

## Part III

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### Structure and Movement in *Lemba* Therapeutics

“Myth shields us from music while at the same time giving music its maximum freedom. In exchange, music endows the tragic myth with a convincing metaphysical significance, which the unsupported word and image could never achieve, and, moreover, assures the spectator of a supreme delight—though the way passes through annihilation and negation, so that he is made to feel that the very womb of things speaks audibly to him.”—Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*

# Introduction

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*Lemba* sources studied so far reveal a strong preoccupation with conscious thought and deliberative action. The *Lemba* adherent is admonished to keep secrets, be vigilant, argue effectively, prevail in public debate, trade skillfully, and maintain a strong household and a peaceful community. Legendary figures and ritual symbols reflect these virtues; antiheroes define them negatively by demonstrating the sad consequences of erroneous choices.

The general content of these ideas of *Lemba* well-being and *Lemba* illness may now be spelled out more fully. We have analyzed the expressive domains to understand the *Lemba* ritual setting, and we have clarified the codes of these domains to determine the logic of the expressions. Now we can attempt the difficult task of examining *Lemba*'s self-perception. In other words, is it possible to identify the perspectives of *Lemba* priests and priestesses themselves?

It would seem possible to reconstruct such a *Lemba* consciousness, given the emphasis on clarity of thought and skillful rhetoric. However, there is a problem. Paradoxically, *Lemba*'s origin and ritual is often elaborated in terms of apparently mystifying creations such as rodents, earth colors, plants, and mythic heroes. Yet these seem to be interwoven with allusions to the familiar ground of daily experiences such as family life, collecting food, and relations between clans. There is thus an obvious tendency to align mundane experience with more abstract principles from myth, cosmology, and social structure. The manner in which the two levels of reality are combined reveals a selectivity of choice of alternatives, a conspicuous manipulation of bits and pieces from the received lore of myth and cosmology to reinforce a particular set of alternatives. The moment this occurs in an institution's or society's culture, it has created an ideology for itself. Why this occurs, the context in which it occurs, and why such an ideology must take recourse to a multitude of images from the natural world will be examined in this section.

Chapter 9 identifies the mechanisms of thought which lie behind the construction of *Lemba*'s unique world view, the process by which it anchors social forms with specific ideals, selecting particular types of authority, defining moral order through specific heroes and anti-heroes. And it goes on to explain how *Lemba* elaborates conjunctive

and disjunctive modes of mediation within relationships and situations, and shifts disjunctive mediation from the verbal realm of discourse to the nonverbal, a process which is the key to understanding *Lemba's* "illness" and "therapy."

Chapter 10 brings this structural preference of choices—*Lemba's* ideology—together into a theory of order and meaningful existence in a segmentary society caught up in the great trade of coastal Africa from the seventeenth century to the twentieth.

# Chapter 9

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## Modes of *Lemba* Thought

### *Anchoring in Myth, and the Problem of History*

Each *Lemba* variant has reflected a concern for relating its main concepts, medicines, and ritual symbols to a legitimate source, be it culture hero Moni-Mambu, ancestors, first priest and “founder” Nga-Malamu, or someone’s *Lemba* Father. Kerenyi and Jung call this feature an etiological myth’s “anchorage.”<sup>1</sup>

Kongo *min’kisi* reflect an anchoring structure in their charters. The *n’kisi* is revealed to an individual or community, and through its priest it is handed on, extended (*vandisa*), or received (*tumiswa*). An *n’kisi* “apostle” is, therefore, a sent one (*n’tumwa*). Chiefly commissions function in like manner, except that they are exclusive corporations whose officeholders succeed one another, and modern Kongo prophets tend to be consecrated by a comparable structure. All consecrated roles and functions in the society, of whatever generality or specificity, share a common anchoring structure.<sup>2</sup>

The structure of a mythic charter, whether of an *n’kisi*, a ruling dynasty, a prophetic or clan genealogy, has three stages of reference, reflecting a temporal, spatial, social, and cosmological sequence: first, the original “anchoring” figure; second, the mediator; last, the human here-and-now. An attempt is made to relate the fragmentary, multiple, dispersed, or confused state of present human society to the unitary, idealized, and orderly condition “in the beginning.” The charter myth’s sequence of names, priests, officeholders, or places inhabited, and conditions met and dealt with, thus refer to the structure of society and the universe, or to recollected human events and individuals.<sup>3</sup> Frequently Kongo etiology myths have been confused with history, or with pure legend, because of the parallel (metonymic) series of persons, roles, legendary figures, animals, colors, or cosmological categories which inhabit them. An effort to resolve this problem of history in myth is pertinent to understanding *Lemba*, whose lyrics contain, as the last section shows, a combined view of human and nonhuman structures.

The historical school of ethnology has a clear answer to this problem, one which numerous analysts of Kongo and Lower-Zaire culture have adopted. Frobenius' theory of "spiritization" (*Vergeistigung*) of ancestors holds that masks, cult deities, mythic heroes such as Nga Malamu, perhaps even Mavungu, were manistic creations standing for the long-deceased in the time-dimmed memories of the living.<sup>4</sup> According to this theory, the ancestors' individual identities became blended with sun, plant, and animal identities in the process of working out cultural conflicts, whence the frequency of masks with two, three, and four faces throughout the secret-society region of West and Equatorial Africa. This view of African ritual symbols and art was very common at an earlier period in European ethnology. Laman adopted it in regard to Kongo *min'kisi*, arguing that one could justifiably abandon the *min'kisi* without doing damage to a postulated fundamental Kongo religion of which they were merely a manistic degradation.<sup>5</sup> Bittremieux used the theory to suggest that *Lemba* was a more recent institution than earth-shrine Bunzi.<sup>6</sup> Recently Thiel has analyzed regional Zaire and Kasai-basin religion in terms of the gradual spiritization of human figures into middle-range deities who are situated in a religious cosmology alongside or beneath true "high God" figures.<sup>7</sup>

The problem with this approach is the partiality introduced by the historical bias. Some of the figures of *Lemba* charters may very well have been historic persons of prominence, such as an eponymous Teke chief Nga Malamu, or Haitian national heroes Jean Pétro, Toussaint L'Ouverture, Rigaud, Dessalines, Christophe, and Pétion in the New-World *Lemba* variant. Yet at the other end of the continuum there are those charters whose figures are typological male/female, androgynous beings, or some other characterization of a social role or relationship. One variant of *Lemba* called *Lemba-Nsongi* states outrightly its goal as assuring the continuity of the patrilineal blessing over three generations, from fathers to children and grandchildren, thereby closing the circuit of exchanges so important to social harmony.<sup>8</sup> In this latter example a rather abstracted function is attributed to the *n'kisi*, one of succession as well as relationship, of diachronic continuity as well as synchronic coherence.

A view of human thought which clarifies this problem in myth analysis allows models of society and human experience to be devised by either (1) personalizing the individual who has an experience or (2) emphasizing the relational situation in which he may be involved. History is enhanced by personalizing, individualizing, an experience,

but at the risk of exposing the individual to social threats and conflicts. Even so, *Lemba* initiation, like other initiations, gave an initiate a new personal name, often one expressing his accomplishments and anxieties. Emphasis on the relational, by contrast, enhances the social and religious categories that lend meaning to an experience. In *Lemba* thought, which is characteristic of Central-African thought, the relational emphasis in ritual invokes the various domains of the natural and cosmological world, often it would seem simply for the purpose of connecting the individual experience to all the rest of the universe, to give it a totalizing framework. Another important reason for naturalizing a ritual situation is to deal more readily with those uncomfortable, ugly human emotions associated with anger, witchcraft, envy, competition, and power, which cannot well be diagnosed by isolating individual, named persons.

