Part III. Vindicating Durkheim through ethnographic fieldwork

Chapter 5. Durkheim vindicated: Shrines and societal segments in the highlands of North-western Tunisia (North Africa)

5.1. Introduction[185]

We have seen that Durkheim's religion theory as presented in *Les Formes*, is many things – an innovative epistemological treatise; an ethnography of Australian religion; a metaphysical statement on the alleged societal reality behind the symbolism of religion; a corporatist statement of how individual tendencies may splendidly be tamed by the beneficial, even glorious impact of society... However, over the past century it has also been considered as just a sociological theory in its own right, and even if this does not do full justice to the scope and intentions of Durkheim, as such it may be put to the empirical test. The purpose of the present chapter is to present such a test, in reference to popular religion (the cult of shrines and saints) and social organisation in the highlands of Ḫumiriyya,[186] North-western Tunisia, in the late 1960s CE. This chapter is

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[185] This chapter closely follows my original text as published in 1985, and as recently reprinted in van Binsbergen 2017a. I consider reprinting the chapter in the present book justified because it throws an illuminating light on the continued heuristic value of Durkheim's theory.

[186] For the rendering of place-names (including the names Ḫumiriyya / Kroumirie for the region, and Ḫumiri, Ḫumiris / Kroumir for its inhabitants), and of Arabic terms and of plurals, *cf.* van Binsbergen 1980a: 71, n.7. The

therefore a contribution to the ethnography of religious behaviour in general and that of rural North Africa in particular.

As is the case in much of religious anthropology, studies of popular Islam have tended to concentrate on systems of belief and symbolism, with excursions into the relations between religion and the wider social, economic and political context in which that religion occurs. The behavioural aspect of religion has been somewhat neglected, and as a result for some of the most pertinent questions of contextual religious analysis we have had to content ourselves with tentative answers largely founded on intuition and persuasion; the necessary empirical data have often been lacking. A major problem in this connexion is that an empirical, quantitative description of religious behaviour – such as I shall offer towards the end of this chapter – remains meaningless without an adequate discussion of the symbolic and social-organisational aspects of such behaviour.

Having elsewhere[187] dealt with the historical aspects of saintly cults and the interplay between popular and formal Islam in the Ḫumiri region, in the present chapter I shall largely limit myself to the modern situation concerning pious visits (*zyāra*) to shrines associated with named local saints – touching on local history only in so far this helps to explain the nature of territorial segmentation today, and refraining from a discussion of such significant aspects of Ḫumiri religion as: the veneration of trees and sources; veneration of saints through other rituals than pious visits; the ecstatic cults that are loosely organized in religious brotherhoods and that, although implying saints, form a popular-religious complex somewhat distinct from *zyara*; the symbolic deep structure of such key concepts as sainthood and *baraka*; and finally the formal Islam of the Qur'ān, the mosque, the pilgrimage to Mecca. Even so the ethnographic argument will be too lengthy to allow for a more than cursory discussion of the many wider theoretical implications of the Ḫumiri data.

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system adopted is merely intended to approximate the (unwritten) Ḫumiri dialect and obviously obscures many of the orthographic and phonetic distinctions of literary Arabic. Long vowels in Ḫumiri Arabic words are indicated by a horizontal stroke whenever the word appears for the first time. This may yield surprises, *e.g.* general Arabic *bărăkă̆*, 'grace', becomes *barāka* in the mouth of my Ḫumiri hosts. In Ḫumiriyya the personal names Muḥammad (Arabic) and Mḥammad (Turkish / Ottoman) are clearly distinct, with the first 'a' in Muḥammad tending towards the Italian 'a', in Mḥammad towards the French 'è'. Earlier ethnographic sources on the cult of saints in Ḫumiriyya include: Dornier 1950; Demeerseman 1938, 1939-40, 1964; Dallet 1939-40; Ferchiou 1972; for my own work on this topic, see the end bibliography of this book. I shrink from citing here the enormous literature on Maghribine rural popular religion. For a dated but useful bibliographical survey with particular reference to Tunisia, *cf.* Louis 1977. Studies of Maghribine rural religious behaviour applying the canons of modern social science are, however, scarce; I have found much inspiration in the work of Ernest Gellner, especially 1969, who in 1976 also read my 1971 thesis on the topic and recommended it for publication – although that project has still not been concluded. A useful, though dated, and more Islamological than anthropological, survey of popular Islam is: Waardenburg 1979.

[187] van Binsbergen 1970a, 1970b, 1971a, 1971b, 1976, 1980a, 1980b, 1985a, 1985b, 2017b, forthcoming (b).

5.1.1. Durkheim applied to North African social segmentation

In one of his major books preceding *Les Formes*, notably *De la Division du Travail Social* (1893), Durkheim sketched two main formats of social organisation: the simple concatenation of identical units (resulting in a society governed by 'mechanical solidarity'), and the intricate connectivity between essentially different and complementary units, resulting in 'organic solidarity'. The forms of social organisation produced by a (real or nominal) lineage system based on unilineal descent, constitute a standard example of mechanical solidarity. Units at the same level are in principle identical and equal to all others at that level, and vertically the structure of all levels is analogous – the basic structure is that which mathematicians call *recursion*. In the 1950-1970s, the study of such descent systems was a major part of anthropological research.[188] North African societies have habitually been described in terms of segmented patrilineal descent groups, and that is also how the members of such societies look at their own organisation – even though the actual practice in the ongoing social process may be very different, and patrilineal segmentation turns out to be an *emic* ideology rather than a sociological explanation.[189] According to Gellner (*e.g.* 1985, 1987) such work is indirectly indebted to Emile Masqueray, author of a Tuareg dictionary and of early ethnographic studies on Algeria. Masqueray is cited once by Durkheim, in passing (1893: 193), in reference to a *sedentary* Algerian population where the dynamics of segmentation that so fascinated Gellner, scarcely were to be expected. With his studies of the saints of the High Atlas, Central Morocco, Ernest Gellner (1963, 1969, *cf.* van Binsbergen 1971b) made himself the principal theoretician of segmentation as an alternative model of socio-political organisation – alternative, in the sense of lacking enduring corporate groups, political leaders, a sense of bounded collective identity. The problem now is, as Hugh Roberts (2002; *cf.* Munson 1997) argues, that Gellner's assertion about Masqueray and segmentation is not substantiated, not can it be. With some justification, Munson reproaches Gellner for bad scholarship and habitual failure to check and recheck his sweeping pronouncements; personally I feel implied, not only because Ernest Gellner (1925-1995) is dead and can no longer defend himself, but also because similar attacks have been made on me; moreover he and I have the same multiplicity of disciplines (anthropology and philosophy), both qualified as Mediterraneanists, and both have experienced that above-average productivity and versatility brings out the worst in envious colleagues. Those who have seen Gellner (almost the Stephen Hawking of British social philosophy and anthropology) struggle for years under a wasting and painful physical condition, and those who (like myself) have benefitted from his encouragement and hard work, would be rather milder in their judgement. Anyway, *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*.

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[188] Fortes 1953; Lewis 1965; Barnes 1962; Meggitt 1965.

[189] Peters 1960; Favret 1966; van Binsbergen 1970a, 1970b, 1971a, in forthcoming (b).

5.2. Regional and historical background

Ḫumiriyya is a mountainous area in north-western Tunisia, situated between the Tunisian-Algerian border (which is hardly a social and cultural boundary), and the towns of Tabarka and Janduba. The regional capital is the small town of ᶜAin Draham, where the region's only mosque is found, built only in the mid-20th c. CE.

Until the late 19th c. CE, the narrow, densely-forested valleys of this remote region provided a relatively prosperous livelihood for a tent-dwelling population engaging in semi-transhumant animal husbandry (cattle, sheep, goats) and small-scale agriculture (wheat, rye, olives). Each of the scattered homesteads consisted of a core of close agnates, with their wives, children and non-agnatically[190] related adult male dependants (herdsmen, who often became sons-in-law). These residential and productive units constituted the bottom tier of a segmentary system, whose explicit ideology was one of patrilineal descent but in which, in fact, factional allegiance, geographical propinquity, and genealogical manipulation were equally important structuring principles. Localized clans, tribes, and confederations of tribes formed the highest levels of the segmentary model. The segmentary organisation regulated: rights over pastures, forest areas and springs; special patronage links between social groups and invisible saints, associated with the numerous shrines scattered over the land; and burial rights in local cemeteries situated around a saintly shrine – although, given the large number of shrines and the very small number of cemeteries per valley, most shrines had no cemetery around them.

On all segmentary levels, complementary segments were in competition with each other over scarce resources, women, and honour. The armed conflicts to which this competition frequently gave rise, were in two ways mitigated by the cult of saints.

First, each higher-level segment (encompassing the majority of the population of a valley) would have a twice-annual saintly festival (*zarda*) near the shrine of its patron saint, located at some conspicuous point in that valley. On this occasion, all members of the local segment (*i.e.* all inhabitants of the valley) would make a collective visit to the shrine, and would for several days stay near the shrine, chatting, feasting, and being entertained by dancing and singing. Members of feuding segments in neighbouring valleys were likewise under obligation to make a pious visit to the shrine concerned, attending this festival, and sharing in the collective meal there. Temporary lifting of segmentary opposition was achieved not only through this ritual commensality but also through a safe-conduct for all pilgrims, sanctioned by the invisible saint. Also women who, originating from the local segment, had married into a different valley, were under obligation to make the pious visit to the shrine on the occasion of the saintly festival.

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[190] *Agnates* are blood relatives in the paternal line.

Secondly, the major shrines – those that had a twice-annual festival catering for an entire valley – were administered by specialist shrine-keepers. The latter were not considered saints in themselves, but they were pious, pacifist men who had placed themselves outside the feuding system and who, on the basis of a saintly safe-conduct and by virtue of the respect that the shrine's flags commanded, were often successful in quenching violence between segments.

The colonial period in Tunisia, which began with the French conquest of Ḥumiriyya in 1881,[191] brought tremendous changes in the social, economic and religious structures of the region. It took the colonial state a quarter of a century to impose its monopoly of violence, but from the beginning of the twentieth century an effective stop was put to feuding as the main motor behind segmentary dynamics. Movement of the population was further restricted by state exploitation of the extensive cork-tree forests, the establishment of European settler farms (which in Ḥumiriyya however remained a much more limited phenomenon than in the fertile Tunisian valleys to the south and the east of this mountainous area), and the concentration of land rights in the hands of a few state-appointed chiefs and their families, who were in collusion with the colonial administration. Pressure on the land was exacerbated by dramatic population increase, and massive erosion through over-exploitation of the vulnerable soil system proved inevitable. The economic opportunities in the French-created garrison town of ᶜAin Drāham, even after its development into a regional capital and a tourist resort, could not compensate for the decline of the local subsistence economy; neither could, during the colonial period, labour migration directed to areas of capitalist farming, and to urban areas, in Tunisia and Algeria. The re-afforesting projects and the unemployment relief work undertaken since Tunisia became independent (1956), did not alter this state of

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[191] #34. *VICISSITUDES OF AN INTERNATIONAL AND RELIGIOUS BOUNDARY BETWEEN ALGERIA AND TUNISIA.* Today, the international boundary runs some three kilometres West of Sidi Mḥammad, and comes much closer than that to the Tabárka-ᶜAin Drāham motor road near the border village of Babouche, whence the traveller is granted a glimpse across the mountains to the city of Annaba / Bône on the Mediterranean Sea, the ancient Christian bishopric of Hippo, St Augustine's (whose writings incidentally contain interesting information on shrines and funerary customs in the region c. 400 CE, in pre-Islamic times but in many respects continuous with today; after all, at the heart of Ḥumiri popular religion are megalithic constructions from the Bronze Age, up to 3 millennia before St Augustine). The political and religious economy of the regional landscape can only be understood once we take into account the fact that, prior to the 1881 CE French conquest, the international boundary between Algeria (French Protectorate since 1830) and Tunisia (nominally ruled by the Bey of Tunis as part of the Ottoman Empire) was formed by the Wad al-Kabīr. Hence the location of major, domed shrines on hillocks (*raqūbat*) adjacent to that river, from Sidi ᶜAmara at the end of the al-Mazūz valley due North of ᶜAin Drāham, to Sidi ᶜAbd Allah Jr beneath the village of Fīdh al-Míssay (the principal regional shrine of Sidi ᶜAbd Allah Sr is, however, 3 km South of ᶜAin Drāham in the Ulad Hallāl community; the entire series of interconnected ᶜAbd Allah shrines in the region is a vestige of the Northbound expansion of the ᶜArfawi clan associated with the *Qadiri* brotherhood), Sidi Mḥammad, and Sidi Salīma. The shrines's consistent locations bring out the role of the saints as both emphasising, and transcending at the same time, secular socio-political boundaries. This is in line with the shrines's functioning as characteristic attributes of higher-level territorial segments – as we shall see.

affairs substantially. The ethnographic present of the late 1960s offers the picture of a destitute peasant population, which within the rigid confines of its villages of immobile stone houses and small and fragmented fields keeps going a transformed neo-traditional social and ritual organisation, and a no-longer viable local subsistence economy ineffectively supplemented by unemployment relief projects.

5.3. Segmentation in Ḫumiriyya today

The model of a segmentary lineage system has remained the standard idiom by which participants structure their social environment, distinguish between residential groups, and explain relationships between these groups. In the face of the realities of peripheral capitalism, this lineage model became devoid of such economic and political significance as it had in nineteenth-century Ḫumiriyya. It no longer effectively governs the everyday ongoing social process in the villages. Moreover, as the population has become totally sedentary, and pressure on the land increased, the idiom of patrilineal descent is no longer a device for segmentary mobilisation in the competition over scarce resources, but has become merely a folk idiom to loosely describe the pattern of organisational alignment of bounded territorial units such as are manifestly visible in the Ḫumiri countryside today – and a means to claim legitimate membership of such units, *i.e.* rights of residence and rights in land.

From the lowest level upwards, we find (*cf.* Fig. 5.1) households, compounds, sub-neighbourhoods or hamlets, neighbourhoods, villages, valleys, chiefdoms. Each of these is clearly marked, and distinguished from complementary units at the same segmentary level, by unmistakable features in the landscape: the walls of dwelling-houses and the open spaces between houses; the cactus fences between compounds and hamlets; the pastures, fields, shrub-covered fallow areas, and patches of forest between neighbourhoods and between villages; and the steep, forested mountain ranges between valleys and between chiefdoms consisting of a number of valleys.

Most of these units are designated by names derived from human proper names: Dar ᶜAli ("ᶜAli's House'), Mḥamdiya ('Descendants of Muḥammad'), Ulad Ibrahim ('Descendants of Ibrahim'), *etc*. While these labels in fact function as names for residential units, and as toponyms, their evocation of a historical or mythical ancestor from which all born members of that unit are claimed to descend, enables Ḫumiri participants to represent their territorial organisation today by a patrilineal genealogy encompassing an entire valley and even chiefdom – despite massive oral-historical evidence at my disposal which clearly establishes that, at least in the 12 km² that formed the core of my research area, few compounds and hamlets, and no neighbourhoods, villages or higher-level territorial segments, are composed of a homogeneous set of agnates descending from one common ancestor. On the contrary, the population belongs to more than a dozen mutually unrelated patrilineal descent lines, most of which immi-

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grated into their present day territory in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth century; only by virtue of genealogical manipulation can they manage to identify as agnates.
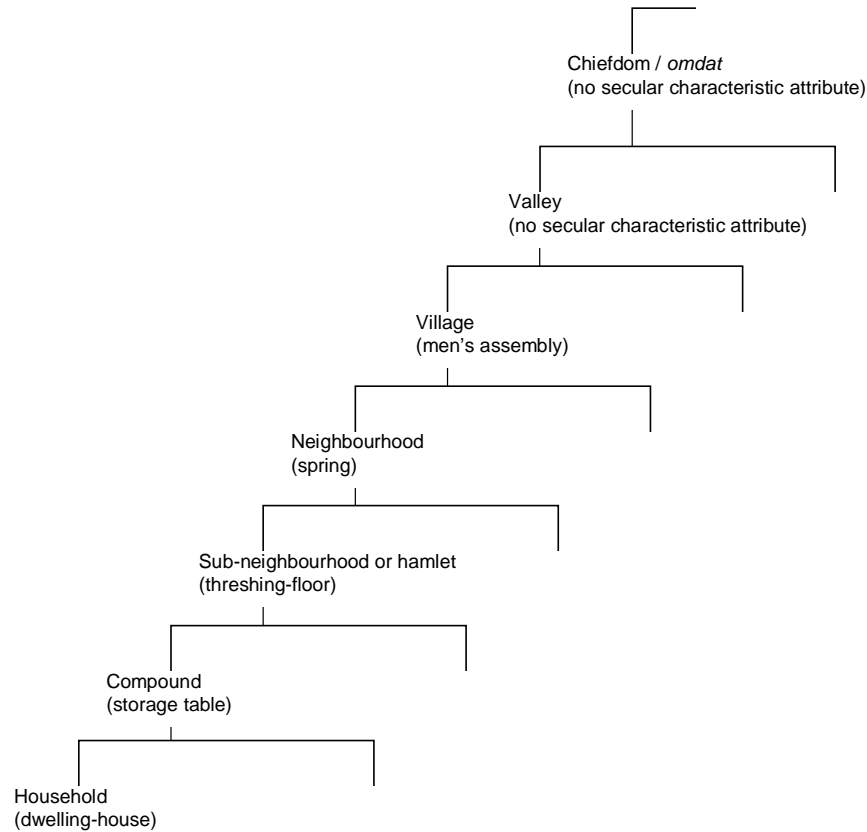

Fig. 5.1. Segmentation in Ḫumiri society: Segmentary levels and their *secular* characteristic attributes

Ḫumiri territorial segments have distinctive features beyond their visible boundaries and their proper names evoking ancestors. The extent to which the model of territorial segmentation sketched here is not just a researcher's construct, but a living reality to the participants, is clear from the fact that at each level of territorial segmentation a segment has a characteristic attribute which defines it against complementary segments at the same level. Like the unit boundaries, these attributes are clearly visible in the landscape, and they are a result of human activity. Each household is characterized by its own dwelling-house, which defines the basic unit of human reproduction, since by containing the family bed it sets the scene for sex life, child-birth and child-rearing. A few dwelling-houses combine so as to form one compound; this territorial unit is defined by the storage table, which marks the compound as a basic unit of food processing and consumption. While this reflects the historical ideal, the breaking-up of commensality between co-residing kin has led to a situation where households, rather than compounds, are in possession of their own storage

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table. Each hamlet or sub-neighbourhood consisting of a small number of compounds, is characterized by its own threshing-floor, which defines the hamlet as a minimal unit of agricultural production. Neighbourhoods, consisting of a small number of hamlets, each have their own springs, use of which is private to the members of that neighbourhood. The spring defines the neighbourhood as a unit whose members share (for such purposes as water hauling, grazing, collection of firewood, hunting) an overall productive interest in the surrounding countryside, even though the neighbourhood is internally divided into smaller complementary segments with relation to those aspects of production and reproduction that require more prolonged, complicated and socially more intricately-organized tasks. Finally, villages, consisting of a small number of neighbourhoods, are characterized by their own men's assembly: a wind-swept open space overlooking the valley and its main shrines. Here the adult male inhabitants of the village assemble towards the evening, to discuss the ongoing social and political process and to entertain each other with tea-drinking and card-playing. If the village has a store, it is located adjacent to the men's assembly. The men's assembly defines the village as the social unit of sufficient scope and at the same time of sufficient intimacy, to accommodate the ongoing face-to-face social process between people who have widely divergent and conflicting economic interests, as members of lower-level segmentary units. At the men's assembly people meet most of whom, while not strangers to each other, do not automatically share a day-to-day routine of dwelling and working together; thus the men's assembly provides a social and political arena, a more or less external yet inescapable standard for the evaluation of wealth, honour, and propriety, and as such the wider social framework of the interactional processes on which, within the lower-level segmentary units, the organisation of production and reproduction depends.

