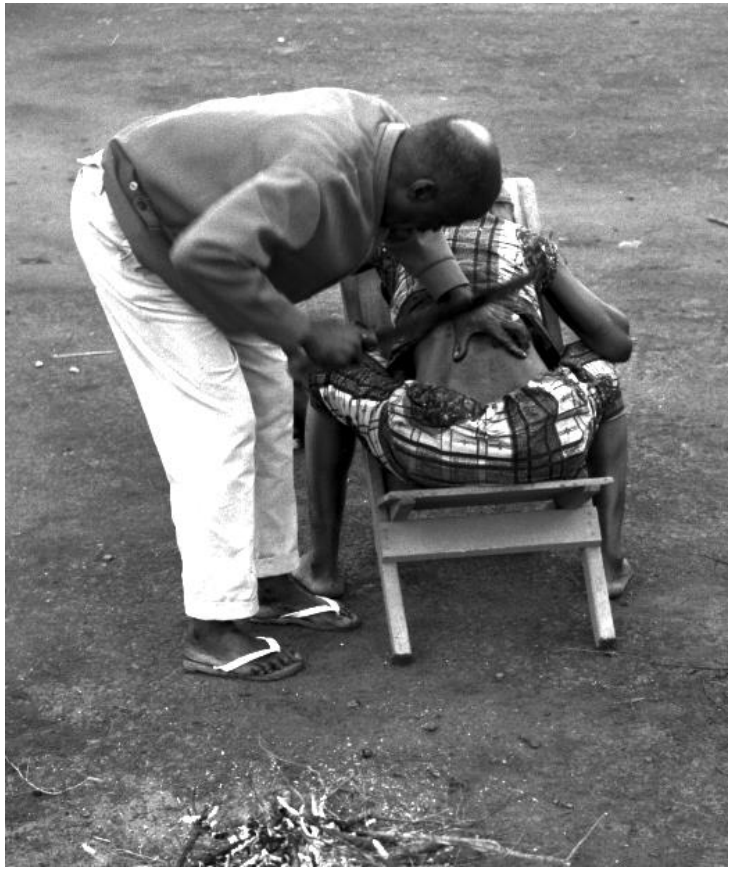
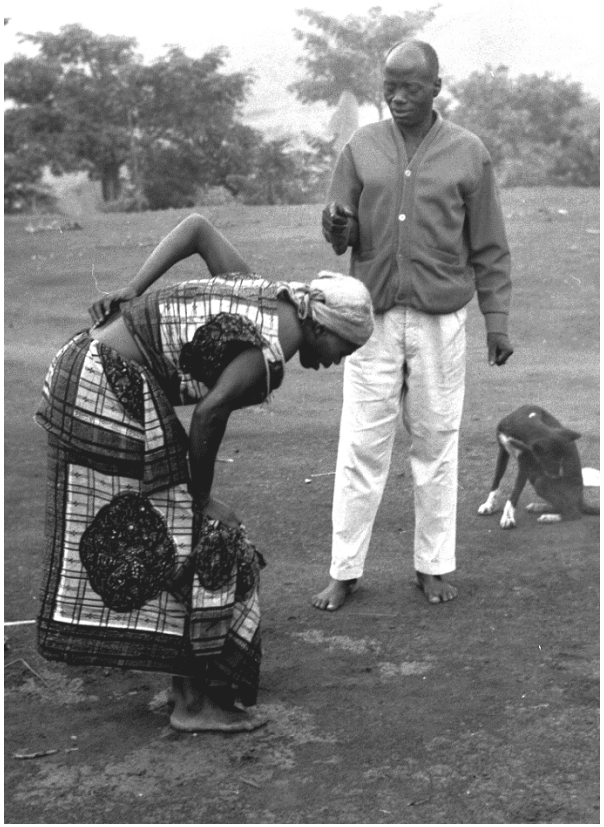
Introduction—Representations, Ritual, & Social Renewal

Nzoamambu Oscar, Kongo *nganga*, begins a treatment for a woman's "kink in lower back" Left, he heats a machette in a fire; right, he massages the sore spot with an ointment.