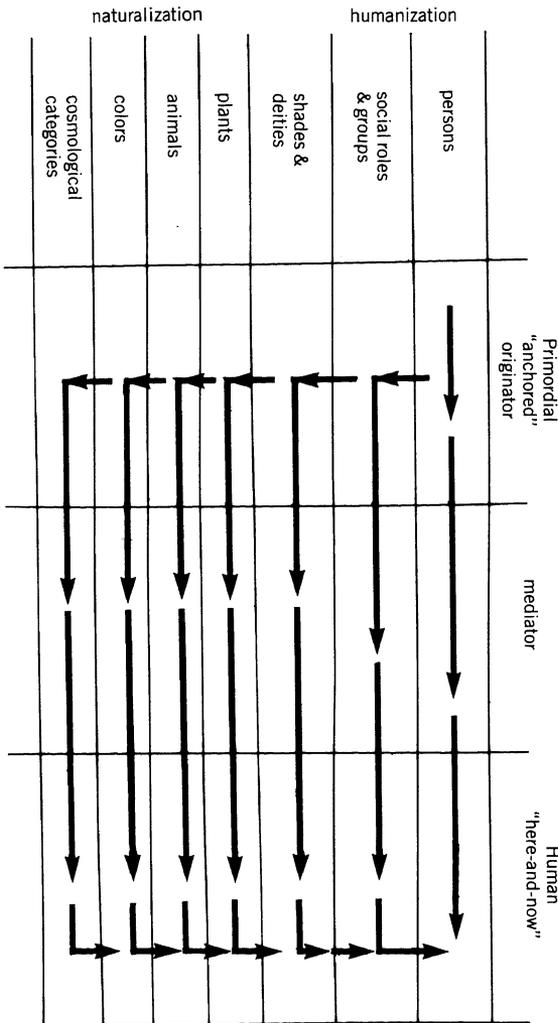
The next several sections will show how, and at which moments, these possibilities of metaphoric transference and movement are invoked. Figure 25 illustrates some of the features of the Kongo ritual metaphor vocabulary.

### *Successional and Relational Modes of Authority*

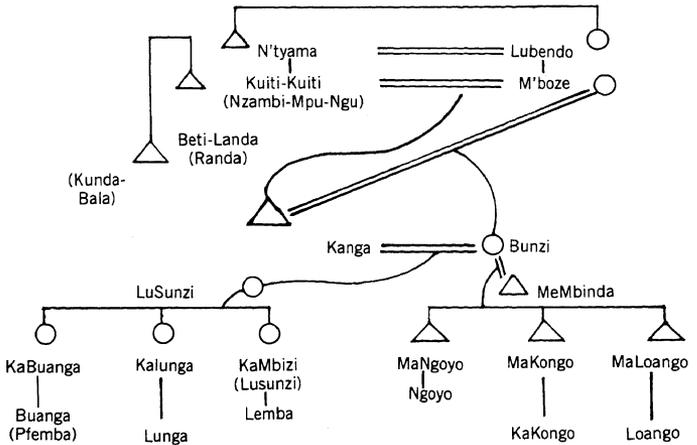
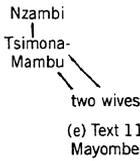
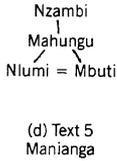
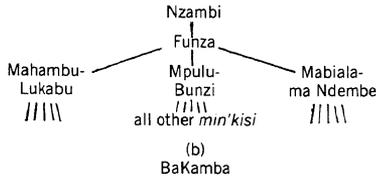
The successional and relational aspects of Kongo ritual charters may be manipulated to express authority modes ranging from hierarchic to egalitarian, as well as ranging from the autonomy of a person or corporate unit to its complementary involvement with other units. Clan genealogies that express extensive complementarity of local and regional lineages frequently show three houses descending from a common source. Exclusive genealogies tend to show a direct lineal descent from an original founder. A similar structural transformation is possible in *n'kisi* charters, including *Lemba*. Often charters of individualistic medicines and commissions are inserted in a more inclusive charter of a collective nature. The individualistic charters are fragments of the larger ones. It is in the major *min'kisi* and related commissions of chiefship, kingship, and prophet movements that transformations from centralized and hierarchic to decentralized and complementary may be found. For example, in a set of texts by Laman's catechists derived from the Kamba region around Mboko Nsongo, the same set of deities and mediators—Funza, Mpulu-Bunzi, Mahambu-Lukabu, and so on—are ranged in one instance as a successional hierarchy through which all power passes until in

Mpulu-Bunzi it is dispersed to “all other *min'kisi*.”<sup>9</sup> But in the other variant, this dispersal is made from Funza, the god of twins, to three mediator gods, Mahambu-Lukabu, Mpulu-Bunzi, and Mabiala ma Ndembe, from whom power is distributed to all other *min'kisi* (figure 26, a and b).<sup>10</sup>

**Figure 25**  
Categories of ritual transformation in Kongo



**Figure 26**  
 Charter myths of several *Lemba* variants  
 and other *min'kisi* and kingdoms



(h) Text 13  
 Cabinda/Ngoyo

The relational mode of authority is in *Lemba* and other charters often expressed as a marriage, out of which flow further qualities or heroic figures, emphasizing the complementarity of social and cosmic units. A series of original incestuous sibling/couples inhabits these myths, as is characteristic of many Bantu etiology myths. The most inclusive of these myths that includes *Lemba* comes from Cabinda, as told by the last court historian of Ngoyo.

### *Text 13*

- (1) The earth, sky, ocean and Nzadi river have always existed, and all that moves, moves in this framework. At the beginning of life, in Yalala Songo, a lake at the foot of the second cataract upstream on the Nzadi, there appeared the heads of the three god: Kuiti-Kuiti, most powerful of all, creator of all, master of the world, also named Nzambi Mpu Ngu, and Kisi-a-Nsi, earth god; at his right side appeared Bati Randa, also called Kunda Bala, ruler of animals with tails and their creator, who is in charge of rain and water; the third deity was M'boze, chieftess of prayer. At first they were one, but as they grew up they separated. The three gods take any form, preferably orphidic. Kuiti-Kuiti and his sister/wife take the shape of huge male and female serpents named N'Tyama and LuBendo. N'Tyama is the "stallion" of Kuiti-Kuiti, LuBendo the "mare" of M'Boze. Kuiti-Kuiti and M'Boze never separate, nor N'Tyama and LuBendo, their masters, twins who form whirlpools in the Nzadi.
- (2) Kuiti-Kuiti went out with Bati Landa leaving behind M'Boze his wife with her son Kanga. When he returned he saw to his consternation that M'Boze was pregnant. He accused his son, who said his mother had enticed him. Kuiti-Kuiti killed them both in rage. While she was being murdered a deep fog settled over the world, and she bore a girl named Bunzi. Later Kuiti-Kuiti regretted his act of murder, and resurrected his sister/wife and son. Then he gave the new goddess Bunzi in marriage to Kanga, telling him to go away with her and never return. Kanga went to live at Nto on the right bank of the Nzadi; Bunzi upstream at Ne M'lao, Tchi-Sinda, near Banana.
- (3) At Nto, Kanga had a large temple, six meters long and three wide, surrounded with fromagière trees. On a throne there was a cane of *m'bota* wood (which also could be found in the temple of

Lusunzi), ornamented with a buffalo tail and an ivory figure of Kanga. Kanga is invoked when rain fails to come because of sexual violations in the land.