Ḥumiri territorial segments thus are not just significant units in the organization of geographical space, they also structure the social and economic space in a way that reflects the vital processes going on in this society. The characteristic attributes by which each segmentary level is marked are, as it were, chosen with great wisdom, and their very nature is suggestive of the social and economic significance of the segments at various hierarchical levels. Not surprisingly, in Ḥumiri symbolism the storage table, the dwelling-house, the threshing-floor, the spring and the men's assembly constitute powerful images, around which an important part of the local world-view condensates and finds expression. What is more, each of the characteristic attributes mentioned is conceived as a diffuse, nameless but somewhat personalized, supernatural entity, a distinct power which appears in the dreams of the human members of the segment with which it is associated, and which can mete out benefits and punishment depending on the degree of propriety and respect people display in the specific activities involving that characteristic attribute. Nor are these activities of an exclusively utilitarian nature: dwelling-house, threshing-floor, spring and men's assembly are in themselves subjected to ritual actions, particularly the burning of

incense and the sprinkling of sacrificial chicken blood. The most important symbolic aspect of these characteristic attributes, and one that in the people's eyes sufficiently explains the animistic overtones alluded to here, is that (as latent or primordial shrines) they are all carriers of *baraka*, the Grace or Life-force through which, under the catalytic effects of morality and good social relations, Man succeeds in sharing the non-human power of Nature and of the Divine.

These characteristic attributes with their rich symbolic elaborations are the visible beacons in a structure of territorial segmentation. But although segmentary dynamics have been stagnant as compared with the turbulent pattern obtaining in the last century, the system of territorial segmentation is by no means entirely static today. Despite rural decline and the pressure on the land, demographic and economic processes are at work which over time propel some lower-level units to higher levels, and vice versa. A compound, while retaining its proper name and ancestral association, may be seen to wax into a neighbourhood and even a village in the course of half a century or less. In those cases the named units, as they break through from one segmentary level to a lower or higher one, will shed the characteristic attribute appropriate to the former level and will adopt one appropriate to the new level. Thus the construction, and the sinking in decay, of dwelling-houses, threshing-floors and men's assemblies, and shifts in patterns of water hauling from one spring to another, all mark, again in a way that is visible in the landscape and in daily interaction, the waxing and waning of territorial segments.

This is the moment to introduce shrines into our increasingly complex picture of territorial segmentation in modern Ḫumiriyya.

5.4. Shrines in Ḫumiriyya

Shrines[192] exist in Ḫumiriyya in a number of variants. I shall leave aside such non-man-made salient features in the landscape as remarkable trees, rock formations and ferruginous springs,[193] which tend to be venerated without being clearly associated with saints. All other shrines are man-made, and considered to be intimately associated with saints: deceased human beings whose *baraka* was and is such that they continue to wield power in the world of living humans. The association between shrine and saint is conceived in either of the following three ways:

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[192] For a definition of shrine, and a theory of shrines in relation to social organisation and the natural environment, *cf.* van Binsbergen 1981, also *cf.* chapter 2 of the present book. In *The Reality of Religion*, I return to the theory of shrines and present a revised approach.

[193] In Ḫumiriyya, springs emanating from soil with a high iron content contain reddish foam; these springs, which are relatively rare, are invariably the object of a minor cult. A stranger can only drink from them at the cost of a small offering: a rag torn from one's clothing and tied to a nearby branch. In 1968 such tied rags were conspicuous among major springs situated along intervillage paths.

a. the shrine was erected upon the saint's grave;
b. the shrine was erected upon a spot that had a special relation with the saint during his lifetime or shortly after his death: as the place where he rested in the course of his wanderings, or where his body was temporarily rested before definitively being put into the grave; and finally
c. the shrine has been secondarily erected upon relics brought from a shrine as explained under a or b. For every shrine there tends to be some disagreement among participants as to which option (a, b or c) applies in its particular case.

The historical dynamics underlying these patterns fall outside our present scope; I have discussed them elsewhere.

Saintly shrines comes in variety of material forms. All mimick more or less the human dwelling-house. Many do so in a very crude form, and consist only of a semi-circle of large rocks covered by another rock or by a slab of cork. This is the type commonly called *mzara*, although this term (meaning 'that which is visited') in principle applies to all shrines. In some shrines the inner room within the ground-plan of rocks is more spacious and of more or less rectangular shape; they may be covered by an elaborate reed roof supported by forked poles carrying a roof-beam. This is the type called *kurbi*, a word otherwise reserved for human dwelling-houses constructed out of arboreal material. The most elaborate type of shrine in Ḥumiriyya is the *qubba*: a square, stone building with plastered white-washed walls, a domed roof and horned ornaments on the four corners, as commonly found throughout the Islamic world.

All saintly shrines contain minor pious gift: small amounts of incense wrapped in paper, candles, incense-burners and candle-sticks locally made out of fired clay, and household refuse such as broken teapots and spoons purposely taken to the shrine as token offerings. In addition, the major shrines associated with saints of the highest rank, often contain stone balls (*kurra*: the saint is said to have carried them in his life-time, as proof of his sainthood; I take them to be medieval canon balls, or weights from prehistoric digging-sticks or *bolas*); elaborately decorated flags donated to the shrine as votive gifts; and a wooden chest in which these flags are stored along with other pious gifts, including coins.

Although for the sake of simplicity saints are described here as male, participants acknowledge the existence of female saints. A valley's major saints usually are male. Many saints bear ordinary personal names: Mḥammad, Massauda, A'isha, *etc.*, preceded by the reverential term of address *Sidi* (master, sir: elder brother), *Lalla* (madam, miss, grandmother; elder sister) or *Jaddi* (grandparent). A large number of saints however do not bear human names but derivatives of words denoting natural species: Bu-Ḥaruba ('Man with the Carob-tree'), Bu-Qasbaya ('Man with the Reed'), *etc*. The Ḥumiri saintly cult has an undercurrent of totemism which is also manifest in saintly legends and taboos; but this, however interesting, falls outside our present scope; see my other work.

Neither can I go into detail here with regard to the relationships deemed to exist between saints. Various structuring principles are invoked to establish some degree of order among the large number of local saints with which each Ḥumiri participant is familiar. First, there is a general hierarchy of saints, ranking from Sidi ʿAbd al-Qadir al-Jilani (who throughout the Maghrib is considered to be the most powerful saint), through a small number of major saints of more than regional significance (*e.g.* Sidi ʿAbd as-Salam bin Mašiš), to the greatest Ḥumiri saints (the ones whose shrines are best known and whose festivals are best frequented: Sidi ʿAbd Allah bi-Jamal, Sidi Mḥammad, Sidi Bu-Naqa, Sidi Bu-Ḥaruba, Sidi Ben-Mtir), the lesser saints that are only known within a valley and adjacent valleys, and finally the least powerful saints, the ones that are only known and venerated at the village, neighbourhood or even compound level.

This hierarchy very roughly corresponds with the material form of the principal shrines associated with those saints. Whereas the top-ranking international saints do not even have shrines within the region (they are known through hagiographic legends, and as saints featuring in the songs that pertain to the ecstatic ritual of the brotherhoods), the greatest regional saints have long-established *qubba*s, those immediately below them tend to have large *kurbi* shrines or large rock *mzara*s, whereas the smallest *mzara*s and miniature *kurbi* shrines tend to be associated with the least important saints.

Besides this overall hierarchy, saints associated with shrines within the same valley, or in adjacent valleys, tend to be linked to each other in hagiographic legends that claim specific relationships to exist between these saints: they are described as unrelated equals (neighbours, friends), as non-kin involved in a master-servant relation, or – most frequently – as close agnatic kinsmen: father and son, brothers, brother and sister.

The erection of a shrine upon relics brought from an older shrine often creates a situation where, within a valley or adjacent valleys, a number of shrines are associated with and named after one and the same saint. In that case the main shrine (the one that is the most elaborate, and that has the greatest festival) is considered to be the original shrine – although objective historical research would not always bear out the participants' view on this. This shrine is called 'the Elder' / 'Sr', *al-Kabir*, whereas the other shrines bearing the same name are called 'the Son' / 'Jr' (*al-Wilda*). Thus in the valley of Sidi Mḥammad four shrines of the saint Sidi Mḥammad exist: Sidi Mḥammad al-Kabir is a *qubba* located on a hill-top overlooking the valley,[194] whereas one *qubba* and two *kurbi* shrines, all three called Sidi Mḥammad al-Wilda, are found at a distance of 1 to 1.5 km south of Sidi Mḥammad al-Kabir. In the same valley, four shrines associ-

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[194] Again: the valley's central river was the international boundary between Algeria and Tunisia until the latter's annexation by France in 1881. The major shrines of Sidi Mḥammad and Sidi Salima are thus strategically placed in the sacred geography of the Eastern Atlas mountains.

ated with the saint Sidi Bu-Qasbaya exist, all of them fairly large *mzaras*: the shrines of Sidi Bu-Qasbaya al-Wilda are situated at 0.3 and 1.5 km south and 0.5 km north of the parental shrine.[195]

Here we encounter a most interesting phenomenon, which occurs time and again in saint worship featuring localized shrines:[196] the material multiplicity of shrines associated with one and the same saint tends to create several more or less autonomous cultic foci, despite the fact that the participants are fully aware that at all these shrines the same saint is venerated. Thus the various shrines of Sidi Mḥammad and Bu-Qasbaya are each in their own right objects of ritual attention. Having a relationship with a saint does not mean that one can venerate that saint at just any shrine associated with him; one has also specific relationships with shrines. One cannot however visit any of the three shrines Sidi Mḥammad al-Wilda unless as part of a ritual cycle, which, within the same week or so, also includes a visit to Sidi Mḥammad al-Kabir; and the rules of etiquette, which apply in man-saint relationships just as in man-man relationships, would suggest that one visits Sidi Mḥammad al-Kabir first. The point is that the shrine, as a material entity, takes on a personalized and autonomous aspect more or less independent from the invisible saint to which it refers; for no participant would maintain that the saint venerated at the shrine of Sidi Mḥammad al-Wilda is a son of the saint of the hill-top – it is *the shrine itself* which is the child of the other shrine, and which functions as an irreducible focus of ritual action rather irrespective of the saint with which is associated. This is summarized in the Ḫumiri maxim:

barāka wāhada; nzūru kull

('it is the same grace / blessing, [but] we visit them all'). And it is precisely the shrines' capability of taking on such cultic autonomy which enables them to function as beacons in the segmentary structure, even when so many shrines bear the same name.

The reader may have noticed that for the highest territorial levels no utilitarian characteristic attributes have been mentioned. Major shrines, with or without adjacent cemeteries, function as such. As in the nineteenth century CE, every Ḫumiri valley has a major shrine which serves as its characteristic attribute, and which provides a focus for ritual interaction and identification for people whose life-world is contained within the same steep mountain ranges, even though their day-to-day economic, social and political lives, as members of different villages, only infrequently intersect. But there is more. While the attachment of more or less utilitarian characteristic attributes (dwelling-house, threshing-floor, spring, men's assembly) to territorial segments could be seen as a spilling-over, into the symbolic order, of the essentials of the economic and social process, this system is

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[195] *Cf.* Table 5.3, below. The puzzling status of shrines 3 and 4 as filial branches of shrine 1 is discussed in van Binsbergen 1971a: 281 *f.* and 1980b: 71, n. 15.

[196] For a striking parallel in Andes popular religion, *cf.* Sallnow 1981.

again duplicated in this sense that lesser shrines, in addition to these utilitarian attributes, can be seen to function as ritual attributes of lower-level segments, from the compound level onwards. There are too many territorial segments at the lower levels to make it possible for each segment to be uniquely and exclusively associated with one local shrine. Patterns of shrine ritual are however such that each segment above the household level can be said to be characterized by a fairly unique pattern of saint veneration, in which a number of shrines, *venerated with different frequency and intensity,* combine in a manner that is manifestly and characteristically different from the combination obtaining in complementary segments. In ways which will become increasingly clear in the course of this chapter's argument, shrines are intimately associated with segments; as can be shown on the basis of a detailed reconstruction of the residential history of the valley of Sidi Mḥammad and adjacent valleys since c. 1800 CE, the creation of filial shrines of the saints Sidi Mḥammad and Sidi Bu-Qasbaya is a direct reflection of the fission, migration, and relative waxing and waning of social groups in that area since the middle of the 19th century CE. These processes occur throughout Ḥumiriyya, and invariably find expression in the geographical distribution, and nomenclature, of shrines.

However, the fictive genealogy of humans, encompassing all living inhabitants of the valley via the ancestral toponyms of their villages and neighbourhoods, is never systematically mirrored by a fictive genealogy encompassing all saints and shrines in a valley – easily a score or more. The multiplicity of shrines associated with the same saint, and the non-kin relations supposed to exist between many saints whose shrines are situated near each other, render such a saintly genealogy impossible. Shrine and segment are united not through a saintly parallel of human genealogical fictions, but through patterns of pious visits establishing relationships between saints and the living.

5.5. Saints and the living

Let us therefore now turn from saint-saint relationships to the relationships that the people of Ḥumiriyya claim to exist between living humans, and saints. There is no doubt as to the human nature of saints. However exalted their powers and grace are, the legends about them depict them as recognizable human beings, whose exploits of piety and wonder-working often contain a touch of humour and human weakness. The extremely complex and protean semantic and symbolic properties of sainthood in Ḥumiriyya cannot be adequately summarised here. For instance, to stress that saints (as indicated by their most frequent designation: *ulī*) are Allah's friends and derive their *baraka* from Him, would underplay the fact that for most practical and ritual purposes Ḥumiri saints (not unlike the several shrines with which they are associated) are conceived as autonomous supernatural beings, whose dealings with living humans hardly require Allah's rubber-stamp.

Saints have the power to open up the potentialities of nature and human life for those humans who approach them in the proper manner, *i.e.* respectfully, sincerely (*qalb bāhi*), and with pure intention (*nīya*). There are few provinces of life that are considered to be outside the power of saintly intervention. Saints are invoked to send rain, to assist in the reproduction of domestic animals, to cure madness and reproductive troubles in humans, to enhance the general economic and physical well-being of the family, to control and ward off *jnūn* (spirits of the wilds), to enhance the *baraka* of the house, the threshing-floor, the spring and the men's assembly, to protect people who depart on a long journey, to help people in their careers, to render supernatural sanctions to oaths, to inflict misfortune on humans at the request of their human rivals, *etc.*

Much of this saintly intervention is taken for granted, as the automatic result of the routine aspects of the saintly cult in which every Ḥumiri is involved: the frequent invocation of the names of local saints, the regular dedication of a meal to a specific saint, and the pious visit (*zyara*), at least twice a year, to the local shrine or shrines of that saint. At the latter occasion a small offering of incense and candles is left at the shrine, and specially prepared and dedicated oil cakes are consumed, which after having been consecrated at the shrine, are full of the saint's *baraka*. This ongoing routine of the saintly cult is characterized by great spontaneity, fondness and trustful reliance implied in the main kinship term Ḥumiri people employ for their local saints: *jaddi, jadda* ('my grandfather', 'my grandmother). Although immensely powerful, the saint is not usually thought of as a stern figure of authority, but rather as a grandparent who, like a real grandparent, can afford to spoil his grandchildren, the living humans, since their disciplining is left to an intermediate generation. This quality of fond intimacy stands out clearly when people recount hagiographic legends about their saint, share a meal dedicated to him or her, or when women, in the course of *zyara*, shed their socially-imposed reticence, and (their chastity protected by a circle of kinsmen and -women) in near-ecstasy dance near the shrine, fondle and kiss the walls and the *sacred* objects there, and exclaim *jaddi, jaddna* ('grandad', 'our grandad').

> While the saint, deceased and invisible, is considered a grandparent, the kinship term *jadda* carries an interesting additional connotation: it also means lineal or collateral ancestor, in general. Supposed (often erroneously) to be buried at the main shrine that carries his or her name, the Ḥumiri saint is considered to have lived in the same area in some undefined past, and to be, somehow, among the set of local ancestors, *but hardly ever is the saint the imputed apical ancestor of a social group, to whom descent is traced through a genealogy.* Likewise, the ancestors that gave their names to social and territorial units at various levels of segmentation, are hardly ever saints. The two sets of personalized historical symbols do not overlap, at least not in the valley of Sidi Mhammad (highly endogamous, and a regional pilgrimage centre) for reasons whose details have remained obscure to me but that no doubt have to do with the pacifist saint's functioning as characteristic attributes of warring social units. In rare cases a saint is claimed to have been a brother of a local apical ancestor, but it turned out to be impossible to let participants pinpoint any living lineal descendants of the saints venerated at local shrines; even when my own historical research convinced me that at least one of these saints, Sidi Mḥammad, had actually lived in the area during the nineteenth century CE,

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> and I thought I could identify his living descendants whose saintly origins had been hidden under the historical and ideological constructions of the modern participants.

Outside the ongoing routine of the saintly cult, there are three complementary modalities for the relationship between man and saint, in addition to the trustful intimacy of the grandparent idiom.

First, in particularly important matters the implicit reliance on saintly intervention tends to give way to explicit supplication. Reminding the saint of the supplicant's ritual prestations in the past, and stressing the (fictive) kinship relation between man and saint, the supplicant describes his or her plight and entreats the saint to intervene. Such supplication normally takes place at the saint's main shrine, in the course of *zyara*. All the predicaments summed up above may apply. Normally supplication is made to one of the saints associated with the territorial segment to which the supplicant belongs. In rare cases, however, typically having to do with illness and impaired human fertility, supplication may be made at distant shrines, associated with one of the regional saints that are well-known throughout Ḥumiriyya. On such occasions the usual, small pious gifts are augmented by more substantial offerings, such as: an expensive, elaborately adorned candle; a flag; a meal dedicated to the saint and eaten at home; a similar meal but prepared at the shrine and distributed gratis among passers-by; and, as the highest prestation stipulated in the Ḥumiri saintly cult, the sacrifice of a domestic animal (chicken, goat, sheep, cow, or bull – in a dramatically increasing order of cost, prestige and supernatural pay-off).

Secondly, the prestations accompanying such supplication often assume a conditional aspect. The saint whose special intervention is requested with regard to a specific problem, is promised a substantial offering, only to be made if the saintly intervention turns out to be successful: if a previously barren woman produces a child, if a mental patient regains sanity, *etc*. Often these conditional promises take on the nature of a gamble. thus saintly protection over a herd of cattle or a brood of hens is ensured by promising the saint a male specimen of that year's calves or chicks as a sacrifice; if no males are produced, the saint has to accept that his intervention will go unrewarded that year.