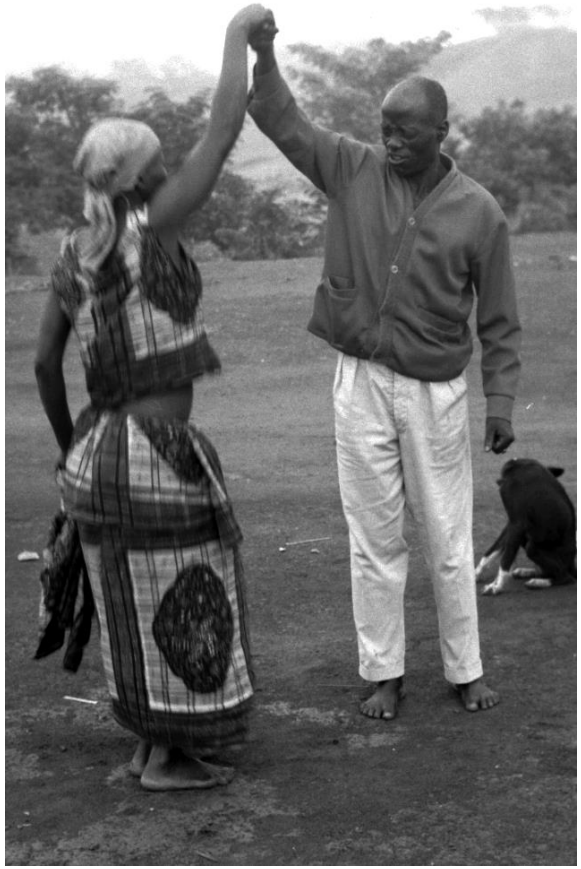
The hot machette for “kink in back”





Nzoamambu applies the hot knife several times to sore spot; the woman then bends over, touching the spot, and declares that it feels better.

Ritualization of successful cure: *Sala duma*



Nzoamambu leads woman in a triple “dumuna” jump to celebrate the successful treatment of her kink; he then has her pass three times between his legs to symbolize the steadfastness of the cure.

