)



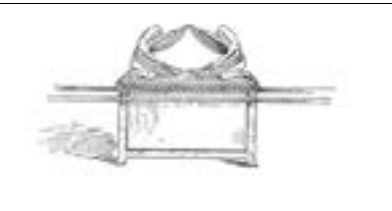
3.19.5. *Imiut* in front of the composite god Ptah-Soker-Osiris; Strouhal 1993: 107, Fig. 112, from Lady Chertweshet's *Book of the Dead*



3.19.6. The Holy Ka'aba courtesy <http://faculty.maxwell.syr.edu/gaddis/HST210/Dec4/Default.htm>



3.19.7. Artist's impression of the Ancient Israelites' Tent of Assembly (Goote & Wielemaker 1912)



3.19.8. Artist's impression of the Ancient Israelites' Ark of the Covenant (Goote & Wielemaker 1912)



3.19.9. Sacrifice to Mbona in Khulubvi, Nsanje, Malawi ca.1970 (© C. Zonneveld, at <http://www.stichtingmlambe.nl/fotos.htm>)



3.19.10. Situated within a vulva shape, the aniconic Jyotir Linga Śiva shrine of Grineshwar, India (courtesy [http://www.sacredsites.com/asia/india/shiva\\_shrines.html](http://www.sacredsites.com/asia/india/shiva_shrines.html))



Fig. 3.19. Images relating to the world history of spirit

### 3.15. Yet hear who is talking...: Once more the question as to the material grounds for affirming the reality of spirits – the current nature of my *sangoma* spirituality

The critical and sceptical, comparative and long-range stance that I have adopted in the last few sections of this chapter, has created an impression of ambiguity and contradiction which I have to address before concluding this chapter. From the beginning, I have explicitly identified as a trained, initiated, certified and practising *sangoma* in the Southern African spirit tradition. So how could I *not* affirm Edith Turner's claim as to the reality of spirits? In reply, let me indicate the roots of my own spirituality today, and how I see these related to my *sangoma* practice.

In the first half of my scientific career, for more than twenty years, I managed to resist (not always completely successfully), in the field, the lures of ecstatic religion on which I had specialised as a student of popular Islam and of sub-Saharan African religion. When finally, in Botswana in 1990, I did submit to a combination of host-community pressures and my own inner desire, and followed the call to become a *sangoma*, it was (as I later realised, and analysed)<sup>223</sup> for three complementary reasons:

1. *charitable sociability*, i.e. a practical application of the philosophical principle of charity – amply referred to above – that what so many people believe, must be taken seriously and at least deserves the benefit of doubt

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<sup>223</sup> Cf. van Binsbergen 1991a, 2003h. The discussion of these motivations comes back elsewhere in this book under a slightly different angle.

2. *political solidarity*: South Africa (Botswana's neighbouring country with enormous influence on all sections of Francistown life) was still in the clutches of *apartheid*, historic local beliefs had for decades been suppressed from public visibility if not explicitly prosecuted, instead of receiving recognition; and in this marginalisation one 'White' Dutch / Afrikaner person's crossing the line and personally, through publicly undergoing initiation, affirming the validity of such beliefs, was news that captured the town like bushfire; it earned me ostracism from the local 'White' population (Francistown had been founded, over a century ago, as a 'White' mining settlement), and in the eyes of African Francistonians clearly represented an act of knowledge-political solidarity of the first order
3. *an epistemological reason*: my rejection of the dominant, reductionist and dismissive paradigm in religious anthropology, and instead my growing awareness of the wider, universal validity of (some of the) knowledge produced under *sangomahood*.

Points (1) and (2) still stand, but of course they do not constitute a reason to accept the reality of spirits. On the contrary: social and political niceties, and political correctness, tend to conceal, rather than reveal, the truth; and being in themselves forms of make-believe, they cannot afford to affirm other such forms, as the claim of the reality of spirits. So this leaves us with point (3) as far as my own experience of the reality of spirits is concerned.

I have gone out of my way to provide<sup>224</sup> illustrations of the wider, universal non-local validity of (some of the) knowledge produced under *sangomahood* (i.e. point (3)), of the kind that might satisfy Skeptics – until I found out (in a painful episode involving the Leo Apostel Centre for the Philosophy of Science in Brussels)<sup>225</sup> that the Skeptics' position amounts, not to healthy programmatic and empirical Scepticism, but to entrenched, immutable, and aggressive truth claims about the structure of the world, the claim of definitive triumph of today's natural sciences to have already (but how prematurely!) completely revealed that structure once for all, and hence the impossibility, and aggressive denial, of telepathy, clairvoyance, psychokinesis etc. This Skeptic position is being maintained in the face of extensive empirical, quantitative, and theoretical counter-arguments (special topics C and CC). Paranormal phenomena frequently occur spontaneously but (for understandable reasons, argued elsewhere in the present book) tend to shun experimental situations; yet over the past century they have been well recorded under plausible experimental conditions, to such high levels of statistical significance that they would make any PhD candidate in experimental psychology envious – and convince any PhD committee, for that matter.

The claim of performing veridical divination belongs to the much documented and equally contested field of psi phenomena, whose study is the concern of parapsy-

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<sup>224</sup> Especially in van Binsbergen 2003: chapter 7, pp. 235-297.

<sup>225</sup> The case in point was the blunt rejection (under pressure from the Leo Apostel Instituut's leadership) of my 2003 Brussels conference paper from inclusion in the collection edited by Aerts *et al.* 2005, for which it had been commissioned.

chology. Although greatly denounced by sceptical mainstream science in recent decades, some authors (e.g. Carter & Sheldrake 2012; cf. Sheldrake 2012: *The Science Delusion*), have vocally defended this field of study and have sought to expose the dogmatic, bigotted scientism that (along with the attempt to reinforce the power position of highly remunerated and privileged professional groups such as cosmopolitan physicians) underlies much recent scepticism. But it does not help if the advocate herself or himself, like Sheldrake, has personally become estranged from mainstream science by paranormal claims, such as the hypothesis of *morphogenetic fields*.

Many authors have found psi phenomena to be, in Kennedy's (2003) words,

'capricious, actively evasive, unsustainable';

Kennedy is one of the authors to explore the applicability of Quantum Mechanics in this field; also cf. Oteri 1975; and Walker 1977.

Although it is my impression that many experiments in parapsychology have met the kind of stringent methodological and statistical requirements that I am accustomed to insist on as a professional social scientist in regard of the measurement of other phenomena of human action, this positive assessment is far from shared by all commentators. A typical, dismissive view is that of Moss & Butler 1978.<sup>226</sup>

'A faculty of psychologists is much more skeptical regarding the existence of ESP than beginning psychology students. The students, however, are unaware of this discrepancy. The greater acceptance of ESP by the students is due to cultural and psychological factors which encourage such beliefs. The skepticism of academic psychologists arises because the evidence for ESP has failed to meet generally accepted scientific standards. Among these are (1) a replicable experiment, (2) the elimination of more plausible explanations, (3) isolation of an independent variable, (4) a coherent theory, and (5) practical applications. Much of the research in ESP may be criticized because of the lack of accurate reporting, improper design, and inadequate controls. In view of these considerations behavioral scientists should make a public disavowal of belief in ESP.' (Moss & Butler 1978)

As a reflection of mainstream scientific views of ESP Moss & Butler's summary is still valid, even though it reveals striking inadequacies on the part of the academic psychologists: is their rejection of ESP perhaps due, in many cases, not to the laudible methodological reasons listed but merely to these psychologists's conformist adherence – under peer group pressure – to the dominant academic paradigm concerning ESP, in other words to a socio-cultural factor which need not be objectively valid? The signalled imperfections attributed to ESP research could largely be laid at the doorstep of most psychological research, and of social science research in general.

Such paranormal effects as claimed in parapsychological studies might well be explained as implications of straight-forward Quantum Mechanics under the Einstein-Rosen-Podolsky effect of non-locality, which implies that any object has (among other, far more conspicuous and far better studied effects such as gravitation and magnetism) an immediate effect on

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<sup>226</sup> For a similar discussion but more sympathetic to ESP, cf. Ullman 1952.

any other object wherever in the universe, simultaneously, not diminished by increasing distance, and even regardless of distance.<sup>227</sup> In other words, if in writing this text I move my computer mouse and press some of the keys on my computer keyboard, these slight and trivial displacements immediately leave *some* imprint on the entire solar system, our Milky Way galaxy, yeah, as far as the outer fringes of the universe! What more does one need in order to explain successful divination,<sup>228</sup> and so many other paranormal phenomena? Time and time again I have been astounded when my own *sangoma* divination turned out to produce valid knowledge (explicitly endorsed by the clients in question) about the life details of my clients, who until then were total strangers to me. Shocking though this is, these few dozen instances (so far mainly established and reported through introspection) are about all I – by training and vast experience an empirical social scientist, and a trained statistician – have concretely in hand as far as empirical, scientific proof of the validity of *sangoma* knowledge is concerned. I have heard the rumours, as circulating among my *sangoma* colleagues, of bilocality, levitation, asity (the capability of going without food), apparent death, impossibly long immersions under water (as in chapter 2 of the present book), harming and killing from a distance without material agency or intermediary, *etc.*, but none of this has ever come within my own conscious sensory perception. I am, probably, a Skeptic myself, and although I cannot escape the conclusion that my *sangoma* divination occasionally produces valid knowledge, I do not necessarily accept the *sangomas'* own professional explanation (in terms of the direct intervention of omniscient, omnipresent and materially effective dead ancestors) as the only possible explanation, let alone as an *adequate* explanation. I would rather attribute paranormal phenomena to normal, scientifically demonstrable (which does not necessarily mean: recognised by today's mainstream North Atlantic science) characteristics of human beings and of the world at large. In this regard my working hypothesis is in terms of a universe all of whose parts are densely interconnected and hence, in principle, interdependent and inter-informed; so our individual mind is not closed in itself but porous, and so is our body – we should speak of body-minds anyway. We are not omniscient as humans, but the universe certainly is, because non-locality conveys all information about the entire universe to any part of the universe. With these relatively modest, rational and scientifically underpinned assumptions it would not be exceptional to have extra-sensory knowledge of other persons or places – the extraordinary thing to be explained would be that our Modern mind has been conditioned to filter out most of that knowledge unless under special circumstances (when we are in mortal danger, deeply in love, or engaging in technologies of altered consciousness through dancing, drumming, *etc.* – or when this extra-sensory knowledge happens to run parallel, and to be

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<sup>227</sup> Cf. Einstein *et al.* 1931; Einstein *et al.* 1935; Bohm & Aharonov 1957; Aerts 1985; Bohm & Hiley 1993; Bohm 1980.

<sup>228</sup> Lest my rhetorical question should be taken to suggest that non-locality constitutes the only, and exhaustive, explanation of veridical divination (provided the latter is more than just a figment of the imagination), let me remind the reader briefly that at various points scattered over this book I offer another, and rather more abstruse, explanation: according to this hypothesis, the pronouncement of the oracle does not secondarily *follow* the pattern of reality, but the other way round, reality is bend secondarily so as to conform to the oracular statement.

reinforced, by ordinary sensory information and thus could go unnoticed yet may be acted upon). This interconnectedness at a cosmic scale is awesome and beautiful; the most comprehensive framework for producing, nurturing, ending, and rendering meaningful, the individual human existence; the true basis of my innermost spirituality and my poetry; the common fount from which my wife and I fill and refill our marriage; and the only credible comfort I give my children and my patients – and indeed, myself – when in existential need. Yet this interconnected universe is not a necessarily *personal* entity, and (despite whatever suggestions there are to the contrary, see below) it does not necessarily<sup>229</sup> consciously and lovingly respond even if I were to pray to it, which I do not – I pray to my ancestors, to the Virgin Mary, to Sidi Mhammad (a local North African saint who lived and died in the 19<sup>th</sup> century CE, whose adept I became in 1968, and in whose honour sacrificial meals are regularly prepared in our household), and occasionally to Our Father through the prayer of that name; and several times a month I bring little offerings of light, oil, and flowers to several shrines (बुद्ध Buddha, गणेश Ganesha, शिव Śiva, 觀音 Guan Yin etc.) all around my premises, but these scarcely receive articulate prayer except ॐ नमः शिवाय *Aum nama shiwaya*, an affirmation of humble rapture in the face of the universe. I celebrate the universe in every instance of beauty, love, harmony and knowledge that comes my way, and the whole of my life has been in pursuit of such celebration, with infinitely greater fulfilment than my unhappy childhood had made me expect.

*Then, to what extent does my spirituality hinge on my being, and affirming to be, a practising sangoma?*<sup>230</sup> The answer is: *only on the surface, as an imperfect idiom to convey things*

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<sup>229</sup> In the course of the next chapters I shall succinctly develop my Theory of the Oscillating Reality, where under conditions yet to be ascertained in detail (but which are likely to devolve from the place of the conscious, ritually active, human mind in the universe), every default characteristic of reality as we know it may incessantly turn into its opposite, and back, and so on. If this comes anywhere near the true nature of reality, any ontological claim should be made with great reticence, and in the full awareness that its opposite will also occasionally be true. *God does not exist, the universe is not a personal entity, it cannot come to our rescue, there is no life after death* – these are the human existential default conditions favoured by specialist thought since Early Modern times, and by the underlying assumptions of our Post-modern, globalised, digital and consumption-orientation world culture. Yet by the very logic underlying our oscillating reality, each of these discomfiting, barren assertions will oscillate into its opposite (*i.e.* a conscious universe in which a personal God exists and comes to our rescue, and in which there is life after death) under undisclosed conditions. Perhaps this is the place to make the connection with Durkheim's theory of religion, with which I have grappled ever since I came into contact with it at age 18, and to which I have devoted one of my latest books (2018). In a nutshell, Durkheim sees as the essence of religion that religious symbols are entirely arbitrary, but they are yet crucial in that they offer us the opportunity to think the absolutely sacred – without realising that behind this sacrality lies society itself, which is the true object of our veneration. Religion accords institutions their sacrality and thus makes for the possibility and continuity of social life. Phrased rather differently, and less outspoken as to why it should be religion of all possible cultural complexes that links the individual reflective mind to the universe, yet there are (as was to be expected) many parallels between my emerging views and those of Durkheims – which deserve being threshed out on another occasion.

<sup>230</sup> In the background lurks the affirmation of the South Asian, South East Asian and East Asian elements that have gone into the Southern African *sangoma* cult, and whose recognition has stimulated, and increasingly dominated, my empirical and philosophical research over the past two decades.

that, without such an idiom could hardly be conveyed at all.

Admittedly, at the experiential level I could cite many stimulating anecdotes about the work of the spirit in my fieldwork, my *sangoma* practice, and the life of my patients. But this is rather like any other religious anthropologist, and although constituting an under-researched variety of anthropological intra-disciplinary *folklore* (!), such narratives do not in the least qualify as proof of the reality of spirits. Many years of fieldwork, in North and sub-Saharan Africa, have managed to implant in me a typical villager's notion (not always active, and sometimes eclipsed under the mask of egotistic social forms of brilliance and competition which academic life has forced me to wear) of humble dependence on higher forces, a sense of gratitude, and a practical sense of ritual obligation. I often give in to this, pour alcoholic libations at my *sangoma* shrine (reserving only a very tiny, sacralised sip for my own consumption at the end), pray there (sometimes with my family), cast my divinatory tablets, make snuff offerings, *etc.* But (except perhaps in the initial years, in the early 1990s, when my *sangomahood* was still a novelty) I have never been sure whether these ritual actions, including my practice as *sangoma*, are more than mere vicarious ostentation, and correspond materially to some objective ontological reality out there (*i.e.* contrary to Edith Turner, I have never been sure of *the reality of spirits*), or whether, on the contrary, it is simply an elaborate placebo. I am not in the least concerned about the strong probability (but note the ambiguities of an oscillating reality!) that it is merely the latter. If a placebo, it serves well, allowing me and others to address and placate the more credulous, more infantile layers in my own personality and in the personalities of my patients. And of course it is not just African and Alaskan spirit notions that address these infantile notions and project upon them the infant's utterly personalised yet magical outlook – much the same happens, in my opinion, in world religions, including Christianity.

These infantile layers must be taken eminently seriously, because it is here that more affect, more pain, and more tyranny is invested than anywhere else in the body-mind. Therefore it stands to reason that expert ritual attention involving these layers – through the proper, time-honoured manipulation of symbols and paraphernalia, which is then to be tailored to the measure of the individual patient – may have a cathartic, sometimes dramatically positive, effect on the body-mind as a whole. Unfortunately my knowledge of religious anthropology, epistemology and psychoanalysis competes in my mind with my expertise as a *sangoma*. So whenever I use my *sangoma* idiom to bring myself, and my patients, to a point of greater illumination, resignation and balance, pressing into service such body-mind techniques as prayer, sacrifice, dancing and divination to reach that point, I can hardly refrain from re-articulating, in my mind, the *sangoma* phraseology in terms of psychoanalytical formulations, nor can I escape the censoring self-awareness, at the back of my mind, to the effect that I am *feeding my childish mind-layer with titbits of totally imaginary infantile-lust material. Such ritual action in itself does not prove the reality of spirits, nor does it require my belief in such a reality.* As the great French mathematician and astronomer Laplace (we have encountered him already in the previous chapter and

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But that is not the point now.



shall come back to this anecdote in chapter 5 below) is reported to have said in reply to Emperor Napoleon when chided for the absence of the Creator in Laplace's work on mathematical cosmology,

'Je n'avais pas besoin de cette hypothèse-là.' (I did not need that particular hypothesis).<sup>231</sup>

I was a published poet before I became an anthropologist, I have continued to be a publishing poet, my most recent book of poetry appeared early 2021, and the idea of rendering the world slightly more manageable by the mere poetics of *sangoma* eminently appeals to me, even (or rather: especially) if this means that the forms of *sangoma* cannot be taken literally or at material face value.

Allow me to take these poetics still further, although now I must pick my step extremely carefully.

One of the questions that have informed my research into ecstatic religion from the very beginning, 45 years ago, has been that of the status of the actions which adepts exhibit when in trance: *is this learned behaviour*,<sup>232</sup> *somehow*, or *is it compulsive and mandatory behaviour without any conscious choice on their part?* My early observations included the following details:

Q. A TUNISIAN FAQĪR'S MUSICAL DIRECTIONS UNDER TRANCE.

In the early phases of my field-work on popular Islam in North-western Tunisia (1968, 1970, 1979, 2002), Ḥasān ben Kašrūth<sup>233</sup> was one of the most prominent local *fūqra* (sing. *faqīr*), i.e. ecstatic dancers belonging to an Islamic brotherhood – in this case the Qadiriyya. In trance, the *faqīr* performs amazing feats so as to prove that he is truly fulfilled of the divine grace (*baraka*) of the Islamic saint whose adept he is; *fūqra* may handle glowing coals, walk over fire, roll over spiked cactus leaves, etc., all without the slightest injury to them, provided the musical accompaniment by an ensemble of snared frame drum (*bendir*) and flute (*qūsba*) continues uninterrupted and without the slightest mistake. Hasan's speciality was to stick, when in trance, the silver pin of a woman's dress clasp (*ūḥll*) entirely through his cheeks, without causing any visible injury or bleeding, even though such pins are half a centimetre thick. *Repeatedly I witnessed that Ḥasan, while in trance, handling hot coals and with the clasp pin stuck in his cheek, would give very articulate and specific directions to the musicians, as if he was in full and conscious control of his actions.*

This observation of selective awareness under trance also applies to sub-Saharan Africa:

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<sup>231</sup> Anonymous, 'Laplace', n.d.

<sup>232</sup> Richard Noll poses similar questions in his 1985 paper on 'Mental Imagery Cultivation as a Cultural Phenomenon'.

<sup>233</sup> His father, Kašrūth ben Bu-Ḥris, settled in the valley of Sidi Mḥammad in the 1920s CE, coming from the adjacent valley of Saydiyya. His three sons, including Ḥasan, came to be among the most prosperous inhabitants of the hamlet of Mayziyya, where they occupied the North-eastern part, which their father had once personally cleared upon the cork-oak forest. I am not aware of any Arabic / Islamic background of the name Kašrūth, but in Hebrew, of course, it is the abstract noun קְשֻׁרִית denoting purity in accordance with the Israelite Biblical food laws. Rural North Africa, including the Ḥumiri highlands of North-western Tunisia, displays many more traces of adulterated Jewish influences incorporated in an overall milieu of popular Islam. The question is why Ḥumiri apparent renegade Jews should pose as adepts of popular Islam, but that is outside our present scope (cf. van Binsbergen in preparation (a)).

R. CONSIDERATIONS OF MODERN DECENCY OVERRIDING TRANCE AMONG URBAN FEMALE ADEPTS IN A ZAMBIAN CULT OF AFFLICTION.

A general rule in historic religion throughout South Central Africa has been that women are to approach the sacred with bare breasts. No convincing *emic* explanation of this custom was ever given to me, but I suspect that worshipping women, by showing their breasts, as absolutely vital organs of nurturation hence of reproduction (in a society lacking bottled formula feeding for babies), proclaim their closeness to the source of life and death which is being venerated in their ancestral rituals and their cults of affliction. In the early 1970s, my initial encounter with Zambian cults of affliction was in the town of Lusaka, and only after a year did I extend the research to a rural area, notably the Nkoya region of Barotseland (then Western Province) in Western Zambia. In the rural areas, cults of affliction abounded, and women participating in them still observed the above rule concerning baring their breasts – even though in daily life in the villages it had become fairly rare for women to go about their non-ritual tasks with their upper body exposed; the heavy work of pounding grain was an exception. (Needless to add that the extreme sexualisation of adult women's breast as in North Atlantic Post-modern media popular culture had not yet effectively penetrated to the African population of Zambia by 1970, although Christian prudery had, for close to a century, especially through formal education. In town, women engaging in ecstatic cults considered themselves to be under the scrutiny of neighbours and passers-by not belonging to their own ethnic group and region, and in general they were committed to live up to the codes of decency imposed by Western education, missionary Christianity, and the lower-middle-class norms of (post-)Victorian England. So when ecstatic cults would be staged in town (by no means a rare event), most women would participate not with exposed breasts, but wearing conspicuous, large white bras. However, near the paroxysms of trance the cultic movements (accompanied by a small male ensemble playing on cylinder drums, while some of the audience would sound rattles made of food tins or woody fruits containing small pips) would tend to be so violent that the shoulder straps of these bras would continuously sag down to the adept's elbows, threatening to expose the breasts and shaking them wildly. In these, very common, situations the adepts would pull up their shoulder straps every few seconds and tuck their wandering breasts back into their bras, even when in other respects they went through the motions associated with full trance. By the same token, the violent trance movements would threaten to expose the adepts' thighs and crotch, and again care would be taken during trance to avoid this from happening by continuously tucking back the adept's cloth wrapper between her thighs – although such care was usually in the hands of fellow-women in the audience rather than of the adepts themselves.

These observations suggest that trance and consciousness are not as incompatible as the adepts' and cult leaders' *emic* pronouncements may suggest.<sup>234</sup> And although I had some experiences of wavering at the brink of dissociation as a learner-*faqir* (when the saint would loom as a peripheral black presence in the corner of my fading consciousness), my much more elaborate and frequent experiences as a *sangoma* concur with the above observations. When in *sangoma* trance, I was supposed to be totally unconscious of any action in which

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<sup>234</sup> The question of authenticity / integrity in trance has been picked up in the international literature on shamanism; e.g. Jensen 1996; Douglas 1980 (on the much doubted authenticity of Castaneda); Blain 2001; van Binsbergen 1998 / 2003. Considering the expanding field of neo-shamanism (cf. Blain 2002; Lindquist 1997; Sanson 2011; Wallis 2000), where (usually self-styled) spiritual performers go through the motions of an (often self-) invented tradition but frequently with such accoutrements as diagnosis, healing, master classes, international seminars, websites, etc., the question of authenticity cannot be avoided. It also played a role when my colleague Robert Buijtenhuijs, in ways detailed elsewhere in this book, on reasonable yet hegemonic / Northern scholarly grounds doubted the authenticity of my own *sangoma* calling on the grounds that my formal training period had been far too short; my 1998 piece was partly written in response to this challenge.

my body engaged at the time, and to have no subsequent memory of such actions. The food (porridge, eggs) that would be served to me while in trance would be consumed by the ancestral spirit that, through my mouth, had demanded to be fed in the first place, and was supposed to leave my own stomach empty. And the ritual conversations in which my visiting / possessing ancestral spirit (speaking through my mouth with a voice very different from my own and even in languages I was not supposed to command) would engage with the audience present at my *séance*, was supposed to be totally beyond my conscious will, and to leave no traces in my memory, so that when I recovered from trance, my fellow-*sangomas* had to report to me what my ancestor had said and what new rulings he or she had imposed on me. This was the theory as circulating at our *sangoma* lodge. However, in practice I turned out to be able to produce a demonstration (eminently convincing to my *sangoma* colleagues) of trance, a visiting ancestor, his halted speech trembling with age, speaking in a foreign tongue (one of the many I happened to know!), his demands for food and drink, his senile slobbering and messy spilling when consuming this, and finally his departure back to the realm of the spirits and my return from trance to normal consciousness and interaction, while remaining consciously aware of my actions at least most of the time (there were shorts moments and incidents reported by my colleagues but unaccounted for in my memory – as if occasionally I did sink into a deeper, unconscious trance). Participant observation in anthropological research means that one engages night and day with the host society, and uses the knowledge gained as basis for the public production of speech acts and other behaviour in front of the host society, whose subsequent approval or rejection is a test for what one has learned and understood so far, and constitutes a feedback towards learning and understanding more. I am an highly experienced anthropological fieldworker, and in that professional capacity it is an essential skill to surreptitiously observe others acting their role and then to play out that role oneself. From the outer fringes of the world of the Francistown *sangomas*, I had a command of such languages as Nkoya, very imperfect Nyanja / Cewa, similar Bemba, and rather better Afrikaans,<sup>235</sup> and it was in these languages that I composed my ancestral message which after the session would be reported back to me by my colleagues (including a senior *sangoma* couple from South Africa), dis-

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<sup>235</sup> Prior to moving to our rural Nkoya fieldwork site in Western Province, my first wife Henny van Rijn and I taught for two years at the University of Zambia, living in Lusaka near the famous Munalii secondary school. A few kilometres down the Munalii road was the Reformed Church's Theological College, whose senior staff consisted of South African 'Whites' (including some recent South African immigrants from my home country, the Netherlands), Afrikaans-speaking and adhering to a Dutch-derived variety of Protestantism – the ideological backbone of the apartheid ideology. Our political views and allegiances were diametrically opposed to those at the Reformed Church's Theological College. We became close friends of the ANC freedom fighters and communists Jack Simons – my head of department – and Ray Alexander, who schooled us in radical thought and in whose home – the principal ANC safe house north of South Africa – allowed us to meet most members of the ANC senior leadership. But as long as we shunned political discussions, the Dutchness of our nearby Afrikaander contacts was comforting and appealing, despite our differences they became our friends, too; they taught us to drive a car, cut our hair, minded our child, discussed favourite and culturally kindred meals, drinks and home decoration with us, introduced us to African branches of their church, mobilised our physical help whenever a Reformed Afrikaander farmer in the Lusaka region had given them a cow to slaughter for meat, and in the process I learned to make the syntactic and phonological transformations superficially turning my native Dutch into bad Afrikaans.

torted since it was ill understood,<sup>236</sup> and re-edited after standard *sangoma* formulas circulating in our group. When I consider how, during our months of *thwaza* training, the daily dancing and divination practice under senior supervision laid great and overt stress on the desired effect of our actions upon the clients,<sup>237</sup> on enhancing their awe and acceptance, I am inclined to think that my trance experience as reported here was not essentially different from that of my local fellow-*sangomas*, – that also for them a trance séance was in the first place the enacting of a learned performance in accordance with intersubjective rules, and not so much (as was far more the case with the *Wosanna* type of adepts in our midst) the spontaneous rapture of being overwhelmed by an uncontrollable supernatural force – although the performance always aims at suggesting such rapture. If there are indications that in the process an entity external to the *sangoma's* personality is conjured up and makes itself felt in ways not consciously controlled by the *sangoma*, I would tend to interpret such an entity not as existing independently from the *sangoma's* action both before and after the séance, but as the ephemeral product of the *sangoma's* action, to sink back, after the séance, into the same non-existence where it had sojourned before the séance. The ancestral spirit need not have an independent prior and posterior existence, for it to manifest itself in the *sangoma's* trance. In other words, ancestors do not exist in the sense of constituting a firm ontological given, but the *sangoma's* performance lends them a virtual existence for the duration of the ritual, and under those conditions they may be able to work upon reality with real, and not merely virtual, effects.<sup>238</sup> From this perspective, I would not consider my trance performance in *sangoma* an instance of insincere and reproachable *faking* – it is the enacting, on the basis of a sense of respect and integrity, of a more or less mastered local religious idiom. My many publications on *sangoma* are sufficient proof that I take this institution seriously and accord it respect. If I admit that I did scarcely, or not at all, witness any objective and blatant breaches of natural law in my experiences as a *sangoma* (apart from apparently veridical divination, and apparently effective healing), that is not to deny that, at the subjective level, these experiences shook me existentially to the bone – as I have written on the destruction of my sense of time; the sense of omniscience that came with the introduction to the *sangoma* veridical divination and particularly with the discovery, time

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<sup>236</sup> Kalanga, Tswana, Ndebele and Sotho were the languages used at the lodge, although some adepts had other mother tongues, e.g. a lady *thwaza* who spoke Luvale (a language from eastern Angola and western Zambia) and with whom I could communicate in Nkoya.

<sup>237</sup> In other words, the prospective *sangomas* were demonstrably trained to *perform* – as was very clear from numerous stage directions we, as *bathwaza*, would receive from our ritual leader and senior colleagues, whenever we were dancing in the privacy of the lodge, in the absence of any lay public. The lodge leaders would also engage the entire set of *sangomas* under their command to perform at public celebrations of national holidays, at the Francistown Stadium. The point is well worth making, not only because it may reflect (somewhat negatively) on the impression of authenticity and sincerity which the *sangomas* seek to make in order to gain therapeutic authority over their clients; but also because in other parts of the world shamans are explicitly claimed to refrain from all performance (Horwitz 1995).

<sup>238</sup> Cf. my discussions of virtuality, van Binsbergen 1997e, 1998a, 1998b, 2001, 2015b: ch. 1. Rasing 2018 disagrees, somewhat surprisingly but gratifyingly: initially my argument on virtuality was largely developed in order to provide (successfully) a theoretical context in which Rasing's intended research under my supervision could be funded by the National Science Foundation ZWO / WOTRO.

and time again, that it was indeed veridical, the voice of the High God calling me in my dream on the eve of my initiation into *thwazahood* (*sangoma* novice); the voice of the High God speaking to me in my own, West European native language Dutch (as very different from Afrikaans, a creolised language which Mr Sinombe also commanded) when finally confirmed as a fully-fledged *sangoma* at the shrine at Nata in Northern Central Botswana... However, the whole thrust of this book is that being impressed subjectively is not enough to affirm the reality of spirits and thus to discard the compelling canons of a transparent world-view which science and philosophy have built up over the millennia – yet that such discarding is prompted by other reasons.

A similar perspective (call it *affirmative performance*) may illuminate my continued ritual attention (prayers, libations and occasional bloody sacrifices) at the *sangoma* shrine near my present home in Western Europe. Inevitably, there is here, too, the element of placating an infantile, impressionable strand in my personality; as well as an element of going through the motions with a distinct sense of scepticism. However, often (though far from always) my spiritual ministrations appear to be followed by specific occurrences that are rather beyond expectation, yet are more or less in line with what is most needed or desired. By the same token, neglect of these spiritual ministrations over a considerable period of time appears to be typically followed by occurrences that are highly undesirable, and equally unexpected – serious illness, particularly. If for months I do not observe my ritual obligations as a *sangoma* (and such lapses do occur), I ultimately find (after weeks or months of beating about the bush) that I am more vulnerable to illness and distress – and this undesirable state rapidly changes for the better when I go back to normal practice. I am trying to avoid any claim of a causal relationship in the way of *post hoc ergo propter hoc*. Of course, there are totally normal psychological explanations for the vague subjectivities I am trying to convey here. However, the sequences of events I describe are precisely how my *sangoma* healers / teachers told me how it was going to be. Even in the face of established psychoanalysis (by a simple act of translation: 'family history' becoming 'ancestors'), their causal standard explanation in terms of satisfied or irate ancestors may yet have a point – enough to communicate that point to my own *sangoma* clients (but in *sangoma* discourse, not psychoanalytical discourse).

#### S. A DEAD ANCESTOR BORROWING HIS LIVING DESCENDANT'S BODY FOR THE FULFILMENT OF HIS OWN DESIRES?

I take this opportunity of describing a frame of interpretation which I have often found useful in dealing with my own existential challenges and with those of my *sangoma* clients. A leading idea among *sangomas* is that a dead ancestor often seeks to regain a material form by emerging in the body of her or his living descendant. (Incidentally, this is again an established idea of occultism that is so widely occurring in many cultural contexts recognising reincarnation, that one is tempted to consider a transcontinental background, beyond the specifics of today's Southern Africa in space and time.) When manifesting herself or himself through a *sangoma* adept during trance, speaking across the ages with an old and tired voice, the ancestor states to be hungry and thirsty, and is fed with beer, porridge, water, eggs, as described above. But ancestors may crave for more than the bodily comforts deriving from eating and drinking – i.e. the means to sustain a body they once had. They may covet specific objects of value (items of clothing and adornment especially glass beads), or licentious sexual experiences, or access to distant places, and such ancestral desires they may vicariously satisfy through the body of the descendant they possess.

When giving spiritual advice to clients, and interpreting the oracular divination I have performed

on their behalf, I often use my awareness of this ancestral strategy of vicarious gratification through the descendant they have possessed. The relevance of this perspective was forcibly driven home to me when, four years after my biological father's death, and during a short spell of renewed fieldwork among the Nkoya in early 1995, I made the acquaintance of a single mother of three, among my research participants. As a single young man during World War II, my prospective father had become enamoured of my prospective mother, a grass widow of three children whose husband, a professional subaltern officer, had for years disappeared in the war theaters of Central or Eastern Europe. My prospective father had joined her household and become the foster father of her children. A few years after I was born from this union, it turned out that my father – who had sustained serious brain injury in a car accident as a 20-years old<sup>239</sup> – could not restrain his paedophilic interests in the two girls, and our family came to profound and protracted misery. Over forty years later, in 1995, and while clearly perceiving the pitfall that was opening for me, I had to summon all my presence of mind in order to resist the inexplicable, and inexplicably strong, apparently ancestral appeal to allow my dead father – through the intermediary of my body as that of his only child – a repeat performance with the Nkoya mother and her three children.

Strange, costly, shameful, and otherwise socially discouraged cravings in the living client may thus find a *sangoma* explanation,<sup>240</sup> and be made acceptable, in a way totally devoid of moral censure. Since one of the main purposes of all psychotherapy, also in the North Atlantic region, is to release the client from excessive fear, worry, shame and embarrassment, this *sangoma* discourse on vicarious corporality can be very effective therapeutically, regardless of the question whether it has any roots in actual family history. Given the diversity and frequency of human aberrant desires, and the possibility of transgenerational telepathy across the grave, it often has.

Yet my own innermost interpretation of such events sees the idiom cast in terms of ancestors as merely a convenient, stereotyped, simplified, comic-books way of addressing more fundamental truths – even though I oblige by maintaining some regularity in my spiritual duties, making a point of going to my *sangoma* shrine especially at peak times of celebration or grief, and intensifying my practice after the tell-tale signs of negative events – like a series of protracted and increasingly serious illnesses that have struck me from 2006 onward – but I am an aging person, working far too hard, overweight, and not taking enough exercise, so apart from ancestral wrath there are other explanations available for these illnesses.

Not only before my patients but also before my own infant's soul I keep up the idiom of interaction with ancestors, but in fact I believe that something else is the matter – as already indicated in the above formulations in terms of virtuality. When I (often wholeheartedly and with gusto) play at addressing cosmic connectivities through the idiom of *sangoma*, it is as if an echo of that play is refracted back to me, through some unexpected and invisible crack in

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<sup>239</sup> For the likely relation between this condition and sexual transgression cf. Swaab 2010.

<sup>240</sup> Which of course does not preclude a more standard, North Atlantic, psychoanalytical interpretation, as a defensive mechanism seeking to resolve the unbearable contradiction between (a) realising that a certain person is incontestably one's parent, one of the two principal sources of one's genes and the obvious reference point for identification and societal placement; and (b) the indignant repulsion stemming from having seen that person inflict great pain and suffering on one's loved ones for decades. As an only, illegitimate child of a violent and child-molesting father, the move of becoming a 'Servant of the Ancestors' hardly came natural to me – why celebrate a filiation that had caused me great, life-long pain? When I protested to this effect to the Francistown *sangoma* leader Sithole of the Masemenyenga squatment, whose divination and sacrificial supervision first put me on this track, he waved away my objections: 'That man is still alive and not even an ancestor yet – spiritually, he does not count.'

space and time. It is as if the universe is largely, but not for the full 100%, governed by immutable natural laws – as if the universe turns to us a different face, each time we approach it with a different paradigm. When we harness the universe in a fully-fledged, state-of-the-art experimental setup of a physics or psychology laboratory (or, which is rather my own experience and expertise, when I subject observable socio-cultural behaviour to some utterly formal mathematical model; cf. van Binsbergen 1971a, 1970a, 1985b), the universe largely obliges, and largely produces the straightforward, unproblematic stochastic distributions we could predict on theoretical grounds; hardly any chance of capturing any paranormal phenomena, in this situation – and if we do (as several parapsychologists of unmistakable integrity have done, especially for telepathy, clairvoyance and other forms of extrasensory perception, and for astrology), Skeptical scrutiny would predictably find that the test setup did not to satisfy the highest methodological requirements,<sup>241</sup> since in fact no test setup ever does anyway. Under laboratory conditions, the universe *largely* complies with the predictions based on so-called natural laws, but not quite: much of twentieth-century physics has been about the discovery of fundamental *unpredictability*, in which the universe showed itself to be a triadic tangle, a collusion between the object under study, the observing subject, and the measuring apparatus. Here one will learn both humility and interconnectedness. As one learns the same lessons under what I have called '*Sangoma Science*': you must go through the rites, put on at least part of the *sangoma* uniform, pour the libations and the snuff offerings, energise the air around with a sacred fly switch and saturate the divinatory apparatus with whatever imperceptible 'fluidum' is produced in the process, and when you thus address the universe with a very different paradigm than that prevailing in laboratory setups,<sup>242</sup> it will turn you a very different face, one in which veridical extrasensory perception and a whole range of further paranormal phenomena become matters of course, to be taken for granted provided one cultivates a receptive, resigned, *sangoma*-professional state of mind and does not push, wilfully, for results. This is nothing less than, in St Paul's words, *the faith that could remove mountains* (1 *Corinthians* 13:2) – an expectation of occasional, capricious miracles triggered by human thought but dependent upon ἀγάπη, 'charity / non-sexual love' – in other words, the preparedness to take other people's truth seriously even if it differs from the one we hold ourselves. Other spirit traditions from other parts of the world and other periods are likely to trigger the universe to turn yet a different face; the next chapter 4 is a case in point. One gets the feeling that even more is involved here than the triadic collusion of subject, object and measuring

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<sup>241</sup> Hansel 1969, 1980; Moss & Butler 1978.

<sup>242</sup> Yet the *sangoma* paradigm is historically related to that of modern natural science. For both converge – along trajectories of transmission and innovation that become increasingly clear – to the proto-sciences of extispicy ('reading the entrails') and star lore ('astrology') in Ancient Mesopotamia. When I felt that my becoming a *sangoma* had subjectively disqualified me from fieldwork anthropology, two ways out opened up for me. In the first place: gradually, in an attempt to vindicate *sangoma* knowledge and to understand what becoming a *sangoma* meant as an apparently self-destructive turning point in my yet so successful anthropological career, I started on the path of epistemological and knowledge-political reflection, which in 1998 earned me the Rotterdam chair of intercultural philosophy. The second strategy was that I started on a series of library research projects seeking, initially, to identify the transcontinental, long-range roots of the divination system (apparently not of local origin) I had learned in Botswana – and gradually extending to encompass the whole of Anatomically Modern Humans' cultural history; cf. van Binsbergen 2012b, and in press (g).

apparatus proclaimed by Quantum Mechanics – it is as if the world is actively being shaped by the ritual, as if the ritual is world-creating not just in a symbolic but also in a literal sense, and if subsequently that creation, under conditions that are as yet mysterious, may occasionally take on a life of its own and produce material manifestations normally exclusively reserved for matter that is not dependent upon human thought. *It is as if ritual is a machine to convert virtuality into actuality. Here I am both affirming and denying the reality of spirits*, and that, to me, is a particularly comforting thought, commensurate – hopefully – with the kind of fundamental, oscillating irrationality that I (*pace* Kant, Newton, Einstein and Carnap) take to be the universe's innermost true structure.

Now, when I admit that other spirit traditions from other parts of the world and other periods are likely to trigger the universe to turn yet a different face, this also means that I do not have to doubt the integrity and veridicity of Edith Turner's account of ectoplasm visibly emanating from the body of a Ndembu patient in trance, or of a giant nocturnal birdlike animal phantasm audibly alighting in the backyard of a North Alaskan home and leaving its footprints there, in the night of its calendrical celebration. My quarrel is not with the phenomenon but with the interpretation. I think these are figments of the human imagination taking (the appearance of?) material form, spilling over into materiality, and freezing there. If this is to be called 'spirit', so be it. But to me it is not sign of a transcendent reality beyond our world, not an invitation to go down on our knees and pay homage to this mere effluence of frozen energy, although (for reasons that are still not clear to me) merely reading and fantasising about ectoplasm has always inspired me with mortal fear. In their unmistakable *materialisation*<sup>243</sup> I would regard these paranormal things (if they do pass the test of reliable observation) primarily as manifestations of the immanent capabilities built into the structure of the universe. For these capabilities to be triggered, we apparently need the influence (probably mediated through some specific spiritual technology, such as the *sangoma* or *Chihamba* cults) of human thought as (for the moment, and as far as we know) the universe's most complex product. In humankind, the universe has taken consciousness of itself, and therefore humankind is not unlikely to have most, or even all, of the still largely inconceivable capabilities of the universe at its disposal. If our imagination, under the careful and complex technology of ritual, may produce the materialisations that send shudders down our spine, perhaps it may also be similarly powerful when it projects the image of personal, caring, and approachable (even manipulable) beings onto the universe in order to produce what looks like divine or ancestral providence, like hopes selectively fulfilled and fears selectively allayed; or when it projects the manipulative wishful thinking of magic. There are indications that events like this happen all the time, at a minor scale, but again, for me such a distorting mirror of the human consciousness is insufficient reason to believe – otherwise than as the default option of oscillation – in a personal god or a conscious universe as an objective reality.

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<sup>243</sup> A pun on the well-known parapsychological term, *cf.* the works by von Schrenck Notzing referred to above. It is only from written sources like this (also *cf.* Marsman & Vestdijk 1938) that I have any knowledge of materialisation phenomena in the parapsychological sense. I have never witnessed any myself. My first, intensive encounter with this literature was when, in an unpublished study I undertook in the mid-1960s, I traced the references to paranormal phenomena in V.V. Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962).



What I see as a major problem underlying Edith Turner's attempt to vindicate peripheral spirit traditions and to introduce them to the North Atlantic mainstream, anthropology, and world-views at large, is that her project is still predicated on a conventional dichotomy, not so much of body and mind, but of spirit or energy on the one hand, matter on the other. It is the sheer appearance of materiality, in the Chihamba blob of ectoplasm and in the North-Alaska empirical signs (sounds, soil impressions) of the animal phantasm, that bothered her most and that made her believe she was on to something good. But why fuss over this spilling over of energy into some apparently frozen, material form? Nuclear physics, Quantum Mechanics, the Theory of Relativity have seen to it that, for almost a century now, physicists have completely done away with the dichotomy between matter and energy, which still divided Newton and Huygens in the 17th century CE, fighting over the corporeal versus the wave nature of light. What at a macro scale manifests itself under the appearance of matter, rather than waves of energy, is merely energy waves in a slightly different form – and if it is waves, they are bound to be interpenetrable, interacting, and extending to the very edges of the universe. It is not the spiritual, but the material that constitutes the phantasm in our naked-eye observations, and if we could only bring ourselves to dissolve the images of bounded, corporeal materiality into just another bundle of waves, most things would fall into place.



Fig. 3.20. Artist's impression of a nocturnal materialising phantasm of a giant bird, as invoked by Edith Turner

Spirit beliefs outside the North Atlantic region are unconditionally deserving of our loyalty, because of the global politics of knowledge which has, so far, largely discredited indigenous knowledge outside the North Atlantic, and because of the principle of cognitive charity. But that is not the same as affirming that there is also a substantial, material ground to assume the reality of spirits in the sense of a manifestation of personalised

transcendence existing independently from matter and independently from living human agents, as an ontological category in its own right. I submit that any spirituality based on spirit beliefs is, in the last analysis, a mere convenient idiom to name, visualise and personalise, forces that our own, human spiritual technologies conjure up (in the name of the universe, whose self-reflexive vantage point we are) and that are well within the range of the universe's immanent capabilities.

### 3.16. The healer: Agent or catalyst

Healing was one of the two pillars of the original Symposium on which this chapter's argument is based, and we have come close now to a position where we can pinpoint the role and nature of the healer somewhat more precisely. *Is the healer*

1. *the active agent in healing? or*
2. *is she merely a catalyst facilitating things to happen by virtue, largely, of powers not specifically her own?*

In both cases, healing would be a socio-ritual technology of intervention in the body-mind, but as active agent (under (1)) the healer could be supposed to rely more on unique personal qualities such as a physical aptitude to emanate healing power or otherwise to influence the body-mind of patients; whereas in the catalytic conception (under (2)) more emphasis would be laid on the, apparently typical, triadic relationships already highlighted above.

At Edith Turner's clever initiative, it was democratically decided at our Symposium (by a vote of hands – nearly all present were non-healers, at least not active healers) that – apparently – the politically correct way of looking at this matter is to deny any active intercession on the part of the healer, and to conceive of her as a mere catalyst. Under group pressure, and in my servile role as interviewer, I could not bring myself to represent the minority view. Yet, personally I tend to the opinion that the healer is not just a catalyst but that she has an exceptionally great talent, as well as the ritual-technological learning and training, perhaps even the required specific ancestry, to produce, in the natural world, such echo-effects of the human mind as may bring about, not just phantasms and ectoplasm freezing into materiality, but also mental and even organic rearrangements that amount to an enhanced state of health through regained communion with the universe as a whole.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> My becoming a *sangoma* was the culmination, not the beginning, of my trajectory as someone grappling with healing, and having a keen interest in medical anthropology, and personally engaging in diagnosis and the administration of medicine – initially within a cosmopolitan framework. One of my earliest and most extensive ethnographic studies of Nkoya life (1979c) was a very detailed record and analysis of the first years (including pregnancy) of the life of one particular Nkoya boy – the son of my adoptive elder brother and research associate through the decades, Mr Dennis Shiyowe. Years later my friend Sjaak van der Geest, one of the two editors (with the late lamented Klaas van der Veen) of the collection in which my excessively long study was patiently accommodated, conceded (van der Geest 1996: 328) that this was a seminal achievement in early medical anthropology in the Netherlands, that my study had been accorded 'the status of something of a classic, as it was an impressive example of the extended case method in medical anthropology'. (In my 2018 Festschrift Sjaak had again occasion to acclaim my work, this time on the description of defaecation in fieldwork in my novel *Een Buik Openen*, 1988). While still identifying as an objectifying medical-cum-religious anthropologist, I was deeply

### 3.17. Conclusion

I believe to have sympathetically and responsibly delineated the discussion space around Edith Turner's project, in a manner that seeks to strike a balance between my affirmation as a practising *sangoma*, my going beyond spirit notions in my own spirituality, my critical toolkit as an anthropologist and intercultural philosopher, and my empirical work in the anthropology and history of religion. I have taken the opportunity to bring out my own current and evolving thinking about *sangomahood*, as part of a project that is similar to Edith Turner's, yet essentially different. *Affirming the reality of spirits*, as Edith Turner seeks to do, appears a lofty and timely initiative in a world where scientific rationality seems to have brought about general disenchantment and secularisation – albeit often also bringing in their trail explicit human rights, the promise of democracy, freedom from spiritual oppression, wide general access to the accumulated knowledge of humankind, greater equality of the genders, and greater equality of people in general regardless of their somatic characteristic, creeds, continental origin, and cultural orientations. What we need most, however, if we choose to affirm 'the reality of spirits' in a world where spiritual beliefs seem to have less and less grip on the globalised elites, is not so much more, and more compelling, empirical confirmation of manifestations of spirit, but especially profound, and well-informed, specialist, disciplined, *reflection* on what is meant by 'reality', 'existence', and 'empirical proof'. Edith Turner's main claim to sound reasoning lies in good old English 'common sense'— like most anthropologists (van Binsbergen 2003) she seems hardly interested in the vast and complex edifice of epistemology which philosophers and logicians, from all continents and ever since prehistory, have erected so as to confront the central questions of the human condition at a level that is non-trivial, specialist, and enlightened by the efforts of ten of thousands of thinkers before them.

This does not mean that Edith Turner's contribution is naïve and trivial, and nothing more. The great response with which her challenging publications have met on the part of North Atlantic students of religion, suggests otherwise. Is *Sangoma Science* so very different from what she has been trying to do? When I see on how many points she and I radically differ, one would draw that conclusion, yet superficial readers of my work often are under the impression that our two approaches converge.

Starting out as a poet and an anthropologist, during the past half century I have touched on many disciplines and done serious, seriously acknowledged and published peer-reviewed work in them – yet I never stayed on long enough in any one discipline to make it into a comfortable and widely acknowledged intellectual home and power-base for me, and into a trusted resource for institutional protection, further exploration,

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concerned with the problem of therapeutic efficacy – another stepping-stone towards 'Becoming a *sangoma*'. As an intercultural philosopher, invited to comment on the work of my illustrious philosophical colleague Otto Duintjer (a Kant and Heidegger specialist on the transcendental; 1966, 2002) I wrote the Dutch-language booklet *Spiritualiteit, heelmaking en transcendentie*: (2012), which comes some way towards answering the question as to therapeutic efficacy, but had no access yet to the far more accomplished argument expounded in the present book.

publication and funding. It has mainly been my restless, passionate curiosity that has swept me on. Thus I have tasted the promise of many fields, but have reaped the harvest in few. Who am I to rap Edith Turner on the fingers? After all, the Ndembu who were her main inspiration half a life ago, are linguistically, politically, ritually, and culturally closely related to the Nkoya people whom I joined as a young man. On the basis of my command of Nkoya, I can read the scraps of Ndembu expressions that are scattered over Vic's books. When Edith wanted to return to Zambia for new fieldwork after Vic's death, she wrote to me as someone deeply involved in Zambian research then. We are allies and clansmen, not enemies.

To do justice to the serious challenges that become manifest at this juncture, more than half way into this book, I propose an evasive round-about movement, that will first familiarise us with two totally different ways of handling the problem of spirit and history: Cremona & Thompson's controversial book *Forbidden Archeology* (1993); and the best-selling novelist Dan Brown's recent masterpiece *Origin* (2017) — considered in conjunction with the thought of the French Jesuit and geologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955). In these discussions we shall gradually wake up to the realisation that in order to do justice to the realities and counter-realities on which the present book revolves, what we need in the first place is a different perspective on logic and reality. I have given much thought to this problem, and the fact that I was hardly trained as a professional philosopher<sup>245</sup> helps me to be as bold, naïve and original as is imperative at this point. I shall not be able to propose, in detail, in the form of well-

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<sup>245</sup> When, after a series of social-science professorships both in the Netherlands and abroad, I acceded to the Chair of the Foundations of Intercultural Philosophy in the Philosophical Faculty, Erasmus University Rotterdam (1998), my philosophical credentials were fragmented and heterogeneous: sustained fascination for the subject (particularly the works of Teilhard de Chardin and his commentators (van Binsbergen 1962); Sartre; and the Presocratics) as an adolescent; a course with the Platonic philosopher Oldewelt as a freshman; a course in mathematical logic as a third-year student; a life-long preoccupation with the philosopher turned founding father of sociology Durkheim (cf. van Binsbergen 2018), and some of his predecessors including Comte, and successors like the structuralist Lévi-Strauss; elements of Whitehead & Russell's *Principia Mathematica* as a perspective on general linguistics (van Binsbergen 1970b), which constituted a minor for my first and second degree; Marxist social theory and the theory of knowledge (van Binsbergen 1981; van Binsbergen & Geschiere 1985), as the main orientation of my PhD thesis and as the scholarly fashion of the 1960s-1980s; a few articles on Occam's Razor and Francis Bacon as applied to development sociology (1977), and on dilemmas of intercultural ethics – 1987; the Aristotelian background of the concept of virtuality – 1997e / 2015b) – and of course, inevitably, the whole package of science philosophy and methodology (e.g. Popper 1959; de Groot 1966) as *en vogue* in those decades in the social sciences; the anti-hegemonic critique of anthropology and of the classics, in the air ever since the decolonisation of Africa, the critique of Orientalism, the *Black Athena* debate (van Binsbergen 1997 / 2011), and the critique of globalisation (van Binsbergen & van Dijk 2004; Fradon, van Binsbergen & van Dijk 1999 – for which I had initiated, with Peter Geschiere, a lavishly funded national and intercontinental research programme. Inevitably, my several books on the state also touched on themes of political philosophy (Doombos & van Binsbergen 2017, anthologising our earlier work; van Binsbergen with Pelgrim, 2003; van Binsbergen & Hesselting 1984; van Binsbergen, Reijntjens & Hesselting 1986; Konings, van Binsbergen & Hesselting 2000; Salazar, Osha & van Binsbergen 2002. More than my early philosophically-orientated texts, it was my extensive engagement, over the years, with matters of knowledge production and the representation of the other across cultural boundaries, that impressed the Rotterdam appointments committee.

formed discursive philosophical prose, the new epistemology that, I believe, is needed now to answer the fundamental questions posed by this book: *does God exist? are spirits real? can the dead intervene in humans's real life? is veridical divination possible? are other forms of extrasensory perception possible? who or what heals what when we claim that healing is at hand; what is integrity in spirituality; and how does ritual allow us to partake of, and redistribute, the ultimate creative powers of the universe?*

Time for the reader to adopt the bracing position, as in a crashing airplane. It will be a bumpy ride.



**Part III. Towards cosmology: Evolution  
or eternal return**





# ***Chapter 4. Cremo & Thompson's book Forbidden Archeology as an invitation to intercultural cosmology***

## **4.1. Introduction and summary of the present chapter**

A quarter of a century *after* I began to engage in the social and cultural anthropology of religion, along the mainstream lines of detached North Atlantic scholarship, personal predicaments in combination with my first professional identity, that of a poet, made me cross the line separating participant observation from social and ritual engagement; so, during field-work in the rapidly expanding urban environment of Francistown, Botswana, Southern Africa, I allowed the host community to coax me along, first as a client of their divinatory therapeutic services, then as someone training for leadership (*sangoma*) in such services, finally as someone having successfully made the grade as an initiated, certified, and practising, *sangoma*. My initiation as a trainee *sangoma* took place one day after my appointment became effective to the position of professor of social anthropology at the Free University, Amsterdam – after fulfilling similar positions on a temporary or visiting basis in Leiden, Manchester and Berlin. Torn between the expectations of academia and the critique of mainstream anthropology which was implied in my embracing *sangomahood*, I engaged in publications that happened to make me eligible to the part-time chair of Intercultural Philosophy at the Philosophical Faculty, Erasmus University Rotterdam, whilst retaining my principal connection with the African Studies Centre, Leiden. Having brought together many of my relevant texts in a volume *Intercultural Encounters* (2003), my explorations in this domain continued, especially in connection with intercultural epistemology, wisdom, Afrocentricity, and the vindication of African knowledge systems (foremost: divination) deviating from the North Atlantic mainstream scientific norm. Yet I began to realise that it was not by accident that my main books had been on historical reconstruction rather than on contemporary anthropological topics, as

if it was my chosen destiny 'to create history where previously there was none'. Pre- and protohistory have come to occupy an increasingly prominent place in my work of the last decade. For many years I have dreamed of an approach (provisionally entitled *Sangoma Science*) which would bring all these strands together, and allow me to design a world-view in which *sangomahood* would find its place next to wisdom, the philosophy of science, the pursuit of pre- and protohistory, and science *tout court*.

A decade ago, in my preparation for a major protohistorical project where archaeology was to provide much of the relevant data, I hit on the remarkable book *Forbidden Archeology* (Cremona & Thompson 1993). There, the mainstream unilinear, implicitly evolutionary, paradigm in the study of humankind's remotest past is severely criticised, apparently by reference to sound empirical facts, but leading on to a conclusion vindicating the ancient Hindu doctrine according to which the history of the world consisted of long distinct aeons<sup>246</sup> <sup>247</sup> of *immutability*, separated by total *cataclysm* that left nothing to survive into the next aeon. I had found a suitable peg on which to suspend my own project in progress. The following summary may guide the reader through the bewildering

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<sup>246</sup> With the limited resources at my disposal as a non-Asianist I cannot with any certainty identify the historical background of the South Asian concept of (कल्प kalpa / αἰών aeon (cf. Anonymous, Kalpa (aeon); Tull 1989, writing on the Vedic origins of concept of *karma*, refers (p. 93) to studies (*non vidi*) by Kashikar 1968, 1994 on the *Kalpa Sutras*, as a locus where Ultimate Reality and Meaning are being set out. Conceptually there is a certain parallel with the notion of aeon in the work of the Presocratic philosopher Empedocles from Agragas / Agrigento, Sicily, Italy (6<sup>th</sup> c. BCE; cf. Minar 1963; van Binsbergen 2012 and extensive references there). Especially since the days of Alexander the Great (late 4th c. BCE) there had been a remarkable rapprochement between Greek and Indian culture, as is clear from such fields as cosmology (the notion of reality as built out of a very limited number of elements), astronomy and astrology (Pingree 1978), whereas the Gandhara sculptural style meant a translation of Greek aesthetic and artisanal techniques to the (Early Buddhist) South Asian subcontinent. Against this background, and also in view of the fact that in Indian philosophy the concept of *kalpa* appears to belong to the Sanhya orthodoxy which emerged by the end of the first mill. BCE – half a millennium after Empedocles –, I am inclined to suggest that the concept of *kalpa* arose under considerable Empedoclean influence. Subbarayappa (1966) claims Upanishadic origin (after the early-1<sup>st</sup> mill. BCE) for the Hindu thinking in terms of aeons, suggesting that this system was a forerunner of the theory of elements of the Greeks, among whom Empedocles, and in his trail Aristotle, are the main exponents. Subbarayappa's claim is in principle plausible: from their Aegean backwater at the periphery of the then civilised world of Asia and Egypt, the Greek sages travelled widely in order to pick up inspiration for their thought. Subbarayappa could be right in the sense that also according to my reconstructions in *Before the Presocratics* (van Binsbergen 2012) an element cosmology had been a widespread, trans-continental substrate world-view in both the Old World and the New ever since the Upper Palaeolithic. Conceived in that way, both (A) the Empedoclean, and (B) the Indian literate element cosmologies of the 1<sup>st</sup> mill BCE and after, could have been original local developments from: (C) a much older, common substrate, and need not have been borrowed from A to B or vice versa. However, while granting this possibility, I submit that the similarities between the Greek and the Indian system are so massive that specific borrowing in historic times is much more likely – hence my proposal that the Indian variety derives from Empedocles.

<sup>247</sup> For background data on relevant concepts in Indian philosophy and world-view, cf. Dasgupta 1992 / 1975 / 1922; Ganeri 2017; Grimes 1996; Radhakrishnan 1951, 1952-1953. Indian mythology is covered in e.g. Keith 1917. The Indian conceptions of time are also discussed in a chapter of Eliade's *Images et symboles: Essais sur le symbolisme magico-religieux* (1952).

maze of this chapter's argument.

After an autobiographical section (4.2) in which I show how the evolutionary belief in progress in history (but also a tendency to historical falsification...) has been with me ever since I was a schoolboy, I set out (4.3) the project of *Forbidden Archeology*, and bring out its methodological and empirical weaknesses from a standpoint of mainstream North Atlantic science. In the next section I argue that writing history is both a scientific and a mythical project, and that therefore the preposterous methods and conclusions of *Forbidden Archeology* might have more validity than meets the eye at first glance. To appreciate this point, we need to look carefully (4.5) at the assumptions informing the Received North Atlantic World-view today – which is not in the first place the perspective of today's state-of-the-art specialist natural science, but the informed layman's view based on 19<sup>th</sup>-c. science yet still circulated in primary and secondary educational institutions and the media, and thus forming a backbone of general North Atlantic, increasingly global, present-day culture. In the next section (4.6) I briefly indicate, building on my earlier published work, how these North Atlantic assumptions differ radically from those informing *Sangoma Science* in Southern Africa – as fairly representative of the more or less *magical* world-views found in past and present cultures outside the North Atlantic one, which has considered itself mainstream. Meanwhile, however, I draw attention to the fact (4.7) that not only local and peripheral world-views like that of the *sangomas* deviate radically from the Received North Atlantic World-view, but that the latter is in itself also decisively rendered obsolescent – for over a century now – by developments at the heart of North Atlantic mainstream science, notably Quantum Mechanics and the Theory of Relativity, both of which have begun to render thinkable and plausible those very aspects of *Sangoma Science* which would be anathema from a point of view of the (obsolescent) Received North Atlantic World-view. This brings me to affirm (4.8) the materially creative and kaleidoscopic nature of *all* cosmological thought from whatever region and historical period; which leads to the view of truth in the modern world as a patchwork quilt of detached, locally valid and true but translocally invalid and untrue world-views – a mosaic of 'truth provinces' which may expand and overlap but remain in principle incompatible, unless they are reconciled by *the unprincipled and unprocedural compromises of the pursuit of wisdom*. In the final section (4.9) this leads to the contentious and unexpected vindication of *Forbidden Archeology*, in the light of my emerging *poetics of writing remote prehistory* – leaving so many loose ends (e.g. the problem of intersubjective convergence that, beyond the fragmentation and apparent mutual exclusiveness of 'truth provinces', yet the modern world for many purposes presents itself to its 8 billion human inhabitants as essentially coherent and continuous) that the radical intercultural epistemology that it is supposed to foreshadow, remains nothing but a promise.

Most of this chapter has the trappings of a scholarly piece, with references and bibliography, and the pedestrian style that is the hallmark of scholarship. Yet I deliberately start out with an autobiographical account of my adolescence and its dabbling in historical fraud, in order to indicate to the reader that this is a meta-scientific, literary text, towards the end of which, tongue-in-cheek, the most blatant scientific enormities will be presented as, at least, plausibilities. I am merely using the stylistic format of science to present a dazzling view of reality which by its very nature (both of the view, and of reality) cannot be adequately mediated in scientific terms alone.

Therefore I provisionally designate the present argument, not as an epistemology, but as a *poetics*, notably a poetics of remote prehistory writing. To the extent to which *belles lettres* have a broader window on reality, and a greater freedom in capturing reality and unreality in text, I seek to use that more powerful tool to render, in good faith, what I think I learned in decades as a scientist, a poet and an African healer. I anticipate that this combination of experiences, however fruitful and illuminating it may be, will yet estrange me from nearly all potential readers.

## 4.2. Progress in history: A boy's bluff

A second preliminary step must be taken. As stated in the introductory chapter, I will use Cremo & Thompson's book *Forbidden Archeology* to throw in relief general problems of writing humankind's remotest prehistory, and of the world-view in which such writing must be situated. Meanwhile the project of *Forbidden Archeology* resonates deeply with my own biography,<sup>248</sup> in a way that I prefer to set out before I launch on a discussion of Cremo & Thompson's book itself.

Before the limited but respectable contents of my parents' bookcase, and more so the example and active prodding of my elder brother, awakened me to philosophy and *belles lettres*, it was not the youth literature available in our popular-neighbourhood home and from our Roman Catholic neighbourhood centre (in fact, an inner-city missionary establishment, where I also served as an acolyte), but comic books, that constituted my most cherished readings – and among them the Dutch-produced *Sjors en Sijmmie* series (now since decades exposed as racist, depicting a stereotypical black boy with fat lips and sub-standard speech – at the time, the intended readership would have scarcely noticed what was wrong, for 'Black' people were still hardly available in the Netherlands in the early 1950s), and the weekly *Donald Duck*, Dutch-ised after a USA Walt-Disney template. When, at the precocious age of eleven, I broke out of the neighbourhood career model (according to which I had been destined to become a senior *coupeur* / cutter in the garment industry in which my family, some of our neighbours, and much of our social network was involved) and (partly through the intercession of the neighbourhood centre) entered grammar school – like my brother had done some eight years before –, my mother decided that I had outgrown *Donald Duck*, and without consulting with me terminated my subscription.

My regret concerned both her highhandedness and the fact that thus I was cut off from one of the few sources of enjoyment my childhood had offered. Now, 60 years older and aware of the imperialist features some critics (Dorfman 1975) have read in Walt Disney's products (whose effects on the present-day reception of time-honoured myths, fairy-tales and animal representations I have myself criticised; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011), I am still magically drawn to every stray copy of the same weekly in second-hand bookshops or snack bars.

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<sup>248</sup> I have repeatedly engaged with the genre of autobiography. Since my siblings are still alive, with whom I largely share the same painful family history, most of these writings are still under embargo. Two exceptions are: my critical pamphlet on Otterspeer's biography of the Dutch prominent literary writer W.F. Hermans, who was born in the same Amsterdam popular neighbourhood as I (van Binsbergen 2014); and a lavishly illustrated and annotated recent book of autobiographical poetry: *Kinkerbuurt 1947-1960* (van Binsbergen 2020).

However, I was compensated for the loss by our family's taking out a subscription to what was called a 'reading folder': a heterogeneous and rotating bundle of weekly and monthly magazines, that was delivered at the door and exchanged for another bundle at the end of every week; the subscription fee was determined by the age of the contents, which however seldom exceeded six weeks. Thus I was introduced to the comics version (in the collection *Illustrated Classics*) of the *Count of Montecristo*, *Huckleberry Finn*, and *The War of the Worlds*.



Fig. 4.1. The youth periodical *Robbedoes* and the series *Illustrated Classics* of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.



Fig. 4.2. The Borgerstraat SFL (Sint Franciscus Liefdewerk) neighbourhood centre decades after the 1950s, when I frequented it.

But I was thus also introduced to the youth weekly *Robbedoes*, mainly a Flemish (Netherlands-speaking Belgian) product which soon led me to identify with the glorious Flemish past of the Battle of the Golden Spurs (1302) – Henri Conscience’s nationalist epic *De Leeuw van Vlaanderen / The Lion of Flanders* was serialised in the first few *Robbedoes* copies that came my way, and thus paved the way for the prominent place Flanders (the Northern part of Belgium) was to occupy in my later marital and academic life. In *Robbedoes* I was to publish my first independent article,<sup>249</sup> illustrated with my own photographs taken with my brother’s camera: a feature on the medieval town of Elburg (Central Netherlands) and its geometric street plan reproducing a Roman *castella*; although I persuaded my parent to take me to Elburg for this purpose, my data came mainly from a volume in the Dutch-language *Heemschut* series of regional archaeology and folklore.<sup>250</sup>

Thus, when around 1960 *Robbedoes* published a Letter to the Editor written by a Belgian boy with a name suggestive of nobility (van Leenberghe?) and claiming descent from a Greek hero during the Trojan war (Aeneas) and ultimately from the goddess Venus, as a thirteen-year old I felt sufficiently at home in *Robbedoes* circles and in matters historical, to try and refute (not without a whiff of sublimated class struggle – my father’s working-class milieu cherished a family myth of noble, rural origins) what I considered an utterly nonsensical claim – unaware of the fact that such claims used to be common-place especially among British nobles.<sup>251</sup> With the aid of such meagre resources as were at my disposal (mainly the AULA series of affordable (popular-)scientific books published by the *Het Spectrum* publishing house – my pocket money allowed me to build up a sizeable library of those within months) I bluffed, and blundered, my way through (the merest surface of) archaeology, ancient history, palaeoanthropology, palaeontology, evolution, biology, astronomy, nuclear physics. The project rapidly outgrew the scope of my intended sceptical *Letter to the Editor* of a youth magazine, such a Letter even never materialised, but after half a year I could send my Belgian target a tightly typed (on the second-hand typewriter my parents gave me for my 14<sup>th</sup> birthday), fully referenced and (in those pre-computer days) lavishly colour-illustrated 80-pp. manuscript in which I refuted his preposterous claims against a juvenile synthesis of the last few billion years of the Earth’s history. To add further authority to this remarkable product I pretended to be twice my age, which the addressee predictably doubted. Then I let our correspondence slide, and I went on to further explore popular science, until this happy phase of my life was only too soon overtaken by a shattering *prise de conscience* of the existential mess in which I had

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<sup>249</sup> At age 10, I sent a pedantic Letter to the Editor of the Amsterdam newspaper *Het Parool* about the daily column of Henri Knap / ‘Dagboekener’, which was printed and discussed so as to fill an entire day’s rubric. The subject was Knap’s erroneous interpretation of a conditional clause. Hilariously, and with all the vicarious pompousness reminiscent of the boy Jesus teaching in the Temple (*Luke 2: 41-52*; at that age that passage greatly appealed to me) my letter concluded thus: *Ik hoop dat U mijn betoog hebt kunnen volgen, en dat U voortaan in het Uwe de logica in het oog houdt* (‘I hope you have been able to follow my argument, and that henceforth you will stick to logic in your own arguments’).

<sup>250</sup> Probably the book in question was: Kloos 1947.

<sup>251</sup> Piggott 1973 / 1965.

landed, both because of my violence- and incest-ridden parental family and because of my obsessional infatuation with an upper-middle-class school girl who had been my counterpart in a school drama production of Gogol's *The Revisor*. In a psychotic few months, I disbanded my budding popular-scientific library and started to identify as a poet – only to return to science, history and anthropology when, a few years later, I chose to read anthropology as preparation for an academic career that (deceptively, of course) seemed to be least incompatible with the pursuit of *belles lettres*.

Given my Roman-Catholic background which was also that of *Het Spectrum* (it was a time when religious denomination constituted still the main dimension of social organisation in the Netherlands), my earlier quest into non-mythical ancient history had inevitably led me to the writings of the French Jesuit geologist / palaeontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. His (amateur, and apparently naïve) association with the Piltdown palaeo-anthropological forgery<sup>252</sup> in South England in the 1910s could not prevent that his mystico-scientific synthesis of palaeontology, cosmology and heterodox theology was seen by many Roman-Catholic intellectuals at the time as one of the main breakthroughs of the mid-twentieth century, the captivating statement of scientifically grounded hope the world was waiting for after two World Wars. At age 14 I had bought and read all his collected works, in the original French (a language I had only learned in secondary school), and was a corresponding member of the Paris-based *Association des Amis de Teilhard de Chardin*, who sent me their journal as well as free copies of his much-coveted unedited roneographed works, in exchange for the annotated, French-language manuscript bibliography of the reception of Teilhard in the Netherlands (van Binsbergen 1962), which they had commissioned with me. In the process I had acquainted myself with every major library in my home town Amsterdam, and when the staff of the municipal University Library tried to put an end to my visits on the ground that I was considered under-age, my mother went to talk to them and obtained official permission. As budding Teilhard specialist I entered into correspondence with some of the major players in the Teilhard reception in the Netherlands and Belgium (Wildiers, de Lange, Delfgaauw), and at the author's request (Claude Cuénot) I advised *Het Spectrum* to publish a Dutch translation of one of the more authoritative little books on Teilhard that were then in circula-

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<sup>252</sup> Since the original publication (Dawson & Smith Woodward 1913) many discussions have been devoted to this sham discovery; cf. Weiner 1955; Spencer 1990. Apparently, Teilhard de Chardin (then a priesthood student at the Jesuit Major Seminary at Hastings, England, UK, and still only an amateur palaeo-anthropologist a decade away from his 1922 doctorate under the leading French palaeontologist Marcellin Boule) had been led to 'discover' an apparently matching molar in the neighbourhood of the main Piltdown find. Toulmin, who is excessively critical of Teilhard's cosmological synthesis, joins others in the suggestion that Teilhard's association with the forgery may have been more than naïve and less than innocent – which however would not be true to character; (Toulmin 1985, which has an entire chapter devoted to Teilhard). Toulmin justifiably chides Teilhard for having worked in China for twenty years without picking up anything of the Chinese language or culture; but, especially for a natural scientist, the fact that Teilhard *extensively published with Chinese colleagues* suggests far greater transcultural sensitivity and responsibility than Toulmin gives him credit for. For further details and references, cf. Speaight 1967. The Piltdown episode and Teilhard's role in it are also discussed in *Forbidden Archeology*, o.c., ch. 8, pp. 501–525.

tion in France (Cuénot 1962).