Supplications, particularly if of a conditional nature, introduce a contractual element into the man-saint relationship, that stands in some tension with the inclusive, generalized pattern of the grandparent model. Here the saint appears more as a patron. However, both as a patron with whom one has struck a dyadic, conditional contract, and as a grandparent, the man-saint relationship carries, as a third modality, many obligations for the people involved. However much a saint is supposed to love his living protégés and clients, however much he is prepared to intercede on their behalf, every saint insists on respectful treatment. The same *baraka* that can, positively, release the possibilities of nature and human life to the people's benefit, is sure to inflict material misfortune, illness and death, should the people fail in respect, and neglect their general and contractual obligations vis-à-vis a saint. On the basis of these sanc-

tions, the saint protects the integrity of his shrine, the *sacred* objects and pious gifts it contains, and the immediately surrounding area. The dead that may be buried there, remain undisturbed; and the trees, plants and animals there are taboo. He also protects his shrine-keepers, and pilgrims in the course of *zyara*. He does not allow people to terminate their relationship with him: whoever has entered, at some point in his life, into a relationship with a saint, is under a life-long obligation to make the twice-annual *zyara* to his shrine and to dedicate meals for him. The saint is supposed to jealously guard his human following against the claims of other saints. Thus the cult of saints acquires an internal momentum of its own which allows it to express and underpin, at its turn, non-religious segmentary aspects of life in Ḥumiriyya.

5.6. Segmentation and types of *zyara*

The principal set of people who have a definite relationship with a particular saint are the actual members (*i.e.* inhabitants) of the territorial segment with which that saint is associated. All these people, male and female, must partake in the routines of the saintly cult, including dedication of meals, at least twice-annual *zyara*, and observance of the saint's festival.

Male members of the segment are not under formal obligations of *zyara*, although many of them do visit, as individuals, the shrines, and attend the festivals, of the major saints in their own valley and adjacent valleys. Some men are involved in the saintly cult as ritual specialist: as shrine-keepers, and as members of the ecstatic cult in whose songs local saints feature along with international saints, and with demons (*jnun*). For most purposes, men rely on the women in their households and compounds to deal with the local saints. Yet men who intend to definitively settle elsewhere, in the realm of a different saint, will find their plans crossed by dreams and omens through which the saint protests against their absconding.

Women, through their dedication of meals and their *zyara*, carry the bulk of the saintly cult in Ḥumiriyya.

This ritual involvement of women is intimately linked with the marriage pattern. Marriage is virilocal: both according to the rule and in c. 95% of actual practice. and since no woman marries into the household in which she was born, every marriage involves a woman's crossing of segmentary boundaries at least at the lowest level of segmentation (in the rare case she marries within the same compound). Like other Islamic societies, an explicit rule as to the preference of agnatic endogamy exists in Ḥumiriyya. Demographic processes, the dynamics of marital alliance, the essentially bilateral kinship system hiding under the patrilineal idiom, and the intergenerational transfer of property, however, are much more complex, at the analytical level, than that they could be covered by the participants' ideology of patrilateral parallel-cousin marriage. This is not the place to present my very extensive data on this point. Let it

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suffice to say that roughly 50% of modern marriages involve partners belonging to different villages, each with their own distinct set of local shrines and saints. A village-exogamous marriage means that a woman leaves her original set of village-level local shrines behind and adopts a new set, that of her husband's female consanguineal relatives. It is part of a woman's extensive incorporation into her husband's segment[197] that she fully adopts the shrines of that group. Within the compound, hamlet and neighbourhood, elder women coordinate food production, food processing, water hauling and firewood collection. From these female leaders the in-marrying woman will learn about the identity and relative importance of the segment's shrines and saints. She will soon dedicate some of her household meals to these saints, and join the other women in collective *zyara* to the shrines. However, she will not as a rule give up her relationship with the shrines in her original segment. Although a woman will not often leave the immediate environment of the village for the purpose of visiting relatives, the hospital, the market, or diviners, she has an unalienable right to visit her original shrines, and thus her segment of origin and her relatives there, twice a year.

A married woman is involved in two complementary sets of relationship with saints – which mirrors, and in fact sustains, her involvement in both her original segment and that of her husband. The picture is further complicated by the relative nature of segmentation. The greater the segmentary distance a woman crosses for marriage, the more different the two sets of shrines will be. If she marries in a different village within the same valley, the two sets will overlap in that the valley's main shrine and festival will be part of both sets; in that case marriage will only add a few lesser shrines of her husband's segment (at the village neighbourhood, hamlet and compound level) to the woman's pre-existing set. With intra-village local endogamy (c. 50% of all marriages) the differences will be even less significant, and in fact the set of shrines before and after marriage may entirely coincide. The differences are far more conspicuous in the case of a marriage linking people from different valleys or even chiefdoms. But the principle remain the same throughout.

Thus every Ḥumiri woman has *zyara* obligations *vis-à-vis* the local shrines associated with the territorial segment (or better: nested hierarchy of segments at various levels) to which she belongs at a given point in time; for descriptive purposes, this type of *zyara* will be called *local zyara*. In addition, all women who have migrated from their segment of birth, *i.e.* mainly in the context of marriage, retain *zyara* obligations vis-à-vis the local shrines in that segment; this type of *zyara* will be called *original zyara*. For the sake of completeness, we should not overlook the fact that marriage is the main, but not the exclusive occasion for a woman to adopt a new set of *zyara* obligations: when the house-

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[197] An indication of this incorporation is that very few widows ever move back to their village of origin; for a set of indicators of female incorporation in a context of marriage, *cf.* Lewis 1965.

hold of which she is a dependent member takes up residence elsewhere, a similar situation obtains regardless of her marital status. However, such cases are so rare as compared with the virtual universality of marriage among Ḥumiri women, that they require no separate treatment.

Local *zyara* comes with actual membership of (*i.e.* residence in) a territorial segment, and unites all adult women of that segment under a female leader. The latter co-ordinates the collective *zyara* of the segment's women to the local shrines, as part of her general tasks of female leadership. In fact these collective visits to local shrines present an amazing spectacle of territorial segmentation in action. At the occasion of the festival of a valley's or village's main shrine, the various female leaders of segments will have agreed on a time for collective *zyara*. Compound by compound, hamlet by hamlet, neighbourhood by neighbourhood, one will see small groups of women in their best clothes converge along the village path, and team up on their way to the shrine, only to break up again, segment-wise, on their return, Alternatively, the fact that virtually every woman in a compound, hamlet and neighbourhood derives obligations of original *zyara* from her own, unique life history, endows her with an individuality in the religious sphere which she will normally be allowed to maintain despite strong social pressures towards incorporation in her husband's segment. The frequent attribution of misfortune to irate, neglected saints suggests however both the practice of individual shedding of original *zyara* obligations, and the deep-lying tensions in the marital and inter-generational sphere that would seem to attend the incorporation process.

Personal zyara to major regional saints in the context of illness or infertility results, finally, in the third type of women's *zyara* obligations in Ḥumiriyya. For here again the norm applies that a living human cannot at his or her own initiative terminate a relationship with a saint once entered into. For a variety of reasons (which seem to include female under-nutrition; a very low marital age of women before marital legislation was revised in the 1960s; and a repressive sexual culture instilling profound fears and sexual inhibitions in young people of both sexes) many Ḥumiri women are recorded to have suffered from impaired fertility in the first years of their marriage. In order to remedy this complaint, women would often resort to pilgrimage to distant shrines of regional saints outside the set of shrines falling under local or original *zyara* obligations. The personal relationship between a woman and a regional saint invoked for reproductive troubles would ideally last a lifetime; in later years, as a woman would take her daughters and daughters-in-law with her on this personal *zyara*, the younger generation would automatically inherit this relationship, even though the regional shrine would be too distant to be listed among the territorial segment's local *zyara* obligations.

Numerous are the cases when material misfortune, illness and even death are attributed (via various techniques of specialist divination) to irate saints revenging humans' lack of respect, breach of promises, failure to dedicate meals and make

pious visits, or neglect of duties *vis-à-vis* one saint while honouring the expectations of another saint. Since Ḥumiri saints are shown to embody, on the one hand, concepts of intra-kin intimacy and inter-generational relations, and on the other hand a structure of complementary opposition of segments, it will be obvious – even without a discussion of specific cases – that the social, mental and psycho-somatic dramas enacted in such cases reveal deeply-rooted tensions and contradictions within the Ḥumiri social process and symbolic order. However, an explanation of misfortune like the Ḥumiri one would represent a welcome escape clause in any religious system: given a certain degree of recognized non-observance of rules and of opportunism[198] among the living humans involved, the supernatural entities invoked are free to honour or to ignore human requests without succumbing to their professional disease: credibility gap. In fact, not all Ḥumiri women attend to their *original* and *personal zyara* obligations with equal zeal; the factors apparently determining this variation in religious behaviour will be discussed below.

In modern ethnography, paradigmatic consistency and elegance in the *emic* rendering of cultural systems have become reasons for healthy mistrust. Therefore, the above generalized description of the saintly cult, and particularly of *zyara*, in modern Ḥumiriyya needs to be substantiated with evidence on actual religious behaviour as stipulated by the models and rules described here. We find ourselves here in the somewhat exceptional situation that such evidence is, in fact, available, and that it corroborates the generalized description with amazing precision – which is a further reason for surprise, notably at the fact that the system as conceived and employed by the participants turns out to be so elaborate, rational and consistent as to be capable of mathematical representation.

5.7. Local *zyara* in the valley of Sidi Mḥammad

In the remaining sections of this chapter I shall describe the patterns of local, original and personal *zyara* as found among the adult women inhabiting the villages of Sidi Mḥammad and Mayziya, in the valley of Sidi Mḥammad. The data were collected in 1968, at a point in my field-work when I had sufficiently mastered the principles of Ḥumiri popular religion and society to phrase my questions properly; and when my stay in the village of Sidi Mḥammad had generated a sufficient amount of trust and rapport to allow me to systematically interview the majority of the adult female population in both villages. In Sidi Mḥammad, of the total population of 42 resident adult women, 35 (= 83%) were thus interviewed. The 17% non-response could be shown to form an a-select sample from the total population of 42, with regard to important background variables: relative economic position of their household; number of years of their marriage had lasted; geographical distance across which their marriage had been contracted (Table 51).

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[198] *Cf.* Köbben 1975, who in fact cites the Ḥumiri case as described by me.

		(a) duration of marriage (years)§)															
		2	3	6	8	10	16	18	20	23	24	25	28	30	33	38	total
no. of ♀♀	in response group	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	13
	in non-response group	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	4

§) the analysis is limited to women resident in the village of Sidi Mḥammad but born in a different village

Mann-Whitney U-test, corrected for ties: z = 1.13; p = .13 (*cf.* Siegel n.d.)

		(b) distance across which marriage was contracted (km)													
		.0	.1	.2	.3	.4	.5	.6	.7	1.1	1.3	1.4	1.8	2.3	2.5
no. of ♀♀	in response group	0	7	6	4	2	3	2	0	1	1	1	0	2	0
	in non-response group	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0

		(b) distance across which marriage was contracted (km) (continued)						
		2.6	3.0	3.5	6.2	7.8	10.2	total
no. of ♀♀	in response group	2	1	1	1	1	0	35
	in non-response group	0	0	1	7			

Mann-Whitney U-test, corrected for ties: z = -1.36; p = .09

		(c) relative economic position of household*)			
		poor	medium	wealthy	total
no. of ♀♀	in response group	21	11	3	35
	in non-response group	2	2	2	6

*) one woman was omittted from the analysis since the wealth of her household could not be assessed with certainty

Mann-Whitney U-test, corrected for ties: z = 1.11; p .13

Table 5.1. Validating the sample of women in the villages of Sidi Mḥammad and Mayziya

My data on Mayziya are less complete: they adequately cover local zyara, but show gaps with regard to original and personal zyara. The analysis of the latter two types (section 5.8) will exclusively be based on Sidi Mḥammad data.

Zyara is public behaviour and moreover a source of prestige and *baraka*. It is therefore discussed without reticence, even when the interviewer is a young male foreigner, and a non-Muslim to boot. The interview data were checked against: observational data concerning the various types of *zyara*; systematically elicited statements about the *zyara* behaviour of neighbours;

and many accidental statements uttered during everyday conservations or open-ended interviews. The correspondence between these data proved to be almost 100%.

Moreover the data show great internal consistency, particularly in the extent to which the responses and observational data on local *zyara* converge for the several women of each segment. This convergence could hardly be a research artifact, because when I collected the data I was not even beginning to realize that Ḥumiri social organisation could be described with a model of territorial segmentation. For all these reasons I consider the data to be of good quality, and amenable to such non-parametric statistical tests as I shall perform upon them.[199]

The valley of Sidi Mḥammad stretches from south to north along the Wad al-Kabīr, a river whose tributaries have their sources at the highest peaks of Ḥumiriyya, and which flows into the Mediterranean near the town of Tabarka, c. 15 km north of Sidi Mḥammad. Fig. 5.2 shows the wider surroundings of the valley. This figure conveys the remarkably small geographical scale of the phenomena at hand. The valley of Sidi Mḥammad has an area of about 10 km², and comprises only six villages: Sidi Mḥammad, Mayziya, Traᶜaya-sud, Traᶜaya-bidh, Fidh al-Missay and Raml al-ᶜAtrus; together these villages comprise c. 600 inhabitants.

Movements between villages is mainly on foot, and here the mountainous terrain imposes severe constraints. Thus from Sidi Mḥammad it takes people half a day to reach the major regional shrine of Sidi ᶜAbd Allah bi-Jamal, a distance of barely 10 km as the crow flies. Such a distance forms in fact the effective maximal radius for most purposes of inter-village contacts, including *zyara* and marriage. While illustrating this point, Table 5.2 suggests that structures of *zyara*, and the affinal networks created by marriage, together constitute a relational region, of the sort which Meillassoux has called a marriage field (*aire matrimoniale,* Meillassoux 1964: 11 and *passim*).

	range (km)	median (km)
distance across which marriages are contracted	.1 – 7.8	. 45
distance across which shrines are visited (all types of *zyara* combined)	.0 – 10.1	. 55

Table 5.2. A comparison of geographical distances across which women resident in the village of Sidi Mḥammad (a) visit shrines and (b) have married

[199] These non-parametric tests are not affected by the relatively small number of cases, nor do they imply assumptions as to the scale level (interval, ordinal, nominal) of the variables; *cf.* Siegel, n.d.; I have particularly used the likelihood-ratio test, similar to the well-known Chi-square (χ^2) test but suitable for expected cell frequencies < 5 (Spitz 1961; van Binsbergen 1972).

Like Sidi ᶜAbd Allah bi-Jamal, Sidi Mḥammad is a regional saint. The latter's twice-annual festival lasts for several days and nights. In addition to the people of the valley itself, who are under obligations of local *zyara*, the festival attracts, from all over Ḥumiriyya, scores of women who are under obligation of original or personal *zyara*, and moreover scores of male pilgrims, as well as musicians, showmen, ecstatic dancers, butchers, and peddlers in sweets, candles, incense, haberdashery, *etc*. While the saint Sidi Mḥammad is locally represented by no less than four shrines including two *qubba*s, he is by no means the only saint of the valley.

Fig. 5.3 shows, in their relative position *vis-à-vis* the dwelling houses, the location of the eighteen shrines that are found in the immediate environment of the villages of Sidi Mḥammad and Mayziya alone. Table 5.3 summarizes the names and physical characteristics of these shrines.

A minority of the local shrines are surrounded by cemeteries, and a segment's right to bury its dead in a particular cemetery, *i.e.* near a particular shrine, is an important expression of the segmentary structure. However, this aspect is not dealt with in my present argument, which concentrates on *zyara*. Of the shrines listed in Table 5.3, the numbers 1 and 8 are surrounded by cemeteries that are still in use, whereas abandoned cemeteries are found around the shrines 5 and 7, as well as several hundred meters south of 9 and 13. Moreover, many of the saints listed in Table 5.3 have shrines elsewhere, outside the villages of Sidi Mḥammad and Mayziya; those distant shrines are not listed here.

The local *zyara* pattern in those two villages is confined to the eighteen shrines of Table 5.3. Of the 18 shrines, the numbers 8 and 9 are not visited by any inhabitant of either village: 8 is, however, visited by inhabitants of the neighbouring village of Traᶜaya-bidh.