Nganga doing dumuna, after "coming in contact with *nkisi*

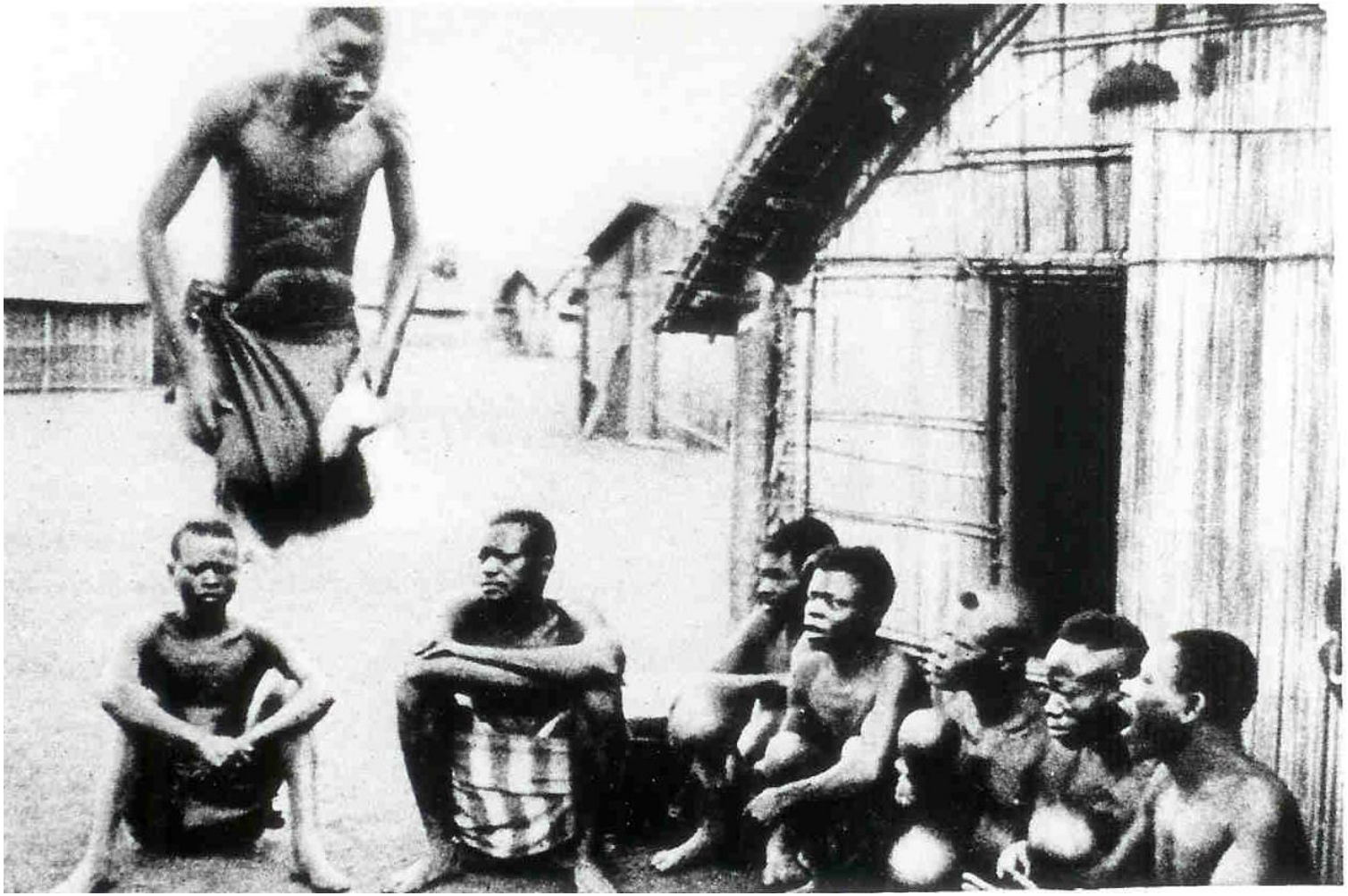


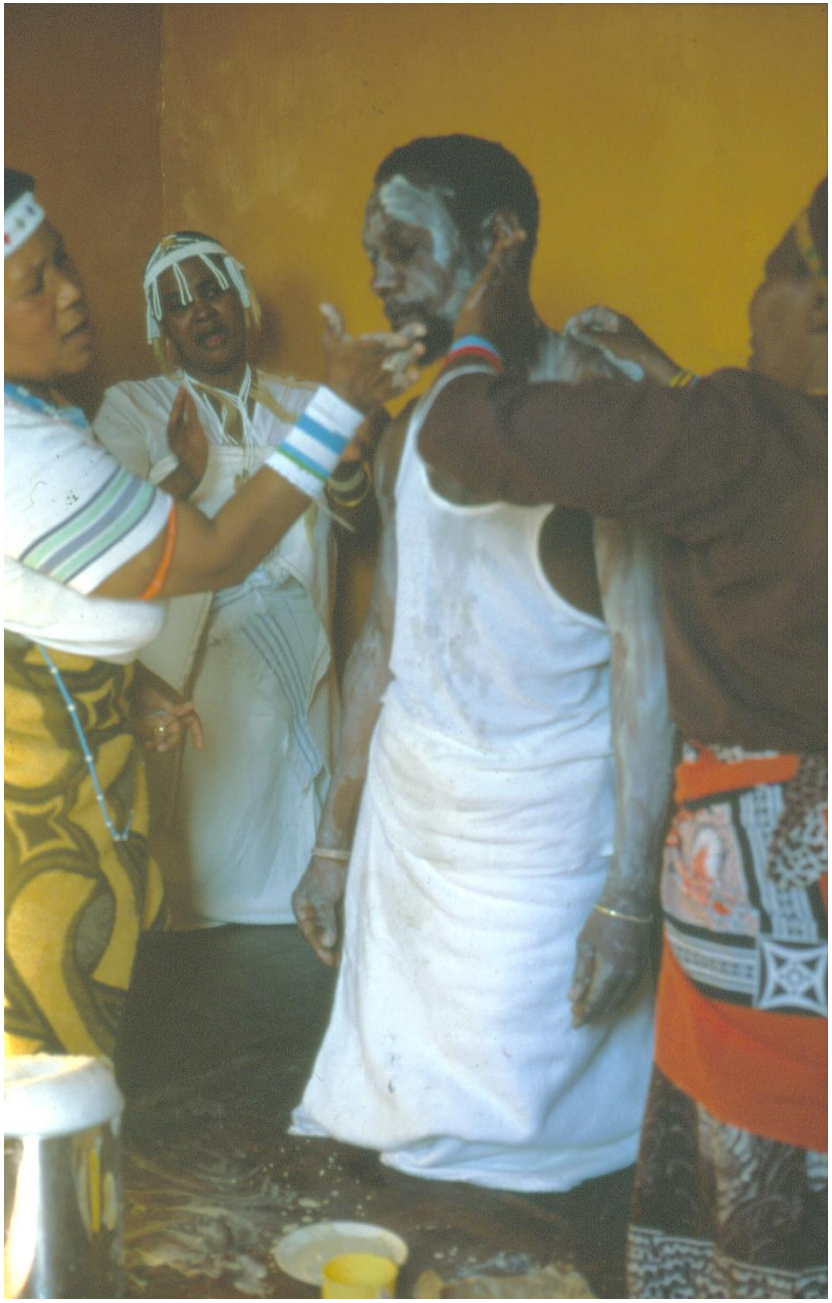
Photo by J. Ohrneman, ca. 1920s, courtesy of Gothenburg Ethnographic Museum, Sweden.