As I have set out elsewhere,<sup>253</sup> my over-eager identification with Teilhard's writings offered an impersonal, universalising and utterly optimistic answer to the personal existential crisis that was then building up in my adolescent life – but that answer proved vulnerable and short-lived, unable to survive the atheist / existentialist critique by the schoolmate who, already a published poet himself, further initiated me into *belles lettres* and launched me as a poet.



Fig. 4.3. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, c. 1950

And now the point in connection with *Forbidden Archeology*. Our grammar school was run by a Roman Catholic religious order, the fathers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (SCJ) – although most of the teachers were married laymen. Throughout several years, my teacher of history was Father Dr van de Wansum, a shy scholarly person who had written a doctorate on the late-medieval religious revival movement of Geert Grooten's Broeders des Gemeenen Levens / Brethren of the Communal Life.

Fr van de Wansum had reason to take me seriously, perhaps even to fear me. At my elder brother's directions, I had manufactured a one-page text in more or less late-medieval handwriting and archaic language, in which one captain Toe Hoerne claimed to have had, in the second quarter of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a violent encounter on a distant westerly shore,

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<sup>253</sup> E.g. in the notes to: van Binsbergen, 2012, *Dendrogram*; also cf. chapter 5 of the present book.



with savages covered in red paint. Soaking in vegetal oil, application of burn marks, and a year of exposure to dirt and damp when buried in our garden, had given the document an oldish appearance, even though the black Indian ink with which it had been written was of modern manufacture, and the paper even bore the watermark of the prominent Amsterdam stationer's firm, the Winter Bros. Although the book *Vijftig eeuwen schrift* and another book in the Heemschut series on ancient scripts of the Low Countries were in my possession, I had never made a close study of late medieval Dutch handwriting; like in so much of my life, I simply followed my brother's (only slightly more tutored) instructions, which basically amounted to the squaring of every letter, replacing its convex curve by angular concave elements, e.g.  $e = \text{e} > \text{E}$ . Not out of contempt (Dr van de Wansum was deservedly one of my favourite teachers) but out of mischief bred by an utterly unhappy adolescence and also by way of an experiment on academic credulity, I had shown the document to my teacher, pretending that I had found it bound in the cover of an old book bought at Amsterdam's flea market the Waterlooplein. By accident or by strategy, I absented myself from school the following week on the ground of illness, and when I returned the school was alive with rumours: our very own Dr van de Wansum, who was after all an expert on late-medieval manuscripts, had made a discovery that was to make him and our school famous – not Columbus but some Dutch captain had discovered America! In the previous week he had broadcast the news in all his classes, and he was now about to go to the press for national and international recognition. I rushed to his classroom and, in private, told him the truth – but (having made himself so vulnerable as a result of announcing his apparent discovery all over the school) he could only believe me when, at his challenge, I instantly produced a few lines in the make-believe ancient handwriting on the blackboard. The rumour soon died out, he had the charm to forgive me, and henceforth my standard marks in his subject would be straight A<sup>+</sup>, i.e. 10 out of 10.

I realise that, for a scholar, this is a dangerous story to tell. So my work as an historian started out with forgery and fraud, and at such a tender age that it may be fitting to speak of a congenital condition! Such a state of affairs does not add to the credibility of my ethnography and historiography! Does this not mean that my experiences in the field, as a *sangoma*, may also be totally fraudulent, invented? The tendency to forgery may indeed have been inherited (of course it is, all humans are capable of lying and fraud – some linguists – e.g. Aitchison 1997 / 1996 – even situate here the origin of language!), for also my elder brother, who became an accomplished Romance and Hebrew scholar and secondary school director, during his graduate studies attracted his professor's attention and earned his praise because of masterly pastiches of Ancient French poetry. When at age 13 he was playing truant from his first secondary school, and I was five, we occasionally stole chocolate bars from the *Bijenkorf* department store, and military dump electronics from the Amsterdam flea market. The road from our conflictive and modest origins, to our later academic and social achievements, was inevitably bumpy. When subsequently I established myself as a minor Dutch poet, and when later, around 1990, after over two decades of the detached academic study of African religion I crossed the line and became a fully-fledged, certified and practicing African diviner-healer, and when still I later en-

gaged in long-range cultural comparison when this was still greatly disapproved of by most of my anthropological colleagues educated in an abhorrence of ‘diffusionism’ (our discipline’s previous paradigm, before the structural-functionalism of our own student days), I widely came to be recognised as a divine trickster, with admitted exceptional skills and resources, yet so unwilling to submit to dominant paradigms and institutional structures as to be utterly distrusted as a scientist. My epistemological explorations as a professor of intercultural philosophy at Erasmus University as from 1998, now emeritus) have bred similar suspicions among my anthropological and African colleagues. Even my home institution of long standing, the Leiden African Studies Centre, where I played leading roles for over three decades, refused to publish the proceedings of my farewell conference (van Binsbergen 2019) – which they had themselves initiated and funded. I have learned to accept such vicissitudes as a the night side of paradigm. In science as in life, courage is an indispensable requisite for quality. Let me therefore declare here, once for all, that I am fully aware that cheating in my scientific work would completely defeat one of the three principal endeavours in my adult life (to serve my wife and children, as the foci of my self-purifying and self-redeeming love; to serve science as the royal – though bumpy – road to truth; to serve *belles lettres* in order to testify – albeit very imperfectly – to the splendour and horror of human life, especially my own) and would make a lie of my very existence. I have demonstrably pursued my scientific research and writing with more passion and diligence than any other scholar I know of, and true to that passionate dedication I have never cheated as a scientist, nor will I ever do so.

When however, later that school year, Dr van de Wansum taught on Ancient history and the Neolithic, he volunteered the view that we cannot possibly know if not some much more highly developed earlier civilisation, now disappeared without a trace, preceded those civilisations we know from history and archaeology. Perhaps our civilisation was the product of decline from some unknown, older, far more perfect form.

This view has a respectable ancestry in the intellectual life of the West: Hesiod’s *ἡρώτα μὲν πρόσωτα γένος* ‘The first age was golden...’ (*Opera et dies*, 109),<sup>254</sup> Plato’s Atlantis legend in *Critias* and *Timaeus*,<sup>255</sup> and also, although less articulate and less consistent, in Ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian mythology. This myth was revived in modern esoteric writings by Theosophists and Anthroposophists, foremost Blavatsky and Donnelly,<sup>256</sup> and thus has become a major component of New-Age lore. It surfaces again with Hapgood (1966 / 1979), who has sought to derive esoteric knowledge from the *Maps of the Ancient Sea Kings* – including Piri Reis’s 1513 map, showing – decades before these coasts were properly charted – an uncannily precise

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<sup>254</sup> Hesiod / Gaisford 1823. Lévi-Strauss used this quotation as motto for his 1962 book.

<sup>255</sup> Plato 1975. Without joining the crowds of New-Age Atlantis enthusiasts, both my sometime co-author Fred Woudhuizen, and I myself, have ventured into the mine field of Atlantis studies, by proposing possible etymologies of the name ‘Atlantis’; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 55n, 306, 372 f.; Woudhuizen 2002.

<sup>256</sup> Blavatsky 1950; Donnelly 1882. For an interesting overview of these 19<sup>th</sup>-c. ideas, cf. Jennifer Westwood’s chapters on Atlantis and on Lemuria, in: Westwood n.d.; and the extensive section on Atlantis in the reprint collection: Hare 1995-2007.

depiction of the southern coasts of South America.<sup>257</sup> However, the possibility which my teacher advanced was directly in contradiction with the biological and cultural evolutionary views that I had internalised in the preceding two years, and I asked permission to present my relevant knowledge before the class. On the basis of the social and intellectual indebtedness I had build up with the forgery episode, it was an offer my teacher could not refuse, and so the next history class was devoted to a summary of the Teilhardian synthesis, as understood by a fourteen-year old, and adapted for a pubescent lay audience. I absolutely denied the possibility of cultural devolution from some earlier, now forgotten, civilisations superior to our own or to those known from the Ancient world. Human evolution, both biological and cultural, was to be conceived as a unilineal process from lower to higher forms,

*'vers le haut et en avant'*: moving both upwards, and ahead (Teilhard's adage for human history).

Looking back across more than half a century, it would be fair to say that my first, juvenile attempt to grapple with the puzzles of long-range human history implicitly reiterated the biologism<sup>258</sup> characteristic of Teilhard's work. Admittedly, cultural change in many ways may be (and has been) compared with genetic adaptation in biological evolution, both being a species's collective response to changing environmental conditions with greater or lesser success. But the fact that culture is *not* (or hardly, and at least not in a way that is empirically demonstrated and theoretically affirmed) somatically / genetically inherited, but is invested, outside the body and its histology and anatomy, in representations, institutions and language which are subject to interpersonal communication via the senses, allows in principle for limitless flexibility.

#### T. HOW CAN HUMANKIND'S CORE MYTHEMES REMAIN MORE OR LESS RECOGNISABLE OVER TENS OF THOUSANDS OF YEARS?

In my work on long-range comparative mythology I have wondered how a small number of basic mythemes could appear to persist over time from, arguably, before the Out-of-Africa Exodus, which specialists now date at 80-60 ka BP (*cf.* van Binsbergen 2010: 155). A recent and authoritative statement on these old mythemes is by Michael Witzel (2012). The neurobiology answer to our question in small caps would be that these mythemes are instantly produced all the time as the repeated and converging, responses of the mind (thought to be an unchanging given) of Anatomically Modern Humans to similar outside stimuli – responses, therefore, that despite their similarities are historically independent from one another – so that similarity between these mythemes in concrete historical and geographical situations rests on mere parallel invention (*cf.* Farmer 2010). It is far from obvious

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<sup>257</sup> Similar views of civilisation as proceeding from an early height to decline (*cf.* Cantrell 1988) may be found in New-Age popular texts such as Wilson & Flem-Ath 2001, and Gilbert & Cotterell 1998, who all claim a superior very ancient civilisation (Atlantis, they suggest) to have existed near Yucatan, Meso America.

<sup>258</sup> 'Biologism' is the term for reductively and naïvely applying the perspectives and the theory of biology to a topic outside the obvious scope of biology. By the same token: 'sociologism', 'scientism', etc. Lacking an up-to-date theory of culture, and having a biologist's typical myopic disdain of humankind's specific cultural expressions, Teilhard had very little understanding of the historical development of human cultures enshrined in institutions, representations and language, but instead only saw one undifferentiated and unarticulated 'noosphere' (there is disagreement as to who first coined this term; *cf.* Anonymous, 'Noosphere'), analogous to the lithosphere and the barysphere, as an additional thin layer spread over the Earth's stony crust – almost even a *geologism*, rather than a biologism.

that mythemes, or any other cultural product, would persist over centuries, millennia, tens of millennia even, they would be prone to errors of transmission, mutation, cultural drift; and if they do survive across long periods, we need to identify the social and communicative mechanisms that support their continued reproduction; personally I am inclined to look for such mechanisms in initiation cults, which have been recognised to retain and reproduce very ancient cultural material. Of course, one could dismiss the modern, long-range turn in comparative mythology altogether, and maintain that these very old mythemes are mere figments of the scholarly imagination; Farmer appears to incline to that position. An alternative explanation would be to affirm their very old nature, but claim that these ancient mythemes in some way have been genetically programmed in the human (*i.e.* Anatomically Modern Human) psyche – just like the capability for articulate language has been claimed – by one of the greatest minds of our time and age, Noam Chomsky – to be thus programmed (Chomsky 1968). I realise that in the field of comparative mythology, such an hypothesis would force us to rethink the tenet, ever since Tylor initiated modern culture theory (Tylor 1948 / 1871), to the effect that all culture *by definition* has to be *learned* *i.e.* transmitted through an explicit process of sensory communication. An exponent of the view of the potentially innate nature of certain representations has been the psychologist Carl Gustav Jung, linking such innate memories not just, universally, to Anatomically Modern Humans, but to specific subsets of humanity: nations, tribes, ethnic groups, families, regions (Jung 1959 / 1978). By implication, Jews, like Freud, would have a partly different collective unconscious from Gentiles, such as Jung himself. The utter undesirability of such a theory (because of its racist implications; *cf.* Wilmsen 1993) does not mean that we can close our eyes for the problem of perpetuity posed by the mythemes reconstructed to belong to humankind's oldest mythical repertoire. (I discussed the same question in my 2018 book on Durkheim, pp. 275n.f.)

Clearly, there is something of a case, although slight, to be made for a certain amount of heredity in cultural evolution. But to return to the stream of my argument, the apparently limitless flexibility of the human cultural evolution certainly implies the possibility of decline – even though our modern insistence on cultural relativism, in other words on the equality of different cultural positions through space and time, hardly provides us with tools to adequately measure progress and decline in cultural history. Moreover, that historic civilisations may disappear without a trace, only in exceptional cases to be retrieved by the scholarship of a much later period, has been common knowledge – ever since the Ancient Sumerian, Elamite, Hittite and Indus civilisations, with their languages and scripts, had to be retrieved by scholarship in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, across a gap of three to five millennia of total<sup>259</sup> ignorance. On a lesser scale, the scope and splendour of Buddhism as a dominant religious expression, not only in the countries around India but also in India itself, had to be carefully reconstructed by European scholars from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century onward, when (at least on Indian soil) Buddhism as a despised world religion had been completely eclipsed by Hinduism and Islam (Allen 2002). The implication of all these recent discoveries is that archaeology, being unpredictable, may reveal in future decades and centuries historical complexes that today we cannot even begin to suspect, and that such revelations may totally change our view of the course of cultural history – including the possibility of finding civilisational complexes at a higher

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<sup>259</sup> One could argue that this statement needs to be qualified since Chittim / Hittites were repeatedly mentioned in the Bible, especially in *Genesis* and *Exodus*, as inhabitants of Syro-Palestine. However, what recent archaeology discovered was the kingdom and people of Hatti, owners of the language and script deciphered by Hrozný in the early 20<sup>th</sup> c. CE, and inhabitants of Anatolia with a capital at Boğazköy, whose effective rule seldom or never extended to Syro-Palestine.

level of development than anything we know today.<sup>260</sup>

In passing we should realise, once more, the possibility of fraud and forgery also in the revelation of hitherto unknown historical cultural complexes. A decade ago the archaeological world was rocked by the discovery of the splendid Jiroft complex, on the Iranian Plateau, which some scholars now consider a forgery (Perrot & Madjidzadeh 2003). Very recently, the famous excavator of Çatal Hüyük, Mellaart, was accused of extensive fraud, although in the pages of the specialist journal *TALANTA* (2019) he was partly disculpated by Zanger & Woudhuizen, specialists on the Luwian language, on the grounds that Mellaart's knowledge of Luwian was too limited to be able to have fraudulently produced his alleged forgeries, with all the fine linguistic points displayed there. For extensive general discussions of fraud in archaeology, cf.: Munro 1905 (clearly an over-sceptical author who denies even Neolithic man the capability of sculptural representation; cf. the French prehistorian Cartailhac, who for many years denied the authenticity of the Altamira Upper Palaeolithic rock art); Rieth 1967; Feder 1999; Hitchcock 2013. Famous individual cases include the Piltdown case briefly discussed above; the prehistoric script claimed by the archaeologist / antiquarian Solomon Reinach misled by his informant on the Glouzel question (but extensive evidence of prehistoric scripts – albeit a contradiction in terms<sup>261</sup> – has been presented by the feminist archaeologist Marija Gimbutas of unshakable reputation);<sup>262</sup> while several cases, e.g. of the Vinland map, and the Phoenician inscription from Brazil, are still in the balance (Cross 1968; Gordon 1968, 1968, 1971; Wallis 1990).

Yet, with all these reservations, my youthful exposé largely reproduced the dominant paradigm informing today's proto-history, archaeology and palaeo-anthropology: according to this paradigm, *humankind goes through one, shared, and global process of interconnected socio-cultural history, where local and regional variation is massive and important, yet translocal and even transcontinental communications have informed the outcomes of this process everywhere on the globe to such an extent, that it is virtually impossible to completely forfeit the cultural achievements at other points on the globe, and to maintain that humankind as a whole should move, not towards accumulation and innovation, but towards loss and decline*. However rendered, and however censored for political correctness, the dominant view of human history is one of progress, accumula-

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<sup>260</sup> A case could be made for a maritime archaeological complex in front of the coast of Gujarat, Western India; the coast before Yucatan, Meso America; and also for the pre-flooding subcontinent of Sunda, which with the melting of the polar caps from the Early Holocene (10 ka BP) on became inundated and whose population has been claimed to flee, in part, in all directions, including Taiwan, Oceania, the Asian and African shores of the Indian Ocean including the Indus Valley, the Persian Gulf, and the Red Sea (Oppenheimer 1998; Dick-Read 2005; van Binsbergen 2019). When I looked closer into this matter I came to the conclusion that the culture that could be reconstructed for pre-flooding Sunda can hardly have been ancestral, in detail, to that of Indonesia today, and that in fact we are largely at a loss to reconstruct pre-Sunda 'Indonesian' culture.

<sup>261</sup> The distinction between history and prehistory depends on the very presence or absence of writing.

<sup>262</sup> Gimbutas 1991: ch. 8, 'The sacred script'; for scandals in which Reinach was involved, also see: Brodrick 1963.

tion, and interconnectedness, in ways that in details may be divergent and parallel, but that yet when viewed in their totality, would tend to unilinearity. *Humankind's history is considered to be unique, non-repetitive, and progressive.* This was not yet the view of the 'fathers of history', Herodotus and Thucydides, who acknowledged the concatenation and causal accumulation of events (in Thucydides limited in space and time to Attica and the Pelopponesus in the course of one century; in Herodotus's masterly grasp, however, encompassing the entire known Ancient World (the Mediterranean and West Asia across almost a millennium) but without imposing a differential evaluation upon earlier or later phases. The linear and progressive line in history is largely indebted to the Judeo-Christian tradition – limited in historical elaboration in the Israelite world of the *Old Testament* despite its incidental expectations of an Anointed One (מָשִׁיחַ *ha Meshiah*), but extensively worked out in the Christian theology of *history as salvation history*, from the creation of the world to the Last Judgment.

### 4.3. The project of the book *Forbidden Archeology*

Against the background of this underlying, unilinear and progressive paradigm informing important versions of human history today, the argument of *Forbidden Archeology*, and the elaborate apparent evidence on which it is based, can only be considered devastatingly shocking.

My juvenile first explorations into evolution and palaeoanthropology coincided with the worldwide celebration of the first centennial of the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (Darwin 1859) and I benefited from the spate of evolution-related popular-scientific works published in that connection. The empirically-grounded overall picture of evolution on Earth as presented in Teilhard de Chardin's work (on which I concentrated as a 14-15 year old) is and was scarcely controversial from a scientific point of view; what was controversial was his theoretical and ideological elaboration, where Teilhard (especially in what is generally considered his principal work, *Le Phénomène Humain*, written in 1938-1940, but – because of the 'Byzantine' contradictions attending Roman Catholic clerical life and its authority structure – only published after the author's death in 1955), postulated:

- a *mental* component to all manifestations of matter in the universe,
- a unique place (of course, an increasingly moot point given the recent, abundant evidence on Earth-like planets far outside our solar system) for Earth in the universe as the only spot (...?) where a one-directional, sustained and apparently pre-ordained process of the unfolding of the capabilities of matter / mind led:
- not only to the *emergence* of life (on the basis of terrestrial, not immigrant extraterrestrial factors; another moot point given theories of *panspermia*, from the Presocratic Anaxagoras to modern Arrhenius

and Hoyle, and its dazzling complexification and progress, but also

- to the *emergence of conscious, self-reflexive thought* in the form of humans
- in such a way (and here most scientists would part ways with Teilhard) that the features of this process can and must be extrapolated into the near and remote future, as the *final and total convergence of all cosmically generated consciousness to one final end, the Point Omega*, which in effect would amount to a total divinisation / Christianisation of the universe.

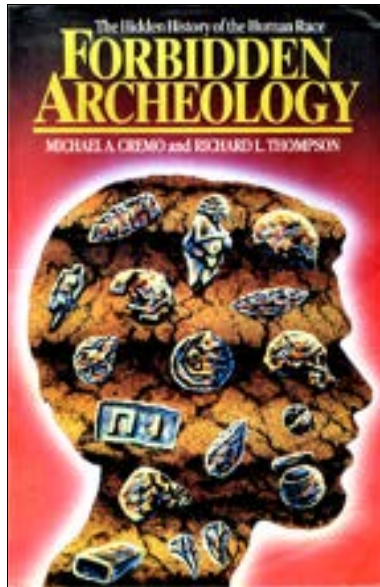


Fig. 4.4. Dust jacket of *Forbidden Archeology*

This is not the place for a fuller discussion of Teilhard's work; we shall come back to it in greater detail in the next chapter of this book. However, I have recently been re-reading *Le Phenomene Humain* sixty years after my first encounter, and I must confess that (despite the considerable scientific and philosophical growth which I have myself gone through in that long period) such revisiting turned out to be far more positive than I anticipated.

But whatever specific and potentially controversial use Teilhard made of the idea of evolution, *evolution theory has come to stay*, and has established itself as the dominant paradigm in biology, palaeontology, palaeoanthropology, geology and many related fields

– even though the enormous progress in genetics, molecular biology, ecology, earth sciences, chemistry, mathematics, statistics *etc.* since Darwin's time have suggested to us rather different and more complex answers to the question as to the causes and mechanisms of evolution. As commonly happens when a scientific paradigm establishes itself, general consensus has arisen among specialists to the effect that nearly all reliable available evidence now seems to corroborate the overall theory, so that it is considered most unlikely that any evidence destructive to the theory will ever be found.<sup>263</sup>

The purpose of the two authors of *Forbidden Archeology*, M.A. Cremo and R.L. Thompson, is nothing less than to challenge the evolution paradigm in favour of a Bhaktivedanta Hindu alternative view.<sup>264</sup> The first author is a documentalist proclaimedly having spend eight years on the academic substantiation of the book's central thesis. Thompson holds a PhD in mathematics and has published on evolutionary biology. Their personal credentials towards supporting the credibility of their argument appear to be somewhat limited (neither of the two authors is a palaeoanthropologist, geologist, or biologist with manifest authority based on peer-reviewed publications), and it may not just be false humility that has led to the situation where the extensive, 32-page bibliography (containing over 600 items of full bibliographical description) of this 914-pp. work lists none of the authors's own publications.<sup>265</sup>

However, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and not in the chef's credentials. After the prelims, the book consists of two main parts, entitled 'I. Anomalous evidence', and 'II. Accepted evidence', followed by Appendices, of which the first part deals with chemical and radiometric testing methods of human skeleton remains, leading on to what are perhaps the most alarming text sections of the entire book: 'A2. Evidence for advanced culture in distant ages' [ and by distant the authors mean anything between the Upper Palaeolithic, 12 ka BP, and the Pre-Cambrian, older than 590 Ma BP ], and 'A3. Summary of anomalous evidence related to human antiquity'. The authors's strategy may be summarised as follows. By and large accepting (although critical of details; but their accep-

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<sup>263</sup> On the notion of paradigm, cf. Kuhn 1962, 1970, 1970, 1974. Recent philosophies of sciences are no longer so impressed with the concept of paradigm and would rather stress the communicative, interactive, socio-cultural process of science production. I have found the Kuhnian perspective on paradigms useful to understand why paradigm persist, and why they supplant each other – although Kuhn laid less stress than we do today on the institutional, local-political, individual-career aspects, and funding aspects of such competition and supplanting.

<sup>264</sup> The topic of this essay implicitly touches somewhat on the protracted discussion, especially among USA right-wing Christians, on the merits of an Intelligent Design theory concerning the origin of life and of humans, as an allegedly viable alternative to the mainstream scientific theory of evolution. We shall come back to this in the next chapter. I have no intention to join that debate. Despite my continued interest in Teilhard's work, I ceased to be a Christian half a century ago, and find the Intelligent Design perspective entrenched and regressive. I have rather different concerns here: not so much the existence and knowability of God, but the existence and knowability of historical facts. Yet from the viewpoint of a Perpetually Oscillating Reality, both evolution theory and the notion of Intelligent Design would have a point – the default situation being evolution.

<sup>265</sup> One of the co-authors, Cremo (1998), presented an overview of the impact of the book.



tance is in itself puzzlingly inconsistent) the various standard methods to determine the age of the stratigraphic context in which human remains have been found, a detailed assessment of much of the central and especially the peripheral palaeoanthropological and archaeological scientific literature on human remains and artefacts strongly suggests to them that the evidence is contradictory, not just in one or two cases but in scores, even hundreds of cases: skeletal remains and artefacts that according to the dominant paradigm should be found in stratigraphic contexts of a specific age range and never more than a few million years old (which is the mainstream estimate of humans' emergence as a species), often fall considerably, sometimes dramatically, out of that range, in ways that play havoc with the evolution paradigm: they appear in stratigraphies that according to the accepted dating methods predate the appearance of Man on Earth by millions, sometimes even hundreds of millions, in a few cases even a few billion years. Often the various researchers originally reporting on these finds, or their contemporary critics, would seem to have been conscious of these contradictions but, in the authors' perception, these initial misgivings have been hushed over in the interest of an untainted preservation of the dominant, evolutionary paradigm. The theory of evolution as determining present-day views of humanity's remote history appears to be based, in Cremo & Thompson's opinion, not on solid empirical facts, but on negligence and dissimulation, and a radically different view of humanity's remote past is therefore proposed by them. An important part of the argument is devoted to fossil human evidence from the Americas, confronting the near-consensus that this part of the world was populated only in the Uppermost Palaeolithic, mainly long after 20 ka BP (cf. Tamm *et al.* 2007; my Fig. 3.16).

I cannot reproduce here the hundreds of apparently well-referenced and illustrated cases which our two authors discuss in detail. Nor do I have the specialist palaeoanthropological competence to review the authors's discussion of these cases in detail. Suffice it to reproduce, in my Table 4.1, the most telling cases they list in their Appendix 3: 'Summary of anomalous evidence related to human antiquity', referring to the oldest stratigraphic contexts to be discussed in their book, and to be available world-wide.

Period / Ma BP	Site	Category	Reference	Section of <i>Forbidden Archeology</i>
Pre-Cambrian				
2800	Ottosdal, South Africa	grooved metallic sphere	Jimison 1982	A2.14.3
>600	Dorchester MA	metal vase	<i>Scientific American</i> , June 5, 1852	A2.5
Cambrian				
505-590	Antelope Spring, Utah	shoe print	Meister 1968	A2.14.2
Devonian				
360-408	Kingoodie Quarry, Scotland	iron nail in stone	Brewster 1844	A2.3
Carboniferous				
320-360	Tweed, England	gold thread in stone	<i>Times</i> (London), June 22, 1844	A2.4
312	Wilburton OK	iron pot	Rusch 1971	A2.11
286-360	Webster IO	carved stone	<i>Daily News</i> , Omaha NE, April 2, 1897	A2.10
286-320	Macoupin IL	human skeleton	<i>The Geologist</i> , December 1862	6.3.1

286-320	Rockcastle County KE, and other sites	humanlike footprints	Burroughs 1938	6.3.2
280-320	Wilburton OK	silver object	Steiger 1979	A2.13
260-320	Morrisonville IL	gold chain	<i>Morrisonville Times</i> , June 11, 1891	A2.9
260-320	Heavener, OK	block wall in coal	Steiger 1979	A2.13
Triassic				
213-248	Nevada NV	shoe print	Ballou 1922	A2.12
Jurassic				
150	Turkmenian Republic	human footprint	<i>Moscow News</i> 1983, no. 24	6.3.3
Cretaceous				
65-144	Saint-Jean de Livet, France	metal tubes in chalk	Corliss 1987a	A2.14.1
Eocene				
50-55	Picardy, France	eoliths	Breuil 1910	3.4.1
50-55	Clermont, France	eoliths, palaeoliths	Breuil 1910	3.4.1
45-55	Laon, France	chalk ball, cut wood	Melleville 1862	A2.6
38-55	Barton Cliff, England	carved stone	Fisher 1912	2.16
38-55	Essex, England	eoliths, palaeoliths	Warren 1920	3.3.7
38-45	Delemont, Switzerland	human skeleton	de Mortillet 1883	6.2.7
Oligocene				
33-55	Boston Tunnel, Tuolumne Table Mt., CA	neolith carved stone	Whitney 1880	5.5.8
33-55	Montezuma Tunnel, Tuolumne Table Mt. CA	neoliths	Whitney 1880	5.5.9
33-55	Tuolumne Table Mt., CA	human skeleton	Winslow 1873	6.2.6.2
26-54	Baraque Michel, Belgium	palaeoliths	Rutot 1907	4.4
26-54	Bay Bonnet, Belgium	palaeoliths	Rutot 1907	4.4
26-30	Boncelles, Belgium	palaeoliths	Rutot 1907	4.4

*Legend* (original): 'In Table A3.1. [our present Table 4.1, WvB ] sites mentioned in this book are listed in order of the published minimum ages we [ = Cremona & Thompson ] find most likely or otherwise worthy of consideration. The following is a glossary of terms used in the table.

*eoliths* = naturally broken stone with one or more edges intentionally modified or worn by use.

*palaeoliths* = stones purposely fashioned by chipping into a recognizable tool type

*neoliths* = the most advanced stone tools and utensils

*human* = identified by at least some workers as Anatomically Modern Human

*incised, broken, carved, or scraped bones* = purposely modified animal bones.

[ a few editorial changes were made in this table to match the editorial conventions of the present book as a whole. ]

Table 4.1. Anomalous human remains in very old stratigraphic contexts, according to the authors of *Forbidden Archeology*

#### 4.3.1. Cremona and Thompson's original references to Table 4.1:<sup>266</sup>

Ballou, W.H., 1922, 'Mystery of the petrified "shoe sole" 5, 000,000 years old,' *American Weekly* section of the *New York Sunday American*, October 8, p. 2.

Breuil, H., 1910, 'Sur la présence d'éolithes à la base de l'Éocène Parisien,' *L'Anthropologie*, 21: 385-408.

Brewster, D., 1844, 'Queries and statements concerning a nail found imbedded in a block of sandstone obtained from Kingoodie, Mylnfield, Quarry, North Britain', *Report of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Notices and Abstracts of Communications*, p. 51.

<sup>266</sup> Not systematically included in the end bibliography of the present book.

- Burroughs, W. G., 1938, 'Human-like footprints, 250 million years old', *The Berea Alumnus: Berea College, Kentucky*, November, pp. 46-47.
- Corliss 1987a [is not to be found in the book's bibliography, perhaps is meant: Corliss, W.R., 1978, *Ancient Man: A Handbook of Puzzling Artifacts*. Glen Arm: Sourcebook Project, and listed accordingly]
- De Mortillet, G., 1883, *Le Préhistorique*, Paris: Reinwald.
- Fisher, O., 1912, 'Some handiworks of early men of various ages', *The Geological Magazine*, London, 9: 218-222.
- Jimison, S., 1982, 'Scientists baffled by space spheres', *Weekly World News*, July 27.
- Meister, W.J., 1968, 'Discovery of trilobite fossils in shod footprint of human in "Trilobite Bed" – a Cambrian formation, Antelope Springs, Utah', *Creation Research Quarterly*, 5, 3: 97-102.
- Melleville, M., 1862a, 'Foreign intelligence', *The Geologist*, 5: 145-148.
- Melleville, M., 1862b, 'Note sur un objet travaillé de main d'homme trouvé dans les lignites du Laonnois', *Revue Archéologique*, 5: 181-186.
- Rusch, Sr., W.H., 1971, 'Human footprints in rocks', *Creation Research Society Quarterly*, 7: 201-202.
- Rutot, A., 1907, 'Un grave problem: Une industrie humaine datant de l'époque oligocène: Comparaison des outils avec ceux des Tasmaniens actuels', *Bulletin de la Société Belge de Géologie, de Paléontologie et d'Hydrologie*, 21: 439-482.
- Steiger, B., 1979, *Worlds Before Our Own*, New York: Berkley.
- Warren, S.H., 1920, 'A natural 'eolith' factory beneath the Thanet Sand', *Quarterly Journal of the Geological Society of London*, 76: 238-253.
- Whitney, J.D., 1880, *The auriferous gravels of the Sierra Nevada of California*, Harvard University, Museum of Comparative Zoology Memoir, 6(1).
- Winslow, C.F., 1873, 'The President reads extracts from a letter from Dr. C.F. Winslow relating the discovery of human remains in Table Mountain, Cal., Jan 1', *Proceedings of the Boston Society of Natural History*, 75: 257-259.

With the exception of the Melleville 1862a reference, none of the six Table 4.1 references to periodicals appear in the book's bibliography, and none is more specific than indicating the periodical's year, month and sometimes date – never author and title of the relevant article are mentioned, nor their pagination. Admittedly, this is common practice in some natural-science contexts, even today. Of these six periodical references, five are 19th-c.:

- Moscow News*, 1983, no. 24  
*Scientific American*, June 5, 1852  
*Times*, London, June 22, 1844  
*Daily News*, Omaha, Nebraska, April 2, 1897  
*The Geologist*, December 1862 (= Melleville 1862a)  
*Morrisonville Times*, June 11, 1891

Overlooking this list of references to what should have been the most staggering and impressive, for relating to the oldest contexts, claims on anomalous human presence in the remote geological past, we can only be disappointed, not to say appalled. Most of these references derive from venues that cannot under any condition be accepted by specialist scientists today as reliable empirical sources – newspapers, college periodicals, popular literature. Others derive from journals on 'creation research', in other words from contexts that cannot be taken seriously on the empirical level because their religiously-motivated rejection of the evolutionary paradigm is bound to prejudice their observations. The rest largely derives from the earliest professional attempts at palaeontology and archaeology – from a period when the canons of these sciences had not yet been worked out, and modern standards of method and theory cannot be expected to be applied. The one entry that derives from a great name in the history of palaeontology / archaeology,

Breuil's, clearly represents the first, awkward, attempts to come to terms with the class of objects in question (notably, *eoliths*), and cannot be considered to be of lasting value.

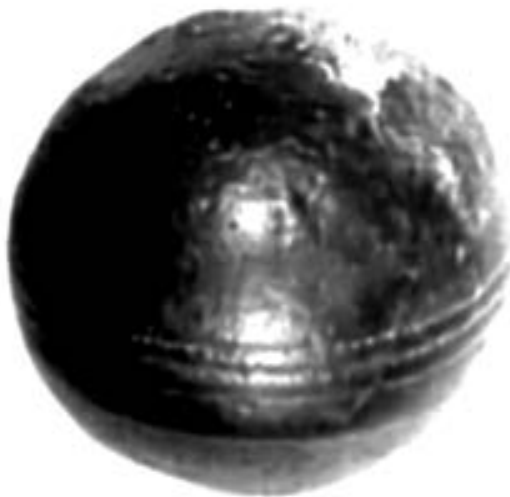


Fig. 4.5. The grooved sphere alleged to be from Pre-Cambrian South African soil.

The most recent entry, Jimison's, is at the same time the most spectacular and the most disappointing. It is a mere journalistic piece, which cannot be taken at face value despite the enormity of the claims it makes:

'Over the past several decades, South African miners have found *hundreds* [ my italics – WvB ] of metallic spheres, at least one of which has three parallel grooves running around its equator (Fig A2.9 [ reproduced here as my Fig. 4.5 ] ). The spheres are of two types – 'one of solid bluish metal with white flecks, and another which is a hollow ball filled with a white spongy center' (Jimison 1982 as quoted in Cremo & Thompson 1993: 83, where also additional statements are quoted from Mr Roelf Marx, curator of the museum of Klerksdorp<sup>267</sup> (a small town in South Africa) where important specimens of

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<sup>267</sup> Considering the absolutely spectacular implications of the reports on the Klerksdorp spheres if they could be demonstrated to be true, it is most remarkable that these discoveries, or hoaxes, have – as I found out after considerable efforts – left so few traces on the Internet and the published media. One explanation may be that the discoveries were made prior to the rise of Internet as today's principal means of communication. Other reasons may be: embarrassment by the inexplicable nature of the case; or certainty that the claimed discoveries were fraudulent; or South Africa's involvement, at the time, in rather more important matters – the struggle to end apartheid. In the context of this book's overall argument, it does not greatly matter whether the grooved spheres from Klerksdorp really exist

these spheres are being held, and from A. Bisschoff, professor of geology at Potchefstroom University, South Africa – a reputable institution of higher learning, although (being originally Afrikaander-dominated – not entirely unblemished in the history of the struggle against apartheid).

The context in which these spheres are found is estimated to be 2.8 billion years old – Southern Africa is home to some of the oldest surface rock formations on Earth. At the time Jimison wrote, South Africa was in the throes of apartheid – a civil war was on to end that undesirable condition. Most South African miners belonged to the oppressed ‘Black’ majority, and despite the exceptional hardness of the metal constituting the spheres (allegedly, their surface cannot be scratched by steel), one cannot preclude the possibility that the spheres, including their puzzling horizontal grooves, were made by present-day people expressing their anti-establishment feelings by creating a scientific hoax.<sup>268</sup> We are not even told what the sphere’s diameter is, or what the spongy substance turned out to be with which one of the spheres (the grooved one?) is reported to be filled. (Is it the decayed tissue of Extraterrestrials? The remains of panspermic large molecules bringing life to the Earth? God’s brain tissue?) When I first came in contact with *Forbidden Archeology*, a decade ago, I was deeply impressed with these spheres, and I designed all sorts of theories that might account for them, but now, having assessed in detail in what sloppy and obsolete context of documentation and scientific accountability they find themselves, in the hands of Cremo & Thompson, I am more inclined to simply dismiss them as another UFO-like fantasy. I have undertaken an Internet search on the aftermath of Jimison’s 1982 publication, and I have tried to contact the book’s South African spokesmen on these spheres. All to no avail – the matter is as much covered up as the detailed digital code for the mining of bitcoins.... But then: one sphere could have been manufactured and planted fraudulently, but hundreds?

We note an interesting similarity between this sphere and the spheres that feature in some of the works of the Belgian surrealist graphical artist René Magritte (Fig. 4.6).

What do Cremo & Thompson do with the data so painstakingly though unimpressively gleaned from the pre- and parascientific peripheries of palaeoanthropology? As so many inhabitants of the North Atlantic region today including myself, they have been inspired by South Asian spirituality, which in their case not only guides them existentially but (perhaps somewhat regrettably) also intellectually.

#### U. MY OWN POSITION VIS-À-VIS SOUTH ASIAN RELIGIONS.

Let me clarify my own position lest I will be mistaken to be a partisan, or alternatively a

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the way they are described in Cremo & Thompson, or are merely imaginary. In both cases, thinking through their implications is what this chapter is all about.

<sup>268</sup> Scientific hoaxes are not entirely uncommon. Earlier in this chapter I described my own making, as a boy, a pastiche of a Late Medieval document that – if I had not personally recanted and interfered – would have given rise to a scientific hoax contesting Columbus’s discovery of America (never mind the rival claims featuring Native Americans (!), Phoenicians, Egyptians, the predecessors of the Meso American deity or culture hero Kon-Tiki, St Brendan, Vikings, Breton Fishermen, etc.) Elsewhere in the present book (also cf. van Binsbergen 1999d / 2015, on Guattari) I refer to Sokal’s hoax (Sokal 1996; Sokal & Bricmont 1997) which consisted in trying to make Post-modern philosophical discourse ridiculous by having a respectable cultural-studies journal accept a nonsensical pastiche of a Post-modern textual reading of Quantum Mechanics.

determined enemy, of the Hindu world-view Cremo & Thompson subscribe to. After having been brought up a Christian and leaving that faith (despite profound mystical experiences while growing up) because it did not offer a solution for the profound crisis I found myself in at age 15, religious-anthropological fieldwork brought me to study North African popular Islam and both royal cults and cults of affliction in Zambia, South Central Africa. Local popular religious idioms tend to be low-threshold, community-based, and access is gained through participation and social identification with the adherents, rather than through an act of faith and conversion – so such religious systems’ tenets selectively seep into the fieldworker’s mind and practice – the twice-annual cult of Tunisian saints is still part of our family life after half a century – without being constructed into an exclusive and coherent world-view.<sup>269</sup> In a similar way (i.e. affirmative practice without an overall cognitive and existential commitment as a believer), but inevitably enhanced by my attaining and retaining a position of leadership as diviner-healer, I have more or less adhered to *sangoma* religion since 1989. From 1990 onward I opened up to the partly South Asian (Buddhist and Hindu) background of *sangoma* religion; in recent years also my Zambian cultic and royal kinship experience has revealed its partly South Asian and Sunda background (van Binsbergen 2019, 2020)? In addition to the gradual transmission to Western Europe of South Asian religious practices and representations, my extensive and repeated travelling in South, East and South East Asia from 2002 on has brought me in close personal contact with Hinduism, Buddhism / Lamaism, Taoism and Shintoism, which again involved my local worshipping and inevitably left traces in my personal spirituality, world-view, literary writing (I published books of poetry on Thai and Japanese Buddhism, depicting myself as an occasional worshipper; 2010 and 2019), and scholarship (e.g. van Binsbergen 2017, 2020). I also posted several videos on Tamil Nadu temples on YouTube) without making me an adherent in the strict sense, of those religions. In the background is my specific theory of religious practice as detached from religious beliefs, which informs much of my *sangoma* activities and much of the present book.

Cremo & Thompson’s research, undertaken and published in the context of the Hindu-philosophical Bhaktivedanta Institute at San Diego, California, USA (the book is dedicated, with an untranslated Sanskrit motto,<sup>270</sup> to His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda), is to state the case for a Hindu cosmology which rejects the Western (ultimately Judaeo-Christian) unilinear and unitary conception of history, and instead poses the doctrine of successive *aeons*. According to this doctrine, the history of the universe consists of distinct periods, at the end of which a cataclysm (in principle brought about by the primal god Śiva) totally destroys the world, in order to make place for an entirely new period where everything has started afresh. In such a world, evolution has no meaning. The traces of appar-

<sup>269</sup> Cf. van Binsbergen 1988b, 1987d / 2003h. <sup>270</sup> Transliterated and translated, the motto runs:

‘om ajñāna-timirāndhasya jñānāñjana-śalākayā  
cakṣur unmilitāmyena tasmāi śrī-gurave namaḥ’

I was born in the darkest ignorance, and  
my spiritual master opened my eyes with  
the torch of knowledge. I offer my respectful  
obeisances unto him,

a passage repeated several times in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (Canto 4, 6 and 8; Prabhupāda 1987); in this sect is the standard honorific phrase for adepts when addressing their spiritual master. In my opinion, *sangoma* lodges are largely modelled after South Asian *ashrams*, which makes this motto doubly relevant here.

ently older life forms found as fossils are to be interpreted not as truly, directly ancestral (through a chain of evolution) to present-day forms, but as immutable remnants of an earlier aeon, accidentally preserved from a past world otherwise totally destroyed and disappeared without, or nearly without, a trace. Humanity as we know it today has undergone no evolutionary development but emerged fully-fledged at the beginning of the present aeon. One is puzzled how such a travesty of scientific thought (a travesty, since it is an anachronism in our intellectual world of globalised modern knowledge and culture, where ever since Vico and Hegel<sup>271</sup> the time dimension has been taken as crucial) could be mentally combined, as in *Forbidden Archeology*, with

- authority-enhancing rituals of impression management (in other words, window dressing), such as diligent citation and bibliography, and
- a largely (yet, given the authors's viewpoint, puzzlingly inconsistent: one cannot use in positive evidence the very geology one sets out to destroy) unshakable reliance on scientific dating through physical and chemical methods.



(a)

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<sup>271</sup> Hegel 1952; Heidegger 1980, 1993; Fulda 2001; Rothe, 2001. If Hegel's view may be summarised as 'the World as the gradual unfolding of Spirit through History', then it is clear that Teilhard de Chardin's work is largely a (heterodox) Roman-Catholic, scientific application of Hegel. Teilhard does not seem to have been aware of this rapprochement: in *Le Phénomène humain*, which does not have the format of a philosophical treatise and scarcely makes reference to other authors whether philosophers or not, Hegel is only mentioned once (p. 328), as one forcefully opposing – with Plato and Spinoza – the Christian idea of incarnation; instead, Teilhard sees cosmic evolution as a process, sustained across billions of years, of the incarnation of Christ (the Point Omega) in the universe. Further see my chapter 5, below.



(b, c)



(d)

Fig. 4.6. Strange grooved spheres depicted in the work of René Magritte

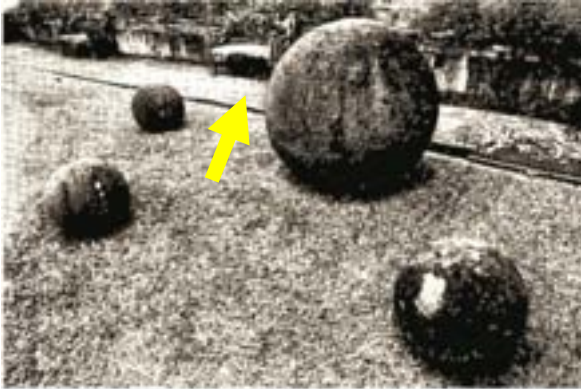


4.7.1. grooved elongated spheric stone in the Central Sahara



4.7.2. grooved concrete spheres preventing undesired parking of cars in the premises of the Leiden University Teaching Hospital, the Netherlands, 2020 CE





4.7.3



4.7.4

source: 4.7.4: Wilson & Rand-Adh 2002: photo section after p. 199; note the garden bench (top centre, light arrow) for comparative sizes (but on other photos of the same objects from other sources, as available in *Google Images*, the garden bench appears to be relatively much larger); 4.7.3: <http://oneangrysheep.weebly.com/the-mysterious-stone-spheres-of-costa-rica.html>.

4.7.4: Mystery spheres at Costa Rica; Note that some of these spheres also appear to display equatorial lines or grooves, like the South African metal spheres

*Fig. 4.7. Various manifestations of grooved spheres in real life.*

Also in the latter respect does the catastrophe theory fall back to a position rendered obsolete by evolution theory more than one and a half centuries ago; cf. Gould 1993.

In fact, there are at least two complementary problems here:

- the anti-Hegelian *denial of history* by the model of serial catastrophes separating essentially static periods of immutable beings, and
- the implicitly racialist and ethnocentric *denial of the unity of history* of humankind

(or at least of Anatomically Modern Humans, as presumably emerged in Africa c. 200 ka BP; cf. van Binsbergen 2015, 2020). It is only by affirming the genealogical / demographic / genetic interconnectedness of the various present-day branches of humankind that we can make sense of today's multicultural presence, as a major consideration for the immediate and distant future.

Whatever their positive contribution to the spiritual life and existential maturity of their followers (achievements which I am prepared to take seriously), the Bhaktivedanta views on human history differ only in specific phrasing from the theoretical alternative proposed by early opponents of Darwin's evolution theory:<sup>272</sup> 'in the Earth's crust God has deliberately hidden fossil forms different from those we know today, simply in order to test our Biblical faith in the creation of each individual species as an article of belief.'

*Forbidden Archeology* entails the attempt to totally upset the accepted modern, scientifically-based world-view by introducing a spasmodically cyclical conception of time – an Eternal Return, with catastrophic discontinuity separating the various aeons of the world's existence. The book is not entirely without merits, if it were only as a challenge that makes us aware of the tacit assumptions underlying our modern world-view.<sup>273</sup> In such a potentially catalytic effect (worthless in itself, yet conducive to illumination to be found along a different path) Cremona & Thompson's work is comparable to that of Velikovsky, who in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> c. CE (after contributing to the early phases of the Hebrew University at Jerusalem, Israel, and working as a Freud-trained psychiatrist in that country) revived and intensified the debate about the chronology of the Ancient world by a number of books (Velikovsky 1950, 1952, 1977, 1982) calling to question the converging scholarly views concerning Egypt's New Kingdom, Echnaton, the Exodus, and related issues. When reading Velikovsky with the moderately tutored eye of someone who, like myself, has done extensive research and authored scholarly publications on the Eastern Mediterranean Bronze Age including Ancient Egypt (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011; van Binsbergen 1997 / 2011, 2021), one is constantly torn between awe at Velikovsky's courage, sharpness of wit and power of imagination, and dismay over his preposterous iconoclasm; for better or worse, I have recognised in him in some respects a kindred spirit, and realise that I have sufficiently challenged established academic paradigms to expect an intellectual ostracism similar to that which was Velikovsky's fate in the USA. The macroscopic background phenomena which Velikovsky evokes (such as the dramatic dislocation of the Earth's axis due to the hypothetical nearby passage of the planet Mars; Hapgood favours the same hypothesis) seem to be too fantastic to be considered even remotely credible – but they would appear in a different light from the perspective of the oscillating

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<sup>272</sup> From an extensive literature, with major growth points in the 'Darwin years' 1959 and 2009, I merely mention: Desmond 1982.

<sup>273</sup> As we have seen above, the notion of Eternal Return of the Same (*Ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen*; cf. Löwith 1986; Stambaugh 1972) plays an important role in Nietzsche's work ((e.g. *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, and *Also sprach Zarathustra* 1973b / 1882, 1973a / 1885; Horneffer 1900; van Binsbergen 2015: 362 n464); but it is already found in St Augustine's *De Civitate Deo* (numerous editions e.g. 1467 CE; written early 5th c. CE). For a general discussion of the concept of eternal return, e.g. Eliade 1954, 1959. For an illuminating application in the context of Sartre's main work *L'Être et le Néant*, see Gardner 2009.

view of reality advanced in the present book: even thought totally impossibly by the standards of today's mainstream science, they might yet have an ephemeral probability which is larger than 0 albeit only infinitesimally so; *moreover, and by the same or a closely adjacent, surprising ontology, there is the possibility – or at least thinkability – that already the sheer formulation of a vision of the past, however preposterous, projects itself into the past by its own impetus, and retrospectively alters that past.* While the debate on Velikovsky's work has continued (e.g. Talbott 1980), and some authors do see merits in parts of it, clearly he has not succeeded in exploding the complacency of mainstream scholarship. In this respect Velikovsky fared far worse than his qualified admirer Martin Bernal,<sup>274</sup> who likewise dabbled in Ancient History far beyond his professional field (which in Bernal's field was: Sinology, and particularly Chinese political philosophy around 1900 CE), who set out to rewrite the history of the Western part of the Old World since the Bronze Age (Bernal 1987-2006) with visionary zeal, made many mistakes in the process for which however he deserved to be forgiven (Lefkowitz & McLean Rogers 1996; van Binsbergen 1997 / 2011, 2013 and references cited there), but who even prior to his death in 2013 smacked the satisfaction of seeing his views canonised (prematurely, in my opinion) as mainstream (Orrells *et al.* 2011).

#### 4.4. Historiography as both a scientific and a mythical project

In the more than fifty years of my academic association with anthropology as an empirical science I have moved from present-day ethnography and temporally relatively shallow ethnohistory spanning a few centuries within a very restricted geographical scope (as in my first, North African, fieldwork, 1968, 1970), to an analysis of vast expanses of space and time, encompassing the Mediterranean Bronze Age (as in my contributions to the *Black Athena* debate and to *Ethnicity in Mediterranean Protohistory*, 2011), the full time range attributed to Anatomically Modern Humans (as in my work on comparative mythology), and in research in progress on Mousterian *i.e.* Neanderthaloid graphical representations and their possible palaeoastronomical interpretation, and on the interpretation of cross-hatching patterns (201f). In 2002 I visited 周口店 Zhoukoudian, near Beijing, Peoples's Republic of China (where Young, Black and others, including Teilhard de Chardin, discovered Peking man) as a guest of a division of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. I have thus slightly made up for the fact that in my initial choice of academic subject, I gave up my adolescent, Teilhard-inspired dream of becoming a palaeoanthropologist, and instead became, first an historicising cultural anthropologist, and subsequently (as the fruit of my epistemological and existential critique of prevailing forms of African religious

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<sup>274</sup> Bernal latter rejected Velikovsky's revised chronology – 1987, p. 6, where Velikovsky is called a crank; it was Bernal's own greatest fear to have the same label planted upon himself – but Bernal accepted Velikovsky's equation of Oedipus and Achnaton, and claimed that in general Velikovsky had deserved a fairer treatment from mainstream scholarship.

studies) an intercultural philosopher. My interest in *Forbidden Archeology*, therefore, is as a philosopher investigating the foundations of historiography, much more than as one dabbling in palaeoanthropology.

I have occasionally described, also above, my life's scientific passion as the insistence 'to produce history where previously there was none' – the history of migration and shrine cults in four valleys in the highlands of North-western Tunisia; the history of healing cults in Western Zambia in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries; the history of cults of the land and royal cults in South Central Africa throughout the (almost entirely illiterate) second half of the second millennium CE; the history of the Nkoya people throughout that, largely precolonial and illiterate, period; the history of geomantic divination throughout the Old World (and part of the New World) during the last three millennia; the history of leopard-skin / granulation symbolism; a long-range historical reconstruction (greatly inspired by Michael Witzel) of the oldest mythemes of Anatomically Modern Humans; the pre- and protohistorical history of transcontinental (especially Sunda-related) continuities between Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, etc. In the process, I have explored empirical methods (linguistic analysis, distributional analysis of ethnographic traits in space and time, close reading of mythemes and their transformations, modes-of-production analysis as a skeleton framework in which to situate semantic and formal innovations) that might enable us to overcome – through the systematic and cautious application of models and theories – the paucity, even absence, of documentary evidence for most of the periods covered in these projects.

This drove home to me the essentially creative and imaginative nature of historiography. Very seldom, or never, do the data dictate one and only one historical interpretation of the facts. Just as there will be a number of different and complementary solutions for a system of  $n$  equations with  $p$  unknowns when  $p > n$ , in historical interpretation there will always be a number of possible rival interpretations that would seem to fit the data at hand equally well.<sup>275</sup> One of the main functions (but also dangers) of the *paradigm* in the development of science is to provide researchers with useful blinkers that (like horses teamed before a cart) allow them to keep away from most alternative paths of analysis, and to concentrate on one path that, given the intellectual and institutional environment in which they find themselves in their time and place, would appear to be the most promising and the most profitable, both in terms of revealing the truth, and also (shockingly!) careerwise. Going through all available evidence and weighing it all against existing and emerging interpretations, and submitting one's emerging conclusion to the forum of fellow-researchers from the same and adjacent fields of specialisation, are the accepted strategies, not necessarily resulting in (a) enhancing the truth value of one's conclusions, but at least resulting in (b) enhancing their short-term acceptance and one's personal institutional survival – (a) and (b) may be very different things. Grand speculation, based on vast factual knowledge accumulated over years of grappling with the topic, but also inspired by sudden intuition from the subconscious, may be a royal road to insight and truth, and it has been claimed in some cases even in the history of modern science to have yielded amazing results (like the German chemistry professor Kekulé's insight into the

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<sup>275</sup> Cf. Harding, 1976; Quine 1960, 1980, 1981, 1990; Duhem 1914, 1908.

hexagonal benzene ring, allegedly triggered by his daydreaming about the *ourobouros*<sup>276</sup> mythical snake biting its own tail),<sup>277</sup> but it is one increasingly, and regrettably, discouraged and negatively sanctioned in modern science, with its routinised, institutional, intersubjectivity-orientated, competitive, peer-reviewed and almost industrial methods.

Alternatives, nonetheless, are still available, although severely frowned upon. In a serious collection of papers on anthropology and parapsychology, Wolkowski reported on the *fairly impressive* attempts of paragnostos such as Stefan Ossowiecki to read archaeologically relevant impressions (life styles, crisis conditions of violence and destruction) from excavated artefacts.<sup>278</sup> We have already seen how over half a millennium ago, the North African scholar Ibn Ḥaldūn used the divination system of Islamic geomancy to inquire about that systems's own history – an approach I was to emulate myself but without hoping for trustworthy results.<sup>279</sup> For the sheer *formation* of historical *hypotheses*, anything goes, and (apart from impression management in order to keep up one's scientific

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<sup>276</sup> Cf. Sheppard 1962; Betz 1986.

<sup>277</sup> Read 1957: 179f.; Anonymous, 'August Kekulé', 2014. The latter text casts some doubt on the authenticity of the famous *ourobos* story. Similar rumours have been told about the decipherment of ancient scripts. The famous Dutch poet P.C. Boutens in his poem HET GEHEIM (THE SECRET) wrote about:

*Te verraden niet en niet te raden,  
Tussen ons zelfs een gemeen geheim  
(Als de manna-stralende genade  
Van het in de slaap gevonden rijm).*

*Never to betray nor to guess  
Even between us a secret shared  
(Like the manna-shining blessing  
of the rhyme found while asleep).*

Regrettably, and probably to demonstrate that I am only a minor poet, I cannot boast such serendipities, and can only cite one remotely similar case from personal experience. At the end of my 1968 Tunisia fieldwork, after sacrificing a big calf to the shrine of Sidi Mḥammad, overseeing its slaughter and ceremoniously distributing the meat over all 80 households of the villages of Sidi Mḥammad and Mayziyya, treating my fellow Dutch student-researchers (who had been brought in from their respective distant villages) to the meal and festivities that followed this rite, and being taking back by car, with all my luggage, to the comfortable and privacy-offering town house in the district capital ʿAin Draham, I fell into an exhausted sleep – only to wake up in great alarm, realising that it had been intimated to me that one of my indispensable note books, recording a week or more of my most effective interviews and observations, was lying out in the street in front of the house, invisible from the bedroom. I summarily dressed, sleepwalked through the front door, into the night, and within seconds I saw my previous note book lying – in full view, but undisturbed near the kerb where we had unloaded the car. No doubt the saint, pleased with his calf, had extended his protection to my precious possession...? As he would apparently continue to do in the next half century.

<sup>278</sup> Wolkowski 1977. The Dutch / American novelist Jan de Hartog, in a pamphlet accompanying the Dutch edition of one of his last books, *De Centurio*, 1989, claims – no doubt with characteristic exaggeration, he needs the claim to situate his own book – that the paragnostical 'reading' of sites and artefacts has become a respected, and fairly productive, archaeological sub-discipline.

<sup>279</sup> Ibn Ḥaldūn 1980; written in Arabic 1377. I repeated his example several times, and – as expected – found initially my emerging hypotheses as to Islamic geomancy's origins reflected in the oracle's answers. Of course no objective empirical meaning can be attached to such outcomes. Meanwhile continued research (cf. in press (g)) has convinced me that Islamic geomancy emerged in Northern Iran, where Graeco-Roman, Pelasgian, Jewish, Islamic, Zoroastrian, and Chinese influences intersected by the late 1<sup>st</sup> mill. CE. This later finding, unprepared by the medieval or recent scholarly literature, was never perceptibly hinted at in my recent use of Islamic divination...!

credibility and reputation) there is no reason to shun such divinatory explorations. But of course, once the hypothesis has been formulated, more intersubjective, systematic and accepted methods of substantiation need to be employed for the *testing* of such hypotheses, before the results could ever become intersubjectively acceptable to the scientific community. And even so, such testing remains utterly preliminary and inconclusive, and the more so, the more our data are fragmentary and scarce, and the more remote the past to which they are supposed to relate.



Source: (a) from: Berthelot 1885 (b) from Merian 1678: 353. Also cf. Seligmann n.d.

Fig. 4.8. Hellenistic to Early Modern depictions of the ouroboros cyclical snake

As we have seen, ever since Karl Popper (1959) the label 'pseudo-science'<sup>280</sup> has been readily used especially by 'Skeptical' scientists for forms of knowledge construction that

<sup>280</sup> For a critique of the whole idea of pseudo-science, cf. Laudan 1981.

seem to be clearly distinguishable from true, state-of-the-art science in that the pronouncements of pseudo-science *cannot be falsified*.

V. AN APT EXAMPLE OF THE SKEPTICAL ATTITUDE

An apt example of the skeptical attitude is Glymour & Stalker's (1982 in: Grim 1982: 75-86). With caustic sarcasm these authors chide, not the defective methodology of pseudo-science, but its financially profitable nature. This is a complex issue. The social circulation of knowledge inevitably is a source of social benefits, including financial remuneration – but in that respect 'genuine' scientists are no exception, especially since, sometime around 1800 CE, the pursuit of science stopped being a mere gentleman's pastime and became a moderately remunerative career. As already referred to above, in a collective book on commoditification edited by Peter Geschiere and myself, I looked (2005) into *sangomas's* own claim that they merely were 'in this [ *sangomahood* ] for the money', and I found that such a claim was mainly made in order to conceal the healers' genuine commitment and to limit the dangers of psychological dependence this creates in their clients.



Fig. 4.9. Geomancy in the Early Modern European context: A German edition of Abu Hali [ 'Abū Ali ] ben Omar's Punctier-Kunst (Freystadt 1704).<sup>281</sup>

<sup>281</sup> In the extensive literature on geomancy, this text is usually listed as: *Vollkommene geomantia etc. 1715-1716*. The *Punctir-Kunst*, modern *Punktierkunst*, or 'art of punctuation' of which the title speaks, refers to geomancy's specific procedure and notational system: a random generator (e.g. the end of a stick made to bounce on the soil and leaving an odd or even number of indentations; or a small number of marked tablets; or a usually larger number of cowries, nut kernels, etc.) is made to produce sequences of one or two dots, or (in the Islamic notation) one dot or one line (two connected dots). Note the expression *irdische Stern-kunde* (terrestrial astronomy /

The alleged pseudo-sciences thus targeted are astrology, homoeopathy, psychoanalysis, etc. In fact, as compared to the often meagre, uninteresting and unsavoury little truths of Analytical Philosophy, the entire humanistic, Continental Tradition in philosophy could be termed a pseudo-science in that its pronouncements, however attractive and impressive as literary renderings of the human condition and of reality at large, tend to be cast in such a way as to elude falsification, forcing us to rely on textual strategies of evocation, persuasiveness, authority construction, instead. Now the dilemma in the field of writing history, including the history of the remotest human past as in palaeoanthropology, is that the writing is done by a category of professionals who claim to use scientific methods of fact-finding, but who in fact largely rely on the same textual strategies, producing truth claims of a type that are at home in philosophy, art history and cultural anthropology, but that for that very reason elude falsification by strict empirical methods. The field of rock art studies is a convincing case in point, with its pedantic display of scientific mannerisms yet jumping to conclusions (e.g. concerning the central role of shamans and their use of hallucinogens and optoptric devices, and their common-sense assumptions concerning underlying Palaeolithic world-views) without serious attempts at rigorous intersubjective methodology and theory (van Binsbergen 2018: ch. 9).

#### W. ASTROLOGY AS A PSEUDO-SCIENCE.

Let us dwell a bit on astrology. That field has a very long, checked, and well-studied history (e.g. Tester 1989; Pingree 1978; Bouché-Leclercq 1879, 1899). As a scholarly investigator of geomantic divination I had no choice but to familiarise myself with the astrological tradition. The underlying world-view and scholarly terminology of geomancy is that of mainstream Babylonian-Egyptian-Greek astrology, which found its culmination in Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*. This link was already asserted by Ibn Ḥaldūn 14th c. CE / 1980) and any reading of geomantic fundamental texts from the Islamic or Renaissance world may bear this view out; e.g. al-Zanati 1995 / 1923, written 13<sup>th</sup> century CE; van Binsbergen 2012, 1995b, 1996d, and in press (g). The decline in astrology which Ibn Ḥaldūn described for the last few centuries before his own writing, is claimed by other writers to have started in Late Antiquity, when already we find devices (such as the *Tabula Bianchini*) where the painstaking reconstruction of the heavens at the divinatory relevant moment in time, is bluntly replaced by the chance outcome of a throw of dice.<sup>282</sup> After learning to draw horoscopes at the professional level (which is very different from the popular pseudo-horoscopes appearing in newspapers and other media), I found (just as I had found after starting in *sangoma* divination, a few years earlier) that the information they contained turned out to be far more often veridical than could have been expected on the basis of mere chance – even though I had no reason to believe that the astronomical fantasies underlying astrology could in any way reflect or predict a person's character and life's destiny. Paraphrasing material already presented in *my Intercultural Encounters* (2003: 253 f.) let me point to the following serious scholars who have tried to make a scientific case for astrology: the leading psychologist H. Eysenck (Eysenck & Nias 1982); the astronomy PhD P. Seymour (1988); from deep psychology: Jung 1972 and von Franz 1980; and see particularly the sophisticated statistical work by the Gauquelins.<sup>283</sup> The

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astrology) in the subtitle – which returns in recent popular discussions of geomantic divination.

<sup>282</sup> E.g. Tester 1989, although another authority claims that Isidore of Seville (*obit* 636 CE) had still access to genuine astrology (Fontaine 1953; Isidore of Seville 1911; also cf. Spalding, at: <http://www.isidore-of-seville.com/astdiv/> for an overview of astrological and other divinatory methods available in Isidore's time.

<sup>283</sup> F. Gauquelin 1980; M. Gauquelin 1969, 1970, 1973; Gauquelin & Gauquelin 1977-1978.



Gauquelins have perfected a line of modern statistical research that has a longer history.<sup>284</sup> For a critical assessment of these more or less scientific defences of astrology, cf. Kelly (1982), who explains with an appeal to normal psychology why astrology so often seems to 'have a point' even though it would be unnecessary to appeal to the postulated influence from the heavens; yet also Kelly has to concede that undeniable evidence partly supports the basic tenet of astrology – some correspondence between human events and the pattern of the heavens. Elsewhere (e.g. 2003: 255) I have sought to explain this in the following terms: the superabundance (a term from the anthropologist Werbner when studying Botswana divination; Werbner 1973) of interlocking but often contradictory interpretational clues in a typical astrological or geomantic divination procedure brings the practitioner to a chaotic, unfocused state of mind in which the usual constant non-sensory flow of knowledge traces reaching everybody's mind all the time, may be able to brave the usual censoring filters, register to the consciousness, and suggest specific choices between the options which the divinatory / astrological procedure leaves open. (2003: ch. 7). From that perspective I find no fundamental fault with the contentious epistemologist Feyerabend, who tries to shock his philosophical colleagues by openly flirting with astrology.<sup>285</sup> <sup>286</sup> But perhaps we need to distance ourselves even further from what is

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<sup>284</sup> E.g. Flambart 1908, 1913; Choïnard 1924; Choïnard & Flambart 1908.

<sup>285</sup> Feyerabend, 1975, 1984; a specific discussion of his attitude to astrology in my *Intercultural Encounters*, 2003: 246 f.

<sup>286</sup> X. THE POSSIBLE EFFECT OF GRAECO-ROMAN ANTIQUITY UPON OCCULT AND MAGICAL PRACTICES IN SOUTH CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

At this point we may briefly come back to another question: *The possible effect of Graeco-Roman Antiquity upon occult and magical practices in South Central and Southern Africa*. Until the 19<sup>th</sup> c. CE the main sources of information on occult phenomena outside the North Atlantic, were traveller's accounts, and particularly the writings of, and concerning, Graeco-Roman Antiquity. On the latter we are extensively informed (de Jong 1921, 1930; Kiesewetter 1891-1896; Dodds 1951; Bouché-Leclercq 1879, 1899; etc.). Only since the early 19<sup>th</sup> c. CE, accounts on Ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian 'magic' came to importantly broaden the scope of our insight in occult practices and beliefs of Graeco-Roman Antiquity.

The topic is too broad and too rich to do justice to in mere passing, but a few pointers may suffice to indicate its importance. An important factor is that in latterday Africa, many magical and occult practices have a more or less acknowledged background (Becker 1913) in Islamic secret sciences (, which, flourishing in West and South Asia in the late 1st and early second mill. CE, were in fact highly continuous with Graeco-Roman approaches, and often served to preserve the latter in Arabic versions when the original Greek texts had gone lost. But there are also indications of even older connections. The pathbreaking work of Dierk Lange has proven beyond doubt the cultural and demographic continuity between Ancient Mesopotamia (especially the outgoing Assyrian empire of the 7<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> c. BCE) and West Africa. Other suggestions of continuity between the Ancient Near East (including Egypt) and sub-Saharan Africa may be found in the aftermath of the Sea People's episode, which by the end of the Bronze Age in the Mediterranean (ca. 1300) brought a wide variety of peoples on the move, some of which passed via Egypt into the Sahara and West Africa – constituting the southbound branch of the 'cross model' identified for the Pelasgian demographic and cultural extension by the end of the Bronze Age (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011; van Binsbergen 2011; and in press (e)). Other indications are few and far between yet well worth considering. When describing in unique detail the traditional pantheon of the Tswana people (knowledge of which had otherwise been largely eroded and disappeared by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. CE), the missionary J.T. Brown sketched a detailed array of deities which displays parallels with Ancient Graeco-Roman religion, Yoruba religion, and perhaps even more strikingly with the religion of the Ancient Near East; the god of divination turns out to be Nape – cf. the Ancient Mesopotamian god of wisdom Nabi, which is the etymon of the words for prophet in Hebrew and Arabic, but which also seems to surface in the extreme West of West Africa as the term *napene* for oracular priest

plausible by current mainstream scientific standards, and go even further than my clever explanation in terms of superabundance: why not contemplate the possibility that the explicitly textual divinatory outcome does not so much reflect, *secondarily*, a train of events in reality, but primarily *brings about* that train of events – in other words, that the universe (perhaps only in one of the myriad parallel possible worlds in a Many-Worlds model) specifically responds to the divinatory outcome, projecting it as real back into the past.

*Admittedly, once we are prepared to at least consider such extreme and abstruse ideas about the true nature of reality* (but the scientifically sanctioned implications of the Theory of Relativity and of Quantum Mechanics are scarcely less weird, in fact overlap with such ideas) *we risk to be swept away by an avalanche of conceptual nonsense*. In designing images and coherent theories concerning the remote past including human origins, authors have often reached for hypotheses so unpopular as to dispel them from the community of serious scholars. The literature on Atlantis and Lemuria – which feels like ‘pornography for the academic mind’ just like readings in astrology and psychoanalysis do – is full of such ideas,<sup>287</sup> identification with which will do irreparable damage to an author’s name. A similar case is that of the, otherwise respectable and competent, Assyriologist Temple (1976). He sought to explain an exceptional piece of apparent astronomical knowledge attributed by

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(van Binsbergen 1988a, 1984b, both reprinted in 2017a). Turning to a setting central to this book’s argument, and one with which I have considerable direct experience: even though the South and East Asian continuities in the present-day *sangoma* cult have been gradually brought to light to me, the *sangomas* display two traits by which they are reminiscent of Late Graeco-Roman Antiquity:

- Especially in private conversations among themselves (accessible to me through participant observation as a fellow *thwaza* and *sangoma*), they consider themselves to be gods (*badimo*) – a trait detected in ritual leaders of South Asian Hinduism (van der Veer 1988), but also in Hermeticism: ‘don’t you know you are like gods?’ (cf. Fromm 1967; Waite 1893 / 1973; Quispel 1992; Festugière 1945-1954; Cory 1828; Ferguson 2003; Ruska 1926; the disreputable best-seller Picknett & Prince 1998 yet contains a few useful indications on this point, e.g. p. 174)
- *Sangomas* (and other magical practitioners in South Central and Southern Africa) seek to entrap spirit familiars – e.g. by luring and locking them into honey-covered containers placed near fresh graves – so as to make them their magical servants in the execution of their occult schemings. These are greatly feared practices often discussed under the heading of *necromancy* (e.g. Spargo 1934; de Jong 1921, 1930; Hubert 1904; Alverny 1962; Hopfner 1931, 1965; du Prel 1890; Kiesewetter 1895; van Binsbergen & Wiggemann 1999 / 2017; other relevant entries in Pauly-Wissowa 1894-1963, Ziegler & Sontheimer 1979, and *Der Neue Pauly. Enzyklopädie der Antike. Altertum* (1997)).