- (4) Kanga and Bunzi are the main gods of Ngoyo, their devotees giving pre-eminence to one or the other. They preside with their daughter, the mermaid LuSunzi, at the crowning of the MaNgoyo, king of Ngoyo. Bunzi, not wanting to be dependent on her father and mother, M'Boze and Kuiti-Kuiti, went out to Ne M'Binda, first man, and father of the triplet kings MaLoango, MaKongo, and MaNgoyo, receiving from him white chalk with which to consecrate the kings.
- (5) Among the BaVili, Bunzi, tranquil, retiring, and moderately interested in affairs of the soil, is called mother of mermaid Tchi Kambizi, who is extremely violent like a soldier with arms, ready to fight to protect the authorities. She favors her friends, offering them money; she destroys her enemies. At Loango the tempests are attributed to her. At Ngoyo she is called LuSunzi (N'sunzi), who lives in a river of her name, the Tchi Buanga, matron of education.
- (6) LuSunzi is a female with two faces, one white, the other black. Her body is similarly colored. From a distance, she is the color of fire. Nzambi Mpungu sent her to be married to Ma N'kakala. She is the legislator of men, who gives the laws of LuSunzi. At midnight she protests excesses of those who have her laws, telling her priests in each village to condemn or absolve them. She appears in dreams, revealing the reasons for her actions. She permits *kisi-ba-si* to represent themselves as living or dead; those *bakisi* who are her lieutenants, the *njimbe*, each take on the name of their genie, such as Bunzi, Tchi Sinda, Kanga. (Thus, the MaNgoyo became Njimbi Kanga a Nto.)
- (7) LuSunzi created the cults: *Bingo (Buanga)* to distinguish and classify families; *Lemba*, to protect households; *Kalunga*, to confess sins between married spouses and to absolve them. She also instituted medicine doctors, diviners, talismen, funerary statues, to cure illness and reveal the hidden, and to protect against witches.
- (8) Progeny are asked from *min'kisi Lemba, Kalunga, and Bingo (Mua Bua Nga)*. *Lemba* is the spirit of peace, as its name indicates. In *Lemba*, Nzambi is asked, "Nzambi *Lemba*, give us fecundity." He guards us, and must be respected and obeyed.<sup>11</sup>

A number of modes of relationship are used to build this cosmological picture of complementary kingdoms and cults derived from Bunzi. Patron founder of the kingdoms is the first human MeMbinda, and of the cults, mermaid Lusunzi. Male and female are used here, as at every stage of the myth, to bridge contrasts. At first, in the myth's progression, these pairs are endogenous, incestuous, whereas in the later stages of the myth the differentiation grows, and exogenous pairs, even triads, are recognized. Other contrasting pairs of figures are noteworthy. Peace and violence appear to be brought together in related terms. Bunzi, who is calm, gives birth to LuSunzi, the violent one. Bunzi is an earth shrine of very general application. LuSunzi possesses men and provides laws with which to rule, and to maintain peace, whence the name *Lemba*, "calm," "peaceful." The myth also combines the successional mode of authority in the sequential pairs of sibling/couples and male/female dyads, while at the same time establishing sets of triple public structures in an intricate relational pattern of authority (for example, the cults to each other, the kingdoms to each other, the cults to the kingdoms). The Cabinda origin myth also addresses the problem of history as it was formulated earlier in this chapter. Human history, as distinct from the history of the gods and autochthonous creatures, begins with MeMbinda, father of the kingdoms. As in most Kongo origin myths, this one clearly differentiates series of beings: humans, ancestors, nonhuman creatures, plants, cosmological domains, and the like, and relates them according to several modes of association and succession. Whatever order emerges is not erroneous history, or the history of humans forgotten, but the resolution of human and cosmic dilemmas through analogy and metaphor, by transference to parallel domains. This chapter builds up the hypothesis that humanization and naturalization in myth and ritual are directly related to the perception of these dilemmas. What needs to be determined yet is under what conditions, and in what situations, humanization or naturalization of the discourse occurs.

### *Conjunctive and Disjunctive Mediation*

An important feature of the lyrical in *Lemba* is the manner in which songs and origin myths diagnose characteristic human dilemmas and then offer the "*Lemba* solution." In foregoing chapters it has been suggested that heroes such as Mahungu and Tsimona-Mambu become, in these *Lemba*-related narrations (for example, Texts 5, 11), the masters of conjunctive mediation. Outside of *Lemba*, these heroes

and others become involved in disjunctive or failed mediation. These concepts, loosely borrowed from structural analysis, need to be more sharply defined for purposes of the present study.<sup>12</sup>

The lyrics introduced above are replete with common problems of historical and present life in north-Kongo society. Some of these have to do with attitudes, rhetorical or surface problems, and confusions. There is the concern for barrenness (Text 1.46), for harassing spirits (1.21-5), pain (1.94), dreams, nightmares, and possession (9.8), for failure to return a borrowed tool that has been lost (7.5ff.), and other problems of daily life. Some of the trickster tales focus on another type of problem of daily life, that of misunderstandings, the consequences of which can be disastrous. Yet other facets of these same lyrical passages should be called structural analyses of deeper societal dilemmas, such as the consequences of wrong or inadequate political alliances in society (Texts 7-8, 11), the importance of following the counsel of ancestors and spirits, and being at peace with the supernatural (Texts 5, 11), and the great desirability of open relations between fathers and children (Texts 5, 8, 11).

A considerable degree of attention is given to formulating the negative side of these dilemmas, to narrating the confusing words and leading the character of the story through wrong action; or of developing at great length the antihero who embodies the negative values and traits. Some of this negativity, as the dilemmas which are embodied in the hero, is simply an inversion of the commonly understood social and cultural norm. Frequently the trickster *Moni-Mambu* is put into this role. *Mahungu's* characteristics differ from this, in that here he (it) is often cast as a dichotomized character type, whose two parts develop the polar implications of a dilemma, or the two roles in a relationship. Sometimes both parts will be "false" solutions (for example, Text 8, life with the python woman excludes life with father, and vice versa). At other times one will be victorious and the other defeated (for example, Text 7, one brother a slave, the other a master). There are here then a number of ways of formulating the negative, implying related ways of reaching solutions.

Some of the exaggerated negativity, particularly that having to do with misunderstood verbal instructions, has to do with a play on "comic" possibilities, ludicrous developments of horrors and errors setting the hero off from real life but reminding listeners of the dangers of ambiguous situations. The early *Moni-Mambu*, supposedly unaware of social syntax, is typically cast in these situations.

As soon as the trickster, or some other lyrical figure, becomes conscious of the syntax—the structure—and begins to manipulate it or be

manipulated by it, the dilemmas are more serious and take on the aura of deeply heroic, religious, and tragic motifs. The conclusion of the myths, their denouement, may take several turns, conjunctive or disjunctive: bringing together the odds, resolving the dilemma, overcoming the contradiction; or being destroyed by the dilemmas, contradictions, and odds.