Kongo prophets use *dumuna* to “weigh the spirit” of their faithful

“Why Ritualization”

•Life crises & transitions made into rites *de passage* (Van Gennep)—rites of separation, passage (liminality), reintegration;

•In Kongo clan communities, sickness & healing become idiom for dealing with social health and leadership;



Ritual, ritualization defined

•Exaggerated and stylized behavior to attract attention in mating (Ethology)

•Repetitive activity helpful in language learning and communication (Linguistics)

•The addition of non-verbal dimensions (e.g., music, art, incense, dance, architecture, light, to verbal discourse (liturgy)

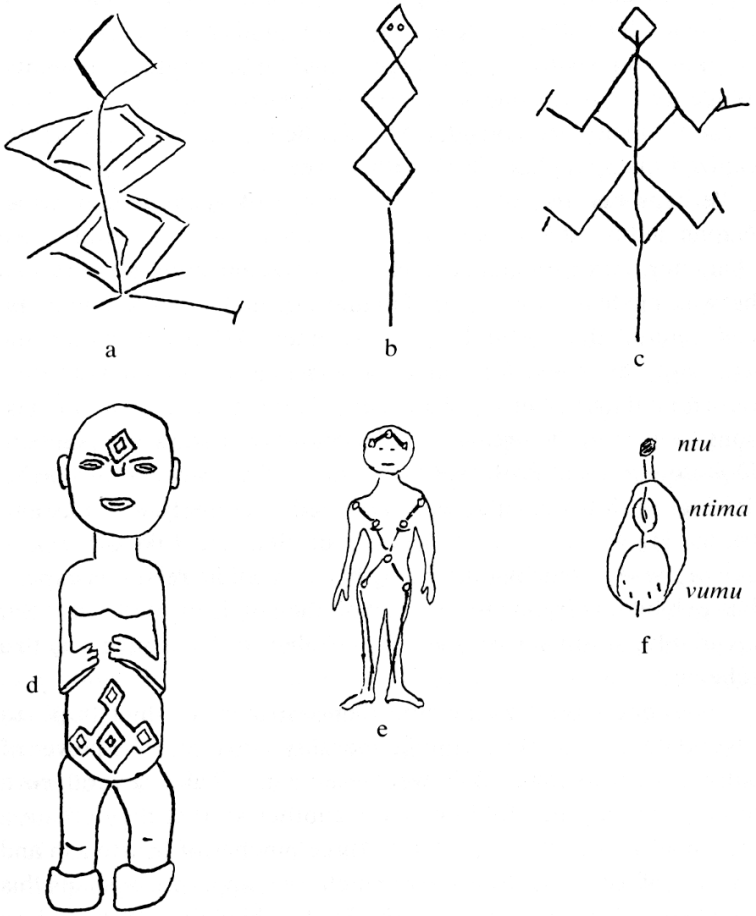
• Heightened use of signs and symbols in social setting or transaction, „ritualization nourishes faith & deep involvement, reproduces culture nature, or habitus“ (Rudie, anthropology)

•Why ritualization? Amplification and redundancy in „clogged“ or contradictory medium of expression and life (Bateson, Leach, anthropology)