<sup>287</sup> Starting with Plato, the literature on Atlantis is too extensive to do justice here; for a small selection, cf. Görgemanns 2000; Frobenius 1912-13; Ramage 1978; Blavatsky 1950; Bernal 1991 (where he discusses the case of the volcanic eruption of the Aegean isle of Thera / Santorini in the Middle Bronze Age as possibly the ultimate referent of Atlantis traditions, with extensive literature there, also cf. Manning 1999, cf. 2014; Görg 1976; Donnelly 1882. On Lemuria as a mythical geographical concept, cf. Ramaswamy 1999; Cantrell; Scott-Elliott 1896-1930; Spence, 1933; Steiner 1923. In passing we note that it is in this cluster of non-scholarly literature that the idea, considered above, of human history as decline instead of progress is emphatically expressed. The very existence of this nonsense literature in itself confirms the claim of decline!

the French ethnographers Griaule & Dieterlen (1965) to the Dogon people of Mali, West Africa: the latter's apparent awareness of the multiple nature of the star Sirius,  $\alpha$  Canis, the brightest star in the night sky as seen from the Earth. If the ethnographic claim were indeed authentic and reliable, it is truly remarkable, since Sirius' multiple nature can most certainly not be perceived with the naked eye and was first postulated by the German leading mathematician Bessel (1844) on mathematical grounds – before being confirmed only decades later by observation through one of the most powerful telescopes then available. Temple's solution was to invoke a hypothetical but not impossible historical link between the Dogon, via the Sahara-crossing Garamantes people (cf. Law 1967; Sergi 1936), and the origins of Sumerian civilisation on the Persian Gulf c. 5 ka BP. Here, as claimed by a late and somewhat suspect tradition,<sup>288</sup> an aquatic being called Oannes (rather indistinguishable from the Phoenician fish-tailed god Dagon, and the Mesopotamian fish-tailed god Ea / Enki) taught the fundamentals of culture to the local savages – much like the ancient vegetation gods and victims of violence Osiris and Dionysus, in their capacity of culture heroes, are mythically claimed to have done at the beginning of Egyptian and Hellenic history.<sup>289</sup> Temple proposed that disclosure of Sirius' multiple nature was among Oannes' intimations, and that Oannes could only have derived that precious piece of information from an extraterrestrial source – perhaps Oannes was an alien himself. Temple's is an example, not only of *forbidden* intellectual history, but also of *unnecessary* intellectual history, for a critical anthropological re-reading of Griaule & Dieterlen (van Beek 1991; Clifford 1983) reveals that the Dogon cosmological myths should not be taken for the modern scientific astronomical statement it could not possibly be (the genre and format being unavailable in local discourse in the interior of West Africa at the time Griaule & Dieterlen's writing). Alternatively, at the time of the latter's ethnographic fieldwork, knowledge of Bessel's finding could have been circulated in West Africa by Europeans with a lay knowledge of astronomy, like these ethnographers themselves, or even by astronomic specialists visiting the region to benefit from its favourable observational conditions in regard of a rare astronomical event such as a planet visibly passing in front of the Sun (e.g., cf. Gore 1907: 245 f). The fact that the Dogon are also claimed to attribute the number of exactly ten moons to the planet Saturn points in the same direction of European borrowing about a century ago: this is the number of satellites professional astronomers attributed to Saturn around 1900, whereas today their recognised number is more than 6 times larger (as every extraterrestrial passing Saturn on her way to Earth could have told the Dogon, or the Sumerians...).<sup>290</sup>

Behind such examples of scientifically unsound and unacceptable reconstructions of the past lurks the insight that properly *scientific* reconstructions, while perhaps the most truthful, are not necessarily the most relevant. Humans invariably define their identity by articulating their proclaimed history, and in most historical contexts (ranging thousands of years and thousands of kilometres in time and space) such an act of indirect self-definition by appeal to a reconstructed remote past is far more essential than that it would

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<sup>288</sup> Cory 1828; some scholars however consider Cory's Sanchuniaton fragment fraudulent; further: West 1994; Jacoby 1923-1929; Schnabel 1923; Burstein 1978; Verbrugge & Wickersham 1996.

<sup>289</sup> Otto 1933; Carpenter 1986; Griffiths 1980; Helck 1962,

<sup>290</sup> van Binsbergen 2012: 223, with additional literature.

stop short at scientific untruths or fantasies. Misinterpretation of myths about the remote past (to the effect that the Israelites are God's chosen people and hence rightful traditional owners of the soil of Syro-Palestine) forms, for instance, the basis for the modern state of Israel, its continued existence and international support, and the extreme predicament of today's Palestinians under another apartheid. Early Islamic legends about a decisive battle to be fought in West Asia was among the principal roots of the violent movement of Islamic State from 2014 onward. Invented history of the Low Countries by the beginning of the Common Era, lent support to Daendels's 1795 invasion into the Netherlands under 'Batavi' flags. The strong conviction that the Vedic scripture could only have originated in the Indian subcontinent where now the great majority of Hindus dwell, brought Hindu fundamentalists to violently dismiss the results of Michael Witzel's splendidly under-pinned scholarly findings to the effect that the Vedic scriptures had their cradle further to the north-west, towards Iran. Myth, not scientific method, is humans' standard approach to the past, and any attempt by modern science to expand into the most cherished of domain of mythical construction (the geopolitical ones), and even take control of it, is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the scope and power of science as against the all-overriding lure of myth.



Sources: (a) [https://nl.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bestand:Johannes\\_Kepler\\_horoscope.PNG](https://nl.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bestand:Johannes_Kepler_horoscope.PNG); (b) <https://birthcharts.astroseek.com/birth-chart/johannes-kepler-horoscope>

Fig. 4.10. (a) Birth horoscope by Johannes Kepler, 1586; and (b) a modern version of his own

Such a perspective helps us understand an essentially mythical project like that of *Forbidden Archeology*. We need, moreover, an additional perspective to understand why that project should at all be cast within the trappings of a sustained and respectable scientific endeavour, with bibliographical research, references, tables, charts *etc.* The answer is within our grasp once we realise, with Foucault (1969, 1971, 1980), that in the modern, post-Enlightenment world, science has taken over from religion as the ultimate legitimating instance in the North Atlantic world and its cultural and political satellite societies worldwide. The aeon cosmology of history in its original, South Asian version may be religiously inspired and underpinned, but once it is being transmitted worldwide, is being *globalised* (as in the context of the San Diego Bhaktivedanta Institute – California has been a principal focus of the spread of Indian philosophy and religion since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century; cf. Huxley 1945), a restatement in terms of the dominant, scientific discourse becomes attractive, perhaps even imperative.

## 4.5. Assumptions informing the Received North Atlantic World-view today

The view of humanity's remote history as proffered by mainstream evolution theory today is based on a number of assumptions which appear to be so obvious, so ingrained in the structure of our (post-)modern North Atlantic / global life-world, as to be taken for granted ('received'), and as remaining more or less invisible. Some of these important assumptions are the following:

1. Valid scientific knowledge is constituted as a *relationship of separation combined with mental appropriation between two clearly separated entities, the known object and the knowing subject*. For instance, viewpoints concerning the exhilarating effects of a certain drug on subjective well-being, or concerning humans's distinction between good and evil, that are merely based on a writer's introspection, would under most circumstances not be considered valid scientific knowledge – although they may be a fruitful source for hypotheses (*e.g.* in the field of pharmacology,<sup>291</sup> psychoanalysis (*e.g.* Freud 1961-1973) or comparative mythology; van Binsbergen 2009), subsequently to be tested by other methods than mere introspection.
2. The forms and processes of reality that are the topic of modern natural sciences' pronouncements (however ephemeral, and meant to be supplanted by later, even more valid statements) *exist independently from the observing and articulating hu-*

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<sup>291</sup> This field is not so far removed from the following two fields as might be assumed. Freud started out as a pharmacologist, then moved on to create or invade the other two fields.

*man mind*. When I write a history of kingship among the Nkoya in the 15<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> c. CE (van Binsbergen 1992), I am supposed to render events and conditions that have existed objectively and that would have appeared in rather the same way to other proto-historians of South Central Africa, even to non-specialists, to contemporary itinerant merchants from the Swahili Coast or Angola, at the time, and to hypothetical researchers from another planet. My account is supposed to order and selectively stress data that in principle lead an objective existence independently from me, and (if created by me, e.g. through my taped and transcribed interviews with local elders) the course of past events and the nature of past conditions *is not in the least supposed to be altered by the production of my scholarly account*. By the same token, a fossil found to be embedded by an excavating palaeontologist is not considered to be created by the excavator's action or thought, but is taken to have been there all the time, irrespective of the excavator's gaze, even of her or his existence, and, if left unexcavated, will continue to be there regardless of the presence of potential excavators, even regardless of the extinction of the human race or of other beings capable of reflexive thought. Material objects in non-human reality, from rocks and stones to plants, animals, celestial bodies, meteorological phenomena and man-made objects, are supposed to have an independent material existence in their own right, and do not owe their present-day or past existence and presence to human mental processes calling them into being.<sup>292</sup>

A third, apparently totally self-evident assumption informing current common-sense images of the world around us, is:

3. *Laws of nature* to which present-day material phenomena are plausibly argued to obey, *constitute universal and immutable conditions that have governed their respective domains of reality in exactly the same way ever since these domains came into existence*. Big-bang theory, which has been the dominant cosmogonic paradigm for three quarters of a century now, makes it possible to think of the very earliest moments in the existence of the universe, when matter and time did not yet exist or at least could not yet have had their recent constitution and meaning. Yet, after these first moments, more stable conditions began to prevail so that laws of nature could come into effect, in the sense that no velocity could (by the Theory of Relativity) exceed the speed of light, which was then, and has remained, 299,792,448 m/s (meters per second); the laws of the conservation of matter, of energy, and the subtle arrangements at the micro level of reality set out by Quantum Mechanics, were and remained in effect as we have established them to function today. By virtue of this third, apparently self-evident, assumption, *Laws of nature as such have no history (although their recog-*

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<sup>292</sup> All of this may appear very obvious and self-evident at the macro-level of our senses, but takes on a different shape in the world-view of modern physics. Hence the physicist Mermin (1985) can legitimately ask the question – totally nonsensical up to the dawn of the New Physics, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> c. CE – *‘Is the Moon there when nobody looks?’* If reality (as under Quantum Mechanics) is a tripartite meeting point between outside event, observer, and observation, the answer becomes far from obvious.

*nitition and formulation do, in the course of the history of science), and do not go through an evolution.*

Y. IMMUTABLE LAWS OF NATURE?

The idea of laws of nature being immutable, impervious to the human mind, and not going through any evolution, did never sit comfortably with me. I have very vivid memories of how, as a three year old, I was supposed to take a few hours' nap in the early afternoon; left alone in the tiny room where little light penetrated, I once discovered that, seen from the inside of the earthenware cup I was holding, my fingers stood out in outline against the bottom – and with an alarming mythomania that would never quite leave me I fantasised that I could look through matter, and realised that in principle this was a most exceptional faculty (although much later I found that much porcelain is translucent, so that there was nothing special about my observation). For the same period, I have distinct recollections of flying in an inclined position through the central corridor of our apartment, about shoulder-high. It is the same corridor that has come back numerous times in my dreams (and in some of my poems) as the ominous, terrible place known to lie behind the closed door of our living, the almost imperceptible movement of whose old-fashioned door handle (blackened forged iron with a wooden grip) would paralyse me with fear in my dream. Before age 15, this was as close as I ever came to consciousness of the family dramas that went on behind that door. Meanwhile, in the seething of ideas triggered by my first exposure to (popular) natural science, in 1960, I naively grappled with the idea of the expansion of the universe and the apparent outward drift of galaxies as shown in receding light spectra. I remember the moment when, bored during a mathematics class at school, I hit upon a singular solution: not the nebulae fled away from us, but in a continuous and ubiquitous process the distance between atomic nuclei and electrons circling around them would have been involved in a process of infinitesimally small increase since the beginning of time, leading to the impression of an expanding universe. It was an idea that bore some resemblance with the prominent British astronomer Fred Hoyle's hypothesis, then still unavailable to me, of continuous creation of matter at any point in the universe, bringing about a similar impression of expansion. Cf. Hoyle 1983.

If Planck's Constant is today established at  $4.135667516(91) \cdot 10^{-15}$  eV.s,<sup>293</sup> it may be considered to have had the same value (within the usual error limits) last year, ten million years ago *i.e.* before (according to mainstream palaeoanthropology) intelligent humans roamed the Earth; in Pre-Cambrian times three billion years ago when life on Earth was in its first stages; and immediately after the time of the Big Bang now dated at less than 14 billion years ago. By the same token, *miracles* (which have for millennia captivated the medieval European mind<sup>294</sup> as well as popular religion throughout Asia and North Africa<sup>295</sup>) cannot exist.<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> Anonymous, 'Planck constant', 2014.

<sup>294</sup> Ward 1982; McNamara 1985. Christian miracle beliefs, enshrined in specific passages of the *New Testament*, had a foundation in pre-Christian Mediterranean (including Israelite) beliefs and practices (Ehnmark 1939; Gruenthamer 1948; Chaó as cited in Battistini 1997, p. 54, n. 7; Mauduit 1998 1999; Reitzenstein 1922). In modern times, the Christian insistence on miracles has somewhat subsided and is no longer so actively propagated by the church leadership, yet miracles have continued to play an important role in popular religion, and the sanctification or beatification of mortals (*e.g.* Woytila Pope John Paul II in recent years) still requires proof of specific miracles. Cf. Ryle 1988; Doane, n.d. Further cf. Ritter *et al.* 2001, *s.v.* 'Wunder', and Hastings 1909-1921, *s.v.* 'miracles'.

<sup>295</sup> Dejeux 1987; Samanta 1998.

<sup>296</sup> On Putnam's recent philosophy of miracles, cf. Mueller & Fine 2005. Grappling with the idea of miracles has a long history in Western thought, from the ambiguities of Roger Bacon (13<sup>th</sup> c. CE) to the illuminating Enlight-

## Z. MIRACLES?

In the early 1990s the Dutch Protestant daily newspaper *Trouw*, where several interviews with me had appeared over the years, had a special on miracles, and I was among the handful of intellectuals approached over the telephone to give an *ex-tempore* reaction to the question as to whether miracles exist. My response (printed in the paper) was that we should not exaggerate the scope and power of laws of nature – formulated, after all, by humans, in a scientific setting where statements are in the first place intended to be short-lived and to be supplanted – on sound methodological and empirical grounds – by better, truer such statements; and that we should, therefore, entertain the possibility of exceptions. At the time, I had recently been initiated as a *sangoma* and was building a therapeutic practice on that basis. I was not aware of having worked wonders myself nor had I seen anyone do so, yet the possibility of doing so was implied in my *sangoma* training, my senior colleagues in *sangomahood* were reputed to have worked wonders as a matter of course, and the evidence of my powers at veridical divination were piling up, although I was inclined to explain this not as miraculous but as the result of a fairly common spiritual technology merely not yet fully acknowledged let alone understood in the North Atlantic region. Rather to my surprise, as soon as the newspaper report had appeared I got an enthusiastic phone call from my close friend and colleague Matthew Schoffeleers, with whom I had collaborated on African religion for many years, who had been the supervisor of my doctoral dissertation, and who had also, as a Roman Catholic priest, inaugurated my second marriage in 1984. I had not realised that my answer to the newspaper would play into the hands of the Christian belief in miracles; I had ceased to identify as a Christian fifty years earlier.<sup>297</sup>

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enment explorations by especially David Hume (Hume 1975 / 1748; cf. Schroeder 2001

### <sup>297</sup> AA. MIRACLES AND SANGOMA SCIENCE

By a discourse far removed from my own, one could say that the underlying purpose of *Sangoma Science* is to find an *explanation for miracles*. In Late Antiquity, with their state religion, proliferation of cults and superstitions, and the erosion of time-honoured regional and local forms of organised religion, wonder workers enjoyed particular popularity, and – whatever his other, supernatural claims to a spiritual calling – Jesus of Nazareth was one of their number; so was the rather more widely famous Apollonius of Tyana. A miracle may be defined as a *perceived violation of an established and recognised law of nature* – so in order to have a miracle, we should first have a firmly established local consensus concerning an immutable natural order, and specific observations concerning that order's supposed violation. Most people are not natural scientists and even in regions of the world with extensive primary and secondary education, most people have only a vague and incomplete idea of the world-view upheld by modern (which in educational terms often means: late 19<sup>th</sup> c. CE / classic) natural science. The North African society of Tunisian mountain dwellers I studied in my first fieldwork (1968, 1970), was only peripherally literate and its members certainly did not have much awareness of formal Islam and the Qur'an let alone of the laws of physics, yet the idea of the miracle (*karamat*) was well established among them: it was miracles that, mainly in the past, but still in today's ritual interaction between humans and invisible saints, proved the latter's sainthood – although in addition to miraculous events, also selected material objects (especially stone spheres seldom exceeding 15 cm in diameter – perhaps medieval canon balls, more likely prehistoric tools of grain milling or of bola hunting; their varieties were discussed in chapter 3, above) could serve as *karamat* – since they were considered to have been brought as *proofs of sainthood by the saints when these were still alive*. Here *Humiriyya* showed itself to be the peasant society which it has been ever since the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE: *a part society with a part culture, in relaxed but conscious dependence upon distant urban centres of politics, taxation, religion and learning*. And even among the Nkoya of Zambia, similarly peripherally literate but, before the 19<sup>th</sup> c. CE, never effectively incorporated in a world religion and an effective polity (although indications have been identified of Hinduism and Buddhism concentrated at royal courts that since the



4. Also the nature of time has occupied philosophers from the earliest periods,<sup>298</sup> and would continue to do so right through to Kant, Reichenbach, Heidegger, Craig, Benjamin, Costa de Beauregard, my Rotterdam philosophical colleagues, and many others.<sup>299</sup> It was Newton (1822-1833 / originally 1687; 1846) who adopted the approach to time as *absolute and flowing equally, a one-directional given*, defined on the first pages of his *Principia Mathematica* (Newton 1846 / 1947 / originally 1687):

*Scholium*

*Hactenus voces minus notas, quo in sensu in sequentibus accipiendae sunt, explicare visum est. Nam tempus, spatium, locum et motum ut omnibus no-tissima non definio. Dicam tamen quod vulgus quantitates hasce non aliter quam ex relatione ad sensibilia concipit. Et inde oriuntur praecipua quaedam, quibus tollendis convenit easdem in absolutas & relativas, veras & apparentes, Mathematicas et vulgares distingui.*

*I. Tempus absolutum verum & Mathematicum, in se & natura sua absq; relatione ad externum quodvis, aequabiliter fluit, alioq; nomine dicitur Duratio; relativum apparetis & vulgare est sensibile & externa quaevis Durationis per motum mensura,*

*Scholium*

Hitherto I have laid down the definitions of such words as are less known, and explained the sense in which I would have them to be understood in the following discourse. I do not define time, space, place and motion, as being well known to all. Only I must observe, that the vulgar conceive those quantities under no other notions but from the relation they bear to sensible objects. And thence arise certain prejudices, for the removing of which, it will be convenient to distinguish them into absolute and relative, true and apparent, mathematical and common.

I. Absolute, true, and mathematical time, of itself, and from its own nature flows equally without regard to anything external, and by another name is called duration: relative, apparent, and common time, is some sensible and external (whether accu-

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1<sup>st</sup> millennium had been under the influence of South Asia; van Binsbergen 2012, 2017, 2019, 2020). Among 20<sup>th</sup>-c. CE Nkoya the idea of violation of common causal processes in nature did exist. The natural order was differently defined from that under the world religion of Christianity (although the latter has served as some sort of distant Great Tradition overarching Nkoya culture today) and under global natural science: natural death was not a permissible category, so every human death however predictable given illness, old age or injuries, would have to be attributed, at least in part, to sorcery wrought by human malice. Such sorcery was locally not counted as a miracle but as a predictable, inevitable fact of social life. Yet also here there were widely circulating rumours concerning amazing feats that attributed to local specialist in divination and healing (*banganga*) – the manipulation of their paraphernalia and magical substances for sinister purposes, or to the royals of old (power of flight, bilocality, invulnerability – summarised under the local term *malele*, ‘magic’). In fact, in a part of the world reconstructed to have been under considerable South Asian cultural and political influence around 1000 CE, *malele* as a concept comes close to the miraculous capabilities attributed to South Asian sages, Brahmins etc. (cf. Flood 201).

<sup>298</sup> Cf. Kadish 1993; Benjamin 1968.

<sup>299</sup> Kant, 1983, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 1781 / 1787; Reichenbach 1958, 1928; Craig 1988; Tiemersma & Oosterling 1996 – to which I contributed a piece on African divination and board-games; Benjamin 1968; Costa de Beauregard 1968. A masterly and indispensable overview of actual philosophy of time may be found in Ritter 2001, specifically the following contributions: Assmann 2001; Theunissen 2001; Westermann 2001; Schmitt 2001; Porro 2001; Böwering 2001; Kessler 2001; Hühn & Waschkiel 2001; Beuthan & Sandbothe; Janich 2001; Lubbe 2001; Weinrich 2001; Elberfeld 2001. African philosophical perspectives are seldom represented in Western scholarship; some relevant publications are: Ardant du Picq 1912; Boer 1986; Bohannan 1953; Booth 1975; Bourdieu 1963; Bwele 1991; Byaruhanga-Akiiki 1980; Höltker, 1928; Keto 1995; Laléyé 1992; Mudimbe 1979; van Binsbergen 1996b; Obenga 1982, 1973a; Okeke 1973; Parratt 1977; Tablino 1988; Vansina 1989. On the cultural anthropology of time, we may mention: Munn 1992; Gell, 1998; Fabian 1983.

(*seu accurata seu inaequalis*) qua vulgus  
vice veri temporis utitur; ut Hora, Dies,  
Mensis, Annus.  
II. *Spatium absolutum natura...*'

rate or unequal) measure of duration by the  
means of motion, which is commonly used instead  
of true time; such as an hour, a day, a month, a year.  
II. Absolute space, in its own nature...

The cosy security of the world-view invoked by the four points which I have enumerated begins to collapse once we realise that it has the trappings of the deterministic, Newtonian perspective prevailing in North Atlantic natural science to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century CE, The *locus classicus* for such determinism has been Laplace's<sup>300</sup> passage on an all-knowing Spirit (often referred to as 'Laplace's Demon'),<sup>301</sup> conjured up in one of the writings of this leading astronomer and mathematician around 1800 CE, and claiming:

*'Une intelligence qui pour un instant donné  
connaîtrait toutes les forces dont la nature est  
animée et la situation respective des êtres qui  
la composent, si d'ailleurs elle était assez vaste  
pour soumettre ces données à l'analyse,  
embrasserait dans la même formule les  
mouvements des plus grands corps de l'univers  
et ceux du plus léger atome: Rien ne serait  
incertain pour elle et l'avenir comme le passé  
serait présent à ses yeux.'*

'An intellect which at any given moment knew  
all the forces that animate Nature and the  
mutual positions of the beings that comprise it,  
if this intellect were vast enough to submit its  
data to analysis, could condense into a single  
formula the movement of the greatest bodies  
of the universe and that of the lightest atom: for  
having such an intellect nothing could be  
uncertain; and the future just like the past  
would be present before its eyes.'

This view still governed most of secondary-school teaching in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when however three major intellectual developments had effectively rendered it obsolete:

- a. Einstein's formulation of his Special and General Theory of Relativity,<sup>302</sup>
- b. The emergence and consolidation of Quantum Theory<sup>303</sup>
- c. The rise and consolidation of the *social sciences*, and among them the fields of cultural anthropology and intercultural philosophy, as one of the main intellectual adventures of modern man in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The reader may be surprised that I mention such 'soft' sciences as under (c) at a par with (a) and (b). Yet this is deliberate. It is only about the latter development that I can speak with some confidence, having obtained three academic degrees there and having taught social science at a series of universities worldwide, including professorships in anthropology at Manchester, Berlin, Durban, Amsterdam, and, in an acting capacity, Leiden. The social

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<sup>300</sup> de Laplace 1814; cf. Kaulback 2001.

<sup>301</sup> By analogy with the (originally Socratic) concept of daemon as used by Laplace (1986 / 1814), the same concept has acquired a specific meaning in the context of modern cosmology as an all-surveying and all-governing ulterior function (Aref'eva, & Volovich 2011).

<sup>302</sup> Einstein 1960 1920. Impressive empirical confirmation of the General Theory of Relativity was already offered within years of its publication: irregularities in Mercury's orbit, and gravitational deflection of light rays.

<sup>303</sup> Bastin 1971; Dirac 1982; Eisenbud 1971. For historical reviews, see: Cline 1965; Gribbin 1984, 1991. A stimulating specialist application somewhat in line with the present argument is given by: Bohm & Hiley 1993.

sciences bring the following illuminating perspectives to the present discussion.



source: [https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre-Simon\\_Laplace](https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre-Simon_Laplace)

Fig. 4.11. The French astronomer and mathematician Laplace (1749-1829)

1. In the first place, they have made us aware, and have enabled us (especially from the 1980s onward, when 'social constructivism' became a major shibboleth in the philosophy of science) to articulate in detail and with some theoretical and methodological depth, the extent to which the formation of academic knowledge is a *social* process, with cultural and sub-cultural modelling after collective representations, within a context of specific power relations that favour the production of certain knowledges and discourage the production of other knowledges, against the background of the organisation of individual careers but particular of collective forums of specialists assessing or rejecting (through paradigm formation) the acceptability of specific truth claims in science.<sup>304</sup> The arbitrary and selective nature of this assessment process is already clear from Kuhn's discussion of paradigms referred to above.
2. In the second place, the modern social sciences have developed an elaborate perspective on cultural specificity and on cultures' capability to produce different life-worlds in such a way that each culture has in principle its own coherence, meaningfulness and truth. This has enabled us to take a very relative position *vis-à-vis* the truth claims produced in specific cultures, including the modern North Atlantic culture which has been increasingly globalised in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. CE. Scientific researchers totally immersed in the pursuit of specific institutionally-defined scientific goals in the context of specific relations of power and competition, very seldom have a sophisticated awareness of the extent to which the scientific knowledge they produce is culturally specific,

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<sup>304</sup> Cf. Kelly, 1997; de Groot 1966. Bijker 1993; Hollis & Lukes 1981; Barnes *et al.* 1996; Clavelin 1994.

hence far from universal, but local and ephemeral. The viciousness with which scientists and their partisans among philosophers of science have often dismissed relativist<sup>305</sup> approaches, reflects, not so much a determination to truth's pursuit, but an entrenched sticking to established and profitable positions of hegemony – including those of the North Atlantic region, the male gender, the 'White' somatic model, and the Christian ideologico-religious position.

#### BB. PHILOSOPHERS APPROPRIATING THE NEW PHYSICS DEFENSELESS LIKE SITTING DUCKS? THE SOKAL HOAX.

A related point is the scorn with which entrenched scientists have responded to philosophers' attempts at incorporating in their work recent advances in science, especially Quantum Mechanics and the Theory of Relativity. A notorious case is that of Sokal (1996) – a pastiche of imaginary Poststructuralist philosophical approaches to modern physics (also cf. Sokal & Bricmont 1997; Sokal 1996c) which makes mince-meat of the science appropriations (including Goedel's Theorem) in Lacan, Kristeva, Irigaray, Latour, Baudrillard, Deleuze, Guattari, Virilio, even Bergson and his successors. I have taken my distance from Sokal elsewhere.<sup>306</sup> Although his ridicule while tasteless does have a point, such incorporation is inevitable and necessary, and it has been attempted from the earliest appearance of these innovations of physics.<sup>307</sup>

By contrast, stressing cultural relativism as if it were an unproblematic and lasting achievement, Sandra Harding has addressed these problematics with great insistence.<sup>308</sup> She offers the fundamental insight that the *universality* claimed for modern science (along with rationality and objectivity), may often reflect not so much the absolutely universal applicability of scientific statements as well as: *the global power associated with the culture and state (e.g. the United States of America today, or industrialising Western Europe in the age of colonialism) broadcasting such statements*. This brings her to an anti-hegemonic appreciation of the knowledge systems with a more or less independent origin outside the North Atlantic, just like in earlier work she has critically assessed the relative under-participation of women and non-'Whites' in science, and has sought to improve

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<sup>305</sup> Modern treatises expounding relativism include: Hollis & Lukes 1981; Herskovits 1973; Baghramian 2004. The range and limitations of relativism were intensively debated in the 1980s-1990s. From an anthropological perspective one tends to be surprised to note that some modern philosophers have gone out of their way to attack relativism, which anthropologists would yet be inclined to consider their subject's greatest contribution to intercultural accommodation and world peace. Such dismissive writers include Boghossian 2006; Aya 1996 and Boudon 1996, cf. Boudon & Clavelin 1994 (following Gellner 1985 / 1990); Afshan (2001; cf. Duquette 2005) points out that excessive insistence on relativism would weaken the case of those who clamour for human rights as universal values (e.g. as relevant in the context of feminism; Braidotti n.d.) taking precedence over local cultural specificity – a view contested by Bielefeldt 2000; van Binsbergen (1987a) applies similar ideas to the field of health care; Bernstein 1993 asserts that the anti-naturalistic, by implication relativism-driven stance of social-science epistemologies owes much to Kuhn; Harris offers a principled philosophical argument against relativism. This discussion could be greatly expanded but the principal issues appear to be touched upon.

<sup>306</sup> van Binsbergen 2003b: 276, 484 f.; and my piece on Guattari, final version in 2015b.

<sup>307</sup> Cf. Bergson 1922; Barreau 1973; Cassirer 1922, 1923; Rougie & Masius 1921; Reichenbach 1944.

<sup>308</sup> Harding 1997; cf. chapter 2, above. Meanwhile relativist approaches have met with considerable opposition, e.g.: Siegel 1987; Bernstein 2011; Boudon 1996; Harris 1993.

this situation. However, all this well-taken political positioning on Harding's part, reflecting her timely determination to identify with the causes of women, of other subaltern groups, and of knowledge production by people not belonging to the North Atlantic region, does not preclude that even she has to admit that *the likely validity, even universality of many modern scientific statements rests not merely on their being championed by powerful states and classes, but also, and more lastingly and fundamentally, on their methodological, procedural, and logical well-formedness and soundness*. Scientific statements continue to be valid even when applied to regions of the world, and to periods, outside the original cultural and power context in which they were first formulated. Archimedes' Law concerning the apparent loss of mass of solids submerged in fluids did not cease to be valid when, despite Archimedes' own efforts in the field of military technology, the city state of Syracuse was destroyed by the Romans – and Archimedes himself not only saw his draft calculations on his sand tablet disturbed but also lost his life in the process. An airplane built in accordance with the aerodynamic principles derived from modern physics will fly in the skies over the North Atlantic region, but will not suddenly fall down when it crosses into the Middle East or other regions not tightly controlled by the United States of America, the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and their allies.<sup>309</sup> In other words, although illuminating, there is an obvious limit to the relevance of cultural relativity in defining and limiting the scope of modern, North Atlantic science.<sup>310</sup>

In this connection at least one critical remark is in order, concerning Harding's view of transcontinental continuities in science. Although I have the greatest admiration for her work, and have stated so extensively and repeatedly (e.g. 2015: ch. 13), her approach is in need of revision on at least one empirical point: often when we analyse the transcontinen-

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<sup>309</sup> While this was being finalised for publication, in May 2021, my bold statement received an ironic sequel. The Belarus dissident Protasevich and his partner were flying in a scheduled flight from Southern Europe to Vilnius, both airports within the European Union; however, close to its destination and while skirting the Belarus border at the outer reaches of the EU, a fake bomb scare and the threatening approach of a Belarus fighter jet forced the plane to make an unscheduled landing in the Belarus capital Minsk, where the dissident and his partner were forcibly made to disembark and arrested after which the scheduled flight to Vilnius was allowed to continue. The plane went down, not for failure of the aerodynamic laws to apply, but for failure of the Belarus state to respect international treaties and borders. Can we imagine – apart from the context of science fiction writing – a situation when such disrespect actually results in mechanical disfunctioning?

<sup>310</sup> Also attributed to Archimedes (e.g. Tzetzes, 2007 *Book of Histories / Chiltades*, II, 129-130) is the claim

πα βω και χαρακτηριστωνι των γων κινησω πασων.

'If I have somewhere to stand I will move the entire Earth...'

In the same year in which I had my inkling, in the form of widening electron orbits, of a possible local and microscopic explanation of the spectral shift suggestive of the receding of galaxies, the example of the comic books I was reading inspired me to draw my own comic strip, in which a stereotypical egghead professor of science builds a space rocket (this was only a few years after the first artificial satellites were brought in orbits around the Earth) in order to bring into practice precisely Archimedes' claim. In adolescence, growth is often achieved by shedding and destroying older skin, like a snake's, and in these painful attempts at self-definition and self-redirection, most of my earliest writings have not survived.

tal background of particular knowledge systems (be they myths, writing systems, languages, board-games, divination systems), what we find is *not completely separate regional or continental traditions, but criss-crossing transcontinental flows back and forth between Asia, Africa, Oceania, Europe, and the Americas*. The point, therefore, is not merely, as in Harding's approach (which thus comes close to the *Black Athena* debate) to acknowledge the various continental traditions as independent contributions to the growth of global knowledge systems *e.g.* in the fields of science and medicine, but also to admit that *much of what today is regarded as typically and originally European or African, or Asian, in fact is the complex, fused result of the transmission, interaction, transformation and innovation of a surprisingly coherent and sustained, multicentred and multidirectional transcontinental global knowledge system*, where often specific crucial steps are taken, and may be identified as such, in one particular continent, subcontinent or region, but where in fact we have to admit a shared, global cultural history for at least the past 5 ka. This has been the thrust of my various long-range projects. over the years

Is it at all thinkable that the four self-evidences as explicitly listed by me might not be so self-evident as all that to other people in some cultures and time periods relatively removed from the modern North Atlantic? In my book *Intercultural encounters* (2003h: chapter 7, pp. 235-298) I have provisionally gone over much the same ground, stating (aspects of) the case for the possibility of veridical divination, with the relevant philosophical and natural-scientific references including those treating the Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen paradox.<sup>311</sup> However, at the time I shunned (2003h: 280) from outlining the specific ontology such a position would imply. The present book is meant to fulfil this obligation.

#### 4.6. Aspects of *Sangoma Science* from Southern Africa

The question of the universality of North Atlantic science and of the possibly universal validity of knowledge traditions from outside the North Atlantic region has been most relevant to me, ever since, in the course of fieldwork on Southern African traditional religion in the late 1980s, I learned,<sup>312</sup> at the highest professional level locally available, an African knowledge system that substantially departs from the four assumptions listed above.<sup>313</sup> I have not only studied this system as an ethnographer, but early on was considered a colleague (on the basis of my expertise in *Zambian Bituma* – central theme in my PhD thesis 1979 / 1981), and a trainee (*twaza*) practitioner (*sangoma*), and in fact I have applied this knowledge system when I have myself been practising *sangomahood* ever since, in hundreds of divinatory and therapeutic encounters with clients both in Africa, in the Netherlands, and worldwide.

Here two complementary problems may be distinguished. *In the first place*, my perspective

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<sup>311</sup> Einstein *et al.* 1935; Aspect 1982; Aspect *et al.* 1982a; Bell 1964; Bohm & Aharonov 1957; Aerts 1983, 1985, 1999.

<sup>312</sup> van Binsbergen 2003; Chs 5-8; van Binsbergen 1991a.

<sup>313</sup> 1. subject / object separation and mental appropriation; 2. reality exists independently from the human mind; and 3. laws of nature are universal and immutable, and miracles are impossible; 4. time as absolute, unidirectional, and flowing equably.

from 'Sangoma Science' in principle poses the general question, most relevant for intercultural philosophy, as to *what extent non-Western knowledge traditions could produce valid and reliable knowledge capable of application outside the narrow confines in space and time where these traditions were first generated, and where they are at home*. If we stick to the conventional definition of knowledge as 'justified true belief',<sup>314</sup> and analyse its three components, we will have to admit that all three only take on a specific meaning within a given cultural context, and in that respect knowledge has to be recognised as *eminently culture-specific*. Strictly speaking, it would be very unlikely that the same cultural conditions of the three components (justification; truth; and conscious belief) would exactly apply in exactly the same form in more than one cultural setting, and the conclusion suggests itself that *knowledge is not only culture-specific, but also incapable of crossing cultural boundaries (unless it undergoes a fundamental format change, the price for which is shedding its original, domestic validity and truth)*. The knowledge that constitutes the *distinctive* discourse of an Islamic *mullah* from Iran cannot be accepted as true by a secular post-Christian American truck driver, and that is part of the tragedy of the modern, globalised world. That tragedy is however much attenuated by the fact that, although identifying under a particular religious, cultural and national label, and politically brainwashed so as never to admit to their *shared* identity as inhabitants of the modern world, in fact both Islamic *mullah* and American truck driver *in many ways share the same culture*, especially in the field of modern technology: they know how to operate a car, a public transport system, formal organisations in the medical and financial field, can use a TV, cell phone, laptop, may dress the same at least at the level of underwear, socks and shirts, know their way about in cities, airports and highroads, etc. Yet to the extent to which they do, or do not, subscribe e.g. to a belief in the legitimacy of the *شريعة* *shari'a* legal system, *they belong to different cultures* (van Binsbergen 2003). In a study of *wisdom* (van Binsbergen 2009; cf. 2020) I have sought to stress the fundamental incompatibility and non-communicability of knowledge (at least, knowledge in its original, undiluted, uncompromised form as consciously managed by the original owners of that knowledge) across cultural boundaries, and suggested that *wisdom* (as a strategy of negotiating irresolvable contradictions) offers a structural way out of this dilemma which for the survival of our modern world will be of the greatest importance.

*The second point* in this connection is specifically limited to 'Sangoma Science'. Could its tenets, even though fundamentally different from mainstream North Atlantic science, yet be true, and to what extent? Here I have ingratiated myself considerably with many of my African colleagues (both philosophers, social scientists, and diviner-healers) by proposing *an affirmative answer, one that vindicates African knowledge systems in their own right*. This appreciation from the African side (as Amselle 2001 suggests) might be entirely due to the global politics of knowledge, regardless of any truth of *Sangoma Science* might contain. Africa and Africans and their cultural achievements have been marginalised in the World System for centuries if not millennia, so today, any non-African finding truth, meaning and beauty in things African and declaring this before a global audience, can count on African applause, even if what she or he says is substantially nonsensical, or factually wrong.

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<sup>314</sup> Gettier has advanced a few much-debated examples where this definition turns out to be not totally satisfactory, yet for purposes of intercultural philosophical research I have still found it adequate. Gettier 1963; Austin 1988.



The *sangoma* regalia including a leopard skin, dancing skirt, a fly-switch, a necklace of white glass beads around the temples, and around the neck other such necklaces and one of a rock python's vertebrae; the certificate bottom right declares me to be a life member of the *Kwame (Legwame) Traditional Association of Botswana*

Fig. 4.12. The author (2005) with *sangoma* regalia

However,<sup>315</sup> I was not trying to curry favour with my African colleagues, many of whom are atheist or Christian products of boarding schools and have little knowledge and less appreciation for the status and the work of *sangomas* and similar traditional ritual specialists. My affirmation of *Sangoma Science* has been based on my own experience over thirty years. Even though I fully realise that, from the Christian and scientific perspectives in which I have been raised and educated, the ancestors venerated in *sangoma* rites cannot possibly have any empirical material existence<sup>316</sup> and cannot be considered to be other

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<sup>315</sup> Contrary to what Amselle 2001 was reproaching me (and Coquery-Vidrovitch) for.

<sup>316</sup> Not according to the scientific perspective, but we must admit that Christians are supposed to believe in life eternal. My god mother, Mien, died when I was three years old, and the assertion that she was now in Heaven and from there would look after me was common Roman Catholic discourse at the time. There are African Christian theologies in which ancestors are equalled with saints, in a context where belief that the living, with the deceased and those not yet born, constitute a community of saints that is counted as genuine part of the order of existence, and even emphatically stipulated in



than mere figments of the imagination, incapable of performing the divinatory, protective and healing functions attributed to them. Yet when I wear my *sangoma* uniform, make the appropriate initiatory sacrifices of snuff, meal, liquor and sometimes animals, and take my clients through the *sangoma* rites in the prescribed manner, I find that I unmistakably wield the power of veridical divination, that the healing I try to administer often seems to lead to improvement in the client's condition, as do the acts of herbal medication, prayer, self-healing and sacrifice that, as the outcomes of my divination, I prescribe to my clients. It seems to work for them, even if it does not work for me.<sup>317</sup>

I have argued this disconcerting finding repeatedly in my works, and have no intention to go through the motions once more, even though I do not expect to be believed. In my initial motivation to accept the *sangomas'* insistent invitation and join their cult, three factors prevailed; I have already discussed them above but they are important enough to bear repeating:

- my thirst for the occult knowledge these local specialists appeared to possess in the eyes of the layman I then still was;<sup>318</sup>
- my hope to find solace in my various predicaments (the completed manuscript of my then latest book (later to appear as 1992) had disappeared from my Francistown house and I had no up-to-date copy, our family was suffering from a range of complaints that brought us to the family doctor every week, and we felt rejected by our neighbours with only a few exceptions);
- and – from a global politics of knowledge point of view – my desire, in a Southern Africa still dominated by apartheid minority rule in South Africa (my initiation into *thwazahood* i.e. *sangoma* apprenticeship took place scarcely half a year after the release from prison of Mr Nelson Mandela, the later President of the Republic of South Africa), to publicly demonstrate my loyalty with a subaltern cultic and

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the Creed. Cf. Glenday 1976; Ishola 1983.

<sup>317</sup> And it does not work for all my African clients, either. We must not assure present-day belief systems among African as integrated monoliths. Western education, globalisation, the installation of 'White' elites with their secular Western culture as a reference group for the African upper and middle class, and the access to digital sources of information, have brought about a situation where many African clients no longer have the traditional knowledge and self-evidences at their disposal which have formed, for a few centuries, the background for *sangoma* divination and healing, and for similar African practices. African divination and healing offered by a 'White' practitioner like myself have, I found, a certain snob appeal among African elites; but normally before I can proceed to the session proper, with such clients, I need an hour of so to lecture them on African traditions they scarcely know and appreciate less. The basis of their trust in my divination and healing lies not in beliefs they may share with me (I have already indicated that my own beliefs in question are minimal), but in the secret private knowledge which I intimate during divination, and which they acknowledge as true.

<sup>318</sup> Our present argument situates itself, among other contexts, among recent reflections on the occult, cf. Badone, 1995; Geschiere 1997 (cf. my critique in: van Binsbergen, 2001); Grim 1990; Kiernan 2006; Moore & Saunders 2001; Niehaus 2001; Olivier de Sardan 1988; Tyler 1986. Such studies emerged partly in response to Post-modern studies celebrating, like my present argument, the boundary-crossing into the occult during fieldwork: Castaneda 1968 1971, 1972 1974, 1977; Stoller & Olkes 1987; Jaulin 1971.

therapeutic idiom which was despised by the then (despite Botswana's 1966 Independence still) dominant 'White' segment of society in that region.

It is perfectly possible to aspire to these three benefits even if one does not believe in the material existence and powers of the ancestors, and sees the *sangoma* rites as forms of placebo. Such skepticism was largely – despite a few moments of captivating rapture – mine at the moment of initiation / graduation. Only gradually, in the course of subsequent years, and rather to my surprise, did it dawn upon me that I had been initiated into a knowledge system that was not only exotic, ethnographically interesting, therapeutically effective, and politically significant, *but that constituted alternative but valid knowledge, to boot.*

In my sustained attempts to come to terms with my experiences as a practicing *sangoma* (including the scepticism, cynicism and agnosticism which my apparent successes continued to arouse in me, to this very day), after many years I developed the following *modus vivendi*. I began to accept that reality is protean and heterogeneous, and cannot be reduced to a single formula however much our (more or less) one culture of birth and early socialisation, and the truth-producing (truth-faking!) life-world it creates for us, seek to persuade us of their own unique relevance and veridicity. In a seminar on *Sangoma Science* and my work on Sandra Harding which I presented before my stimulating colleagues in the Department of Man and Culture, Philosophical Faculty, Erasmus University Rotterdam (2005), we together hit, illuminatingly and felicitously, upon the provisional formula that *reality presents to us the face that is commensurate with the expectations with which we approach reality*. If we wear the North Atlantic scientific mind set summarised in our four fundamental assumptions above, reality will respond accordingly, these assumptions will appear to be true and will be borne out by our observations. If however we wear the *sangoma* regalia and act accordingly, the face of reality which we will encounter provides for materially intervening ancestors, veridical divination, tangibly effective therapies – as if our mind set and actions call to life a reality that, without that mind set, would merely remain a figment of the imagination. As an empirical scientist I was not really prepared for such utter idealism, in other words, for a reality that appeared to live up to Schopenhauer's book title *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung (The World As Will And Representation, 1912 / 1818 / 1844)*.

#### CC. THE HUMAN WILL AND PARANORMAL PHENOMENA.

However, as we have seen, Schopenhauer's emphasis on (his specific interpretation of) the will does not apply in the context of *Sangoma Science*, and in fact the correspondence of *Sangoma Science* with Schopenhauer's doctrine is only very superficial. Let us agree that *Sangoma Science* belongs to the realm of the occult and the paranormal – where my African teachers appear to have accumulated grounded, valid knowledge that in some respects (see below) may perhaps be considered to be at a par with state-of-the-art North Atlantic natural science. However, as we have seen, it has been a recurrent feature of paranormal phenomena that they can hardly be produced and reproduced at will, and cannot be captured and measured experimentally under tightly controlled conditions. (Since there is a considerable negative social sanction on this failure, the occult practitioner is often found to cheat, so as to conceal the failure to produce under pressure; however, this does not mean that she or he is *always* cheating.) As we have seen, for Skeptical scientists (for instance those united in the notorious *Manifest Against Astrology*: Bok, et al. 1975) this state of affairs has constituted sufficient reason to conclude that the paranormal does not exist and is merely a myth. For me however this condition,

which I have experienced repeatedly, is rather a reminder that the assumptions about reality as implied in classic (pre-1900 CE) North Atlantic science, only represent one culturally-specific option – they are true only under certain boundary conditions yet to be addressed below, in fact obsolete in the light of the Theory of Relativity, and of Quantum Mechanics, and do not exhaust all aspects that reality has had in all times and all places.

As a poet I have felt at home in a world where the imagination, rather than hard and inflexible material reality, seemed to rule supremely, even to the extent of letting itself be experienced in the material reality.

More could be said about the extent to which the world-view of the *sangomas* differs from the four assumptions of the modern Received North Atlantic World-view as listed above. The descriptive details may be found in my earlier works on *sangoma*, but scarcely their epistemological assessment. So let us go over them once more.

- 1) In *Sangoma Science*, the objectifying separation between knowing subject and known object is in several ways denied, dissimulated or simply absent. The *sangoma* is supposed to act under the empowerment of invisible superhuman agents, the spirits of her or his<sup>319</sup> ancestors (and occasionally those of her clients and teachers), who supposedly manifest themselves in her, take over a part of her personality, effectively possess her especially when in a trance condition, impart otherwise unavailable knowledge to her (so that she is, theoretically at least, in a position to know a client's complaints even without these having been stated explicitly, and can articulate secrets from the client's life so as to add credibility to her divinatory and therapeutic pronouncements in which the client's predicament is expressed and remedied). These ancestral spirits are also considered to bring about the specific fall of the oracular tablets which, in a succession of one to about forty throws, with each throw produce a particular configuration which is interpreted by reference to an (intersubjective, widely known and accepted) oral catalogue of multi-dimensional meanings stored in the *sangoma's* mind.
- 2) In regard of the second assumption (*the world exists independently from the observing and articulating human mind*), I am not aware of an explicit *sangoma* doctrine but since world, ancestors and *sangoma* are considered to be entangled beyond separation (and in ways very similar to the stipulations of Quantum Mechanics), many phenomena in the physical world are interpreted as manifestations of processes in the mind. A person insulting the *sangoma* will instantly experience misfortune because of the *sangoma's* and / or the latter's ancestors' anger; new clients are drawn to the *sangoma's* surgery as a result of his magical action; enemies are warded off and punished, but riches are made to flow to the *sangoma*, also because of the purposeful manipulation of specific doctored substances, etc. In fact, the considerable fear which *sangomas* inspire in their community of residence has everything to do with the formidable and destructive

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<sup>319</sup> Most *sangomas* are women, which allows me to avoid the pitfalls of the English language in the handling of gender, and simply use the feminine form from this point onward.

mental powers attributed to them.<sup>320</sup>

- 3) The third assumption, relating to *the universality and 'exceptionlessness' of laws of nature, hence the impossibility of miracles*, gives a very clear picture to see. *Sangomas* are supposed to be wonder-workers. Bilocality is often attributed to them and

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<sup>320</sup> DD. THE SANGOMA IN THE PUBLIC URBAN SPACE OF BOTSWANA C. 1990 CE: FEARED OR DESPISED?

Although in the ideology of the *sangomas* it is a fairly unique privilege to be chosen by the ancestors to be their incarnation on Earth and share in their powers, yet most parents in Francistown sigh in exasperation when their adolescent or adult child shows such an inclination. This may be partly due to the fact that this religious speciality is still considered a relatively recent alien import, and a heathen, even satanical, deviation from dominant Christianity. The *sangoma* is feared and superhuman powers are attributed to her or him, but one would only associated with him or her if misfortune, or the desire of magical success, would compel one. Personally I have only very few experiences of seeing such formidable occult powers explicitly attributed to me as a *sangoma* in Southern Africa, except as a member of a lodge or procession of *sangomas*. MmaShakayile had her lodge in the old mining compound of Monarch, her sister or cousin MmaNdhlovu had here in the informal city ward of Riverside, and regularly the *sangomas* would walk *en groupe*, as a sinister procession dressed in black, to the nearby stream where the ancestors were considered to dwell, and where novice initiates were to be chased across the river bed dropping coins as offerings. On these occasions, the neighbours would stand in their open front doors, clearly awed and intimidated, silently watching us go by, and pressing their children close to their skirts lest they should come to harm. More pleasant was the following experience. The herbalist Mr Smarts Gumede, my main teacher of the details of local geomantic divination, and spiritual leader in occult matters, immediately welcomed me after my *thwaza* initiation, insisting that (under the name of Dr Sibanda) I should help diagnose and treat his clients, and would have an equal share of the proceeds; this is what we did, but for one day only. When our initial lodge leader, MmaNdhlovu, died in September 1989 under sinister circumstances, my wife (then already in *sangoma* uniform) and I (still an outsider) went to the funerary wake and openly protested against the total denial of our mentrix's *sangoma* identity, in the face of the Christian rites, prayers and speeches and political rallying prevailing at her funeral; but such dissimulation was part, I began to understand, of the strategy of Botswana traditional religion of going underground in the modern urban environment. So in that setting, whatever sinister powers were attributed to us *sangomas* were far from publicly acknowledged. Another experience was even less pleasant. In the first years after my initiation as an *thwaza* I would wear my several strings of *sangoma* beads (each string represents a substantial sacrifice, normally of a goat) visibly protruding from under the unfastened collar of my shirt. Sangomahood is a public role, even without introduction members of the public are free to call on the *sangoma* for divination and therapy, and the visible beads are like the Christian clerical collar to publicly identify the religious specialist. One day, a few weeks after my initiation as an *thwaza*, I was shopping at the Botsalano grocery and butchery, on the edge of the Somerset East Extension site-and-service township where I had lived for a full year 1988-1989 with my family; a young man in his early twenties, unknown to me and addressing me in strongly accented Botswana English, started to insult me, trying to touch my beads and making fun of them, and implying that I did not know what I was dabbling in, and anyway had no right to do so. A shop assistant was shocked: 'He is playing with his life. He deserves to be touched by your ancestors.' Overcome with indignation and anger (as if my ancestral spirit was indeed taking over), I reassured her 'Don't worry, I am already touching him right now', and quickly left the shop, relieved that he had not physically assaulted me.

even claimed by them, and so are many other capabilities (especially in the fields of diagnosis / divination, and healing) that in the North Atlantic scholarly tradition are usually subsumed under the heading of magic. In the Southern African subcontinent the population has been decimated since c. 1980 by the scourge of HIV / AIDS; in subsequent decades, many *sangomas* have been considered to hold the cure to that otherwise incurable infection, and many claim such powers for themselves (which does not prevent them from featuring in the state's distribution of free condoms as prevention against HIV / AIDS). To bring back the irretrievably lost, even the dead,<sup>321</sup> and alternatively to harm and kill enemies from a distance, is considered to be well within the *sangoma's* power, as is the magical enhancement of business success, the multiplication of a client's money, and the magical rigging of football matches and political elections in the interest of one of the parties involved. Local fortunes are being paid in exchange for these services. Such alleged feats require, in addition to the ancestors' intercession which is reinforced by animal sacrifices, the manipulation of exceptional and prohibited substances, like the remains of lions and leopards, even of humans; and sometimes humans (especially boys) are admitted to be killed specifically for the purpose of acquiring these substances (brain and genitals).<sup>322</sup> Effectively repulsed by the

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<sup>321</sup> For instance, after I was (in 1992) publicly recognised, and occasionally active, as a traditional diviner / healer also in the Western Zambian context (where that role is designated not *sangoma* but *nganga*), I was approached there, in 1995, to bring back to life a deceased elderly lady, whom her relatives suspected of have been put to work as a *zombie*, judging her death to be merely apparent. When I declined, arguing (in this superficially Christianised environment) that only Jesus had the required powers, the prospective clients immediately offered to pay me more, as if they were thoroughly convinced that such powers existed and were within my reach but that I was only bargaining for a better deal; but wisely, I continued to decline (van Binsbergen 1996. When I found myself on less shaky grounds I usually honoured my clients's demands , savouring their obvious trust in my spiritual powers. For instance, in Kaoma district, when travelling with Mwene Kahare Kabambi and his retinue, I was requested to look into the health problems of one of the king's *kapasus* ('Native Policemen'); in a divination session that was rather too public to my liking, I brought out (much to the client's consent) that his ailment stemmed from an unresolved conflict over inheritance (especially hunting rifles are highly coveted heirlooms among the Nkoya), and – as later reports brought out – I successfully prescribed redressive action and additional herbal remedies. On another occasion, in Francistown, Botswana in the same year, I was commissioned to cleanse from *tokolosh* (obnoxious, potentially murderous demons) the vacant house of a close friend's daughter – like so many in Botswana at the time including her husband, she had died of AIDS, and – by a belief widespread in Southern and South Central Africa – her loving father, a major local entrepreneur, was generally accused of having secretly given her up to the spirits in return for entrepreneurial success. My own divination to the contrary could scarcely counter this sinister and bitter allegation. In full *sangoma* uniform I drove to the large council house indicated. There, mistakenly entering the adjacent plot, my gaudy appearance scared the 'White' neighbourhood out of her wits, but finally, with the aid of my fly switch and a bucket-full of *mptlelwa* solution, I cleared the job satisfactorily. A few years earlier, while still under the tutelage of the herbalist Mr Smarts Gumede, his medicine had been meant to protect ourselves from enemy-sent *tokolosh* rattlingly walking on the roof of our house at night; for the present exorcism I needed to summon all my courage to confront these formidable invisible spirits alone, and chase them. Publicly going through the motions, it hardly made a difference that at the cognitive level I did not believe in them.

<sup>322</sup> Unfortunately these are not just remote rumours. In 1998-1990 my principal female field assistant was Ms Ennie Mapangwane; Jane Sinombe, one of the daughters of the High Priest of the Mwali cult at Nata,

moral implications of such actions, my personal experience with exceptional powers in the hands of *sangomas* has been largely limited to the accounts of my clients, my collegial contacts with fellow-*sangomas*, and my own paranormal experience, repeated numerous times, of apparently being able to convince my clients with what in their eyes is considered veridical divination (and to effect cures for which there may be simple psychological and psychosomatic explanations, like in the case of faith healers in general).

- 4) The fourth assumption relates to the *nature and perception of time*, and again offers a very clear picture. When my wife and I were drawn into the *sangoma* world during fieldwork in Francistown, Botswana, in 1988-1989, we were treated to a number of situations that rocked our consciousness by totally upsetting the assumptions about time which we had hitherto entertained. In massively attended rituals, *sangoma* adepts were seized by what were claimed to be ancestral spirits – the minds of people long dead who (in what was taken to be their authentic voices, senile and wavering – sounding as if after death they had continued living and aging) were delivering messages through the mouths of the living adept. Such divinatory sessions were also initiated and staged for the benefit of my wife and me, and the ancestral messages delivered on those occasions claimed to reconstruct in detail our respective family histories and the impact these were having on our present life; in the process, lineal and collateral ancestors who had died in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century CE and with whom we had never had any personal dealings, were presented as seeking to settle old scores with us, as requesting ritual attention and sacrifices of animal victims and liquor, as complaining that their name had not been given to living descendants, and as seeking to emerge in bodies and taking over our personalities.<sup>323</sup> Among these *sangomas*, death, dying, even murder were

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Central Botswana, was her fellow-student at a prominent Francistown typing school, and because of this link, I could locate and interview Jane and be brought by her to her father at Nata (200 kms west of Francistown) for further confirmation as a *sangoma*, and registration of the association of traditional healers, after my initiation as an *thwaza*. A year later I was to return to Nata as a fully-fledged *sangoma*, but then Jane was not involved. Ritual leaders in Francistown were apparently seeking to gain entry to the domain of modern technologies of ICT through their daughters, one of them was the daughter of the official Mwali representative at Francistown (owner of a transport company), and another such student was the daughter of the most prominent Mwali-associated diviner-healer in town, owner of a large dwelling with busy surgery (often operated by this daughter) near the Tati River. When I was taken to Nata for my final confirmation as *sangoma*, in 1991, this diviner-healer was obliged, *qualitate qua*, to accompany us (my mentrix MmaShakayile, her granddaughter Molly, and myself), but at the shrine he was flatly refused entry because he was alleged to engage in boy sacrifice for the procurement of entrepreneurial success medicine. Alarming, his senior position within the cult was not in the least called to question in that connection.

<sup>323</sup> EE. THE BUDDING SANGOMA HAS HIS PICK OF AVAILABLE ANCESTORS

In the first weeks of our intensive, practically full-time engagement with the Francistown *sangomas* in mid-1989, we were swept off our feet by a roller-coaster ride of yarns, suggestions, half truths, and surprisingly correct intimations. For my wife, the inflicting ancestor was identified – with some plausibility – as her

being discussed in an off-hand manner since everyone now living, espe-

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mother's paternal grandmother Clementine, who had gone down in family history for her bad temper and dominating personality. A year later, in the context of my own initiation into *thwazahood* in 1990, several afflicting ancestors were identified for me in an intensive communication process between myself and the lodge leader: my historic paternal grandfather Henk, who as father of a handful of very young children had been mobilised into the Dutch army during World War I, and (like millions of others) had succumbed to the Spanish Influenza in 1918; a, *apparently totally imaginary* paternal grandfather's brother, who allegedly (but without leaving the slightest trace in family traditions) had emigrated to South Africa at the time of the Boer War, and was supposed to have been killed as a soldier in the Boer army – it was in honour of him that I was obliged to add (much like the young students I was to see 'toytoying' on South African university premises shortly after Mandela's release in 1990) a wooden gun to my *sangoma* paraphernalia. I first fashioned a black gun out of inferior wood, but significantly it broke in several pieces when I accidentally knelt on it at the threshold of the house in Mathilagabedi where my final initiation as *sangoma* was to be staged (see black flap photograph); a more solid red specimen sawn out of thick waterproof plywood is still in my possession. The next ancestor whom I impersonated during trance was historic, Mwene Timuna, the royal father of my adopted Zambian father, king Kabambi Kahare – the latter had been a sergeant in the British colonial army. At birth, I first received the surname of my mother's ex-husband, another professional soldier (cf. Fig. 3.18). Thus, although an affirmed pacifist, I was surrounded by an entire entourage of military men in my real and imagined ancestry. When as a small boy I had frequented the apartment of my paternal grandmother, Henk's widow, a few blocks away from our family home in the same popular neighbourhood, I was often puzzled by the framed photograph of a young man (in military uniform?), displayed on my grandmother's sideboard, and suitably adorned with the adage 'VOOR HEN DIE VIELEN' (TO OUR WAR HEROES). This had been my father's elder brother Chiel, whose full name Michiel I received as a second name at birth, but about whom never the slightest information was volunteered within our family – probably because his close kinsmen had been rather less heroic and patriotic during the German occupation. I do not know why I never broke that silence at my own initiative, but that is how children tend to respond to the painful spots in their family history. Only while the present book was going through its final stages, in mid-2020, did my own half-brother call my attention to the website of the Netherlands War Documentation Centre, where Chiel appeared as an esteemed resistance hero, a Communist, probably one of the instigators of the February Strike which, in February 1941, constituted the first public protest against the Nazi deportation of Jews from Amsterdam. Chiel was immediately arrested, spent four years in German captivity, and was murdered in Hamburg a few days before the German capitulation in early May 1945. So my *sangoma* interlocutors had conjured up a non-existent soldier in the Boer War, but what had totally escaped their attention was the historic resistance hero, Communist (I had been a declared Marxist as a young man) and pro-Jewish champion (for my mother local Jews constituted a reference group; my brother became a prominent Hebraeist) whose last days in prison and painful murder I had – as I finally realised in retrospect – often vicariously experienced in daydreams without being able to understand the origin of these terrible images and anxieties. Still, in hindsight it must have been my heroic father's brother Chiel who was the true ancestor seeking to emerge in me – a thought that makes me proud.

cially those belonging to the *sangoma* lodge, would without a doubt return to life within a short period after dying.

Apart from being afflicted by several ancestors, I was revealed to be the reincarnation of the two female cult leaders' (classificatory)<sup>324</sup> brother Johannes<sup>325</sup> (a common Afrikaander name – the two cult leaders had part Afrikaander ancestry – , and also my third and fourth given name, which however I never used before that time). Proudly my own grave was shown to me at one of the cult leaders' premises, and henceforth I was looked upon, and treated in every respect, as Johannes-Returned – as the person who would take over the lodge, and look after its dozens of adept and non-adept resident family members, after the death of the aged leader. It is hardly possible to describe the violent, unsettling brain-washing effect which such an intensive denial and restructuring of time and history, embedded in day-to-day intensive social exchanges, has on one's mind. Soon after my graduation as a *sangoma*, when my supernaturally-sanctioned privilege of donning a leopard skin created alarmingly open conflict with some other lodge members, I shied away from the responsibility of becoming the next lodge leader (after all, I had a beloved wife and children in Holland), and from 1992 on I have never dared return to the Monarch lodge.

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<sup>324</sup> *Classificatory*: an anthropological technical term, denoting a usually wide class of relatives who, regardless of the precise biological relationship by which they would be known in North Atlantic society, are called by a primary kinship term such as 'brother', 'father', etc. and socially function as stipulated by that term.

<sup>325</sup> Perhaps to compensate for the fact that my parents never married, my given names derive from those of my father, and (for all I know) his two brothers: Chiel (the resistance hero) and Johan. The latter however was never particularly close neither to my father nor to me, and therefore there may be truth in my half-brother's suggestion to the effect that I was called Johannes in order to honour my mother's first husband, Joop, under whose surname I was initially entered into the Registry of Births and Deaths. Later I was officially recognised by my father, whose surname I then received. For a quarter of a century my father remained part of my mother's household, often as its most stable provider, but the bond, however materially effective, while neurotic and destructive, was never solemnised in marriage. The *sangomas* may be credited with a rare intuition for stressing the name Johannes above my other given names, even if it made them overlook the symbolically far more formative link with my uncle Chiel. Beyond being a common Afrikaander name (using the official Hebrew / Greek / Vulgate Biblical version rather than its Dutch or English domestications: *Jan, John*), cf. the toponym Johannesburg, one might wonder if the name *Johannes* might have any further special appeal in the *sangoma* context. Picknett & Prince's 1998 disreputable New-Age best-seller *The Templar Revelation* implies a specific affirmative, though highly speculative, answer to this question: Given my above consideration of links between *sangomahood* and the Ancient Mediterranean, we might encounter here an echo of a Gnostic tradition in Early Christianity, according to which not Christ but John the Baptist was the cult's initiator and leader, dextrously eclipsed and possibly killed by Jesus. This is the kind of rumours which have taken a new lease of life with the renewed interests in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Templar Knights, Mary of Magdalen as possibly Jesus's wife, and Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code* (cf. chapter 5 of the present book). At any rate, such an interpretation may be supported by the sexual imagery surrounding John the Baptist – his decapitation in prison (*Mark 6:27*) suggests castration and also usurpation of his leadership. Remarkably, phallic symbolism (the raised index finger, notably but not exclusively on Leonardo da Vinci's LAST SUPPER) also attaches to the other John in the *New Testament*: John the Disciple, of all disciples closest to Jesus, and traditionally the (pseudo-epigraphical) author of the fourth *Gospel* and of the *Book of Revelation*. In 1995 I visited the alleged tomb of John at Ephesus, Ionia, Turkey.





Mma Shakayile, later one of my principal teachers of *sangomahood*, casts her divining tablets. On this deliberately posed photograph, taken many months before I had established a personal therapeutic relationship with her, she is using a double set of eight tablets, augmented with a short twig and a little rod of ivory – intended for demonstration purposes only? In her lodge (where I was to be trained as a *sangoma*, including learning to operate the tablet oracle) a number of four tablets was the norm for actual, serious divination. Her headdress is reminiscent of a Nepali *Homa* fire priest's (cf. van Binsbergen 2010a). She is dressed in full regalia and is attended by her major adepts, Molly and Kwani, who are also her granddaughters; Monarch township, Francistown, Botswana, 1989. Although this divination was supposed to be for demonstration purposes only (with my camera I was making the farewell round of my informants before returning to Europe after my first major spell of Francistown fieldwork), I suspect that when less than a year later I joined the lodge training as a *thwaza*, the *sangomas* believed that this had been foretold by the fall of the tablets documented in this photograph.

Fig. 4.13. Francistown sangomas demonstrate divination, 1989.

Let us return to the discussion of *sangoma* in the light of the four assumptions underlying the modern scientific world-view. At the experiential level, *Sangoma Science* seems to consist more of the readiness to assume the possibility of a violation of laws of nature, than in the actual empirical observation of such violation, and even less in the *sangoma*'s own deliberate action implying or causing such a violation. Apart from my own experiences with my clients, I would be hard pressed to cite any personal observations of such *sangoma* violation observable in the outside world – even though through *introspection* I have very regular, almost daily, experiences of telepathy, clairvoyance and precognition, especially when it comes to mail on its way to me from abroad, or simple numbers such as what time it is, what the winning *bingo* number is, or how much my wife paid for her new purchases. I have been aware of the widespread claims as to exceptional abilities attributed to *sangomas*, to royals in South Central and Southern Africa, to South Asian sages and to holy men worldwide: the familiar series of bilocality, asity, levitation, ability to speak exotic languages, the emanation of light from or around their bodies, the instant production of precious material objects as gifts for their visitors /

consultants, etc. But although I would not offhand dismiss all such reports and claims as inherently untrue even fraudulent, I must confess that in my own waking and alert experience hardly anything of this nature has happened, not even at the time when I was receiving my training and frequented the *sangoma* lodge on a daily basis.



the room is stuffed with herbal and animal *materia medica* (stored in jars once containing manufactured food stuffs such as jam, some of which still bear labels in Afrikaans), whose administration and dosage is dictated by local geomantic divination

Fig. 4.14. A herbalist's (Mr Gumede's) surgery, Francistown, Botswana, 1989.

What I did experience is something that looked like fraud although probably it was rather a case of fellow-*sangomas* overplaying their hand in their own belief of being able to transgress laws of nature: at the end of my training, after being initiated and confirmed as a fully-fledged *sangoma* with the right to start my own lodge, I was given a very large (ca. 4 cm largest dimension) gold nugget to sell in Europe and cover the expenses of my training – which had amounted to a general worker's year's salary by local standards, even though my cult leader, as a sign of integrity, commitment, and good faith, had thrown in a large black bull and a sheep of her own to be sacrificed, in addition to the three goats I had had to buy and bring myself, apart from the stipulated large fee in cash, and the ingredients for a large-scale sacrificial meal feeding dozens of *sangoma* guest. To my considerable embarrassment, when taken to a friend's goldsmith's workshop in Europe, the nugget turned out to be an ordinary pebble covered with gold paint. The only benefit I derived from it, in addition to soberingly calling my attention to the possibility of fraud in the *sangoma* context, is that it constituted my first indication (later to be confirmed by several others) to the effect that the *sangoma* cult may have derived from the historic presence of Indian gold mining and trading in Southern Africa in the late first and early second millennium CE (cf. Thornton 2012).

#### FF. PENTECOST-LIKE ILLUSIONS OF INTERLINGUALITY.

An experience that did puzzle me was the following. As already indicated in an above footnote, after my final graduation as a *sangoma* in 1990, I was taken to the regional

headquarters / central shrine of the Mwali High-God cult in North-Eastern Botswana, in Nata. I had been taken to the same place a year before, when entering *thwazhood* as a trainee *sangoma*. Keeper of the shrine was 70-years old Mr Sinombe, for many years President of the Kwame / Legwame Traditional Association of Botswana, one of the few professional associations of traditional healers in that country (cf. van Binsbergen 1990). On the earlier visit I had been made a life members of that association, on the intercession of MmaShakayile, one of my principal teachers, who considered such membership an important professional protection in case of trouble with the authorities, for instance if one of my patients would die; traditional divination and healing had for decades been prohibited and persecuted under colonial rule. Having received a secondary-school education at an English-medium mission school in Zimbabwe, Mr Sinombe spoke perfect English with me most of the time; but when (ritually blindfolded under a white bed sheet made of cheap, synthetic fabric) I was taken to the shrine, and from the adjacent room heard the unmistakable voice of Mr Sinombe again, now impersonating the High God Mwali, he was speaking mainly in the Hume dialect of Shona. *However, the statements that were immediately addressed to me inside the shrine I found to be in my own native, unmarked Dutch.* To the native speaker the Dutch language is worlds apart from Afrikaans, which to Dutch ears sounds like children's make-believe gibberish; Mr Sinombe and I could have used Afrikaans between us but never did. I cannot interpret this extraordinary phenomenon as an infringement of natural law. It may be an effect of the brain-washing that was undoubtedly an aspect of my *sangoma* training. Later, two of my *sangoma* clients, an Indian entrepreneurial couple from Francistown, reported a similar linguistic illusion when on audience with Sathya Sai Baba (1926-2011), in India (probably the city of Puttparthi, the main location for that saint to make his sacred appearances (*darśana*)).<sup>326</sup>

As we have already seen above, the two Francistown *sangoma* lodges I was frequenting, each headed by either of the two classificatory sisters Mma Shakayile and MmaNdhlovu, both had two kinds of adepts. There were

- the *sangomas* in the narrower sense, considered to be possessed by their personal ancestral spirits, donning gaudy uniforms that displayed the near-universal sacred colour triad black-white-red (often interpreted as 'rain clouds'<sup>327</sup> – ancestral bones – blood'), dancing (in a manner rather continuous with ceremonial and recreational traditional dancing throughout the region, with much foot stamping, the upper arms vertically down from the shoulders and bent horizontally at the elbows so that

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<sup>326</sup> What we are dealing with is a case of diasporic Indians being addressed by an Indian in India – perhaps no big deal. However, given the incredible plurality of languages in India, the reported effect may still have been remarkable; the couple involved were native speakers of Gujarati (< Indo-Aryan < Indo-European), from the Gujarat region (near Mumbai, Western India) which has greatly contributed to the recent Indian population of Southern Africa; whereas the audience took place in a Telugu- < Dravidian-speaking context. The materialisation of small precious objects (as reported by my clients / spokesmen), and especially of sacred ashes, as plays a distinctive role in the cult of Sai Baba, are features also found among some of the most successful and feared para-Christian occult sects in Francistown; probably there is a recent connection here. Cf. van Binsbergen 1990a / 2017a.