The figure who is cast as antihero, inverse of norms, may be reincorporated into society, redeemed so to speak. Mahungu as ogre-of-the-forest (Text 6) meets this kind of end when he is arrested and brought into civil society. Moni-Manbu as bringer of *Lemba* medicine is brought back into normal healthy life by his effective maneuvering of the satchel—and *n'kisi*—and his recognition by his father, God (Text 11). The conjunctive resolution of the dichotomous hero, such as Mahungu, may be seen in the reintegration of the two parts into one complementary whole (for example, male and female in marriage, Text 4, or perhaps the two brothers working out a complementarity as hunter and cultivator, superior and inferior mediator, in Text 7).

The disjunctive conclusion of these lyrical accounts makes the antihero, the inverse of the norm, into a victim who is killed by the forces of authority in society. Moni-Mambu in Text 12 picks up all the sins imaginable in Kongo society, from innocently misunderstanding instructions to consciously flaunting rules and conventions such as relating wrongly with his in-laws, to confusing codes of food, and to causing death and destruction around him. Perhaps he could be called a scapegoat figure,<sup>13</sup> but he is more the hero of tragedy in that his fate and character change when he becomes conscious of the contradictions in society.<sup>14</sup> In this he is different from the Greek tragic hero who is destroyed despite his ignorance of cosmic and social laws. The Kongo tragic hero is vindicated for his errors until he becomes aware of the laws, then he is punished for continuing mistakes that destroy others.

The disjunctive conclusion is somewhat different in the case of the dichotomous hero who embodies alternative possibilities in a dilemma. This type of hero, personified by Mahungu in the present study and in *Lemba*, seems always drawn beyond singular characterization to the dramatization of a relationship. His failure to develop such a relationship within his complementary facets (male/female, elder/junior), results in his destruction and death because of the paralysis arising from incompleteness, as was true of Mavungu in Text 8 who went with the python woman and rejected his father. The hero of these types of disjunctive conclusion myths is closer to the Greek

tragic hero. Mavungu of Text 8 is portrayed as if irrevocably bound to his decision, made at a time when he was a youth bored by life under his father's tutelage, unaware of the significance of adult exchange with his father. The tragic hero here may be characterized by his entanglement in circumstances and structures that lead him to a confrontation with disparate and irreconcilable alternatives and thereby to his own destruction.

It would be wrong and oversimplified to conclude here that *Lemba's* therapeutic concept was, then, the fabrication of an image of society and personalities in which all dilemmas are somehow overcome through "the *Lemba* way" of doing things. It has been suggested that rising self-confidence characteristic of a bourgeoisie engenders a positive self-image, without an element of the tragic.<sup>15</sup> The elite status of *Lemba* might account for the absence of tragedy in the origin myths. But to stop here would be to ignore the significance of *Lemba's* medicines and their ritual function, the subject to which I turn next.

### *Humanization and Naturalization of the Discourse*

Bernard Dadié, the well-known African novelist, has stated openly what many observers of African cosmology and thought have suspected, namely that African fables about human-like animals are indeed commentaries about the human scene.<sup>16</sup> The material of the present study suggests that this process of substituting animals, or other dramatis personae, for real living human beings is a rather old practice. It is not just a literary convention for the purpose of amusing an audience but an integral necessity of life in a society where it is dangerous to speak openly of anger, conflict, power, and the other dilemmas of social structure. My explanation of *Lemba* medicines and their ritual function, deferred until here because of the complexity of the issue, is related to the naturalization of expression in those situations and at those moments when it is impossible to handle the discourse of human interaction by direct, verbal means. Moreover, I shall hypothesize that naturalization of the discourse between persons permits feelings and phenomena intrinsically muddled, contradictory, and many-sided to gain a more coherent understanding within a community. *Lemba's* various modes of expressiveness, the domains studied in parallel, reflect a tendency to move the conscious, verbal

narratives toward a positive, conjunctive resolution of characteristic dilemmas of social life—for example, patrilateral ties reinforced, marriage alliances strengthened, market trade encouraged, and so on—all the while the naturalized rituals of medicine “draw off” the dirty, contradictory, polluted, and evil aspects of the neophyte’s illness.

Both the songs and the origin myths of *Lemba* demonstrate a certain tendency toward naturalization of imagery in those settings where negative ritual statuses are considered. The antelope’s growth from fawn to adult is invoked as an appropriate analogy for the transition of the *Lemba* neophyte from harassed candidate to full and secure member (Text 1.21–5). Barrenness is spoken of in terms of a “field’s barrenness,” which will be made fertile (1.46). The transition from ritual death to resurrection in *Lemba* is described by referring to the movement of the sun (1.92–6). The incompetent orator is compared to the *nsibizi* rodent, whereas the effective orator, the *Lemba* advocate, is likened to *nkumbi* rat (Text 3). The palm of God is the natural object at the center of the separation of Mahungu male and female (Text 5), necessitating their efforts at thought and mediation. And, of course, the satchel of helpers is assembled by Tsimona-Mambu during his quest for relief for his wives and is unpacked and used during the various tests set up by a father reluctant to give his recognition (Text 11). In *Lemba*, however, the lyrical domain usually retains as its point of reference the humans who are in *Lemba*—father, son, wives, priests, priestesses—and their virtues. Passages of naturalization in the lyrical scores are fairly specific analogical metaphors to amplify the character traits of a specific affliction or adverse condition. This is possible, as suggested, because the full content of adverse emotions and perceptions is diverted to the medicinal ingredients, the nonverbal domains of expression.

In non-*Lemba* myths the naturalization of disjunctive passages is more pronounced. Semihuman characters such as the python-woman (mermaid?) make their appearance, or individuals become changed to animals or birds midway through the story. In the tale of Mavungu-son’s marriage that will exclude exchanging with his father, the clue that this will be an impossible and tragic marriage is the woman’s half-god or god-disguised identity. Mavungu-father’s attempted mediation is signalled by stray pigs wandering from Mavungu-son’s village, pursued by hunters, signifying an unconscious effort to accomplish the forbidden (Text 8).

The transformation of the hunted elephant with a spear in its side into a human sufferer (Text 7) represents a confirmation of the principle by negative example: humanization of the discourse. The successful mediator, Mavungu-spear-loser (elder), attempts to reconcile contrasting domains and follows his mystical guide obediently, thereby bringing the interaction of the two main characters to a human level. Mavungu-unsuccessful-mediator, his brother, again demonstrates the case of naturalization, in that his dilemma of the lost banana tree is not resolved but is transformed into a "bad trip" of hemp smoking, further transposing the discourse away from the open human level in the face of an impasse. The hunting scene with Moni-Mambu, tragic trickster, (12.7) illustrates the potential of naturalization in the face of disjunctive mediation. Attempting marriage but finding his wife hungry for meat, Moni-Mambu misses his game, destroys his in-laws' house, drops the axe into a river, and gets eaten by crocodile. The scene shifts to a drama between crocodile and hawk, the original hunter having become "hunted" game.