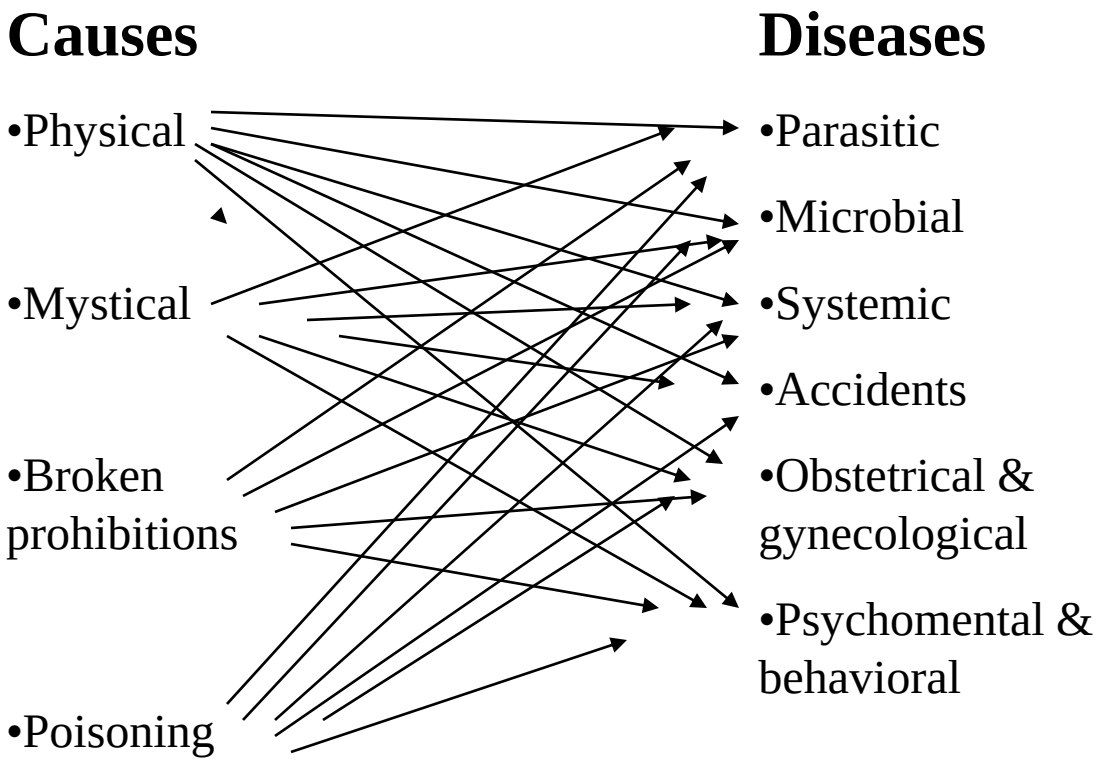
•Ritualization as interplay of words, symbols, indexicality, iconicity—a continuum of signs, a seamless semiotics.

Representing “Flow & blockage”

In Nzoamambu’s anatomy of the person (see Quest for Therapy) he represents the body as a channel through which flows food and all liquids. Flow and exchange are life-giving, blockage in bodily and social functions is destructive and deadly.