<sup>327</sup> In South Central and Southern Africa, agriculture is a mainstay of the village economy, and dependent on an erratic pattern of rainfall. Here rain clouds are the sign of divine blessing *par excellence*. The High God Mwali, bringer of rain, is predominantly represented by the colour black. However, according to a more universal conception of the colour triad as mediated, for instance, by Victor Turner, black is interpreted in somatic terms as excrement, which seldom has propitious connotations. Turner 1966; Jacobson-Widding 1979.

the lightly curved hands move horizontally to and fro in front of the stomach) to the tune of well-articulated sacred songs with lyrics in Kalanga and Ndebele, and on the other hand;

- the Mwali adepts (*Wosanna*,<sup>328</sup> considered to be possessed by the High God Mwali (or by their own lineal ancestors who were so possessed), dressing mainly in black, and so overwhelmed by the presence of the High God in their persons that rather than articulated cultic songs they would produce pained, unarticulated groans; they may dance in the same *sangoma* manner just described, but may also adopt a rigid stance as if completely catatonic under the impact of the sacred.

The High God Mwali and her cult was considered to oversee all expressions of ecstatic religion in the region (even all religious expressions *tout court*, including Christianity). Therefore, although myself identifying as a *sangoma*, whose uniform by ancestral dictate (as revealed by divination and dreams) consists of white trousers, a red shirt, a red (at first black) wooden gun, and assorted black elements in the form of beads, a fly-switch, a cloak), I was hardly surprised when, in the restless night preceding my public initiation into *thwazahood*, I had an acoustic hallucination of a featureless anthropomorphic personality addressing me (I cannot remember in what language, probably in English) with the words '*I am Mwali, and I am calling you*'. As an adolescent I had had several experiences of hearing God's voice when walking the family dog on the fallow lands surrounding the brand-new residential estate in the then outskirts of Amsterdam, where I was living with my parents, 1960-1969. Although I had soon after that relinquished all belief in a personal God, the brain-washing to which my *sangoma* training amounted had brought back remnants of this belief across a quarter of a century. I was a specialist on African religion, familiar with the deconstructive social-scientific, psychoanalytical and philosophical literature on theistic beliefs, and vaguely aware, in a corner of my mind, of the mental manipulation I was being subjected to – for instance when being shown my-grave-as-Johannes, and when being persuaded to constantly engage in time-defying divination of past and future. Yet hearing what appeared to be God's voice lent a factuality to my experiences from which I have found it near-impossible to tear myself loose. Despite my agnosticism I could not escape the impression of being confirmed in a sacred status, and I took pride and joy in it. No laws of nature were being infringed in the process, again – but the experience made it much easier for me to play along, in my mind, with the belief

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<sup>328</sup> Elsewhere (2003: 167n; 2017: *passim*, see that book's Index) I have considered the question whether this name derives from the Biblical exclamation *hosanna*, which I now consider likely although the details of the specific historical path of borrowing remains undisclosed. As considered above, Ancient Mediterranean influences upon *sangoma* abound, and the Pelasgian Hypothesis (including the link between the Ancient Near East and West Africa, repeatedly highlighted in Dierk Lange's work) takes care of their southward transmission. Meanwhile, lacking a more convincing etymology, we might propose to find the etymon in the Hittite office of *hazannu*, 'burgomaster, esp. of the Hittite capital Bugaskoey' (Bittel 1970: 66); after all, over the millennia there had been considerable Hittite influence in Syro-Palestine, and by the *New Testament* accounts (*Matthew* 21:9; *Mark* 11:9; *John* 12:13) Jesus was greeted with the cry 'Hosanna' when solemnly making his entrance into the city of Jerusalem as if he were taking possession of it.

of my fellow-*sangomas*, to the effect that laws of nature only existed to be violated at will by the superior powers of Mwali, the ancestors, and their servants, the *sangomas*. This amounts to the ability to loyally and expertly go through the motions (in gestures, uttered discourse, and inner thoughts) of a local belief system yet without committing myself to it at the cognitive level through a deliberate act of conversion; instead merely playing with it as an optional discourse assumed or terminated at will (van Binsbergen 1981b), has been my standard stance throughout my decades of research and participation in African religion, from the first moment the Christian church congregations I was studying in Lusaka 1972-1973 asked me to preach to them – and I saw no reason not to oblige; and in fact my fieldwork stance had not been different when studying popular Islam in the highlands of North-western Tunisia, engaging in saintly sacrifices, prayer, and ecstatic dancing. Perhaps to some readers this confirms me as essentially a liar and an hypocrite – someone who has been unable to cast off his adolescent occasional lapse into fraud.<sup>329</sup> I think that such a dismissive judgement mainly betrays the legalist and textual tradition of European Christianity, and does not do justice to the fact that my own participation, which I call 'loyal' and 'expert' on good grounds, is not necessarily clearly different from that of local participants, in situations (like a Nkoya or Tunisian village – but not an urban African Independent Church) where membership of the cult comes with community belonging as bestowed by birth.

Nonetheless, it looks as if we are getting close here to a type of mystical experience, fusion with the divine, that is familiar from the writings of great Christian mystics (St Theresa, St John of the Cross, Hildegard von Bingen) but also from a Persian Islamic mystic such as al-Hallaj (858-922 CE), executed for his insistence on such fusion hence proclaiming *Ana al-Haqq* / 'I am the Truth' (Massignon 1922). Perhaps my own most compelling experience of the megalomaniac sense of omnipotence generated by the mystical self-awareness of being possessed by the High God, is the following episode, which is situated in Francistown, three and a half years after my *sangoma* graduation. In this account, again, no laws of nature were perceptively transgressed, but the experience was yet saturated with a world-view in which such transgression is common-place and in fact *seems* to be occurring as part of my identification with the regional High God Mwali.

#### GG. THE SANGOMA OVERWHELMED BY TERRIFYING MYSTICAL MERGING WITH MWALI.

After the Francistown fieldwork, I had gone back to live permanently in the Netherlands, where in December 1993 I was informed of the death of my adoptive father in Zambia, the Nkoya king Mwene Kahare Kabambi. So I rushed to Kaoma district, Western Zambia, in order to attend the funeral – I had associated with Mwene Kabambi for over twenty years as a researcher, a courtier, and a son. Af-

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<sup>329</sup> This was at least the reproach by one of my friends, a staunch Protestant Christian I had known since our student days, and one engaged in the study of African Independent churches herself. Incidentally, cheating in adolescence is commonplace and transitory – the juvenile brain is insufficiently developed to do otherwise but will grow out of it (Swaab 2010).

ter paying my respects, I travelled on to Francistown, Botswana. Here I found to my dismay that one of my three teachers of divination, the herbalist Mr Smarts Gumede (the other two being the two *sangoma* 'sisters' Elizabeth and Rosie Mabutu / MmaNdhlovu and MmaShakayile), had also died. It was at the time that the world, least of all Africa, had not yet been taken over by cell-phone communication as has become commonplace today, and no message of Mr Gumede's demise had reached me. A chance encounter (although in the *sangoma* world there is no such thing...) with one of Mr Gumede's other adepts near his former home, a police officer from the town of Selebi Phikwe, informed me of the circumstances of Mr Gumede's death and burial in that town, and of the whereabouts of another police officer there who could direct me to the grave. The deceased (then in his late fifties) and I had been very close since 1988, and the members of my family had shared in that closeness. In the first years Gumede's teachings had dominated the relationship. But after my initiation into *thwazahood* and my joining the association of traditional healers (of which Gumede had been treasurer in the past, until he was dismissed on accusations of embezzlement), my sometime teacher had leaned heavily on me for spiritual and traditional-medical guidance, especially when he made his last journey (which he himself upon his return characterised as 'blessed') into Zimbabwe, in order to reconcile with his surviving sister. Having shared ancestral sacrifices of liquor with Mr Gumede in the past, I was determined to libate a bottle of best South African brandy on his grave.

In my rented car it would be about a two-hours' drive to Selebi Phikwe, a booming mining town in Eastern Botswana. I was in a hurry since I was to fly to Gaborone (the Botswana capital) that evening. Rain clouds were gathering massively and thoughts of Mwali filled the air, but the rainy season had not yet fully set in. The Tati River, whose usually dry bed traversed Francistown from North to South offering a useful shortcut for pedestrians (van Binsbergen 1993b), was expected to have its annual flooding every day now. I was staying with our adopted, adult daughter in Francistown, and decided to quickly make the trip to Selebi-Phikwe, so that I could still return to Francistown and properly take my leave from her before departing to the local airport. The trip went smoothly. I easily located the local police officer. Instead of taking me to the grave (he might have, for as he asserted, Mr Gumede 'had taught him all he knew' – obviously referring to occult, *sangoma* knowledge and magical procedures which come in handy in a competitive, potentially violent environment like the Police Department and its criminal target population), he took me to a house where Mr Gumede's unmarried daughter, of around age 20, was living. Accepting my claims of siblinghood without noticeable surprise or comment, she led me to the nearby cemetery and identified her father's grave, still a rather tall sandy mound, identified as Mr Gumede's by a placard carrying hand-painted lettering. I poured the brandy as intended, and spoke to the deceased in the warmest possible terms. I took my newly-acquired adoptive young sister for a meal of fast-food (which by that time had largely taken over Botswana), and seeing that she was not wearing any proper shoes, stopped at a shoe retailer to remedy that situation.

After our emotionless farewell I hurried back West to Francistown, across the darkening open plain through the rain, which rapidly acquired such torrential characteristics that the windscreen wipers could hardly cope. I was very late to return to our daughter, and found her sulking, disappointed for seeing our last hour together cut short. Although we knew that at the airport she would not be able to get a taxi back home, she insisted on accompanying me there, where I was to drop the rented car and board the plane to Gaborone and then Johannesburg. We quarrelled for I could not leave her any money as I always did – my trip to Selebi Phikwe had exhausted my ready cash, Automated Cash Dispensers were not yet part of the street scene in Francistown as they are today, and banks were closed. Walking the few yards to and from the car with my luggage, car keys and documents left us completely soaked, and with trepidation I saw her starting on her long walk back to town amidst the hurricane-like thunderstorm and the blasts of lightning in rapid succession. The airplane was late and the flight threatened to be cancelled, yet after being nearly washed away by the rain once more while traversing the platform on foot, I could board and we left without delay.

Once off the ground in the alarmingly unstable, rocking small plane, I felt as if my body was dissolving and spreading all over the dark town whose landmarks, well-known to me from years of field-work, I could see through the window, all the time punctuated by lightning – far away the high-rise cereal silos along the main road to Zimbabwe, closer-by the tell-tale red signal lights atop the pylon at

Nyangabwe Hill at whose foot I had often conducted interviews in the Public Works Department squatment, then suddenly close to the runway the dismal squatter town of Masemenyenga where Francistown's third *sangoma* lodge (Mr Albert Sithole's) was situated but I could not make it out so quickly amidst the unlit township, then following the Tati River, keeping to our left the townships of Somerset East, Donga, Satellite, with their utterly familiar road systems, and the filling Tati riverbed already shimmering wildly in the dark, finally to set course due South, with the new abattoir as the last building in view before the plane's climbing in the rain storm put an end to all visibility (cf. Fig. 4.19). I merged with the storm and the rain, seemed to expand to gigantic dimensions, and I was not in the least surprised when the next morning, in Gaborone, I learned that the rain had caused a violent flood to fill the Tati River bed, sweeping away and killing two children who had been on their way across. I could not bring myself to detach myself from the event, and instead of admitting the normal human regret of this accident to my consciousness, I felt certain that this was my own purposeful doing, it was how I, definitively ending my work in Francistown, had taken my leave from that town as the black rain god Mwali, claiming the two child sacrifices in my stride.

My experiences with transgression of the laws of nature as a *sangoma* are not all of this merely imaginary, oneiric kind. My 'occult' experiences with clients come in two categories. The standard format is that (instantaneously while the divination session is in progress in the case of an eye-to-eye session, or in a written summary if the contact with the client is through correspondence) I present to my client an outcome of the *sangoma* version of geomantic divination, with the client responding affirmatively or dismissively to that outcome. Given many clients' eagerness to please the therapist and to believe in veridical divination which they consider beneficial to themselves (and for which they pay), such an affirmative response needs not be taken as proof of veridical divination, but in at least one case I have described in detail (2003h: 256 f) the evidence, which seems fairly convincing.

The second category is more tricky but also more compelling. In the discourse of *sangoma* therapy of Southern Africa, the client is not supposed to disclose to the therapist exactly what complaint or misfortune brings her or him to consult the latter – being able to foresee the client's visit and the nature of the client's predicament is generally considered the standard proof of the *sangoma's* professional stature. As a result, every consultation begins with the therapist being severely tested by the very client, in a way that no medical practitioner or spiritual councillor in the North Atlantic today is ever.<sup>330</sup> In many dozens of *sangoma* consultations since 1989 I have passed this initial test. I have always been very conscious of being thus tested; and every time I have counted on finally being found out to be a fraud and a charlatan. Admittedly, one can successfully and satisfactorily go through the motions as a *sangoma* without necessarily believing in the material existence of the ancestors nor in their powers to manifest themselves in the physical world. Simple mind-reading would often be sufficient explanation for successful divination, but that in itself (unless totally reducible to the banale reading of non-verbal communication, like music-hall artists do) may be counter-paradigmatic from the point of view of the Received North Atlantic World-view (which denies telepathy), and in itself implies an infringement of laws of nature. If we absolutely must refuse to appeal to such infringement, we can always appeal to the standard interviewing tricks that are any field-

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<sup>330</sup> Cf. Heald 1991 on 'divinatory failure' of diviners among the Gisu people of Eastern Uganda.

worker's stock-in-trade for accessing information held by unwilling interlocutors.



Note the number of eight differently marked tablets (constituting two standard sets), augmented with several peripheral tokens: a coin, a predator's claw, a cowry

*Fig. 4.15. The herbalist Mr Smarts Gumede throwing his oracular tablets in his surgery, Somerset East squatment, Francistown, Botswana, 1989*

This is the world in which practitioners of Southern African cults, and their clients, find themselves. The extensive worldwide literature on the comparative ethnography of the occult brings out that identical or similar deviations from the dominant North Atlantic world-view inform the lives of billions of people all over the world, in the near past, and largely also today. *Are they merely benighted 'natives' waiting to be rescued by the liberating kiss of modern science, or do they have a point in the sense that also their conception of reality may be to some extent reliable, and valid?*

## **4.7. Quantum Mechanics and the Theory of Relativity are rendering the Received North-Atlantic World-view obsolescent**

In order to answer the question with which the previous section ended, we must turn to the three great scientific innovations of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Quantum Mechanics and the Theory of Relativity (the third being the rise of the social sciences). Having trained and worked as a social scientist / historian and as an intercultural philosopher defines me as the typical outsider dabbling in advanced physics and risking to fall in all the obvious pitfalls surrounding this field – as Sokal's hoax so painfully brought out, and as in fact many New-Age writings are there to prove (even more so than the Poststructuralist philosophers' works that are



Sokal's target). Yet I have no option but to try and discuss these achievements of 20<sup>th</sup>-century physics, because they have rendered the Received North Atlantic World-view obsolete to such an extent that the apparently immense gap separating non-Western knowledge (including *Sangoma Science* and Bhaktivedanta) from North Atlantic science may yet be bridged – that gap may even turn out to be nearly non-existent.

As I said, the four assumptions of the received North Atlantic world-view:

- subject / object separation and mental appropriation;
- reality exists independently from the human mind;
- laws of nature are universal and immutable, and miracles are impossible; and
- time is absolute and flowing equably

do reflect the scientific consensus of specialists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century CE – but not necessarily state-of-the-art natural science of today.

Quantum Mechanics, as emerging among modern physics in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century CE, had to come to the conclusion that the separation of knowing subject and known object is an untenable simplification – every enquiry, every observation in the natural world, must be seen as the complex and interdependent interaction between the world, the observation of a specific aspect of the world, and the observer. The observer must not be conceived as existing outside the world she or he observes, but as actively and indispensably involved constituting that world in the most literal sense, and co-creates also the outcome of any physics experiment in the most literal sense.

Another spinoff of Quantum Mechanics is the 'Many-Worlds-theory', according to which at each of the probability nodes that present themselves in the description of a sub-atomic system of events, reality branches off in numerous different directions, leading to a hypothetical situation where *many possible worlds* exist side by side, each of them in principle as valid and legitimate as the others. The theory has been explored by physicists like Everett, Wheeler, DeWitt, Neil Graham and Paul Davies; criticised by Kent 2010 among others; and the practical implications – both hilarious and disconcerting – have been explored in science fiction (assuming that at the level of the New Physics the distinction between science and fiction can still be made).<sup>331</sup> This state-of-the-art physics background seems to lay a solid foundation for what I will discuss below towards a partial vindication of the thesis of *Forbidden Archeology*: the madman's ('trivialistic?') dream of a universe and a universal history in which everything is both true and false, existing and non-existing, albeit not with the same probability.<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> For a stimulating, non-mathematical treatment, cf. Gribbin 1984: chapter II; Davies 1980. For stricter, mathematical treatments, Gribbin leads us to: DeWitt & Graham 1973; Davies 1982. In this connection, Gribbin points to a number of illuminating science-fiction works, including Williamson 1977. The latter piece aptly illustrates the overall relevance of modern physics for a rethinking of time and history, although (or precisely because?!) it was published nearly two decades *before* the 'Many-Worlds' theory had been formulated by physicists.

<sup>332</sup> In addition to the sophisticated reflection on the New Physics by philosophically equipped physicists or scientifically equipped philosophers (e.g. Heisenberg 1958; Cassirer 1923; Jeans 1943; Werner 1958), and

A related implication of Quantum Mechanics is the doctrine of non-locality.<sup>333</sup> Any part of the universe can be theoretically argued to communicate with, and influence, any other part of the universe, and that not in a delayed manner (e.g. in the way it takes light from the Sun over eight minutes to cross the c.  $150 \times 10^6$  kms to the Earth, or in the way the strength of an acoustic signal decreases with squared distance), but instantaneously, and in full. This opens up the theoretical possibility of veridical divination about anything that has left, anywhere in the universe, a trace in reality; and it is virtually impossible to exist without leaving a trace, however slight, on the environment. In the hands of *sangomas* (and of the thousands of other types of divinatory specialists worldwide, past and present), veridical divination needs not be a *perversion* of laws of nature, but it may simply be a specific application of laws of nature, by a specialist who has learned, not to bend such laws, but to pick up and recognise faint signals, bits of information, that for most people most of the time remain imperceptible under the much louder noise that our physical and socio-cultural world produces (including such obscuring noise as caused by the common scientific belief that extrasensory perception is impossible). In fact, training (with exercises in concentration and in the spinning of therapeutically relevant life histories, with occasionally the administration of mind-widening vegetal drugs)<sup>334</sup> to cast the

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the philosophically-orientated popularising interpretations by such well-known writers as Capra (1978) and Zukav (1979), we have seen the abstract and often purely nominal appropriation of the New Physics by philosophers (a practice violently, and with some exaggeration, exposed – as discussed above – by Sokal 1995; Sokal & Bricmont 1997), and subsequently a retreat of physicists into their own homespun philosophies, as reported by Svozil 2004 with specific reference to the philosopher of science Feyerabend:

‘Feyerabend frequently discussed physics. He also referred to the history of the subject when motivating his philosophy of science. Alas, as some examples show, his understanding of physics remained superficial. In this respect, Feyerabend is like Popper; the difference being his self-criticism later on, and the much more tolerant attitude toward the allowance of methods. Quite generally, partly due to the complexity of the formalism and the new challenges of their findings, which left philosophy proper at a loss, physicists have attempted to develop their own meaning of their subject. For instance, in recent years, the interpretation of Quantum Mechanics has stimulated a new type of experimental philosophy, which seeks to operationalize emerging philosophical issues; issues which are incomprehensible for most philosophers. In this respect, physics often appears to be a continuation of philosophy by other means. [A none too funny pun on von Clausewitz’s (1984: 87) well-known adage ‘War is the continuation of politics by other means’ – WvB ] Yet, Feyerabend has also expressed profound insights into the possibilities for the progress of physics, a legacy which remains to be implemented in the times to come: the conquest of abundance, the richness of reality, the Many Worlds which still await discovery, and the vast openness of the physical universe.’ (Svozil 2004)

<sup>333</sup> Maudlin 1994.

<sup>334</sup> This is an interesting point so far scarcely covered in my argument. The Francistown *sangomas* put an high premium on alcohol consumption, and as an *thwaza*, procuring (and paying) bottles of alcoholic beverages for the benefit of our lodge leader was among my menial tasks and financial obligations. (Another such task was procuring goats for sacrifice, which were unexpectedly difficult to obtain from the adjacent countryside, and often needed long trips in my car.) Personally I care little for alcohol, I find the interaction with intoxicated people (a common occurrence in fieldwork worldwide) cumbersome and irritating, and I remember with dismay my early-morning fieldwork routine among the Manjacos in Guinea-Bissau (when as a resident at the household of a senior land priest I had to

tablets, to open up to the possible information contained in the configurations which they form, and to interpret that information as part of an evolving, reassuring and healing story about the client and the latter's predicament, takes up the largest part of a *sangoma's* supervised learning period.

This is how I tried to express this aspect of *Sangoma Science*.<sup>335</sup>

#### HH. HOW I VISUALISED THE SANGOMA'S APPARENT CAPABILITY AT VERIDICAL DIVINATION TWO DECADES AGO.

'Perhaps this is a model for the relation between the diviner and the surrounding world. In everyday life, and during divination sessions when the diviner is fully alert, focused, and verbalising, the condition of plurality (in this case: duality) prevails, the diviner is the knowing subject and what he knows about the outside world is constrained by the fact that he is emphatically dissociating himself, as a distinct element, endowed with thinking capability, from the rest of the world. At such moments the Kantian epistemology obtains: the diviner as subject has no *direct* knowledge of the outside object-world, but can only build a mental representation of that world in his own mind, within the limitations of his sensory impressions. Needless to say that it is specifically in the light of the Kantian epistemology that divination, astrology, telepathy, and other forms of extrasensory perception are relegated to the realm of illusion and fraud – for that epistemology assumes that man is forever imprisoned within his / her impenetrable mind. However, there is another, fundamentally different condition, which obtains when the diviner suspends his / her subject-object relation with the surrounding world, and instead trades the duality implied in that subject-object relation, for a moment of uni(c)ity, in the light of which his mind is not impenetrable but porous, and continuous with the world.<sup>336</sup> Whatever the world contains in the way of traces of information on past and future events, is then in principle available for the diviner's cognition. Whether he can capture some of that information and continue to have a measure of access to it when subsequently (returned to a condition of duality) re-focusing and verbalising, *depends on the existence of a knowledge filter between the states of uni(c)ity and plurality*. For most inhabitants of the North Atlantic region this filter would sieve out practically 100% of extrasensorily acquired world information in most situations – yet the great majority of people, even in that region, has occasional experiences of veridical telepathy and precognition. However, apparently one can mentally train (*e.g.* as a *sangoma*) to reduce the filter's effectiveness, and to create situations conducive to relatively low filtering (*e.g.* dimmed lights, throbbing drums, meaningless patterns as in the gazing at water, oil or coffee dregs, or confrontation with an overflow of contradictory information as in a *sangoma* session or in reading an astrological chart). Also, the knowledge filter appears to be less effective in a cultural environment that does not emphati-

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partake, on an empty stomach, generous helpings of the rum offerings supplicants brought in daily). While at the Francistown lodge I tried to drink as little as socially acceptable. Use of narcotic drugs was not common at the lodge, I was never offered any, observed none, nor took any of my own initiative; but when I returned to the lodge in 1991, I was told that Molly, one of the senior *sangomas* and MmaShakayile's granddaughter, had just served a short prison sentence for possession and presumably trafficking of soft drugs – thus catering for a wide-spread practice throughout the town's population. Molly was not always conspicuous at the Monarch lodge, and thus eluded my census of the lodge population in van Binsbergen 2017a: 164f.

<sup>335</sup> van Binsbergen 2003: 277f., slightly edited.

<sup>336</sup> (footnote added later) There are echoes here, not only of Christian, Ancient Greek (*e.g.* Neo-Platonist) and Islamic mysticism, but also of the Hindu philosophy of *Advaita*, 'non-duality', which is related to the Bhaktivedanta context of *Forbidden Archeology*. I am indebted to my sometime Rotterdam philosophical colleague Douwe Tiemersma for mediating *Advaita* thought to me.

cally subscribe to sensorialist rationality and its Kantian epistemology – and such an environment can be found in many milieus in Africa throughout the twentieth century CE and before, as well as worldwide among pious Christian and Muslim believers, and among New-Age sympathisers. I fear that the above ‘model’ is little more than a crippled metaphor, for the situation of one element of reality contemplating the whole reality outside itself is likely to have very different implications from the situation of two elements of reality being *entangled*<sup>337</sup> within, and as parts of, the wider reality surrounding them. One could try to consider the diviner and his client as two observers in an entangled state, but then it remains unclear what specific conditions cause such entanglement so as to single them out from the rest of the world. Anyway, the task of intercultural epistemology is not to solve the riddles of the world, but to call attention to the world-wide diversity of approaches *vis-à-vis* those riddles, other peoples’ promising attempts at such resolution, and to help create an intercultural framework within which these can be appreciated.

Meanwhile the oscillating between unicity and plurality opens up vistas beyond the subject-object distinction within which most of the Western philosophical tradition has entrenched itself for several millennia and especially since Descartes, although from its very beginning Pythagoras, Plato, and Plotinus (all greatly influenced by much older Egyptian philosophy)<sup>338</sup> have profoundly struggled with the problem of reconciling ‘the One and the Many’,<sup>339</sup> by defining the conditions under which unicity can be said to govern (following the above three thinkers in the order in which they have appeared: in the number mysticism of the *tetraktys*; in the perennial nature of the Ideas; and in the overflowing of the One).<sup>340</sup> There are strong religious associations here. Mysticism, trance and ecstasy are informed by the desire, the technique, or the imperative, to shed plurality and merge into unicity. Durkheim’s theory of religion (...) hinges on two moments of emergence:

- the emergence of the sacred to which numerous individuals submit by opposition to the profane, and
- the emergence of the social as the ultimate referent of the sacred object whose sacrality in itself is merely imposed and non-intrinsic.<sup>342</sup>

Both movements are a way of negotiating between unicity and plurality. The relation between a symbol and that to which it refers is caught in the same dialectics: from one perspective, the symbol only represents the referent and derives all its significance from the latter, but from another [ complementary ] perspective the symbol no longer symbolises but takes on an semi-independent life on its own, in a similar tension between sustained reference and broken reference.’

Over forty years ago, it was my extensive but unpublished, juvenile analysis of Ancient Greek mythological symbolism in the work of the Belgian literary writer Hugo Claus which first drove this insight home to me. Although convinced that I had discovered something worthwhile, I impatiently moved on, to become a poet and then an Africanist anthropologist, and for the next decades had little use for theories of symbols beyond the ones of Durkheim and Marx. I filed the idea away in my poetry:

‘.....when I

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<sup>337</sup> We shall define such entanglement shortly.

<sup>338</sup> [ original footnote ] Cf. Hornung 1971; Stricker 1963-1989; Wilkinson 1994.

<sup>339</sup> capitals and quotation marks non-original here. Cf. Hornung 1971.

<sup>340</sup> (non-original footnote) This is the form in which the unicity quality in question presents itself in the works of the three Ancient writers just mentioned, in that order.

<sup>341</sup> (footnote added later:) Durkheim 1912; cf. van Binsbergen 2018.

<sup>342</sup> Itemised series not original here.

discovered the flip-flop nature of the symbol  
as alternation between reference and not, so God is thought  
which constantly denies itself or else  
would be incapable of thought, isn't that wonderfall<sup>343</sup>

Then again, when defending my doctoral thesis in 1979, one of the dozen or so *Propositions* which (by Dutch custom) accompanied my book-length argument was

'13. Following in the footsteps of Langer and Cassirer,<sup>344</sup> many anthropologists emphasise the referential nature of symbols. However, an essential characteristic of symbols is that, under conditions which remain to be specified, they now refer to their referents, now are absolutely autonomous *vis-à-vis* those referents.'<sup>345</sup>

In the context of non-locality, one of the principal implications of Quantum Physics often invoked in the context of claims of extrasensory perception, verifical divination *etc.*<sup>346</sup> is the Einstein<sup>347</sup>-Rosen-Podolsky Theorem (e.g. Kiess *et al.* 1994; Nadeau & Kafatos 2001;

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<sup>343</sup> Van Binsbergen 1979d. The non-existent last word in the English translation is an attempt to render a pun in the original Dutch:

.....toen ik  
de *flipflop* eigenschap tan het symbool ontdekte  
verwijzend en dan steeds weer niet God is het denken  
dat steeds zichzelf ontkent en zonder dat  
niet denken kan is dat niet wonderbier'.

There is an implicit reference here, not only to a popular cabaret performance from the 1960s (...of laten wij voor hen getuigen...is dat niet wonderbaar?... ja dat is wonderbier!), but especially to one of the most puzzling and innovative novels published in Dutch in the 20<sup>th</sup> c. CE: *De God Denkbaar Denkbaar De God*, Hermans 1955. Originally trained as a physical geographer (in which field he held a readership at Groningen University, the Netherlands, 1958-1973), Hermans had a strong interest in analytical philosophy and published several controversial, idiosyncratic, books on Wittgenstein (Hermans 1967, 1970; Wittgenstein 1975). بركة

<sup>344</sup> [original footnote, later expanded] Cf. Cassirer 1953-1957; Langer 1942. Van Binsbergen 1979e.

<sup>345</sup> In the original Dutch:

'13. In navolging van Langer en Cassirer leggen vele antropologen de nadruk op het verwijzend karakter van symbolen. Een essentiële eigenschap van symbolen is echter dat zij onder nader te specificeren condities, nu eens verwijzen naar hun referenten. dan weer volstrekt autonoom zijn ten opzichte van die referenten'.

<sup>346</sup> Nicolic 2007 offers an interesting caveat in this connection:

'A common understanding of Quantum Mechanics (QM) among students and practical users is often plagued by a number of "myths", that is, widely accepted claims on which there is not really a general consensus among experts in foundations of QM. These myths include wave-particle duality, time-energy uncertainty relation, fundamental randomness, the absence of measurement-independent reality, locality of QM, non-locality of QM, the existence of well-defined relativistic QM, the claims that Quantum field theory (QFT) solves the problems of relativistic QM or that QFT is a theory of particles, as well as myths on black-hole entropy. The fact is that the existence of various theoretical and interpretational ambiguities underlying these myths does not yet allow us to accept them as proven facts. I review the main arguments and counterarguments lying behind these myths and conclude that QM is still a not-yet-completely-understood theory open to further fundamental research.'

<sup>347</sup> There is no dearth of excellent studies that sketch the history of the New Physics and situate each of its

Ghirardi & Romano 2012; Santini 2007) which focuses on so-called conditions of non-locality inadequately captured by the earlier Quantum equations. Amazing effects are claimed under this theorem. For instance, two computers not physically connected in any way have been claimed to display the chameleon effect, where one mimics the other (Accardi & Regoli 2001). This proves just another instance of a much wider condition. The Einstein-Rosen-Podolsky theorem was an early formulation of the principle of *entanglement* further centrally explored by Bell (1964; cf. Aerts *et al.* 2000; Goldstein 1995, Bohm & Hiley 1993); Hardy 1999; Kwiat *et al.* 1994; Smith & Mann 2011): a surprising connection between otherwise unconnected physical entities regardless of their location in space (and time?). Quantum Mechanics revolutionised our conception of reality, in ways that have taken especially disconcerting forms in the non-specialist appropriations of recent higher physics, as found in philosophy, New-Age thought, *etc.* (again Sokal & Bricmont). Central is the idea of *wave function collapse under the impact of the observer's gaze* – without the latter the world may be demonstrated to have different properties. Once again: *Is the Moon actually there also when we do not observe it* (Mermin 1985; Adenier 2008)? The question is a variant of that of Schroedinger's Cat setting out the classic (though recently contested; Barrett *et al.* 2014) example of entanglement – the famous thought experiment according to which there is genuine uncertainty about the condition of a cat (whether alive or dead) when locked in a box with a container of poisonous gas which will only be released upon opening the box (Gribbin 1984); the opening of the box under the observer's gaze has the effect that the wave function collapses – before that moment it was impossible to say whether the cat was alive or dead. The Quantum perspective also opens the possibility of teleportation (Barrett 2002; Jennewein *et al.* 2002), which has already materialised as a demonstrated reality under laboratory conditions.

As we have seen, one application of Quantum Mechanics that has particularly captivated the layman's imagination is the *Many-Worlds hypothesis*. From this perspective, reality is seen as a bundle of myriad possibilities grafted upon one another, in such a way that not only the actually chosen and demonstrably materialised has reality, but that all other alternative possibilities exist in fact side by side each in their own plane or dimension – each constituting a parallel world. I find it difficult to picture what this hypothesis would mean in the world of the practising diviner-healer: although the latter would probably be familiar with altered states of consciousness comparable with temporarily operating in another of the Many Worlds beside the one macroscopically and consensually appearing as *the here and the now*, one would be hard put to argue how the integrity of the perceiv-

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contributors in the historic position. *E.g.* Ferreira 2014. Although Einstein was one of the founders of Quantum Physics, he continued to abhor its probabilistic implications: 'God does not play dice'. (An interesting claim in the context of *Sangoma Science*, where the casting of divinatory dice (*Hakata*) is considered the principal means for the gods to communicate with the living.) Translated to *Sangoma Science* Einstein's apodictic claim might be read as 'the ancestors do not engage in geomantic tablet divination'. But don't they? Tongue in cheek, I venture to point out that the oscillating world-view underlying *Sangoma Science* would make 'God does not play dice' a contentious, premature statement: if most physicists would claim, with Einstein, that 'God does not play dice' (= 'disagrees with a probabilistic model of the universe:), that would also imply a different God, one who (though very occasionally) does play dice, and expects her adepts to cast their divinatory dice in order to deliver her divine messages.

ing, signifying and communicating person herself or himself could be preserved (despite perhaps temporary lapses) in such an ontology. Is such integrity then to be considered a myth – much in the way post-structuralist philosophy has sought to dismiss the idea of the *autonomous individual subject* (van Binsbergen 1999d)? But even if it were largely a myth, in an oscillating reality it would yet occasionally and temporarily oscillate into becoming unconditional, fully-fledged – but short-lived – reality.

Quantum Physics have given rise to considerable philosophical speculation as to its implications for our world-view, e.g. Malin 2003; Maudlin 1994; Rohrlich 2007.

As a reflection on space-time (recognising time as a necessary fourth dimension of everything in the world and thus thinking through the Vico / Hegelian perspective to its ultimate mathematical consequences), Einstein's *Special* and *General Theory of Relativity* did more to the obsolescence of the nineteenth-century CE Received North Atlantic World-view than I can or need set out in the present argument. One thing is crucial. Before Einstein, the most complete physical analysis available of the world was that of Newton.<sup>348</sup> For centuries, it provided an adequate and invariably corroborated description that seemed exhaustively adequate for all aspects of the world as known by our senses and by the fairly crude scientific instruments of Early Modern times. However, with Einstein, Newton's description was revealed *to apply only under the boundary conditions of macroscopy*: of a world measured in meters and seconds, commensurate with the dimensions and pace of our human bodies. For much smaller, atomic and sub-atomic, and much larger, planetary and galactic levels of reality, Newton's pronouncements were shown to need replacement by the more subtle and complex reformulations of Relativity Theory and Quantum Mechanics. It took only a few years before this theoretical possibility was in fact confirmed by astronomical measurements on the transit of Venus before the Sun – when, as predicted by Einstein, gravity in fact turned out to bend the straight propagation of light as in the Newton world. And even today, the acceptance of the Theory of Relativity is based on internal mathematical consistent procedure much more than on empirical substantiation – which painstakingly goes on to this day.

Einstein's theory did not fall out of the blue sky, but had been prepared by some of the most brilliant work in physics in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – Maxwell, Lorentz, Minkowski, Poincaré, etc. Yet even by the year 1900 the shattering innovation that within a few years was to be brought by Einstein could scarcely be foreseen. Not only did it render obsolescent (although, within macroscopic boundary conditions, still valid and useful) the Received North Atlantic World-view which has continued to inform modern lay people's conception of reality and their practical, macroscopic applications of physics in ballistics, architecture,

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<sup>348</sup> Newton, *Philosophiae naturalis etc.*, 1947 / 1822-1833 / 1846, first published 1687. Incidentally, Newton (offering a synthesis of Kepler and Galilei, cf. Koestler 1959) was not just the founder of modern physics, but also (in ways most illuminating to our present argument!) what would today be called an obscurantist, who dabbled in alchemy and allegedly also in astrology (Dobbs 1991; Cohen 1941). He considered not his contributions to physics and mathematics, but his Biblical chronology extending over the then conventionally assumed six millennia since Creation, his lasting life's work. Gascoigne 1991; Manuel 1963; Westfall 1982.

aerodynamics etc. – it also contains a warning for the future: Science is not about the formulation of eternal truth but about the tentative grasping for ephemeral truths in the hope that they will elicit further research and reflection that will bring truer truths which however will still be provisional and are meant to be supplanted in their turn. It is premature, myopic, and unscientific to denounce occult and paranormal phenomena as imaginary and fraudulent simply because they do not meet the bowdlerised canons of a philosophically unsophisticated conception of natural science today. It seems more advisable to lend occult claims the benefit of the doubt, and to admit that reality is so complex, and that we as humans are so irretrievably entangled in it (in ways Quantum Mechanics has begun to elucidate), that reality cannot be reduced to a single, coherent and consistent knowledge discourse. If I am not mistaken, state-of-the-art specialist physics has not yet clearly identified the boundary conditions that would also qualify, in their turn, Quantum Mechanics and the Theory of Relativity (is the hunt for the Higg's particle a step in that direction?), and would render them obsolescent, in their turn. However, it is almost certain that, after nearly a century, such a development is soon to be expected, and I submit that then phenomena now appearing to be occult and paranormal, may come closer to being recognised as appertaining to such boundary conditions, and will be one step closer to being drawn within the orbit of a future, mainstream natural science.

Already in chapter 1 of the present book we have touched upon inkling of such a possibility, inevitably contentious: the concept of *synchronicity*<sup>349</sup> as advanced by the prominent physicist Pauli (author of the Pauli prohibition, regulating the equitable distribution of energy levels in an atomic system) and the psychologist Jung (an obscurantist if ever there was one – dabbling in magic, divination, astrology, alchemy, nude dancing, promiscuous sexuality, claiming the hereditary nature of a collective memory and its possible restrictions to less than the totality of humankind, etc.; but also a courageous and path-breaking explorer of the unconscious in non-sexual, existential realms largely shunned by Freud).<sup>350</sup> The standard example of synchronicity – repeated *ad nauseam* by now – is the following: the psychiatrist Jung is in therapeutic conversation with a client in his consultation room, the conversation turns towards the image of a butterfly, and as in response a butterfly flies in through the open window. One effective but apparently impossible explanation of such a 'subjectively meaningful chance occurrence' could be that the thought in itself produces the material manifestation or at least coaxes a butterfly already available in the world to manifest itself in the consultation room. Perhaps a more attractive hypothesis<sup>351</sup> could be that the speaker's perception of the actual occurrence in the world of the butterfly entering the room at time  $T_1$ , triggers the image of such an occurrence and *sends it back through time*, causing the speaker to speak of a butter-

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<sup>349</sup> Jung 1972; von Franz 1980, 1968; Mansfield 1995.

<sup>350</sup> In addition to the footnote above devoted to Jung, cf. also: Noll 1997; Jung & Strauß 1974; Jung 1974, 1944, 1946, 1955, 1956.

<sup>351</sup> More attractive, in the sense that (a) it merely requires a rethinking of lineal time and not of the principle of the preservation of matter; and (b) that it is one in line with Walker's Quantum-Theory explanation of veridical divination; Walker 1977.



fly in what is only apparently the first place, at an early moment of time  $T_{1-i}$ . In such a view, as so often in paranormal and occult phenomena that challenge the Received North Atlantic World-view, time appears to be, not unique, linear and consecutive, but on the contrary erratic and multiple, going back and forth on the flow of the subjective experience of the human actors involved.

Repeatedly (e.g. 2003, 2013)<sup>352</sup> I have wondered at the strange paradox that various pseudo-sciences (by today's standards of global science), such as astrology and other forms of divination, which by no twist of the present-day scientifically-informed imagination could possibly be taken seriously as producers of veridical statements, yet often seem to produce just those. Above I have summarised the case for and against astrology as a pseudo-science; and repeatedly I have pointed out the historical paradox that, what once started out as the earliest form of proto-science (astrology, along with extispicy, in the Ancient Near East), with all the promising features of being both rational and intersubjective, prominently based on empirical conditional statements, yet four millennia later has (probably rightly) become a school example of an utterly non-scientific undertaking. Various famous (though contested) studies including those by Gauquelin, Seymour, Eysenck & Nias, have sought to demonstrate empirically and statistically the validity of the astrological approach. From the perspective of my oscillating ontology, I can now see that such scientific approaches, however worthy of our sympathy both in their premises and in their conclusions, are yet barking up the wrong tree. Paranormal phenomena are in principle evasive, impervious to the human will, and in a world where Being and Non-Being oscillate constantly into one another, statistical proof (predicated on the assumption of Being as a firm given, and Non-Being as its absolute, irreconcilable opposite)<sup>353</sup> is to be taken with a pinch of salt. My personal experience is that my own divination often turns out to yield valid, trustworthy results

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<sup>352</sup> With extensive references, e.g. Seymour 1986a, 1986b, 1988/ 1989 (that writer, in possession of a PhD in astronomy, passionately defends astrology on the grounds of possible astronomic mechanisms notably cosmic magnetism (possible galactic conditions for such effects may be found in cosmic macrosystems of magnetism, e.g. Elstner et al. 2009; Kitchatinov & Rüdiger 2004) – however Seymour's 1998 title *The Birth of Christ; exploding the myth: An important and fascinating account of what really happened 2,000 years ago* suggests a sensational best-selling New-Age production which makes us suspicious of his overall intentions; Eysenck & Nias 1982; Gauquelin 1984; Gilbert & Cotterrell 1998. Among the numerous expositions of astrology as a field of systematic knowledge, cf. Kepler 1602; Ptolemy 1952; Bouché-Leclercq 1899, 1879. Refutations of astrology are also many, e.g. an early one from Moody (1838), and a notorious more recent one: Bok 1975, signed by nearly 200 scientists including Nobel laureates.

<sup>353</sup> The following point would require a full argument, which I have already presented elsewhere and need not repeat here: whereas we take for granted the capacity of human rationality to make *absolute* (as distinct from *relative, range-extensive*) distinctions, yet there is impressive evidence that this capability emerged relatively late in human cultural history, among Anatomically Modern Humans, sometime during the Later Palaeolithic (40–10 ka BP). Not absolute distinctions such as *white / black, male / female, wet / dry*, but 'range semantics' where the same lexical root covers both opposites, abound in the richly reconstructed \*Borean lexicon, which offers us over 1000 lexical roots of a language construct supposed to be more or less spoken in Central to East Asia c. 25 ka BP, and supposed to have left detectable reflexes in the reconstructed proto-lexicons of all of today's macrophyla (it is these traces that allowed us to reconstruct \*Borean in the first place). For further discussions, and a listing of the \*Borean lexicon, cf. van Binsbergen 2018a; also cf. van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011.

– even though I know that it should not, and more in particular, even though I cannot define with any precision the boundary conditions under which truth, rather than falsehood, is produced by my oracle. Some boundary conditions seem to become perceptible on the basis of my vast experience over the past three decades: A relaxed, jocular state of mind does seem to help; emphatic mobilisation of the will, hence dogged concentration, seems detrimental; formal external controls and the sense of being scrutinised and examined, like in a laboratory text, are likewise detrimental; going through the prescribed ritual motions, donning the *sangoma* uniform, making the appropriate offerings of snuff and alcoholic drink, sometimes meat, also helps. Admittedly, these conditions do not make much sense. Perhaps we may summarise their effect as a careless sense of security and confidence.

In fact, this entire book was conceptualised and written in order to somewhat illuminate the resulting paradox: *why are we confronted with the apparent manifestations of paranormal phenomena that cannot be explained with the Received North Atlantic World-view?*

Within the context of lay appropriation of Quantum Physics, *reversed causality* is a mechanism that has been occasionally invoked (notably by Walker 1977, as we have seen) to explain veridical divination. If A during a session at time  $T_1$  predicts that B will experience event Z at time  $T_2$  ( $T_2 > T_1$ ), and this prediction will turn out (at  $T_3$ ,  $T_3 > T_2$ ) to have been veridical, it is perhaps not so much because A has correctly predicted Z, but rather, by reversal of time and causality, because at  $T_2$  (the moment of the actual event of B experiencing Z) a signal to this effect is sent back into time to  $T_1$ , when it is registered by A. Such an explanation may be stretching Quantum Mechanics beyond its originally intended application, but still seems in line with established modern physics. I therefore propose, with Walker, that the principle of reversed causality offers a ready and convincing explanation in many cases when paranormal phenomena seem to be at stake.

However, the notion of reversed causality in combination with my Hypothesis of Ontic Oscillation may play tricks upon us which greatly upset our accepted views of reality and history. If a historic fact may (albeit very occasionally, under boundary conditions still to be ascertained, probably including a religious component) change places with an a-historic myth, and if (again, very occasionally, and under boundary conditions still to be ascertained) reversed causality is a possibility, then a statement about the past  $T_1$  made at time  $T_2$  ( $T_2 > T_1$ ) might have the possibility of materialising – from sheer fantastic nothingness – into factuality into  $T_1$ , where we may than subsequently have a (very slight) chance of encountering it empirically. The thought is bewildering, and implies the end of firm, immutable historical claims – or, more likely, the end of my long career as a serious academic producer...

## II. WHAT IF TEXTUAL FORMULATIONS TODAY MIGHT BE PROJECTED BACK INTO THE REMOTE PAST AND TAKE THE SHAPE OF REALITY THERE?

Let me give a concrete example (van Binsbergen 2018: 277 f.; cf. van Binsbergen with Lacroix 2000). In the years 1999 and 2000 I investigate at the famous Musée de la Préhistoire at Les Eyzies, Dordogne, France, a pattern of cupholes found in a limestone block from a Mousterian Neanderthaloid grave situated at nearby La Ferrassie and dated at c. 70 ka BP. I suspect that the pattern may amount to a star map, featuring Sirius, Betelgeuze, the Milky Way, and other adja-

cent stars of the greatest magnitude in the nocturnal sky as visible from La Ferrassie c. 70,000 years ago. Modern astronomy and computer technology claim to allow us to reconstruct that night sky with a high degree of precision, and the fit between the astronomical pattern of the largest visible stars at the time, and the pattern of cupmarks on the limestone block, is amazingly good – appreciably better than the fit with the celestial pattern of today. I take this as proof that Neanderthals were capable of making star maps – there is some slight further contemporary evidence apparently corroborating such a conclusion (in the form of other funerary blocks and cupholes in archaeologically similar sites; and the position of the block with cupholes turned down, as if indeed representing stars looking down upon the Earth).<sup>354</sup> *However, from the perspective of reversed causality the train of argument would be radically different.* The fact that today's researcher looks at the block in the museum, cannot possibly in itself change the block's appearance nor its array of cupmarks (the block has not visibly changed its appearance since it was excavated nearly a century ago; it has been under museal supervision and protection ever since; I observed it repeatedly at close quarters but never so much as touched it) – but the present-day researcher's astronomical interpretation might be considered to be projected back into the remote past, and to have brought Neanderthals living in the period when the latest glacial period was very slowly building up, to consider the stars and (re-)arrange their cupmarks in a pattern reminiscent of the sky over their heads. (But – under an oscillating ontology – why should that celestial pattern precisely correspond with the outcome of a sophisticated and state-of-the-art astronomico-mathematical computer application from the early 21<sup>st</sup> c. CE? Also here there would be an infinitesimal chance that the pattern came out substantially different.)

Such an extreme, blatantly absurd, formulation of the well-known observer effect (a central theme in Quantum Mechanics) admittedly smacks of acute and total mental disorder on the part of the present author. Yet when it comes to apparent phenomena that boggle the mind, would it not be more prudent to take in the whole range of disconcerting, crazy possibilities, rather than yielding to current scientific paradigms which are manifestly incapable of offering a satisfactory explanation?

Reversed causality is particularly attractive when it comes to explaining why astrological results might often appear to be veridical, even though they have been arrived at on the basis of invalid premises ('the pattern of the heavens influences human fate'; 'one day in the calculations equals one year in reality') and nonsensical methods, even if concealed under layers of astronomically sound calculations performed with state-of-the-art computer methods. If the astrological interpretation may be sent back in time across periods of a few hours to tens of thousands of years, there encounters the owner of the horoscope and manages to influence her or his actual historic behaviour, a nonsensical pseudo-science may yet yield valid results for reasons totally unrelated to the merits and demerits of that pseudo-science. Provided we are to admit that the structure of reality may be very different from what we have hitherto taken for granted.

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<sup>354</sup> Not all the La Ferrassie details can be explained thus, admittedly. We are dealing with here with the burial of a 3 year old child, decapitated before or after death. Human, especially children's sacrifices to the celestial bodies considered gods have not been exceptional in cultural history, but we know too little of the overall Mousterian life-world to ascertain whether such a child sacrifice is involved here.

## 4.8. Towards an affirmation of the materially creative and kaleidoscopic nature of all cosmological thought from whatever region and historical period; the pivotal role of religion in the universe

The hopefully radical breakthrough in intercultural ontology on which I have been brooding for several decades now and of which the present argument only manages to give a tentative and highly defective formulation, does not stop short at the facile critiquing of the Received North Atlantic World-view – which others far more erudite, competent and eloquent than myself have done repeatedly and long before me. The decisive step I propose concerns not the contents of a particular world-view, nor its specific truth or shortcomings, but *the very nature of truth and reality in themselves*. My proposed solution is so drastic as threatens to make an end to my professional credibility as an empirical scientist and academic philosopher. I am afraid it will not even be taken seriously enough to invite all the sarcasm and scorn of Sokal and his successors. When, a quarter of a century ago, I published my first account of ‘becoming a *sangoma*’, I decided to put my argument in the form of a literary narrative – not so much in order to celebrate the unmistakable beauty and thrill of what I had to share, but to have my hands free to write what I could not very well write as a university professor of anthropology. In the present context I reach for the same way out, not in a vain attempt to protect myself professionally (I am retired now, and twenty books further), but in the full awareness that I am opting for what, for the time being at least, cannot be seriously entertained as an academic perspective but needs the disclaimer implied in the term ‘poetics’ of my subtitle.

In short, then, my preposterous claims (in which the reader may recognise echoes of Poststructuralist philosophy, especially of Derrida and Guattari)<sup>355</sup> are the following:

- (1) every truth carries in itself not merely *the seeds* of its own denial, but – beyond a boundary condition whose precise nature remains to be ascertained – every truth conjures up, simply, to the full extent, and literally, its own denial and opposite
- (2) every truth claim about Being is therefore – beyond a boundary condition whose precise nature remains to be ascertained but which almost certainly involves ritual – at the same time an affirmation of Non-Being
- (3) since thus whatever exists at the same time does not exist, and therefore the material evidence for existence dissolves in this contradiction, we have to give up – to some extent, notably beyond a boundary condition whose precise nature remains to be ascertained – again, the distinction between mind and matter, thought and particle, fantasm and fact, reality and irreality.

In passing we note that these statements are reminiscent of the Liar’s Paradox (Rüstow 1910; Gödel 1986; Anonymous, ‘Liar Paradox’), of which the Cretan Epimenides’ statement ‘All Cretans are liars’ is the classic example: if they happen to be true, they would at the

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<sup>355</sup> van Binsbergen 2000g, 1999d, with their final published version in my books of 2015 and 2017.

same time be false (for Epimenides, being himself a Cretan, clearly belies his own statement here), and thus be confirmed, and falsified, and so on *ad infinitum*. More seriously, in other words less flippant, is that in terms of these three propositions the truth-claims of even state-of-the-art modern science are declared to be futile, simply false, *beyond* the mysterious, unspecified boundary conditions listed in all three statements. I do not expect, nor deserve, any mercy from fellow-scientists when, with a single gesture, I thus sweep their most cherished securities off the table. I cannot even hide behind the inner conviction that (1), (2) and (3) are true – because the eternal regress contained in them, precludes such a claim. Has not all systematic accumulation of knowledge, within and outside science, been a desperate attempt to postpone the moment of truth / falsehood when we become aware of the unfathomable delusion to which the human, thinking existence seems to amount? Is it this for which I have sacrificed, during half a century, my peace of mind, health, leisure time, comfort, institutional power, retirement, private funds, and happy hours with my wife, children and grandchildren? Can we safeguard our sanity and find a way out, before we collapse under the weight of the sky falling down?<sup>356</sup> Is there somewhere a new *cogito*<sup>357</sup> that we have overlooked in our anxiety?

In fact, with our statements (1), (2) and (3) we may be gaining more than we lose. Admittedly, we lose the faith in once-for-all established, scientific knowledge as a firm fulcrum on which to turn the universe (Archimedes again). But we have gained, among other benefits, a skeleton logic that (with all its destructiveness) appears to be so fundamental as to provide the key for the solution (dissolution) of all the compelling, insurmountable contradictions that have attended our argument so far – and this gain also promises to throw light on the remotest, murkiest aspects of *Forbidden Archeology*. Spelled out, our spoils include the following:

- We begin to perceive, also from an updated North Atlantic perspective, what has already been amply explored in many cosmological, mythical, mystical and philosophical traditions outside the North Atlantic region: an ontological level even more fundamental than that on which our truth claims are made, are asserting themselves and are methodically substantiated or refuted – *the deep-down level for such assertion and substantiation (the hallmarks of science) dissolves into the awareness of the dual and complementary nature of all truth as falsehood, of all Being as Non-Being*

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<sup>356</sup> At the height of the mythical trial of Horus and Seth (very similar to the trial of Orestes, in the Ancient Greek setting, concerning Agamemnon, Klutainnestra and her paramour Aegistus) concerning the murder of Horus's father Osiris and Horus's subsequent revenge on Seth, the Ancient Egyptian goddess Neith revealed herself in the primal status she clearly possessed as epiphany of the Mother of the Waters, and threatened to let the sky fall down if Horus were not acquitted. Later, Celts from different parts of Europe and different periods were known to swear their heaviest oaths by 'the sky falling down' (Rolleston 1994: 23).

<sup>357</sup> Descartes 1904. The *cogito ergo sum* adage occurs in vols. VI: 32 ('*ie penŕe donc ie fuis*') and VIII: 7 ('*ego cogito, ergo fum*'). The Cartesian 'cogito' has continued to constitute a major inspiration for philosophers in modern times; cf. Hintikka 1962; Williams 1967; Žizek 1997; Mudimbe 1987.

- We begin to perceive much more clearly, and in a far more central position in the landscape of our ontology, the fundamentally *kaleidoscopic* nature of reality, and of all pronouncements about reality as (beyond the stilted pretension of scientific truth claims and methods) essentially poetical and experiential
- When the fundamental divide between thought and matter is closed – not bridged as a mere affirmation of their separation and distance, but truly closed as two wandering rocks slamming together and destroying everything that happens to be between them – we have reached a point where we can begin to appreciate and affirm the materially creative capacity of thought, as well as the spiritual longing inherent in matter, both in the most literal sense, but again, governed by as yet unspecified boundary conditions (religion, ritual, addresses and expresses that very longing)
- However, in the light of our argument so far, these boundary conditions have not really been left entirely unspecified: *they are situated, at least in part, in the separation, and (in truth terms) incompatibility, of cultures* – even though it is unlikely that with such a general answer we can fully and satisfactorily account for the complexity at hand; at any rate, if we are looking for a sanity-preserving device in the midst of the maddening chaos our propositions (1), (2) and (3) have landed us in, it would have to be sought within the arbitrary, and transient, boundaries of a specific culture, in the first place.
- Moreover, throughout the history of philosophy there has been a protracted and central debate on the limitations of our ability to know – which led on to the Kantian problematic of the transcendental, that which we need in order to be able to think at all, but which, being given *a priori*, is not in itself the product of our thought – notions of time, causality, number, and so on.<sup>358</sup> In the social-science tradition initiated by Durkheim (especially 1912; cf. van Binsbergen 2018), stress has been laid on the extent to which such categories *are socially produced* – which brings us back to the previous point, of culture as boundary condition. However, it appears to be a sociology to leave the question at that, without further enquiring as to what more lasting and universal ontological givens in mind, matter and the universe may be at stake here *beyond* the whimsical treatment of space and time inherent in any specific human culture. Is not the affirmation of a knowable reality independent from the human mind, as in the most abstruse forms of naïve scientific realism, and is not the Kantian denial of such knowability (except via the transcendental appropriation by the knowing mind), just another expression for the fundamental paradoxes of existence / non-existence, truth / falsehood, Being / Non-Being, which I have been working towards in the previous pages?

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<sup>358</sup> Kant 1983 / 1781. A highly illuminating contribution has been Duintjer 1966. An exhaustive historical overview is offered by the contributions in Ritter *et al.* 2001, o.c., Band X, s.v. 'Transzendental (engl. transcendental; frz. transcendental bzw. transcendantal; ital. trascendentale); das Transzendental; Transzendentalien; Transzendentalphilosophie': comprising the following parts: Red[aktion ] 2001; Aertsen 2001; Honnfelder & Moehle 2001; Leinsle 2001; Hinske 2001; Cesa 2001; Koenig 2001; Poggi 2001; Ollig 2001; Lembeck 2001; Niquet 2001; Trappe 2001.

Let us reiterate the road travelled so far. Throughout the preceding chapters, I have erected many instances of contrasts between two or more statements and interpretations, and I have indicated specific perspectives:

- modern natural science versus a traditional world-view;
- a view stressing separation between known object and knowing subject, versus their merging as in mysticism and ecstasy;
- time as a unique and consecutive and consistent flow, or as eddying back and forth through reversed causality;
- laws of nature as immutable and exception-less, or as evolving over time and perchance miraculously yielding to ancestral or divine intercession;
- gods and ancestors as mere figments of the imagination, or as tangible forces in material reality

from which one position in these contrasts would be favoured and the alternative rejected. It has looked as if the progress towards knowledge consists in the identification of the proper perspective, articulating its advantages sufficiently seductively to let the reader adopt the choices I was advocating. However, as both an empirical anthropologist / historian, and an intercultural philosopher; both a North Atlantic scholar, and a Southern African diviner-healer; both a scientist, and a poet – I have been at a loss to stick to one favoured position, and have to admit that there is fundamental truth and fundamental defect in all of them.

*First step towards a solution.* Instead of the subjugating, hegemonic claim to a unique truth triumphing over all other alternatives, I now submit (as a *first radical step* towards the development of an intercultural epistemology that may enable us to do justice to all the contradictions in the preceding arguments) *that, given the complex and kaleidoscopic nature of reality including our own experience of, and our working upon, reality as thinking animals on our planet Earth, there is truth in all possible pronouncements about the nature of reality, and any attempt to favour one particular truth essentially reflects, not a superior truth, but a one-sided attempt at hegemonic ideological violence, supported only by the superior material (economic, military) and institutional power of the instance championing such an attempt.* The Received North Atlantic World-view, while shown to be obsolescent from the perspective of 20<sup>th</sup>-c. CE Quantum Mechanics and the Theory of Relativity, for centuries has been able to pose as superior to, as truer than, the alternative views found in other parts of the world, not because these alternative views could be demonstrated to be under no circumstances possible, even plausible, even (by locally prevailing standards, *i.e.* as culturally support 'justified true belief') *true*, – but because the North Atlantic world-view was upheld by a section of humanity temporarily endowed with superior economic and military power. It is for the same reason that Intercultural Philosophy, and explorations into the intercultural global politics of truth as in the present book, could emerge once the global power of the North Atlantic region had begun to wane, towards the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. CE. In terms of the construction of, and the allegiance to, world-views, the human world constitutes a patchwork

of mutually exclusive and initially unrelated knowledge domains, each of which is world-creating and truth-producing in its own right, and despite the large extent of some of these domains in space and time,<sup>359</sup> they cannot be reduced to one another, nor be subjugated to one another, by formal logical / methodological procedures; on the contrary, they can only be reconciled, negotiated and combined by a *wisdom* (van Binsbergen 2008c, 2009b, 2020a) of tolerance and acceptance, based on a non-standard non-Aristotelian logic, which is not predicated on the Excluded Third, in other words which does not hold that 'where p there not not-p'.

*Second step towards a solution.* In addition to this plurality of truth domains that are loosely, and in a non-principled, improvised 'wisdom' manner, combined in the thought and action of people straddling the boundaries between such domains (and such straddling is the typical stance in the modern, multicultural and globalised world), I make a *second radical claim: whatever is thinkable from whatever perspective in whatever cultural, regional and historical context, deserves to be considered as making a valid claim to Being, and to being truth – albeit as truth only in a limited, restricted domain, in one particular truth province among the very many that constitute the past and present human life-world.*

*Third step towards a solution.* This second step inevitably leads to a *third step: truth as truth will manifest itself in material, tangible reality; so whatever is thinkable, can – within the limited domain of its specific truth province – express and effect itself in the material world, to be experienced by those humans who because of their culture, region and history subscribe to the truth province in question, but is in principle also capable of being experienced by those humans who do not formally, not even recognisably, belong to that truth province.* The airplane constructed according to the Received North Atlantic World-view, will fly also when crossing into the airspace over a region where that Received North Atlantic World-view is not generally accepted by the population (be they devout Muslims, Hindus, adherents of traditional African beliefs, etc.), and will not crash simply by having crossed the boundary into another truth province. But by the same token, the divinatory knowledge produced by the proper application of *sangoma* knowledge, when applied by someone who because of competence, training, internalisation and proper ritual gestures and paraphernalia represents and brings to life the appropriate *sangoma* truth province within, but procedurally secluded from, the overall context of the North Atlantic space and in our present time, will effectively be produced as if it was being produced in a more original and congenial context of Southern African *sangomas* and their clients.

A world in which so many contradictory truths, and their material manifestations and precipitations, exist next to one another and mixed through one another, is no longer the coolly ordered rational paradise of the European Enlightenment world-view. On the

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<sup>359</sup> My work revealing the widespread model of the cyclical transformation of elements (2012), on leopard-skin symbolism (2004 / in press (f)), and on geomantic divination (1995, 1996, 2012, and in press (g)) brings out a few of such domains.



contrary, it is without the slightest doubt a madman's hell,<sup>360</sup> where illuminating, superior truth is no longer effectively recognised, and where all material appearances could be mere figments of the imagination, or could be inescapable destructive material forces, or both, or neither. The person conjuring it up (I myself) could justifiably be suspected of being a madman himself.

*Fourth step towards a solution. At least one, fourth, further step is required* to bring such a world back to the manageable, compartmentalised proportions that we know and recognise as reality from our own cultural and social experience – as a reality amenable to the knowledge-producing procedures of science. How could such compartmentalisation as is needed for the preservation of our sanity, be effected? I suggest that part of the answer is: by an arrangement similar to that which is *separating* (and, in a way, protecting and preserving)

- (a) our macroscopic Newton world, with its simple and obvious physical and mathematical description, from
- (b) the nanoscopic and cosmoscopic world of the sub-atomic and the galactic level;

here (a) exists, and for most purposes operates demonstrably within the limits of measurability inherent in Early Modern scientific apparatus, given specific macroscopic boundary conditions. What makes the Received North Atlantic World-view persist also today as the 'obviously valid' world-view of several billion people, is that most of these people are, in their consciousness, their everyday and professional experience, and in their collectively supported culture, shielded off from (b) the nanoscopic and cosmoscopic details where the Theory of Relativity and Quantum Mechanics rule supreme (as long as the latter will have not been supplanted by even more recent, superior theories) – while the people in question are also, culturally and socially, almost completely shielded off from other culture's alternative world-views that would produce life-worlds commensurate to and accommodating to *Sangoma Science* – life-worlds where the phenomena stipulated by *Sangoma Science* (such as veridical divination, and ancestors' material intercession in the physical world) do exist and constitute actual, tangible occurrences.

Crossing those insulating and protective boundaries, repeatedly, wholesale and virtually unconditionally, in the course of my career, has burdened me with the disorientation that (as my wife and children and colleagues have sometimes feared) occasionally seemed to bring me to the brink of insanity, and has caused me to be an occasional victim of exclusion and ostracism<sup>361</sup> –

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<sup>360</sup> Hence, ironically, the choice of the book's cover illustration, which is taken from Jheronimo Bosch's famous painting *The Garden of Earthly Delights*.

<sup>361</sup> Not so much – until recently – among my Africanist colleagues at the Leiden African Studies Centre (my safe haven, from the moment when I joined that institution in early 1977 until I became victim of ostracism in 2007) and worldwide – for Africans are considered to often affirm the occult, and Africanists, even if non-Africans, tend to emulate that attitude – vicariously and performatively – as a token of their own professional identity; nor, to any oppressive extent, among my, by and large, highly accommodating and stimulating philosophical colleagues in Africa and at the Department of the Philosophy of Man and Culture, Philosophical Faculty, Erasmus University Rotterdam; but – as discussed above – certainly, for instance, in the context of the conference on 'Wereldbeelden. wetenschappen en wij:

but not without bringing me the worthwhile prize of being able, finally, to make a beginning with formulating an intercultural epistemology that affirms both the validity of modern North Atlantic / global science, and the equal validity, in principle, of alternative knowledge constructions in regions and periods outside the modern North Atlantic.

One of the yields of the present analysis therefore, not by accident (for my entire career as a researcher and writer has been orientated towards that goal) has been the recognition, affirmation and vindication of knowledge systems from outside the North Atlantic region and / or outside the Modern period. But that does not even exhaust the merits of the approach here advocated. Beyond the global politics of knowledge, my approach begins to reformulate an alternative view of what ontology is all about: not so much specific, concrete pronouncements about aspects of Being, statements on that what exists and what does not exist – for by affirming the existence, even in the material sense, of whatever is thinkable (albeit within the confines of a specific, culturally defined truth province), reality is affirmed in its protean, inexhaustible and unpredictable riches – as the creative, literally divine power of the Universe capable of producing (in us, humans) self-reflective thought about itself. This approach tempts us to state that at the heart of ontology is not a specific truth about what exists and how it does exist, but about the mode of existence in general: as both existing (within a specific truth province) and non-existing (within alternative, rival, adjacent truth provinces), at the same time. *The oscillation between affirmation of Being and Non-Being*<sup>362</sup> is the fundamental condition of Being.

Among the many loose ends and likely errors of argumentation that need to be considered before the above can be anything more than a pipe-dream, and to be re-considered from a far more accomplished philosophical perspective than I have the personal competence for, there remains the problem of *convergence*. We may admit that our present-day world and its images of the near and remote past are immensely multiplex, contradictory and fragmented, reflecting in content, and expressing in material form, the myriad thoughts and fantasies that have been projected upon reality by humans for millennia. Vicious (often downright violent, murderous) debates rage as to the affirmation or denial of the following themes:

- something as massive, recent, and amply documented as the 1939-1945 CE Holocaust,

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Naar meer kritische, verantwoorde en open wetenschappen' [ World-views, the sciences and us: Towards a more critical, more responsible and less entrenched conception of science ], Centre Leo Apostel for the Philosophy of Science, Free University, Brussels, Belgium, 10 June 2003: Nicole Note and Dirk Aerts organised this promising event in all openness and trust, but during my own presentation a vocal Skeptical member of that Centre's Board challenged and ridiculed my views, and later he used his institutional power to have me excluded from the conference proceedings. These then appeared as: Aerts *et al.* 2005. A piquant detail was that during the conference Aerts went out of his way to share his profound research on Quantum Non-locality with me, admitting its relevance for the divinatory experiences I was claiming in my conference contribution (subsequently published as ch. 7 of my *Intercultural Encounters*, 2003), whereas later, presumably rapped on the fingers for allowing my heretical views to be vented, he condoned my exclusion from the book and could not even summon the civility to answer my several letters and e-mail messages.

<sup>362</sup> In other words, between reference and autonomy, which I found in my juvenile analysis of literary symbolism.

- more remote issues such as the historic nature of Jesus Christ as the proclaimed founder of Christianity,
- the true nature of part of Syro-Palestine as allegedly promised to and claimed by one section of the alleged descendants of a West Asian Bronze-Age trading prince called Abra(ha)m / Ibrahim,
- the (only very recently affirmed; cf. Bernal 1987-2006) North Atlantic region's scientific and religious indebtedness to Africa and Asia,
- the claimed emergence of humankind and civilisation in such imagined contexts as Atlantis and Lemuria,
- the claimed past action of extraterrestrial intelligences bringing civilisation, even life, to our planet, *etc. etc.*
- the explanation of the history of life on Earth as due to evolution, or to Intelligent Design
- the existence, or non-existence, of God.

However, in the face of all this confusion and divergence, *what about the unmistakable convergence of the experience of reality, which is one of the most striking features of human life today?* A formidable argument against the Many-Worlds Hypothesis (and in favour of simple old-fashioned common-sense Realism) is the obvious *convergence* between human individuals' behaviour within co-inciding settings of space and time. Despite their extreme variation in mental constructs and their material projections onto reality, we may come back to our comparison of the American truck driver and the Islamic *mullah* – they perceive and operate the same technologies, apparatuses, material constructs such as buildings, airplanes, *etc.* Without constantly comparing notes, without even communicating with one another in language or through signs, they turn out to be largely confronted with the same material realities of sea shores, mountain ranges, buildings, obstacles, time constraints, weather conditions, medical threats, and the strategies they deploy to circumvent such challenges suggest that very largely they experience these material obstacles as the same immutable givens. Their experiences demonstrably *converge*. *It is as if the prevailing boundary condition of our modern world is one of cosmological convergence and unity, as a truth province in which an ever greater part of humanity shares an ever greater part of their lifetime*, while the wildly diverging alternatives including material manifestations that are dictated by their individual truth provinces, govern only smaller and smaller sections of everyone's life. Another term for this process is *globalisation*, and we may wonder whether, as a result (as many theoreticians of globalisation have claimed) also the number and the differences between truth provinces goes through a process of reduction.

#### **4.9. Forbidden Archeology: Conclusion**

As stated above, the ideas presented in this chapter have regurgitated in my mind for decades, on the basis of my comparative and historical work on world-views outside the

North Atlantic. Cremo & Thompson's *Bhaktivedanta* view of humankind's history as a non-evolutionary succession of aeons each with their complete and non-evolving set of natural phenomena, merely provide a peg on which to hang the various strands of my evolving intercultural epistemology – although admittedly, deep down, there is a profound resemblance, perhaps even historic continuity, between Hindu Indian philosophy and the views advanced by me here. As a student of sub-Saharan Africa, North African popular Islam, and the Mediterranean Bronze Age, my data and inspiration initially derived from parts of the world relatively remote from the South Asian subcontinent, but (after my transitional focus on comparative mythology) in the last few years I have increasingly turned my analytical gaze to India in a bid to explore Africa's transcontinental continuities in pre- and protohistory (van Binsbergen 2012d, 2019a, 2020d).

The preceding argument leads up to a pertinent and somewhat surprising positive conclusion concerning the claims made in *Forbidden Archeology*. From the perspective of the Received North Atlantic World-view, and of North Atlantic / global state-of-the-art science, Cremo & Thompson's argument cannot be true, and their attempts to present their data and analysis in accordance with modern scientific paradigm must be faulted – as I have done above – , and appears to be little more than futile window dressing. However, the last few sections of this chapter have created space for non-Western, rival truth provinces, and have offered an extensive argument in the light of which the truths of these non-Western truth provinces cannot be dismissed offhand by exclusive reference to the North Atlantic scientific paradigm. The reason is not only that, by accidents of recent history, in the last quarter of a century, the North Atlantic region has lost much of its former dominance. The more fundamental reason is that, once thought, the *Bhaktivedanta* view of human history must also be appreciated as, *locally* (within a Hindu truth province) *but essentially, true* – and as potentially having its own material impact, retrospectively, on the reshaping of human history. Cremo & Thompson's interpretation may be, even *must* be, rejected, but

- not in the name of universal, unitary science (for<sup>363</sup> given the cultural diversity of the present-day world there cannot be such a thing as a unified truth regime – one and only one truth province),
- but merely – in a limited sense – in the name of the one truth province peopled with modern, global / North Atlantic scientists, and their readers.

Only in the latter respect can the archaeology of Cremo & Thompson, however apparently preposterous from a mainstream North Atlantic point of view, be properly considered to be *forbidden*. But by virtue of the oscillating and world-creating epistemology hinted at here, their book may have altered the course of *remote* history simply because it was written and might – crazily – find its way back into the past.