Much of this material deals with patrilineal and alliance relations because of such an emphasis in *Lemba*. However myths may be found in Kongo oral literature to reflect the matrilineage viewpoint. There, even more than in the present texts, naturalization of discourse imagery is used to mediate dilemmas. The Kuba-Ntu cycle, for example, describes the fate of a woman and her daughters and son when they discover that their oft-absent merchant father is really a witch wishing to sell them.<sup>17</sup> Kuba-Ntu the son by mistake breaks his father's powder box and is hidden in a tree by the mother. To avoid being trapped by the father, now disguised as a hunter (or in league with a hunter), the son transforms himself into a brightly-spotted guinea fowl which, on the day the father is selling the daughters at the market, drops feathers or bright beads to distract everyone and snatches his sisters away to safety. Another variant depicts the father, turned crocodile, seizing the daughters while they are fishing and keeping them in a cavern nearby where they are finally discovered by their bird-brother. In all variants the son succeeds in taking his mother and sisters to the safety of their maternal uncles' home, from where they initiate a legal suit against the father. In some variants he is accused of witchcraft and killed.

Of course, symbolic naturalization of dilemma situations is widespread in Central-African thought and verbal act, as well as ritual. If the foregoing examples represent attempts to discuss varieties of

human experience, then it is true, as Dadié says, that fable-like transformations are made up in many instances of human relationships too volatile to discuss openly yet which require commentary. Also, belief in animals as witch's familiars, as in the father-crocodile example above, may prompt the choice of a particular animal. The transformation of discourse from explicitly human to veiled animal, like Bateson's understanding of redundancy in a noisy or clogged communications channel, permits discourse to continue even though troubled by conflict, anxiety, fear, jealousy, or other negative emotions.<sup>18</sup>

Naturalization of the discourse may also result from the ritual operator's or storyteller's desire to describe a human situation more cogently by invoking an image drawn from the world around him and known to everyone. For example, to contrast the fumbling *nsibizi* with the clever *nkumbi* and to identify *Lemba's* rejoicing with the twitch of *nkumbi's* whiskers charges the expression with nuances more vivid and lively than is possible in abstractions. The art of speaking in Kongo requires this sort of metaphor building. Moreover, ritual is based on the amplification of nonverbal metaphor. In *Lemba*, the music of chiming bracelets and throbbing drums as backdrop for the lyrics, as well as the totalizing statement of the medicines drawn from natural and human domains, together construct a universe of meaning that can readily objectify inchoate feelings of anxiety or ill. As Nietzsche noted in "The Birth of Tragedy," music—the non-verbal—could express the objectivity of the will itself "and therefore represent the metaphysical of everything physical in the world," far better than "unsupported word or image." Music created the tragic myth because it alone could penetrate to the real depths of a person's experience, "through annihilation and negation, so that he is made to feel that the very womb of things speaks audibly to him."<sup>19</sup>

### *Structure, Choice, and Medicine*

Given, then, that naturalization of the discourse occurs in dilemmas of human experience and is used by metaphor-makers to focus or amplify their messages, is it possible to identify precisely the situations in which this naturalization occurs? Lévi-Strauss's early understanding of the logic of mythic discourse suggested that it provided a manner of resolving a cultural contradiction through metaphoric "templates" each slightly different from the previous

one.<sup>20</sup> This characteristic of myth would explain the transfer of the father-son conflict over control of the daughters (sisters) in the Kuba-Ntu cycle to the plane of the bird-crocodile drama within natural cosmological parameters. Lévi-Strauss did not at first find the context of such metaphoric mediations within social life; rather, he found it in the oppositions created by the “savage”—human—mind. He was criticized for this apparent confusion of “structural oppositions” and “contradictions.” Burrige, for example, has defined a contradiction as alternative, goal-oriented activities or processes which effectively and simultaneously negate each other.<sup>21</sup> “Life” and “death” are alternatives, meaning either to be alive or to be dead. Later Lévi-Strauss revised the notion of mythic mediation to include the “symbolic,” the “imaginary,” and the “real,”<sup>22</sup> suggesting that some oppositions might stem from structures of classification such as earth/sky, birds/reptiles, and the like, but that others might be based upon contradictions within the structures of society and cultural values. For Burrige, true contradictions could only occur in dramatic situations in recognizable historic events. That is, they must be based upon alternatives between which an actor must choose. Thus Burrige injects into the analysis of myth structure the concrete terms of given historic moments as well as the structure of ideology.

Such moments of choice in the face of alternatives constitute in Kongo society the context of metaphorization of the discourse. Judicial palaver (*nsamu*) may well be the prototypical context for this. When antagonists become uncomfortably alienated from one another, a third party or two spokesmen take up their causes. In the negotiations that ensue, they invoke songs, proverbs, and other rhetorical devices. Up to a point these techniques examine evidence and probe possibilities for conciliation. The texts examined in this work show moments like this, as for example when the trickster (in Texts 11 and 12) is judged for having killed. A chief or judge decides the matter, and the decision of guilt or innocence is final. However, it is in the portrayal of irreconcilable alternatives such as that which the python-woman presents Mavungu (Text 8) that we find naturalized metaphors.

Examination of *Lemba* lyrics suggests that recourse to naturalized metaphors may also have to do with the psychological process of drawing a sufferer/neophyte out of an intractable personal dilemma. A framework for analysis of this process is lent by Lacan’s interpretation of psychoanalytic processes as applied to language.<sup>23</sup> The frequency in *Lemba*-related lyrics of dreams, visions, nightmares,

and possession (see Texts 1.18, 1.45, 1.115, 7.13–16, 8.4–6, 9.5–7) indicates the presence of a mode of image association Lacan would call “the sliding of the signified under the signifier,” in which a hidden message is postulated because of the mystification of the subject.<sup>24</sup> In Kwamba’s report (Text 1) on the *Lemba* initiation, repeated reference is made to a hidden referent or signified force such as that which is “given and taken away” by *Lemba*, that which “falls in the water when the payments are made,” or that which “dies and laughs with the dogs.” These lyrics, like many types of divination, float an image which will “catch” the subject’s perception of his condition.

Another psychodynamic process may be identified in the *Lemba* attempt to construct a metaphor of parallel expressive domains once an appropriate image is discovered for the affliction or its cause. Often one domain or point of reference in the metaphor is the hidden force or referent in the life of the neophyte, and the second point, to which the first is associated, is drawn from nature, resulting in such constructs as, “What *Lemba* given, *Lemba* takes away; what the sun given, the sun takes away.” Signifiers which stand in a relationship of near similarity are “piled up” until their common point of reference, the hidden referent, is made clear. This symbolic process is sometimes called condensation.<sup>25</sup> Its role in the psychodynamics of *Lemba* healing appears to be that of attaching the presumed affliction to a set of symbolic anchors so that it may be more effectively “moved” in the subject’s life.

A third type of process in the psychological effect of the metaphor seen in *Lemba* is the “displacement” of signifier to signified, which Lacan speaks of as the “veering off of meaning” from one object or person to another, comparable to the action in grammar of the transitive verb in getting the noun to influence the object.<sup>26</sup> *Lemba* lyrics such as “that which was the fawn, is today the grown antelope” (1.21), or “that which was barren . . . has become fertile” (1.46), or “that which was a ‘stitch’ of pain, has become the path to the priesthood” (1.94), take one quality or entity and transform it into a related, different member of the same class. The series of naturalizing allusions to spirits, plants, animals, and cosmological spaces serve to bring movement into the neophyte’s or the neophyte couple’s status. Evidence from other drums of affliction suggests that this is the way they too use ritual metaphor.