In order to assess whether the pattern of local *zyara* as found in these two villages is in fact governed by territorial segmentation, we have to go through a number of steps. Firth, the dwelling-houses, representing the lowest level of segmentation, have to be clustered into higher-level segments, according to their location, to the visible boundaries by which they are surrounded, and to the distribution of utilitarian characteristics attributes (threshing-floors, springs, men's assemblies) over the clusters thus formed. The outcome of this exercise is shown in Fig. 5.4.
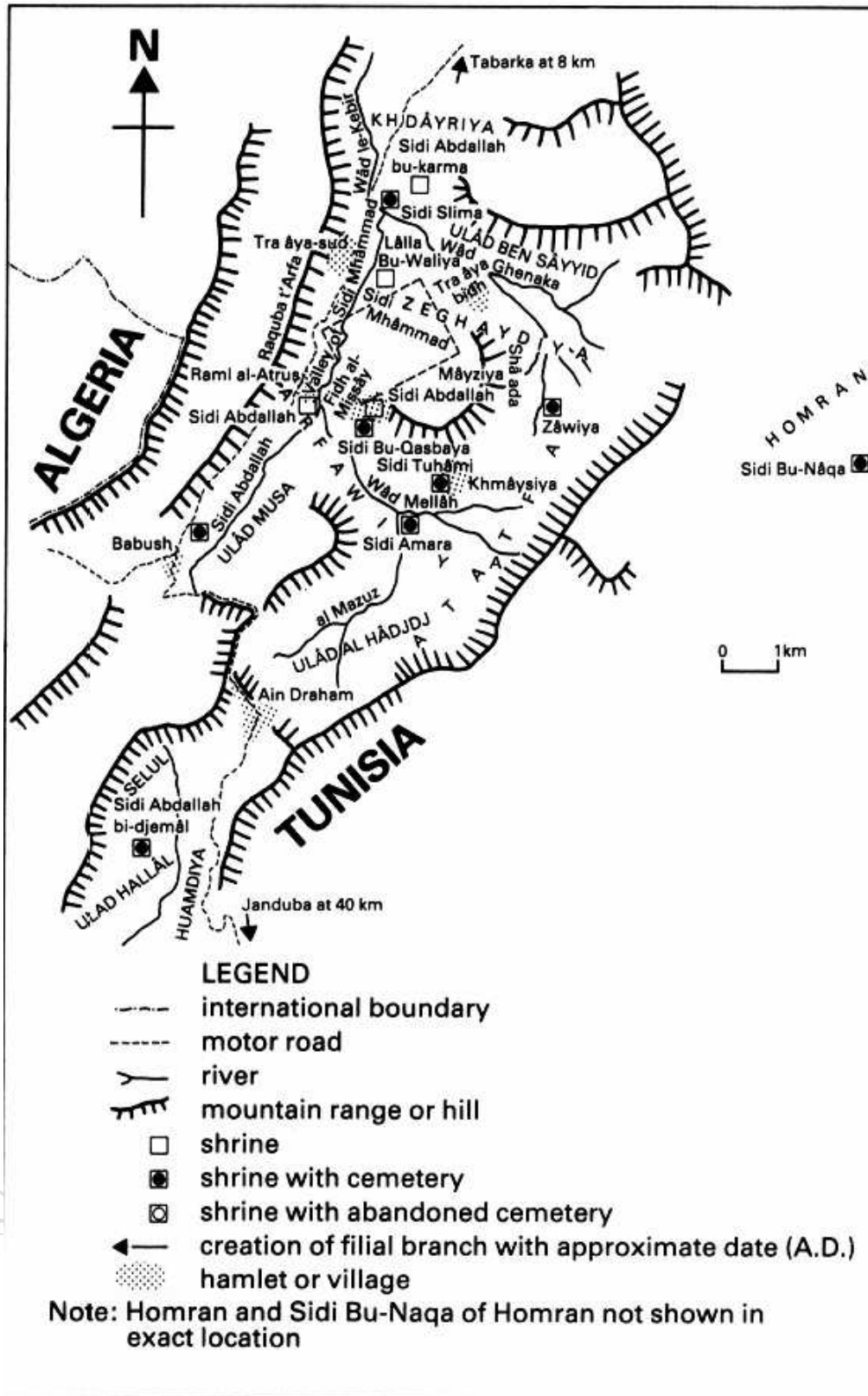
The inset around Sidi Mḥammad is enlarged in Fig. 5.3

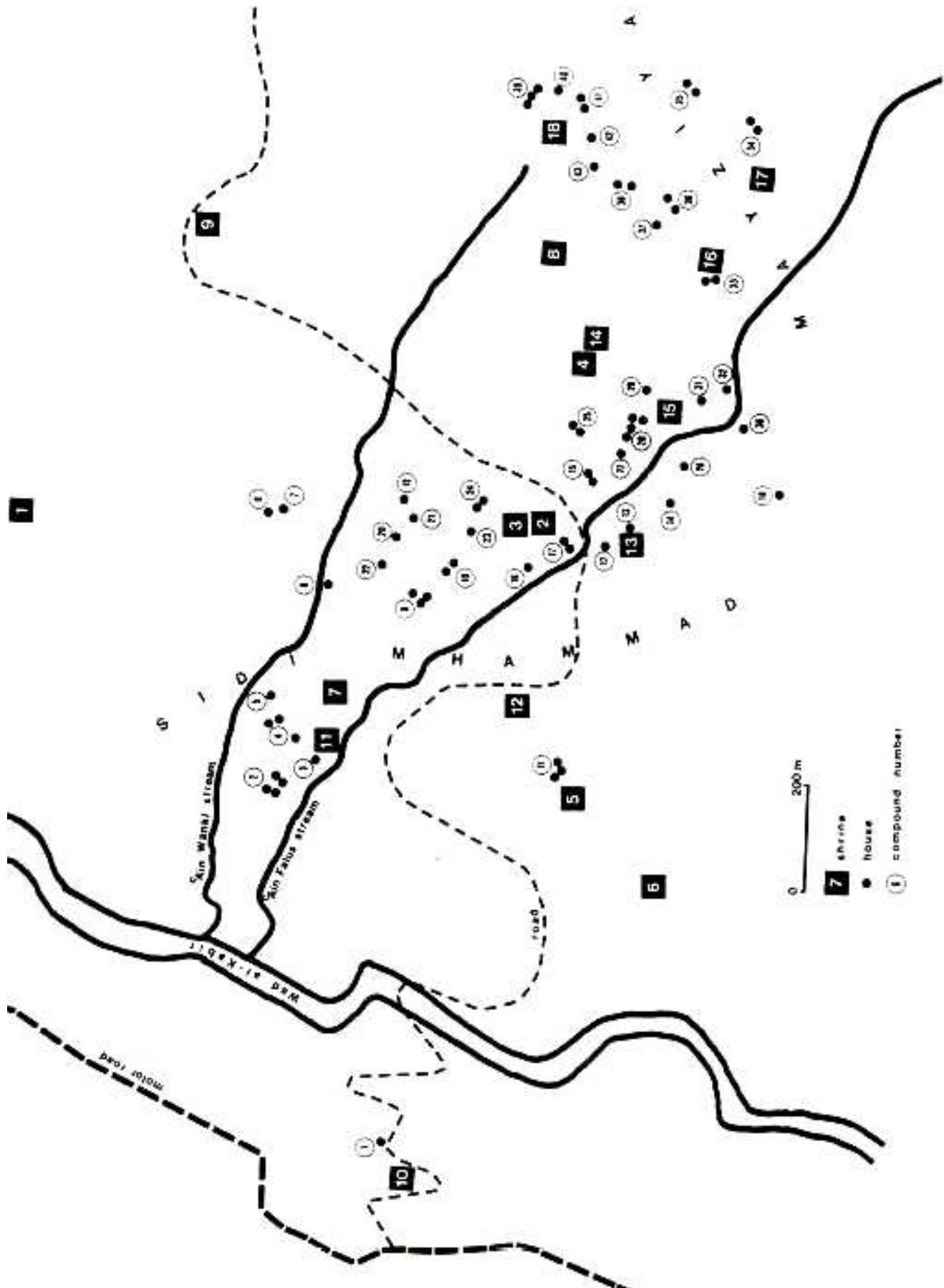Fig. 5.2. The wider surroundings of the valley of Sidi Mḥammad

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Fig. 5.3. Shrines in the valley of Sidi Mḥammad, numbered as in Table 5.3

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The following step is the tracing of the specific pattern of local *zyara* which obtains in each of the territorial segments thus distinguished. A problem arising at this point is that there are far fewer local shrines than territorial segments. The choice is further limited by the fact that not all shrines are available in the same degree as additional, religious attributes of segments. For two adjacent lower-level territorial segments, which are complementary in that they both form part of a higher segment at the next hierarchical level, it would be impossible to express their segmentary opposition by differential patronage, of some very minor shrine situated at a considerable distance, say at the other end of the village: the catchment area of that shrine would be too small to reach as far as these segments.

No.	Name	format
1	Sidi Mḥammad al-Kabir / Sr	*qubba*
2	Sidi Mḥammad al-Wilda / Jr	*qubba*
3	Sidi Mḥammad (al-Wilda) / Jr	*kurbi*
4	Sidi Mḥammad (al-Wilda) / Jr	*kurbi*
5	Sidi Bu-Qasbaya al-Kabir / Sr	*mzara*
6	Sidi Bu-Qasbaya al-Wilda / Jr	*mzara*
7	Sidi Bu-Qasbaya al-Wilda / Jr	*mzara*
8	Sidi Rhuma	*mzara*
9	Sidi Bu-Naqa	*mzara*
10	A'isha	*mzara*
11	*Mzara* ᶜAin Raml	*mzara*
12	Hasharat al-Brik	*mzara*
13	Sidi Hammad	*mzara*
14	Sidi Bel-Ahsin	*mzara*
15	Jadda Massauda	*mzara*
16	ᶜAli ᶜAbu 'l-Qassim	*mzara*
17	Sidi Bu-Ḥaruba	*mzara*
18	Hašarat al-Fras	*mzara*

Table 5.3. Names and physical characteristics of shrines in the villages of Sidi Mḥammad and Mayziya

Similarly, these segments could not distinguish themselves by differential patronage of the village's or valley's main shrine, for that shrine would already function as the additional, religious attribute of a higher segment encompassing both lower-level segments.

Two devices combine so as to solve these dilemmas. First non-patronage, even of a nearby shrine or combination of nearby shrines, can mark a terri-

torial segment just as much as positive local *zyara*. Secondly, segments can distinguish among themselves not only through the selection or non-selection of local shrines in a particular combination, but also through differences in *frequency* with which the selected shrines are actually visited. Twice-annual *zyara* constitutes a minimal frequency for any shrine; four times a year is an average frequency for shrines that are visited with more than minimal zeal.

As marking devices, non-patronage and differential frequency dramatically increase the number of possible combinations given a limited number of shrines; yet it must be admitted that differential frequency introduces a non-discrete element that somewhat spoils the neat, digital combinatory logic of the segmentation model.

These devices are clearly at work in the pattern of local *zyara* in the village of Sidi Mḥammad and Mayziya, as shown in Fig. 5.5.

Here for all compounds of both villages the associated patterns of local *zyara* are shown, on the basis of the interview and observational data discussed above. Combining the information of Figs 5.4 and 5.5 results in Fig. 5.6, which presents the segment's differential local *zyara* patterns in the familiar dendrogram format.

A number of conclusions can be based on Fig. 5.6. Clearly, territorial segmentation provides the key to existing structures of local *zyara*. Territorial segments, whose existence is marked by visible boundaries and the distribution of utilitarian characteristic attributes, distinguish themselves in the religious sphere by the veneration of specific combinations of local shrines, in specific frequencies.

What emanates clearly from Fig. 5.6 is the fact that complementary opposition in segmentation only refers to one level at a time, irrespective of the distribution of distinctive features at higher or lower levels. Thus segments 1.1.2 and 1.2.2 can afford to be both associated with shrines 1, 2 and 3, which both segments visit frequently. There is no direct complementary opposition between these two segments, since they belong to different higher level segments (1.1 and 1.2 respectively), and the difference between the later is marked by shrines 7 and 11.

The complementary segment of 1.1.2 is 1.1.1. (this difference is marked by frequent visiting of shrines 7 and 11, as against shrines 1, 2 and 3); the complementary segment of 1.2.2. is 1.2.1, with differences being marked by frequent visiting of shrines 5 and 6 as against 1, 2 and 3, respectively. The inclusion of complementary segments in higher-level segments renders the combinatory logic of characteristic attributes more complicated, but does not destroy it.
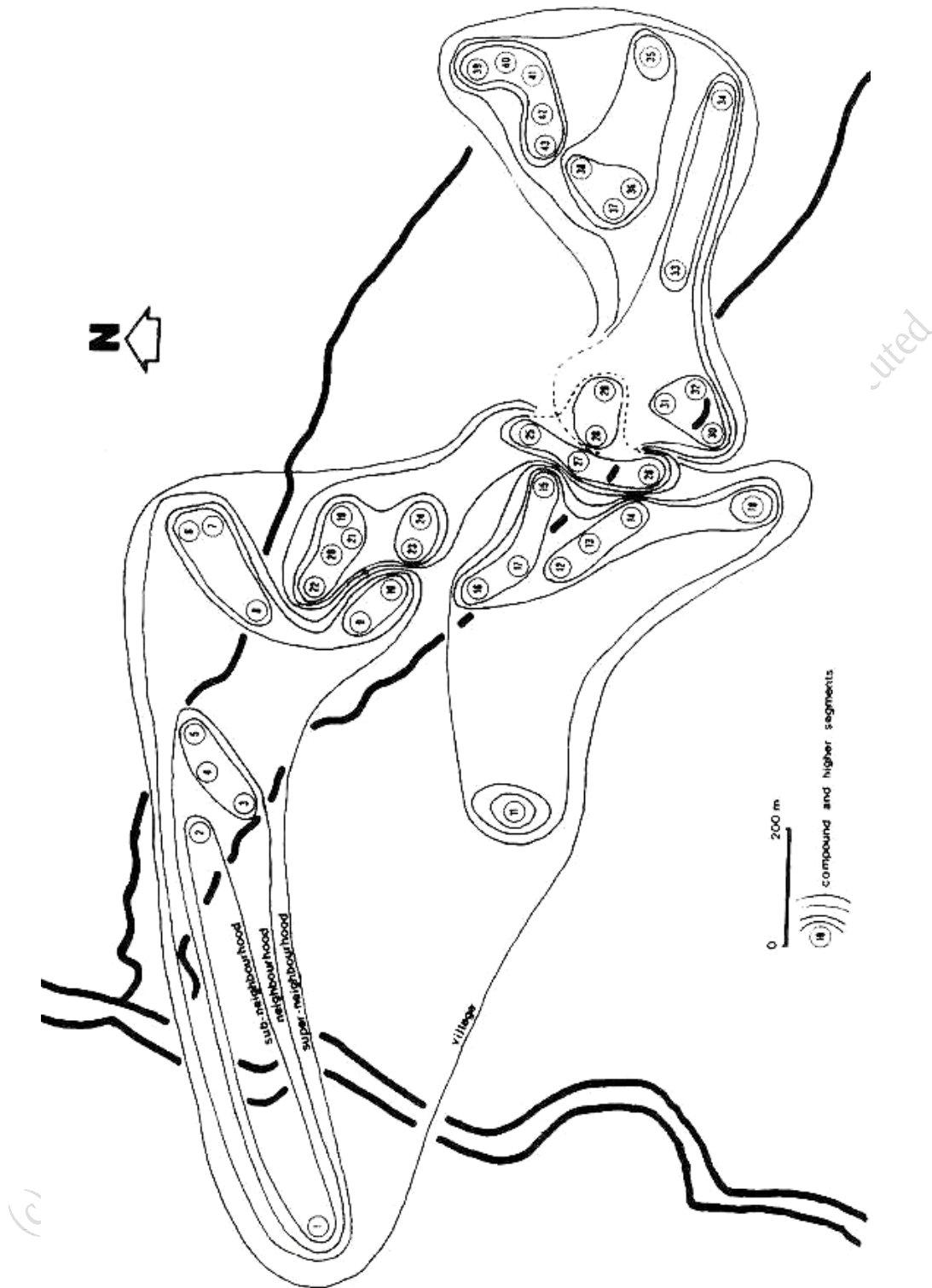
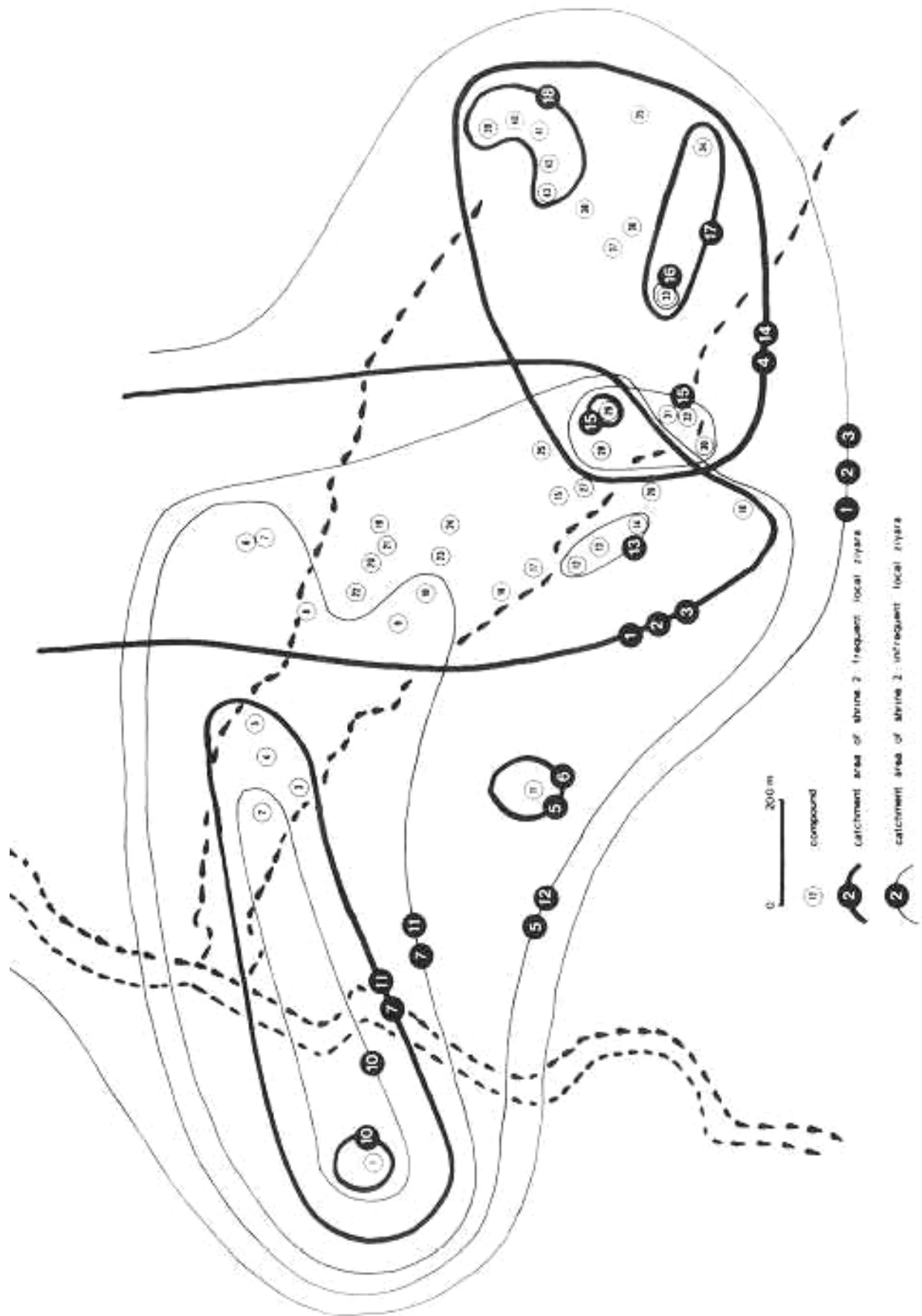Fig. 5.4. The spatial structure of segmentation in the valley of Sidi Mḥammad

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Fig.5.5. The spatial structure of local *zyara* in the valley of Sidi Mḥammad

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However, while the model fits empirical reality amazingly well, the fit is, of course, not 100%. Not all complementary segments at all levels are marked by differential local *zyara*. Thus the sub-neighbourhoods 1.2.2.3, 1.3.1.1, 1.3.1.2 and 1.3.2.1 have an identical pattern of local *zyara*.

Moreover it turns out that, insofar local *zyara* is concerned, three and not two segmentary levels are to be distinguished between compound level and village level; this is particularly the case in the village of Sidi Mḥammad. Environmental conditions and the ongoing dynamics of territorial segmentation can explain these deviations from the simpler model. Permanent water supplies are scarcer in Sidi Mḥammad than in Mayziya: in the former village there are 9 to 17 households to one permanent water source, against only 8 to 9 in Mayziya. Hence the spring-defined neighbourhoods are in fact considerably larger in Sidi Mḥammad than in Mayziya, and begin to approach villages. This process of segmentation also manifests itself in the erection of a separate men's assembly in the southern part of the village of Sidi Mḥammad (super-neighbourhood 1.1, called Qaᶜa-Raml / 'Sandy Threshing-floor'), and in the growing expression of antagonism between people from that part and the rest of the village. The complex historical background, involving competition between rival clans, aspirations of political leadership, the vicissitudes of marriage alliances, the effects of establishment of a colonist's farm near Qaᶜa-Raml, and the differential use of cemeteries cannot be elaborated upon here (but see van Binsbergen 1971a, 1980a, 1980b).