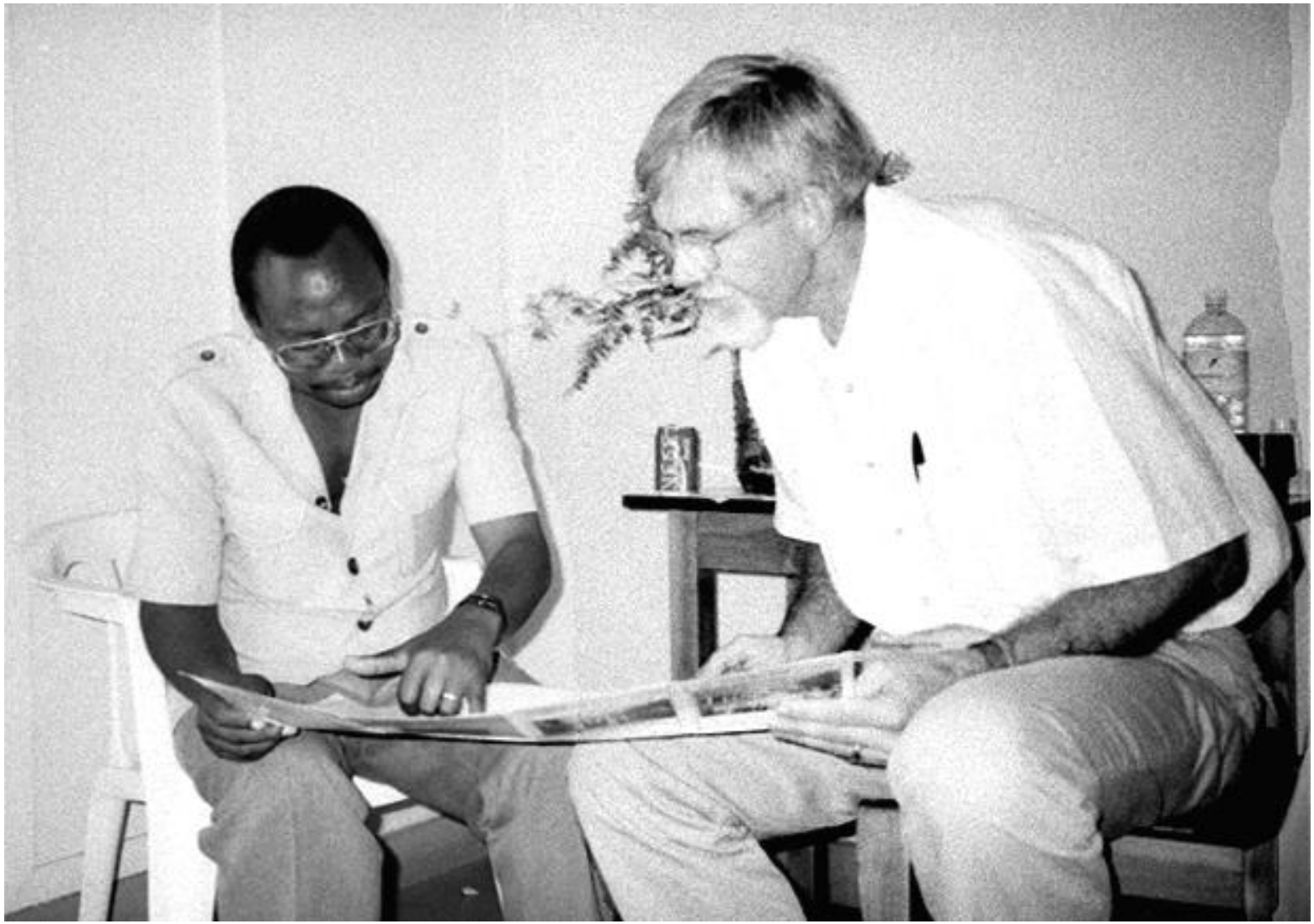


Diseases & their Etiologies in Rwanda



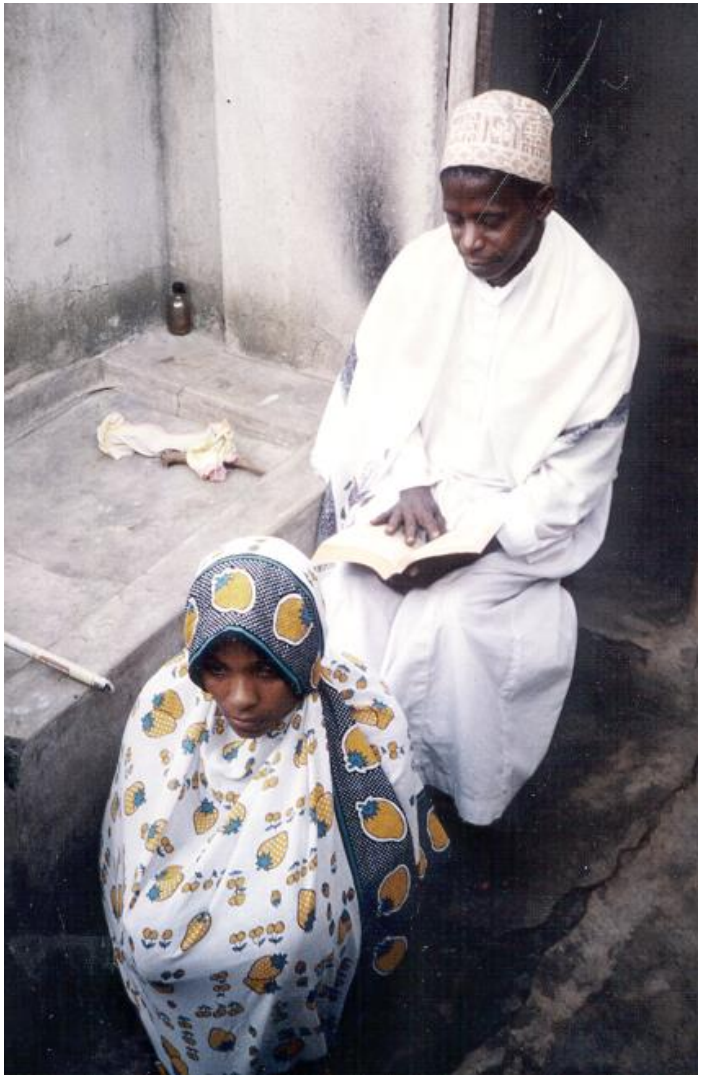
Pierre Claver Rwangabo, Ph.D Pharmacology