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<sup>363</sup> Contrary to what I asserted over a decade ago in the introduction to my *Intercultural Encounters* (2003), when I had not yet grappled enough with the central issues of the present argument, and was still not prepared to give up the naïvely realist and universalist epistemological models in which I had been trained as an empirical social scientist over fifty years ago.

If the past does shape and reshape itself (in the most literal sense of producing specific material objects commensurate with a particular human view of that past), as a result of the intellectual activities – especially the text production – of human researchers in the fields of archaeology, palaeoanthropology *etc.*, or even of scientifically lay people, then we may expect some kind of learning process. Older finds, still relatively unhindered by the censure of a paradigm that was soon to become dominant, would then offer a larger range of wild, counter-paradigmatic data, whereas more recent finds could have been preventively adjusted (by whatever agency it is that produces historically significant artefacts in the soil) to this paradigm so as to avoid the risk of being rejected or overlooked. Translated to the level of conscious human agency (which is not necessarily the agency referred to in the preceding sentence), we could alternatively describe the same process, with the same outcome, in the following way: earlier publications, especially if submitted to and accepted by more peripheral and informal venues of publication, would have a much greater chance of containing unfiltered, uncensored anomalous data concerning the remote human past, than recent ones published in the major journals and by the major university presses – in the latter cases the odd data would have been filtered out either by the authors' self-censure or by the editorial process of critical feedback, acceptance or rejection. However, I am much more convinced by my earlier explanation to the effect that early and peripheral venues contain most apparent data on anomalous human presence in remote history because these venues are unprofessional and were prepared to print their authors' unsubstantiated fantasies.

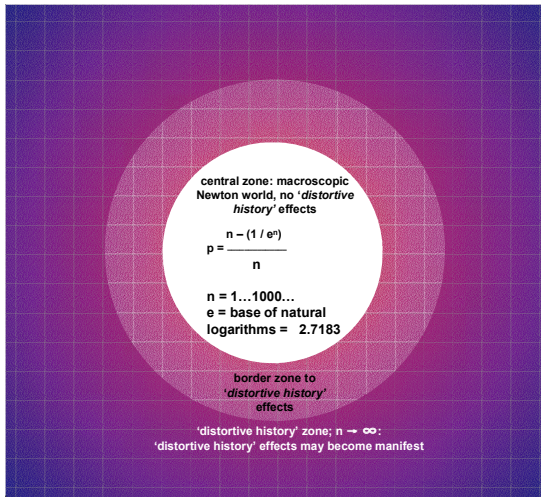


Fig. 4.16. World model with 'distortive history' effects in the periphery

In Fig. 4.16 I have schematically represented the world model proposed above. The important thing is the formula expressing the probability of a particular configuration of Being / Non-Being:

$$\text{associated probability: } p = \frac{n - (1 / e^n)}{n}$$

In the overwhelming majority of situations, in other words in situations whose associated probability  $p$  is equal to 1 or scarcely lower than 1, we find ourselves in the 'central zone'; here, all the familiar characteristics of the Newton world obtain, and no 'distortive history' effects of the kinds proposed in *Forbidden Archeology* do occur. However, in an infinitesimally small proportion of situations, where  $n \rightarrow \infty$  so  $p \rightarrow 0$ , we have crossed a boundary condition and have been propelled outside the central zone, across a border zone and into the peripheral zone; we no longer find ourselves in a Newton world, but in one in which Quantum and Relativity effects are so manifest as to become measurable, and in which therefore 'distortive history' effects may occur, in the sense of uncontrolled material projections of the imagination into observable situations where they are totally out of place in terms the theory applying to the 'central zone'. In this light, even Cremona & Thompson's championing of the strange metallic spheres in South African primal, Pre-Cambrian soils of 2.8 billion years old, however amazing and apparently nonsensical, can be accommodated within the tentative intercultural epistemology advanced in my present argument.

Let us return for a moment to the mainstream prehistoric archaeology of Southern Africa. Although we cannot hope to throw much comparative light on the South African case of the grooved metallic sphere assigned to a stratigraphy scientifically estimated to go back 2.8 billion years, yet it is important to keep in mind that stone spheres have played a conspicuous role in African archaeology. Gruet (1955) reported on a pile of calcary spheres in a Mousterian / Neanderthaloid context in South Tunisia, from the Middle Palaeolithic. We are reminded of the stone spheres (كرة *kora*), usually less than 10 cm in diameter, which are found in many North African contexts involving the veneration of saints and are considered to be the main miraculous sign (*karamāt*, كرامة) by which a saint has proved his or her sanctity<sup>364</sup> they are usually considered to be ancient Turkish cannon-balls, but that may be a presentist fallacy. Admittedly, their reported presence in a Middle-Palaeolithic context could be suspected to be an intrusion from historic times. However, stone balls had a recognised prehistoric use notably in *bolas* (stone-weighted ropes thrown around the legs of the quadrupeds one was hunting). Moreover, as Willoughby (1985) wrote

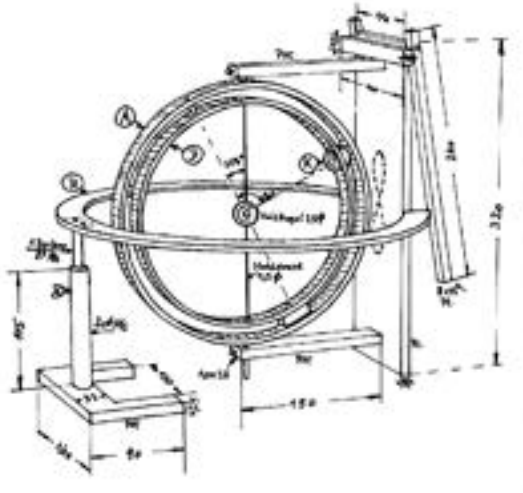
in 1910, E.G. Gobert described faceted bales de silex from sites in Tunisia and bordering areas in the Department of Constantine in Algeria'; cf. Gobert 1910a, 1910b.

If these spheres look like the figments of the imagination depicted by Magritte, it is because they are *thinkable* – and if they are thinkable, they may (by the preposterous ontology which I have advocated above) well have taken material form, erratically ending up in stratigraphies where they had no logical or mainstream-historical grounds to be, but where

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<sup>364</sup> Cf. Montet 1909; Demeerseman 1964, first published 1938-1939 in the same journal.

the materialising powers of the imagination may have landed them just as anywhere else.



Source: Teichmann 2015

Fig. 4.17. Model of Eudoxos spheres for the movement of the Sun (or the hippoped movement of a starlike planet)

As we have seen in chapter 3, stone balls are also prominent, whatever their associated use, in African Lower Palaeolithic sites – spheres either brought into shape by humans, or collected by them from nature (Wiloughby 1985). There is moreover an important literature on *bored* stones in Southern African prehistory – regrettably, such stones are not clearly spherical, so scarcely pertinent to the problem of *Forbidden Archeology*, yet they are full of relevance for the history of (especially terraced) agriculture and animal husbandry, metallurgy, the hypothesis of Bantu expansion, arm rings as body adornment, and transcontinental continuities between Southern Africa and India, including the Śiva cult, where the open circular element of the *yoni* (vulva) constitutes the ideal receptacle to hold the phallic *lingam* of the male god Śiva.<sup>365</sup>

Meanwhile the radically absurdist epistemology set out above opens up another possibility which is the main reason why I put ‘poetics’ in the sub-title of this book. Within boundary conditions that may be very exceptional and that may hardly ever obtain, yet we could admit that writing about the past is creating, bringing about that past also with potential material consequences. In other words, beyond the border zone to ‘distortive history’, where infinitesimal probability closely approaches zero, we do not even need proper geological methods of dating the stratigraphy in which the metallic spheres allegedly were found, nor proper archaeological excavation methods precluding all risks of spurious intrusions; the very fact that Cremo & Thompson write about them as occurring in those 2.8 billion years old layers, may already result in implanting them there in one, immensely unlikely, respect.

<sup>365</sup> Cf. Goodwin 1947-1952; van Riet Lowe 1941; Dart 1932, 1948.; van Binsbergen 2019.

Or would the implantation reflect the trilogy by one of the most prominent recent German philosophers, Peter Sloterdijk's *Sphären* [ 'Spheres' ] I-III,<sup>366</sup> whose final instalment even is entitled *Schäume* / *Foams*, as if rendering the puzzling contents of the South African grooved metallic sphere? Or a reflection (possibly even the original referent?), of Eudoxos' spheric clockwork, mentioned by Vitruvius, and so complex that it appeared like a spider? (Maula 1975-1976; my Fig. 4.17). Come to think of it, the sphere as a concept and shape has been immensely important in the history of early science: recognised as an eternal, divine shape by Plato along with a short series of others including the tetraeder and the cube, it was Archimedes<sup>367</sup> who treated at length on the sphere and the cylinder; and σφαῖρα / 'sphere' became the standard expression, not so much for the Earth (although from about Plato's time this was recognised to be spherical) but particularly for the vault of heavens (especially from Anaximander onwards, when it came to be conceived as a system of concentric, hollow spheres; Liddell *et al.* 1897).

For someone like myself, some of whose principal writings have been attempts to reconstruct the past, these are rather depressing thoughts. Is all historiography then doomed to radically alter the very past it seeks to render objectively and faithfully? But as a poet, I secretly rejoice at this apparent vindication of the creative powers of the written word. And who is that late-medieval Dutch mariner setting foot (like the heroine of *The Tempest*, and especially in the immensely moving final images of the motion picture *Shakespeare in Love*, John Madden, 1998) on an uncharted North American shore, braving the attacks of the local inhabitants covered with war paints? Is it not Skipper toe Hoerne, after all? Did my boyish prank tangibly put him there, bringing him to materialise out of my brother's and my own untutored fantasies? Or did I clairvoyantly pick up the details of his (unexpectedly) factual historic landfall on the North American east coast, and was it the same paranormal influence that guided my boy's hand so as to emulate an ancient script that could fool a doctor of late medieval Dutch history? A clichéd adage has it that poets by lying bring out the truth. Is it perhaps an implication of historic fraud, like our juvenile nautic manuscript, like Glozel's alfabet, like the Piltdown skeleton fragment -- that they constitute possible parallel histories in a world where such parallels, although utterly untrue, are yet capable of, disastrously, inserting themselves back into reality? And become somewhat true? How much of our accepted, standard academic history would go back to such a shaky foundation? Is it still meaningful to speak of 'historical facts'?

Or is it simply time for us to depart from Neverneverland, and return, with our next chapter, to that so hospitable, eminently meaningful, eminently human and warm, world of... digital globalised today?

We move on to the last leg of our erratic journey in this book, to examine evolution from a rather different angle than classic Hinduism, in Dan Brown's unexpectedly brilliant recent novel *Origin*.

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<sup>366</sup> Sloterdijk 1998-2004.

<sup>367</sup> Archimedes 1912.



		
<p>4.18.1. Henk van Binsbergen, my FaFa, mobilised into the Netherlands army during WWI, and succumbed to the Spanish Influenza in 1918</p>	<p>4.18.2. Joop (Johannes) Broers, my administrative Fa 1947-1948, wearing his sergeant's uniform of the Netherlands army, and posing with his eldest two children at Easter 1940, weeks before engaging the German enemy at the Grebbeberg, Central Netherlands</p>	<p>4.18.3. Chiel van Binsbergen (1912-1945), house painter and communist, resistance hero, arrested in connection with the 1941 February strike against the deportation of Amsterdam Jews, and murdered a few days before WWII ended</p>
		
<p>4.18.4. Joseph Goar Klein (as tentatively identified by an arrow placed by his daughter sixty years later) – born in Berlin (Germany) as son of a local herbalist female practitioner, at the Bergen (North Holland) internment camp for German soldiers, 1918; immediately prior to this episode he lived with my widowed MoMo, siring two children, of which only Maria Theodora Treuen, my mother, survived into adulthood. Joseph was never set eyes on again. He returned to Berlin after WWI, where he became a successful journalist († 1953)</p>		<p>4.18.5. Chief Mwene Kahare Kabambi (1921-1993) of the Nkoya, my adoptive father (1977); prior to ascending to his father Timuna's throne in 1955, he was a sergeant r in the Northern Rhodesia Army</p>

The present author's Nkoya name is Tata Shikanda, after his middle daughter Shikanda / Sarah; she was named after the belligerent Nkoya Queen Shikanda (18th c. CE), who in turn (given the strong South Asian influence on Nkoya courts, cf. van Binsbergen 2020) took the name the Hindu war god Skanda, a transformation of the world conqueror Alexander the Great. Skanda is also known as Kartikeya, Kumara, Murugan, Mahasena, Shanmukha and Subrahmanya. My heroic uncle's name became my second given name at birth – clearly a reference to the heavenly host's general, St Michael.

*Fig. 4.18. The erratic path of a Servant of the Ancestors: Born in a century saturated with large-scale war, the author, occasionally a peace activist, yet belligerent, and of proven courage both in the field and in academia, finds himself surrounded by an abundance of soldiers among his real and adoptive ancestors and patrons*



# ***Chapter 5. An unexpected science-fiction masterpiece***

## ***Dan Brown's Origin considered in the light of Teilhard de Chardin's work***

### **5.1. Introduction: *Origin* amidst Dan Brown's novels**

Frankly, when *Origin*, the new Dan Brown appeared in the local bookshops by the end of 2017, I was not particularly eager to acquire and read it.

I had read *The Da Vinci Code* (2004), on the recommendation not of my usual literary advisors but of that of my athletic eldest son, whose informal father-in-law (a university professor of psychology and, like me, a poet) had greatly enjoyed the book. The mixture of Christian historic myth (the 'bloodline' of the founder of Christianity had been the subject of several other speculative bestsellers in the previous decade), Early-Modern science, Swiss bank secrets, British nobility, secret societies and terrorist murder, full of rapid plot changes and cliff-hangers, had been entertaining to the very end: the eerie, dreamy evocation of the Scottish chapple where Christ's last surviving alleged descendants were re-united as one little happy family – fully aware of their global divine mission, and amply compensated for the sacrilegious Black Mass the book's heroine as a child had seen her grandfather perform, when she was peeping in through their castle's window. Nonetheless, donning his Mickey-Mouse wristwatch, emulating vague popular stereotypes of the Harvard professor (Brown's rendering on this point remains totally unconvincing to me, who between 2004 to 2010 was a very regular participant in Harvard intellectual exchanges) and of the non-existing field of 'symbolology', the book's male protagonist Robert Langdon did not come to life – his psychology was if possible even flatter than that of his female counterpart, even more reminiscent of early science fiction full of clichéd scholarly and academic *couleur locale*, his lapses into colloquialisms too un-professorial, his Harvard too much a view from afar. I suppose it

was only in order to stress this fake dimension of the book that in the movie, Langdon was played by the sentimental, gregarious, integrity-oozing and blatantly non-academic Tom Hanks, while the heroine was brought to a comic, equally unsophisticated and miscast life by the French comic actress Audrey Tautou.

I soon read other 'Dan Brown's. Some showed amazing skill and accomplishment (I particularly liked the first, *Angels and Demons*, which afforded my wife and me a welcome travel guide for a fascinating afternoon in Rome when we had no more time to spare, and which rekindled my altar boy's childhood experiences mixed with fantasy, of Roman Catholic clerics as a vain, murderous, lascivious, heretical lot – but how on earth could a future pope resign himself to the idea that impregnating a nun through Artificial Insemination was no infringement of his, nor of her, vow of chastity?). Most titles in the Dan-Brown series, however, in my opinion revolved on an appalling display of flimsily appropriated Internet gleanings passed off as state-of-the-art architectural, historical and art-historical knowledge. For me *The Lost Symbol* was the last straw: a fantasy on Freemasonry symbolism in USA state architecture at Washington DC – how could a prodigal son who had left home as a near-adult, after many years in which he cherished his childhood resentments, re-enter the life of his rich and powerful father and not be recognised? However, also these later books had proved entertaining reads, if intellectually and literarily shallow; and being involved in a protracted and exhausting process of moving house I expected to find at least entertainment with *Origin*, – miles away from the philosophical, scientific, comparative-mythological and *belles-lettres* canon with which I normally occupy myself as an intellectual producer.



Fig. 5.1. Gauguin's painting 'D'ou venons-nous – Que sommes-nous – Où allons-nous'.

However, somewhat to my regret I have no option but to report the following. After the predictably slow and somewhat clumsy first fifty pages, *Origin* is an amazingly well-written exploration of some of the most profound and enduring preoccupations of the human mind, and specifically of our globalised, digitalised world today. The book aptly (though somewhat amazingly) avoids the most conspicuous international conflict matter of today (the North Atlantic demonisation of Islam, and the Islamic demonisation of the North Atlantic post-Christian region). Instead, it addresses far more essential and enduring problematics: the origin of life on Earth, the future of humankind, the debate on the relation between religion and science, and the excesses of recent Creationism (cf. Skybreak 2006) as a theology of the long-term history of the universe and of life on Earth. For a change, Brown's input of scientific knowledge, although inevitably second-hand (after all, he is a failed pop musician and a best-selling author, not a scientist), is far from stale, but, on the contrary, up-to-date, complex, and brilliantly managed. An extensive team of editors and copy editors has ensured that most of the prose is of exceptional quality, and that unmistakable slips of the pen are very rare. Used, by now, to the jaded amateurism and anti-intellectualism of pseudo-professor Langdon I was not so irritated any more by the details (like Langdon, I am myself a comparative mythologist: founding member, and between 2005 and 2020 one of the directors, of the International Association for Comparative Mythology), and, I must admit, I was increasingly captivated by the author's serious and relevant voice unfolding state-of-the-art versions of perennial central questions of humankind.



## 5.2. Where do we come from – Who are we? – Where are we going?

In 2010, when, at Harvard, Eric Venbrux and I presented the edited proceedings of the Second Annual Conference of the International Association of Comparative Mythology which we had organised, the doyen of that field, the Sanskritist Michael Witzel, concluded his presidential address with a PowerPoint slide showing Gauguin's well-known monumental painting entitled '*Dou venons-nous – Que sommes-nous – Où allons-nous*.' These very words are written in the upper left-hand corner of the painting, and Witzel (German-born, and ever since his transfer from Leiden a true Harvard professor, unlike Langdon) generously (but, as I pointed out in the subsequent debate, from a philosophical point of view somewhat shallowly) claimed that the painter had phrased there the three central questions of all human thought and all mythology: Where do we come from – Who are we? – Where are we going?

I could not help wondering if perhaps more of Witzel had gone into *Origin* than Brown gave him credit for – Witzel is absent from the long list of acknowledgements that concludes the book. Anyway, Gauguin's title runs as a red thread through *Origin*, and determines much of its structure.

*Origin* is full of felicitous *trouvailles* which show what mastery Brown has acquired by now, in his fifties. The book not only uses extensive data from the Internet, but also is a incessant celebration, in form and content (whole sections emulate web pages!), of the Internet as it has established itself as the standard mode of expression and of interaction in the course of the last decade. The novel's characters communicate not by postal pigeons or smoke columns, not even by secret letters smuggled in by a trusted servant, and only rarely by telepathy, but like we all do these days, by Internet / e-mail / text messages / Whatsapp. This renders credibility and unity of style and purpose to the book – even though the same approach, in the hands of a lesser writer (and of lesser editors, I suppose...) would have produced a boring and merely fashionable but essentially ephemeral text.

This permanent emphasis on recent media also constitutes a constant homage to the character who, more even than Langdon and his reluctant heroine (the female museum director Ambra Vidal, 'the future Queen of Spain' since she is considered the fiancée of the Spanish crown prince) is the true protagonist of this book, notably: the computer scientist, futurologist, modern oracle and multi-billionaire Edmond Kirsch. Ambra Vidal remains bleak, featureless, stilted, devoid of personality, like all of Dan Brown's heroines and in fact like Langdon himself also in this book. By contrast, Kirsch is truly 'A Hero of Our Time' (Lermontov 1840). His rags-to-riches story (like in *Angels and Demons* again the nun who gives birth – in this case, for once, using the usual procreative anatomy, and fortunately before making her vows) does manifest some of the thin, early-science-fiction psychology Brown is addicted to (it effectively spoiled *The Lost Symbol*, and almost spoiled *Angels and Demons*). Yet as a top-ranking specialist in Artificial Intelligence, and as a more than passionate and abundantly equipped thinker struggling to find the ultimate answers to Gauguin's above ques-

tions, Kirsch is in an excellent – and what is more, credible – position to invent, build and finance the supercomputer with which these questions may now be answered with state-of-the-art techniques of mathematical modelling, algorithms, and simulation. This requires unprecedented calculating power which before the Quantum computer was simply unimaginable, but which now enables Kirsch to replicate – but this time mathematically controlled to the greatest possible and thinkable detail – the famous 1952-1959 Miller-Urey experiments in which the conditions of the Earth's presumed primordial atmosphere were modelled in a test tube for a few weeks.

### 5.3. Simulating the origin of life on Earth

What made those experiments audacious and thrilling is that less than a century earlier test tubes had been used (Huxley 1873: 218 *f.*) to demonstrate the very opposite: that life could not possibly emerge from dead matter, in other words, that the *generatio spontanea* in which many generations of early scientists had believed ever since Aristotle and Pliny, was an impossibility. Two-thirds of a century ago, Miller's and Urey's experiments certainly did not yield *life*, but at least some of its indispensable building bricks – amino acids. (Brown, who obviously and understandably is only familiar with these experiments as mediated by today's secondary reports, believes that these results were considered negative at the time, as if the experiments were failures; but I personally learned about them – and about Oparin's 1938 / 1953 counterpart experiments in the Soviet Union, mentioned in Miller's first, 1953 publication<sup>368</sup> – as a boy, in the wake of the centenary of Darwin's (1859) *Origin of Species*, and then scientific opinion was far more positive, not to say elated; cf Quispel 1960). Kirsch's supercomputer allows him to engage in digital simulation on an even grander scale than is already habitual in this field of advanced and boundary-crossing research. He thus manages to convert the simulation model into an incredibly precise and comprehensive time machine, re-calculate the probable fate of every atom and molecule, yea every electron, electromagnetic discharge, and gamma ray in these test tubes, not just for a few weeks but for millions of years forward and backward, and thus to recapture the most probable details of the origin of life on Earth.

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<sup>368</sup> There is an interesting link here with another long-standing interest of mine (van Binsbergen 1997 / 2011): the *Black-Athena* debate, as initiated by Martin Gardiner Bernal (Bernal 1987-2006). His father, John Desmond Bernal, a leading physico-chemist widely known for his four-volume social history of science, was with J.B.S. Haldane one of the pioneers in the West of a natural-science approach to the origin of life (cf. Bernal *et al.* 1962 / 1957), and both were staunch Moscow communists. Finding a materialist explanation for the origin of life was for them an interesting application of the historical materialism of Marx, Engels and Lenin. Martin Bernal, although himself not really a communist, originally studied Sinology in Cambridge UK (where for some time he lived in the house of the leading anthropologist Meyer Fortes), and wrote a PhD on Chinese Communism in the early 20th c. CE.

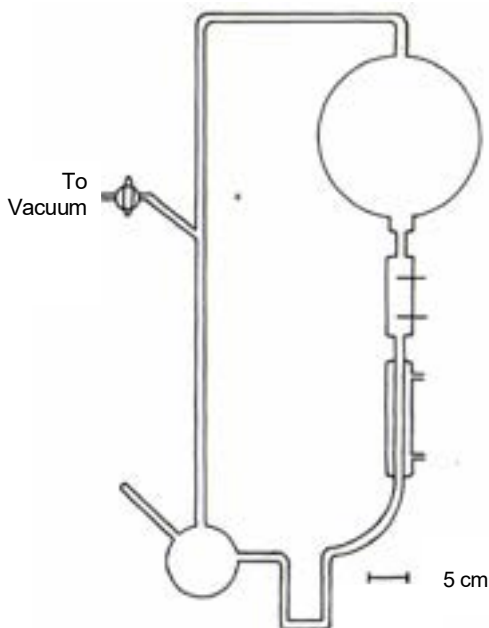


Fig. 5.2. Schematic view of Miller's 1952 experiment (Miller 1953: 528).<sup>369</sup>

This yields Kirsch the answer to one of his momentous questions – but it happens to be the very same answer (and this is one of the few regrettable oversights of Brown's book) which also the controversial science-and-religion writer of a much earlier vintage, the French geologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, gave in *Le Phénomène Humain* (1955, originally written 1938–1940):<sup>370</sup> *provided we allow for all matter to contain the tiniest fragment of spirit, life can emerge from matter on the basis of no other conditions than simply those*

<sup>369</sup> Although meanwhile raised to iconic status, the Miller-Urey findings have not gone without profound criticism; cf. the opening chapter in Wells 2002, where he speaks of *misleading* and *mythology*. In other chapters he criticises the idea of the *Tree of Life* (popular with Darwin and many of his sympathisers, including Teilhard de Chardin, cf. Teilhard 1955: 86 my Fig. 5.3; for a general overview of trees of life, cf. Pietsch 2012). Meanwhile the simple, one-origin tree model has been increasingly criticised as merely a simplistic, linearised model of thought hailing from the Romantic period (cf. Bernal 1990: 2 f., 53 f.; Blažek 2007; Kammerzell 1994; Salminen 2002; Dewar 1995).

<sup>370</sup> Ever since his death in 1955, when the Roman Catholic church lifted the embargo on the publication of his writings, an enormous literature has grown around Teilhard's work and person. The principal works are easily identified on, and retrieved from, the Internet, and I shrink from listing them here – limiting myself to such works as I actually discuss.



contained in the natural laws that supposedly have unalteringly governed all so-called dead matter since, supposedly, the beginning of time. For the emergence of life on Earth there is no need whatsoever to invoke the specific intercession of a personal, creative god.<sup>371</sup> We will come back below to the several reservations ('supposedly...') which the previous statement contains.



Fig. 2. L'« Arbre de la Vie », d'après Cuénot. (Masson et Cie édit). Sur cette figure symbolique, chaque lobe principal (ou grappe) équivaut à une « Nappe » au moins aussi importante (morphologiquement et quantitativement) que celle formée par les Mammifères pris tous ensemble. — Au-dessous de la ligne AB les formes sont aquatiques ; au-dessus elles vivent à l'air libre.

Fig. 5.3. Cuénot's 1951 *Tree of Life*<sup>372</sup> as copied in Teilhard de Chardin 1955: 86

<sup>371</sup> This reiterates Immanuel Kant's introduction to his theory on the origin of the Solar system (1755): if we can explain phenomena by an appeal to natural laws, which may be taken to be divine creations anyway and to splendidly testify to God's glory, why take recourse to the idea of direct divine intervention?

<sup>372</sup> The 'Tree of Life', here depicted in the most literal conception, is a cosmological and mythological concept of long standing and wide geographic distribution. Cf. James 1966; Widengren 1951; Parpola

## 5.4. Debating the origin of life on Earth

Kirsch's research is set against the background of a major ideological war now being waged in American (*i.e.* USA) intellectual and religious life: that between Scientism<sup>373</sup> and Creationism (*cf.* Scott 2004; Sweetman 2015; Ayala / National Academy of Sciences 2008; Ruse 2008). The latter position, vocally and fanatically voiced by many devout Christians, holds that the creation of life out of dead matter early in Earth's history, a few billion years ago, necessarily required the direct intercession of a personal creator God. *Kirsch's outcome seems to amount to the ultimate refutation of creationism.* This is why his results are deemed to be so worrying to the world's religious leaders – to three of whom (a top-ranking Jewish Rabbi, a Roman Catholic bishop, and a prominent Muslim scholar) he has given a preview of his findings a few weeks before divulging them through digital media on a global scale. Convinced that Kirsch's findings will do devastating damage to existing religious beliefs concerning creation, these religious leaders ask him to postpone the public presentation, and soon afterwards two of them are murdered as a result of what looks like a global conspiracy against Kirsch. When Kirsch finally goes public with his findings and stages a major media event for this purpose, he himself is shot down by a Spanish retired admiral belonging to an obscure Christian sect. This happens halfway Kirsch's initial presentation, before the essence of his findings could be disclosed. Langdon and Ambra Vidal witness the murder at close quarters, and go on a wild chase (with extensive parallels in earlier Brown books, always along the world's major architectural and sculptural sites – this time Antonio Gaudi's *Sagrada Familia* / *Holy Family* cathedral in Barcelona) in order to procure the password that can unlock the essential part of Kirsch's intended presentation from his supercomputer, and thus divulge his findings even after his death. In the process – which ultimately proves successful – they are greatly assisted by a personalised sub-programme in Kirsch's supercomputer, 'Winston', complete with British name (*cf.* Winston Churchill, the UK's World War II Prime Minister) and accent, who keeps feeding them with information, backgrounds, Internet searches *etc.* In the end however it perspires that 'Winston' himself is responsible for the conspiracy against the world-religion leaders, and even for the murderous plot against Kirsch himself – not out of a machine version of malice, but in a simple but eminently successful bid to maximise the media attention and possible impact of his master's presentation, who was already due to die from pancreatic cancer a few days after the presentation anyway.<sup>374</sup>

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1993; Russell 1981; Kuntz & Kuntz 1987; Regardie 1969. As a central symbol, it has played a considerable role in the Ancient Near East, Egypt (the *djed* pillar and shrub epiphanies of the goddess Hathor), Ancient Israel, Ancient Europe, North American cultures, *etc.* It is related to the cosmological / theological concept of the Great Chain of Being (*cf.* Lovejoy 1978 / 1939; Kuntz & Kuntz 1987), which however up to the 19<sup>th</sup> c. CE lacked nearly all implications of evolution.

<sup>373</sup> Scientism here simply means: the insistence on state-of-the-art global science. In other places in this book I insist on the distinction between (a) Science (see my definition below) and (b) a different conception of Scientism (*i.e.* the essentially fundamentalist and anti-scientific mis-appropriation and reification of scientific ideas and results as lastingly and universally true).

<sup>374</sup> One of the ways in which science fiction has managed to create a convincing illusion of a real future life-world

'Winston' is at the same time a fascinating illustration of the heights of achievement which Artificial Intelligence research has reached in the hands of Kirsch and the likes of him; a warning of the dangers which such technology (*i.e.* machine thought unmitigated by human values and ethics) may entail; and a prelude to the answer of the *future-directed* other main question posed by Kirsch (and Gauguin): *where are we going*. On this point the time span becomes greatly compressed: no longer several billion years between the origin of life on Earth, and the present – but only half a century between now, and the total mutation of humanity. By the mid-21st century CE, as Kirsch's supercomputer simulations bring out, the human species as we know it will be radically changed in that it will have been incorporated by, or supplanted by, now still unpredictable forms of Artificial Intelligence, whose materiality will only be partially carbon- and cell-based, and largely amount to further developments of the Quantum computer technology now still in its infancy.<sup>375</sup>



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is through *intertextuality*: the same concepts, such as *warp speed*, *hyperspace*, *tractor beam*, *co-existing multiple worlds branching off whenever a specific choice is made between alternatives*, crop up in very different narratives written by very different authors, and this produces the converging illusion of a true rendering of an existing reality. The prominent science-fiction writer and natural-science professor Isaac Asimov has greatly contributed to this common pool, for instance by formulating 'the three laws of robotics' – the principal one among which is that a robot cannot turn against its master. In *Origin*, 'Winston' apparently does just that. Langdon, when realising that this is the case, explicitly declares that a programming line 'you shall not kill' should have been added to 'Winston's software – but the immense implications against the background of converging science-fiction worlds (where, intertextually, all robots are invariably built to comply with the three laws of robotics) seem to escape Brown, who thus reveals himself to be not really a science-fiction writer or reader himself.

<sup>375</sup> Here Brown is taking up an idea that has been circulating in the world of Artificial Intelligence and its philosophy for at least two decades: the replacement of the human natural brain by computer hard discs, so that minds can be downloaded there and humanity will finally be able to shed its allegedly embarrassing and imprisoning 'carbon chauvinism' – as Jos de Mul pompously used to put it, one of my Rotterdam philosophical colleagues in the 1990s-2000s.



top left: overview; top right: scenes of the passion of Christ; bottom: triumphant papal coat of arms

*Fig. 5.4. The Cathedral of the Sagrada Familia / Holy Family, Barcelona, Spain, (2018) as a pathetic, typically unfinished icon of the encounter of obsolete Roman Catholic spirituality with ornate Modernism*

When Kirsch's full message to the world is finally broadcast as a result of the heroic exploits of Langdon and Vidal, and his vision of the past and future of humankind has been unfolded, the book ends in an optimistic and inspiring eulogy of science. Rather than eclipsing all previous religion, this is claimed to usher in a new religion of science – not unlike the vision of the future of human knowledge and the worshipping of humanity as formulated by the French pioneer sociologist August Comte in the 1830s. The opposition between science and religion did not only dominate much of Early Modern European intellectual developments (with Giordano Bruno and Galileo Galilei as exemplary cases – and victims), but also, half a millennium earlier, led to the regional eclipse of science and philosophy, entirely supplanted by theology in medieval Islam since al-Ghazzali. And after recently precipitating the science wars of the North Atlantic region around the year 2000 CE (over Evolution vs. Intelligent Design; and in fact also over *Black Athena* and Afrocentrism, vs. hegemonic North-Atlantic-centred humanities and science), this opposition finally turns out – at least within *Origin* – to be false and unnecessary: science can only have its beneficial impact on human society once it becomes a religion in its own right. Kirsch, rather than being the destroyer of all religion, thus, quite deliberately, finds his true calling by becoming a new religious prophet in his own right.



Fig. 5.5. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin S.J. (1881-1955) in 1947 – the present author's year of birth (source: Archives des Jésuites de France).

While Brown's adventurous novel *Origin* is entertaining, convincing, and moving, right to the very end, the main point I wish to make here is not so much to stress its unexpected literary and visionary quality, and its closeness to contemporary scientific and ideological research and debate. Admittedly, these are considerable achievements, but my personal fascination with this book lies elsewhere: as food for thought about cosmology, about humans and their place in the universe, and about the existence and nature of God.

## 5.5. Enters Teilhard de Chardin

I have taken a great personal interest in some of the underlying themes for well over half a century: evolution, the origin of life on Earth, Man's place in Nature and in the Universe, and the religious implications of any scientific findings bearing on these topics. As an adolescent I was already conversant with the life's work of Teilhard de Chardin, then being published in French after its author's death in 1955. Teilhard is nowhere mentioned or even hinted at in *Origin*, and I am confident that Brown has not been directly influenced by the French thinker, whose claim of the complementarity of science and religion rocked the Roman Catholic intelligentsia and leadership in the mid-20th century, and some of whose ideas have gradually been adopted in diffuse, attenuated and implicit form in modern

intellectual life in general. If Brown had been more specifically aware of Teilhard's work, he would have keenly realised that Kirsch with his simulation of the origin of life was only providing a partial answer, and that recent Creationism is largely barking up the wrong tree (in the sense that the origin of life without the invocation of direct divine intercession has been an accepted theme in main-stream science since the 1930s CE). Even within a thoroughly theistic world-view, as Teilhard's, life may be considered to emerge from natural causes without requiring direct divine intervention.

In a nutshell, Teilhard de Chardin's vision of the history of the universe is as follows. The emergence of life and that of thought in the history of the Earth, and of the universe, present obvious difficulties if life and thought are considered – as has been usual throughout the history of Western thought since Antiquity – to be phenomena totally alien to lifeless matter. Teilhard's ingenious solution is the following:<sup>376</sup> Spirit is not an epiphenomenon of relatively late appearance in the evolution of the universe, but a universal and perennial quality. Not just since the origin of life, but throughout the existence of the universe, matter has always had two aspects – a material, apparently lifeless, outside, and a potentially spiritual inside. Evolution proceeds from simple to more complex material forms, and the more complex a material form, the more conspicuously and articulatedly the spiritual inside may manifest itself. With increasing complexity, a threshold value was crossed and life emerged, several billion years ago. With increasing complexity of life forms and especially of the brain, human self-reflexive thought emerged, by today's specialists' consensus a few million years ago. (Largely because of the lack of essential data meanwhile provided especially by African material, Teilhard's time scale for humanity was still more compressed and remained well under one million years). Throughout the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic periods the consistent progress persisted towards complexity and the unfolding of spirit; despite Teilhard's biological, evolutionary language and his lack of a professional philosophical frame of reference, there seems to be a genuine parallel with Hegel here.<sup>377</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> I cannot go here into the antecedents of Teilhard's solution. His ideas come close to the concept of 'subtle matter', whose world History of Ideas has been painstakingly traced by Poortman 1978. 'Emergence' (ultimate manifestation of what had been in preparation in a preceding period) is a concept frequently resorted to in theories of evolution.

<sup>377</sup> Yet it is not as if, applying the Hegel of *Die Phaenomenologie des Geistes*, 1977 / 1986 / 1807) the emergence of mind, of thought, in the history of life on Earth, becomes a solved problem for us. For Hegel, that which reveals itself in history, is rationality:

'Whatever is rational (*vernünftig*), that is real (*wirklich*) and whatever is real, that is rational.'  
(Vorrede, Hegel 1821: 33; my translation)

The apparent circularity of the statement smacks of sleight-of-hand. Hegel seems to make shift, here, with a contention which (*mutatis mutandis*: when we take articulate language instead of rationality) is also found in 20<sup>th</sup>-c. CE phenomenology as a branch of philosophy (not by accident, considering the latter's intellectual genealogy): the intelligible world is limited to the scope of whatever is within reach of modern humans with their rationality and their articulate language, but whatever preceded that familiar and comfortable situation (by state-of-the-art scientific cosmology: nearly  $14 \times 10^9$  years since the postulated Big Bang!), in other words the world *before* it was contemplated by human consciousness, or those aspects of the world that are – in space and time, and perhaps

After the geological phase of the *lithosphere* ('stone spherical layer'), and after life forms had wrapped the Earth in a *biosphere* ('life spherical layer'), Teilhard considers the emergence of humans to lead to a new layer, that of the *noosphere* – the 'consciousness spherical layer'. This geological imagery brings him, regrettably, to almost totally ignore the dazzling specific forms of social and cultural evolution and their social-organisational proliferation on the various continents of the Earth since the Palaeolithic. Remarkably out of touch with significant developments in 20th-c. CE archaeology (which yet shades over into palaeoanthropology, one of Teilhard's specialties), naïvety and ignorance in the face of social, cultural, and political phenomena are major shortcomings of Teilhard's work.

And, like Brown's protagonist Kirsch in the 2010s, Teilhard also believed he could make out the direction of human evolution. He sees the entire universe as involved in one all-encompassing progress towards ultimate complexity and ultimate spirit – a so-called 'Point Omega'<sup>378</sup> to be reached in the distant future (a few million years?) when, through an evolved and unified humanity, the universe, which has become self-reflexive through Man as – allegedly – its most advanced product,<sup>379</sup> will reach its consummate development and realisation in total unity with God. Whether at that stage a distinction can still be made between God and the universe, or whether throughout the history of the universe God has been nothing else but the self-realising universe itself (Hegel's *Geist*), are questions which Teilhard could not explicitly go into, as a Roman Catholic priest precariously balancing – throughout the second half of his life – on the sharp edges of Christian heresy, inviting specifically the reproach of pantheism. What he does consider, however, is whether on its way to Omega, humanity may split in a loyal, more or less God-fearing,

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still other dimensions – beyond the reach of human consciousness, stay out of our consideration (cf. Kwant 1968; explicitly referring to Hegel). Considering the age of the Earth, let alone that of the universe, the c. 100 ka passed since the emergence of articulate human speech is a negligible moment. Jeans (1943) touches upon the same aporia; so does Mermin 1985.

<sup>378</sup> The Ω omega is the final letter of the Greek alphabet. The astronomer Flammarion (1894), whose popular-scientific works were immensely popular at the time and probably did not escape Teilhard's attention, already employed this term for the end of the world, and in Christian theology Christ is known as the Alpha and Omega – the beginning and the end (cf. *Revelation* 1:8). Theologically, Teilhard's Point Omega merges with the established Christian concept of the Second Coming of Christ, and this – although it does not concern us in the present context – has been a major point of criticism which Christian orthodoxy has levelled against Teilhard.

<sup>379</sup> Here both Brown / Kirsch and Teilhard fall victim to the same antiquated geocentrism ('Earth-centredness') – as if humankind, and the Earth that produced it, constitute the self-evident unique centre and end point of the universe. Science fiction was thriving, but actual space travel was still non-existent when Teilhard wrote his principal works; the first unmanned artificial satellite was launched from Earth by the USSR two years after his death. Since then, the discovery of hundreds of planets *outside* our Solar system, and the study of possibly favourable conditions for life outside the Earth (e.g. Seckbach 2004; Anonymous, 'Extraterrestrial life'), have made us suspicious of such terrestrial chauvinism. However, if science fiction can realistically evoke the vision of extraterrestrial travel and socio-political organisation (Asimov's immensely successful *Foundation* series is a case in point), it would be relatively easy to rewrite Teilhard's vision of the future in this direction. In fact, Teilhard himself foresaw these developments, and addressed them in a 1953 piece whose title would translate to English: 'A sequel to the problem of human origins: The plurality of inhabited worlds' (in Teilhard de Chardin 2002). Incidentally, the idea of a plurality of inhabited worlds goes back to Antiquity and received several discussions in Early Modern times (Flammarion 1866; de Cyrano de Bergerac 1657; Fontenelle *et al.* 1803).

and an evil section ('chute dans la dispersion', cf. my Fig. 5.7; as also suggested by the Biblical *Book of Revelation*).

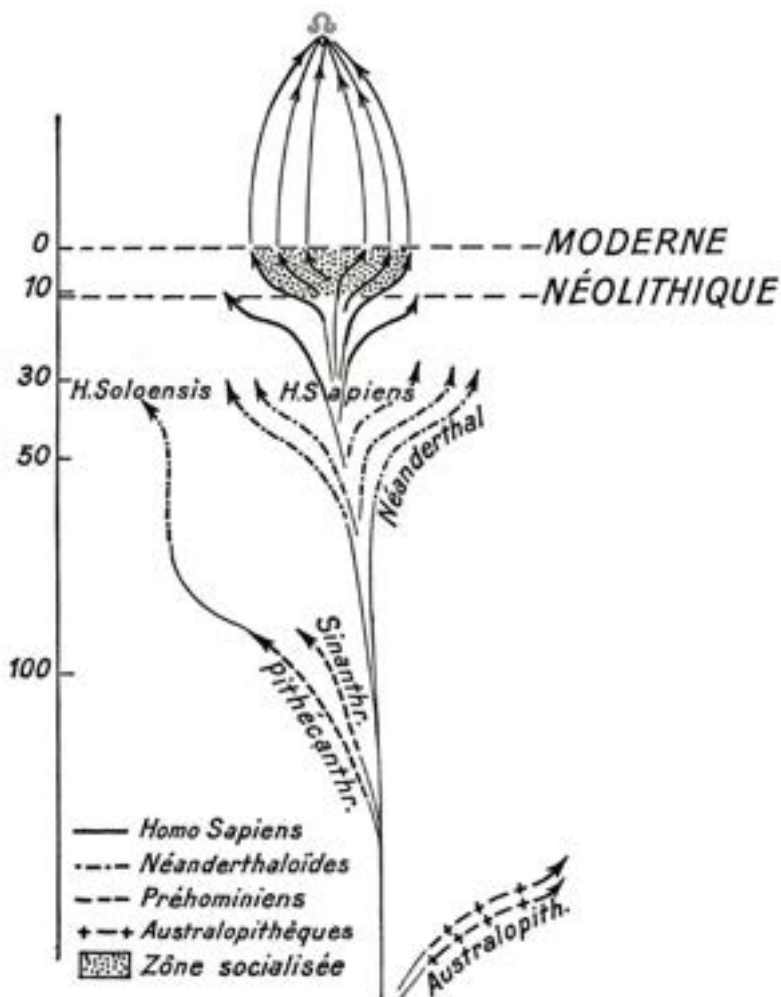


Figure schématique symbolisant le développement de la Nappe humaine. Les chiffres à gauche comptent les milliers d'années. Ils représentent un minimum, et devraient sans doute être au moins doublés. La zone hypothétique de convergence sur Oméga (en pointillé) n'est évidemment pas exprimée à l'échelle. Par analogie avec les autres Nappes vivantes, sa durée serait de l'ordre des millions d'années.

Fig. 5.6. The evolution of humanity according to Teilhard de Chardin: towards the Point Omega (Teilhard 1955: 212).



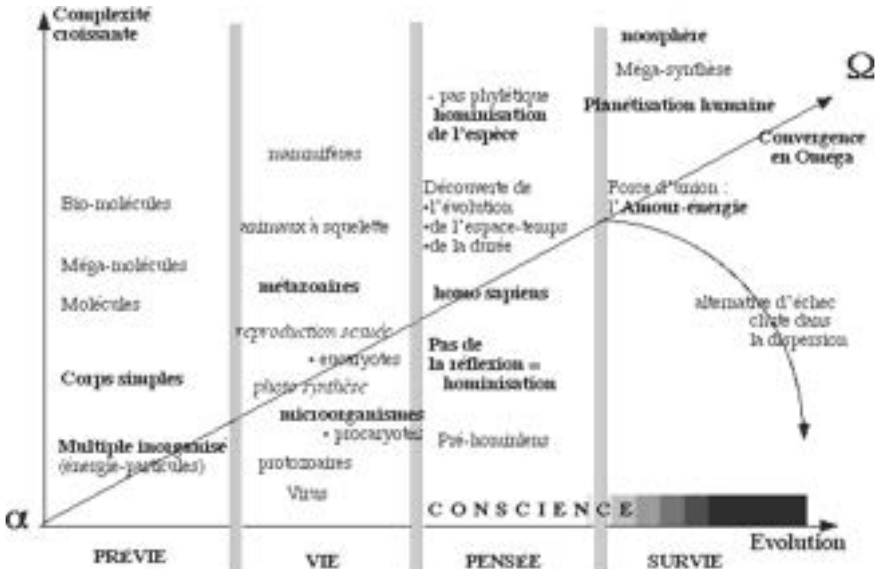
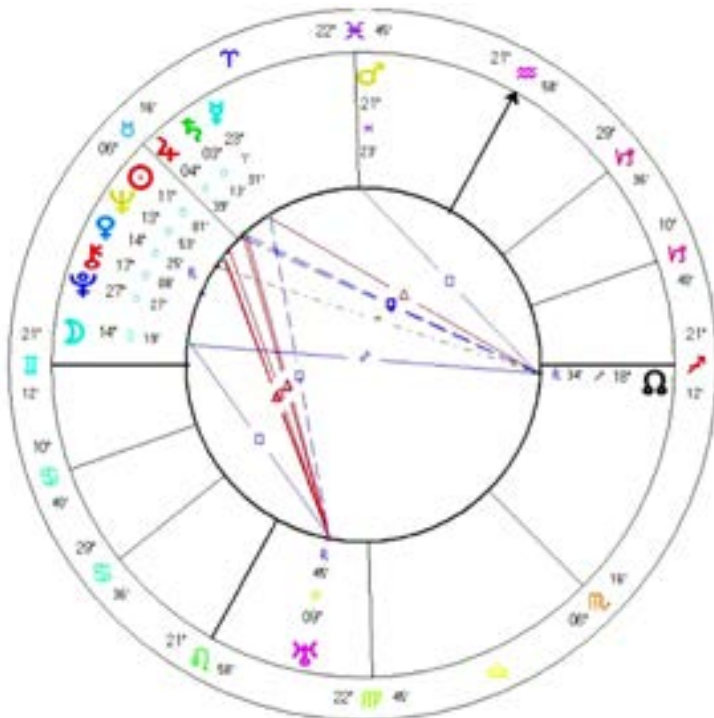


Fig. 5.7. Teilhard de Chardin's vision of cosmic coherence through progressive complexity, all the way to the Point Omega (from Teilhard 1956).

We see that, whether consciously inspired by Teilhard or not, Kirsch's vision as presented by Dan Brown has much in common with that of the Roman Catholic science visionary – despite the fact that the latter (who lived 1881-1955) missed the entire digital revolution of the second half of the 20th c. CE, and despite the lesser point that for Kirsch the future, total transformation of humankind into a new life form was a matter of decades rather than of a million years.

Astrology was, with extispicy, the first *proto-science* to emerge in the Ancient Near East five millennia ago, and it was taught at European universities right into the Age of Enlightenment. Today, it is generally dismissed as a *pseudo-science*: a mere superstition. Yet the *enfant terrible* of modern epistemology, Paul Feyerabend, defiantly chiding the stilted pretensions of epistemology, shocked his colleagues by displaying his birth horoscope on the cover of two of his major books (1975, 1978). Elsewhere in the present book I have repeatedly touched on the enigmas presented by astrology – so there is no need for a detailed discussion here again (cf. van Binsbergen 2003: 246 f.). For whatever it is worth, Fig. 5.8 presents the birth horoscope of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, with a very strong clustering of planets in the twelfth house, traditionally associated with mysticism and

mystery, and suggesting (for whatever this may be worth) the horoscope owner to be a great prophet...



based on the following parameters: born at Orcines, France, 1st May 1881, 7:00 hr (from: <http://www.makara.us/04mdr/owriting/03tg/bios/Chardin.html>, with thanks). I did not collect independent data on Teilhard's place and time of birth, and did not check the calculations on which the present diagram is based. However, a number of alternative Teilhard horoscopes circulate on the Internet, and most show the same pattern. The arrangement of nearly all astrological 'planets' (i.e. including Sun and Moon; with the exception of the ascending Lunar Node and Uranus in one closely packed series in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> House is truly extraordinary.

*Fig. 5.8. Teilhard's most remarkable birth horoscope*

In passing we should note a remarkably abstruse and abstract attitude on the part of Teilhard. A born scientist and mystic at the same time, Teilhard was convinced of having discovered, single-handedly,<sup>380</sup> the spiritual destiny of the evolving universe and of hu-

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<sup>380</sup> The perceptive reader can hardly fail to notice that apparently such ontological / cosmological hybrid has been contagious (not to say: has set a bad example) in my personal case; without my adolescent

mankind, and from this insight he nominally, theoretically, derived an inspiring active ethics of 'construire la Terre' – of constructing the Earth: we should all play our part in bringing about (by work, research, organisation, prayer, enhancing the complexity and spirituality of the noosphere) the realisation of Omega.<sup>381</sup> But apart from a network of scientific colleagues, of religious *confrères*, and of close relatives, this did not bring Teilhard to pinpoint, visualise, let alone deeply identify with, any concrete sub-sections of humanity in their historic and cultural specificity, nor contribute to their specific self-realisation and historical destiny, if any. The exceptional hectic vicissitudes of global socio-political history between 1881 and 1955, passed him by practically without touching him, without response: two World Wars, the colonisation and decolonisation of Africa, the secularisation of the formerly Christian North Atlantic region, the rise of socialism and communism, the Russian Revolution, the emergence of the social sciences, the New Physics but also the horrendous nuclear weapons they spawned, the rise of modern music and abstract art, of Japan as an Asian modern state and economy, the unprecedented growth of labour productivity, the invention and popularisation of the motor car and the air plane, the emergence of digital technologies... One could say that, as essentially a geologist, he lacked all sociological imagination (Mills 1959) and commitment. Fascinated by the intellectual objectivation and appropriation, through text production, of his research objects, he remained the proverbial scholar of the 19th c. CE, existentially thrilled by what he was studying, but separated from it by his pith helmet, his insect-proof gauze tent, his priestly habit and dog collar, his excessive body height, his limited linguistic and cultural knowledge and skill, his reserved style of relating to other people. Although a remarkably courageous man, in his braving uninhabitable research sites (the Gobi desert!) for years on end, in the audacity of his thought and his defiance of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, and as a decorated hero of World War I (not as an active combatant but as a stretcher-bearer), Teilhard's radical cosmological thought (which mainly took shape during the interbellum) did not protect him from the conservative, crypto-fascist socio-political tendencies peculiar to his time and age, his class of provincial petty nobility in France, moribund Roman Catholicism including the Jesuit religious order he belonged to. Early in life, as still a palaeoanthropological amateur, he allowed himself to be implicated in the Piltdown fraud – out of sheer naïvety or (as Toulmin suggests) perhaps less naïvely so. Since Roman Catholicism has been one of the few niches within which philosophy has thrived in post-independent Africa (van Binsbergen 2005d), there is now a remarkable revival of Teilhardian thought among African philosophers – but although they believe they can derive entire social, political and ethical philosophies from the thought of this

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exposure to Teilhard's amateur attempt to single-handedly rethink past, present and future of the universe and of the place of humans and of God therein, I may never have summoned the courage or the stupidity to try and rethink the logical foundations of reality, and propose *Sangoma Science* as an alternative.

<sup>381</sup> At ages 14-15 this abstract, optimistic world-view and the attending ethics of 'construire la terre' as formulated by Teilhard greatly inspired me, made me contemplate a career in palaeoanthropology, and temporarily managed to offer me a mental escape from the physical and sexual abuse that characterised my family life as a child. However, the construction proved shaky, and soon totally collapsed, resulting in temporary mental breakdown and the deepest depression, when passionately challenged by a school friend who promptly became my role model for a totally different career aspiration, notably in *belles lettres*.

geologist / mystic, few dare confront the implicit elitism and perhaps racism of his writings, and what this means from Africa. For Teilhard, humanity essentially derives from Asia, and in his mind a '*bifurcation précoce*' – 'an early split' (Teilhard de Chardin 1953) separated the apparently viable Asian branch of early hominids from the apparently retarded and doomed African branch.<sup>382</sup> This reflected the North Atlantic contempt of Africans during the Age of Colonialism. However, by today's near-consensus of specialists, humans first emerged in Africa ca. 4 Ma BP, as did Anatomically Modern Humans ca. 200 ka BP.

## 5.6. The origin of life on Earth, and divine intervention

Brown's book revolves primarily on the question of the origin of life on Earth, and it is on this point that we must dwell a bit longer. When life first manifested itself on Earth as elusively indicated in the geological record (Dodd *et al.* 2017; Anonymous 2018 'Abiogenesis'), more than four billion years ago, our atmosphere was only emergent, the oceans were still very young, and the Earth not much older. With an estimated age of 14 billion years for the universe as a whole since the reconstructed 'Big Bang', the period of the origin of life on Earth by no stretch of the imagination can be equated with the origin of the universe. The sustained order and complexity, semi-autonomous dynamic equilibrium *vis-à-vis* the environment, and self-reproduction, which are all characteristics of life, may require special conditions to cross the threshold so as to emerge from pre-organic matter, but they are not in themselves the essence of creation if by the latter we mean the origin of the universe. Creationism as the claim of divine intercession requisite for the origin of life on Earth is little more than an underestimate of the built-in creative capabilities of matter and the natural laws that govern it. On closer scrutiny (as in the experimental work of Miller and Urey, its theoretical preparation by Oparin, Haldane, Bernal *etc.*, or the bio-philosophy of Teilhard de Chardin – all from the middle of the 20th century CE) the step from lifeless matter to life remains a considerable one, from chaos to order, counter-intuitive in the light of the Second Law of Thermodynamics (which stipulates a continuous progress from order to entropic chaos – quite the contrary), *yet most probably well within the range of capabilities of familiar natural laws.*

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<sup>382</sup> The idea that Africa has constituted a dead end of human biological, cultural and linguistic evolution was inveterate in both the natural sciences and the socio-cultural sciences from the Age of Discoveries and especially the Enlightenment up to the middle of the 20th c. CE, and may still be encountered today in such fields as linguistics, comparative mythology (Witzel), and genetics (Cavalli-Sforza). The latter is all the more remarkable in view of the specialists' general acceptance of the Out-of-Africa hypothesis, which emerged as a result of the decoding of the human genome in the 1980s (Cann *et al.* 1987). Much of my research work during the last two decades has been orientated towards affirming the underlying fundamental unity of humankind, and stressing (from a transcontinental perspective) the historical continuity of Africa with the other continents. For a recent discussion of my work on these points (mainly dealing with van Binsbergen 2012), *cf.* Osha 2017; Mosima 2018; also *cf.* van Binsbergen 2010, 2011, 2015, 2020.

The point is not so much whether life emerged directly on Earth itself or (as the Panspermia Theory proposes) only landed on Earth after an extraterrestrial origin. The Panspermia Theory has a venerable ancestry; in the West, it originated with the Presocratic philosopher Anaxagoras, and a few eminent modern champions are the astronomers Arrhenius (1908), Hoyle, and Wickramasinghe (1981, cf. Hoyle 1983). The attestation of fairly complex molecules in interstellar space, and the failure so far to produce life from scratch on Earth, are strong points in favour of an extraterrestrial origin, but in fact the precise location of life's emergence is only a secondary issue. Whether in Earth's 'primordial soup' or under extraterrestrial conditions in space, the same natural laws would be deemed to be at work – or, failing which, the same divine intervention would be deemed necessary.

(Another, usually avoided, question arises at this point; we have already considered it in chapter 4, above, under the headings of the potential mutability of natural laws, and the universe's capability of going through a learning process.<sup>383</sup> Habitually, natural laws are considered to be constant through all times, immune to the *historicity* that, since Vico and Hegel, North Atlantic thought has recognised as the central feature of every aspect of the universe, and especially of life, humanity, society and culture – after the idea of cosmic history as unilinear progress towards the goal of salvation had been pioneered by rare *Old Testament* texts and reformulated in early Christian thought. In the course of the 20th c. CE, extensive theorising of the idea of the Big Bang made specialists realise that time, matter and the laws that govern it, could not have been universal and immutable givens, but instead must have emerged from a previous state of non-existence, and evolved rapidly and dramatically in the first split seconds, years or millennia after the universe came into being. It is not unthinkable that also in later periods, say during the last ten billion years, minute changes occurred in the natural laws as we know them today – that universal constants acquired slightly different values, that Quantum Mathematics and Relativity followed slightly different rules, etc. Earlier formulations that proved to be satisfactory for centuries (e.g. Newton's laws of mechanics) were not so much proved wrong by later theoretical developments (e.g. Einstein's Special and General Theories of Relativity), but on closer scrutiny turned out to be *special boundary conditions of more comprehensive and complex relationships which only recent measurement apparatus could gauge and provisionally ascertain in detail*. Even if these very relationships ever underwent very slight changes in the course of billions of years, we would be none the wiser – we would never have noticed such changes – unless new theories and method would enable us to measure such changes – or to interpret already known data in the light of such changes. Perhaps at one point in time conditions prevailed which, although commensurate with the natural laws then in existence, caused life to emerge, whereas due to minute, hardly perceptible changes in the attending natural laws such conditions may no longer obtain today. However, unless we equate the idea of God

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<sup>383</sup> The learning universe and the mutability of natural laws are also implied in Sheldrake 1988, who in this connection refers to the late-19<sup>th</sup> c. writer Samuel Butler (1879, 1909).

simply with that of Nature (for which there are respectable precedents, e.g. in the philosophical works of Spinoza, and among the Neo-Platonist Plotinus), such an argument is very far removed from the idea of the origin of life as a separate divine creation in defiance of natural laws – as the major variant of Creationism has it.)



As depicted (under expert palaeontological tutelage) by Zdenek Burian, from Beneš & Burian 1980.

Fig. 5.9. Images of evolution: *Scutosaurus* and *Sauroctonus*, Late Permian geological period, c. 250 million years BP

Once more, in insisting on the need for divine intervention in the very emergence of life, Creationism, while seemingly taking its lead from a Biblical inspiration, in fact underrates what many have chosen to consider ‘God’s creation’, and does not do justice to the otherwise perplexing, apparently limitless powers of creation and innovation of Nature. If we want credit to go to a god (whose personal characteristics, including the attribution of a gender and an anatomy, a voice, differential sensitivity to light and darkness, even capability of being enticed and manipulated by human promises and offerings, clearly betray that he or she was merely imagined after the self-reflexive image of humans themselves!) would it not be the greatest tribute to god’s divine qualities to consider her or him capable of investing her or his creation with such immense creative powers (natural laws) as to lead to the emergence of life and of self-reflexive thought? *Creationism is a slight on the creative greatness of the universe.*

#### JJ. WHAT KEEPS THE SOLAR SYSTEM GOING: GOD, OR SIMPLY MORE ADVANCED MATHEMATICS?

As we have seen, one of the greatest astronomers of Early Modern times was the Frenchman Pierre-Simon Laplace (1749-1827) about whom the following apocryphal anecdote is in wide circulation. AF

ter explaining his view of the solar system to Emperor Napoleon I, Laplace, answering the emperor's question as to the place of God in this system, is reported to have said

*'Je n'avais pas besoin de cette hypothèse-là – I did not need that particular hypothesis'.*

In all probability (Faye 1884: 109 f.; Anonymous, 2018, 'Laplace') Laplace did not mean to address a theological question about God's existence, but instead a fine point of celestial mechanics: whatever the achievements of Isaac Newton (1642-1726/1727), the latter had been unable to understand the solar system as a totally stable system, and hit on what he thought to be perturbations of such momentous effect that, in his opinion, only God's occasional intervention could prevent the collapse of the system. A century later, Laplace's greatly enhanced physical insight in the mechanism of the solar system – as compared to Newton's – and access to more advanced mathematics (much being of his own invention, incidentally), enabled him to give, without recourse to God, an exhaustive mathematico-physical description of the Solar system as known then (including the planets known in Antiquity, and the recently discovered Uranus, but not yet Neptune which, although already spotted by Galilei, nearly two centuries earlier, was only recognised as a planet decades after Laplace's death).

This anecdote, even if apocryphal, at least has the merit of alerting us to the various apparently irreconcilable dimensions (and pitfalls of perversion and corruption) of the questions so captivantly raised in *Origin*. Much depends here on what we decide to mean by science. In my opinion, as an empirical social scientist and a philosopher, *science is the pursuit, by explicit and intersubjective empirical methods, of essentially ephemeral answers (meant to be discarded as quickly as possible in the light of more adequate, more recent, truer answers!) to theoretically grounded questions about reality as accessible to us humans.*<sup>384</sup> The question as to the origin of life on Earth could be a

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<sup>384</sup> I am afraid my views here differ, for epistemological reasons, from various vocal specialists writing today on evolution. One of them is John H. Relethford, who in his book *50 Great Myths of Human Evolution: Understanding Misconceptions about Our Origins*, lists, as the very first and presumably most important myth about evolution: 'Evolution is a theory, not a fact'. So in Relethford's opinion, the correct statement would be: 'Evolution is not a theory, but a fact'. Many modern scientists, while experts on method and measurement, take their scientific *habitus* for granted and are not fundamentally interested in epistemology. Thus they tend to reify the findings of their expert field, and to misjudge the epistemological status of their pronouncements. A more sophisticated – although still far from impeccable – approach we find with the famous cosmologist the late lamented Stephen Hawking:

'In order to talk about the nature of the universe and to discuss questions such as whether it has a beginning or an end, you have to be clear about what a scientific theory is. I shall take the simpleminded view that a theory is just a model of the universe, or a restricted part of it, and a set of rules that relate quantities in the model to observations that we make. It exists only in our minds and does not have any other reality (whatever that might mean). A theory is a good theory if it satisfies two requirements. (a) It must accurately describe a large class of observations on the basis of a model that contains only a few arbitrary elements, and (b) it must make definite predictions about the results of future observations. For example, Aristotle believed Empedocles's theory [ ironically, Hawking uses the word *theory* here in defiance of his own above definition – WvB ] that everything was made out of four elements, Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. This was simple enough, but did not make any definite predictions. On the other hand, Newton's theory of gravity was based on an even simpler model, in which bodies attracted each other with a force that was proportional to a quantity called their mass and inversely proportional to the square of the distance between them. Yet it predicts the motions of the Sun, the Moon, and the planets to a high degree of accuracy.' (Hawking 1988: 11; numbered series and initial capitals added by me – WvB. Incidentally, I have written at length (*Before the Presocratics*,

scientific one, – although in the hands of Creationists it ceases to be so and merely becomes a point of theological debate. The question as to God's existence can never be a scientific one – contrary to what common-sense authors such as Dawkins (2006) assert, it cannot be answered, neither negatively nor positively, with scientific data and methods. Scientists who engage in the debate with Creationism on the basis of the so-called 'facts of science' seem to be mistaken about the nature and purpose of their results, take their scientific insights to a level of essentialised debate where they can no longer be appreciated as provisional and ephemeral (yet they *are* provisional and ephemeral), and in fact allow themselves to be pushed into an impossible, theological, rather than empirical-scientific position. Most of the so-called debate between belief and science (or rather, scientism *i.e.* the mistaken conception of science as universal, immutable and infallible truth), such as that around Creationism, is governed by the 'fallacy of misplaced concreteness' (Whitehead 1997 / 1925) and amounts to an impossible exchange between the proverbial deaf-mutes.

Pressed into service in an alien and perverse role as theologians, the scientists and science journalists featuring in the debate for and against Creationism display, just like their religious interlocutors, all the symptoms of today's most dangerous disease of the mind: *fundamentalism*. The eminently contemporary pathos which fuels Brown's novel and renders today's intellectual and media climate so convincingly, is not the search for scientific truth, but, on the contrary, *fundamentalism: the utterly mistaken hope that ultimate, contextless, timeless truth may still be had in today's globalised, mediated (and by implication truth-destroying) world*. It is the fundamentalist's dream offering a modicum of comfort in an otherwise inhospitable and uncomfortable Post-modern society where God has been declared dead since nearly one and a half centuries (by Nietzsche 1882, 1883-1891) – comfort so desperately needed under the social conditions of globalisation and secularisation, which have rendered us homeless,

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2012) about Empedocles's four-element cosmology, and there I demonstrate that in fact it was an eroded, misunderstood form of the ancient (Upper Palaeolithic), and transcontinentally distributed cosmology of cyclical element transformation, which – contrary to Empedocles's frozen version – did imply specific predictions as to which element would be turned into which other, or would be supplanted by which other.)

In terms of this approach to the concept of theory, evolution is certainly a theory: it makes sense of a large class of observations, and allows us to make predictions, *e.g.* that we will not find human remains or artefacts made by humans in geological layers older than 10 million years (the underlying puzzle in the previous chapter, on *Forbiden Archeology*). The naïve implication that a theory (not unlike that other popular shibboleth, 'myth') is just conjecture and necessarily far removed from the truth, belongs to popular culture, not to the world of science and academia. A fact is a primary datum in reality, exhaustively established by empirical sources accessible through our senses. In this perspective, evolution, while certainly a plausible theory and possibly a true theory, *cannot be a fact* – we simply have no direct sense information on processes involving myriad specimens of animal or vegetal species, and taking place over many thousands, usually even millions of years. In the same way, the structure of the water molecule or of the desoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) molecule, while plausibly established by biochemical means, is not a fact but merely the subject of a (highly plausible) theory. Incidentally, the late lamented Hawking is an interesting case of an accomplished natural scientist who, in his last book (Hawking 2018), touches on the central topics in my present book. His avoidance of all redundancy in argumentation (understandable in view of his extreme physical handicap), and his naïve scientism, invite severe criticism, but to do him justice would require an extensive separate argument.



desperate, and (as the *Origin* illustrates brilliantly, while tactfully avoiding all reference to today's Islam) murderous. Ultimately, Brown has written his own version of Arthur Conan Doyle's novel *The Lost World* (the original inspiration for the successful motion picture *Jurassic Park*, Stephen Spielberg 1993): the motivating force of modern fundamentalism is dogged defiance in the face of the realisation that a world in which truth was redeeming, has been lost for us forever.

## 5.7. At long last: Thinking about God and the universe

*'It were better to have no opinion of God at all than such an opinion as is unworthy of him.'*  
Francis Bacon, 'Of Superstition', 1612 / 1625; Bacon 1852: 49.

We are rapidly reaching the end of this chapter's argument, and of this book.

I am not in the least saying that it is nonsense to reflect on the existence or non-existence of God and on the meaning or lack of meaning of the universe. I have considered these questions all my life, during my devout Roman Catholic childhood, my loss of faith during adolescence, my passion for the natural sciences and for evolution, as a poet and novelist, during my periods as an existentialist and Marxist, in my becoming an anthropologist of African religion, an African diviner-healer-priest, and an intercultural philosopher. But as a result of this preoccupation for much longer than half a century, I have now come to the insight that we need a totally different logic to pose, debate, and to answer, such questions.

As Matthew Alun Ray (2017) has cogently argued in detailed reference to the works of Kant, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, the question of God's existence remains characteristically unresolved in post-Kantian philosophy. Books proclaiming (or contesting, as the case may be – I already mentioned Dawkins 2006, which is a particularly naïve recent case) the existence of God, continue to appear year after year, and the Christian, Islamic and otherwise theistic constituency, although somewhat dwindled, is by no means silenced. From the perspective of the present book, this is not surprising: in an oscillating world-view, God both exists and does not exist, and the ultimate question is not after God's existence; life after death, the existence of extraterrestrial life, *etc.*, but

- a. after the ultimate structure of our reality in terms of which to each specific answer to these questions a particular (usually infinitesimally small) probability may be attributed, while the opposite answer may also be true but to a substantially different extent; and
- b. what logic and what ontology do we need in order to approach question (a) at all?

The question whether God exists, is meaningless;<sup>385</sup> so is the assertion that she or he does, or does not, exist. Such questions belong to the realm of binary oppositions in the attribution of truth and falsehood – a realm which scholarship has carved out ever since the creation of Aristotelian binary logic, but which is utterly insufficient to address the most fundamental existential questions humankind is facing. God exists and does not exist at the same time. God is dead, and (because of our own ritual actions, prayers, myths, offerings) is alive and kicking at the same time. God coincides, and does not coincide, with the material universe. Therefore

- life was *both* created out of lifeless matter by special divine intervention,
- *and* emerged from lifeless matter by the sheer play of natural laws governing matter, more or less, since the beginning of time.

<p>Table 1 List of the principal propositions of Darwin's theory, extracted from the <i>Origin of Species</i> (Darwin 1859, 1872)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Supernatural acts of the Creator are incompatible with empirical facts of nature</li> <li>2. All life evolved from one or few simple kinds of organisms</li> <li>3. Species evolve from pre-existing varieties by means of natural selection</li> <li>4. The birth of a species is gradual and of long duration</li> <li>5. Higher taxa (genera, families etc.) evolve by the same mechanisms as those responsible for the origin of species</li> <li>6. The greater the similarities among taxa, the more closely they are related evolutionarily and the shorter their divergence time from a last common ancestor</li> <li>7. Extinction is primarily the result of interspecific competition</li> <li>8. The geological record is incomplete: the absence of transitional forms between species and higher taxa is due to gaps in our current knowledge</li> </ol>
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The theological dimension of Darwin's theory of evolution was conspicuous from the very beginning. Not only were theologians his first and most critical interlocutors; also Darwin himself made theological pronouncements a pivotal element of his evolutionary statements, like in the first line of the above table (derived from Kutschera & Niklas 2004: 256). Further textual analysis is needed before it can be ascertained precisely why 'supernatural acts of the Creator are incompatible with empirical facts of nature'; cf. Darwin 1859: 167). It would probably be more prudent, and more convincing, to say: 'attempted explanations in terms of supernatural acts of the Creator exist on a different plane from explanations grounded in empirical facts of nature, and therefore the two kinds cannot be considered to be mutually exclusive'.

Fig. 5.10. *The theological dimension of Darwin's theory of evolution*

By the same token, the Huygens-Newton debate over the true nature of light, either corpuscular or wave-like, ended in a draw: light is both, but now the corpuscular, now the wave element is more conspicuous to the human observer. This appears to be worlds away from the most basic quality of man-made symbols: the essence of a symbol is that it refers to an aspect of reality – but in fact it is the same question, for even though basically referring, the symbol may detach itself from the referent and take on independent life of its own. The first achievement in the invention of the transistor was a compact electronic switch which, without qualitative changes, could 'flip-flop' i.e. serially assume two essentially different and incompatible positions. Human life,

<sup>385</sup> Meaningless, in so far as it is predicated upon an ulterior question: *what logic, what epistemology, and what ontology, do we need in order to make the question as to God's existence meaningful, and answerable?* According to the proposals for these three preliminary questions as presented in this book, the only answer to the question as to God's existence is: *yes and no at the same time*. Which is scarcely an answer.

thought, myth, culture, the interaction of cultures, human's interspecies interaction with other life forms, life's interaction with other material forms, the universe at large, may be seen as one continuous, immense complex circuit of such flip-flop switches. The binary opposition is a great and relatively recent achievement of human thought and language, and has become the principal tool of scientific thought, but at the same time it is utterly artificial and deceptive: as can be demonstrated from the oldest reconstructed human language forms, those of the so-called \*Borean language of the Upper Palaeolithic; and as has recently been stressed by Poststructuralist philosophers especially Derrida, every given always carries inside itself, by implication, the very opposite of its contents (on these issues, cf. van Binsbergen 2012, 2015, 2018; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011 – the operative concept is 'range semantics' as discussed there, e.g. the semantics 'water' and 'land' are expressed in \*Borean by the same lexical item covering the full range from dryness to wetness). Considering both the contradictions and the interconnections of our human experience, the only way to conceive of a coherent and credible universe is by making allowance for all possible alternatives at the same time, contradictory and mutually exclusive as these alternatives may appear to be. So both Kirsch and his religious opponents are right, but neither can afford (for fear of annihilating one's proper ground to stand on) to explain the underlying meta-logical mechanism, tell us why this joint applicability of apparently irreconcilable opposites should be the case; and neither side can firmly establish his truth as a result of scientific research procedures alone.