The ongoing segmentation process also explains the ambiguous position sub-neighbourhood 2.1.1.1 occupies in the dendrogram. But here we encounter not fission (as in the Qaᶜa-Raml case), but fusion: the segment in question, straddling the boundary between the two villages, historically forms part of Mayziya. However, its members have established strong ties of marriage and clientship with their present neighbours, the administrative chief's family; the latter's residence in the village of Sidi Mḥammad dates back to the 1910s.[200] Rather than upsetting the model of territorial segmentation as governing local *zyara*, these deviations show that model to be dynamic, and capable of responding to the realities of the social and ecological process. Let us now turn to the quantitative data concerning original and personal *zyara*: forms of religious behaviour that cut across, instead of express, the pattern of territorial segmentation.

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[200] A peculiarity of the *zyara* pattern of the village of Mayziya, and one that is not easily accommodated within our tripartite typology of Ḥumiri *zyara*, is that virtually all adult women resident in that village have an infrequent *zyara* relationship with the shrines of Sidi Bu-Ḥaruba and Sidi Bu-Zarura in the adjacent valley of Saydiya, c. 4 kms east of Mayziya. Here again segmentary fission provides the explanation: these distant shrines are collectively visited because the majority of the present-day inhabitants of Mayziya are recent immigrants from Saydiya; their migration from that valley has been too recent than that religious and secular ties with that relatively distant place of origin could already have been severed entirely. Ḥumiri history offers numerous cases of emigrants cutting off such ties after a few decades.
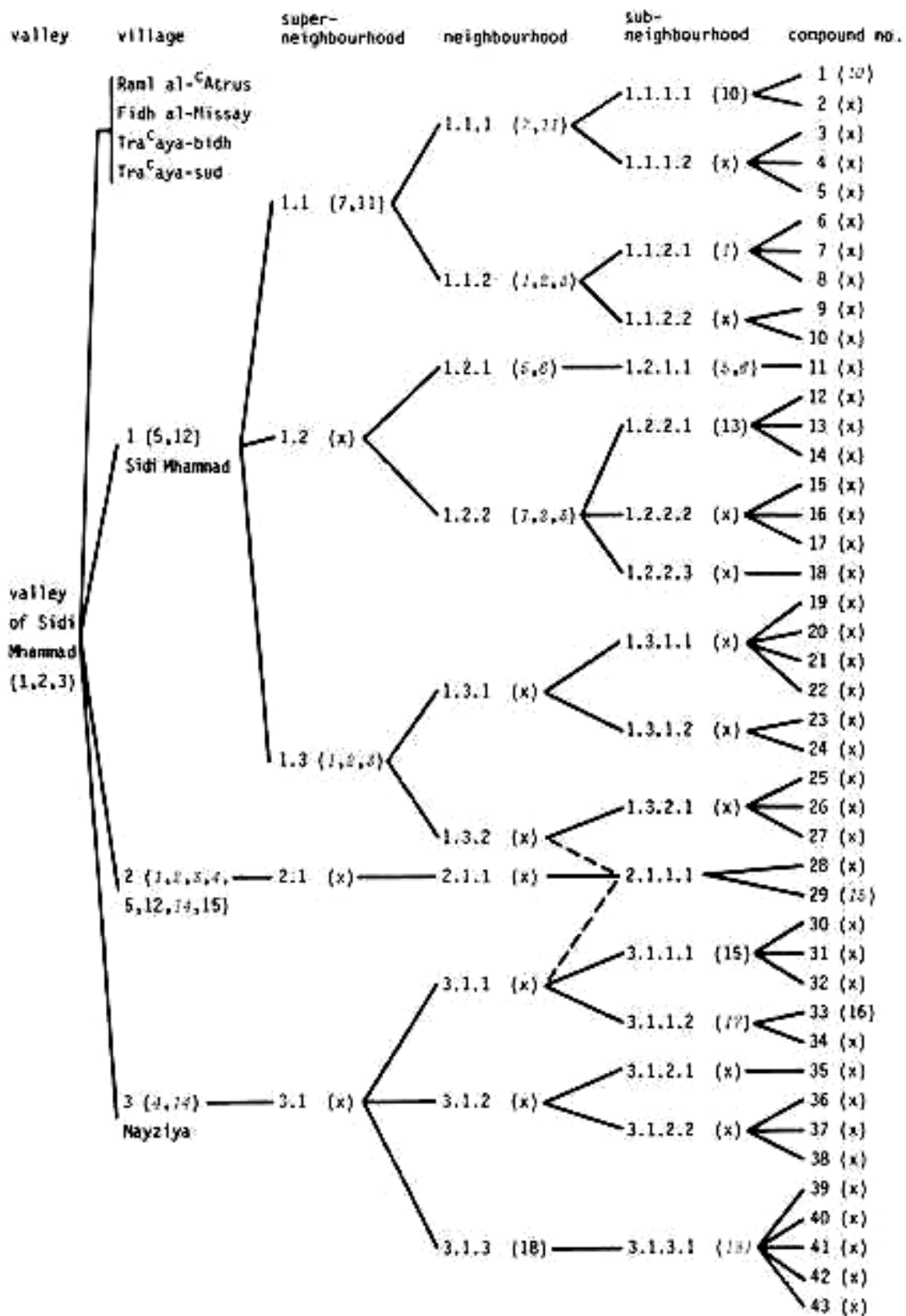
Fig. 5.6. Patterns of local *zyara* (pilgrimage) in the village of Sidi
Mḥammad as an expression of segmentation

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5.8. *Original* and *personal zyara* in the village of Sidi Mḥammad

Turning now to non-local *zyara*, we should first assess the relative incidence of the three types of *zyara*.

The 35 systematically interviewed women in Sidi Mḥammad observed between them 232 *zyara* obligations *vis-à-vis* shrines in Ḥumiriyya. Of these, 219 (= 94%) involved local *zyara*. Each woman observed an average of 6.6. *zyara* obligations, the total range stretching from 5 to 10. Of this average of 6.6., an average 6.3 involved local *zyara* (range 5-8, as can be read from Fig. 5.6). The fact that many shrines are associated with the same saint, means that the number of observed *zyara* obligations *vis-à-vis* different saints is lower than that *vis-à-vis* shrines. The women of the sample have an average of 4.1. (range 3-7) observed *zyara* relations with saints, out of which an average of 3.7 (range 3-5) involve saints associated with the local segments these women belong to at the several hierarchical levels. These data on *zyara* relationships can be converted into figures on actual pious visits made, by taking differential frequency into account. Per period of six months, the women of the sample make 342 *zyara*s between them, of which 329 (= 96%) are local *zyara*s, 10 (= 3%) are original *zyara*s, and only 4 (= 1%) are personal *zyara*s. These figures must be considered estimates. Yet they convincingly demonstrate the overwhelming preponderance of local *zyara*, as stipulated by the structure of territorial segmentation, over the non-local forms that cut across the segmentary structure.

It is virtually impossible for a woman to resist the strong social pressure and the supernatural sanctions that prompt her participation in the collective local *zyara* of the segment in which she is resident. Original and personal *zyara*, however, are a more individual matter, and here observance of existing obligations shows considerable variation.

The positive data on personal *zyara* are too limited to allow statistical analysis. The three women concerned are between forty and sixty years old. They have exceptionally high prestige and power because of their age, their very close kinship relations with administrative chiefs, and the wealth of their households. Two are effective female leaders of their neighbourhoods, and as such co-ordinate local *zyara*. Their maintaining of personal *zyara* relations with distant shrines, nearly all of which are of regional importance, adds to their local prestige, and renders further independence to their religious and social behaviour as individuals. Moreover, they would hardly be able to fulfil their personal *zyara* obligations if their social position did not provide them with the financial means to undertake a long journey, and with an extensive regional network of social contacts on which they can rely during that journey and at the distant shrine. The data strongly suggest that many other women in the sample contracted personal *zyara* obligations at some time in their lives, but had to drop them because

of their less exalted social position within their segments of residence.

Original *zyara* is a somewhat more common phenomenon. Here we can draw on two sets of data: data on the women resident in Sidi Mḥammad; and on the set of women who originate from that village and who (according to the converging evidence of observational data and interviews) either observe, or fail to observe, their obligations of original *zyara vis-à-vis* the regional shrines of Sidi Mḥammad.

Since about 50% of all marriages are contracted within the same village, and since (*cf.* Fig. 5.6) not all segments within a village differ as to the set of shrines to which local *zyara* is directed (although frequencies of *zyara* tend to differ), not all women in the sample acquired obligations of original *zyara* at marriage. In fact, since the village of Sidi Mhammad is exceptionally village-exogamous, only 14 women in the sample did so (= 40%); for the remaining 60%, local *zyara* and original *zyara* entirely coincide.

Of these 14 women, 7 (= 50%) observe their original *zyara* obligations, while 7 (= 50%) do not. Table 5.4 makes clear that the relative importance of shrines is a crucial factor here. Such importance is measured by the following indicators: the segmentary level at which the shrine functions as an additional, religious attribute; the physical characteristics of the shrine (*qubba, kurbi* or *mzara*); and the existence of a twice-annual festival for that shrine.

importance	range of geographical distance (km)	number of observances	number of non-observances	total
high	2.6 – 8.8	8	1	9
middle	.8 – 3.2	1	7	8
low	.1 – 2.1	0	5	5

Table 5.4. The observance of obligations of original *zyara* among women resident in the village of Sidi Mḥammad, as a function of the importance of the original shrine, and of the geographical distance between that shrine and a woman's current place of residence

Further statistical analysis (van Binsbergen 1971a: 286 *f.*) demonstrates that such conceivable factors as wealth, prestige, and the number of years elapsed since the woman, by marrying and taking up residence in her present segment, acquired obligations of original *zyara*, do not have a statistically significant impact on the observance of original *zyara* among the resident women of Sidi Mḥammad.

These data are supplemented by those on women who, originating from Sidi Mḥammad, have married outside and therefore are under obligations of original *zyara* focussing on the valley of Sidi Mḥammad. The festival of Sidi Mḥammad is the only occasion at which the necessary observational data can be collected; moreover it is by far the most important occasion for women to observe their original *zyara* obligations. For these reasons I

shall concentrate here on *zyara* to the major, regional shrines of Sidi Mḥammad, and ignore *zyara* to lesser shrines in the same valley. A fortunate implication is that thus importance of shrines as a factor determining observance of original *zyara* is kept constant, so that other factors may stand out more clearly. It is important to realize that in these cases we are dealing with women who have married not only outside the village, but also outside the valley of Sidi Mḥammad – for all villages of that valley would make the pious visit to the shrines of Sidi Mḥammad as part of their local *zyara* obligations.

On the basis of my village census and genealogies the full set of women involved can be identified. Limiting the analysis to those who currently live within a distance of 20 km (original *zyara* across wider distances would be practically impossible anyway), the set consists of 22 individuals, 15 of whom (=68%) actually observe original *zyara*, while 7 (=32%) do not.

While no data are available as to the wealth and prestige of these out-marrying women in their present, distant places of residence, the data reveal that the number of years elapsed since marriage (*i.e.* since the departure from the original segment) is significantly associated with observance of original *zyara* (Table 5.5).

duration of marriage (years)		3	4	5	7	8	10	12	15	25	total
number of women	observing	1	1	4	2	2	2	1	1	1	15
	not observing	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	2	7

Mann-Whitney U-test, corrected for ties: z= -2.81; p= .003

Table 5.5. Observance of original *zyara* obligations among out-marrying
women from Sidi Mḥammad, as a function of the duration of marriage

All women who left the village for marriage ten years ago or less, stick to the rule; those who left longer ago, tend to drop observance. Duration of marriage seems to be a surface factor, underneath which a more important one is hidden: the residence, in the segment of origin, of a surviving parent (Table 5.6). Of course, the longer a marriage has lasted, the older a woman is and the less likely she will have surviving parents.

	at least one living parent resident in Sidi Mḥammad	no living parent resident in Sidi Mḥammad	total
observance	12	3	15
non-observance	0	7	7
total	12	10	22

l =15.30; df=1; p< .001.

Table 5.6. Observance of original *zyara* obligations, among out-marrying
women from Sidi Mḥammad, as a function of parents's residence in the segment of origin

This factor points to the social functions of original *zyara*, as a unique opportunity to visit living kinsmen. Additional statistical analysis (van Binsbergen 1971a: 288 *f.*) however suggests that, besides sociability and psychological kin support in

the vicissitudes of marriage and virilocal incorporation, another structural theme is involved here: the inter-generational transfer of property rights (particularly in relation with land, a scarce asset in Ḥumiriyya). The wish to keep in touch with consanguineal relatives around the original shrine is not a sufficient reason for original *zyara*; for observance of this type of *zyara* is not significantly associated with the residence, in the segment of origin, of an out-marrying women's brothers – whatever the wealth of the latter. The continued residence of parents suggests an undivided patrimony. By keeping up visits to her segment of origin, the woman, in accordance with Ḥumiri views on land tenure, asserts her right to a share equal to that of her male siblings. *De facto* these rights are waived as, after the father's death, the surviving sons administer the patrimony on their own behalf: initially under the direction of the eldest sons, until such time when fraternal rivalry necessitates division. At that point a reversal of visiting obligations can be seen: more fully incorporated in her husband's segment, the woman tends to drop her original *zyara* obligations, but instead here brothers are under obligation to visit her with presents at the day of the Great Festival (Īd al-Kabīr, Īd al-Adha). The woman's sons, however, retain a latent right in the land administered by the mother's brothers, and in exceptional cases these rights are actually exercised, leading to a man's matrilocal residence.
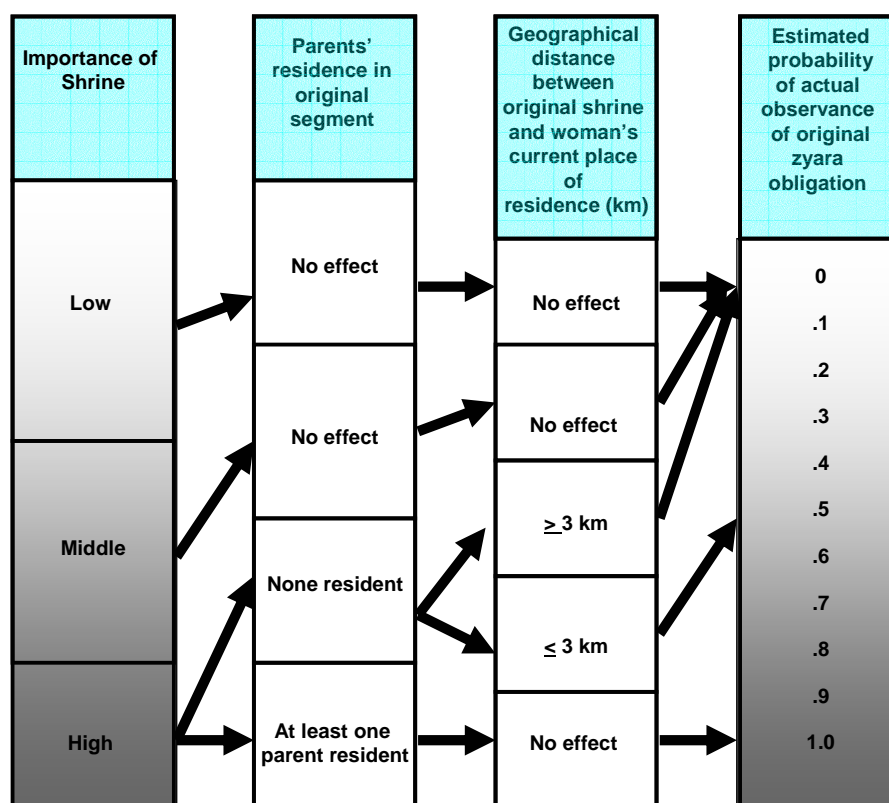
Combining the evidence on Sidi Mḥammad's resident women and out-marrying women, the main factors determining observance of original *zyara* obligations may be summarized as in Fig. 5.7.

5.9. Conclusion

The ethnography presented here clearly has many interesting openings towards central theoretical concerns in the social science of religion. There is a striking Durkheimian suggestion of one-to-one correspondence in the extent to which the saint and his shrine seem to function, at all levels of social and ritual organisation and experience, as a straightforward symbol of the social group with which they are associated. Alternatively, such cutting-across the overall structure of segmentation as can be seen in original and personal *zyara*, points to the potential of religion to provide alternatives to the structural arrangements that govern the more secular aspects of social life.

This calls to mind the theories of pilgrimage and regional cults as advanced by the Turners and by Richard Werbner (Turner 1974; Turner & Turner 1978; Werbner 1977). The possible contribution of the Ḥumiri data to the further development of these theories would at first glance appear to be somewhat negative. Werbner, in an attempt to get away from the classic correspondence paradigm in religious anthropology, has stressed cultic regions' autonomy *vis-à-vis* processes of material production, secular social organisation, and political structure. *The Ḥumiri case (of predominantly local zyara) however would be an example of extreme correspondence*

between cult and the secular societal process. Moreover, except in the relatively rare cases of original and personal *zyara*, which cut across segmentation, the more massive manifestations of the cult (at the village and valley level, and culminating in festivals) do not seem to involve principles different from those operating at the lowest level: the cult of inconspicuous *mzaras* that are tucked away in some corner of a compound and hamlet, and that have virtually no relevance beyond these small territorial units. In this respect the Ḥumiri cult of saints, while clearly a regional cult in terms of geographical scope and number of people involved, would not stand out as one when its organisational structure is considered: it reinforces, rather than deviating from, the overall social organisation of the society in question.

Importance of Shrine	Parents' residence in original segment	Geographical distance between original shrine and woman's current place of residence (km)	Estimated probability of actual observance of original zyara obligation
Low	No effect	No effect	0
			.1
	No effect	No effect	.2
			.3
			.4
Middle		≥ 3 km	.5
	None resident		.6
		≤ 3 km	.7
			.8
			.9
High	At least one parent resident	No effect	1.0

as always in the theory of probability, the probability p of any event taking place = 0 ≤ p ≤ 1

Fig. 5.7. A statistical model of the structure of local *zyara* in the valley of Sidi Mḥammad[201]

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[201] For religious anthropology, this is an unusually powerful and exact statistical analysis, revealing pilgrimage behaviour as highly deterministic, dictated mainly by three basic variables, and rendered fairly precisely predictable on that basis. In the thesis work where these results were first presented (van Binsbergen 1970b, 1971a, *cf.* 1970a), the combination of quantitative religious data with a quantitative approach to Ḥumiri social organisation enabled me to propose even more sophisticated and deterministic mathematical models in the form of differential equations, not only of such religious action as pilgrimage but also of the distribution of interaction partners and marital partners over the local landscape. Such a quantifying ethnographic approach (not uncommon at the time, as demonstrated by the work of Jongmans 1968, 1973; Mitchell 1967, 1980; Meggitt 1965; and Colson 1967) also revealed the seminal influence of my first wife, the (bio-)physicist Henny van Rijn. The results reinforced my Durkheimian inclination; brought out the great extent to which

Similarly, it is only in personal *zyara* to distant saints – the expression of an atomized devotion – that the shrine appears, in Turner's terms, as the 'Centre Out There', and that his generalisations and Werbner's apply as to pilgrimage as a distinct social process in its own right. In local *zyara*, which constitutes the vast majority of pious visits in Ḫumiriyya, the shrine is not a distant place visited at the end of a long and arduous physical and spiritual journey across unknown parts – it has more the nature of a visit to a close and dearly-loved relative, involving a short passage through familiar surroundings, in the company of people one knows well and identifies with. It is for this reason that I have largely refrained, in this chapter, from using the term pilgrimage.