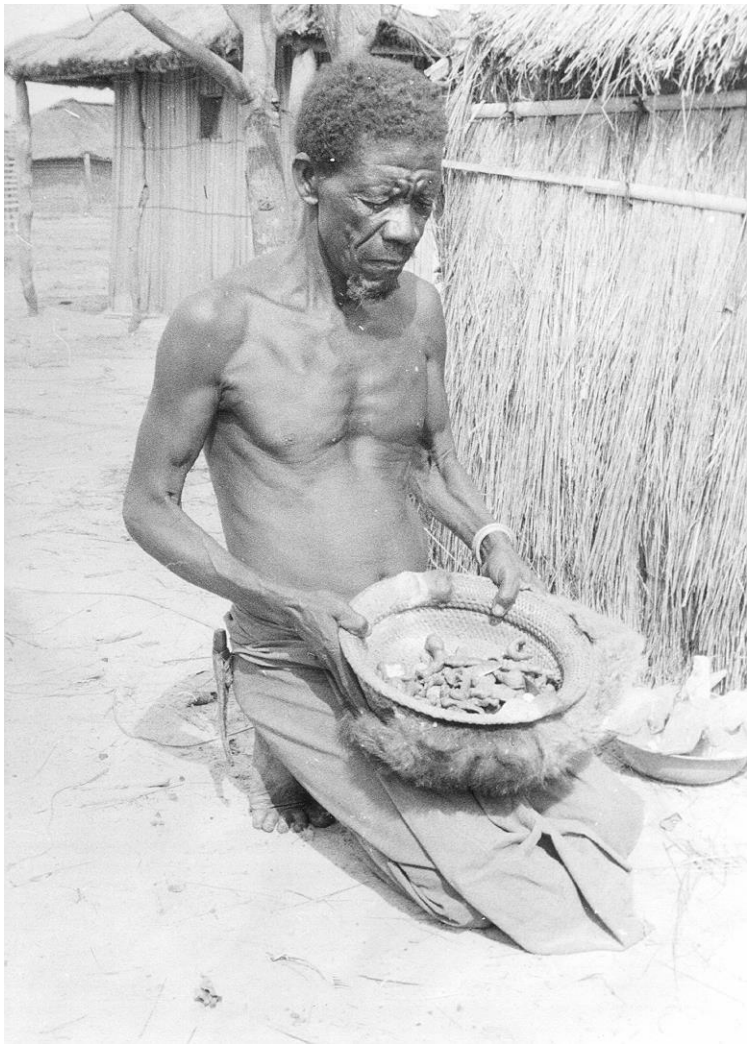
Reading the Signs Anthropologically:
Gaze, Listen, Touch, Relate



Anthropologist converses with Manianga prophets about their worldview and the colonial history of their movement

Reading the Signs: reading as Sufi Islamic medicine in East Africa



Ngombo yakusekula –reading the signs of society, nature, the universe in face of misfortune

This Chokwe *tahiye Ngombo* —shaker of the ngombo basket – works outside his shrine house in Southern Congo, near Kahemba. The Ngombo divination technique exists (or has existed) from the Atlantic coast to Malawi on the Southern Savanna.