In transferring the image of conflict, contradiction, and evil “down” to natural metaphors, *Lemba* was able to emphasize a lyrical, verbal consciousness of positive mediation. The conscious image of positive mediation was clothed through the ideal roles of the *Lemba* Father,

the culture-hero trickster, or the androgynous hero who invented marriage. Simultaneously the natural metaphors were made to draw away from the neophyte couple all the dirt, evil, pollution, and contradiction. This activity was absorbed by *Lemba*, and apotheosized through identification with a mythic hero or ritual object like the *n'kobe*. Personal and social contradictions once contained in this manner became "powers" (*makundu*) in the rule of *Lemba* and its image of an ideal society.

It should by now be apparent how *Lemba* healed, and why it was heuristically advantageous to adopt a model of analysis which identified distinctive expressive domains, each with its own codes and characteristics of discourse. This image of an ideal society and a therapeutic ideology may be spelled out even more explicitly, drawing from pronouncements by *Lemba* adherents, early ethnographers, and recent interpreters of this major drum of the Congo region.

## Chapter 10

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### The Ideology of *Lemba* Therapeutics

In this chapter I shall consider the evidence for an explicit *Lemba* theory of therapeutics. In the previous chapter it becomes clear how *Lemba* ritual and thought manipulated symbolic frameworks to put forward a coherent lyrical or verbal picture of human society—the *Lemba* model—transferring downward into nonverbal symbols the negative and contradictory where it became sacralized and powerful “medicine.” The task of this chapter is to engage in a somewhat hypothetical conversation with *Lemba* priests and priestesses over the conscious mission they had. Texts presented in this work and other sources give localized and historically specific versions of this *Lemba* consciousness. Interpretations since *Lemba*’s demise by scholars, both African and non-African, are almost as localized and time-specific. It is the role of the historian and the ethnologist to take all such evidence and extrapolate from it a synthesized consciousness, theory, or ideology from which to make sense of the institution.

#### *The Affliction and its Etiology*

Probably all *Lemba* adherents would agree that *Lemba* was a “drum of affliction.” It was spoken of as an *n’kisi* whose rituals were drummed up with its unique hand-held instrument (*ngoma* or *nkonko*). In earlier chapters, the indigenous theory of drums of affliction was spelled out in terms of public, corporate, sacred medicines. In one region of the Lower Congo/Zaire, such drums were devoted to clan leadership, chiefship, water spirits, judicial affairs, and order in markets and public sites (the case of *Lemba*).<sup>1</sup>

A more difficult to understand aspect of *Lemba* therapeutics has been the conception of the affliction it was intended to treat. Particular symptoms designated as the “*Lemba* illness” vary greatly. Thus one finds a host of physical symptoms mentioned such as “evening fever” (Text 3.2), “chest cough, stitch, or breathing with difficulty,” or other

respiratory ailments (1.1), sterility of self or spouse,<sup>2</sup> “swollen stomach” (10.22), and the like. Other accounts offer psychosocial afflictions such as “spouse’s infidelity” (10.31–4; 1.105ff.), dreams or nightmares of *Lemba* ancestors or authorities (1.18; 9.7), hallucinations and outright possession by “*Lemba* spirits” (9.7, 9.20). Several writers attribute to *Lemba* panacean claims of universal healing. The European version of this notion attributes to *Lemba* even the ability to heal the “incurably ill”<sup>3</sup> The African version of this is that *Lemba* deals with all afflictions of the abdomen, head, heart, and sides, that is to say, the whole person as defined by Kongo thought (10.10). Specific afflictions such as these no doubt originate in personal accounts of individuals having been treated by *Lemba*, but they convey far too particularistic and individualistic a view of *Lemba*’s orientation. They originate in second- and third-hand accounts quite removed from *Lemba*’s therapeutic consciousness and distantly removed from any sense of *Lemba*’s ideology of healing.

Closer to *Lemba*, and even among *Lemba* adherents, one still finds particularistic notions of a “*Lemba* illness,” such as one priest’s view that *Lemba* dealt with persons who had experienced a miraculous cure from an incurable disease<sup>4</sup> and was a type of votive offering by the neophyte to the power that had cured him.

Kongo authors of the past twenty years who have sought to clarify this aspect of the *Lemba* affliction have tended to argue that there was no single, specific *Lemba* illness. Ngoma, for example, in his dissertation on Kongo initiation, suggests that a variety of illnesses, indeed any illness, could precipitate the curative stages entailed in a *Lemba* initiation.<sup>5</sup> The duration of the cure would be determined by the wealth of the candidate. Malonga and Mampuya agree with Ngoma that there was no specific *Lemba* affliction. However they shift the perspective of the question around to make the entire therapeutic symbolism of the initiation an artifact of *Lemba*’s explicit approach to social control. In Malonga’s view the manifestation of one or another affliction was a shrewd feigning of illness proposed by the *Lemba* Father. With the help of a diviner treatment or pretreatment might induce a skin rash or other symptoms which the full therapy then pretended to relieve. *Lemba* afflictions were thus “iatrogenic” elements in the maintenance of *Lemba*’s public posture.<sup>6</sup> Mampuya is harshly critical of *Lemba*, suggesting that this sickness induced in the neophyte, whether through psychical manipulation or through outright mystical threat, served only the “antisocial” ends of coercion and exploitation. Malonga, however, respectfully calls this aspect a

feature of the major “social institution”—the government—of the region, echoing Munzele’s view that *Lemba* integrated “markets, villages, and people,”<sup>7</sup> or echoing that of a *Lemba* wife that *Lemba* was “a medicine of government,” or that of a clan head that it was the “government of multiplication and reproduction.”

Although the scholarly views of Ngoma, Malonga, and Mampuya thus reflect an understanding of *Lemba*’s function which corresponds to the views of others close to *Lemba*, they still fall short of comprehension of the nature of *Lemba*’s ideology of affliction and therapy. All three scholars, as well as Fukiau whose work on *Lemba* has been reviewed extensively in Chapter 6, portray *Lemba* as it was in the early colonial era: an institution losing its control of resources and influence. Only the primary texts in the catechists’ accounts, written early in the twentieth century, offer a glimpse of what must have been an earlier, more characteristic picture of *Lemba* therapeutics.

Konda, in Text 8 (Chapter 7), offers a remarkable picture of the *Lemba* affliction. *Lemba* may be “aroused” (*komwa*) through dreams of *Lemba* ancestors, nightmares of suffocation, or outright possession. These modes of affliction are sometimes accompanied, he notes, by blockage of speech requiring therapeutic “loosening,” or “opening.” Bittremieux’s depiction of *Lemba* priests as reflected in their names suggests that they were persons driven, even obsessed, with success in trade, influence, and public prestige.<sup>8</sup> Konda, of all writers, comes closest to relating the affliction to this reputation of *Lemba* adherents and aspirants for seeking wealth and influence. He suggests that the force emanating from the ancestors to make one wealthy and influential will also make one sick unless one is somehow protected. The therapy for this affliction is appropriately first a confession by the sufferer of blocked speech revealing what he has seen in dreams and nightmares, followed by the prescribed rituals of marriage and massive redistribution of goods to his patrilineal children and other bystanders.