(a)

208

(b)

(a): Sidi Bu-Qasbaya Sr (1968); (b) *mzara* ᶜAin Raml (2002);[202] the topmost horizontal element is a car bumper!

Fig. 5.8. a-b. Originally megalithic shrines in the valley of Sidi Mḥammad, ᶜAin Draham, Tunisia

Fig. 5.9. The shrine of Sidi Mḥammad Sr, in the valley of Sidi Mḥammad, ᶜAin Draham, Tunisia, 2002

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[202] A proper, detailed discussion of the megalithic nature, if any, of these shrines will have to wait for the final book publication (van Binsbergen forthcoming (b)). As currently worshipped sacred places they scarcely lend themselves to intrusive, potentially extractive or destructive archaeological research. There are indications that at least a minority of these stone monuments have been erected in the most recent centuries. This makes them potentially megalithic in type (the type has been around in the region for at least three millennia) and practice, but not in dating.

Finally, while both Vic Turner and Werbner would stress the dialectics of inclusiveness / exclusiveness or universalism / particularism as the crux of the cults they describe, the Ḥumiri data would suggest that this dialectic could hardly be adequately analyzed on the level of popular religion alone. On the one hand the very same dialectic underlies the secular structure of segmentation (where the opposition of complementary segments is resolved at the next level of segmentary inclusion). On the other hand it is on this dialectic that the interplay revolves between formal and popular Islam (which the saints straddle, as epitomes of the former and yet cornerstones of the latter) (van Binsbergen 1980a).

Another obvious dimension of the Ḥumiri data concerns the dialectics between socio-economic structure and the symbolic order (*cf.* van Binsbergen 1981 for a general theoretical discussion on this point; and Morris 1996: 164-176 for an appraisal). The embeddedness of most of the cult of saints, through patterns of local *zyara*, in a segmentary organisational structure (of localized social units entrusted with material production, biological reproduction, and with the regulation of the social relations upon which these fundamental processes depend), would suggest that in the cult production finds expression, and is in itself being reproduced. Too little could be said here about the contradictions involved (mainly: those between men and women; and between human patrons and clients) to indicate their relation to the cult of saints. Moreover, the virtual coincidence (Table 5.2) in Ḥumiriyya between the cultic regions as created by various types of *zyara*, and the area within which the biological reproduction of human population takes place (as indicated by the distances across which marriages are contracted) suggests that the relation between religion and societal reproduction operates at an even more profound level than the sheer underpinning of the structures of segmentary organisation, and of authority, that govern the local subsistence economy. The saints' involvement in women's reproductive troubles points in the same direction. Marital relations, and more in general the tension between male and female, would seem to constitute a dominant axis in the Ḥumiri cult of saints.[203]

Meanwhile at least one other contradiction would have to be considered, that between the state-supported rural elite (administrative chiefs, officers of the unemployment relief work organisation, teachers) and the peasants. The dialectics of their relationships must be understood in the light of the relation between the peasants's less and less viable subsistence economy (with its manifold links with the cult of saints), and the capitalist economy into which Tunisia is increasingly drawn – with as local manifestations the massive labour migration to Libya of Ḥumiri men in the 1970s, and to Western Europe in subsequent decades. This interplay of competing relations of production seems to offer, finally, a setting for the persistence of Ḥumiri popular religion, with the cult of saints as its major manifestation, despite the inroad of formal Islam.

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[203] *Cf.* Fernea & Fernea 1972; Dwyer 1978; Davis 1979 / 1984. Davis' juxtaposition of pious men in Islam versus pious women in Mediterranean Christianity seems scarcely to apply to Ḥumiri popular Islam.

Popular religion lives on at least to the extent to which the non-capitalist local subsistence economy lives on – albeit that the symbolic order tends to either lag behind, or anticipate, the development of economic relations.

Having thus vindicated, for the special case of popular Islam in the highlands of North-western Tunisia, the main claim of Durkheim's sociological religion theory, notably the very close association between religious symbols and the constituent units of society, we shall now turn to another, and rather more problematic, implication of Durkheim's approach: the alleged arbitrary nature of religious symbols. For Durkheim there is nothing in the nature of religious symbols that predestines them to become objects of veneration; many later authors have objected to this, pointing out that the totemic animals feature prominently in the diet of the Australians, as if their economic importance may be the cause of their veneration. Is there a way out of this dilemma?

Chapter 6. Having your cake and eating it: Intrinsic sacrality as a challenge to Durkheim's religion theory

6.1. Intrinsic sacrality as a puzzle

'Throughout the twentieth century CE, part of the sociology of religion and most of the anthropology of religion have revolved on the specific empirical application, as well as the theoretical critique, of Durkheim's theory. From the original context of the *Année Sociologique* and of *Les Formes*, the British anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown (reprinted 1952) introduced the theory into social anthropology, greatly modifying and simplifying it in the process. Durkheim's general approach to the identity of the *sacred* and the social obtained a particularly original twist in the work of René Girard. Malinowski (1954 / 1948) initiated a dominant line of critique: given Man's selective interest in nature (some natural species are more edible than others, etc.), it can be argued that for some symbols their *sacred* nature is not entirely arbitrary and superimposed, but does spring from some intrinsic quality they have for human production and reproduction. This line of argument was carried on by the British Marxist anthropologist Peter Worsley (1956, 1967). On the other hand, a direct link of student / teacher relations connects Durkheim, via his most famous student Mauss, to Claude Lévi-Strauss. The latter's rationalistic theory of what at his time of writing had already been an anthropological hobby-horse for over a century, *totemism* (Lévi-Strauss 1962a, 1962b) as constituting and expressing binary group oppositions, is not just a specific application of structuralist ideas with a Saussurian ancestry, but also a

specific elaboration of Durkheim's ideas as rendered above. Yet in Lévi-Strauss' work ritual, veneration, 'spirituality', emotion, effervescence, scarcely play a role, and neither does economic or dietary interest – with typical rationalistic myopia, only operations of the mind are considered.

Above, in my explorations concerning the continued utility of the paired concepts *sacred / profane*, I have oscillated between two positions,[204] without arriv-

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[204] #35. *FIFTY YEARS AGO: THE PRESENT WRITER'S EMERGENT THOUGH JUVENILE THEORY OF THE SYMBOL.* This state of affairs may be considered against the background of other aspects of my intellectual production at the time. Around age 20, nearing the completion of my undergraduate studies, I had come to identify, in the first place, not as a social scientist but as a literary writer (van Binsbergen 2015a), largely as a result of my intensive adolescent friendship with my fellow-student, then an abortively budding poet and later a professor of literary science at Tilburg University, Hugo Verdaasdonk. At the instigation of the latter I had set myself the task of elucidating the working of intertextual literary symbolism in the works of two authors then prominent: the Flemish writer Hugo Claus and the Russian-American writer Vladimir Nabokov.

In Claus's case, I centred on his short novel *Omtrent Deedee* (1963), which prompted the research question as to how the author had managed to bring to life and weave into his present-day narrative selected motifs from ancient Graeco-Roman mythology.

In Nabokov's case I centred on his then recent, English-language novel *Pale Fire* (Nabokov 1962), which posed as central problem how his use of intertextuality (not between the narrative and mythology, but between the narrative and other works from the English-language literary canon) informed the narrative construction of reality around the refugee king or madman and literature professor Charles Kinbote. Although these studies were never completed let alone published, they yielded a significant conclusion (*cf.* van Binsbergen 2003a: 278 *f.*) which has greatly influenced my extensive work on symbolism and myth throughout the subsequent decades.

In accordance with Dutch, and Medieval, academic custom I added a list of short intellectual claims ('theses') to my PhD text when it was to be defended in 1979, and there I took the opportunity of summarizing the following results of my literary investigations:

'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' (van Binsbergen 1979)	'13. Following in the footsteps of Langer and Cassirer many anthropologists have stressed the referential nature of symbols. However, it is an essential characteristic of symbols that, under certain conditions which remain to identified and specified, they oscillate between two opposite ontological positions: now they refer to their referents, and now they are absolutely autonomous vis-à-vis the latter.'

I believed to have identified, in this concise formulation, a fundamental property not only of symbols, but in fact of reality as a whole as it appears to us humans, and this insight became the basis of my practical and theoretical handling of, and living with, contradictions in life, in intercultural research, and in scholarship (*cf.* van Binsbergen 2009a), right up to the drafting of my next book, now in preparation: *The Reality of Religion / Sangoma Science*. This is the background of my oscillation, as signalled, between 'having your cake' (notably: 'the ecology determines the selection of religious symbols'), and eating it ('yet these religious symbols take on a life of their own, detaching themselves from the ecological basis'). The idea of electronic switches that are now open now closed (the term *flipflop* was used) was very popular in the mid-20th c. CE when transistors had recently been invented. Application of this idea to symbols can already be found with the comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell, for whom the symbol is alternately an arrow on a bowstring (binding energy to itself) and, beyond the bow-and-arrow image, as no longer referring to anything, and then devoid of all meanings, and releasing energy for ourselves (Campbell 1992: 155).

ing at a proper solution. Durkheim's viewpoint appears to be taken for granted by me in a passage like the following:

> 'In Stanner's formulations, also the concept of *mundane* retains the suggestion of an intrinsic quality (notably: intrinsically useful, intrinsically utilitarian, intrinsically referring to everyday life), which has little heuristic value for the study of religious phenomena, as Durkheim, of all people, saw very clearly.'

But on the other hand I dwelled at length at the criticism by Radcliffe-Brown, Stanner and Worsley, who all stress the ecological background of the sacrality of specific totemic animals.

In March 1968, a few months after concluding and submitting my BA sociology thesis, I left for my first field-work, in the highlands of North-western Tunisia, and there I could further work out this problematic in a concrete empirical context. For, the central topic of that research was the veneration of local shrines, which were associated on the one hand with a territorial / spatial or kinship segment, and on the other hand with a plethora of invisible supernatural beings (more or less Islamised so as to become saints, *wali*), each of which has a animal or vegetal species as a characteristic attribute – much like many Christian saints. When writing up my Tunisian field-work I devoted an entire chapter to the dilemmas of ecological intrinsic quality versus Durkheim's arbitrary imposition, I engaged extensively and with less prejudice with Lévi-Strauss's view of totemism as a classification system based on binary opposition, and I believe I did bring the matter much closer to a solution (van Binsbergen 1971a and forthcoming (b)). It is pertinent to cite in full a relevant selection of my account:

6.2. The indirect relation between ecology and religion: A partial vindication of Durkheim's theory of the sacred

Initially, at the level of a down-to-earth description of social and productive realities, my Tunisian ethnographic material (on the highlands of Ḥumiriyya) would appear to constitute a strong argument for the ecological interpretation of the selection of visible entities into the religious, and to contradict Durkheim's theory of the *sacred*. However, I shall now argue that the ecological point of view, no matter how viable, still does not offer a complete analysis. Subsequently, I shall attempt to reconcile the ecological point of view with Durkheim's views.

The ecological approach cannot give an explanation for the following:

1. In addition to the series of house, threshing-floor, spring, men's assembly and path, as set out in Chapter 5, above, there still exist the shrines (*cf.* Table 6.1). Shrines are not utilitarian, nor strategic in the process of ecological transformations, yet in the hierarchy of visible repositories of blessing they rank topmost: both in terms of the quality of their blessing as well as the frequency, intensity and cost of the religious actions di-

rected at shrines.

2. Shrines, house, threshing-floor, spring and men's assembly do not just feature in the local religion; they make a major contribution to Ḥumirī society as characteristic attributes of social units in a system of spatial / territorial segmentation.

type of segment (the terms are *etic*, analytically imposed)	size (number of families)	locally named after	characteristic attribute
household	1	(male) head of household	*dār* ('house'; especially: the *rḥal*, *i.e.* storage table inside the house')
compound	2-5	senior head of household; founder	*qāʿa* ('threshing-floor')
neighbourhood	5-20	ancestor of the numerically dominant agnatic core; mythical ancestor; toponym; spring; shrine	*ʿayn* ('spring') or *bīr* ('well')
village	10-50	see: neighbourhood	*raqūba* ('men's assembly'), often annex *hanūt* ('village store and tea house')
valley	150-300	see: neighbourhood	*mzāra, jamāʿa, qubbah* ('shrine')
chiefdom	600-1200	named by the French colonial government, loosely after pre-existing tribal units and confederations	*jamāʿa, qubbah* ('shrine')

Table 6.1. Spatial segments in Ḥumirīyya

Clearly, the ecological approach does not offer an exhaustive explanation.

Problems (1) and (2) now turn out to have a non-ecological solution which entirely corresponds with Durkheim's religion theory. In his theory, religious actions are directed at the symbol of the group, and religious agents derive their *sacred* character from the fact that their relation with humans is modelled after the relation between man and group. In the visible world, items are selected to become religious agents, not because of their intrinsic characteristics, but because they are suited to function as symbol of the group.

Now, all items throughout the series of shrine, house, threshing-floor, spring and men's assembly function as symbols of social units which are of crucial importance within Ḥumirī social organisation: spatial segments. Each element in that series is the characteristic attribute of a spatial segment at a specific level of segmentation. We have not arrived at this conclusion *ad hoc*, merely on the basis of our analysis of Ḥumirī religion; in that case the argument is likely to be circular. No, this conclusion has been reached by thorough analysis of Ḥumirī social organisation and of the major local forms of secular interaction, throughout Volume I of my 1971 thesis in question and of the forthcoming book.

This analysis reveals why house, threshing-floor, spring and men's assembly are outstandingly suited to function as the characteristic attribute of spatial segments – in other words, as group symbol in Durkheim's terms. *The most impor-*

tant collective actions in which all members of a spatial segment participate are continually directed at these visible entities in the landscape. In these collective actions directed at characteristic attributes, the members of the segment present themselves to one another and to the outside world; those actions therefore in a unique way promote (or further) the integration of the segment.

But while these symbolic, identity-reinforcing functions also, and *a fortiori,* apply to the shrine, in the series from house to men's assembly there is an vital utilitarian aspect as well: the activities conducted in the context of these material structures are indispensable for the production and reproduction of the spatial segment, in other words for its physical survival. This insight enables us to organically incorporate the ecological point of view in a wider argument on religion and social organisation. For the activities associated with the house, threshing-floor, the spring and the men's assembly are only outstandingly collective and integrative simply because those activities are of decisive ecological importance:

- protection (or as the case may be storage) for people, cattle and foodstuffs (the house),

- cereal cultivation (the threshing-floor),

- fetching water (the spring), and

- co-ordination of the social process so that ecological transformations are at all possible, and are promoted (men's assembly) –

– without these conditions of production and reproduction having been fulfilled, Ḫumirī society would not be possible.

But despite this ecological 'input' in the selection of characteristic attributes, in other words of social symbols, ecology cannot explain why or how those attributes take on religious overtones. And ecology can least of all explain why, besides ecologically important objects such as house and threshing-floor, also absolutely non-utilitarian objects such as shrines become characteristic attributes of segments and objects of religious action.

The relation between ecology and religion therefore is unmistakable but not direct. Ecology and religion are related to each other via a third complex of human activity and thought: social organisation. Ecologically inexplicable, shrines are yet essential from a social-organisational point of view. There are, in present-day Ḫumirīyya, no direct ecological needs stipulating collective activities at the highest segmentary levels: the valley, the chiefdom. Even collective activities with regard to men's the assembly, that is at the village or super-neighbourhood level, are not directly ecological: they only facilitate the social process which is necessary for ecological activities. In as far as social integration arises from collective activities, this requires for the highest-level segments the substitution of non-ecological collective

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activities, and this need is met by religious activities (pilgrimages, festivals) directed at important local shrines.

For the highest-level segments such integration by collective activities is indispensable because these maximal segments provide the setting not only for religious activities (that would lead to a circular argument, explaining religion by reference to religion), but also marital relations, political organisation, specialist services and other inter-local contacts. Patterns of interlocal interaction which are essential for Ḫumirī society are safeguarded by the religious integration of the highest segments.

Now we can also try to explain, from a social-organisational point of view, the hierarchy in the series of the visible repositories of blessing, from shrine to path. The fact that shrines rank topmost, both according to the quality of their blessing as to the religious actions which are directed at them, can now be seen to relate to the fact that, of all spatial segments, those at the highest segmentary levels have only shrines as characteristic attributes.

However, this explanation is not sufficient. For when we descend to the lower segmentary levels (village, super-neighbourhood, neighbourhood, sub-neighbourhood, compound, household) it would lead us to expect that also the characteristic attributes associated with these lower-level segments (men's assembly, spring, threshing-floor, house – in that order) should rank the higher in the religious hierarchy, the higher is their segmentary position. The reverse, however, is the case: the quality of blessing, and the nature of the frequency of the religious actions directed at it, make the house rank immediately after even the major shrine, followed by the threshing-floor, then the spring, and finally the men's assembly.

An alternative social-structural explanation is the following. The collective actions which keep the members of a family together are extremely intensive, complex and many-sided; next to an ecological aspect (in other words, production), they concern among other aspects reproduction, education, and recreation. Towards the higher levels the intensity, complexity and inclusiveness of the corresponding collective social actions are clearly diminishing. The religious hierarchy in the series house/ threshing-floor, spring/ men's assembly therefore corresponds with this differentiation between the various segmentary levels in terms of the intensity and many-sidedness of social interaction.

According to this interpretation the characteristic attribute of a social grouping would rank higher in the religious hierarchy, the more important is the corresponding social grouping to the individual. In essence this is Durkheim's theory rephrased not in absolute but in relative terms, and amended so as to acknowledge the fact that in virtually all societies an individual is a member not just of 'the group' (whose symbol then becomes venerated in Durkheimian terms) but of a number of interlocking groups, each with their own symbols, all of

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which have a tendency to be selected into the religion. What we have here is not so much an alternative to, but an ulterior explanation of, the above view which linked the ranking of visible repositories of blessing to the complexity and costs of the ecological transformation producing these repositories. The more intensive, more complex and more inclusive the common actions of a particular segment, the more complicated and more costly the object towards which these actions are directed.

Yet even this combined ecological and social-structural view does not explain the top-ranking position of shrines in the religious hierarchy. For we have another dilemma here. The higher the segment with which the shrine is associated, the *less* intensive, complex and inclusive are the collective actions of the members of this segment – but the *more important* the shrine.

