

tions and variations which Geschiere discovered on this intermediate, virtual plane, which for village-orientated anthropologists is so difficult to conceptualise and which is yet the scene at which much of the symbolic life of African today take place. My aim here has not been to do full justice to his approach, but to show how it is an excellent example of virtuality and its analytical potential.

1.8.10. Section conclusion: The rural-orientated perspective on witchcraft and healing as an anthropological trap?

Finally, we should not miss the opportunity of going full circle and assess what these achievements on Geschiere's part mean in terms of a possible re-assessment of Schoffeleers' picture of the Chisupe movement.

Schoffeleers helped us to pinpoint what could have been learned from a rural-inspired reading of the spatially distant, Cameroonian data, while taking for granted that such a rural perspective was eminently applicable to the Malawian healing movement's discourse. But were the Malawian actors involved really prepared for such a reading, and did they have the symbolic baggage to make such a reading at all relevant to their situation?

Does Schoffeleers' reliance on such rural insight as prolonged participant observation at the village level accords one, yield insight in modern Malawian actors' conscious interpretations of the problem of evil as expressed in Chisupe's mass movement? Or does it merely reveal the historical antecedents of such interpretations – a background which has gone lost to the actors themselves?

Does the analytical return to the village – and I myself have made my own instinctive enthusiasm for such a reading abundantly clear in the preceding pages – amount to valid and standard anthropological hermeneutics, or is it merely a form of spurious *anthropologising* which denies modern Malawians the right to the same detachment from historic, particularistic, rural roots, the same de-contextualisation, which many North Atlantic Africanists very much take for granted in their own personal lives?

It is this very detachment, this lack of connectivity – a break in the chain of semantic and symbolic concatenation –, which the concept of virtuality seeks to capture.

H. RIJK VAN DIJK ON YOUNG MALAWIAN PURITANS. On this point the work of Rijk van Dijk (1992) is relevant, and revealing. In the PhD thesis which he wrote under supervision of Matthew Schoffeleers and Bonno Thoden van Velzen, the assertive puritanism of young preachers in urban Malawi is set against the background of the preceding century of religious change in South Central Africa and of the interpretations of these processes as advanced in the 1970s and 1980s. Here the urban discourse on witchcraft already appears as 'virtual' (although that word is not yet used), in the sense that the urbanites' use of the concept is seen as detached from direct references to the rural cosmology and rural conceptualisations of interpersonal power. Similarly, the events around Chisupe may be interpreted not as an application or partial revival of time-honoured rural cosmological notions, but as an aspect of what van Dijk describes as the

emphatic moral re-orientation in which Malawi, under the instigation of the new president Mr Muluzi, was involved at the national level, at the eve of the 1994 elections, and in the face of the AIDS epidemic (van Dijk 1999). It may be interpreted as an instance of virtualisation.

## **1.9. The virtual village in the village: A rural ethnic festival in Western Zambia**

### 1.9.1. Introducing the Kazanga festival

My fourth case study takes us back to Zambia. It concerns an ethnic association in modern Zambia, and its annual festival. It shows us that even today's rural environment is affected by globalisation in such a way that the concept of virtuality helps us to make sense of the situation even there.

In Western Zambia a large number of ethnic identities circulate, among which that of the Lozi (Barotse) is dominant because of its association with the Luyana state. The latter had its pre-colonial claims confirmed and even expanded with the establishment of colonial rule in 1900, resulting in the Barotseland Protectorate, which initially coincided with North Western Rhodesia, and after Zambia's Independence (1964) became that country's Western Province. Lozi arrogance, limited access to education and to markets, and the influence of a fundamentalist Christian mission,<sup>174</sup> stimulated a process of ethnic awakening. As from the middle of the twentieth century CE more and more people in Eastern Barotseland and adjacent areas came to identify as 'Nkoya'. In addition to the Nkoya language, and to a few cultural traits recognised as proper to the Nkoya (even if these traits have a much wider distribution in the region), royal 'chiefs', although incorporated in the top ranks of the Lozi aristocracy, have constituted the major condensation points of this identity. The usual pattern of migrant labour and urban-rural migration endowed this identity with an urban component, whose most successful representatives distinguished themselves from their rural Nkoya nationals in terms of education, income and active participation in national politics. While the Lozi continued to be considered as the ethnic enemies, a second major theme in Nkoya ethnicity was to emerge:<sup>175</sup> *the quest for political and economic articulation with the national centre*, by-passing

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<sup>174</sup> The South Africa General Mission; cf. Bailey 1913a, 1913b; van Binsbergen 1987c, 1992b, 1994c, 1995f.

<sup>175</sup> In the 1990s a third theme emerged: the blurring of ethnic boundaries in Western Zambia, the attenuation even of Nkoya / Lozi antagonism, in favour of a pan-Westerners regionalism opposing the Northern block which was the then President Chiluba's ethno-political base. This at least is the situation around the National Party, which in bye-elections in Mongu (the capital of Western Province) in early 1994 defeated both MMD and UNIP. As a result of the general elections held during the 1994 Kazanga festival, the office of national chairman went to the leading NP official in Kaoma district.