I have recently bundled much of my life's work in religious anthropology (*Religion as a Social Construct*, van Binsbergen 2017), but that has been only the first leg in a more ambitious trajectory. A year later I returned to my life-long fascination with Durkheim's theory of religion, and I managed to vindicate it (*Confronting the Sacred*, 2018). In the present book, *Sangoma Science*, I seek to set out what I have learned from a life in which I have continuously straddled religious situations in Europe and Africa. If God can both exist and not exist at the same time, and if this seems to sum up the essence of religion, we may perhaps go one step beyond this already unusual and audacious position. In the present book I have dwelled (against the background of the experiences of others, discussed in the chapters 1 to 3) on my extensive experiences as a Southern African *sangoma* since 1990. Although I bring to these experiences my academic expertise as a recognised anthropologist of religion, and although the distancing / debunking / deconstruction of religious beliefs has been an implicit principle (I almost wrote: 'article of faith') in religious anthropology during most of the hundred years of its existence, I was in for a very big surprise. Knowing full well that the powers of clairvoyance, divination and healing (not to speak of even more contentious claims such as levitation, bilocality, asity and other such extreme mystic achievements) that are supposed to be the ancestors' gift to the *sangoma* as their chosen representative on Earth, constitute a mere fantasy performatively enacted so as to attract clients and to address their existential problems with imaginative but essentially invalid answers, it has yet been my almost invariable experience, that when acting *ex officio* as the ordained and initiated *sangoma* that I have been since 1991, and donning my ceremonial robes, these powers which could not exist, have turned out to be at my disposal – I could heal, and I could make veridical pronouncements about clients and the details of their lives of which I had no previous ordinary sense-based knowledge. The conclusion I draw from this confusing lot is that the supernatural beings that do not exist unless as figments of our imagination, through our very ritual action (after all, the entire creative power of the universe self-reflexively flows

through us as humans!) are sometimes, somehow, brought to independent life and are occasionally endowed with the ability to have their own demonstrable, material impact on our human reality – not by virtue of an individual or collective placebo or otherwise deceptive illusion, but simply on the ground, on the level of ordinary sense reality. *The reality of religion is that through our rituals and prayers we create gods that subsequently have such an impact on reality as we no longer control.* Again: God exists, and does not exist, at the same time. This, I suspect, is a truth even more shattering to organised religion, and to organised science, than anything Dan Brown has imagined in *Origin*. It suggests even that, because Brown imagined it, what he describes in *Origin* is actually (does actually create retrospectively) one of the ways in which life has originated, and is actually (does actually create prospectively) one of the ways in which humankind is currently developing into some amalgamated digital hybrid species. I fully realise that with such pronouncements, my writing on *Origin* as science fiction becomes in itself science fiction raised to the power two. The well-trained and experienced scientist and accomplished intercultural philosopher in me revolts against such *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* (Kant 1766 / 1900), but the sum total of my life experiences leaves me little choice.

For the contents of world religions such an insight, if taken seriously, is truly devastating. Today's religiously-orientated conflicts, such as those between Islam and the West, and between Creationism and mainstream global science, are often interpreted as if people are fighting and killing over *doctrine*, over the contents of religious and cosmological statements and claims. This is also what appears to motivate Brown's many murderers and conspirators throughout his books. There are however reasons to seriously doubt such an interpretation. Most people who are engaged in such fights, have only a second-hand and imprecise knowledge of the doctrinal issues at stake. They are joining a band wagon much like others prefer particular forms of music, or brands of state-of-the-art clothing, home decoration or whisky; in a half-hearted quest for artificial belonging, now that Post-modern globalisation and digitalisation have eroded such genuine (or nostalgic?) belonging as might once have come with the sense of belonging to time-honoured social groups and identities. Their violence is not so much a means to an end (the proclaimed end being to let their supposed doctrine become triumphant), but (much as theorised in the work of René Girard and his followers; cf. Girard 1972) their violence is simply the most effective means of powerful group formation. Ideas and doctrines are primarily the dummy fillings of processes of group formation and group conflict, but any ideas or doctrines could have served that purpose, and in fact are often demonstrably interchangeable.

These are some of the thoughts that come to mind when reading Dan Brown's masterpiece. The question as to life's origin on Earth, or even as to God's existence, may not be the central preoccupation of most humans now living, yet *Origin* manages to bring out fundamental dimensions of our time and age, and of the human condition at large, in a way that commands my greatest admiration.

## **Part IV. Conclusion**



## ***Chapter 6. Towards an ontology of universal and perpetual oscillation between Being and Non-Being***

Possession and trance are philosophically significant human experiences / conditions, in that they suggest the possibility of *direct* knowledge (of the other, of the invisible, the divine) unmediated by our own mental constructs (*pace* Kant), and modes of human existence in which yet conscious rationality is at a very low ebb (*pace* Descartes). The purpose of this book has been to do justice to these dimensions of the art of the *sangoma*.

The implications of what I learned about the structure of the world in my *sangoma* explorations largely lie in the domain of what is commonly called ontology. One of the principal strands in the history of Western philosophy ever since its inception, ontology is also one of the most contested fields.<sup>386</sup> Obviously, there is no way in which I can do justice to the topic here – on which Western philosophy had focussed from the Presocratics to the end of the Middle Ages. In recent philosophy the revival of focussing on the central question of Being (beyond that of Knowing – the main focus since Kant) was largely due to Nicolai Hartmann 1949 / 1953, and Martin Heidegger (1977, 2004; Levinas 1996) which harked back to the Presocratic philosopher Parmenides. Within analytical philosophy, Quine among others focused on ontology (1983, 1966). Heidegger's stature and his justified great impact on modern philosophy cannot be overestimated, and spilled over into the social sciences.<sup>387</sup> Yet another major influence on the social sciences, Adorno (2019),

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<sup>386</sup> Cf. Ritter *et al.* 2001, s.v. 'Ontologie'; Calmers *et al.* 2009; de Beistegui 2004; Dombrowski 2006; Effingham 2013; Hacking 2002; Heil & Heil 2003; Langlet & Monnoyer 2013; Lukacs 1995; Swiatkowski 2005 – on Derrida and Deleuze.

<sup>387</sup> Where recently it has, *e.g.*, given rise to the 'ontological turn' in anthropology' (Viveiros de Castro

truer to dialectics as the seminal idea of modern thought since Hegel, became the principal contestant of Heidegger's essential conservative and essentialising view. Putnam, too (2004) dismissed philosophy's focus on ontology:

'...that once we assure that there is, somehow fixed in advance, a single "real", a single "literal" sense of "exist" – and, by the way, a single "literal" sense of "identity" – one which is cast in marble, and cannot be either contracted or expanded without defiling the statue of the god, we are already wandering in Cloud Cuckoo Land.' (Putnam 2004: 84.f)

However, such qualitative philosophical use of the concept of ontology must be distinguished from at least two other usages:

- (a) ontology as a fundamental cosmology in the natural-scientific sense (e.g. Baianu c.s. 2007; Barrand 2011; Bohm & Hiley 1993; Bohn *et al.* 1987; Kuhlmann *et al.* 2002; Lewis 2016),
- (b) ontology as merely a system of operations which enable ICT specialist to categorise the reality in such linguistic units as may be searchable with digital search machines. (e.g. Sharman *et al.* 2004). Now that technologies of the digital are partly preserving, partly supplanting millennia of civilisation history (a history of which most digital users are unaware, anyway), the word 'ontology' has acquired a new meaning, which on the Internet has begun to eclipse its original philosophical semantics.

When setting out to draft the present book, my intentions were simple and my ambitions limitless. Although the first three chapters, dealing with two doctoral dissertations on South African *sangomahood*, and Edith Turner's affirmation as to the 'reality of spirits', may suggest that my principal aim has been to formulate a methodology of transcultural research on ecstatic religion, these were only stepping-stones towards my ulterior aim: not so much to adequately *describe sangomahood* but – far more ambitious, and light years beyond ethnography – *to articulate the world picture, the ontology, in which that sangoma ecstatic religion, its practices and world-view, could make a legitimate claim to valid knowledge and effective therapy.*

It was my initial contention that *sangomahood* entailed an authentic, comprehensive, and valid insight in the structure of the world, one which could rival with the insights only recently attained by North Atlantic / global natural science in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. CE, and which offered an explanation not only for the veridical divination and other paranormal phenomena associated (in my perception at the time) with the practice of *sangomahood*, but that also foreshadowed the findings of Quantum Mechanics and the Theory of Relativity, – much in the way of Capra's (1978) and Zukav's (1979) claims in regard of East and South Asian mystical thought as paralleled in the New Physics, but now in an African context practically untouched by North Atlantic modern science. In other words, *sangomahood* was to be presented as a form of *Sangoma Science* in the strict sense. Against the background of my extensive work, in the most recent decades

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1992, 1996, 1998; cf. Vulto 2019). Also cf. Jackson 1989.



(2012, 2017, 2019, 2020), on the massive South, South East, and East Asian influences upon sub-Saharan Africa in the course of the last few millennia, such a parallel between Africa and the picture of Asia as presented in Capra's and Zukav's works, should not really come as a surprise. But now that I am about to reach the culmination of a process of over a decade in which this book was painstakingly pieced together from my various unpublished writings and enriched with a considerable amount of interdisciplinary reading, I find, inevitably of course, that my initial (essentially Afrocentrist) inspiration was largely unfounded, that I cannot really substantiate the claims contained in the e x p a n d e d sentence above, and that the task of spelling out the underlying ontology that might be deduced from the preceding chapters, or that might be constructed secondarily so as to make sense of the trains of thought contained in these chapters, largely remains incomplete. Thus the book cyclically returns to the ontological challenge which two of my junior colleagues, Roderick van den Bosch and Arthur Eaton, put before me many years ago now.

Like most other sub-Saharan African life-worlds, including the Ndembu Lunda one as captured in the ethnographic writings of Victor Turner (1957, 1967, 1968), the mythical and doctrinal bases of *sangomahood* are largely implicit, enshrined in oblique symbols and in a tacit praxeology of ritual acts rather than in unequivocal recordable verbal expressions of doctrine, and such expressions as do circulate are multilayered, cryptic, multi-interpretable, implicit. The long and intensive training that *thwazas* undergo on their way to *sangomahood*, is practical: dancing, singing, learning the *sangoma* bedside manner, and particularly learning to use the Hakata tablet oracle and to weave, out of its vague and multidimensional returns, a meaningful, insightful and healing life story for the benefit of the consulting client. Explicit explanation of the many puzzling and unfamiliar aspects of *sangoma* practice is generally avoided by the lodge leadership: the adept is supposed to think up her or his own interpretations, or to receive them in dreams sent by the possessing ancestors. Therefore there is, in the literal sense, no *Sangoma Science* to speak of – unless in the abstruse and largely distortive verbalisations of the ethnographer, who thus distances himself widely from his role as *sangoma*. If we need a specific, explicit ontology to make sense of the complexities of *sangoma* experiences and actions, we shall have to construct it ourselves, on paper, as a philosophical and introspective, rather than as an ethnographic, exercise.

When I try to do so, I constantly hit upon the same kind of absurdities – or let us call them, more politely, aporias. *Sangomas claim to offer veridical divination and lasting healing as results attributed to the privileged assistance they receive from the spirits of departed ancestors – both their own and of their clients; and, even though departed ancestors cannot, by any stretch of the scientific imagination, directly and effectively manifest themselves in the natural world, yet sangomas appear (as least to my frequent experience extended over decades) to be capable of veridical divination and effective healing.* As part of my social-science training at the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, during a mandatory seven years full time, I had an excellent training in statistics, I published statistical articles, and I shared sixteen years my life, night and day, with a beloved partner (Henny E. van Rijn) who was not only an experimental physicist but also an accomplished statistician supervising much of the medical research in the Physiology Department at Amsterdam University. Nuclear physics,

cosmology, evolution and palaeoanthropology were my favourite subjects as an adolescent, in the popularising literature on which I was widely read. When I was drawn into the circle of *sangomas* in Francistown, Botswana, and admittedly underwent their clever brainwashing, it was not as an infatuated, desperate, ill-educated, marihuana-smoking New-Age adept, but as a leading social scientist, in mid-career, with several international university professorships on his resumé, having supervised for ten years dozens of Africanist researchers with PhD and MA degrees. My personal, often repeated experience of being capable of veridical divination and of effective healing, throughout the more than thirty years that have passed since my initiation as a *thwaza*, has continued to puzzle me especially in the light of my statistical awareness and empirical rigour, and lies at the roots of the present book.

The struggle to integrate my *sangoma* experiences in the scientifically-informed world-view I had hitherto entertained (expounding that world-view in my many publications, and propagating it among my students and colleagues), brought me, initially, in the first years after my *sangoma* initiation, to circumvent the epistemological problems by concentrating on a type of transcontinental research in the History of Ideas and the comparative ethnography of divination systems, which did not require the objectifying distance which was then (in the early 1990s CE) standardly expected from anthropological fieldworkers. The system of divination which I had learned in Francistown turned out to be a transformation of a geomantic system that was first documented in <sup>c</sup>Abbāsid, Islamic, Iraq at the turn of the 2<sup>nd</sup> mill. CE, and that showed affinity with the classic Chinese wisdom system of 易經 *Yi Jing* (*I Ching*). Having gone native to such an excessive degree as to forfeit the professional objectifying distance, posed a very real problem for my credibility as an anthropologist, but the historical research offered a temporary refuge. Meanwhile I started to ask, in writing and lectures, the obvious epistemological questions appropriate to my odd combination of both detached empirical scholar and local African practitioner. This enabled me to disengage myself from a narrowly anthropological perspective and made me eligible to the Chair of the Foundations of Intercultural Philosophy at the Erasmus University Rotterdam, to which I acceded in 1998. But although an experiential expert in the field of intercultural situations, my credentials in the professional field of academic philosophy were few and far between, as set out in detail above. Much as I tried, oftentimes greatly overplaying my hand, I was admittedly hardly equipped to broach the formidable epistemological and ontological challenge which my own *sangomahood* was posing to me as a would-be intercultural philosopher.

There was another and even more pressing challenge. The leading scientist who becomes an apparent obscurantist in later career is considered an abomination, and the things one may have to say after making the transition cannot possibly be taken seriously by one's present or former colleagues. The Newton of the Law of Universal Gravitation is venerated, but Newton the alchemist and Biblical chronologist is abhorred and dissimulated. R.F.G. Temple as an Assyriologist is taken seriously, but the R.F.G. Temple who seeks to explain, by reference to extraterrestrials, the African Dogon's apparently superior astronomy is an embarrassment. E. Tregear, L.A. Waddell, and S. Reinach as pioneer writers on Oceanic and South Asian philology, Ancient History, religion, and art may be taken seriously, but as partisan, implicitly racialist writers on Aryan / Indo-European identity (of the Maori, the alphabet, and the Glozel alleged script) they must

be shunned especially when, like Reinach, the name turns up in several scandals involving the suspicion of fraud.

In my own personal experience, the predictable ostracism was initially rare, but gradually the rejection has built up and today, thirty years later and nearly a decade after my institutional retirement, it is haunting me and condemning me to a painful isolation. (At least, I do hope – although with diminishing conviction – that it is my infringement of established paradigms which has brought former junior colleagues to stonewall me and erase my name from the records of Netherlands African Studies, and not just oedipal hatred, ingratitude, hurt pride, unfamiliarity with my published work or intellectual inability to read and understand it, dogged refusal to accept my international recognition, and lack of admiration for my *enfant-terrible* personality.) Under such a cloud of disqualification of my sustained scientific project, my incessant desire and energy to complete my life's work with a series of lasting books, would be reduced to absurdity. The great decipherer of Hittite hieroglyphic Hrozny underwent such a fate when his last book (Hrozny 1951) was considered unscholarly fantasy; as did the great ethnographer of Native American Zuñi life Frank Cushing, when he insisted on the holiness of what he had learned in fieldwork; and also for Martin Bernal the (not entirely unfounded; cf. Muhly 1990) fear of being considered a crackpot loner dominated the last decades of his scholarly production. Eysenck, Haberland, and Feyerabend, recognised stars in their respective disciplines (psychology, anthropology, and the philosophy of science) put their colleagues off by their ostentatious flirting with astrology. Numerous are the examples of crack-pot pseudo-science, would-be science, and perverted science being written and published, and even reaching best-seller status.<sup>388</sup> Such is certainly not the company I have wanted for my own work, not even for the present *Sangoma Science* – which, although unconventional in conception and execution, is yet intended as a painstakingly serious, academic intellectual product, in whose bibliography alone I have invested many months at a time when I had no months to spare any more.

I have long given up the almost system-building ambitions of the original conception of this book, and now will retreat to a much more minimal execution of the original plan: still sketching the required outline of an ontology that promises to make sense both of (a) *sangomahood* and (b) of the world from a modern scientific perspective – but doing so in unmistakably inchoate, impressionistic ways, leaving it to professional and specialised philosophical thinkers to work out the details and – no doubt, and inevitably – to show the many profound shortcomings in my design, perhaps even the one fundamental, irreparable flaw, the beam in my own eye (*Matthew:7:3*).

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<sup>388</sup> Bestseller status I do not expect to be the fate of the present book, for which I have given myself great pains (including a bibliography of well over two thousand items – but above I have identified this as potentially a form of pseudo-scientific window-dressing...!) to try and keep it out of the realm of pseudo-science. In the wake of Popper's definition and rejection of pseudo-science, and the rise of the New-Age movement as – among many other things – a legitimate context for protest against the cultural, political and especially scientific status quo, a number of important critical warnings have been written against that type of production, e.g. Shermer 2011; Sagan 1997; Schadewald 2008; and Stove's 1998 book with the eminently striking and threateningly applicable title: *Anything Goes: Origins of the Cult of Scientific Irrationalism*.

Unfortunately, in order to make sense of the double package of constraints defining my task (i.e. to remain faithful both to (a) my experiences and observations as a *sangoma*, and (b) as a modern global / North Atlantic scientist), I find that I have to call in question the very foundation of rational Western science: Aristotelian logic and its derivatives, notably the Doctrine of the Excluded Third ('where P there not not-P'). *To have one's cake and eat it* seems to be the only way out of the dilemmas that arise. The beings to which the *sangoma* mentally and verbally appeals in order to produce, and explain, veridical divination and effective healing, are the spirits of ancestors who, from the point of view of modern science, are mere figments of the imagination, devoid of all capability of manifesting themselves empirically in the material world. If we do *not* fundamentally and *a priori* dismiss all subjective claims and all more or less objective reports about *sangoma* divination, the best way out so as to salvage the data in accordance with the Platonic prescript<sup>389</sup> appears to be the following:

We contemplate the possibility that Being is not a static once-for-all condition, but (perhaps in a remote echo of Aristoteles's<sup>390</sup> concept of δύνاميς *dynamis*) a dynamic and virtual possibility, whose actual realisation is qualified by a certain statistical probability  $p$  ( $0 \ll p < 1$ , in other words,  $p$  is nearly 1) – in such a way that this realisation can always, due to conditions not yet adequately identified nor controlled, turn into its opposite, Non-Being, with the associated complementary probability  $q = 1-p$  ( $0 < q \ll 1$ , in other words  $q$  is nearly zero). All givens, and the entire universe, is subject to a continuous, spontaneous and *sui generis*, process of oscillation between Being and Non-Being. The adoption of an emphatic and intersubjective scientific perspective, the insistence on strictly controlled experimental circumstances, the context of producing formal mainstream science before a scientific forum of peers, tends to enhance  $p$  to come even closer to the value 1, and to further reduce to practically zero the possibility of alternative associated phenomena whose existence calls to question the edifice of mainstream science. This is, formulated in other words, the principal reason why under laboratory circumstances, attempts to demonstrate *psi* and to replicate earlier *psi* experiments are bound to fail. However, there are also conditions under which  $q = 1-p$  takes on a value well above zero, and in those cases

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<sup>389</sup> σόζειν τὰ φαινόμενα, *sooizein ta phainomena*, 'to make sure that our theoretical explanation remains faithful to what we perceive with our senses' – strictly speaking an exhortation made in connection with the explanation of the apparently whimsical movements of the planets (which in the original Greek meant: 'wandering stars') as observed from the Earth – which in a geocentric view of the solar system necessitated the introduction of highly artificial and conjectural epicycles *etc.* But the same adage could also be adopted more generally, as epitomizing the task of the empirical scientist (Duhem 1908; Whitehead 1925). It has been the contention of the Duhem-Quine thesis (see Harding 1976) that always more than one model may be invoked to account for a specific set of empirical data – an insight I have gratefully adopted in the present book.

<sup>390</sup> Aristoteles 1931; an exhaustive overview of Aristotle's manifold and multivarious use of the term *dunamis*, with all attestations referenced in detail, may be found in the Index of that publication, Vol. V, s.v. δύνاميς, pp. 206-208. In my various discussions of virtuality (1997e; 2015b: ch. 1), I have extensively used that Aristotelian concept.

paranormal phenomena may manifest themselves even though they are outside the expectation of mainstream science. In such cases of  $q \gg o$ , a creativity is released which actively calls into Being what (by scientific expectations, conventions, consensus) should have remained in the state of Non-Being, but which, once having turned into Being, is capable of having a palpable, empirical (even though usually virtual) effect on observable reality, regardless of the tendency for such virtual Being to relapse into Non-Being once the special creative conditions subside. Going through the motions of traditionally prescribed ritual behaviour (praying, sacrificing, dancing *etc.* – especially when following established rules in bodily movements, verbal expressions, attire, spatial setup *etc.*) appears to be among such creative conditions. There may be other such conditions (*e.g.* intense love, mystical trance, the commitment to save and heal another human being, group, or humanity at large) but their enumeration need not concern us at this point.

Ritual thus appears to be far more central and far more essential to the human existence than as a mere rendering homage, a mere expression of fear and concern, or whatever more or less reductionist theories have been abundantly advanced concerning ritual in the anthropology / sociology of religion and in religious sciences at large. *Ritual seems to be nothing less than a creative technology of turning Non-Being into Being, and vice versa.*<sup>391</sup> *Probably the opposite is also possible: ritual as a destructive technology (a form of black magic?) of turning Being into Non-Being.* Where does such creative and destructive power come from? I suggest that it directly accesses the creative potential of the universe as such, which makes ritual, beyond being just a comment upon or a reflection of the universe, far more profoundly and indispensably, one of the ways in which the universe creates and recreates itself. That it does so through human agency and particularly *through the human intelligent, self-reflexive mind* is scarcely surprising (*cf.* Stapp 2000, 2002): after all, the human mind can be considered as the condition which the universe has worked out – across a most complex, substained evolutionary process spanning billions of years –

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<sup>391</sup> A delightful cliché in science fiction stories and motion pictures is that of extraterrestrials who have descended upon Earth or otherwise have entered into contact with terrestrial humans, and who have, by some advanced communication technology available to these extraterrestrials, adopted the appearance of modern human bodies – but the tric has not succeeded completely, and every so often their true, alien material appearance keeps shimmering through the images of humanity that they so actively and cunningly produce – and when this happens, it is of course deeply alarming to the true humans that observe them. Stereotypical biped human beings then momentarily oscillate into, for instance, reptilian life forms with scaly skin and tentacular extremities – but a moment later the intended anthropomorphic appearance is restored. In fantasy tales and movies featuring sorcerers, demiurges, gods, a similar device is often adopted. This image may help the reader to picture what kind of creative, virtual production of Being out of Non-Being, and back, and back again, I have in mind here.

in order to take consciousness of itself. Humans, ritual, and the mind (a triad reminiscent of schemes familiar from Quantum Mechanics) thus appear as the pivoting instances of the continuous oscillation between Being and Non-Being, which in its totality make up reality.

One of the great surprise discoveries of Quantum Mechanics has been that between the details and inner workings of processes of nature, and their observation, stands the human mind – not as a deep, passively mirroring lake, but as an actively constitutive and essential factor in the equation. Mind may be considered a crucial aspect of the reality of the universe – and one that ramifies and makes itself felt everywhere without limits of space and time. Having spent my adult life trying to gauge the essence of religion and explain its social and existential importance, and having summed up my attempts and the meagre insights gathered in the process in a series of recent books (van Binsbergen 2012, 2015, 2017, 2018), it is only now beginning to dawn upon me that the tenets of the world-religious complex (Judaism-Christianity-Islam) in which I was raised in childhood, and which I discarded already in early adolescence, may yet have been literally true in the most unexpected way. Religion manages the awareness that accords to Mind the central place in the universe – God’s mind, the universe’s mind, of which the individual human mind constitutes, or at least reflects, a mere sparkle. It is a truth that was already within reach in the earliest recorded attempts at cosmological thought (the mythic cosmogonies of the Ancient Near East and Egypt, the Vedic scriptures, Taoism), that surfaced again in Hermeticism and Gnosticism, and that in Early Modernity found differential expressions in the thought of Spinoza and Hegel.

A standard way to account conceptually for the apparent influence of one human mind upon another (often termed ‘telepathy’), has been the concept of the World Soul,<sup>392</sup> whose history in Western philosophy goes back to Plato (*Timaeus*, 30b–c, 33b), and was given an original further development – with considerable admixture from Ancient Egyptian elements – by Plotinus in his *Enneades* (1966–1988, written 3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE). If individual minds are part of an hypothetical World Soul, then it is via the World Soul that such minds can exchange information and emotions. In Western specialist philosophy the idea of the World Soul was revived in the 19<sup>th</sup> c. CE with Hegel and Fechner; the latter specifically applied it to paranormal phenomena. Meanwhile, the concept is not exclusively Western – it is *e.g.* also found in Akan (Ghana, West Africa) cosmology, where it surfaces in the concept of the *sumsum*; and (given recent demonstrations of direct demographic and cultural exchanges between Ancient Mesopotamia and West Africa – Lange 2004a, 2011, 2004b, 2019) the *sumsum* is conceivably tributary to the Akkadian (Ancient Mesopotamian)

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<sup>392</sup> Cf. Anonymous, *Weltseele*; von Schelling 1798; van Binsbergen 2015: 515, 552, 515n–516n. In anthroposophical circles a similar concept is known under the name Akasha. A recent application in the context of the New Physics is Gardner 2009. His title, *The Intelligent Universe*, is identical to that of a brilliant book by the leading astronomer Fred Hoyle to whom we shall shortly turn.

concept of the Sun god (Shamash) as an all-knowing and all-judging instance.<sup>393</sup> For Southern African *sangoma* diviner-healers, the game skin to whose wearing they have received the right at their formal, final initiation, is considered to act as a conduit of extrasensory information and communication; as the Mwali High Priest at Nata, Botswana, phrased it to me,

'your leopard skin is your radio with God'.

The Judaic-Christian-Islamic tradition focusses on the idea of a personal and also in other respects anthropomorphic god as the creator, providential custodian and protector of the universe, but this idea was largely discredited in Early Modern times. Modern thought insists on the view that, except for the perceiving and structuring individual human mind, there is no ulterior, superior consciousness keeping the world going. Few people today still identify with Dante's

*'L'amor che move il sol'e l'altre stelle.'*

'Love that moves the Sun and the other stars.' (final line of *Paradiso*, XXXIII, v. 145).

Having had intense mystical experiences of the Christian God up to age 14, as an adolescent I soon lost my faith entirely when – crushed under the pressures of an unbearable family situation and history, and haunted by an impossible love in which the contradictions of my situation appeared in unrecognisably distorted form, I no longer succeeded in making contact with that external mind and could no longer hear its voice. Now, nearly sixty years later, I have resolved these puzzles thanks to my wife, my children and a few other loved ones, but that has not brought back my awareness of, let alone reliance on, a personal God – it only no longer makes such a thought absurd.

Given the central place that consciousness is accorded not only in religion in general, but particularly in the blundering attempt at ontology which constitutes this book's erratic argument, we hit here again upon a question which has come up time and again in modern philosophy: if mind is so crucial in the constitution of the world, can we maintain that the world existed, in the literal sense, before conscious minds emerged on Earth as a result of billions of years of evolution, and before such minds could make the reality outside themselves into the object of their contemplation? I have touched on this interesting question above (with reference to modern philosophical phenomenology) without answering it. Now we can reply that to the extent to which mind needs not be limited to the human consciousnesses that have emerged on Earth only a few million years ago (1/5000 of the estimated time span of the universe), the existence of the external world seems to be safeguarded; by implication this also suggests that reality, Being, God, the World Soul, and the

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<sup>393</sup> One of the principal transformations by which the Nigercongo (> Bantu) macrophylum constituted its proto-lexicon on the basis of \*Borean and some of the groups into which \*Borean disintegrated initially, during the Upper Palaeolithic, was by truncating an original lexical root, then duplicating it; e.g. Proto-Afroasiatic \*šam, 'sun' -> \*šam > \*sumsum. Cf. Starostin & Starostin 1998: 2008, 'Afroasiatic etymology'; van Binsbergen in press (b).

cation this also suggests that reality, Being, God, the World Soul, and the world, are synonyms for the same all-encompassing entity, of which we are part even though our own consciousness allows us a modicum of dissociation from it – often to our subjective distress – but that is simply the price we pay for our rational, qualified individuality.

Meanwhile, an appeal to the possible presence of reflexive thought comparable to that of Anatomically Modern Humans but elsewhere in the universe, while thinkable, does not solve our dilemma as to the reality of the world in the absence of an anthropomorphic human observer and speaker. The idea of the World Soul does, to some extent – if it were not so archaic and idealistic as to be entirely unamenable to modern mainstream natural science thought. Some scientists (e.g. James Lovelock, Rupert Sheldrake, Fred Hoyle – why should they all be Britons?) have themselves sought to fill the gap thus arising in our explanation of the world – although these scientists have usually found – at the cost of disciplinary ostracism – that one does not with impunity engage in such fundamental explorations. Lovelock's *Gaia Hypothesis* (1979) offers the possibility that Earth itself, in its entirety, constitutes a conscious being that self-reflexively is aware of the processes in which it is involved, and that is capable of responding defensively or even aggressively when threatened in its functioning and existence – e.g. responding with natural disasters to the devastation which humans have brought about in the environment ever since the Neolithic and especially since the Industrial Revolution (through deforestation, large-scale industry, the dumping of waste, the invention of the internal combustion engine that drives cars, boats and airplanes, and through globalisation). Exponents of Lovelock's unpopular view are inclined to interpret not only the alarming succession of hurricanes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions in recent years, but especially the COVID-19 / Corona crisis that has hit the entire world since late 2019, as one such aggressive response aimed at decimating humanity and calling an halt to its environmental destruction. Similarly, another biologist, Rupert Sheldrake (1998, 2011) in a number of influential books has posed fundamental questions about life's *form-producing* ('morphogenetic') capabilities far exceeding those recognised in today's mainstream evolution theory, and seeking to account for subtle workings of something akin to a collective soul – *morphogenetic fields* on the basis of which, e.g., an incredibly complex and purposeful organ like the eye may have evolved (rather than by Darwinian trial and error through the survival of the fittest), or e.g. a language spoken by a billion people (such as Mandarin Chinese, or English) should be easier to learn (contrary to my personal experience) than one like that of the Nkoya spoken by scarcely a hundred thousand speakers. Also Sheldrake and his associates (*et al.* 1998, 2001) venture into the possibility of a conscious order in the universe, with a title like *Chaos, Creativity, and Cosmic Consciousness*.

Sheldrake's biology is not exactly mainstream, and one critic even declared, in a 'Letter' to the leading natural-sciences journal *Nature*, Sheldrake's main book *A New Science of Life* (1981) to be

'one of the best candidates for book burning' (Gary Steigmann).

Do scientism, fundamentalism, and fascism converge, after all, in the preparedness to take one's (inevitably ephemeral and situational) truth so seriously that one is prepared



to commit murder for it (just in order to make it appear less arbitrary, less man-made)?

One does not have to emulate Sheldrake and go to such nearly fantastic extremes smacking of science fiction, in order to find prominent modern natural scientists defending the idea of a Conscious Universe. Fred Hoyle (1915-2001) was one of the most prominent astronomers of his generation, and in addition to a number of path-breaking astronomical contributions (e.g. on the distribution of chemical elements in the universe, and on the Theory of the Steady-State Universe where loss through peripheral expansion is continually compensated by creation of new matter closer to the centre) he wrote *The Intelligent Universe* (1983; cf. Gardner 2009), where he expertly and persuasively sketches a universe thoroughly geared to intelligence and meaning; there he revives the Swede Arrhenius's (1908) *Panspermia Theory* (which incidentally was already found in Anaxagoras and in Aristotle as the latter's rendering of the thought of the Presocratic philosophers Leucippus and Democritus).<sup>394</sup> Regardless of the question of actual intellectual influence, clearly such ideas converge with those of Teilhard de Chardin, who sees a universe involved in a sustained evolution ultimately geared to the production of life, thought, and to an amalgamating cumulation in a divine Omega.

Modern, global science constitutes an edifice based on a few simple assumptions that remain close to common-sense thinking. The edifice is emphatically supported by consistent and demonstrable practical applicability, which seems to prove its validity time and time again. Such apparent applicability is usually realised only within the very lenient boundary conditions prevailing in the macroscopic Newton world, where we are allowed to ignore nano effects and cosmic effects. And such a foundation is largely illusory also for another reason – for very few scientists, science journalists, science teachers, let alone people in general, are equipped to think through in detail, logically criticise, and prove or disprove by actual experiments, to what extent science is actually and in detail true. *Most of the support for science is based on hearsay, conformism, social control, cheap and imprecise popularisation, macroscopic crude conditions of application.* Above I already cited Michel Foucault as rightly observing that science is now the main legitimating instance in the North Atlantic world and its dependencies. Therefore, supporting science is not just a mental, intellectual act but also a political one bordering on a religious one – challenging the edifice of science means challenging the existing world order, it is an act of heresy and sacrilege and – as I have experienced in the last few decades – it is punished accordingly. Just like the Newtonian physics which we have known to be imprecise and in principle wrong since the emergence of the New Physics, has yet continued to be taught at secondary schools because in macroscopic situations it yields almost perfect approximations, so (given the infinitesimally small probabilities associated with other than standard states of Being in the oscillating universe) the coarse approximations of macroscopic logical realism satisfy the moderately alert and moderately up-to-date modern mind – unless in unfamiliar and extreme situations. Near-death experiences may be good examples of the latter, and strange

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<sup>394</sup> For specific references to Aristotle as a source on Democritus and the latter's teacher Leucippus, see Diels 1964; de Raedemaeker 1953.

reports have reached us from the border of the Beyond<sup>395</sup> – but these are easy to dismiss as figments of the imagination. The initiation into a foreign cult at the other side of the globe, in a culturally and linguistically new environment, such as happened to me when I was trained and initiated to be a *sangoma*, would also qualify as an unfamiliar and extreme situation – exacerbated by the insistent brainwashing that attended the training period.

Are we mere detached observers of the natural world around us? Is it merely an amazing accident that we should have build in our minds and speech, in the course of a few hundred thousand years (and much more recently, in our texts), the mathematics that, although initially and apparently a sheer human invention, yet on closer scrutiny turns out to fit the observable non-human material reality surprisingly well? (And not just the macroworld: when, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> c. CE, Quantum Mechanics and the Theory of Relativity were about to be formulated and needed new mathematics in which to be expressed – notoriously clumsily at first, especially in Einstein’s hands), that mathematics turned out to be already available, recently invented for rather different purposes, or no purpose at all.) In order to consider this question as to the coincidence between human mathematics and the structure of the natural world, we may take recourse to a concept of increasing importance in modern cosmology, among natural-science-based cosmologists: *the anthropic cosmological principle* (Barrow & Tipler 1986; Hawking 2001). This principle is aptly summarised in the following terms:

‘The anthropic principle is a philosophical consideration that any data we collect about the universe is filtered by the fact that, in order for it to be observable in the first place, it must be compatible with the conscious and sapient life that observes it. (...) Proponents of the anthropic principle reason that it explains why this universe has the age and the fundamental physical constants necessary to accommodate conscious life. As a result, outside the narrow

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<sup>395</sup> One of the finest English-language novels by Russian-born Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale Fire* (1962), is built (especially in its central showpiece, 999 lines of poetry) around near-death experiences, paranormal phenomena, and what they might tell us about the Beyond. The book is presented in the *virtuoso* format of the fictive John Shade’s genuine masterpiece of English poetry – vicariously and stunningly (considering the English was only his second or third language) composed by Nabokov himself, literature professor at Cornell, Ithaca, upstate New York, USA – in combination with a rambling critical commentary by the equally fictional literary scholar Kinbote (Shade’s homosexual academic colleague secretly in love with him? a madman suffering from paranoia – which early psychoanalysis (an object of Nabokov’s intense hatred) diagnosed – prematurely, and obsoletely – as repressed homosexuality? or, as Kinbote claims himself to be, the true refuge king of Zembla, ‘a distant northern land?’) At one level of interpretation, the book is about the contradictions between the status of creating artist vs. that of critic; the latter only blazes with a pale, Shakespearean fire (*Timon of Athens*, I, 4) reflecting the former’s original genius. The essential reading experience of *Pale Fire* consists in an incessant, dazzling oscillation between different apparent realities (the madman’s; the king’s; the poet’s), linked by fantasy, delusion, and unbounded intertextuality encompassing oblique references to practically the whole of Western (including Russian) literature since Beowulf. As a budding poet, which was then my principal identity, between age 17 and 19 I spent many months full-time trying to decode this complex novel and to identify as many specific references as possible caught within the web of literary intertextuality which Nabokov had spun. In this exploration (a gripping detective story with adolescent me as protagonist) I familiarised myself with much of the Western literary canon, parapsychology, and psychoanalysis, and picked up the principles of the Russian language to boot. Needless to add that the critical essay to which all this was supposed to lead, has remained to be written. But the reader who detects here a first inkling of the universe of *Sangoma Science* may not be far off.

range thought to be compatible with life it would seem impossible that life (in particular, intelligent life) could develop. (...) The strong anthropic principle (SAP), as explained by John D. Barrow and Frank Tipler, states that this is (...) the case because the universe is in some sense compelled to eventually have conscious and sapient life emerge within it. Some critics of the SAP argue in favor of a weak anthropic principle (WAP) similar to the one defined by Brandon Carter, which states that the universe's ostensible fine tuning is the result of selection bias (specifically survivorship bias): *i.e.*, only in a universe capable of eventually supporting life will there be living beings capable of observing and reflecting on the matter. Most often such arguments draw upon some notion of the multiverse for there to be a statistical population of universes to select from and from which selection bias (our observance of only this universe, compatible with our life) could occur.' (Anonymous, 'Anthropic principle')

*In other words, we perceive the universe in a particular way because we are build so as to unavoidably reflect its principles.*<sup>396</sup>

Especially in chapter 4, which explores a time conception (the South Asian *kalpa* / *aeon*) apparently totally at variance with the one that has prevailed in North Atlantic specialist thought since Early Modern times, time has occupied an important place in this book's argument. Cremo & Thompson's subtitle claims that their argument presents 'the hidden history of the human race'. This situates that book, however philosophically naïve, in the field of the philosophy of history (*e.g.* Lowith 1949; Hegel 1986, 1977; Marcuse & Benhabib 1987).<sup>397</sup> Revolutionary new approaches to the nature of time have emerged in the New Physics: the Theory of Relativity, and Quantum Mechanics. Time reversal,<sup>398</sup> reversed causality; precognition; simultaneity; synchronicity; the theoretical implication of Quantum Mechanics that any object in the uni-

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<sup>396</sup> One of the leading Dutch novelists of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. CE, W.F. Hermans, by training and initial occupation a physical geographer, tried to make a name for himself as a specialist in Wittgenstein, which occasionally brought him to clash with professional philosophers. For the physical geographer, the traditional core natural sciences (physics, chemistry, astronomy) are merely auxiliary subjects to which the physical geographer herself or himself need not make, in fact cannot make, an original contribution. Apparently Hermans was not familiar with the anthropic principle. In an interview with the philosopher F. Elders (who rightly disagreed; 1979) Hermans made the exact opposite point, insisting that science, or a strictly logical philosophy, would never be able to approach the essence of the world, for in order to do so we would have to be able *to step out of the universe* – an unnecessary step, which Hermans deemed moreover to be impossible, perhaps slightly unfaithful to his true calling as a top-ranking literary author.

<sup>397</sup> Again we have to admit that given the abundance of philosophical, literary and scientific perspectives on *time*, we cannot begin to do justice to the available literature. A useful, if severely dated, cross-cultural overview is offered in Hastings 1909-1921, s.v. 'Ages of the World', vol. I: 186 *f.*. In recent decades, we have seen a marked revival of time studies as a specialism, and a number of overviews and collective volumes testify to this development (*e.g.* Bardon 2013; Dyke & Bardon 2013). Also in recent philosophy time as an issue has received considerable attention. *E.g.* Bergson 1923; Heidegger 1977, 2004, 1992, (*cf.* Dastur 1998) ; Deleuze (*cf.* Batra 1996; Williams 2011); Husserl (*cf.* Chernyakov 2002, who also considers Aristotle and Heidegger in this respect), de Warren 2009; Scheler (*cf.* Frings 2013); Tiemersma & Oosterling 1996. A special study of time with Aristotle is Laurent 2009. Overviews are provided by McLure 2015; Oaklander 2001. St Augustine's views on time have continued to enjoy particular popularity (Teske 1996; St Augustine 1467 / 4<sup>th</sup> c. CE).

<sup>398</sup> *Cf.* Dietz *et al.* 2007.

verse exerts an immediate impact on any other totally regardless of distance (so without the effect of the speed of light as limiting factor in the transmission of that influence) – all this has opened up theoretical and speculative vista for a much more subtle approach to veridical divination than was every possible within the classic, mechanistic paradigm of late-19<sup>th</sup> c. CE physics and philosophy. In earlier work I have tried (2003, 2013) to present a layman's first impression of the possibilities in this field, and I am afraid that in the meantime my insight into the required specialist physics and mathematics has scarcely grown beyond these pedestrian earlier statements.

When we think about time, causality and prediction, an important concept in the background is *contingency*, roughly to be defined as *a condition which may be true or may be false, but which cannot be predicted with certainty*. One of the ways to understand my ontological proposal of the incessant oscillation between Being and Non-Being is to affirm that in such a universe, no events or conditions (not even the daily rising of the Sun in the morning, or the certainty of human life ending in death) are entirely devoid of contingency, although in most cases such contingency may be infinitesimally small. Such a universe is the opposite of the one defined in Leibniz's ontology, which (still smacking of the medieval theology of Divine Providence) was supposed to be entirely free of contingency (Palmer 1994; Russell 2009; Blumenfeld 1985; Talley 2000). Likewise the universe epitomised by Laplace's Demon, as discussed above, is considered to be entirely free of contingency. The concept of contingency is frequently encountered in recent philosophical discussions of the Modern and Post-modern condition of humanity (freedom, globalisation) in our time and age (Rorty 1989; Butler *et al.* 2000).

A shocking consequence of the idea of a universe that constantly and in all its details and ramifications oscillates between Being and Non-Being, is the mutability of natural laws, implying that the universe may be able to accumulate the results of past events in the sense of a systematic change of natural laws and constants in particular directions. In other words: under such assumptions *we must contemplate the possibility that the universe is able to change and to learn*. Such learning is also a fertile concept if we wish to explain why astrology may occasionally, perhaps even often, lead to valid results even though it appeals to pretended astronomical mechanisms and effects that are very clearly utter nonsense and that only have a time depth of a mere handful of millennia since they were invented by humans (such as the negative effect which the (apparent, due to a perspectival illusion as seen from Earth) retrograde course of a planet is supposed to have on the life experiences of the person whose horoscope we are considering). If the universe can, retrospectively, take the outcome of the astrological consultation into account when deploying the horoscope owner's fate, we have the possibility of a valid astrological result even if arrived at by nonsensical, invalid methods and premisses.

If the universe can positively learn, in other worlds if the cosmological makeup of the world goes through appreciable changes as a result of a response to past situations, then the entire concept of the natural law (as immutable, perennial, and of universal application, and governed by immutable and universally applicable physi-

cal constants; cf. Barrow 2003) may have to be reconsidered.

KK. SUBMITTING THE QUESTION AS TO THE UNIVERSE'S LEARNING CAPABILITY TO A VENERABLE ORACLE.

As we have seen, when towards the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> mill. CE the North African scholar Ibn Ḥaldun (1980 / 1377 CE) wished to ascertain the origin of the Arabic geomantic system of *'ilm al-raml*, علم الرمل on which he was writing (a system that stood at the root of the Southern African geomantic divination system of the *sangomas*; van Binsbergen 1995, 1996, 2011, in press (g), he cleverly used the Islamic geomantic divinatory system itself, putting the question of its origin to it – and received a meaningful (if mythical) answer in terms of an intellectual ancestry going back to the Prophet إدریس Idrīs and the Archangel جبريل Jibrīl / Gabriel. By analogy with such a time-honoured (although essentially poetic rather than scientific) approach, I asked the 易經 *Yi Jing* (*I Ching*) oracle (whose affinity with the Southern African *Hakata* form of geomantic divination I have argued elsewhere: 2012) whether my idea of the *learning* universe was correct. The (admittedly ambiguous, yet apparently affirmative) answer I received was:

☵☳ Hexagram 59 涣 (huàn), Dispersion [Dissolution]

The Judgment: *Dispersion*. Success. The king approaches his temple. It furthers one to cross the great water. Perseverance furthers. The Image: The wind drives over the water: The image of Dispersion. Thus the kings of old sacrificed to the Lord and built temples.'

Accepting for a moment that the world-view underlying *yi jing* divination is to some extent (under one particular – very rare – modality of reality's constant oscillation) valid, while admitting that the idea of a dynamic, constantly changing universe it at the very heart of *yi jing* (= *'Book of Changes'*), one could hardly expect a different answer from that particular source. But let us not put too much stress on this meagre finding, lest the universe oscillates back to the opposite position, crushing us in its sweep.

Close to the possibility of a learning universe with evolving natural laws there is the question of whether the laws of physics do provide an exhaustive and valid description of the universe. Mainstream natural science claims that they do -- while implicitly taking into account the likelihood that today's laws will soon have to be replaced by tomorrow's more precise and more comprehensive laws still to be discovered. Some physicists and philosophers (e.g. Cartwright 1983), however, challenged the mainstream position on this point, suggesting (in a way reminiscent of Kant's epistemology: 'we cannot know reality, we can only know the mental images of reality which we have constructed in our minds') that the formalised physics description merely posits mental ideas that may exist in our minds but may be at variance with the actual operation of the universe in reality. Meanwhile a final, positively staggering implication of the *Sangoma Science* as expounded here is the following:

- if the universe can occasionally display a learning capability, then perhaps such a capability is positively influenced by the fact that *it is we who formulate natural laws* – natural laws, in other words, not as the universe's independent and neutral input into our scientific formulations, but our scientific

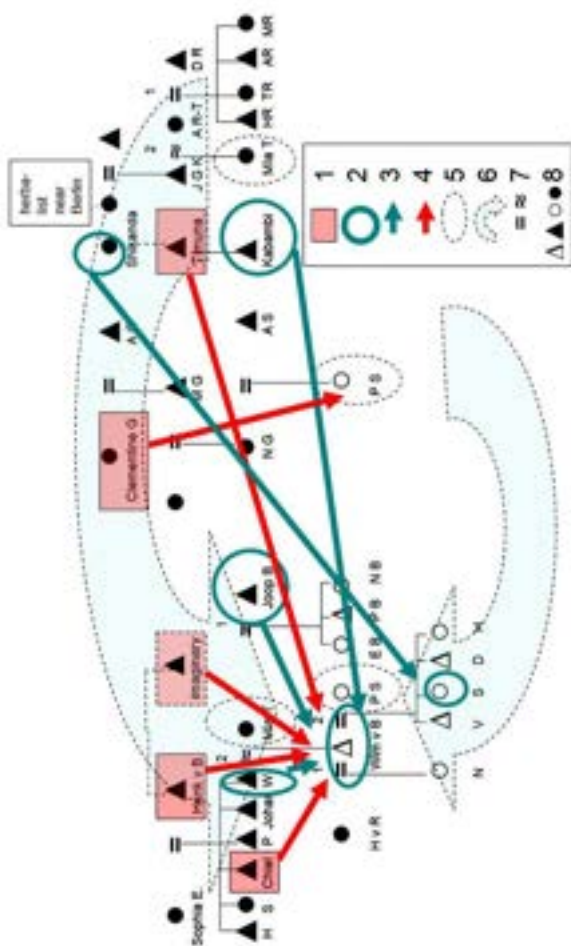
formulations as *dictating* to the universe how to behave (*cf.* our prayers telling God what benefits to bestow on us?)

This is, once more, the belief that may remove mountains – but at what costs for human security and peace of mind? Who would like to become a natural scientist any more, if that were to turn a human into a demiurge, moving the universe and coaxing it into proper course? And what universe, what God, would tolerate, and for how long, to have spawn such children?

There is a nasty snag to be made aware of here. A reality that constantly oscillates between Being and Non-Being, where (although with infinitesimally small probability) fantasies may take material form and implant themselves in the near or remote past or future, warping these episodes beyond recognition, and where magical procedures may occasionally work simply because the universe follows their lead – is this not simply (Fraiberg 1999 / 1959) the child's Neverneverland, where wishes and lies come true and nothing is what it appears to be? A land which humankind believed to have left behind for thousands of years, its chimaeras dispelled by an apparently ever increasing rationality? Are we now to admit that only a very thin and brittle shield of rationality protects us from what, in adults, is generally considered sheer madness? Are we to commit the bringer of such news (me?) to an asylum? Can we pretend to retreat to the safe centre of our world's probability space, where 'distorted-history' effects may be expected to be minimal and to remain below the threshold of our conscious perception? One of Freud's greatest sins in the eye of leading public opinion at the time was his claim of having discovered infant sexuality, thus spoiling the idyllic, Romantic myth of childhood as a time of purity and innocence. The related discovery to the effect that much adult behaviour, however sublimated and orientated towards lofty goals, should be considered as inspired by thwarted infantile desires, meant a defilement of the adult psyche (Freud 1916, 1953-1974; Stekel 1922). From this defilement the sheer flight of technological advancement in the course of the 20th c. CE could not cleanse us. In fact, technology, and the replacement of family-driven gut feelings by such logocentric, text-driven and apparatus-driven institutions as the state, organised religion, and science also increased the scale in which humans could indulge in such infantile desires (in the reality of two World Wars and their aftermath, with the systematic killing of many millions of humans; and in the fantasy of motion pictures, Internet pornography, and digital gaming) in infantile obsessions with murder, rape, and other forms of aggression). We may never have been Modern (Latour 2012, exploring the social limits of the rule of science), but the Hypothesis of Oscillating Reality constitutes an even bigger challenge: it implies that the very premises underlying modern science (notably the assumption of a fundamentally rational, non-contingent, knowable and controllable universe), are a gross simplification, underneath of which lurks a world picture which children (and poets) have always understood much better than their well-behaved, rationally domesticated, nerd parents. By the same token, who would want to be an historian any more – under the pretext of painstakingly and objectively retrieving the truth about the past, spending years of one's life in archives and in the field of oral history, only to realise that the stupidities, injustices, and atroci-

ties one thus believes to have truthfully documented, may (albeit with infinitesimal probability only) be products of one's own formulations, projected back into the past and having taken material shape there...

And as if this is not enough, there is, admittedly, yet another snag. Throughout this book I have paraded modern and Post-modern New-Age fashions in thought and invented rites as the epitome of pseudo-science, to be shunned at all costs, or to ridicule. Now, when all is said and done as far as the present book is concerned, who can still clearly perceive and define the difference between common New-Age tenets, and what I am trying to say here? But that is the ultimate consequence of the oscillatory epistemology I have put forth: we may expect that under certain, infinitesimally small probability conditions, both perspectives will be found to be complementary, identical even, and both true and false and true again by the snap of a finger.



1. Allegedly possessing ancestor; 2. person involved in real or adoptive filiation; 3. line of real or adoptive filiation; 4. link of alleged spirit possession; 5. person that appears twice in the diagram, as connected by 6; 7 formal and informal conjugal relationship; 8 male / female person (filled out = deceased); the descent line linking Queen Shikanda and King Timuna spans a handful of generations, ca. 150 years. Note the amazing symmetry (regular marriage 1 followed by informal bond 2) between the arrangement around Wim v B's mother and his maternal grandmother; perhaps the sexual child abuse marking the later generation, also already had a parallel in the former generation, explaining why JGK's Dutch episode, lovingly begun in a family with adolescent daughters, ended in an internment camp with total severance of all previous ties? Does this bizarre pattern alone predestine its protagonist to produce the absurdist world-view advanced in the present book?

Fig. 6.1. Links of filiation and alleged possession around this book's protagonist



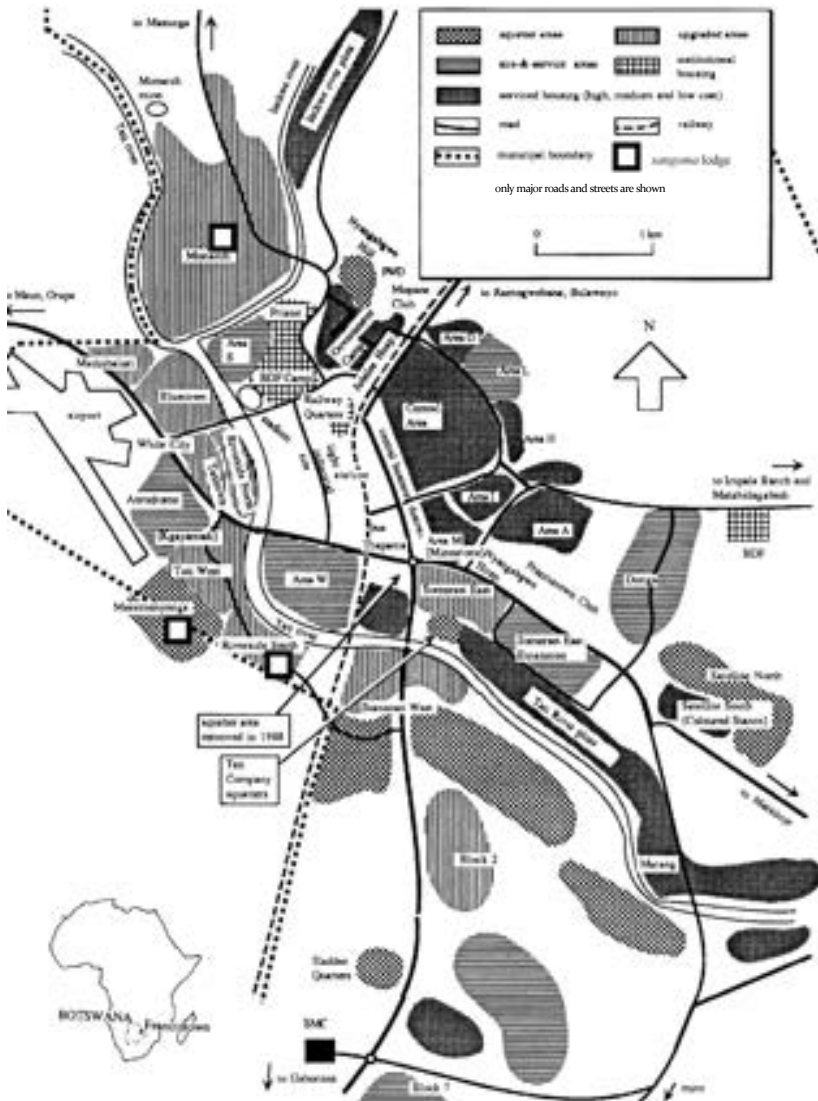


Fig. 6.2. Aspects of Francistown, Botswana, as a ritual space



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<sup>399</sup> I am deviating from the common academic practice of using, tacitly and with embarrassment, *Wikipedia* without proper acknowledgement. *Wikipedia* (although burdened by anonymous authorship and immense fluctuations in quality) is a good example of the riches effectively unlocked by digital techniques, inconceivable only a few decades ago. Many of its entries contain useful information including references to up-to-date literature. Usually I have not relied on such anonymous texts alone but have followed up the references. The vast interdisciplinary orientation of the present book has compelled me to look for such low-threshold additional sources widely outside my areas of competence.

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# *Index of proper names other than those of authors*

The trans-disciplinary and world-wide orientation of the present book makes for a dazzling abundance of proper names, including the names of authors cited. The following indexes aim to bring order in that chaos, by exhaustively listing all proper names, by offering a simplified encyclopaedic description for some of them, and by indicating cross connections when relevant. Subcategories distinguished by a particular direction (North, South etc.) are ideally to be found under those directions and not under the main word. For reasons beyond our control actual page numbers may be one or two pages off as compared by those listed here.

*cf.* = 'compare, see also'; *q.v.* = 'see there'; *passim* = 'does occur frequently but no specific pages listed'; *i.e.* = 'that is'; - = 'insert the entry's key word'

The indexes in this book have been prepared with software designed (1986-1988) by my brother Peter D.H. Broers and written / rewritten by him and me jointly.

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <i>A Hero of Our Time</i> (Lermontov), 310  | Africa, 38, 98, 148, 152, 166, 183, 301, 324, 76n, 83n, 108n, 136n, 142n, 229n, 237n, 238n | 217, 336   |
| <i>A transcontinental career: Essays in honour of Wim van Binsbergen</i> (Mosima), 211n | Africa, North-eastern, 142n  | Afrophilia, 'love of Africa', of ten in a performative and condescending sense, 38 |
| Abel, Biblical figure, 124n   | African Royal Drums and the Ancient Israelites, 185; <i>cf.</i> von Sicard                 | Agamemnon, 294n  |
| Abimelech, 106  | African Spiritualities, 41   | Agaw, 145n   |
| Abiogenesis, origin of life out of dead matter, 324                                     | African Studies Centre, Leiden, the Netherlands, 31-32, 35, 40, 217, 299n                  | Aggregative Diachronic Model of World Mythology (van Binsbergen), 36, 159          |
| Abraham, 106, 300   | African Studies, in the Netherlands, 339   | Agragas, city in Ancient Sicily, 218n  |
| Acheulian, see Lower Palaeolithic   | Africanist(s), 19, 33, 36, 38, 48, 110, 128, 140, 187, 286, 337, 148n, 299n                | Agricento, see Agragas   |
| <i>Achilleid I</i> (Statius), 106n  | Afrikaander, Afrikaner, 196, 237, 273, 203n, 272n; <i>cf.</i> Boer                         | Agricultural Cult, 182   |
| Achilles, 31, 106, 106n   | Afrikaans, 203, 205, 275-276, 203n   | AIDS, 270  |
| Achnaton, 243n  | Afrikamuseum, Berg en Dal, Netherlands, 162, 170   | <sup>c</sup> Ain Draham, 96, 245n  |
| Adonis, 146   | Afroasiatic, 68, 145n, 156n, 343n  | Air, a classic element, 327n   |
| Advaita, 285n   | Afrocentricity, Afrocentrist, 68,  | Akan, 342  |
| AEE, Anthropology of  |  | Akasha, 342n   |
| Extraordinary Experience, 79 <i>f.</i> , 87, 103, 88n                                   |  | Akkadian, 342  |
| Aegean, 163-164, 189n, 218n, 250n   |  | Alaska(n(s)), 110, 113, 137-138, 187, 192, 200, 208; -, North, 116, 192, 209       |
| Aegisthus, 294n   |  | Aleut Islands, 156n  |
| Aeneas, 222   |  |  |

- Alexander the Great, 101, 305, 218n  
 Alexander, a.k.a. Paris, Trojan prince, *q.v.*  
 Alexander, Ray, South African communist freedom fighter, 203n; *cf.* Simons, Jack  
 Alexandria, 106  
 Algeria, 304, 140n  
 Alice Lenshina, Zambian Christian prophetess, 78n, 148n  
 Alighieri, see Dante  
 Allegory of the Cave (Plato), 123  
 All-Souls, 105n  
 Alpha and Omega, 319n  
 Alsace, Alsatian, region in Central Europe, 37  
*Also Sprach Zarathustra* (Nietzsche), 242n; *cf.* Zoroaster  
 Alst, see Isis  
 Altaic, linguistic phylum comprising Turkish, Mongolian, Korean and Japanese, 145n, 156n  
 Altamira, 229  
 Ambra Vidal, heroine of Dan Brown's *Origin*, 310  
 America(n)(s), 59, 98, 111, 116, 121, 137, 144, 146, 149-150, 152, 166, 166, 166, 167, 174-176, 182, 186-187, 190, 225, 227, 233, 262, 264, 301, 306, 314, 339, 26n, 136n, 149n, 152n-153n, 161n, 187n, 237n, 245n, 26n, 344n  
 American 'White', 148n  
 American and African, 152, 176  
 American and Australian Aboriginal, 102n  
 American Anthropological Association AAA, 131  
*American Weekly*, section of the *New York Times*, 235  
 American, Native - (*q.v.*), 166  
 American-Oceanian continuities, 161n  
 Americas, N and S, 161n  
 Amerind, 156n  
 Ammon, see Amun  
 Amsterdam School, of anthropology, 35; *cf.* Köbben  
 Amsterdam University, 337  
 Amsterdam Working Group on Marxist Anthropology, 35  
 Amsterdam, 38, 113, 182, 217, 223, 225, 259, 277, 305, 337, 220n, 222n, 272n  
 Amun, 164-165  
*An Essay on Man* (Pope), 135n  
 Anahita, 105, 150; - and Athena, 106  
 Analytical Philosophy, 248  
 Anansi, 150  
 Anat, 150  
 Anatolia, 229, 189n, 228n  
 Anatomically Modern Human(s), 36, 84-85, 100, 152, 154, 175-176, 178, 189, 228, 234, 242-244, 324, 344, 24n, 99n, 102n, 207n, 291n  
*Anaximenes Rhetorica: Ad Alexandrum* (Aristotle), 137n  
 ANC, African National Congress, 203n  
 Ancient History, 36  
*Ancient Man: A Handbook of Puzzling Artifacts* (Corliss), 235  
 ANE, Ancient Near East, 119n, 140n  
*Angels and Demons* (Dan Brown), 308, 310  
 Angels and Holy Spirits (*q.v.*), 142  
 Anglican Christian, 66n  
 Anglicanism, 48  
 Anglo-Saxon, 31, 124n  
 Angola(n)(s), 144, 146, 170, 180, 182, 254, 147n-148n, 158n-159n, 204n; - , Eastern, 182n; - Bituma Cult, 147n; - and Zambian, 105  
 Aniconic, lacking figurative representation, 172, 186  
 Annual Conference of the International Association of Comparative Mythology, 310  
 Anointed One, see Meshiakh  
 Antelope Spring, 233, 235  
 Anthropic Principle, humans are built after the measure of the universe, 347, 128n  
 Anthropological of Extraordinary Experience AEE (*q.v.*)  
 Anthroposophy / -ist(s), 226  
 Antiquity, 98, 105, 248, 318, 327, 256n, 319n  
*Anything Goes: Origins of the Cult of Scientific Irrationalism* (Stove), 339n  
 Apache(s), 187n  
 Apache(s), 187n; Apache and Navaho, 187  
 apartheid, South African system of 'racial' segregation; Post-apartheid, 50  
 Apep, serpentine primal mythical being, Ancient Egypt, 101, 148n; *cf.* Apopis  
 Aphrodite of Paphos, 165  
 Apollo, 165, 168, 170  
 Apollonius of Tyana, 256n  
 Apopis, 101; *cf.* Apep  
 A priori, 189n  
 Arab Middle Ages, 165  
 Arabian, 168, 185  
 Arabic, 31, 96, 349, 201n, 245n  
 Arabising, 185  
 Archangel, 349  
 Archimedes's (*q.v.*) Law, 261  
*Archives des Jésuites de France*, 317  
 Arctic, 59  
 Aristoteles, see Aristotle  
 Aristotle and Heidegger , 347n  
 Aristotle, Aristoteles, Aristotelian, 118n, 137n, 159n, 212n, 218n, 327n, 340n, 345n, 347n  
 Arizona, 187  
 Ark of the Covenant of the Ancient Israelites, 185  
 Arst, see Isis  
 Artemis, 165  
 Artificial Insemination, 308  
 Artificial Intelligence, 310, 315, 315n  
 Aryan, 338  
 Ashanti, 164  
 Asia and Africa, 37, 151, 176, 229n  
 Asia and Europe, 192  
 Asia and North Africa, 256  
 Asia and South Central Africa, 156  
 Asia and the Americas, 140  
 Asia Minor, 163  
 Asia(n)(s), 22, 36-38, 48, 59, 67-68, 83-84, 86, 105-106, 140, 144, 146, 149-150, 154, 157, 161, 164-167, 172-176, 178, 181, 184-187, 190, 238, 244, 253, 262, 273, 300-301, 323, 336, 347, 55n, 66n, 106n, 140n, 142n, 147n-148n, 151n, 156n, 158n, 160n-161n, 165n, 199n, 218n, 238n, 249n-250n, 257n; - and Egypt, 218n  
 Asia, Central to East - , 158, 188n, 291n  
 Asian and African, 229n  
 Asian and Mediterranean, 174  
 Asian and North-West African, 185  
 Asian and Sunda, 238  
 Asian Babylonia, 82n  
 Asian Buddhism, 147n  
 Asian Hinduism, 53, 250n  
 Asian Lotus, 148n  
 Asian Neolithic and Bronze Ages, 171  
 Asianist, 218n  
 Association des Amis de Teilhard de Chardin, 223  
 Assyria(n)(s), 189n, 249n  
 Assyriologist(s), Assyriology, 140, 250, 338  
 Ast, see Isis  
 Astarte, 164  
 Astrology as a pseudo-science, 248  
 Atabey, Taino (*q.v.*) mother goddess, 174n  
 ʿAtatfa, 96  
 Athena and Anahita, 105  
 Athena, 106, 150, 165, 106n

- Athens, Athenian(s), 175, 160n  
 Atlantic Africa, 146, 176  
 Atlantic and Indian Oceans, 181  
 Atlantic Europe and Africa, 166  
 Atlantic European and North African, 174  
 Atlantic Ocean, 149-150, 152, 176  
 Atlantic, North Atlantic, ocean and region, 19, 22, 27-29, 31, 34, 46, 52, 54, 58-59, 67, 79, 87, 89, 116, 119-123, 125-127, 132, 135-139, 148-149, 152, 176, 181, 184, 192, 198, 206, 209, 211, 217, 219, 238, 253, 256, 258, 260-264, 267-268, 270, 280, 282, 285, 295-302, 309, 316, 323-325, 336, 339, 345, 347, 28n, 32n-33n, 55n, 80n, 94n, 122n, 156n, 206n, 249n, 272n  
 Atlantis and Lemuria, 250, 300  
 Atlantis, 226, 171n, 226n-227n, 250n; cf. Plato  
 Atlas, Graeco-Roman mythical being, 165  
 ATM, Automated Teller Machine, 280  
 Atta (ps.), protagonist in *sangoma* research, 74, 77-78, 101, 103, 75n  
 Attica and the Pelopponesus, 230  
 Attis, 146  
 Aula, popular science series of Het Spectrum publishing house, mid-20<sup>th</sup> c. CE, 222  
*Aum*, Hindu ritual affirmation, 199  
 Aurora Borealis, 155  
 Australia and South America, 98  
 Australia(n(s)), 166-167  
 Australopithecus, 171  
 Austric and Amerind, 181  
 Austric, 180-181, 156n  
 Austronesian, 145n, 151n, 165n, 181n; – and Austroasiatic, 156n  
 Automated Cash Dispensers, see ATM  
 Azil, Azilian, 165, 167, 170  
 Baalbek, 164  
 Babylonia, 150, 248, 82n, 189n  
 Babylonian Marduk, 150  
 Babylonian-Egyptian-Greek, 248  
 Ba'al, 146, 164  
 Bacho, locality in Bulgaria, 169  
 Back-Into-Africa, major population movement since 15 ka BP, 84, 140, 151-152, 154, 175-176, 185, 187, 140n  
 Baikal, Lake –, 185  
 Bali, Indonesia, 86, 140n  
 Bambara, 82n  
 Bantu and Austric, 181  
*Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (Sundkler) 72  
 Bantu, 82, 145-146, 150, 180-181, 304, 74n, 83n, 141n, 151n, 156n, 342n  
 Bantu, Southern, 67n  
 Bantu-speaking Africa, 136n  
 BAR, British Archaeology Reports, q.v., 37  
 Baraque Michel, location in Belgium, 234  
 Barcelona, Spain, 314, 316  
 Barley Mother, 166  
 Barotse, dominant ethnic group in Western Zambia  
 Barotse-land, 202  
 Barton Cliff, location in England, 234  
 Basajaun, Basque primal god, 182n  
 Basongye, 167  
 Basque-speakers, 187  
 Batavi, 253  
 Battle of the Golden Spurs, Flanders, 1302 CE, 222  
 Bay Bonnet, location in Belgium, 234  
 BCE, Before the Common Era, *passim*  
 Beatty, Chester, 24n  
 'Becoming a Sangoma' (van Binsbergen), 30, 48, 79, 110, 211n  
*Before the Presocratics* (van Binsbergen), 82n, 161n, 218n, 327n  
 Beijing, capital city in China, 243-244  
 Being and Non-Being, 291, 300, 335, 340, 341, 348, 350, 80n  
 Being Into Non-Being, 341  
 Being, 23, 137, 291, 294-297, 299-300, 303, 335, 340, 343, 345, 118n, 341n  
 Belarus, 262n  
 Belgium, Belgian(s), 222-223, 234, 237, 286, 299n  
 Bemba, 173, 203, 158n  
 Benin(ese), 46, 185n  
 Benin-Nigeria, 176; cf. Slave Coast  
*Beowulf*, 346n  
 Berber, 68, 156n  
 Berea College, 235  
 Berekhat Ram, location in West Asia, 173  
 Bereshit, see Genesis  
 Berg en Dal, location in the Netherlands, 162, 170  
 Bergen (North Holland), town in the Netherlands, 305  
 Bering Strait, 187  
 Beringia(n), 175, 186  
 Berkley, publishing house, 235  
 Berlin, city, Germany, 31, 217, 259, 305  
 Betelgeuze, 292  
 Bethel, 164  
 Bhaktivedanta Institute, 253  
 Bhaktivedanta, 232, 242, 301, 285n  
 Bible, Biblical, 106, 158, 164, 242, 326, 338, 23n, 82n, 89n, 128n, 147n-148n, 201n, 228n, 277n, 288n  
*Bibliotheca* (Pseudo-Apollodorus), 106n, 157n  
 Bier divination, 193  
 Big Bang, 254-255, 324-325, 318n  
 Bight of Benin, 180  
 Bilocality, 269  
 Biologist, 227n  
 Birth of Christ, 290n  
 Bitcoins, 237  
 Bituma as an Agricultural Cult, 182  
 Bituma Cult, 143, 147, 181-183, 262-263, 147n-148n, 182n  
*Black Athena* (Bernal), 36, 68, 243, 262, 212n, 311n  
*Black Athena* and Afrocentrism, 316  
*Black Athena Revisited* (Lefkowitz & McLean Rogers), 243  
 Black Mass, 307  
 Black Sea, 106, 172  
 Black Stone in the Holy Ka'aba, 166  
 Black Stone of Earhaddon, 164  
 Black Stone, 165  
 'Black', somatically-anchored ethnic identity, 108, 220, 237  
 'Black' African, 102-104  
 'Black' South African, 61  
 Blombos Cave, South African archaeological site, 168  
 Boddhisatvatha, Buddhist saint who gives up personal bliss for the sake of suffering humankind, 149  
 Boer War, 271n-272n  
*Book of Changes*, see *Yi Jing*  
*Book of Histories* (Tzetzes), 262n  
*Book of Idols*, see *Kitab al-Asnam*  
*Book of Revelation*, Bible book, 273n  
 \*Borean, 158, 181, 330-331, 141n, 169n, 188n, 291n, 342n  
 Borgerstraat, street in Amsterdam, 221  
 Bori, 143  
 Borobodur, devotional shrine, Java, Indonesia, 166  
 Bosch, Jheronimo, 298n  
 Boston Tunnel, California, 234  
*Botsalano*, a store in Francistown, Botswana, 269n  
 Botswana and Zambia, 67