This view of *Lemba*’s affliction corresponds to what is known of the historic surroundings of *Lemba* adherents. They were wealthy (or wealth acquiring) and influential merchants, judges, healers, diviners, and chiefs. Frequently they were at the head of slave segments of clans. Their alliances to other clans, consecrated in *Lemba*, constituted a network of sociopolitical relationships across a vast region, in particular where the inland routes of the international trade required some form of social control. Such wealth and influence as this brought introduced strong currents of envy and jealousy into the small-scale

clan communities, touching off in the minds of these wealthy and influential persons such symptoms as dreams, nightmares, fears of sorcery attack, sterility, death, and a host of other specific symptoms. It is thus not wrong to identify specific symptoms such as cough, respiratory troubles, headaches, and other psychic afflictions as "*Lemba* afflictions," if they are seen as deriving from the vulnerable condition of the influential in a society with a strong egalitarian ethic. The *Lemba* affliction is seen then as a psychic or physical symptom of vulnerability and marginality among the influential in a society with a normative ideology emphasizing egalitarian authority and redistributive economics.

### *The Therapy*

*Lemba's* therapy followed from such a conceptualization of the *Lemba* affliction. The *Lemba* sufferer, having perceived either his "calling" to gain wealth or his marginality and vulnerability before his kinsmen or the loss of his productive base in his natural clan community and household, wanted to gain adherence to the corporate body which could protect him. A variety of tests were administered to such a candidate. Was he really a capable, influential person? Then let him pay huge fees or find the patronage to do it for him. Did he have strategic alliances with other clans? Then let him identify the wife or wives who with their clans would undergo the *Lemba* marriage sanctifying this alliance. Was he torn apart by fear of sorcery directed against him and his offspring? Then he must take medicine of purification to find a new integration above and beyond the divisive forces that threatened to destroy him. Let him dedicate his household(s) to *Lemba* so that they could continue to have children and survive into the next generation. Was the candidate indulging in antipublic, prima-donna rhetoric with his speaking skills and his talents for curing or trading? Then he must by all means be "drafted" or even harassed into *Lemba* circles so his influence would not tear asunder the regional social fabric.

*Lemba* initiatory therapy moved the influential but vulnerable sufferer into a course of greater self-awareness and social responsibility. The symbolism of the *Lemba* initiation came to grips with massive contradictions, working them out in the aura of *Lemba's* greater coherence as expressed in the etiology myths. For example, the envy, greed, and destruction seen to accompany irresponsibly

held wealth was neutralized in the *Lemba* medicine, while the generosity of the feast served notice that the neophyte was after all concerned with his dependents' welfare. In several local variants, as has been shown, the neutralizing, purifying power of white chalk (*luvemba*) was combined with food and excrements and sometimes the body parts—hair, nails—of the *Lemba* members. As the neophyte moved into the protective sancity of *Lemba* and was made to distribute massive amounts of his wealth so that others might feast, his own food consisted mainly of chalk, excrements, and token bits of real food.

At the same time as such social contradictions were transferred to nonverbal ritual objects in food, medicine, and the permanent mementos of the *n'kobe* shrine, mythic heroes in the etiological narratives—trickster, androgynous demigod, earth deity, ancestor—were made to iron out all these dilemmas and contradictions, thereby constructing a conscious, positive ideological unity. As with most public ideologies, this perfected version of the institution stands at odds with the actual lives of individuals.

At *Lemba's* end in the colonial era, with a strong lingering memory of wealth and influence but with few remaining goods to distribute, *Lemba's* "lies and exploitation" as Mampuya calls them<sup>9</sup> may have well been very far from the institution's earlier self-image. W.H. Bentley, a pioneer British missionary, wrote that in "the 1860's *elembe* was a word that filled people with fear. The cry '*elembe edio*' (this is *Lemba*) would stop a caravan in its path and make it submit to capture, robbery, and death without a struggle. . . . It is difficult to understand why the word had such an effect, but many who knew the '*elembe* period' as it was called have told the same story. It was shockingly abused and made the means of much violence and robbery."<sup>10</sup> But here too there is evidence of second- and third-hand anecdotal information about *Lemba* in its latter phases, succumbing to the disintegrative influences of the late, coastal slave trade.

### *The Virtuous Society*

It is important to press the inquiry of a conscious therapeutic ideology of *Lemba* further, to the point of asking what may have been the *Lemba* ideology of health? That is, what was *Lemba's* "theory" of social order, of the good life, and of the ideal person? A major institution which prevailed over so vast a region for three centuries leaves its

mark on public consciousness. It must have a notion of the virtuous society. This notion is made up of a specific model of society—a conscious set of alternatives—in this case arising from an acephalous, segmentary society in which problems of trade and authority needed to be dealt with.

It must have been an item of *Lemba* theory to identify the natural base of power in the society—the talented orator, the skilled merchant, the able healer, and so on—and to bring such persons together into *Lemba*'s ranks. Many informants tell of *Lemba*'s character criteria of clarity, gracefulness, integrity, and the like. Malonga notes that *Lemba* arrogated to itself all knowledge in Lari society through techniques of spying and information sharing.<sup>11</sup> On this basis it was able to maintain order in a society lacking centralized institutions of law, police, and taxation. Its governmental methods were derived from this need to keep abreast of the real basis of legitimacy. For this reason there is recurring mention of the membership of slaves in *Lemba*. In contrast, a hereditary aristocracy would have had to maintain control by means of institutional centralization.

Because of the integral role of trade in the regional economy, *Lemba*'s self-concept included an elaborate code of market and trade-route behavior. The marketplaces became the nodes of economic interaction, as well as the sites for the execution of criminals. *Lemba* priests, as trade and market police, were said to enjoy immunity from tariffs and seizure of the entire region. Economic life and public order were thus conceptually joined.

Emphasis on trade and regional social order merged in another feature of *Lemba*, the initiation marriage. The importance of alliances between prominent clans has been frequently mentioned. It may be noted here that marriage and the protection of the *Lemba* household were central in the ritual symbolism and in explicit prohibitions binding priest and priestess. The importance of strong alliances was grounded in symbols of purity in the *Lemba* marriage. This is so striking that observers of the highly moral tone of *Lemba* marriages have suggested influence from eighteenth-century Christian missionaries. However, similar marital conservatism among coastal nobility and royalty in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries makes it altogether probable that this emphasis was internal and indigenous, growing out of the keystone role of marriages to the social order. In some places in the Nsundi and Bwende regions (the Manianga), the emphasis on alliances bears a very specific ideological label, the "reciprocal blood" marriage. Usually embodied in a patrilateral, cross-cousin

marriage, this reciprocation in an alliance requires a male to return, in his marriage, the descent substance received from his father's lineage. An alliance of the reciprocating type combines the emphasis on marriage with that on patrifilial continuity. This special understanding of social order, often found in communities of the *Lemba* region, thus possessed not only a territorial component but also a long-term, temporal component.

This temporal continuity contained in the diachronic structure of reciprocal marriages between exogamous clans is also the model of the religious hierophany. Just as the father-child dyad embodies the *Lemba* master-neophyte relationship of continuing spiritual power (*kundu* or *kitswa*), so it serves as the model of relationships between major spiritual beings and lesser, and between these and medicines via the human priests who convey their power to human society. Patrifiliality in *Lemba* was the relational metaphor of all ascending and descending pairs in the religious hierophany.

There is no doubt, therefore, that the *Lemba* therapeutic ideology was a model for a fully-formed social state. That it was realized to a great degree in the form of a drum of affliction surprises only those who have failed to take Central-African society on its own terms.

# Chapter 11

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## Conclusion: What Were the Questions?