The following argument is a possible way out of this dilemma. For the segmentary organisation of Ḥumirī society to function at all, a minimal integration is necessary of each segment at each segmentary level. At the lower levels this integration is reached in an obvious manner by collective actions, many of which are of prime ecological importance; these actions are chiefly associated with visible objects in the landscape which are characteristic attributes of the segments concerned and, in agreement with Durkheim's religious theory, have been selected as object of religious representations and actions. The ecological interest of these collective actions guarantees that they will continue to take place, and even in such a way that they promote the integration of the segment. However, at the highest levels of integration, ecological concern is not the driving motivation behind the actions directed at localized objects in the landscape; for at this level there are only shrines, and their *direct and tangible* productive pay-off is manifestly zero, however much the supernatural beings associated with them can be construed to facilitate ecological processes in a symbolic way. Because the ecological drive does not spur the actors on, some other arrangement must guarantee that also at these highest segmentary levels collective actions do take place and produce social integration. This condition is now fulfilled in the following way: the shrines are endowed with maximal blessing, while the collective actions directed at shrines (particularly, at the most important shines of a valley) are endowed with an eminently high value and supported by heavy religious sanctions. *Shrines must occupy the highest rank in the religious hierarchy of characteristic attributes, because the activities they inspire have only an immaterial pay-off; without this ideological underpinning these activities would be discontinued, to the detriment of segmentary integration at the highest segmentary levels.*

Even so, the analysis is not complete by any means. Why and how do symbols of social units become objects of religion? Durkheim offers a detailed

argument about the allegedly godlike significance of the group for the individual, and about the 'effervescence', the *sacred* excitement of collective ritual, in which a group allegedly deifies its collective symbols. All this points to the sociologistic, anti-individualist philosophy of Durkheim and his contemporaries.[205] It is a form of meta-sociology which is difficult to accommodate within an empirical, ethnographic context. It remains to Durkheim's eternal credit that he drew our attention to the relation between religion and symbols of social units; but for the explanation of that relationship we may have to look further.

Or should we take another look at the adepts' ecstatic dance, and reinterpret it as an instance of, precisely, Durkheim's *effervescence*? The idea is interesting but poses insurmountable difficulties: admittedly, the saint evoked in the ecstatic cult is, principally through his local shrine, a group symbol, but it is only one or two individuals who before a much larger, passive audience engage in the ecstatic trance; my extensive descriptions of the cult and my quantitative analyses of the relatively low social position of its adepts (who are utterly despised by most of their fellow-villagers) suggest that engaging in trance reinforces rather than reduces the adepts's distance from the group.

The views developed here, based on a thorough analysis of Ḫumirī social organisation and religion, suggest that the contradiction between the ecological interpretation of religious symbols (which ultimately harks back to the idea of intrinsic sacrality), and Durkheim's opposite view (notably: the claim of an arbitrary nature of the sacred) is based on an incomplete analysis of the relation between ecology, social organisation, and religion. In actual fact Durkheim, as well as his critics Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown and Worsley, are all correct. In Ḫumirī religion, items in the visible world become objects of religious representations and actions, not directly because of their ecological interest, but because of the fact that those matters function as characteristic attribute, as symbol, of social-organisational units; this is Durkheim. However, the selection of such items in the visible world as characteristic attributes of social organisational units, is mainly based on the strategic position of these items in the process whereby man transforms his surroundings into usable products for himself; this is Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown and Worsley; *where such ecological underpinning is absent (at the highest segmentary level) dummy items (i.e. items which only have a symbolic significance and lack all ecological utility) are invented – in the form of shrines – and endowed with enough religious glory to compensate for their lack of ecological interest. The ecology is projected onto the religion but only via the connection of both religion and ecology with social organisation.*

In summary we may refer to the following Table 6.2, where ecology, social or-

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[205] Such as discussed by: Sorokin 1964: 433 *f.*; Alpert 1961: 21 *f.*; Benoit-Smullyan 1947: 499 *f.*; Nisbet 1965: 23 *f.*); and Chapter 1, above.

ganisation, and religion are listed as representing an increasing degree of symbolising distance from material concerns: from the ecology (where this distance is zero), via social organisation (where the distancing takes the form of social group formation), to religion (where group formation takes the form of veneration of the material objects that function as ecological beacons):

societal aspect	ecology	social organisation	religion
material concerns	economic, productive activities centring on such material objects ('ecological beacons') as house, threshing floor, *etc.*	clusters of individuals organised around an ecological beacon	ecological beacon becomes an object of veneration (by some sort of symbolic 'overflow')
degree of symbolising distancing from material concerns	none: no symbolising:	implicit, limited social symbolising:	explicit, extensive religious symbolising:

Table 6.2. A possible relationship between ecology, social organisation, and religion

Thus, although clearly Durkheim's sociologism turns out to lead to an underestimation of the economic and social importance of the totem species, his insistence on the social as a separate category of existence *sui generis*, in combination with his subtle and sensitive approach to symbolism, brought us the very solution to the puzzle which Durkheim's most vocal critics (Worsley, Radcliffe-Brown) had signalled. In regard of the question of intrinsic sacrality, my Ḥumiri research was not only an application but also a test of Durkheim's theory, and although stimulating and thought-provoking, it led to only partial vindication of Durkheim's abstract, logocentric insights.

However, the question of intrinsic sacrality was only peripheral to the original research design for my first fieldwork, in the highlands of North-western Tunisia. Already Chapter 7 has shown that, for the overall thrust of Durkheim's religion theory, that fieldwork yielded convincing and positive results as far as the vincidation of Durkheim's religion theory is concerned. In the next chapter we shall turn to another problem that underlies Durkheim's approach: clearly logocentric, reflecting Durkheim's own time and age, his class position as well as intellectual orientation, *and most of all taking transcendence for granted without really problematising that concept,* how justified are we (and was he?) to apply his approach to non-Western, non-industrial, non-urban, in practice even non-literate societies whose level of logocentricity is appreciably lower than that of modern Western Europe?

Chapter 7. Transcendence as an implication of Durkheim's religion theory: Its scope in space and time explored by reference to the Nkoya people of Zambia (South Central Africa)

7.1. Introduction: The relevance of transcendence to our present argument[206]

In Chapter 5 above I have pointed out that Durkheim was very much a child of his time and age, scholarly class and Rabbinical Jewish family. He took largely for granted the social milieu to which he belonged: the literate, logocentric, urban society organised in formal organisations, where processes of production and reproduction had been considerably eclipsed from the daily gaze. Did this myopia not prevent him from capturing the very *elementary forms of religious life* he set out to define – in connection with societies which on all these points were the very opposite of the French sub-elite *fin-de-siècle* life which Durkheim himself lived?

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[206] The following chapter is the edited and greatly expanded English translation of chapter 8 (pp. 53-66) of my Dutch-language book van Binsbergen 2012c; also *cf.* 2005b. On transcendence also see p. 312 *f.*, below.

As we have seen (above, footnote 11), 'transcendence' is a concept which Durkheim occasionally uses without explicitly according it a central position in his religion theory. Meanwhile his construction of the *sacred* as absolutely distinguished from the *profane* implicitly revolves on the applicability of the concept of transcendence: without transcendence no absolute difference. In my own earlier discussion of transcendence worldwide (*e.g.* van Binsbergen 2012c, summarised below, pp. 312 *f.*) I have stressed

(1) the human capability of thinking beyond the here and the now as the hallmark of transcendence

(2) resulting,[207] in the first place, in an upward, celestial flight of the imagination away from the materialities of the here and the now, but also, in the second place, in an equally typical return to earth at the end of that movement

(3) the fact that in principle such capability is already inherent in human language (which is, after all, referring to the here and the now with words that are far more general, that are in fact intersubjectively applicable regardless of space and time) as a universal of Anatomically Modern Humans, and thus may be considered to be part of the human condition as we know it [208]

(4) the effect of the typical Bronze-Age *logocentric* package, in having dramatically reinforced the dominance of transcendence in social, cultural and political life, – particularly in an intersubjective and culturally underpinned, hence routinised form of transcendence.

Taken to their literal implication, these four points would mean that absolutely or practically illiterate societies, or segments of society, of the past and the present, especially those outside the 'logocentric belt' (a chain of ancient societies ranging from Carthage and the Roman Empire to China and Japan), may be supposed to constitute contexts in which transcendence means relatively little in socio-cultural-political life, and in which, as a result, religious life would be relatively down-to-earth, *immanentalist*, instead of cherishing the model of the upward, celestial flight as its main expression. Since the mytheme of the Separation of Heaven and Earth has installed itself, already in the Upper Palaeo-

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[207] In a manner already exemplified by the widespread institution of *shamanism*, which has attained a near-global distribution in the course of the latest 20 ka of human history. A dominant image in shamanism has been the shaman's movement along the celestial axis up into the sky and down into the underworld, in search of knowledge and medicine for the benefit of the community or of individual clients.

[208] Although humans are now considered by the specialists to have emerged in Africa several million years ago and to have populated the world from there, Anatomically Modern Humans is the term for the specific branch to which all humans now living belong; they emerged in East Africa about 200 ka BP (= 200 thousand years Before Present), and, after considerable genetic and socio-cultural evolution within the African continent, spread to the other continents in the Out-of-Africa Exodus in the period 80 / 60 ka BP.

lithic, as the dominant theme of world mythology, we may surmise that the central imagery of transcendence (the upward celestial flight – which is also one of the directions the shaman is supposed to take when sallying out for the benefit of the community or of her / his individual client) has a worldwide resonance.

However, relying on ideal types without the check of empirical data has been one of the main pitfalls attending religious studies, and one which Durkheim, as one of the Founding Fathers of the social sciences and as the author of one of the most influential theories of religion (Marx being another one), has sought to avoid in *Les Formes,* by concentrating on the then already relatively well-studied ethnographic case of the Australian Aboriginals.

Clearly, Durkheim did not fully realise the transcendence-related problematics of his religion theory. Meanwhile the distribution of transcendence-thinking in space and time may be elucidated by applying his own investigative strategy once more: *by considering one well-studied case from outside the North Atlantic region.*

7.2. Looking for transcendence among the Nkoya of Zambia, and the attending methodological requirements

Since 1971 I have interacted intensively with the members of the Nkoya people in Western Zambia. Nkoyaland has come to constitute a second home to me. Adding all longer spells of field-work and my numerous nearly-annual shorter visits I have lived for four or five years full-time among the Nkoya of rural and urban Zambia. I speak their language. I have published in that language. I am among the adopted sons and heirs of one of their kings / royal chiefs, and publicly inherited the royal bow and arrows when my adoptive father died in 1993. In 2011 I was nominated a Nkoya sub-chief in my own right, although this nomination still remains to be effected. I have mainly owed these traditional honours to a spate of scholarly publications I have devoted to the Nkoya in the course of more than four decades.[209]

What right, what authority may I claim to pronounce on something as subtle, volatile, elusive and beyond the actors' own verbalised consciousness as transcendence in Nkoya life? Under the direction of my friend and colleague René Devisch, in Louvain, Belgium, in the years 1985-2010 the so-called Louvain School of anthropology was developed. A characteristic positioning of this theoretically and methodological highly sophisticated movement is the following. Its members have generally claimed that, due to their painstakingly-acquired knowledge of the language and culture of their research population, they had acquired the capability *of*

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[209] *Cf.* van Binsbergen 1979 / 1981, 1992a, 1992b, 2003a, 2011b, 2012a, 2014b, in press (a).

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speaking as a member of that population – mediating towards international scientific audiences, in this way, the local symbolic contents and *sous-entendres* which in normal local social life would hardly ever be explicitly expressed in words. This method is akin to that of Victor Turner (1967, 1968) in his personal, free and creative interpretation of Ndembu symbols and ritual – an interpretation inspired, and justified, by Turner's intensive and prolonged field-work. Turner's method consists *in the analyst's interpretative close reading / anthropological hermeneutics, of local symbols, expressions and ritual actions which the local participants themselves did not (and, most likely, could not) explicitly explain and 'sub-title' by means of their own speech acts.* The field-worker's interpretation, although grounded in extensive local knowledge, thus becomes *a creative act of imposition and appropriation* – out of the local cultural and linguistic contents which the field-worker has acquired and internalised, she or he produces, as it were through introspection, an understanding which otherwise remains largely or totally implicit and even subconscious among the local participants. Upsetting a dichotomy that has been found helpful for ethnography over the decades, the Louvain-style fieldworker sets out to produce valid and reliable *emic* statements in already the communicable format of *etic* statements... My own anthropological training at Amsterdam University in the 1960s, under such teachers as Köbben, Wertheim, Boissevain and Jongmans, was far more positivistically-orientated: only the local participants' sensorily observable, and indeed actually observed, behaviour including their actual, explicit speech acts were admissible as ethnographic evidence – and all further interpretation, hermeneutical, structuralist, Marxist, or of whatever other kind, was dismissed as a figment of the ethnographer's imagination.

This deceptively narrow conception of the ethnographer's role was soon augmented by my intensive participation in Max Gluckman's 'Manchester School' – of which Turner in his approach to religion and symbolism was a major but increasingly peripheral and contentious member.[210] Against this background, sttressing how the social process arises out of the interactive transactions of the individual members and thus brings about a social order that is merely inchoate and precarious, I have occasionally criticised the Louvain School[211] for their *interpretative vicarious transcultural imagination* (also *cf.* my 2015 book *Vicarious Reflections*), where not the social process, but the imagined and reified aggregation of its result ('society', 'culture') became the focus of scientific analysis. Nonetheless, Louvain anthropology's approach, to which I have – to my great sense of privilege and gratitude – been frequently and profoundly exposed over the decades, has formed one of my principal sources of inspiration in my transition, in the course of the 1980s, from a predominantly *etic* to a predominantly *emic* perspective in ethnography. This means that today I am prepared to admit that *the implicit orientation of the local culture as internalised by the field-worker in prolonged field-work, consti-*

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[210] *Cf.* Werbner 1984; van Binsbergen 2007a, and extensive references there.

[211] van Binsbergen 1997d: 43, 2003a: 516.

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tutes one of the principal sources of transcultural knowledge, especially in regard of symbolic, cosmological and therapeutic topics. Such topics largely escape the kind of direct sensory perception (through the local participants' directly perceptible and recordable acts including speech acts) which has been considered of exclusive and paramount importance by more positivistic ethnographers including my own teachers – relying as they did on an epistemology and methodology ultimately (though entirely implicitly so!) mediated through classic anthropologists or at best reverting to Kant, through modern methodologists such as Popper and de Groot).

Fig. 7.1. Exchanging topical kin information with visitors in the village of
Munkuye, Kaoma district, Zambia, 2011

7.3. Transcendence among the Nkoya

So let me put myself in a Louvanian position. To the (apparently: considerable) extent to which I may have acquired the right to call myself a Nkoya, and a part-time inhabitant of the rapidly shrinking savannah forest of the Zambezi-Kafue watershed, *reality* speaks to me as a Nkoya adult in a number of fairly different local situations which are locally considered self-evident. Taken together, these experiences make up the core of Nkoya life, recognisable to all locals; thus they constitute obvious contexts in which we may search for *indications of transcendence thinking*. Let me discuss these situations one by one.

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7.3.1. Daily life among the small circle of kinsmen making up the village

The first context in which to look for transcendence among the Nkoya is that of daily life among the small circle of kinsmen making up the village (Fig. 7.1) – usually only a handful of small, closely adjacent houses. This little community is seldom free from conflicts over scarce resources, over division of labour and over codes of social interaction, nor free from suspicion about possible malicious influences which the members extend to one another or have extended in the past (sorcery). Kinship obligations tend to be loosely defined and are often dodged, yet the ancestors are supposed to guard over, and to sanction, the most blatant infringement of kinship norms. In this loose array of expectations and obligations one is surprised to see the rule on avoidance between (classificatory) son-in-law and mother-in-law to be strictly enforced – even in times of crisis (*e.g.* childbirth that threatens to end in disaster) the two cannot be under the same roof, let alone sleep in a bed earlier slept in by the other. To the extent of the humanly possible the members try to operate within a sphere of tolerance, trust, awareness of the complementarity of the genders, and respect for the vulnerability of children and for the elders' authority. When material misfortune, illness and death strike (as they do only too frequently), one mobilises without the slightest hesitation *all* material and spiritual resources available to the family, from the last savings which are expended on endless visits to nearby and remote traditional healers, to dreams in which the surprising vegetal cure for a kinsman is revealed often even before the latter has reported her or his illness to the circle of kin. Because of the belief in reincarnation and because of the constant re-enactment of that belief in the form of the *ushwana* name-inheritance ritual (see below), the close kin group and the little village constitute a knot of references to the present, past and future, in which every person alive is the living materialisation of a name and social *persona* (generally considered as tending to autonomy as a distinct personal entity detached from its actual bearer) which have already been managed and transmitted by the kin group for generations, having earlier been borne by group members now deceased.

Among the Nkoya, kin support is a person's principal asset in life. The rate of fertility is dramatically low. In their effectively bilateral descent system every person theoretically belongs to a number of kin groups at the same time. Kin groups are in constant competition over effective membership (as brought out by actual residence in the village controlled by a particular kin group) of all their potential members. The weapons in this struggle are not just gentle co-axing and material support but also sorcery and poisoning. One is constantly aware of the formidable threats laying siege to the kin group and the village is as a collectivity transmitting ancestral names / personae. Thus birth and death take on almost eschatological dimensions. On the first sunrise after birth, the father privately presents the newborn child to the sun, and secretly names it – by a name under which the ancestors will know this person, but which is forever to be taboo to the child's future playmates, friends, sexual partners or in-laws. Small ceremonial gifts are offered between the newborn's paternal and maternal kin on the same occasion, and the

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nganga's services are enlisted to ensure that the marriage bed (whose connotations of paternal heat are considered harmful to the baby) will be a safe place for the baby to lie on. The ritual elaboration of birth is however minimal as compared to that of death. Whatever the inroads of Christianity among the Nkoya in the course of the 20th c. CE, the relatively comforting idea of natural death has not managed to install itself among them, and in practice all human deaths tend to be attributed to sorcery – more or less deliberate malice on the part of living humans.[212] At the death of a village member, all social life instantly grinds to a halt. There is a frenzy of rumour, of divination to find out 'who did it', covert and overt sorcery accusations are made from all sides, and the bereft are sure that their enemies (rival villages in competition over ancestral names, and over living members) have dealt their own group a lethal blow. Time-honoured ties of trust, co-residence and commensality are suddenly called to question. The very texture of local society is rent almost beyond repair. A particular aspect of social organisation is now mobilised: Nkoya society is organised in clans,[213] and each clan has a specific complementary clan with which it entertains joking relations in everyday life; it is also that clan which has the unique duty of performing the necessary funerary services in case of death. The social and cosmological order is reversed for ten days, in the sense that not only from the bereft village, but from throughout the valley (comprising dozens of villages) the members flock to the bereft village to gather around fires and sleep out in the open. These wakes are occasions of heightened social, musical, dancing and even sexual activity, – a conscious celebration of life and of community regroupment in the face of death. If the deceased is an elderly person, youths will publicly express their joy that their community has been freed from another witch. While these activities go on in the village, burial at the nearby cemetery is a rapid and relatively unceremonious affair, albeit that here again accusations are flying and threats of violence accompany the heart-breaking impromptu dirges, in which highlights of the deceased's life are given.

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[212] This was the ethnographic situation in the early 1970s, during my first and longest spell of field-work. There are indications that in subsequent years Christian ideas have taken more solid root, also as a result of the HIV / AIDS crises of the 1980s-1990s, resulting in a gradually changing perspective on death.

[213] For a description and analysis of Nkoya clans, see van Binsbergen 1992b and 2012d. In the context of the present overall argument, determined by Durkheim's *Les Formes*, one would be curious to learn more about Nkoya clans: are they named after specific animal and vegetal species (yes, largely); are these apparently totemic species conceptualised in the form of totemic spirits (not in any way that I could detect in the decades of my research – there is no evidence of a totemic cult among the Nkoya in historical times). Our full view of Nkoya religious institutions is considerably impeded, not only the considerable impact of Christianity and of the colonial state since the early 20th c. CE (under whose aegis many traditional cultic forms have been discouraged or even subjected to legal prosecution), but also by the iconoclastic impact of more or less Christian-inspired, popular witchcraft-eradication movements in the first half of the 20th c. CE, when most cultic statuettes (material foci of beliefs and practices now forgotten or dissimilated) were forcibly surrendered and destroyed. The cultic statuette I describe and analyze at length (2011b) is one of very few I came across in over 40 years.