- Botswana English, 269n  
 Botswana Nguni-orientated, 86  
 Botswana, 30, 32-3, 71, 86, 103, 140, 144, 181, 195-196, 217, 249, 266, 271, 274-275, 279, 281, 337, 343, 567n, 77n, 82n, 89n, 207n, 269n  
 Botswana, Central -, 270n  
 Botswana, Eastern -, 279  
 Botswana, North-eastern, 131n  
 Botswana, Northern, 157n  
 Bou-Mergoud, 'sleeping child' in  
     Tunisian folklore, 93n  
 BP, Before Present, *passim*  
 Brahmins, 257n  
 Brazil, 229  
 Brethren of the Communal Life, 224  
 Bringer of Salvation, 149; *cf.*  
     Heilbringer, Saviour  
 British Archaeological Reports, International Series, 37  
 British Isles, 166-167  
 British Museum, London, UK, 85, 101, 184  
 British South Central Africa (*q.v.*), 115  
 British, Briton(s), 58, 115-116, 121, 150, 162, 222, 255, 307, 314, 344, 135n, 146n, 271n  
 Brittany / Bretagne, 237n; -  
     fishermen, 237n  
 Broeders des Gemeenen Levens (Brethren of the Communal Life), 224  
 Broers, Joop (Johannes), 305  
 Bronze Age Mediterranean, 37, 151n, 249n  
 Bronze Age, 36-37, 68, 84, 126, 152, 166, 172, 180, 189, 242-243, 300-301, 241, 82n, 148n, 161n, 182n, 249n-250n  
 Bronze-Age Eurasia, 84  
 Brussels, Belgium, 196n, 299n  
 Buddha, Buddhism, Buddhist(s), 23, 48, 65-67, 101, 123, 140, 149, 185, 199, 228, 238, 66n, 138n, 147n-148n, 218n  
 Buddhism and Hinduism, 144, 238  
 Buddhism and Islam in Asia, 140  
 Buddhism in Nepal and, 148n  
 Buddhism, Japanese Zen -, 28n  
 Buddhist South East and East Asia, 149  
 Bugaskoey, site in Anatolia, 277n  
 Bulgaria, 169  
*Bulletin de la Société Belge de Géologie, de Paléontologie et d'Hydrologie*, 235  
 Burushaski, 187  
 Buryat(s), 145, 185, 145n  
 Bushmen, 140n; *cf.* San, Khoisan  
 Byzantine, reference to the successor state of the (Eastern) Roman Empire; metaphor for labyrinthine bureaucratic and autocratic conditions, 230  
 Cacus, 105  
 Cadmus, 161n  
 Cain and Abel, 24n  
 Cain as Everyman, 23n  
 Cain, 23, 23n-24n  
 Cairo, 193  
 California, USA, 146, 152, 166-167, 235, 238, 253  
 Caligula, 148n  
 Cambrian, 233, 235  
 Cambridge MA, town in Massachusetts USA, seat of Harvard University *q.v.*, 170  
 Cambridge UK 31n  
 Cameron, James, movie director, 106-107  
 Cameroon(ian(s)), 163, 173, 171n  
 Campbell, William Lawrence, 166  
 α Canis, see Sirius  
 Cape Town, 30, 35, 50, 52-53  
 Carboniferous, 234  
 Caribbean Tainos, 176  
 Caribbean, 167, 174, 176, 184, 184n; *cf.* West Indies  
 Cartesian and Kantian, 58; *cf.* Descartes, Kant  
 Cartesian, 122n, 294n; *cf.* Descartes  
 Carthage, 191n  
 Cassara and Chihamba, 184  
 Cassara in Guinea Bissau and Chihamba in Zambia, 176  
 Cassara, 147, 176, 183-184  
 Cassava, 195  
 Çatal Hüyük, archaeological site in Anatolia, 229  
 Category, 233  
 Cattle, 105  
 Caucasian, 164, 187; *cf.* 'White'  
 Caucasus, mountain range, SE Europe, 163  
 CE, Common Era, 140, 253 and *passim*  
 Celts, 294n  
 Centaurs, 165  
 Central Africa, 86, 115, 130, 143-144, 167, 171, 181-183, 185, 202, 238, 244, 254, 78n, 102n, 147n, 158n, 182n, 187n  
 Central and North Africa, 118n  
 Central and North-eastern Asia, 175  
 Central and Southern Africa, 19, 273  
 Central and Southern Africa, 91n, 249n-250n, 277n  
 Central Asia to the West and South West Asia, 140  
 Central Asia(n(s)), 152, 158, 175-176, 187, 142n, 161n  
 Central Chadic Afroasiatic, 145n  
 Centre Leo Apostol for the Philosophy of Science, 299n  
 Centre Leo Apostol for the Philosophy of Science, Brussels, Belgium, 299n; its Board, 299n  
 Centre of African Studies, University of Zambia, formerly Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, Lusaka, Zambia, 86  
 Cewa, 203  
 Ceylon, 181  
 Chad, 33  
 Chadic, 68, 156n  
 Chain of Being, 314n  
 Chair of the Foundations of Intercultural Philosophy in the Philosophical Faculty, 338, 212n  
 Chairperson Foundation for Psychotherapy and Buddhism, 40  
 Chang E, 148n  
*Chaos, Creativity, Cosmic Consciousness* (Sheldrake *et al.*), 344  
 Chartres, city in France, 98  
 Chemmis, mythical location, Ancient Egypt, 31  
 Chewa, ethnic group and language, Malawi and surroundings, 68  
 Chiang Mai, city in Thailand, 65  
 Chichi, ps., protagonist in *sangoma* research, 68  
 Chiel, see van Binsbergen, -  
*Chihamba the White Spirit* (Turner), 144, 147  
 Chihamba, 117, 144-146, 150, 153-154, 162-163, 176, 180-183, 188, 193, 208-209, 142n  
 Child's sacrifice, 292n  
 Chile, 163, 173  
*Chiliades* (Tzetzes), 262n  
 China and the Ancient Near East, 161n  
 China, Chinese, 51, 59, 65, 147, 150-151, 166-167, 171, 175, 189-190, 243, 338, 148n, 161n, 223n, 246n, 311n; *cf.* Sinology  
 Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 244  
 Chinese Communism, 31n; *cf.* Bernal, Martin  
 Chinese Moon goddess, 148n  
 Chittim, 228n

- Chokwe, 144, 159n  
 Christ, see Jesus  
 Christian North Africa, 191n  
 Christianisation, 150, 231, 270n  
 Christianity and Islam, 153, 148n  
 Christianity, 142, 149, 200, 202, 277, 300, 307, 113n, 142n, 154n, 156n, 257n, 273n; cf. Protestantism  
 Chukchee-Kamchatkan, language phylum, 156n  
 Churchill, Winston, UK's World War II Prime Minister, 314  
 CITI, Context of Intensified Transformation and Innovation (van Binsbergen), 175; cf. Aggregative Diachronic Model of World Mythology  
 Classificatory kinship, defined, 272n  
 Claus and Little Claus, Andersen fairy tale, 105  
 Clementine, ancestor alleged to haunt her descendant, the present author's wife, 271n  
 Clermont, site in France, 234  
 Cloud Cukoo Land, 336  
 Cold War, 136n  
 Colocasia, Taro, 149, 151  
 Colonialism, 324  
 Columbian, 1. Columbia, Columbian(s), state in NE South America; 2. relating to Columbus so-called discovery of America, 149, 176  
 Columbus, 149, 225, 237n; post-Columbian, after Columbus, 152n  
 Common Era, 36n, 142n, 147n  
 Communism, Communist(s), 272n, 311n  
 Comparative Mythology of the Thunderstone, 160n  
 comparative mythology, 35, 159-175, 95n, 160n  
 Cone of Elagabalus in Emesa, 165  
*Confronting the Sacred: Durkheim Vindicated* (van Binsbergen), 20, 33n  
 Congo-Zambezi watershed, 145  
 Consciousness, 129  
 Constantine, department in Algeria, 304  
 Continental Tradition in Philosophy, 248  
 Corinthians, 1 and 2, Bible books, 79, 207, 97n  
 Cornell University, Ithaca NY, USA, 115, 346n  
 Corona, Covid-19, pandemic since 2020 CE, 344  
 Costa Rica, 241  
 Covid-19, 344  
*Creation Research [ Society ] Quarterly*, 235  
 Creation, 288n  
 Creationism, Creationist(s), 309, 318, 324-326, 328, 332  
 Creator, 201, 330  
 Creed, 266n  
*Creed, Credo*, Christian formalised declaration of faith, 117  
 Cremo & Thompson and Bhaktivedanta, 301  
 Cretaceous, 234  
 Crete, Cretan(s), 161, 294; cf. Epimenides  
*Critias and Timaeus* (q.v.) (Plato), 226  
*Critique of Anthropology*, 134n  
 Cults of Affliction, 202  
 Cults, 61  
 Culture Hero, 174  
 Culture, 25; cf. Tylor  
 Cupules, 175  
 Cushitic, Central -, 145n  
 Cybele, 163, 165  
 Cyprus, 164  
 'D'ou venons-nous - Que sommes-nous - Ou allons-nous', painting by Gauguin, 308  
 Da Vinci, 273n  
 Daendels, 253  
 Dagon, 105, 251  
 Dakota, 174  
 Danu, 'Drought', mother of Indra's adversary Vrtra in South Asian mythology, 160  
*De Arte Rhetorica* (Aristotle), 137n  
 de Bijenkorf, chain of department stores, the Netherlands, 225  
*De Centurio* (de Hartog), 245n  
*De Civitate Deo* (St Augustine), 242n  
*De God Denkbaar Denkbaar De God* (Hermans), 286n  
*De Iside Et Osiride* (Plutarch), 146n  
*de Leeuw van Vlaanderen* (Henri Conscience), 222  
*De Re Publica* (Plato), 123n, 157n  
*De Volkskrant*, 191  
 de Weger, Dr, thorax surgeon, 40  
 Dead Sea Scrolls, 272n  
 Dean of the Faculty of Theology, Nijmegen, the Netherlands, 40  
 Death, 185  
 Delphi, 165, 170  
*Dendrogram* (van Binsbergen), 224n  
 Dene-Sino-Caucasian, 187; cf. Amerind  
 Department of Constantine in Algeria, 304  
 Department of Man and Culture, Philosophical Faculty, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 34, 267  
 Department of the Philosophy of Man and Culture, Philosophical Faculty, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 16n, 299n  
*der Logische Aufbau der Welt* (Carnap), 128  
*Der Neue Pauly. Enzyklopädie der Antike Altertum* (1997), 250n  
*Descriptio Graeciae* (Pausanias), 175n  
 Deucalion and Pyrrha, mythical pair, 164  
 Devonian, 233  
 Dewi Sri, agricultural goddess, Indonesia, 147  
 Diachronic Model of World Mythology, see Aggregative -  
*Die froehliche Wissenschaft* (Nietzsche), 242n  
*Die Phaenomenologie des Geistes* (Hegel), 318n  
*Die Traumdeutung* (Freud), 79  
*Die Wahlverwandschaften* (Von Goethe), 37  
*Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (Schopenhauer), 267  
 Dionysius, 23; - and Nishida Kitano, 23  
 Dionysus, 23, 146, 160, 165, 183, 251  
*Dioscorea*, 150  
*Discovery Channel*, 89  
 Disney, Walt, 220; Disneyland, 64; cf. Donald Duck, Mickey Mouse  
 Dispersion, one of the 64 Hexagrams of I Ching, 349  
 Divine Providence, 348  
 DNA, DesoxyriboNucleid Acid, 90, 151, 328n; mitochondrial -, 188  
 Doctor Lazarus, ps., protagonist in *sangoma* research, 51  
 Doctrine of the Excluded Third (Aristotle), 24, 339, 118n  
 Dogon, 163, 166, 183, 251, 338  
 Doi Sutep Temple, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 65  
 Donald Duck, fictional character by Walt Disney, and eponymic character of the weekly of that name, 220, 272n  
 Donga, Francistown ward, Botswana, 280  
*Door Schijn Bewogen / Moved by Appearances* (Oosterling), 123n  
 Dorchester MA, location, USA, 233  
 Dordogne, region, France, 175, 292

- Drakon, Graeco-Roman mythical character, 165, 161n  
 Dravidian, 156n, 276n  
 Dreaming, 76n  
*Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* (Kant), 332  
*Drie Meren Apotheek*, dispensary, Hoofddorp, the Netherlands, 39  
 Drought, 160, 160n  
 Duhem-Quine Thesis, 340n  
 Duménil, a Nepali < Sinotibetan language, 148n  
 Dumuzi, 146  
 Durban, city in South Africa, 90, 259  
 Durkheim (q.v.) and Marx (q.v.), 286  
 Dutch Protestant, 256  
 Dutch, 34, 113, 205, 223, 225-26, 276, 286, 306, 54n, 130n, 203n, 211n, 220n, 245n, 271n-272n, 286n-287n, 347n; cf. Netherlands  
 Dutch-ised, 220  
 Dutch-language Heemschut series, 222  
 Dutch-produced *Sjors En Sjimmie*, 220  
 Early Modern, 246, 307, 312n  
 Earth and God(s), 163-164  
 Earth God Geb, 164  
 Earth, 22, 137, 146, 155-156, 159-161, 163-167, 175-176, 178, 183, 185, 222, 230-231, 233, 237, 242-243, 251, 255, 283, 292, 297, 300, 306, 309, 311, 313-315, 317-319, 322, 324-325, 327, 331-332, 343-344, 348, 241n, 117n, 147n, 157n, 227n, 262n, 269n, 318n-319n, 327n, 340n-341n; cf. Mother Earth; 'Construire la Terre' (Teilhard de Chardin), 322  
 Easter Island, 173; cf. Rapanui  
 Echnaton, 242  
 EditorialBoard of *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy / Revue Africaine de Philosophie*, 34  
*Een Buik Openen* (van Binsbergen), 56n  
 Ego, self-identity, 122n, 131n, 134n  
 Egungun, Yoruba cult / mask, 185, 193  
 Egypt and Ancient Phoenicia, 184  
 Egypt and the Graeco-Roman world, 148n  
 Egypt and the Sudan, 185  
 Egypt(ian(s)), Ancient civilisation in NE Africa, 31, 37, 68, 89, 101, 106, 146, 160, 164, 166, 185, 187, 189-191, 193, 242, 285, 342, 241n, 84n, 89n, 142n, 147n-148n, 151n, 156n, 161n, 175n, 190n, 218n, 237n, 249n, 294n, 314n  
 Egypt, the Sahara and West Africa, 249n  
 Egypt's New Kingdom, 90, 242  
 Egyptian and Ancient Graeco-Roman, 192  
 Egyptian and Hellenic history, 251  
 Egyptian and Mesopotamian, 226, 249n  
*Egyptian Book of the Dead*, 82n  
*Egyptian Grammar* (Gardiner), 89n  
 Egyptian Ptah, 150  
 Egyptology, Egyptologist(s), 68, 89, 84n, 89n, 146n  
 Einstein's (q.v.) Special and General Theories of Relativity, 288, 325  
 Ekoi, 173  
 Elagabalus, 165  
 Elam(ite(s)), region East of Mesopotamia, 190, 228  
 Elburg, town in the Netherlands, 222  
 Elizabeth and Rosie Mabututu, 32, 279  
 Emergence, 318n  
 Emesa, 163, 165  
 Emperor Napoleon I, 201, 326  
*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 168n  
*Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (Hastings), 82n  
*Encyclopedia of Africa* (Middleton with Miller), 34  
 England, English, 31, 49, 64, 68, 74, 137, 13, 211, 223, 234, 276-277, 344, 241n, 28n, 171n, 223n, 238n, 268n-269n, 272n, 286n, 319n, 345n-346n  
 England, Victorian - , 202  
 English and French, 169n  
 English-speaking North Atlantic, 28n  
 Enki, 251  
 Enlightenment Europe, 138  
 Enlightenment, European thought 17th-19th c. CE, 29, 128, 138, 253, 321, 19n, 256n, 324n  
*Enneades* (Plotinus), 342  
 Eocene, 234  
 Ephesus, Ephesos, 163, 165, 273n  
 Epimenides, cf. Crete, 294  
*Epistle II* (Pope), 135n; cf. *An Essay on Man*  
 Erasmus University Rotterdam  
 EUR, 25, 34, 40, 217, 226, 267, 338, 26n, 212n, 299n  
 Erechtheum, 160n  
 Erechtheus, 174  
 Erichthonius, 174, 84n  
 Esau, 24n  
 Eskimo, language phylum, 156n  
 Essex, UK, 234  
 Eternal Return of the Same (Löwith; also Stambaugh), 242n  
 Ethiopia(n(s)), 163, 171, 83n, 191n  
*Ethnicity in Mediterranean Protohistory* (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen), 37, 243  
 Ethnographic Fieldwork as a Mode of Knowledge Formation, 27  
 EU, European Union, q.v., 262n  
 EUR, Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands  
 Eurasia and Meso America, 173  
 Eurasia(n(s)), 83-84, 98, 107, 171, 174, 82n-84n, 171n  
 Eurasian Bronze Age, 84  
 Eurasian population, 83n  
 Eurasian Steppe, 161n  
 Eurasian-African, 84  
 Eurasianic, a linguistic macrophylum, 156, 156n  
 Eurocentric, 120  
 Europe and Africa, 331  
 Europe(an(s)), 26, 29, 31, 37-38, 45, 58, 68, 93, 108, 128-130, 138, 144, 174, 176, 182, 190, 205, 228, 247, 251, 256, 262, 274-276, 321, 19n, 83n-84n, 104n, 191n, 142n, 152n, 161n, 181n, 181n, 182n, 191, 294n, 314n  
 Europe, Early Modern, 312n  
 Europe, Eastern - , 206  
 Europe, South-east, 136n  
 Europe, Southern, 178, 262n  
 Europe, South-western, 166  
 European 'Whites', 129  
 European Christianity, 278  
 European Enlightenment, 298  
 European Medieval, 124, 165  
 European Union, 262, 262n  
 European, Northern, 105  
 European, North-western, 185  
 Europeanized Africans, 144  
 Eurytus, 165, 174  
 Evolution, 327n  
*Ewig Wiederkehr des Gleichen* (Nietzsche), 22, 242n  
 Excluded Third, see: Doctrine of the -  
*Exodus*, Bible book, 164, 228n  
*Exodus*, legendary departure out of Egypt, of Ancient Israelite under Moses, 242; cf. *Exodus* (Bible book)  
*Exodus*, Out-of-Africa - , of Anatomically Modern Humans, 175-176; cf. Out-of-Africa



- Experience, 115n, 128n  
 Experiential Anthropology, 27n  
 Extended Proto-Neolithic Fertile Crescent (Sahara-China), 151  
 External Examiner, 44-45, 48, 69, 104, 71 f  
 Extispicy, 126  
 Extraordinary Experience, 81, 103; cf. AEE  
 Extrasensory Perception, 59  
 Extraterrestrial(s), 237, 319n; Foreign Intelligence, 235; cf. Temple  
*Fabulae* (Hyginus), 175n  
 Faithful Hound Motif, 101  
*Fasti* (Ovid), 147n  
 Fatima, Portugal, 153  
 Faust, fictional character in *Faust -II* (Goethe); Faustian, 30, 133  
 February Strike, WWII, the Netherlands, 272n  
 Female Puberty Rites in a Long-range Global Perspective, 187n  
 Female, 187n  
 Fertile Crescent, 151; cf. Neolithic *Festschrift Buijtenhuijs* (Konings, van Binsbergen & Hesselink), 33; cf. *Trajectoires de Liberation en Afrique Noire*  
*Festschrift Eboussi Boulaga*,..... see van Binsbergen 1999d.  
 'Field people' (E. Turner), 135, 134n  
 Fieldwork as a Mode of Knowledge Formation, 27  
 Finland, Finnish, Fins, 156  
 Fire, 157, 62n, 157n, 327n  
 Flanders, Flemish, 222  
 Flood, 84, 152, 152n-154n, 158n, 161n, 175n, 257n  
 Fontenrose, 148n, 161n  
*Forbidden Archeology* (Cremo & Thompson), 22, 30, 168, 212, 217-220, 224, 230-234, 237, 239, 242, 244, 253, 283, 295, 301, 303-304, 223n, 285n, 328n  
*Foundation tetralogy* (Asimov), 319n  
 Foundations of Intercultural Philosophy (Rotterdam chair), 29n  
 France, French, 98, 170, 175, 187, 224, 234, 292, 322-323, 148n, 154n, 223n; France, Western, 153  
 Francistown and the Northeastern District, 103  
 Francistown(ian(s)), 32-34, 50, 52, 196, 203, 217, 266, 271, 274-276, 278-281, 337-338, 78n, 82n, 89n, 95n, 141n, 165n, 269n-271n, 276n, 284n; - Stadium, 204n  
 Francistown, 'White'-founded and 'White'-dominated, 77n  
 Franco-Cantabrian Middle and Upper Palaeolithic, 167  
 Freemasonry, 308  
 French and English, 33  
 French, 23, 171, 180, 200, 212, 223, 225, 229, 251, 259, 308, 312, 316-317, 326  
 French-language, 223  
 Freystadt, 247  
 Fu Xi, 175  
 Gaborone, 279-280  
 Gabriel, 349; cf. Jibril  
*Gaia Hypothesis* (Loveclock), 344  
 Gaia, 81, 164-165, 186  
 Gandhara, 218n  
 Ganesha, 199, 161n, 182n  
 Ganga, the river Ganges, 157, 158n  
 Garamantes, 251  
 Garden of Earthly Delights (Hieronymus Bosch), 298n  
 Gauguin, 308, 310, 315  
 Geb, 164  
 Geert Grooten's Broeders des Gemeenen Levens (Brethren of the Communal Life), 224  
 Geist (Hegel), 119, 319  
*Geistesseher*, Who Sees Ghosts, 88n; cf. Swedenborg, Kant  
 Gellner, 45n, 132n, 260n  
 Genesis, Bible book, 106, 164, 23n-24n, 89n, 128n, 152n, 175n, 228n  
 Genetics, 83  
 Gentiles, 228; cf. Jews  
*Geological Magazine*, 235  
 Geomancy in Early Modern Europe, 247  
 Germanic, language cluster, 147  
 Germany, German(s), 149, 169, 245, 247, 251, 305, 310, 261n, 89n, 124n, 272n  
 Geryon, 105  
*Gestalt*, 125n  
 Ghadafi, Colonel, 136, 136n  
 Ghana(ian(s)), 342  
 Ghrban, Ghrban, demon of the midday sun, KHumiriyya, Tunisia, 95, 95n  
 Gilbert Isl, 147  
*Gilgamesh Epic*, 165  
 Gisu, 280n  
 Glen Arm, unidentified publisher's locality, 235  
 Global Perspective, 187n  
 Globalisation, 139; Globalisation and the Construction of Communal Identities (WOTRO q.v.) national research project, the Netherlands, 35  
 Glazel, 229, 306, 338  
 Gnostic, 273n  
 Gobi Desert, 323  
 God and Cain, 24n  
 God Mwali, 82n, 89n, 277n  
 God of Iron, 157n  
 God(s), Goddess(es), 21, 223, 25, 73, 93, 95, 117, 124, 128, 149, 155, 158, 160-161, 166, 183, 204-205, 212, 237, 242, 252, 277-278, 286, 300, 314, 317, 319, 325-332, 342-343, 349-350, 78n, 82n, 128n, 156n, 181n, 199n, 232n, 286-287n, 313n, 322n, 329n; - Jupiter, 126; - Mwali, 276-277, 279; - Nyambi, 155; - of Death, 185; -dess Venus, 126; God's Child, 155; Biblical God of the *Old Testament*, 82n  
 Gödel's Theorem, 261  
 Golan Heights, Syro-Palestine, 173  
*Google Images*, 241  
*Google Scholar*, 31  
 Gospel of John, Bible book, 273n  
 Graeco-Roman Antiquity, 149, 164-165, 168, 174, 93n-94n, 148n, 246n, 249n-250n; its effect upon occult and magical practices in the South, 249n  
 Graeco-Roman world, 148n  
 Grand Narrative, target of Post-modern discourse, 132  
 Gravitation, 338; Law of Universal -, 338; cf. Newton  
 Great Britain, 235, cf. British, English, England, UK  
 Great Father shrine, Ndjuka, Surinam, 184  
 50 *Great Myths of Human Evolution: Understanding Misconceptions about Our Origins* (Relethford), 327n  
 Grebbbeerg, the Netherlands, site of decisive battle May 1940 CE, 305  
 Greece and Rome, 31  
 Greece and the *New Testament* (q.v.), 91  
 Greece, Greek(s), 68, 105-106, 121, 146, 154, 157, 160-163, 165, 168, 170, 174, 186, 222, 286, 89n, 142n, 148n, 161n, 169n, 218n, 272n, 285n, 294n, 319n, 340n; - and Indian, 218n  
 Greek and Biblical, 106  
 Greek-Israelite, 106  
 Greenland, 166  
 Grimeshwar, location of shrine in India, 194  
 Groningen University, 286n  
 Grooten, Geert, 224

- Guan Yin, East Asian goddess of mercy, 199
- Guinea Bissau, 47, 97, 147, 176, 183-185, 82n, 284n
- Guinea, *cf.* Upper Guinea Coast
- Gujarat(i(s)), region in W India, 229n, 276n
- Gumede, Smarts, herbalist, Francistown, Botswana, 32, 275, 279, 281, 269n
- Haarlem, 39, 238n
- Hainuwele, 146-147
- Hajj, the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, 148n
- Hakata, Southern African geomantic (*q.v.*) divination system, 337, 349, 286n
- Hamburg, 272n
- Hamiltonian, an operator corresponding to a system's total energy, 80n
- Hanks, Tom, movie actor, 308
- Har Karkom, Syro-Palestinian Palaeolithic site, 166
- Harley Street, 51
- Harvard Round Table, 35
- Harvard University, 235, 307, 310
- Hasan ben Kashruth, 201, 201n
- Hasharet Al-Fras, 174
- Hastings, England, UK, 223n
- Hathor, 314n
- Hawaii(an(s)), 167, 125n
- Healing, 210
- Heart of Darkness* (Conrad), 115n
- Heart of Lightness* (E. Turner), 115n
- Heaven and Earth, 154-155, 158, 164-165, 175, 181, 183, 186, 24n, 90n, 159n
- Heaven, 155-161, 163, 165, 175, 183, 185, 78n, 141n, 156n-157n, 159n, 265n
- Heavener OK, USA, 234
- Heavenly Princess, 82n
- Heavenly Queens, 142
- Heaven-on-Earth, 159
- Hebraeist, 272n
- Hebrew and Arabic, 250n
- Hebrew Biblical, 272n
- Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel, 242
- Hebrew, 31, 225, 82n, 89n, 201n, 272n
- Heden Ik Morgen Gij* (Marsman & Vestdijk), 80n
- Heemschut series, Netherlands topography, 225
- Hegel and Levinas, 24n, 185n
- Hegel's *Geist*, 119, 319
- Heilbringer*, Saviour, 149
- Heitsi Eibib, culture hero in Namibia, 163, 166, 173-174
- Helen, *see* Helena
- Helena, 31, 106
- Hellenism, -istic, 246, 158n
- Henk, *see* van Binsbergen, Henk
- Hephaestus, 31, 156-157, 165, 24n, 157n
- Hephaistos, *see* Hephaestus
- Hera, 160
- Heracles, 101, 149, 162, 164-165; *cf.* Hercules
- Hercules, 101, 105; *cf.* Heracles
- Hermes, 164, 165, 168, 170, 174
- Hermeticism and Gnosticism, 342, 250n
- HET GEHEIM (Boutens), 245n
- Het Parool*, 222n
- Het Spectrum, publishing house, 222-223
- Hexagram, 349, 148n; *cf.* *Yi Jing*
- Hiawatha, 149n; *The Song of—* (Longfellow), 149n
- High God, 157n, 270n
- Highlands of Northwestern Tunisia, 38
- Hijra, 168
- Hilazon Tachtit Cave, archaeological site in West Asia, 142n
- Hindu and Buddhist South and South East Asia, 148n
- Hindu, 36, 218, 238-239, 253, 298, 301-302, 305-306, 218n, 250n, 285n
- Hinduism and Buddhism, 257n
- Hinduism and Islam, 228
- Hindu-philosophical Bhaktivedanta Institute, 238
- Historiae* (Herodotus), 106, 175n
- Historical and Ethnographic Fieldwork as a Mode of Knowledge Formation, 27
- Historiography, 243
- History of Ideas, 29, 67-68, 125, 338, 115n, 318n
- Hittite(s), 228, 339, 89n, 161n, 228n, 277n; *cf.* KHatti
- HIV, 270
- Hohefels, site in Germany, 169
- Holland, 273; *cf.* Netherlands
- Hollywood, centre of USA motion-picture industry, 132
- Holocaust, 300
- Holocene, 229n
- Holy Family, 314, 316; *cf.* Sagrada Familia
- Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, 168
- Homeric Hymn to Pythian Apollo*, 156n
- Hominid, 171
- Honesty, 132
- Hoofddorp, city in the Netherlands, 39
- Horus, 31, 294n
- Hosanna*, 89n, 277n
- Huckleberry Finn* (Mark Twain), 221
- Human sacrifice, 292n
- Human, 227, 235, 252, 330, 341; *cf.* Anatomically Modern –s
- Humanism, 129, 27n
- Humanity, 230, 239
- Humbe, dialect of Shona, 276
- Hun Hunahpu, 146
- Hurrians, West Asian Ancient people, 164, 161n
- Husayn, Islamic martyr, 183
- Hutu(s), 136, 136n
- Huygens-Newton debate on corpuscular vs. wave nature of light, 330
- Hypothesis of Ontic Oscillation / of Oscillating Reality, 293, 350
- I Ching*, *see* *Yi Jing*
- Iberian peninsula = today's Spain and Portugal, 153, 156n; *cf.* Spain, Portugal
- Ibrahim, 300; *cf.* Abraham
- ICT, Information and Communication Technology, 336, 270n
- Idris, 349
- IFDC (International Food Documentation Centre), 191
- Ife, city in Nigeria, 163
- Ihamba, 88n
- Iliad* (Homer), 106n, 156n
- Illustrated Classics*, 221
- ʿilm al-raml, 349; *cf.* geomancy
- Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (Turner & Turner), 115
- Images et symboles: Essais sur le symbolisme magico-religieux* (Eliade), 218n
- Imagines I* (Philostatus Jr.), 106n
- Imiut, 194
- In de Knipscheer*, Dutch publishing house, 31
- Inanna, 140n
- Inca, 161n
- Independence, of African former colonial states, 266
- Independent Churches, African – , 74, 142, 278
- India(n(s)), South Asia, 150, 166, 182, 194, 225, 228, 253, 276, 301, 304, 156n, 158n, 218n, 276n; also *see*: Native American
- India, Western, 229n, 276n
- Indian in India, 276n

- Indian Ocean and Atlantic Ocean, 150  
 Indian Ocean, 144, 152, 166, 180-181, 229n  
 Indian of the Vedic scriptures, 160n  
 Indigenous Peoples, 137  
 Indo-Aryan, 276n  
 Indo-European, language phylum, 161, 338, 156n, 276n  
 Indonesia(n(s)), 37, 86, 134, 146, 166, 181, 184, 186, 140n, 145n, 229n  
 Indo-Pacific, 150  
 Indra, 160, 164, 156n  
 Indus Valley, 228, 229n  
 Industrial Revolution, 344  
 Ink[h]osazana, 'Heavenly Princess' (q.v.), mythical being in Southern Africa, 103, 105, 82n  
 Intelligent Design, the claim that the origin of life, and of human self-reflective consciousness, can only be explained by assuming a direct intervention of God, 30, 300, 316, 232n  
*Intercultural Encounters* (van Binsbergen), 20, 27, 63, 120, 217, 248, 26n, 157n, 238n, 249n, 299n, 302n  
 Intercultural Philosophy, 297, 129n, 138n, 284n  
 Intercultural, 101, 127, 263, 297  
 Interlinguality, 276  
 International Association for Comparative Mythology, 35, 309  
 Internet, 31, 59, 68, 89, 129, 138, 237, 308, 310, 314, 322, 336, 350, 80n, 88n, 188n, 237n, 312n  
 Introspection, 122  
 Inuit, 136, 139, 189  
 Invented history / tradition (Hobsbawm & Ranger), 253  
 Ionia, 189n, 273n  
 Iran, 150, 253, 264; cf. Persia(n)  
 Iran, Northern, 246n  
 Iranian Plateau, 229  
 Iraq, 164, 338  
*Irdische Stern-kunde* (Abu Hali), terrestrial astrology, = geomancy, 248n  
 Iron, God of -, Finland, 156  
 Isaac, Biblical figure, 106  
 Isis, 31; cf. Ast, Arst, etc.  
 Islam and Christianity, 192  
 Islam and the West, 332  
 Islam in Africa, 140  
 Islam in North-western Tunisia, 201  
 Islam, Islamic, Muslim(s), 93, 95, 128, 134, 164, 166, 174, 183, 185, 195, 201, 238, 245, 248, 253, 264, 278, 285, 298, 301, 309, 314, 316, 328-329, 338, 349, 23n, 62n, 104n, 148n, 159n, 182n, 19n, 20n, 245n-246n, 248n, 257n, 285n  
 Islamic State, 253  
 Israel, modern state, 242, 253, 24n, 141n, 314n; cf. Syro-Palestine  
 Israelite Ark of the Covenant, 185  
 Israelites, Ancient, 105-106, 150, 169, 185, 194, 230, 252, 24n, 20n, 256n  
 Italic, Ancient language cluster, 165  
 Italy, Italian(s), 153, 166, 84n, 218n  
 Ithaca NY, USA, 346n  
 IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) Red List of Threatened Species, 9n  
 Ivory, 85  
 Izanagi and Izanami, 162  
 Izanami, 157, 162  
 Jabbok, 23n  
 Jachin and Boaz, 164  
 Jacob and Esau, 24n  
 Jacob, Patriarch, Biblical figure, 164, 23n  
 Jahweh, 164; cf. JHWH  
 Jakuta, West African thunder god on the Slave Coast (q.v.), associated with stone axes, 176; cf. Yucahú  
 Janus, 182n  
 Japan and South Asia, 147  
 Japan(ese), 150, 157, 162, 167, 323, 28n  
 Japanese Buddhism, 238  
 Japhet, 24n  
*Jataka*, narratives of the Buddha's earlier incarnations and childhood, 101  
 Java, Indonesia, 166  
 Jegu, 143  
 Jerusalem, 242, 277n  
 Jesuit Major Seminary, Hastings, UK, 223n  
 Jesuit, 212, 223, 323  
 Jesus of Nazareth, Christ, founder of Christianity, 101, 146, 183, 300, 307, 117n, 148n, 154n, 222n, 256n, 270n, 273n, 277n  
 Jews, 305; - and Judaism (q.v.) in Africa, 185  
 Jibril, 349  
 Jirotf, 229  
 Job, Biblical figure, 23n, 147n  
 Johan, (a) the present author's father's brother; (b) for a short while the present author's administrative father, 272n  
 Johannes, close kinsman of Elizabeth and Rosie Mabutu (q.v.), ritual leaders at Francistown, Botswana, 272; Johannes-Returned (the present writer), 273, 278; - given name of the present writer at birth, and backgrounds, 272, 272n  
 Johannesburg, 280, 272n  
 John the Baptist, 273n  
 John the Disciple, 273n  
 John, a Christian name, 272n-273n, 277n  
 John, Bible book, 146  
 John, Gospel of -, Bible book, 183  
 Jonas, Biblical prophet, 105; cf. Water divinities  
 Joop, see Johan  
*Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal*, 120n  
*Journal of Religion in Africa*, 44  
 Judaeo-Christian, 230, 239, 149n  
 Judaeo-Christian-Islamic, 119, 136, 342-343  
 Judaism, Jewish, Jew(s), 98-99, 115, 149, 228, 314, 23n, 148n, 20n, 246n, 272n  
*Julius Caesar* (Shakespeare), 101  
 Jung and Freud, 98  
 Jupiter, 49, 126; cf. Zeus  
*Jurassic Park* (Spielberg, motion picture), 328  
 Jurassic, 234  
 Jyotir Linga Siva shrine, India, 194  
 Kabambi Kahare, King of the Mashasha Nkoya, 279, 27n  
 Kabyliya(n(s)) of Algeria, 140n  
 Ka'aba, 164, 185, 194  
 Kadmos, 164-165, 16n; cf. CCadmus  
 Kagutsuchi, 157  
 Kahare Kabambi, Mwene, 305, 269n  
 Kahare, 182, 279, 31n-32n  
 Kaka people, Cameroon, 163, 173  
 Kalanga, 32, 277, 204n  
*Kalevala* (Lönnrot), 157n  
*Kalpa Sutras* (Kashikar), 218n  
 Kalpa, Indian aeon, 218n  
 Kamunu, mythical first Man, Southern Africa, 155-156  
 Kant and Heidegger, 211n  
 Kaoma District and capital, 182, 279  
 Kaoma, Western Province, Zambia, 156n  
 Kaphesh Kamungampanda, 156n  
 Kartikeya, 305  
 Kartvelian, 156n  
 Kashruth ben Bu-KHris, KHumiri

- settler, 201n; *cf.* Hasan ben –  
Kavula, 183, 193  
Keamogetswe, Diketso, 6, 34  
Kegan Paul International, UK  
publishing house, 31  
Kenites, 24n; *cf.* Cain  
Kentucky, state, USA, 235  
Kenya(n(s)), 33, 83n  
Kepha, Hebrew / Aramaic 'stone,  
rock', 154n  
Kepler and Galilei, 288n  
KHatti, *cf.* Hittite  
Khoe-Kwadi, linguistic cluster <  
Khoisan, 83n  
Khoi, 152  
Khoisan, 82–85, 174; *cf.* Khoisan,  
Khoi, San, 83n, 156n, 188n  
Khulubvi, location in Malawi, 194  
Kinbote, fictional character in  
Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, *q.v.*, 346n  
Kingoodie Quarry, Scotland, 233,  
235  
*Kinkerbuurt 1947–1960* (van  
Binsbergen), 220n  
Kiranti, a Sinitobetan language  
cluster, 145n, 148n  
Kirsch, Edmond, fictional  
protagonist in *Origin* (Dan  
Brown), 310–312, 314–316, 318–319,  
321, 331, 319n  
*Kitab Al-Asnam*, 'Book of Idols'  
(Ibn al-Kalbi), 168  
Klein, Joseph Goar, the present  
author's maternal grandfather,  
305  
Klerksdorp, town in South Africa,  
237, 237n  
Klutaimnestra, 294n  
Kneller, Godfrey, 124  
*Kojiki*, 162  
Königsberg, city in East Prussia,  
122n  
Kon-Tiki Hypothesis of American-  
Oceanian continuities  
(Heyerdahl), 161n  
Kon-Tiki, Peruan culture hero,  
237n  
*Kritik der Reinen Vernunft* (Kant),  
257n  
Krittika, Indian name of the  
Pleiades (*q.v.*), 157  
Kronos, 164–165  
Ku Klux Klan, racialist terrorist  
organisation, USA, 148n  
Kuba, ethnic group, Congo, 163,  
167  
*Kulturkreis*, 146  
Kumara, 305  
Kumarbi, 164  
Kundalini, 80  
Kurdistan, 166  
Kwame (Legwame) Traditional  
Association of Botswana, 265,  
276  
Kwani, a Francistown *sangoma*,  
274  
Kyrgyz, 166  
*L'Être et le Néant* (Sartre), 242n  
La Ferrassie, 175, 292, 291n  
*Lady Cheritwebeshets Book of the  
Dead*, 194, 90n  
Lamaism, 238; *cf.* Buddhism  
Land of the Dead, 105  
Land, mythical son of the Mother  
of the Waters (*q.v.*), 84, 155, 165,  
241n  
Langdon, Robert, fictional  
character, Dan Brown's *Origin*  
and the latter's other books, 307–  
310, 314, 316, 315n  
Laon, town and geological site,  
France, 234–235  
Lapiths, 165  
Laplace's Demon, 258, 348  
Lapland, Lappish, Lapp(s), of  
Scandinavia, 166, 161n  
Lascaux, archaeological site in  
France, 82n  
Last Judgment, 230  
Last Supper (Da Vinci), 273n  
Latin, 31, 23n, 169n  
Law of Thermodynamics, 324  
Law of Universal Gravitation, 338  
Laws, physics, *cf.* Nature  
Lazarus, Dr, ps., *sangoma*, 44  
*Le Phénomène Humain* (Teilhard  
de Chardin), 230–231, 312, 239n  
Leiden African Studies Centre, 35,  
226  
Leiden international conference  
'Rethinking Africa's  
transcontinental continuities in  
pre- and protohistory', and  
published proceedings  
*Rethinking Africa's  
transcontinental continuities in  
pre- and protohistory* (van  
Binsbergen 2019), 151n  
Leiden University Medical Centre  
/ University Teaching Hospital,  
40, 240  
Leiden University, 40  
Leiden, 32, 217, 259, 310, 130n, 151n,  
156n, 191n; *cf.* African Studies  
Centre  
Lemuria, imaginary Pacific  
continent, 226n, 250n  
Lenshina, Alice, 46  
Leo Apostel Centre for the  
Philosophy of Science in  
Brussels, 196, 196n  
Les Eysies, town in Dordogne,  
France, 292, 292n  
Levant, 166, 174  
Leviathan, 147, 148n; *cf.* Yam,  
Tiamat  
Liar Paradox, 294  
Libya(n(s)), 136n  
Lightning, 160; *cf.* thunder  
*Likota Iya Bankoya* (Shimunika /  
van Binsbergen), 158n  
Linga(m), 194  
LIT Verlag, publishing house,  
Germany, 31, 26n  
*Logical Structure of the World*  
(Camap), 128  
Logos, 183  
London, city, UK, 31, 101, 184, 234–  
235  
Long-range Global Perspective,  
187n  
Long-range, 156n  
Lotus, 147n–148n  
Lourdes, France, 153  
Louvain School of Anthropology in  
Belgium, 34–35, 55; *cf.* Devisch  
Love, 343  
Low Countries, 153, 225, 253; *cf.*  
Netherlands  
Lower Palaeolithic, 135, 167, 304; –  
Acheulian of South Asia, 175  
Lozi Flood Plain, 158n  
Lozi, see Barotse  
Lubumba, Nkoya prophet, 156n  
*Luke*, Bible book, 17n, 222n  
LUMC, Leiden University Medical  
Centre, teaching hospital, 39,  
240  
Lunar Node, 322  
Lunda, see Ndemba Lunda  
Lusaka, capital of Zambia /  
Northern Rhodesia, 35, 182, 185,  
202, 278, 31n, 203n  
Luvale, 204n  
Luwé, unilateral mythical being,  
185  
Luwia(n(s)), 229  
MA degree, 337  
Mabutu, Rosie, see MmaShakayile  
Macoupon II, USA, 234  
Madagascar, 181  
Mafa, a Central Chadic Afroasiatic  
language, 145n  
Maghreb, 166  
Magritte, René, 237, 240, 304  
Mahabalipuram, famous site south  
of Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India,  
158n  
Mahasena, 305  
Makapansgat, South Africa, 172–173

- Makeba, ps., Southern African *sangoma*, 74, 78, 90, 92, 103
- Malawi(an)(s), 68, 148, 194
- Malawi, Southern, 183
- Malekula, 173
- Mali, 251
- Manchester School, 35, 86, 107, 115, 75n, 115n, 134n
- Manchester, 115, 217, 259
- Mandarin Chinese, 344
- Mandela, Nelson, 103, 266
- Mandeville Times, 235
- Mandva, a cult of affliction, 143
- Mangango, 31n
- Manifest Against Astrology* (Bok), 267
- Manihot, 144, 176
- Manitou, 166
- Manjacos of Guinea-Bissau, 97, 147, 183-185, 82n, 284n
- Many-Worlds Hypothesis, 250, 282, 288, 300, 283n
- Maori, 338, 82n, 149n
- Mapangwane, Ennie, research assistant, 33, 270n
- Maps of the Ancient Sea Kings* (Hapgood), 227
- Mara, 123
- Marangeli, ps., a Southern African *sangoma*, 44, 50
- Marduk, 147
- Mark, Bible book, 117n, 273n, 277n
- Maroons, 184
- Mars, planet, 243
- Marx, Karl, Marxism, see Author index
- Marx, Roelf, curator Klerksdorp museum, South Africa, 237
- Marxist Anthropology, 35
- Marxist, see Marx
- Mary of Magdalen, 273n
- Masemenyenga, 280, 206n
- Mashave, 143
- Masvingo, 78, 103
- Matakam, see Mafa
- Materialisation, 80n
- Mathematics, 326
- Mathilagabedi, border village northeast of Francistown,
- Matopos, 33
- Matthew*, Bible book, 79, 339, 117n, 154n, 277n
- Maya, 161n
- Mayziyya, village in KHumiriyya, Tunisia, 96, 201n, 245n
- Mbala, West African ethnic group, 82n
- Mbamba, 170
- Mbona, 147, 183
- Mbona, Sacrifice to – , 194
- Mecca, 166, 185
- Medieval, 237n
- Mediterranean and Black Sea, 172
- Mediterranean and West Asia, 105, 230
- Mediterranean and Western Europe, 162
- Mediterranean Bronze Age, 36, 242-243, 301
- Mediterranean, 37, 84, 105-107, 150, 174, 180, 93n, 147n-148n, 256n, 273n, 277n; Ancient World, 89n; cf. *Ethnicity in Mediterranean Protohistory*
- Mediterraneanist, 36
- Medusa, 165
- Melanesia(n)(s), 148n
- Member of Parliament, South Africa, 50
- Menelaus, 106
- Mental Imagery Cultivation as a Cultural Phenomenon* (Noll), 201n
- Mermaid, 84n
- Meru, 166
- Meshiakh*, see Messiah
- Meso America(n)(s), 146, 150, 152-153, 166, 176, 161n, 227n, 229n, 237n
- Meso and North America, 146
- Meso and South America, 153
- Mesolithic and Neolithic (*q.v.*), 318
- Mesopotamia(n)(s), 146-147, 165, 175, 251, 342, 342, 146n-148n, 175n, 207n, 249n-250n
- Messiah, 101, 149, 230
- Metamorphoses* (Ovid), 106n, 175n
- Meteorites in History and Religion, 163-164, 166, 170
- Meteorologia* (Aristotle), 159n
- Methodology, 137; – of Studying African Spiritualities, 41
- Meyer, Cecile, 39
- Mfecane*, the Zulu aftermath in 19th c. CE Southern Africa, 67
- St Michael, 305, 305
- Michiel, the present writer's second given name, 272n
- Mickey-Mouse, fictional character in Walt Disney context, 307
- Micronesia, 147
- Middle Ages, Medieval, 135, 165; Medieval Europe, 93, 128
- Middle Palaeolithic, 304
- Midewiwin medical society of the Ojibways, USA, 152n
- Milingo, Zambian (*q.v.*) Archbishop, 46
- Milky Way, 198, 292
- Mind, 342
- Minsk, capital of Belarus, 262n
- Miracles and *Sangoma Science*, 256n, 256n
- Miracles, 101, 256
- Miss Ophelia, fictional character in Uncle Tom's Cabin (Beecher-Stowe); – complex, 74n
- Mjölñir, 160
- MmaNdhlovu and MmaShakayile, 279
- MmaNdhlovu Mabutou, 34, 276, 279, 269n
- MmaShakayile Mabutou, 34, 274, 276, 279, 78n, 269n-270n, 284n
- Moba, 143
- Modern European, 176, 316
- Modern(ity), –ism, –ist), 92, 95, 125, 132, 198, 289, 292, 298-299, 316, 326, 342-343, 345, 347-348, 350, definition, 191n; 124n, 199n, 260n, 319n; cf. Post-modern
- Molly, senior *sangoma*, Francistown, Botswana, 274, 270n, 283n
- Moluccan Isl., Moluccan(s), 146-147
- Monarch, township, Francistown, Botswana, 273-274, 269n
- Mongolia(n)(s), 166, 185
- Mongolian, language cluster, 145n
- Montezuma Tunnel, 234
- Moon and the Sun, 148n
- Moon, 152, 288, 18n, 147n-148n, 254n, 327n
- Moon-travelling, 148n
- Morocco, 134
- Morrisonville IL, USA, 234
- Morrisonville Times*, 234-235
- Moscow News*, 234-235
- Moscow, 31n
- Motacilla*, 157
- Mother Earth, 163, 165; cf. Earth
- Mother of Drought, 160n
- Mother of Life, 82n; cf. Sinombe, Jane
- Mother of the Waters, 155, 155n, 294n
- Mountain of God, 166, see Har Karkom
- Mousterian, Neanderthaloid culture Middle to Upper Palaeolithic Europe, 169, 175, 243, 292, 304, 292n; cf. Neanderthal(oid)
- Mozambique, Mozambican(s), 67, 101, 180
- Mpepo, 143
- Mpoloka, Edward, research assistant, 33
- Mumbai, formerly Bombay, major

- city in Western India, 276n  
 Munalí, 203n; secondary school and district in Lusaka, Zambia; named after the African nickname of the physician / explorer David Livingstone  
 Munster, city in Germany, 31  
 Mupumani, 78n  
 Murugan, 305  
 Musée de La Préhistoire, Les Eyzies, France, 292  
 Museum for Natural History, Cambridge MA, USA, 170  
*Museum of Comparative Zoology Memoir*, 235  
 Muslim(s), see Islam  
 Mvula, 'Rain', Nkoya demiurge, 183, 156n  
 Mwali High God, 33, 276-280, 82n, 157n, 270n  
 Mwali High Priest, 276, 343; cf. Sinombe  
 Mwana Lesa, 'God's Child', 183, 78n  
 Mwendapanchi, 143  
 MyInfield, 235  
 Mysia(n)s, Ancient Northwestern Asia Minor, 169  
 Mystery spheres, Costa Rica, 241  
 Mystical Merging, 279  
 Mysticism, 285, 122n  
 Myth, 128, 253  
 Mythemes, Humankind's Core – , Remain More Or Less  
 Recognisable Over Tens of Thousands of Years – Why? , 227  
 Mythical Being, 95n  
 Mythical Wagtails At Two Ends of the Old World, 156  
 Myths of Human Evolution, 327n  
 Na Atibun, mythical primal being, Gilbert Isl., 147  
 Nabi, 250n  
 Na-Dene, 187  
 Naga, Indian ethnic group, 166  
 Nahusha, 156n  
 Nalinanga, see Shihoka  
 Namibia(n(s)), 163, 166, 173  
 Nandi, African ethnic group, 168  
 Nape, 250n  
 Narrative Complex 'the Stones', 159, 167, 178-179  
 Narrative Complex NARCOM, constituent element in the Aggregative Diachronic Model of World Mythology (van Binsbergen), *q.v.*, 154n, 171n; NARCOM the Stones, 154n  
 Narrative Complex of the Re-Connection of Heaven and Earth, 155, 157, 159  
 Narrative Complex, 154-155, 159, 163, 170, 175-176, 178-179  
 Narrator, 132  
 Nasinbatsi, 183  
 Nata, village in Northern Central Botswana, 205, 276, 343, 82n, 157n, 270n  
 National Science Foundation ZWO / WOTRO, the Netherlands, 204n  
 Native American, 139, 149, 169, 176, 190, 343, 239n; cf. American 'Native Policemen', Zambia, 269n  
 Natufian, archaeological complex, West Asia, 142n  
 Nature, 255, 258, 317, 325-326, 344; cf. Laws of –  
 Nature, Immutable Laws of – , 254-255  
 Navaho, see Apache  
 Nazareth, 307  
 Nazi, exponent of Hitler's Nazionalsozialismus, a racialist and terrorist movement, 272n  
 Ndebele, 277, 204n  
 Ndembu Lunda, 116-117, 123, 131, 139, 142, 144, 147, 150, 153, 180-181, 183-186, 187, 189, 208, 212, 337, 159n  
 Ndjuka Maroons of Surinam, 184-185, 193  
 Neanderthals, Neanderthaloid, 175, 243, 292, 304; cf. Mousterian  
 Near-death experience, 345, 78n  
 Nebraska, 235  
 Neith, primal Ancient Egyptian goddess of the waters, 105, 107, 150, 24n, 293n  
*Nelumbo nucifera*, the lotus plant in the Buddhist context, 147n  
 Neolithic Fertile Crescent, 151  
 Neolithic West Asia, 37  
 Neolithic, 84, 105, 146, 153-154, 157, 164, 167, 172, 183, 185, 226, 229, 344, 142n, 161n  
 Neolithization, 142n  
 Neo-Platonist, 285n; Neo-Platonist Plotinus, 325  
 Nepal, 148n  
 Nepali, a Sinotibetan language, 148n  
 Neptune, 327  
 Nereus, 105  
 Netherlands Development NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation), 32n  
 Netherlands War Documentation Centre, 272n  
 Netherlands, Central – , 222  
 Netherlands, Dutch, Dutchmen, 39, 113, 162, 170, 220, 223, 240, 253, 263, 279, 305, 337, 21n, 32n, 80n, 203n, 210n, 212n, 286n  
 Netherlands-speaking Belgian(s), 222  
 Neurobiology, 100  
 Nevada NV, USA, 234  
 Neverneverland, 306, 350  
 New Age, 48, 52, 58-59, 66, 68, 81, 89, 91-92, 127, 137, 227, 282, 285, 287, 337, 351, 33n, 89n, 171n, 227n, 273n, 290n, 339n; – Atlantis, 226n  
 New Guinea, Southern , 150  
 New Mexico, USA, 187  
 New Physics, 260  
 New Testament, 91, 158, 183, 117n, 154n, 273n, 277n  
 New Wine in Old Wineskins (Sundkler), 72  
 New World and the Old World, 149, 188  
 New World, 37, 149, 166  
*New York Sunday American*, 235  
 New York, USA city, 115, 127, 235, 346n  
 New Zealand, 149n  
 Newton and Huygens, 209  
 Newton of the Law of Universal Gravitation, 338  
 Newton world, macroscopic level of reality, geared to the human senses, neither nanoscopic nor cosmic, so that Newton's physics is an acceptable approximation, well within the boundary conditions beyond which Quantum Mechanics and the Theory of Relativity constitute mandatory correctives; cf. Newton  
 Nguni, linguistic cluster in Southern Africa, 67, 86  
 St Nicolas, folklore mask, 185  
 Nigercongo, 82-83, 85, 156n, 83n, 188n, 342n; Nigercongo-speaking Mbala, 82n; cf. Bantu – the prominent branch of Nigercongo south of the Equator  
 Nigercongo-speaking African, 83n  
 Nigeria(n(s)), 34, 163, 166, 173, 185  
 Night and Day, 24n  
*Nihongi*, 162  
 Nijmegen 2007 Symposium with Edith Turner, 117, 138n  
 Nijmegen University, 21n  
 Nijmegen, 39, 117, 130, 129n  
 Nile monitor, species of reptile, 91n

- Nile, Nile Delta, 83, 91  
 Nilosaharan and Khoisan, 188n  
 Nilosaharan, 156n  
 Nimrod, 175n  
 Nirvana, 149  
 Nisco, Research Institute for Social and Cultural Research (NISCO), Nijmegen, the Netherlands, 39  
 Njonjolo, stream and valley, Kaoma district, Zambia, 156n  
 Nkoya fieldwork, 203n  
 Nkoya Kazanga Festival, 182  
 Nkoya, 33, 38, 86, 123, 139, 143, 145-147, 149-150, 181-183, 186, 189, 202-203, 206, 212, 244, 254, 278-279, 305, 344, 31n, 62n, 130n, 135n, 148n, 156n, 158n, 160n, 187n, 203n-204n, 210n, 257n  
 Nkoyaland, 181, 31n  
 Nobel Prize, 121, 290n  
 Noether Theorem ('states that every differentiable symmetry of the action of a physical system with conservative forces has a corresponding conservation law' – *Wikipedia*), 80n  
 Nomkhubulwana, see Inkhosazana  
 Non-Being Into Being, 341  
 Non-Being, 294-296, 303, 340, 118n, 341n  
 Noosphere, 227n  
 North Africa, 95, 191n; – Rural, 201n  
 North Atlantic Modernity, 92  
 North Atlantic Post-modernity, 202  
 North Atlantic region, 29, 137, 202, 267, 316, 28n  
 North Atlantic Treaty Organization NATO, 262  
 North Atlantic, *cf.* Atlantic, Received North Atlantic World-view  
 North Holland, 305  
 North-eastern Asia, 187  
 North-Eastern Botswana, 276  
 Northern Rhodesia Army, 305  
 Northern Rhodesia, 115, 75n; *cf.* Zambia  
 Norway, Norwegian(s), 161n  
 Nostratic, 156, 156n; African phyla as Super-Nostratic, 156n; *cf.* Eurasianic (= Nostratic)  
 Nsanje, Malawi, 194  
 Nü Wa, 84n, 161n  
 Nuah, Biblical Flood (*q.v.*) hero, 182n  
 Nubia, 163  
 Nuclear physics, 209, 337  
 NW Europe, 104n  
 NWO, Nederlandse Wetenschaps Organisatie, Netherlands Foundation for Science  
 Nyambe, *cf.* Nyambi  
 Nyambi, 146, 149-150, 155-157, 163, 146n, 156n  
 Nyame, 146, 150; *cf.* Nyambi  
 Nyangabwe Hill, Francistown, Botswana, 280  
 Nyanja, 203  
 Nyirenda, Tomo, 183n; *cf.* Mwana Lesa  
*Nymphaeaceae*, waterlily family, 147n  
 Nzambi, *cf.* Nyambi  
 Oannes, 105, 175, 251, 84n, 158n  
 Occam's Razor (William of Occam), 212n  
 Occult and Magical Practices in the South, 249n  
 Oceania and Meso America, 146  
 Oceania and the New World, 37  
 Oceania(n), 37, 146-147, 150, 152, 166, 173-174, 176, 262, 338, 161n, 229n; American – – continuities, 161n  
 Oceanian and South Asian philology, 338  
*Odyssey* (Homer), 147n  
 Odysseus, 106  
 Oedipus, Greek mythical character, also eponymic mythical figure of the Oedipal complex of (male) intergenerational hatred, 57, 243n; – and Achnaton, 243n  
 Ogetsu-hime-no-kami, 147n  
 Ogun, 157n  
 Ojibways, USA, 152n  
*Old Testament*, 230, 325, 82n  
 Old World, 37, 156, 187, 148n  
 Old World, Western, 161n  
 Oligocene, 234  
 Olokun, 85  
 Olympian Zeus (*q.v.*), 160  
 Olympus, sacred mountain, Greece, 160  
 Omaha NE, USA, 234-235  
 Omega, see Point Omega  
 Omotic, 68, 156n  
 Omphalos Stone, 170  
*On the Edge of the Bush* (Turner & Turner), 115n, 128n  
 Oneida Stone, 166  
 Ophelia, Miss (fictional character in Beecher-Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, known for her fear of contagion), 74  
 Orcines, France, 322  
 Orestes, 294n  
 Orientalism, 212n  
*Origin* (Dan Brown), 307, 314-315, 315n, 319n  
 Osiris, 294n; – and Seth, 24n  
 Ossowiecki, Stefan, a paragnost, 245  
 Ostrich-shell, 83  
 Ottoman, 169  
 Ottodal, location in South Africa, 233  
*Our Drums Are Always On My Mind: Nkoya History, Culture, and Society* (van Binsbergen), 130n  
*Our Father*, Christian prayer, 199  
 Ouranos, 165  
 Out-of-Africa Exodus, 36, 84, 152, 154, 227, 99n, 324n  
 Ovimbundu of Angola, 158n  
 Pacific, 149, 152, 166, 165n  
 Palaeolithic Neanderthaloid, 169  
 Palaeolithic to Neolithic, 166-169, 171, 175, 304, 318-319  
 Palaeolithic, 99n, 142n, 291n; – of Southwest Asia, 142n  
 Palaeolithic, Lower, 82n  
*Pale Fire* (Nabokov), 208n, 345n-346n  
 Paleontology, 235  
 Palestine, Palestinian(s), 106, 253; *cf.* Syro-Palestine, Israel  
 Palladion, 165  
 Pandora's Box (van Binsbergen), 36, 85, 98, 176, 178, 99n, 161n  
 Pangu, 147  
 Panspermia Theory, 324, 345  
*Papyrus Chester Beatty*, 241  
*Papyrus of Anhai*, 101  
*Paradiso* (Dante), 343  
 Paranormal, 196, 267, 291  
 Paranthropology, 120n  
 Parapsychology, 120  
 Paris, capital of France, 223, 235  
 Paris, Trojan prince, 106; *cf.* Alexander  
*Pauly-Wissowa*, 250n  
 Peking Man, 244  
 Pelasgian Hypothesis, 37, 277n  
 Pelasgian, 37, 174, 184-185, 148n, 155n, 246n, 249n  
 Peloponnesus, 230  
 Pentateuch, 89n  
 Pentecost, 276  
 People's Republic of China, 244; *cf.* China  
 Pepo, 143  
 Permian, 326  
 Perpetually Oscillating Reality, 232n  
 Perseus, 165

- Persian Gulf, 180, 251, 229n  
 Persian, 278; *cf.* Iranian  
 Peru, 161n  
 Pessinunt Needle of Cybele, 165  
 Pessinunt, 163  
 Peter, disciple of Jesus, 154n  
 Petrus, 154n  
 Phallic, 169  
 Pharos, 106  
 PhD, 20, 38, 43, 45, 48-49, 51-52, 59, 64, 66, 71-72, 85-88, 91-92, 104, 107, 146, 196, 232, 248, 262, 337, 119n, 130n, 212n, 290n, 311n  
 Philippines, 153  
 Philo, 183  
 Philolaus, 165, 174  
 Philosophers Appropriating the New Physics, 260; *cf.* Sokal  
*Philosophiae naturalis...* (Newton), 288n  
 Philosophical Faculty, EUR (*q.v.*), 25, 34, 217, 267, 299n  
 Phoenicia(n(s)), 164, 229, 237n  
 Phoenician Dagon, 251  
 Phrygia(n(s)), 163  
 Physics, 283, 323, 336, 345, 347, 254n, 283n, 283n, 287n, 342n; – of Quantum Mechanics (*q.v.*) and the Theory of Relativity (*q.v.*), 19n  
 Physiology Department, Medical Faculty, Amsterdam University, 337  
 Phytogeography / -er(s), 150  
 Picardy / -ie, region in France, 234  
 Pierre, Christian given name, 154n; *cf.* Kepha, Peter  
 Pilttdown, England UK, fraudulent archaeological site, England, UK, 223, 229, 306, 323, 223n  
 Piri Reiss, 227  
 Planck's Constant, 255  
 Plato (*q.v.*), *cf.* Neo-Platonist  
 Pleiades, 157  
 Point Omega (Teilhard de Chardin), 231, 319-321, 323, 345, 239n, 319n  
 Poland, Polish, 153  
 Police Department, Selebi Phikwe, Botswana, 279  
 Poltergeist, 80  
 Polynesia(n(s)), 82n, 151n, 181n  
 Portugal, Portuguese, 144, 153, 142n, 182n  
 Poseidon, 165  
 Possession, 19n (defined), 117n, 134n-135n, 199n, 237n, 266n  
*Posthomerica*, 156n  
 Post-Modern Tum in anthropology, 87  
 Post-modern(ity, /-ist(s)), 26, 29, 55-56, 58, 88, 127, 132-133, 202, 253, 328, 332, 348, 351  
 Post-structuralist, 29, 261, 282, 294, 330, 38n; *cf.* Derrida, Guattari, Deleuze, Lyotard, Foucault  
 Potchefstroom University, South Africa, 237  
 PowerPoint, 310  
 Pre-Cambrian, 233, 236, 255, 303  
*Predicting the Future* (Lyons), 33  
 Prehistory, 186, 235  
 Presocratic philosophers, 20, 324, 335, 345, 218n  
 Priest of the Mwali High God, 157n, 270n  
 Primal Waters, 159, 165, 24n  
 Prime Minister, 314  
*Principia Mathematica* (Newton), 258  
*Principia Mathematica* (Whitehead & Russell), 212n  
*Proceedings of the Boston Society of Natural History*, 235  
 Professor of Intercultural Philosophy, 40  
 Professor of Religious Anthropology, 40  
 Professor of Spirituality, 40  
 Prometheus, 161, 24n  
 Proof Palpable of Immortality (Sargent), 80n  
 Prophet, 101, 349; *cf.* Simbinga, Lenshina, Mupumani  
 Propositions, 'Stellingen', series of short academic statements to accompany PhD thesis according to Dutch custom, 286  
 Protasevich, Belarus dissident, 2021 CE, 262n  
 Protestantism, 203n, 278n  
 Proteus, 105-106  
 Proto-African languages, 188n  
 Proto-Afroasiatic, 343n  
 Proto-Agaw, 145n  
 Proto-Amerind, 188n  
 Proto-Austrian, 188n  
 Proto-Bantu, 145  
 Proto-Khoisan, 85  
 Proto-Nigercongo, 85  
 Ptolemaic, relating to the descendants of Alexander the Great's general Ptolemaeus who became the ruler of Egypt, 149  
 Public Works Department PWD, Francistown, Botswana, 33, 280  
*Punctir-Kunst, Punktierkunst* (Abu Hali), 247, 248n  
 Puttapparthi, city in India, centre of the Sai Baba cult, 276  
 PWD, see Public Works Department  
*Pyramid Texts*, 160  
 Pyrrhonism, 121  
*Pyrus aucuparia*, see *Sorbus aucuparia*  
 Pythagoreans, 148n  
 Qadiriyya, Islamic brotherhood, 201  
 QFT, see Quantum Field Theory  
 QM, see Quantum Mechanics  
 Quantum Field Theory (QFT), 287n  
 Quantum Mechanics (QM), 59-60, 79, 121, 127, 197, 207, 209, 255, 268, 282-283, 287-289, 292-293, 303, 325, 341-342, 347, 19n, 237n, 254n, 283n, 287n;  
 Quantum Mechanics and the Theory of Relativity, 22, 219, 261, 282, 289, 297, 336, 346, 80n  
 Quantum Non-locality, 290n  
 Quantum Physics, 287-288, 291, 64n, 287n  
 Quantum Theory, 259  
 Quantum, 287-288, 311, 315, 80n, 287n  
*Quarterly Journal of the Geological Society of London*, 235  
 Queen Omphale, 164; *cf.* Achilles  
*Quest: an African Journal of Philosophy / Revue Africaine de Philosophie*, 25, 31, 34, 38  
 Qur'an, 257n  
 Rabbi, 314  
 Radboud University Nijmegen, 39-40, 113-114  
 Rain Person, 183; *cf.* Mvula  
 Rain, 183, 279, 156n  
 Rainbow Serpent in Africa, Australia and South America, 98; *cf.* Snake, Shihoka (= Snake)  
 Rapanui, Easter Island (*q.v.*), 173  
 Rationalistic, 124  
 Realism, 300  
 Reality of spirits, 22; *cf.* E. Tümer  
 Reality, Perpetually Oscillating, 232n  
 Rebekah, Biblical figure, 106  
 Received North Atlantic World-view, 219, 253, 268, 281-282, 288-291, 293, 297-298, 301  
 Re-connection of Heaven and Earth, 154, 162-163, 175, 179, 154n  
 Red Sea, 180, 229n  
 Reformed Church Theological College, Lusaka, Zambia, 203n  
 Registry of Births and Deaths, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 272n



- Reijnders, Mien, the present writer's maternal aunt and godmother, 265n
- Relativity, 121, 127, 303, 325, 127; *cf.* Theory of Relativity; Quantum Mechanics
- Relativity, Special and General Theory of -, 259
- Religion as a Social Construct* (van Binsbergen), 20, 331, 147n
- Religion, religious, 20, 46, 79, 93, 138, 153, 331, 342, 147n, 199n
- Renaissance, 50, 248
- Report of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Notices and Abstracts of Communications: Notices and Abstracts of Communications*, 235
- Research Institute for Religious Studies and Theology, 39
- Research Institute for Social and Cultural Research (NISCO), Nijmegen, the Netherlands, 39
- Researching Power and Identity in African State Formation* (Doornbos & van Binsbergen 2017), 32
- Revelation*, Bible book, 320, 148n, 319n
- Revue Archéologique*, 235
- Rhea, 165, 186
- Rhodesia, 101
- Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, 86, 115
- Rhodies, 104
- Rice Mother, 147
- RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER (Coleridge), 63n
- Ripples in the Water* (Lagrange), ps. of title and author, 71
- Ritual, 71, 341, 270n
- River temple, downtown Chiang Mai, Thailand, 65
- Riverside, a Francistown township, Botswana, 269n
- Robbedoes*, 221-222
- Rock art studies, 81n
- Rock, *cf.* Kepha, Peter, 154n
- Rockcastle County KE, 234
- Roman Catholic Mission of Mangango, 31n
- Roman Catholic(s, -ism), 23, 117, 153, 220, 223-224, 230, 256, 308, 314, 316-317, 319, 321, 323, 329, 239n, 265n, 312n
- Romance, cluster of languages, 225
- Romantic, given to idyllic illusions, 350
- Romanticism, intellectual and artistic movement in Europe following the Enlightenment, 86, 312n
- Rome, Roman, Ancient city state and empire, 31, 222, 261, 308e, 106n, 148n, 189n
- Romulus and Remus, 24n
- Rosh Hashanah, Hebrew / Jewish New Year, 89n
- Rotterdam Chair of the Foundations of Intercultural Philosophy, 38
- Rotterdam, the Netherlands, 25, 33, 113, 257, 25n, 29n, 32n, 207n, 212n, 285n, 315n
- Round pierced stones, 171
- Round stones, in the Palaeolithic, 168; in divination and ordeals, 169
- RST, see: Research Institute for Religious Studies and Theology
- Russia(n(s)), 115, 127, 136, 138, 136n, 156n, 345n-346n
- Russian Revolution, 323
- Rwanda(n(s)), 136n
- Sacrada Familia, cathedral, Barcelona, Spain, 314, 316; *cf.* Gaudi
- Sacred Heart of Jesus (SCJ), Roman Catholic monastic order, 224
- Sacrifice, 33n
- Sahara, 83, 151, 164, 174, 184, 148n, 249n; circum-Saharan West Africa, 168n
- Sahara, Central - , 105, 240, 105n
- Sahara-crossing Garamantes, 251
- Sai Baba, 276, 276n
- Saint-Jean de Livet, location, France, 234
- San Diego CA, USA, 238, 253
- San, 81-82, 85, 172, 81n-82n, 118n, 140n-141n; *cf.* Khoisan
- Sanchuniaton* (ed. Cory), 251n
- Sandawe, 172
- Sangoma in the Public Urban Space of Botswana, 269n
- Sangoma Science* and Bhaktivedanta, 282
- Sangoma Science* in Southern Africa, 219
- Sangoma Science*, 20-21, 25, 32, 43, 92, 207, 211, 218-219, 263-268, 273, 284, 299, 331, 336-337, 339, 349, 56n, 138n, 256n, 287n, 322n, 346n
- Sangoma(hood), 41, 63, 79, 269, 279, 337, 250n, 269n; - as Shamanism, 140n; - and Bituma, 148n; the *sangomas's* apparent capability at veridical divination, 284
- Sanhya, Indian school of thought, 218n
- Sanskrit, 238, 310
- Sanskritist, 141n
- Santa Fé Institute, 156n
- Santo Domingo, Caribbean, 167
- Santorini, 250n; *cf.* Thera
- SAP, Strong Anthropric Principle, 346; *cf.* WAP
- Sarah, Biblical figure, 106
- Sargon II, 189n
- Sargon, 101
- Satellite, a Francistown ward, 280
- Sathya Sai Baba (q.v.), 276
- Satterthwaite Annual Colloquium for African Religion and Ritual, 131
- Saturn, 251
- Sauroctonus*, 326
- Saviour, 149; *cf.* Heilbringer
- Saydiyya, valley in KHumiriyya, Tunisia, 201n
- Scandinavia(n(s)), 166, 161n
- Sceptical, 118n, 80n
- Scepticism, 121, 196; anti-Sceptical turn in anthropology, 87
- Schäume* (Sloterdijk), 305
- Schism and Continuity in an African Society* (V. Turner), 115
- Scholast, 106n
- Scholium, 258
- Schroedinger's Cat, 288
- Science of Life* (Sheldrake), 344
- Science, Scientific, Scientist(s), 25, 260-261, 235, 289, 328; *cf.* *Sangoma Science*
- Scientific American*, 233, 235
- Scientism, mistaking science for final and immutable truth, 314n; Scientism and Creationism, 314
- SCJ, Societas Cordis Jesu, Roman Catholic monastic order, 224
- Scotland, Scottish, Scotsman, 233, 307
- Scutosaurus*, 326
- Second Coming of Christ, 319n
- Selebi Phikwe, town in Botswana, 279-280
- Seleucid, 149
- Semele, 160
- Semes stones, Santo Domingo, Caribbean, 167
- Semitic, Semitist(s), 68, 98, 174, 185, 241, 156n; *cf.* Hebrew, Arabic, Gordon
- Separation of Heaven and Earth, 154-155, 158-159, 183, 241
- Separation of Land and Water, 155, 159
- Serbia(n), Serb(s), 136, 136n