The immediate aim of this work has been to elucidate the emergence, duration, and decline—the life cycle—of a major drum of affliction in the hope of better understanding this important genre of African therapeutic institution. Because the drum (*ngoma*) combines features often kept discrete in Western institutional perception—healing, politics, commerce, marriage—it has been necessary to show how these features articulated in an original manner. Once this was done, a second aim could be addressed: whether the drum of affliction in general, and *Lemba* in particular, is a reflection of the socioeconomic order or whether, in striving to resolve certain dilemmas and contradictions in that order, it actually shapes society in a unique way. In other words, is the drum of affliction an independent or a dependent variable of social change?

The first part of the work consisted in a reconstruction of the economic, political, and social history of the Malebo Pool-Cabinda-Loango triangle. This exercise, a regional history which needed to be written, showed the interdependent character of the well-known states of the area—Loango, Kakongo, Ngoyo, Nsundi, Kongo, Tio—as well as the less-well-known cults and shrines. In analytic language this history of the *Lemba* region demonstrated the interlinked corporate structures of local landed estates, the large-scale polities, and the movable corporate estates. The same interdependence characterized the relationship of the local economic base to the international trade. In other words, local, regional, and international economies were definitely found to intersect one with the other, just as was true of the “economy” of power symbols and medicines. In all of this *Lemba*, the major transcending institution of the region from the seventeenth century to the twentieth century, apparently played the key role of creating a ceremonial context for the economy of trade to mesh with the economy of agricultural production, and a context in which to generate medicinal symbolism to assuage the lives of those at the intersection of the two economies.

The second part of the work was devoted more pointedly to *Lemba* rituals and to the study of their variations along the lines of differential corporate structures of the region. Going beyond a good measure of free variation in *Lemba*'s ritual style, there was evidence of a correspondence between the rites of *Lemba* as a portable medicine shrine and the long-distance overland trade, on the one hand, and between *Lemba*'s fixed shrines on the Loango coast and the endpoint of the trade, on the other hand, where the brokerage role of a sedentary commercial elite in touch with European traders was a determinant.

At another level the *Lemba* rituals of therapy functioned to address a concern for the protection of *Lemba* members and their households from the envy of others and for relief from symptoms of such envy and the social precariousness accompanying it, for example, dreams, nightmares, possessions, and a range of physical symptoms such as "stitch in the side." *Lemba*'s therapeutic functions went beyond the individual and the household to the society at large where an effort was made at restructuring social relations. Ceremonial goods were distributed to the neophyte priest's dependents; stable alliances were created and legitimated; a new reality was forged through hero narratives which resolved some otherwise implacable dilemmas of the prevailing culture. These narratives deserve closer attention here.

The significance of the resolution narratives of *Lemba* lies not so much, however, in particular outcomes as in the way the mode of narrative used in *Lemba* therapy contrasts with other types of problem-resolution efforts, particularly those offered by the creation, or attempted creation, of new polities, especially centralized state-like regimes. There is widespread evidence of experimentation in the creation of institutions, especially coastal institutions, in the centuries surrounding *Lemba*, institutions that vary from centralized mini-states to alliance networks and ritual movements. In other words it is apparent that *Lemba* might have been displaced or replaced by the creation of another kind of institution. Thus it is significant that inhabitants of the region made a selective choice for the kind of public order that emerged, that, instead of imposing a new order to deal with the coastal trade which resembled a state, they developed a solution to the challenge of trade which emphasized the redefinition of reality in therapeutic terms. There are important implications in this for the writing of intellectual history, very much a concern among Africanists.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to explore beyond historical "solutions" offered by institutions and their ideologies to discover the problems or dilemmas

they were intended to resolve, and to discern the way a society imagined alternatives open to itself and the consequences of such alternatives if taken. A brief allusion to a comparative setting will emphasize the approach I have tried to follow. In a recent work on the origin of the "political" in ancient Greece, Christian Meier suggests that the recognition of alternative courses of action in the Athenian polity was greatly enhanced by the public arena of the theaters, especially the tragic theaters. Public funds were expended on playwrights who were invited annually to produce new dramas. They often took story material from Greek mythology and legends which they then reshaped into commentary on contemporary (fifth century B.C.) life in Athens and the surrounding region. Thus arose a keen appreciation for tragedy, which spelled out the consequences of courses of action around the family, the polity, and the individual in relationship to the gods and the forces of fate.<sup>2</sup>

The task of the third part of this present work has been to identify comparable settings or idioms in which alternatives, contradictions, and ambivalences were raised and dealt with, an analytic course which is imperative if one wants to explain the emergence of a distinctive institution such as a major drum of affliction, or for that matter of a state or any other institution that alters the texture of society. The questions raised by Part III suggest that one can identify traces, vestiges, of the perceived purpose of *Lemba*. Text 8, for example, shows Mavungu moving through the alternatives open to any individual coming to terms with the coastal trade, a situation which certainly provoked debate and questioning. Mavungu is lured to the "city at the coast" (8.16) where there are "whites" and "great wealth" in the "ships." However the same text goes on to show how Mavungu believed he needed to exchange his newly-earned wealth with his father and other kin. The dilemma of accumulation versus exchange is however couched in terms of conventional alliance versus identity, thus pitting marriage and affluence against patrilineal relations. This "tragic" exclusion of one of two idealized goals is accounted for in terms of the seductive lure of the "Mammy-Water" like female embodied in the serpent, but the conscious formulation of alternatives and consequences in connection with the trade is clear. Other narratives (Text 7, for example) speak of social cleavages in society or the dangers of ambiguous language (Texts 9–10). The point at issue here is that we can best compare attempted resolutions of these dilemmas, contradictions, and alternative courses of action in terms of the backdrop of implicit and explicit formulations of their

extreme, that is tragic, consequences. It is safe to assume that without a cultural awareness of such alternatives no solution of any kind would be attempted.

The therapeutic rites and associated etiological narratives record in much greater detail the attempted solutions of various dilemmas, contradictions, and alternative courses of action. I have shown that with the help of separate "expressive domains" an ideology of health is promoted at the level of verbal narrative. This is, as I have shown, more than a denial or sublimation of the contradictory. As close study of the "medicinal" code shows, a great deal of symbolic tension is present between the dilemma-negating narrative and the other levels where an all-out program is involved in harnessing, capturing, or containing the power of the "illness." Through a paradigmatic shift from the "human" to the "natural" the power of the illness is transformed into the power of the priesthood, recalling recent biofeedback experiments designed to give a patient a visual concept of his affliction so as to gain mental, emotional, and, one hopes, physiological control over it.

Whether a given drum of affliction in the Central-African setting is then a dependent or an independent variable of social change and all its forces of contradiction can only be answered once the questions which become the grounds for attempted solutions are elucidated, including a variety of rituals that pour answers into the questions as well as a variety of efforts to impose new orders of institutions such as the centralized state. In Greek antiquity such questions had to do with the freedom of the individual in the face of impersonal fate. In Kongo during at least part of the era of the great trade such questions had to do with the accumulation of wealth and influence in a society of egalitarian expectations, the protection of the individual engaged in commerce, his relationship to his kin, and the creation of a regional institution alongside local clans and dependents. Greek society thought out its alternatives and their consequences in the tragic theater and acted on them through a form of participatory democracy. Kongo society thought out its alternatives in legends, dreams, and in affliction etiologies and acted on them in a therapeutic-alliance-trading association. There is no doubt that *Lemba* shaped the public order, although by no means all medicines did so or may be expected to.