- Servant of the Ancestors* (proposed title of a novel, van Binsbergen), 30, 56n
- Seth and Horus, 24n
- Seth, 146, 24n, 294n
- Seventh Day Adventist Church, 32n
- SFL, St Franciscus Liefdewerk, Roman Catholic urban mission in the Netherlands, 221
- Shade, John, fictional character in *Pale Fire* (Nabokov), 346n
- Shaitan, Arabic name of the devil, 164
- Shakespeare in Love* (motion picture), 306
- Shamanic Cosmos* (Mastromatteo & Rigopoulos), 141n
- Shamans, 141n-142n
- Shamash, 342
- Shango, 161-163, 161n
- Shanmukha, 305
- Shave, 143
- SHHA, Self-Help Housing Authority, Botswana
- Shihoka Nalinanga, Nkoya King, 160n
- Shikanda, Nkoya royal name derive from Hindi Skanda (*q.v.*)
- Shikanda, Queen, 305; *cf.* van Binsbergen, S., and Tatashikanda
- Shimbinga, see Simbinga
- Shintoism, 238
- Shire, 148
- Shiyowe, Dennis, research partner, 210n
- Shona, 75, 276, 74n
- Shumbayama, 103
- Sibanda, the present author's sangoma name in addition to Johannes, 269n
- Siberia(n(s)), 174, 141n
- Sicily, 218n
- Siderite iron, 186
- Sidi Mhammad, 38, 95, 199, 201n, 245n
- Sierra Nevada of California, 235
- Sigui, 163
- Simbinga, Shimbinga, 182, 147n-148n, 182n
- Sinocaucasian, Dene-Sinocaucasian, 187, 156n
- Sinology, Sinologist(s), 36, 68, 243, 31n; *cf.* Bernal, M., Terrien de Lacouperie
- Sinombe, father and daughter, protagonists in the Mwali cult, 205, 276
- Sinombe, Jane, typing student and ritual protagonist, Francistown, Botswana, 82n, 270n; *cf.* Mother of Life
- Sinombe, Reginald, Mwali High Priest at Nata, Botswana, 82n
- Sinotibetan, 187, 145n, 148n
- Sint Franciscus Liefdewerk, Roman Catholic urban social mission esp. in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 221
- Sirius, 251, 292
- Sisyphus, 164
- Site-and-Service, type of plot issued by the World-Bank-sponsored SHHA (Self-Help Housing Authority) project, Francistown, Botswana, final late 1980s CE, 269n
- Sithole, Albert, leader of the Masemanyenga *sangoma* lodge, Francistown, Botswana, 279, 206n
- Śiva, Indian primal god, 194, 158n
- Sjors en Sijmmie*, implicitly racialist popular youth literature, the Netherlands, mid-20<sup>th</sup> c. CE, 220
- Skanda, Indian war god, 157, 305, 157n; *cf.* Alexander, Shikanda, Kartikeya, Kumara, Murugan, Mahasena, Shanmukha and Subrahmanya
- Skeptic(al, -ic(s)), 121, 121, 196, 198, 207, 247, 267, 299n; *cf.* sceptical
- Skeptical Inquirer*, 121
- Skeptics Society and *Skeptical Magazine*, 121
- Sky God Nasinbatsi, 183
- Skyros, 106
- Slave Coast, 176
- Sleeping Child, 93n
- Snake Child of Drought, 160n; *cf.* Shihoka, Vrtra
- Snake, 90, 99
- Sobukwe, Robert, 108n
- Society of Psychical Research, 120
- Sokal Hoax, 261
- Soker-Osirir, 194
- Solar System, 326
- Solar, 313n, 319n
- Somerset East Extension, SHHA (*q.v.*) site-and-service area, Francistown, Botswana, 269n
- Somerset East, informal ward, Francistown, Botswana, 280, 281
- Sorbus aucuparia*, 162
- Sotho, 204n
- Source, 124, 173, 180, 246, 252, 305
- Sourcebook Project, 235
- South Africa(n(s)), 31, 50, 115, 175, 236, 238
- South Asian Religions, 238
- South Asian, 305, 338
- South Central Africa, 145; *cf.* Central Africa
- South East Asia, 150
- South, East, and South East Asian, 149
- Southern Africa(n(s)), 44, 48-49, 64, 67, 67-68, 71, 73-78, 81-85, 87, 90-91, 93-94, 97-98, 101, 103, 105-109, 113, 144, 152, 163, 166, 171-172, 174, 189, 195, 205, 217, 219, 237, 263, 266, 270, 276, 280-281, 296, 298, 304, 331, 343, 349, 321-331, 62n, 73n, 75n, 78n, 82n, 94n, 140n, 148n, 200n, 269n, 276n
- Southern African 'White', 77
- Southern African Hakata, 349
- Southern African Ink[h]osazana, 105
- Southern African Khoisan, 84
- Southern hemisphere, 141n
- Southwest Asia, 142n
- Soviet Union, 31, 136n
- Spain, future Queen of, 310; *cf.* Vidal
- Spain, Spanish, 153, 162, 187, 310, 314, 316
- Spanish Influenza, 305, 271n
- Special and General Theory of Relativity* (Einstein), 259
- Sphären* (Sloterdijk), 305
- Spielberg, Stephen, motion picture director, 328
- Spirit, 119, 136, 139, 209, 258, 318, 125n, 239n
- Spiritualiteit, heelmaking en transcendentie* (van Binsbergen), 211n
- Spirituality, 30, 119n, 211n
- Sri Lanka, 86, 140n
- Srimad-Bhagavatam*, 238n
- Staffordshire, England, 102
- Stone Men of Malekula* (Layard), 166
- Stone, the comparative mythology of -, 159-175
- Stones, the, NARCOM (*q.v.*), 154n, 171n
- Stone-tool, 167
- Stoning, 164
- Subrahmanya, 305
- sub-Saharan Africa and the New World in the Upper Palaeolithic of, 152
- sub-Saharan Africa, 68, 83-84, 147, 149-150, 152, 154, 159, 163, 167, 169, 174, 181, 183, 185, 187, 191, 195, 200, 244, 301, 336-337, 141n, 147n-148n, 174n, 183n, 187n, 249n

- Sudan, 168  
 Sudan, Southern, 170  
 Sumer(ian(s)), 187, 189-190, 228, 251, 151n, 158n, 189n-190n  
 Sun and Moon, 322, 241n  
 Sun, Solar, 152, 251, 283, 289, 305, 327, 342-343, 34, 148n, 327n; *cf.* Moon  
 Sunda Hypothesis (Stephen Oppenheimer), 37  
 Sunda, 149-151, 176, 180-181, 183, 244, 140n, 146n, 151n, 229n; - Indonesian, 229n; *cf.* Oppenheimer, Dick-Read  
 Superstition, 329  
 Swahili Coast, 254  
 Swahili, 145, 181, 182n  
 Swede(n), Swede(s), 345  
 Switzerland, Swiss, 234, 307  
 Swtkh / Seth, 146  
 Symposium Healing and Spirituality, Nijmegen, the Netherlands, 2007, 39, 113, 114, 117, 130, 210, 119n, 129n  
 Synchronicity, 64n  
 Synoptic Gospels, 101; *cf.* Bible, New Testament  
 Syracuse, 261  
 Syro-Palestine, 146, 252, 300, 228n, 277n  
 Table Mountain CA, 235  
 Tabula Bianchini, 248  
 Tainos, Caribbean ethnic group to meet Columbus, 176, 174n  
 Taiwan(ese), 229n  
*Talanta*, 229  
 Tallensi, 168  
 Tamil Nadu, 238, 158n  
 Tammuz, 183  
 Tanzania(n(s)), 172, 83n  
 Taoism, 238, 342  
 Tarkhunt, 161n  
 Taro, 149, 151  
 Tasmania(n(s)), 167, 235  
 Tassili n'Ajjer, region in the Sahara, 105  
 TataShikanda, Nkoya name of the present author, a teknonym (parent's name derive from the parent's child), *cf.* Shikanda, 305  
 Tati River, 270n  
 Tati River, North East district, Botswana, 279-280  
 Tati, former name for Francistown and North East district, Botswana, 280  
 Tautou, Audrey, 308  
 Teilhard de Chardin 's Point Omega, 319n  
 Teilhard in the Netherlands, 223  
 Telepathy, 60n, 94n  
 Telphusa, 165  
 Telugu < Dravidian, 276n  
 Templar Knights, 273n  
 Temple, Jerusalem, Syro-Palestine, in *New Testament* (q.v.) times, 222n  
 Tent of Assembly, Ancient Israelites, 194  
 Tep Tepi, 102n  
 Territory, *sc.* Northern Rhodesia / Zambia, 139  
 Teshub, 161n  
*Tetrabiblos* (Ptolemy), 248  
 Textual Formulations Today Might Be Projected Back Into the Remote Past, 292  
 Thai Buddhism, 238  
 Thailand, 65, 238  
 Thammuz, 146  
 Thanet Sand, geological formation, UK, 235  
*The Abyss*, motion picture, 106-107  
*The Berea Alumnus*, 235  
*The Birth of Christ* (Seymour), 289  
*The Bush Burnt the Stones Remain* (Rasing), 172  
*The Conscious Universe* (Hoyle; also Radin; also Gardner), 344  
*The Count of Montecristo* (Dumas), 221  
*The Da Vinci Code* (Brown), 307, 273n  
*The Descent of Inanna*, 140n  
*The Discovery of Heaven* (Mulisch), 159  
 The Earth as Primary, NARCOM (q.v.), 159  
*The Flight From Science and Reason* (Gross, Levitt & Lewis), 127  
*The Geologist*, 234-235  
*The Intelligent Universe* (Hoyle; and others), 81, 345, 342n  
*The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud), 79  
*The Journal of the History of Ideas*, 67  
*The Lion of Flanders*, *see De Leeuw van Vlaanderen*  
*The Lost Symbol* (Dan Brown), 308, 310  
*The Lost World* (Arthur Conan Doyle), 328; *cf.* Jurassic Park  
*The Mechanisation of the World Picture* (Dijksterhuis), 128  
*The Myth of the Eternal Return* (Nietzsche; also Eliade), 242  
*The Origin of Species* (Darwin), 230, 311  
*The Rake's Progress* (Hogarth), 25  
*The Revisor* (Gogol), 223  
*The Science Delusion* (Sheldrake), 197  
*The Song of Hiawatha* (Longfellow), 149n  
*The Teaching Stones* (Anonymous), 167  
*The Tempest* (Shakespeare), 306  
*The Templar Revelation* (Picknett & Prince), 273n  
 Theory of Relativity and of Quantum Mechanics, 250, 298  
 Theory of Relativity, 209, 254, 268, 289, 347, 19n  
 Theory of the Oscillating Reality, 199n  
 Theory of the Steady-State Universe, 345; *cf.* Hoyle, Wickamasinghe  
 Theosophy / -ist(s), 226  
 Thera, Aegean island, 250n; *cf.* Santorini  
 St Theresa, 278  
 Thor, 160, 166  
 Thunderstone, 160n  
 Tiamat, 147, 148n  
 Tibet, 163, 166, 174  
 Tigril Pileser III, 189n  
*Timaeus* (Plato), 226, 342  
 Time, 198, 347  
*Times* (London), 234  
*Timon of Athens* (Shakespeare), 346n  
 Timuna, King of the Mashasha Nkoya, † 1955 CE, alleged possession agent, 305, 271n  
 Titans, 146, 183  
 toe Hoerne, Skipper [captain], fictitious discoverer of the New World, 225, 306  
 Tortoises, 142n  
 Tower of Babel, 1) Biblical legendary building; 2) global etymological project and website, *cf.* Starostin & Starostin, 156n, 175n  
 Tower, mythical complex, 175n; *cf.* Flood  
*Trajectoires de Liberation en Afrique Noire* (Konings, van Binsbergen & Hesselning), *see* Festschrift Buijtenhuijs  
 Trance, 118n  
 Trance, Musical Directions Under - , 201  
 Transaction Press, 26n  
 Transcendence, 188  
 Transcendental, in philosophy, 296n

- Transcontinental, 174  
 Tree of Life, 313, 312n-313n  
 Treuen, Maria Theodora, 305  
 Triassic, 234  
 Trilobite Bed, 235  
*Tristia* (Ovid), 106n  
*Trouw*, 256  
 Troy, Trojan, Ancient city in NW Anatolia, 106, 163, 165, 222; cf. Homer  
 Truth and Reconciliation Commission, South Africa, 50  
 Truth, 278  
 Tswana, 204n, 249n  
 Tungus, 14n  
 Tunisia(n(s)), 38, 47, 86, 96, 140, 201, 238, 278, 304, 201n, 238n, 245n, 257n  
 Tunisia, North-western, 95, 174, 244, 278, 201n  
 Tuolumne Table Mt, California, USA, 234  
 Turkey, 273n  
 Turkish, Turkic, language cluster, 304  
 Turkmenian Republic, 234  
 Tut-<sup>c</sup>ankh-Amun, Ancient Egyptian king, 164  
 Tutsi, 136n  
 TV, television, 89, 264  
 Tweed, location in England, 234  
 UFO, Unidentified Flying Object, 237  
 Uganda(n(s)), 175n  
 Uganda, Eastern, 280n  
 UK, see United Kingdom (of Great-Britain and Northern Ireland)  
 Uke Mochi, 147n  
*Unbewusste* (Freud), 119  
*Uncle Tom's Cabin, or: Life Among the Lowly* (Beecher-Stowe), 74n  
 Unconscious, 119  
 Underworld, 159n  
 UNESCO (United Nations Educational and Scientific Commission), 138n  
 UNISA Press, publishing house in South Africa, 31  
 United Kingdom, UK, 48, 51, 101, 184, 314, 118n-119n, 223n  
 United States of America, see USA  
 Universe, 299 and *passim*  
 Universe's Learning Capability, 349  
 University Library, Amsterdam, 223  
 University of Zambia, 31n  
*Upanishads*, 218n  
 Upper Guinea Coast, 184  
 Upper Palaeolithic, 84, 154, 156, 167, 169, 176, 185, 187, 190, 229, 233, 330, 24n, 141n-142n, 148n, 156n, 218n, 327n, 342n; - of Central to East Asia, 188n  
 Uralic, 151n, 156n  
 Uranus, 322, 327  
 Urim and Thummim, 169  
 Urshanabis, 165; cf. Utnapishtim  
 USA, 115, 130, 136, 139, 152, 170, 174, 220, 238, 243, 261-262, 308, 314, 75n, 129n, 136n, 232n, 346n  
 USSR, 319n; cf. Russia  
 Utah USA, 233, 235  
 Utnapishtim, 165  
 Validity, 137, 253  
 van Binsbergen, Chiel (1992-1945), resistance hero and martyr, 39, 305, 272n  
 van Binsbergen, Dennis, 6, 33, 39  
 van Binsbergen, Hannah, 6, 33  
 van Binsbergen, Henk, the author's paternal grandfather allegedly featuring in ancestral possession, 305, 271n-272n  
 van Binsbergen, Nezmja, 6, 33, 38-39  
 van Binsbergen, Sarah, 6, 33, 305; cf. Shikanda  
 van Binsbergen, Vincent, 6, 33, 39, 307  
 van Binsbergen-Saegerman, Patricia, 33-34, 40  
 van den Bosch, Roderick, 34, 343, 337  
 van Leenberghe, 222  
 Van Rijn, Henny, and Wim van Binsbergen, 203n  
 Vanuatu, 166, 173  
*Varanus niloticus*, 91n  
 Vedic scriptures, India, 160n  
 Vedic, 253, 342, 218n  
 Venda, 171  
 Venus, 222, 289  
*Vera Historia* (Lucianus), 148n  
 Verheijen, 39  
 Veridical Divination, 284 and *passim*  
*Vicarious Reflections* (van Binsbergen), 20, 30, 25n, 28n  
 Vidal, Ambra, fictional character, Dan Brown's *Origin*, 314, 316  
*Vijftig Eeuwen Schrift* (Engelhart & Klein), 225  
 Vikings, 237n  
 Vilnius, 262n  
 Vinland, 229  
 Viracocha, 161n  
 Virgin Mary, 153, 199  
 Virgin Mother of the Water, 84  
 Virginia USA, 40  
 Virtuality, 76n  
 Vodun, 148n  
*Volkommene Geomantia* (Abu Halli), 247n  
 Voor Hen Die Vielen / To our war heroes, 272n  
*Vorrede* (Hegel), 318n  
 Vrtra, South Asian god of drought, 160-161, 164-165, 160n  
 Vulcan, 24n  
 Vulgate, standard early Christian translation of the Bible, 272n  
 Wagtails, 156  
 Walker's Quantum-Theory of veridical divination, 290n  
 Walt-Disney, 220  
 WAP, Weak Anthropic Principle, 346  
 War of Liberation, Zimbabwe, 102  
*War of the Worlds* (H.G. Wells), 221  
 Washington DC, USA, 308  
 Water, 105, 62n, 327n  
 Waterlooplein, flee market, Amsterdam, 225  
 Webster IO, USA, 234  
*Weekly World News*, 235  
 Weltseele, 342n  
 Wentzel-Kramers-Brillouin approximation, 'in mathematical physics, the WKB approximation or WKB method is a method for finding approximate solutions to linear differential equations with spatially varying coefficients' (*Wikipedia*), 80n  
*Wereldbeelden. wetenschappen en wij: Naar meer kritische, verantwoorde en open wetenschappen' / World-views, the sciences and us: Towards a more critical, more responsible and less entrenched conception of science, Centre Leo Apostel for the Philosophy of Science, Free University, Brussels. Belgium, a 2003 conference, 299, 299n*  
 West Africa, 98, 149, 176, 342, 249n  
 West Asia(n(s)), 105, 164, 230  
 West Asian Bronze-Age, 300  
 West Indies, 161; cf. Caribbean  
 Western Africa, 150  
 Western Cape, South Africa, 43-44  
 Western Eurasia, 105, 160, 166, 174  
 Western Europe, 150, 162, 187, 205, 238, 261, 189n  
 Western Grassfields, Cameroon, 180  
 Western Province, Zambia, 202,

- 156n, 203n  
 Western Zambia, 123, 155-156, 181, 202, 244, 279  
 Westerners, 28n  
*Whatsapp*, 310  
 Where P-there-not-not-P, 24; *cf.*  
 Doctrine of the Excluded Third  
 White Lotus cult, East Asia, 147n  
 'White', socially significant  
 somatic identity, 32, 44, 50, 52-54, 68, 75-77, 101, 108, 129-130, 139, 143, 181, 196, 260-261, 267, 75n-76n, 140n, 148n, 182n, 203n, 266n; - in South Central Africa, 182n; *cf.* Francistown  
 'White-Black', 130  
 'White' Dutch, 196  
 'White' Rhodesians / Zimbabwean, 92, 104  
 White-robed, 148n  
*Wikipedia*, 80n, 136n, 357n, 357n  
 Wilburton OK, USA, 234  
 Will, the human - , and  
 Paranormal Phenomena, 267  
 Winona meteorite, 166  
 Winston, fictional Artificial  
 Intelligence origin in Dan  
 Brown's *Origin*, 314-315, 315n  
 Winter Bros, stationers,  
 Amsterdam, the Netherlands,  
 225  
 WKB, see Wentzel-Kramers-  
 Brillouin  
*World as Will and Representation*  
 (Schopenhauer), 267  
 World Soul, 342-344  
 World System, 264  
 World War I, 305, 323, 271n  
 World War II, 206, 305, 314, 19n  
 World Wars, 223, 323, 350  
*Worlds Before Our Own* (Steiger),  
 235  
 World-views, 299n  
*Wasanna*, 204, 277, 89n; *cf.*  
 Hosanna  
 WOTRO, Wetenschappelijk  
 Onderzoek in de Tropen, a  
 division of NWO, *q.v.* 35  
 Wounded Knee as a Potentially  
 Transcontinental Expression, 174  
 Woytila Pope John Paul II, 255n  
 WvB, Wim van Binsbergen,  
*passim*  
 Xhosa, 90  
 Yahweh, 149n  
 Yaka, 55  
 Yam, 148n  
 YHWH, 150, 24n; introduction of  
 his cult into Palestine, 24n; *cf.*  
 God  
*Yi Jing*, 338, 349, 148n  
 Ymir, 147  
 Yoruba, 85, 161-162, 185, 193, 157n,  
 161n, 249n  
*YouTube*, 238  
 Yucahú, cassava god of the  
 Caribbean Taino, 176, 174n  
 Yucatan, 227n, 229n  
 Zambezi, major river in South  
 Central Africa, Upper - region,  
 145; *cf.* Congo-Zambezi  
 watershed,  
 Zambia(n(s)), 31, 35, 46-86, 86, 103,  
 110 113, 117, 129, 131, 138-140, 147,  
 149, 153, 163, 173, 176, 181-182, 192,  
 202, 212, 238, 262, 279, 75n-76n,  
 91n, 130n, 147n-148n, 156n, 159n,  
 203n-204n, 257n, 271n; -  
 Ministry of Health, 32n; *cf.*  
 University of -  
 Zambia, Central - , 183  
 Zambia, North-western, 116, 143,  
 146, 181, 192  
 Zambia, Western , 270n  
 Zambia, Western Central - , 181-  
 182  
 Zambian Cults of Affliction, 202  
 Zambian Ndembu, 147  
 Zambian Nkoya, 147, 181  
 Zar, 143, 193  
*Zea mays*, the maize plant, 176  
*Zechariah*, Bible book, 82n  
 Zembla, 'a distant northern land',  
 fictional kingdom in Nabokov's  
*Pale Fire*, 346n  
 Zen Buddhism, 28n  
 Zeus, 160, 164-165; *cf.* Jupiter  
 Zhoukoudian, 243  
 Zimbabwe(an(s)), 32-33, 49, 51-52,  
 64, 67, 75-76, 78, 92, 101-103, 171-  
 172, 174, 181, 276, 279-280, 74n,  
 102n, 172n  
 Zimbabwean 'Whites', 101  
 Zimbabwean War of Liberation,  
 102  
 Zion Christian Church, 74  
 Zionist, in Southern Africa:  
 adherents of a Zion Christian  
 Church, 72  
 Zoroaster, Zoroastrian, 246n  
 Zulu, 50, 61, 72, 90, 168  
 Zululand, 50  
 Zuiñi, 339



# Index of Authors

Here follows an exhaustive listing of all authors whose works are cited in the present book. Per entry, after surname (and occasionally initials; further *cf.* Bibliography, above) first appear the relevant main-text page numbers in ascending order, followed by the relevant footnote page numbers, likewise in ascending order – *e.g.*: Adams, D.Q., 1999, 355, 409, 418, 394n, – regardless of the actual footnote numbers. Surnames preceded by a prefix such as ‘de’, ‘von’, ‘van’ appear under that prefix. Co-authors if their number is in excess of two, are listed under the first author as declared in the title of the publication concerned. In this Index of Authors, year of publication, and author’s initials, have mainly been specified if the occurrence of several authors with the same surname creates a risk of confusion; further see the Bibliography. For author’s initials, also see the Bibliography. By and large, Ancient Greek names are rendered in their (awkward! and often substantially deviating from the Ancient original) conventionalised Latin / English form. Aware of the unavoidable pitfalls and inconsistencies of any orthographic and transliteration system, I have transliterated words and names in Arabic according to a hybrid system that strikes a compromise between the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* usage and common English orthography; consonant assimilation in the pronunciation (as distinct from writing) of the Arabic definite article *al-* is usually not reflected in the transliteration.

*q.v.* = ‘see specifically there’; *cf.* = ‘also see ....’; a lower-case ‘n’ written after a number indicates a footnote on a page of that number

- |   |   |                                    |
|---|---|------------------------------------|
| Aarne-Thompson A, 101, 161n                   | Allen 2002, 228   | Asad, 76n                          |
| Abu Hali ben Omar, 247                        | Allison, 173  | Ashley, 115n                       |
| Accardi & Regoli, 287                         | Alverny 1962, 250n  | Ashliman, 84n                      |
| Adams, 183n                                   | Al-Zanati, 248  | Ashymov, 166                       |
| Adelaar, 181                                  | Amselle, 180, 187, 264, 265n                                      | Asimov, Isaac, 315n, 319n          |
| Adenier, 288                                  | Anati, 166  | Aspect 1982, 263n                  |
| Adomo, 335                                    | Anati, 99n  | Aspect <i>et al.</i> , 263n        |
| Aerts, Dierk, 198n, 263n, 298n-<br>299n       | Anaxagoras, 324   | Assmann, 257n                      |
| Aerts, Dierk, <i>et al.</i> , 287, 196n, 299n | Anaximander, 306  | Atkins, 147                        |
| Aertsen, 296n                                 | Andersen, 105   | Atsma, 165, 157n, 161n             |
| Afshan 2001, 260n                             | Andrews, 163  | Audi 1988, 121n                    |
| Aitchison, 225                                | Anesaki, 147n   | Auerbach, 61n                      |
| Akesson, 164                                  | Annas & Barnes, 121n  | Augé, 46                           |
| Akrimi 2007, 168n                             | Apollodorus, 165; <i>cf.</i> Pseudo- –                            | St. Augustine, 242n, 347n          |
| Aldred, 127                                   | Archimedes, 261, 295, 305, 262n,<br>305n                          | Austin, 263n                       |
| Alexander & Coursey, 150                      | Ardant Du Picq, 258n  | Aya, 260n                          |
| Alexander 1991, 115n                          | Arefeva, 258n   | Ayala, 314                         |
| Alexander. Ray, 35                            | Aristotle, Aristotelian, 24, 297, 311,<br>329, 339-340, 345, 159n | Babcock & Mac Aloon, 115n          |
| Alfonso el-Sabio, 162                         | Armstrong, 164  | Babcock, 117n                      |
| Al-Ghazzali, 316                              | Arrhenius, 231, 324, 345  | Bacon, Francis, 329, Francis, 212n |
| Al-Hallaj, 278                                |   | Bacon, Roger, 256n                 |

- Badstuebner, 129  
 Baggally, 60n, 94n  
 Baghranian, 260n  
 Bahn, 82n  
 Baianu, 336  
 Baldwin & di Benedetto, 117n  
 Balfour, 164, 176, 161n  
 Ballou, 234-235  
 Bardon, 347n  
 Barley 1986, 55  
 Barnes *et al.*, 260n  
 Barnes, 90  
 Barrand, 336  
 Barreau, 261n  
 Barrett *et al.*, 288  
 Barrett, 128, 288  
 Barrow & Tipler, 346  
 Barrow, John D, 346, 348, 128n  
 Barthes, 88  
 Barton 1912, 164  
 Basilov, 141n  
 Bastide, 184n  
 Bastin, 259n  
 Batra 1996, 347n  
 Battistini, 256n  
 Baudrillard, 261  
 Bauval & Gilbert, 89n  
 Bauval, 89, 89n  
 Bax, 190n  
 Beauchamp, 166  
 Becq de Fouquières, 171n  
 Bednarik, 172-173, 175  
 Beecher-Stowe, Harriet, 74n  
 Beistegui, 335n  
 Bell, 163, 287, 263n  
 Ben-Ami, 167  
 Bender, 166  
 Benesh & Burian, 326  
 Benjamin, 257, 257n  
 Bent, 172, 172n  
 Berezkin, 163  
 Berglund, 67  
 Bergson, 261, 261n, 347n  
 Bernal *et al.*, 311n  
 Bernal, John Desmond, 311n  
 Bernal, Martin Gardiner, 36, 68, 106, 115, 243, 300, 324, 339, 146n, 161n, 243n, 250n, 311n-312n  
 Bemstein, 260n-261n  
 Berthelot, 246  
 Bessel, 251  
 Betz, 245n  
 Beuthan & Sandbothe, 257n  
 Bezemer, 185n  
 Bianchi, 180n  
 Bielefeldt 2000, 260n  
 Bierhorst, 146  
 Bijker, 260n  
 Bisschoff, 237  
 Bisson, 80n  
 Bittel, 277n  
 Black 1942, 167  
 Black, 244  
 Blackstone, 79  
 Blackwood, 148n  
 Blain, 202n  
 Blavatsky, 226n, 250n  
 Blazhek, Vaclav, 151n, 312n  
 Bleek, Wilhelm, 181  
 Blinkenberg, 160n  
 Blumenfeld, 348  
 Bodkin, 99  
 Boeck & Devisch, 115n  
 Boele van Hensbroek, 31, 136n  
 Boer 1986, 258n  
 Boghossian, 260n  
 Bohannan, 258n  
 Bohm & Aharonov, 198n, 263n  
 Bohm & Hiley, 287, 336, 198n, 259n  
 Bohm, 198n  
 Bohmet *al.*, 336  
 Bok, 267, 290n  
 Bomhard & Kerns, 156n  
 Boncelles, 234  
 Bond & Ciekawy, 124n  
 Bonnet, 164  
 Booth, 258n  
 Bord, 166-167  
 Bouché-Leclercq, 165, 169, 174, 184, 248, 249n, 290n  
 Bouchet, 156n  
 Boudewijnse, 115n  
 Boudillon, 72  
 Boudon & Clavelin, 260n  
 Boudon, 260n-261n  
 Boule, Marcellin, 223n  
 Bourdieu, 72, 258n  
 Boutens, 245n  
 Böwering, 257n  
 Braidotti, 260n  
 Braude, 60, 60n  
 Brendan, 237n  
 Brennan, 163  
 Brett, 166  
 Breuil, Henri, 166, 171, 234-236, 168n  
 Brewster, 233, 235  
 Brier, 60  
 Brodrick, 229n  
 Brown 1926, 148n  
 Brown 1991, 100  
 Brown, Dan, 21, 23, 30, 40, 212, 306-312, 314-315, 317-319, 321, 324, 328, 332, 273n, 315n, 319n  
 Brown, T., 249n  
 Bruner, 115n  
 Bruno, Giordano, 316  
 Buccallati, 140n  
 Budge, 82n, 89n  
 Buhl 1974, 164  
 Bühler, 168n  
 Buijtenhuijs, Robert, 32, 33, 35, 202n  
 Burian, Zdenek, 326  
 Burke, 163, 165-166  
 Burl, 166  
 Burnet, 165  
 Burroughs, 234-235  
 Burstein, 251n  
 Butler *et al.*, 348, 60n  
 Butler, Samuel, 325n  
 Bwalya, Ron, 31  
 Bwele 1991, 258n  
 Byaruhanga-Akiiki, 258n  
 Cadenat, 174n  
 Callewaert, 127  
 Calmers *et al.*, 335n  
 Calvin, 159n  
 Camus, 148n  
 Cann *et al.*, 324n  
 Cantrell, 227n, 250n  
 Capra & Zukavs, 336  
 Capra, 336, 283n  
 Carington, 60, 60n  
 Carnac Temple, 164  
 Camap, 128, 208  
 Carpenter, 60, 60n, 251n  
 Cartailhac, 229  
 Carter & Sheldrake, 197  
 Carter, Brandon, 347  
 Cartwright, 349  
 Carus, 163  
 Cassirer, 286, 261n, 283n, 286n-287n  
 Castaneda, 202n, 266n  
 Caton-Thompson, 172n  
 Cavalli-Sforza *et al.*, 83n  
 Cavalli-Sforza, 36, 324n  
 Cavendish *et al.*, 60n  
 Cesa 2001, 296n  
 Chamberlain 1982, 163  
 Chaó, 256n  
 Chatelain, 158n  
 Chauvin 1902, 164  
 Chen Ganglong, 185  
 Chemyakov, 347n  
 Chirikure & Pikirayi, 172n  
 Chitty, 182  
 Choisnard & Flambart, 249n  
 Choisnard, 249n  
 Chomsky, Noam, 228  
 Chrétien & Prunier, 61  
 Churchill, Winston, 314  
 Clark, 168n  
 Claus, Hugo, 286  
 Clavelin, 260n  
 Clifford & Marcus, 133  
 Clifford, 133, 251, 132n  
 Cline, 259n  
 Clinton 1996, 165



*Index of authors*

- Clottes & Lewis-Williams, 141n  
Cohen 1941, 288n  
Cohen 1993, 124n  
Coia *et al.*, 84, 140n  
Cole, 166  
Coleridge, 63n  
Comaroff & Comaroff, 142n  
Comaroff, 74, 142n  
Combs 1988, 24n  
Comte, 316, 212n  
Conan Doyle, Arthur, 328  
Conrad, Joseph, 115n  
Conscience, Henri, 222  
Cook 1914-1940, 160n  
Cook 1961, 24n  
Copans, 76n, 132n  
Coquery-Vidrovitch, Cathérine, 180, 265n  
Corliss, 234-235  
Cory, 158n, 250n-251n  
Costa de Beauregard, 257, 257n  
Cotterell, 161n, 180n  
Cotterell, 147  
Count 1952, 24n  
Couraud & Lorblanchet, 168n  
Coursey, 150  
Craig, 257, 257n  
Crawford, 60, 173  
Cremo & Thompson, 21-22, 24, 40, 212, 217-218, 220, 232-235, 237-238, 242, ,, 301-303, 305, 347, 237n  
Cremo, 232n  
Crevaux 1884, 184n  
Cross, 229  
Crowley, 183  
Cruciani *et al.*, 84, 140n  
Cuénot, 223-224, 313  
Cushing, Frank, 339  
Cyrano de Bergerac, 148n  
d'Errico *et al.*, 82n  
Dagboekenier, ps. of the journalist Henri Knap, 222n  
Dalberg, 165  
Dalmiya, 55n  
Dancy & Sosa, 121n  
Daniel 1975, 161n  
Dante Alighieri, 343  
Dart, 163, 171-172, 304n  
Darwin, 230, 232, 242, 311, 330, 344, 242n, 312n  
Dasgupta, 218n  
Dastur 1998, 347n  
David-Neel, A., 174n  
Davidson, 130, 22n  
Davies, 283n  
Davis, 128n  
Dawkins, 328-329  
Dawson & Smith Woodward, 223n  
de Laplace, 201, 258-259, 326-327, 201n, 258n  
de Groot, 212n, 260n  
de Hartog, Jan, 245n  
de Jong 1921, 1930, 249n  
de Jonge, Klaas, 35  
de Lange, D., 223  
de Liagre Böhl, 165; cf. Gilgamesh  
de Moor 1995, 164  
de Mul, Jos, 315n  
de Raedemaeker, 345n  
de Spinoza, 325, 342,  
Deflem 1991, 115n  
Dejeux, 256n  
Delafosse, 184n  
Delatte, 165, 174  
Delemont, 234  
Deleuze, 29, 88, 261, 29n, 157n, 335n, 347n  
Delfgaauw, 223  
Demeerseman, 166, 304n  
Democritus, 345, 345n  
Deren, 128  
Dermenghem, 166  
Derrida and Kierkegaard, 23  
Derrida, 88, 294, 330, 38n, 122n, 335n  
Descartes, 59, 119, 122, 285, 335, 55n, 294n  
Desmond 1982, 242n  
Devisch, Renaat / René ,, 34-35, 55  
Dewar, 312n  
DeWitt & Graham, 282n  
DeWitt, 283  
Dick-Read, 37, 149, 152, 151n, 229n  
Diels, 345n  
Dietz *et al.*, 59, 347n  
Dietz & Tenhaeff, 59  
Dietz, 59-60, 60n  
Dijksterhuis, 128  
Dinsmore, 160n  
Dirac, 259n  
Doane, 256n  
Dobbs, 288n  
Dobkin de Rios & Mundkur, 148n  
Dodd *et al.*, 324  
Dodds, 60n, 94n, 119n, 124n, 142n, 249n  
Dombrowski, 335n  
Donnelly, 226, 226n, 250n  
Donovan, 60, 60n  
Doornbos & van Binsbergen, 32  
Dorfman, 220  
Douglas, 202n  
Doutté, 166  
Dowson, 157n  
Drewal, A., 84n  
Driberg, 168  
Driesch, 59  
du Mesnil du Buisson 1966, 174n  
du Prel 1890, 250n  
Dubouloz-Laffin, 93n  
Ducie, 166, 174  
Duerr, 124n  
Duhem, 244n, 340n  
Duintjer, Otto, 211n, 296n  
Dumézil, 24n  
Duquette, 260n  
Durand, 164  
Dürkheim, 77, 79, 92, 96, 160, 228, 285, 296, 331, 82n, 93n, 117n, 199n, 212n, 286n;  
Dyke & Bardon, 347n  
Eade & Coleman, 115n  
Eade & Sallnow, 115n  
Earhart, 167  
Eaton, Arthur, 34, 337  
Eboussi-Boulaga, 142n  
Effingham 2013, 335n  
Ego n.d., 82n  
Ehnmark, 256n  
Ehrenreich, 149  
Einstein *et al.*, 198n, 263n  
Einstein, 115, 208, 259, 287-289, 325, 346, 259n, 286n-287n  
Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen, 197, 263, 287  
Eisenbud, 259n  
Elberfeld, 257n  
Elders, 347n  
Eliade, 218n, 242n  
Ellert, 171  
Ellwood, 98n  
Elstner *et al.*, 290n  
Emerson, 24n  
Empedocles, 119, 24n, 168n, 218n, 327n  
Engelhart & Klein, 225  
Engels, 311  
Enslin, 24n  
Epstein, Bill, 75n  
Eudoxos, 305  
Euripides, 106  
Evans, 150-151, 163  
Evans-Pritchards, 124n  
Everett Wheeler, 283  
Ewing, Katherine 1990, 86  
Eysenck & Nias, 248, 291, 290n  
Eysenck, 248, 339  
Fabian, 258n  
Fardon, Richard, 35, 119n  
Farmer 2010, 228  
Farnell, 165, 174  
Farrakhan, 136, 136n  
Farrington 1900, 163  
Fauth, 98, 164-165, 186, 174n  
Faye 1884, 326  
Fechner, 342  
Feder, 229  
Feigl *et al.*, 119n  
Ferguson, 127, 250n  
Ferreira, 287n

- Festugière, 250n  
 Fetter, 183n  
 Feuchtwang, 167  
 Fewkes, 167, 174n  
 Feyerabend, 249, 321, 339, 249n, 283n  
 Finnestad 1976, 150  
 Firth, 103  
 Fisher 1912, 234-235  
 Flambart, 249n  
 Fleischer, 168  
 Flew, 60, 60n  
 Flournoy, 17n  
 Fontaine, 248n  
 Fontanes, 135n  
 Fontenrose, 162  
 Forster, 178-179, 188, 154n  
 Fortes, 168, 78n, 311n  
 Foster, 144  
 Foucault, 29, 88, 127, 253, 345  
 Fraiberg, 350  
 Frazer, 165, 146n, 180n  
 Freud, 79, 98-100, 115, 122, 228, 242, 254, 290, 350, 119n, 254n; *cf. Die Traumdeutung; Unbewusste*  
 Frings 2013, 347n  
 Frobenius, 140, 143, 140n, 250n  
 Fromm, 250n  
 Frymer-Kensky, 168n  
 Fuccaro, 166  
 Fulda 2001, 119n, 239n  
 Fullagar *et al.*, 150  
 Furst 1977, 169  
 Gaisford, 226n  
 Galilei, 316, 327, 124n, 288n  
 Gamble, 163  
 Ganeri, 218n  
 Gardiner, Alan, 68, 89n, 146n  
 Gardner, 345, 242n, 342n  
 Garlake, 172n  
 Gascoigne, 288n  
 Gaudi, Antonio, 314  
 Gauquelin & Gauquelin, 249n  
 Gauquelin, 249, 291, 249n, 290n  
 Gay, 99, 167  
 Geertz, Clifford, 79, 120, 133-134, 93n  
 Geley & von Schrenck-Notzing, 80n, 118n  
 Gell, 258n  
 Geschiere, Peter, 33, 35, 72, 247, 136n, 212n, 266n; & van Binsbergen, 46  
 Gettier, 263n  
 Ghirardi & Romano, 287  
 Gilbert & Cotterrell, 227n, 290n  
 Gilbert, 89  
 Gimbutas, 167, 172, 229, 229n  
 Ginzburg, 84n  
 Girard, René, 332, 61n  
 Glass-Coffin 1994, 127  
 Glenday, 266n  
 Gluckman, Max, 35, 107, 115, 124n  
 Glymour & Stalkers, 247  
 Gobert, 304  
 Gödel, 261, 294  
 Gogol, 223  
 Goldstein, 287  
 Goodman, 118n  
 Goodwin, 171, 304n  
 Goote & Wielemaker, 194  
 Gordon, 106, 229  
 Gore, 251  
 Goren-Inbar & Peltz, 173  
 Görg, 24n, 250n  
 Göngemanns 2000, 250n  
 Goss 1977, 163  
 Gould, 241  
 Graham, Neil, & Paul Davies, 283  
 Grandy, 22n  
 Grattan-Guinness, 60, 121  
 Graves, 162, 165, 174  
 Griaule & Dieterlen, 251, 183n  
 Griaule, 132, 132n  
 Gribbin, 288, 259n, 283n  
 Griffin 1998, 119n  
 Griffiths, 24n, 180n, 251n  
 Grim, 247, 266n  
 Grimes, 218n  
 Grindal, 121n  
 Grosman *et al.*, 141n-142n  
 Grosman, 141n  
 Gross, Levitt & Lewis, 127  
 Grosz 2017, 59  
 Grottanelli, 149  
 Gruenthamer, 256n  
 Gruet, 304  
 Grunne, 166  
 Guattari, 88, 261, 294, 237n, 29n  
 Gudeman & Rivera, 67n  
 Guenther, 118n  
 Guinefort, 101  
 Gunne 1988, 163  
 Gusinde & Chiye Sano, 167  
 Gusinde, 24n  
 Guthrie, 145, 180  
 Haberland, 163, 166, 339  
 Hacking 2002, 335n  
 Hager 2001, 119, 122n  
 Haldane, 324, 311n  
 Hall, 172n  
 Hammer *et al.*, 84, 140n  
 Hancock & Bauval, 89n  
 Hancock *et al.*, 89n  
 Hancock, 89, 89n  
 Hanegraaff, 127  
 Hannigs, 89n  
 Hansel 1969, 60n, 207n  
 Hapgood, 227, 243  
 Hardie, 84n  
 Harding, Sandra, 30, 125, 261-262, 267, 125n, 244n, 261n, 340n  
 Hardy, 287  
 Hare 1995-2007, 226n  
 Harner, 82n  
 Harrer, 163, 166  
 Harris, 260n-261n  
 Hart & Fry, 173  
 Hart 1998, 119n  
 Hartmann, Nicolai, 335  
 Harva, 141n  
 Hastings 1909-1921, 163, 119n, 82n, 84n, 161n, 168n, 184n, 255n, 347n  
 Hatt 1951, 146  
 Hawking, 346, 327n  
 Hays-Gilpin, 167  
 Headland *et al.*, 47, 125n  
 Heald, 280n  
 Hedin, 174n  
 Hegel, 239, 242, 288, 318, 335, 342, 347, 29n, 119n, 125n, 239n, 318n-319n  
 Heiberg, 67  
 Heidegger, 257, 335, 119n, 239n, 347n  
 Heidel 1942, 150  
 Heil & Heil, 335n  
 Heimpel, 168n  
 Heisenberg, 283n  
 Helck, 251n  
 Hempel, 124n  
 Henshaw, 152, 163, 166  
 Henshilwood *et al.*, 168  
 Herion 1995, 24n  
 Hermann, 140n, 149n  
 Hermans, 220n, 286n, 347n  
 Herodotus, 106, 230, 175n  
 Herskovits & Herskovits, 184n  
 Herskovits, 184n, 260n  
 Hesiod, 168, 226, 24n, 226n  
 Hesselung, 33  
 Heyerdahl, Thor, 161n  
 Hickerson 1962, 152n  
 Higgs, 289  
 Hildegard von Bingen, 278  
 Hindley, 149n  
 Hinke, 164  
 Hinske, 296n  
 Hirst, 91  
 Hirzel, 164  
 Hitchcock, 229, 82n  
 Hitching, 163  
 Hitti 1946, 164  
 Hoernlé, 82n  
 Hoff 1997, 82n  
 Holas, 184n  
 Hollis & Lukes, 260n  
 Hollis, 168  
 Holmberg, 141n; *cf. Harva*  
 Höltker, 258n

- Homer, 31, 106, 168, 106n, 147n, 156n  
Honnfelder & Moehle, 296n  
Hooke, 149  
Hopfner, 250n  
Hom 2009, 60n  
Homeffer, 242n  
Homung, 285n  
Horwitz, 204n  
Hountondji, 46, 67n  
Houtsma, 164  
Hoyle, 81, 231, 255, 324, 344, 342n  
Hromnik, 67  
Hrozny, 339, 228n  
Hubert, 250n  
Huffman, 172n  
Hühn & Waschkiel, 257n  
Hultkrantz, 152  
Hume, 103, 256n, 124n, 256n  
Hunt & McMahon, 127  
Hunter, Jack, 120n  
Huntingford, 163, 174  
Husserl, 347n  
Hutton, 166  
Huxley, 253, 311, 122n  
Huygens, 209, 330  
Hyginus, 175n  
Ibn al-Kalbi, 168  
Ibn Battuta, 182  
Ibn KHalidun, 245, 248, 349, 245n-246n  
Imbelloni A, 166, 165n  
Irigaray, 261  
Isaak, 152n, 175n  
Isaiah, 82n  
Ishola 1983, 266n  
Isidore of Sevilla, 248n  
Jackson 1984, 167  
Jackson, Michael, 1989, 131, 131n, 335n  
Jacobsen, 140n, 146n, 180n  
Jacobson, 24n  
Jacobson-Widding, 277n  
Jacoby, 251n  
Jacottet, 156, 156n  
James 1890, 122  
James 1966, 164, 313n  
Janich, 257n  
Janzen, 142n  
Jaulin, 131, 131n, 266n  
Jeans, 283n, 319n  
Jeffreys, 148-149, 152  
Jennwein *et al.*, 288  
Jensen & Niggemeyer, 146  
Jensen 1936, 146-147, 163, 202n  
Jia & Li, ,, 166  
Jimison, 233, 235-237  
John of the Cross, 278  
Johnson 1987, 59  
Johnson 2002, 151  
Jongmans, Douwe, 35  
Jules-Rosette, 115n, 142n  
Julius Caesar, 101  
Jung & Pauli, 64n  
Jung & Strauß, 290n  
Jung, Carl Gustav, 48, 64, 81, 89, 92, 98-101, 228, 248, 290, 64n, 99n, 134n, 289n-290n  
Kadish 1993, 257n  
Kaiser & Shevoroshin, 156n  
Kammerzell, 312n  
Kamuwanga 2007, 158n  
Kandamakumbo 1938, 168n  
Kant, Immanuel, 122, 208, 257, 284-285, 295-296, 329, 332, 335, 349, 25n, 55n, 88n, 117n, 122n-124n, 189n, 257n, 296n, 313n  
Kapferer, Bruce, 115n, 124n, 134n  
Karst, Joseph, 37, 140, 106n  
Kashikar, 218n  
Kaulback, 258n  
Kees 1923-24, 24n  
Keith, 157n, 218n  
Kekulé, 245, 245n  
Kelly & Locke, 60n  
Kelly 1982, 249, 260n  
Kendall, 82n  
Kennedy 2003, 197  
Kennedy, 60n, 137n  
Kent 2010, 283  
Kepler, Johannes, 252, 124n, 290n  
Kerner & Schelling, 117n  
Kessler, 257n  
Kierkegaard, 23  
Kiernan, 72, 266n  
Kiesewetter, 249n-250n  
Kiess *et al.*, 287  
Kimmerle & Oosterling, 25n  
Kimmerle, 25n, 29n  
Kingsley, 119n  
Kirchner, 141n  
Kitchatinov & Rüdiger, 290n  
Klein 1981, 121n  
Kloos 1947, 222n  
Knap, Henri, 222n  
Köbben, André, 35  
Kock, 149n  
Koenig, 296n  
Koestler, 288n  
Köhler 1975, 185  
Kohler 1976, 166  
Konings, 33  
Krijnen, Ellen, 33  
Krippner 1978, 60n  
Kristeva, 28, 261  
Kuhlmann *et al.*, 336  
Kühn, Herbert, 1955, 167, 172  
Kuhn, Thomas, 1962, 59, 260, 232n, 260n  
Kumar *et al.*, 175  
Kumar, 175  
Kuntz & Kuntz, 314n  
Kutschera & Niklas, 330  
Kwant, 319n  
Kwiat *et al.*, 287  
Lacan, 261  
Lagercrantz, 163, 171  
Lagrange, Charles, ps., *sangoma* researcher, 71, 78, 81, 86-89, 91-92, 945, 101-103, 108-110, 74n, 78n, 80n, 82n, 87n, 108n  
Lalèyé, 258n  
Lanczkowski, 149n  
Lange, Dierk, 185, 342, 148n, 249n, 277n  
Langen 1963, 142n  
Langer, 286, 286n-287n  
Langlet & Monnoyer, 335n  
Laplace, see de Laplace  
Latour, 261, 350  
Laudan, 247n  
Laufer, 149  
Laurent 2009, 347n  
Law 1967, 251  
Lawuyi 1998, 82n  
Layard, 166, 173  
Leclerc, 76n  
Lecouteux, 165  
Lee 1982, 171  
Lee 1999, 151  
Lefkowitz & McLean Rogers, 243  
Leibniz, 348  
Leinsle, 296n  
Lembeck, 296n  
Lenin, 311n  
Lentz & Sturm, 163  
Lentz, 163  
Leonardo, 273n  
Lepore, 130, 22n  
Lermontov, 310  
Lettens, 132n  
Leucippus, 345, 345n  
Levinas, 335, 24n, 185n  
Lévi-Strauss, 55, 137, 166, 212n, 226n  
Levitt & Lewis, 127  
Lewis 1971, 166  
Lewis 2016, 336  
Lewis, 141n  
Lewis-Williams *et al.*, 82n  
Lewis-Williams, 167  
Lhote, 166, 174, 105n, 174n  
Liddell *et al.*, 306  
Liebrecht 1879, 166  
Lindblom, 152  
Lindquist, 202n  
Lips 1959-1960, 149n  
Locke, 149n  
Loftus 1979, 121n  
Long 1977, 60n

- Longfellow, 149n  
 Lönnrot, 157n  
 Lorentz, 289  
 Lovejoy, 314n  
 Lovelock, 81, 344  
 Löwith, 347, 242n  
 Lubbe, 257n  
 Lucianus, 148n  
 Luckenbill, 164  
 Luckhurst, 60n, 94n  
 Ludwig 1978, 60  
 Lukacs, 335n  
 Luomala 1940, 152  
 Lyons 1990, 33  
 Lyotard, 88, 132  
 Macdonald, 181n  
 MacGaffey, 163, 117n  
 Mackenzie, 146  
 Mackintosh, 156n  
 MacLennan, 142n  
 Madden, John, 306  
 Main 2004, 64n  
 Malapa *et al.*, 150  
 Malin 2003, 288  
 Malinowski, 56, 132, 119n, 132n  
 Malpas, 131, 22n  
 Mangelsdorf & Oliver, 149  
 Mannheim, 36  
 Manning, 250n  
 Mansfield, 289n  
 Manuel 1963, 288n  
 Marcus, 76n  
 Marcuse & Benhabib, 347  
 Maret, 162, 165  
 Marshall, 167  
 Marsman & Vestdijk, 80n, 208n  
 Marwitz, 174n  
 Marx, Karl, Marxism, Marxist(s),  
     33, 35-36, 115, 329, 212n, 272n, 311n  
 Massignon, 278  
 Mastromatteo & Rigopoulos, 141n  
 Matthews 1964, 171  
 Maudlin, 288, 283n  
 Mauduit, 256n  
 Maula 1975 f., 305  
 Maunder, 164  
 Maunsell, 166  
 Mauny, 168n  
 Mauss, 157  
 Maxwell, 289  
 McCall, 163  
 McCarter, 168n  
 McGinn, 131, 22n  
 McLure, 347n  
 McNamara, 256n  
 Mead 1937, 166  
 Mead, 161n  
 Meussen, 145, 180  
 Megaw 1960, 82n  
 Megged 1995, 166  
 Meister 1968, 233, 235  
 Mele & Rawling, 125n  
 Mellaart, 229  
 Melleville, 234-235  
 Menzies, 161n  
 Merian 1678, 246  
 Mermin, 288, 254n, 319n  
 Meston 1934, 167  
 Metraux, 24n, 149n  
 Meyer, 84n  
 Middleton, John, with Joseph  
     Miller, 34  
 Milburn, 168n  
 Miller & Urey, 311, 312n  
 Miller, 311-312, 324  
 Miller, Arthur, 64n  
 Miller, Cox, 89n  
 Mills 1959, 323  
 Minar 1963, 218n  
 Minkowski, 289  
 Mitchell, Clyde, 75n  
 Mittmann, 24n  
 Mohan 1987, 98  
 Montani & Cianfrani, 80n  
 Montet, 166, 304n  
 Moody, 290n  
 Mookerji, 89  
 Moore & Saunders, 266n  
 Morris, 83n, 153n  
 Morrow & Volkwana, 82n  
 Mortillet, 234-235  
 Moses, 101, 164  
 Moshinsky, 163  
 Mosima, Pius, 6, 38, 211n, 324n  
 Moss & Butler, 60, 197, 207n  
 Moss, 60n  
 Mudimbe, 66, 88, 107, 66n, 76n,  
     183n, 258n, 294n  
 Mueller & Fine, 256n  
 Muhly, 339  
 Mulago gwa Cikala  
     Musharhamina, 142n  
 Mulisch, 159  
 Mullen, 90  
 Munn, 258n  
 Munro, 229  
 Murphy, 60n  
 Murray, 84n, 171n  
 Musambachime, 90  
 Myers, 94n  
 Nabokov, Vladimir, 115, 208n,  
     345n-346n; *cf.* Russian  
 Nadeau & Kafatos, 287  
 Nadel, 119n  
 Nagano & Ihari, 166  
 National Academy of Sciences, *see*  
     Ayala  
 Nchabeleng, Johnny, 130n  
 Needham, Joseph, 67, 167  
 Neugebauer, 67  
 Newton, 124, 127, 208-209, 257-258,  
     288-289, 298, 303, 325, 327, 330,  
     338, 345, 124n, 288n, 327n  
 Ngubane, 59  
 Nichols, 115n  
 Nicolic 2007, 287n  
 Niehaus, 266n  
 Nietzsche, 22, 328-329, 242n  
 Nilsson, 193  
 Niquet, 296n  
 Nishida Kitaro, 23  
 Nolan 1983, 166  
 Noll, Richard, 201n, 98n, 290n  
 Note, Nicole, 298n  
 Oaklander, 347n  
 Obenga, 258n  
 Occam, William of, 212n  
 Oesterreich 1930, 117n  
 Okeke 1973, 258n  
 Olden, 115n, 117n  
 Oldenburg, 180n  
 Oldewelt, 55n, 212n  
 Olivier de Sardan, 131n, 266n  
 Ollig, 296n  
 Olyan 1996, 164  
 Oosterling, 25n, 123n  
 Oparin, 311, 324  
 Opler, 187n  
 Oppenheimer, 37, 140n, 154n, 229n  
 Orliac, 168n  
 Orrells *et al.*, 243  
 Oruka, 163  
 Osha with van Binsbergen, 38,  
     137n  
 Osha, 30, 34, 38, 324n  
 Osiris, 146, 164, 183, 185, 251  
 Osis & Bokert, 60, 60n  
 Oteri 1975, 197  
 Otterspeer, 220n  
 Otto 1933, 251n  
 Otto 1966, 180n  
 Ouseley, 60n  
 Ouzman, 81n  
 Ovid, Ovidius, 31, 106n, 147n, 175n  
 Owen, 168n  
 Palmer 1932, 166  
 Palmer 1971, 60, 60n  
 Palmer 1994, 348  
 Pappas 1978, 121n  
 Parfitt, 185  
 Parke, 160n  
 Parkinson, 166  
 Parmenides, 335  
 Parpola, 313n  
 Parratt, 258n  
 Pauli, 92, 290, 64n  
 Paulme, 166, 168  
 Pauly-Wissowa, 164, 250n  
 Pausanias, 165, 175n  
 Pekeur, 84n

- Pels, 46  
 Penard, 149n  
 Pennick, 163, 171n  
 Perdue & Turner, 117n  
 Perelman, 137n  
 Perrot & Madjidzadeh, 229  
 Perry, William, 149n  
 Pétrement, 119n  
 Philo, 24n  
 Philostatus Jr., 106n  
 Picard, 148n  
 Picknett & Prince, 250n, 273n  
 Pickrell *et al.*, 83n  
 Pietsch, 312n  
 Piggott, 222n  
 Pingree, 67, 248, 218n  
 Planck, 255, 255n  
 Plato, 123, 226, 285, 305-306, 340, 342, 61n, 122n-124n, 157n, 171n, 212n, 226n, 250n; – and de Spinoza, 239n  
 Pliny, 311  
 Plotinus, 285, 325, 342  
 Plutarch, 101, 169, 146n  
 Poggi, 296n  
 Poincaré, 289  
 Poortman, 119, 318n  
 Pope, 135n  
 Popkin, 121n  
 Popper, 29, 247, 119n, 121n, 124n, 212n, 283n, 339n  
 Porro 2001, 257n  
 Porterfield, 141n  
 Powell-Cotton, 163, 173  
 Prabhup, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhup, 239, 238n  
 Price, 141n  
 Prins 1996, 82n  
 Pseudo-Apollodorus, 106n, 157n  
 Ptolemy, 248, 290n  
 Putnam, 335-336, 121n, 256n  
 Pythagoras, 119, 285  
 Quevado 1891, 174n  
 Quine, 335, 244n, 340n  
 Quinn 1971, 171n  
 Quintus Smyrnaeus, 156n  
 Quispel, 311, 250n  
 Radhakrishnan, 218n  
 Radin & Nelson, 81  
 Radin, 81  
 Ramage 1978, 250n  
 Ramaswamy, 250n  
 Ranger, 35, 46, 183n  
 Rank, 134n  
 Rao, 60, 60n  
 Rasing, Thera, 174, 204n  
 Rattray, 184n  
 Ray, Matthew Alun., 329  
 Read 1957, 245n  
 Regardie, 314n  
 Reichelt, 161  
 Reichenbach, 257, 257n, 261n  
 Reinach, Solomon, 229, 338, 229n  
 Reiner, 169  
 Reinwald, 235  
 Reis, 46  
 Reitzenstein, 256n  
 Relethford, John H., 327n  
 Rhine & Pratt, 60n  
 Rhine *et al.*, 60n  
 Rhine, 60n  
 Ricoeur, Paul, 134  
 Rieth 1967, 229  
 Risjord, 124n  
 Ritter *et al.* 2001, 255n, 296n, 335n  
 Ritter, 140n, 257n  
 Rivet, 151n  
 Robertson Smith, 117, 24n  
 Rodney, 184  
 Rodrigues de Areia, 159n  
 Rohrlach, 288  
 Rollefson, 171  
 Rolleston, 294n  
 Rorty, 348  
 Roscher, 165  
 Rose 1935, 165, 174n  
 Rosen, 121n  
 Rothe, 239n  
 Rothman, 60n  
 Rougie & Masius, 261n  
 Rouse, 176, 174n  
 Rousseau, 86  
 Rowlands, 181n  
 Rusch, 234-235  
 Ruse 2008, 314  
 Ruska, 250n  
 Russell, 348, 314n  
 Rüstow 1910, 294  
 Rutot 1907, 234-235  
 Ryle, 256n  
 Sagan, 339n  
 Salami 1992, 119n  
 Salazar, 38, 137n  
 Salazar, Osha & van Binsbergen, 137n  
 Sallnow, 117n  
 Salminen 2002, 312n  
 Samanta 1998, 256n  
 Sanders 2002, 166  
 Sanson 2011, 1272011, 202n  
 Santillana & von Dechend, 165  
 Santini 2007, 287  
 Santoro 2007, 151  
 Santos-Granero, 167  
 Sargent, 80n  
 Sartre, 55n, 212n, 242n  
 Saunders, 180n  
 Savage 1903, 95n  
 Sawyerr, 241n  
 Schadewald, 339n  
 Schapera, 90, 166, 241n  
 Scheler, 347n  
 Schmeidler & Murphy, 60, 60n  
 Schmeidler, 60, 60n  
 Schmidt & Huskinson, 117n  
 Schmidt, 174n  
 Schmitt, 257n  
 Schnabel, 251n  
 Schoffeleers, 35, 148, 183, 256, 241n, 115n, 142n, 185n  
 Schoolcraft, 149n  
 Schopenhauer, 267, 329  
 Schrödinger, 288, 80n  
 Schroeder, 256n  
 Scott 2004, 314  
 Scott-Elliott 1896-1930, 250n  
 Seckbach, 319n  
 Segal, 98n  
 Segy, 163  
 Seligmann, 246  
 Sellon 1865, 165  
 Sergi, 251  
 Sextus Empiricus, 121, 121n  
 Seymour 1988 etc., 248, 291, 290n  
 Shakespeare, 101, 306, 346n  
 Sharman *et al.*, 336  
 Sheets-Johnstone, 119n  
 Sheldrake, 197, 344, 325n  
 Sheppard, 245n  
 Shermer, 339n  
 Shorter 1972, 1977, 115n, 142n  
 Sichone, 46  
 Siecke, 146  
 Siegel, 261n  
 Simmons, 168n  
 Simons, Jack, & Ray Alexander, 30, 35  
 Simons, Jack, 203n  
 Simonse, Simon, 35, 166, 170  
 Skinner, 171n  
 Skybreak 2006, 309  
 Sloterdijk, Peter, 305, 305n  
 Smith & Dale, 183  
 Smith & Mann, 287  
 Smith & Moddel, 60n  
 Smith 1922, 164  
 Smith 1929, 184  
 Smith 1969, 163  
 Smith, 161n  
 Smith, Seamus Mbedzi, ps., 43, 71, 110  
 Socrates, 119, 122, 55n, 122n, 258n  
 Sokal & Bricmont, 127, 261, 287, 237n, 283n  
 Sokal, 127, 261, 282, 293, 237n, 283n  
 Solecki & Solecki, 164  
 Spalding, 248n  
 Spargo 1934, 250n  
 Speaight, 223n

- Spence, 250n  
 Spencer, 223n  
 Sperber, 128n  
 Spina 1992, 24n  
 Spinoza, see de Spinozoa  
 Spire 1905, 166  
 St John 2001, 115n, 118n  
 St Paul, 207  
 Stambaugh, 242n  
 Starostin & Starostin, 145n, 148n, 169n, 343n  
 Starr, 140n  
 Statius, 106n  
 Staudacher, 154  
 Stayt, 171  
 Steffen, 24n, 185n  
 Steiger 1979, 234, 235  
 Steigmann, Gary, 344  
 Steiner, 250n  
 Stekel, 350  
 Stockton 1974, 164  
 Stoller & Olkes, 131n, 266n  
 Stoller, Paul, 131, 131n  
 Stone 2012, 117n  
 Stove, 339n  
 Strawson, 121n  
 Stricker, 185, 285n  
 Stringer & Gamble, 169  
 Strouhal, 194, 90n  
 Stucken, 151n  
 Subbarayappa 1966, 218n  
 Suhr 1967, 174n  
 Summers, 173  
 Sundkler, Bengt, 72  
 Suzuki, 28n  
 Svozil, 283n  
 Swaab, 206n, 278n  
 Swan 1998, 117n  
 Swedenborg, Emanuel, 88n, 122n  
 Sweetman 2015, 314  
 Swiatkowski, 335n  
 Swiny 1980, 164, 171  
 Tablino, 258n  
 Taddonio, 60, 60n  
 Talbot 1926, 166  
 Talbot 1980, 243  
 Talley 2000, 348  
 Tamm *et al.*, 186, 233  
 Tamminen, 157n  
 Tangan 1991, 163  
 Taussig, 61, 46  
 Tawney, 136n  
 Tedlock, 180n  
 Teichmann, 305  
 Teilhard de Chardin SJ, 23, 30, 212, 223-224, 227, 230-232, 244, 307, 312-313, 317-324, 345, 154n, 212n, 223n, 227n, 232n, 239n, 312n, 318n-319n, 322n-323n  
 Temple, 251, 338, 183n  
 ten Raai 1966, 172  
 Tenhaeff, 60, 60n  
 Ter Haar, 46  
 Teske 1996, 347n  
 Tester, 248, 248n  
 Theunissen, 257n  
 Thiel, 156  
 Thoden van Velzen & van Wetering, 193, 184n  
 Thoden van Velzen, Bonno, 35, 184n  
 Thomas 1962, 184n  
 Thompson, 232  
 Thorndike, Lynn, 67  
 Thornton, 67, 276  
 Thouless, 60n  
 Thucydides, 230  
 Thurber & Thurber, 152  
 Tiemersma & Oosterling, 257n, 347n  
 Tiemersma, 32n-33n, 285n  
 Tipler, 128n  
 Tischner, 60n  
 Tishkoff, 83n  
 Tolboll 2009, 127  
 Tomay & Tomay, 171n  
 Tosello, 167n  
 Toulmin, 323, 223n  
 Touoyem, Pascal, 38  
 Trappe 2001, 296n  
 Tregear, 338  
 Tripp, 164  
 Trombetti, 150, 151n  
 Tull, 218n  
 Turner, Edith, 21-22, 39-40, 110, 113-118, 120, 123, 127-131, 133-139, 153, 187-188, 192, 195, 200, 208-212, 336, 21n, 27n, 57n, 88n, 113n, 115n, 117n-120n, 122n, 134n, 136n; - 's Alaska, 137; - 's Inuit, 139; - 's Ndembu, 123; - and Wim van Binsbergen, 21  
 Turner, Victor and / or Edith, 36, 72, 115, 117, 128, 130-131, 133, 136, 139, 142-144, 147, 163, 180, 193, 115n, 117n, 131n, 136n, 142n, 159n, 277n  
 Turner, Victor, 115-116, 131, 145-146, 182, 212, 337, 88n, 115n, 117n, 128n, 277n  
 Twain, Mark, 221  
 Tyler, 266n  
 Tylor 1871, 99, 228  
 Tzetzes, 262n  
 Ullman, 197n  
 Underhill, 84, 140n  
 Urey, 311, 324  
 Utrilla *et al.*, 167n  
 van Andel *et al.*, 151  
 van Beek, 251, 61n, 132n, 183n  
 van Binsbergen & Hesselting, 33  
 van Binsbergen & Venbrux, 180n  
 van Binsbergen & Wiggermann, 140n, 250n  
 van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen, 36-37, 84, 145, 150, 181, 184, 221, 242-243, 330, 24n, 155n, 157n, 161n, 175n, 182n, 182n, 226n, 249n, 291n, 151n  
 van Binsbergen *et al.*, 139  
 van Binsbergen with Lacroix, 167, 175, 175, 292, 167n  
 van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., *passim*  
 van de Wansum, 224-226  
 van der Geest, Sjaak, 54n, 210n-211n  
 van der Toorn, 150, 24n, 168n  
 van der Veen, Klaas, 210n  
 van der Veer, 250n, 138n  
 van der Zwan, 83n  
 van Deursen, 149n  
 van Dijk, Han, 191n  
 van Dijk, Rijk, & Pels, 46  
 van Dijk, Rijk, 35, 46  
 van Dijk, Rijk, *et al.*, 46  
 van Dijk, Rijk, Reis & Spierenburg, 46  
 van Peursen, 130n  
 van Riet Lowe, 304n  
 van Rijn, Henny, 31, 182, 337, 31n-32n  
 van Teeffelen, 115n  
 van Velsen, Jaap, 35, 86  
 van Warmelo, 185  
 van Wersch, 127  
 van Wetering, 193  
 van Wolde, 24n  
 Vansina, 163, 168n, 258n  
 Velikovskiy, 242-243, 243n  
 Venbrux, Eric, & Wim van Binsbergen, 310  
 Venbrux, Eric, 39-40, 114  
 Verbrugghe & Wickersham, 251n  
 Vermeylen 1998, 24n  
 Vesey 1964, 59  
 Vico, 239, 287, 325  
 Viegas 2006, 164  
 Vigilant, 83n  
 Virilio, 261  
 Vitaliano, 163  
 Vitruvius, 305  
 Viveiros de Castro, 27n, 335n  
 Voelkl 1977, 165  
 Vogel 1991, 1995, 172n  
 Volovich, 258n  
 von Bunsen, 24n, 149n  
 von Clausewitz, 283n  
 von Franz, 249, 64n, 289n  
 von Goethe, 30, 37, 133  
 von Schelling, 342n  
 von Schrenck Notzing, 80n, 118n,

*Index of authors*

- 208n  
von Sicard, Harald, 185, 185n  
Vulto, 27n, 335n  
Waaijman, Kees, 40, 119n, 138n  
Waddell, 338, 24n  
Wainwright, 164-165, 160n  
Waite, 250n  
Waldman, 82n  
Walhouse, 166  
Walker, 197, 291-292, 290n  
Wallis, 229, 202n  
Walsh, 14n  
Waltke, 24n  
Ward 1968, 24n  
Ward 1982, 256n  
Warren & Ferguson, 149n  
Warren 1920, 234-235, 347n  
Wastiau, 146  
Weber, 115n, 136n  
Weiner, 223n  
Weinrich, 257n  
Wellhausen, 168n  
Wells, 312n  
Wells, H.C., 221  
Wentzel-Kramers-Brillouin, 80n  
Werbner, Richard, 32, 35, 249, 62n, 77n, 115n  
Werner, 283n  
Wessing, 166  
Westermann, 257n  
Westfall, 288n  
Westwood, Jennifer, 226n  
Wheeler, 128n  
Wheeler-DeWitt, 80n  
Wheeler-Voegelin & Moore, 163  
Whitehead & Russell, 212n  
Whitehead, 328, 340n  
Whitney, 234-235  
Wickramasinghe *et al.*, 81  
Wickramasinghe, 324  
Widengren, 149, 313n  
Wiedeman, 184n  
Wildiers, 223  
Wilkinson, 164, 285n  
Williams, 185  
Williams, 347n  
Williamson, 283n  
Willis, 147, 147n, 157n, 180n  
Willoughby, 304, 168n  
Wilmsen, 228, 98n  
Wilson, Colin, & Flem-Ath, 241, 171n, 227n  
Wilson, Colin, 171n  
Winkelman, 141n  
Winslow 1873, 234-235  
Witsen, 141n  
Wittgenstein, 63, 55n, 121n, 286n, 347n  
Witzel, Michael, 35-36, 227, 244, 253, 310, 99n, 141n, 180n, 324n  
Wolkowski, 245, 245n  
Wood 2007, 127  
Woodroffe, 89  
Woodruff & Rhine, 60n  
Woudhuizen, 226n  
Woudhuizen, Fred, 36, 226n; *cf.* van Binsbergen & –  
Wyatt, 24n  
Yang & An, 148n  
Young 1954, 180n  
Young, 244  
Zanger & Woudhuizen, 229  
Ziegler & Sontheimer, 164, 250n  
Zinser, 127  
Zonneveld, 194  
Zukav, 336, 283n  
Zwernemann, 163





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