7.3.2. The intimate domain of sexuality

Also in Nkoya society, the intimate domain of sexuality,[214] is fenced by strong conceptions as to what is private and what public. In addition to the self-justifying psycho-physiological satisfaction embodied in the orgasm, primarily three themes are at stake: the awareness of an ecstatic enacting of the cosmic complementarity of genders which constitutes the world; the related awareness that sexuality entails the fulfilment of a *sacred* mandate imposed by the ancestors, whose place one then assumes more that at any other moment; and finally the awareness that sexuality is the mandate, but also the monopoly of adults, who thereby (ideally!) radically distinguish themselves from children and adolescents – the latter are supposed to have not the slightest knowledge let alone experience of sexuality. Formal puberty training (which until a century ago was also extended to boys, but today only to girls) teaches children not only adult sexual roles but especially practical and theoretical knowledge about sexuality. Much sexuality, also on the part of married persons, takes place in secret between lovers who are not each other's spouses, and in that case the three themes outlined are eclipsed by a fourth: the celebration of one's own individuality, mirroring the latter in the unique and private encounter with a beloved other of one's own choice. A more than incidental sexual partner, in other words a spouse, is designated as *ba muntu wobe / wenu*:[215] 'your / thine honourable person', 'the honourable one through whom you experience the glory of being human'. This person's kinsmen are your kinsmen-in-law and remain so throughout your life, regardless of whether any formal wedding ceremony or payment of bride wealth has taken place, and regardless of the ultimate fate of the relationship (divorce is common; the average duration of marriage is 9 years).

7.3.3. The acts of the priest-healer (nganga)

The next context for transcendence to be considered, consists of the acts of the priest-healer (*nganga*), who both fascinates and incites strong fears, with her or his defiant manipulations (full of power display and secret knowledge of nature) at the border of life and death. For the *nganga*'s services one is accustomed to unconditionally mobilise literally all available resources, scarce though they are.

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[214] Elsewhere in South Central / Southern Africa, sexuality is known as 'the work of the ancestors' (*e.g.* in Tswana *tiro ya badimo*); otherwise the living would not be there; and the implicit rationale of the wedding ceremony is to inform the ancestors that henceforth their bloodlines have been joined in the persons of the newly-wed (author's field-notes, Botswana). Much sexual activity tends to take place outside formal wedlock, as both an extension and a defiance of the ancestral work. There are diffuse and not totally convincing indications that the same imagery implicitly applies among the Nkoya, where also sexuality and childbirth are considered to be directly supervised by the ancestors (*bapashi* 'the shades', *bakahanci* 'those down, in the underworld').

[215] The *b* in Nkoya orthography is pronounced almost as a weak *w* in English.

7.3.4. Ecstatic healing cults

The next context for transcendence is formed by the ecstatic healing dances which are mainly being performed by women in the context of possession healing cults, also known as cults of affliction.[216] These rituals have been imported into Nkoyaland, at least in their present form, relatively recently (late 19th c. CE).[217] They are fairly cumbersome to men: it is they who must provide the firewood for the nocturnal fires around which the ritual takes place; who must procure and sound the drums; and who must pay for the ritual leader, the chorus of adepts in attendance, and the prescribed herbal medicine. My PhD thesis (van Binsbergen 1979 / 1981) sketched a broad, proto-historic and theoretically-informed framework within which these cults may be placed within their regional (*i.e.* South Central African) context, and their relatively recent history in the second half of the second millennium CE. Only decades later I began to extend my research into the transcontinental antecedents of these cults, at the other end of the Indian Ocean – although I had dimly suspected such transcontinental links from the very beginning of my Nkoya research, in the early 1970s. But whatever their origin, early on I also made up my mind (at the instigation of C.N.M. White 1949) as to the moral and existential significance of these cults in their South Central African setting, among the Nkoya. These cults meant a transition away from the local, immanentalist veneration of ancestors as the embodiment of morality and sanction, and began to evoke the immense geographical and social space which, through long-distance trade, had come to penetrate right to the heart of Nkoyaland in the course of the second millennium CE (*cf.* Horton 1971). These new cults hinged on the representation of a-moral spirits which, like wind (and literally designated with that term, *mpepo*) came blowing from afar, taking possession of the human person without the slightest offence or transgression on the part of the latter, and bringing her, during trance and dance, to speak unknown languages and to perform exotic gestures (such as dancing while keepings one's buttocks onto the ground, or drinking tea in the fashion of a colonial District Commissioner's wife). The

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[216] *Cf.* Bastian 1997; Carter 1972; Kwenda 1999; Olivier de Sardan 1994 (also *cf.* his incisive and well-taken 1992 critique of postmodern flirtations with professional boundary crossing in religious fieldwork – which, if I would take it seriously and literally, would almost explode my scholarly production of the past quarter of a century); Turner 1968b; van Binsbergen 1981, 2011b.

[217] Although all ecstatic cults to be attested among the Nkoya from the early 1970s on were of recent foreign origin, and ultimately reflected either South Asian Hindu / Buddhist ritual, or North Atlantic Christian ritual, ecstatic cults of deceased royals are found among the surrounding peoples (Ila, Lozi, Tonga, Sala, Shona) which seem to have a much deeper local / regional history. The Nkoya have similar royal cults but over the decades, although adopted into a royal family, I have personally never found any evidence of mediums speaking on behalf of deceased royals. With so much of repression, erosion and destruction having gone on, both in the name of Christianity and in the course of (only nominally Christian, if at all) witchcraft eradication movements of the first half of the 20th c. CE (*cf.* van Binsbergen 1981; Ranger 1972; Fields 1985), it cannot be ruled out that the Nkoya once had royal mediums, too.

cults seem to revolve on a play with transcendence, where reference to the not-here and not-now grants *sacred*ness, even though there is an unmistakable immanentalist streak in the idea of spirits incarnating in a human person and making the latter perform in dancing séances.

My adoptive mother, the great *Bituma* cult leader Mayatilo († 1989) next to her shrine, a beads-adorned forked pole; she is seconded by her grand-daughter Dani; Shumbanyama village, Kazo valley, Kaoma district, Zambia, 1973

Fig. 7.2. The great *Bituma* cult leader Mayatilo

7.3.5. *The humble prayer to the ancestors*

Our next instance concerns the humble prayer to the ancestors, full of thanks-giving, at the village shrine: a shrub or forked branch where the members of the small village group pray collectively to the ancestors especially after settling a serious conflict that has arisen in their midst; or where at nightfall the hunter, after 24 hours of sexual abstinence, addresses his ancestors who may grant him or deny him success in the hunt, and who closely supervise (with illness as

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sanction) the fair distribution of the quarry over all relevant kinsmen.

7.3.6. The deep forest, where hunters roam

Our next instance is formed by the deep forest. As a hunter in the park-like, semi-open spaces of the savannah forest, dozens of kilometres from any inhabited village, where in a combination of lethal danger and maximum sensory alertness (fully aware of the old and sinister forces haunting the deserted homesteads which I pass and which have largely reverted back to the forest – they are mainly recognisable because of the mango trees, brought from South and South East Asia and once planted by humans but now grown to giant dimensions), I experience the original, undomesticated trees as those of Nyambi ('God', once a spider-like[218] goddess from distant West Africa or even West Asia – but no other living Nkoya person is aware of that background),

> *Nyambi balengilē bitondo na bantu*

('Nyambi who created Trees and Humans'). Here I am constantly and tensely anticipating, not only the encounter with small and big game, but also with the ancient, characteristically ambivalent god Mwendanjangula ('You Who Walk On High') – a regional manifestation of the transcontinentally very widely distributed god generically known to scholars as Luwe,[219] and called Mwendanjangula in

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[218] Below, notably towards the end of Chapter 9, we shall return to the widespread 'spider' mytheme; for further discussion and a global distribution map, see van Binsbergen 2010a: 185, and 2011e; in the latter title also the 'cosmic egg' mytheme is treated in the same manner.

[219] *Cf.* von Sicard 1968-1969; van Binsbergen 2011b, 2015: 31, 195 *f.* Among the Nkoya and elsewhere in South Central Africa (*cf.* Jacottet 1899-1901), the divine being Mwendanjangula ('You Who Walk On High') is in the first place associated with Heaven. but implicitly (also in view of the ancient conception of heaven as 'The Waters Above') he / she also has the aquatic connotations of a river dragon – such as the 'River Horse' on whose body the Chinese culture hero 伏羲 Fu Xi reputedly discovered the symbols of the 八卦 *pa gua* 'Eight Trigrams' around which Chinese cosmology revolves. Mwendanjangula is generally considered a benign figure – as long as the human who encounters this deity in the forest makes sure to be the first to greet him or her, considerable luck and wealth will be bestowed on the human in return (but the alternative is terrible). However, the most terrifying form of sorcery known to the Nkoya may well be a transformation of the Mwendanjangula concept: immense political and healing power are sure to be gained if a human cultivates a *jilombo* ('sorcery snake') by the riverside, first feeding the little serpent titbits such as chicken eggs, but gradually yielding to the serpent's desire to devour humans – so that the perpetrator proceeds to name close kinsmen for the serpent's consumption. The point about possible Chinese traces is less far-fetched than it may appear. Chinese cultural traits and artefacts are among the principal trappings in which the Sunda influence has spread to the western part of the Old World – after all, there was massive Chinese influence on South East Asia already prior to the westbound Sunda expansion. All along the Indian Ocean and Atlantic Ocean coast of sub-Saharan Africa ancient Chinese influence may be detected (*cf.* van Binsbergen 2017a: 29, 288, 385, 362, 365, 367, 365n); some core concepts of the worldview of the Bamileke of Cameroon are even classical Chinese (van Binsbergen, in press (b)). And in fact, the very specific, catalytic form of the cyclical transformation of elements which underlies Nkoya clan names makes it quite likely that a Chinese cultural and demographic intrusion took place in South

South Central Africa; who has only one side to his body, and who (perhaps as more recent accretions upon his presumable original identity of a cosmogonic god, or of the Rainbow Serpent; *cf.* van Binsbergen 2011e and below, p. 383n) is associated with hunting, the weather, cattle and metal-working; any moment he may suddenly appear. And once the hunt is successful and one has shot big game (elephant, buffalo, leopard, lion), one cannot simply butcher the quarry and take it back to the village, but extensive rituals have to be performed so as to placate the spirit of the killed animal and to ensure that it will not harm the hunter in future.
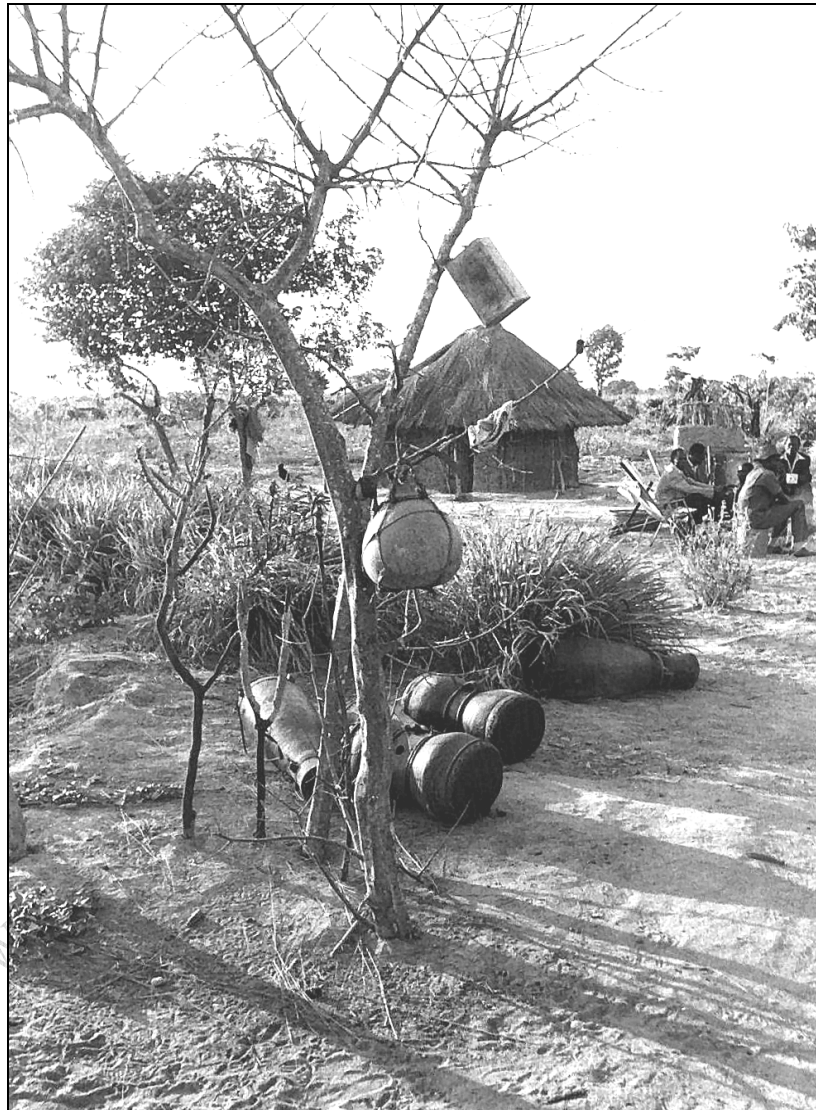

Fig. 7.3. A village shrine at sunrise during an *ushwana* ritual, Mabombola village, Njonjolo valley, Kaoma district, Zambia 1977

Central Africa sometime in the first or early second mill. CE (van Binsbergen 2012id: 260 *f.*)

7.3.7. *The name-inheritance ritual of* ushwana

A particularlly conspicuous instance of transcendent thinking in Nkoya life is the ritual of *ushwana*. One or two years after the demise of a close kinsman, the elders choose a successor for the deceased (even if the latter fulfilled no official function such as village headman). The successor formally acquires the name of the deceased, and the kinship relations around the successor are re-arranged in such a way that the deceased's children now count as her's or his, etc. Initially the successor will have feared identification with the spirit of the deceased, and therefore physically resisted the election by running off to the valley river, and fighting off the elders who try to catch the candidate; but this is a passing phase, and at sunrise the successor is put on a ceremonial reed mat (*shitete*) and welcomed in her or his new capacity in a moving ceremony that sends many tears flowing.

Surrounded by kin, and intimidated to the point of crying, the young girl that is to inherit the deceased's name is brought into the ritual reed fence

Fig. 7.4. *Ushwana* ritual, Mabombola village, Njonjolo, Kaoma district, Zambia, 1977

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7.3.8. The ritual of girl's puberty initiation

The ritual of girl's puberty initiation, *ku-tembwisha kank'anga* 'to make the pubescent girl ('K'anga person') come out as an adult woman' (Fig. 7.5). A young girl's first manifestations of physical maturation – breast development and especially menarche – are considered the signs that she has fallen under the spell of K'anga, the formidable and anti-social demon of menstrual blood. She then enters a secluded training period of a few months, under the tutelage of a few mature women who cannot be her close kin. That training is concluded with a collective nocturnal festive dance (*ruhñwa*), which ends at sunrise when the entire local community welcomes the young girl, whose solo dance expresses her newly acquired capacity of adult woman and future mother. All kinsmen make an effort to make her appear at her best on this occasion. All present are moved and show their pride in this new adult member of society. After her dance, and covered only by a blanket, the novice sits out in front of her father's house and, against the payment of a small fee, may be viewed underneath her blanket by prospective marriage candidates.

Fig. 7.5. Girl's puberty rite in the village of Mukunkike, Kaoma district,
Zambia, 1977

Fig. 7.6. Nkoya men offer the royal salute to the royal grave situated in the copse to the right; Mwene Mutondo royal establishment, Shikombwe, Kaoma district, Zambia, 1992

7.3.9. The kingship

The kingship (*Wene;* the incumbent is called *Mwene,* pl. *Myene*) manifests itself in daily court protocol (in which the royal orchestra plays an important role, performing a selection of its repertoire of ancient songs and praise-names at sunrise and sundown), and by mandatory forms of greeting and bodily stances in the king's presence. Absolute respect is due to the incumbent of *Wene.*[220] (Figs. 7.6 and 7.7).

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[220] #36. *ON SACRED KINGSHIP AMONG THE NKOYA AND WORLD-WIDE.* At least, by day. The Nkoya king is a *sacred king* of the type celebrated by early anthropology, and is a solar symbol to the extent that all court etiquette is suspended at night, when the kingship is being shamed by the nocturnal darkness; by the same token, the kingship is shamed by a king's death, which cannot even be mentioned. Classic statements on sacred or divine kingship include the following: Frazer 1911-1915; Evans-Pritchard 1948; Jeffreys 1935; Meyerowitz 1960; Seligman 1911, 1934. Among the subsequent secondary interpretations I may mention: Arens 1979; Baynes 1936; Bell 1996; Claessen & Skalník 1981; de Heusch 1982 (along Dumézilian lines), and 1988; Fagg 1970; Feeley-Harnik 1985; Hadfield 1949; Kaplan & Edouwaye Krige 1975; Lloyd 1960; Richards 1969, *cf.* Vaughan 2008 and Vitebsky 1985; Riad 1959; Roheim 1930; Schnepel 1986; Simonse 1992; Congress 1959; Radin 1959; Tcherkézoff & Thom 1987; Vaughan 1980; Wilson 1939; Wrigley 1983, 1996; Young 1966. Hoffman, in his authoritative synthesis of the prehistoric antecedents of the Ancient Egyptian state, rightly (*cf.* van Binsbergen 2011d) rejects (Hoffman 1980: 261) the popular Afrocentrist thesis (*e.g.* Kusimba 1996) of Egyptian kingship as deriving from sub-Saharan Africa, in favour of the opposite alternative:

The king / *mwene* is dressed in Western costume adorned with regalia, holding his ceremonial fly-switch and seated at the temporary royal shrine (*kara*) amidst ancestral poles, leopard skins, xylophone and drums and surrounded by retainers and musicians, at the Kazanga Festival in the early 2000s. The shrine temporarily erected at the Kazanga festival site is copied after the *kara* at the royal capital of Mwene Mutondo in the West of Nkoyaland, and (as far as I know) never had a counterpart at the capital of Mwene Kahare in the East.

Fig. 7.7. An incumbent of the Kahare kingship among the Nkoya people, early 2000s CE.

'Instead, we find a slow diffusion of Egyptian influence up the Nile beginning in Late Gerzean times (ca. 3300-3100 B.C.) and a concomitant copying of some of the attributes and paraphernalia of Egyptian kingship by frontier and client groups over the next 2,000 years.'

Myopically, Shinnie 1971 sees this hypothesis only confirmed for the Ugandan Bunyoro, despite confirmations from various parts of Africa, *e.g.* by the Egyptologist Wainwright (1940, 1949, 1951). The leading Egyptologist Hassan (1992) looks at the construction of divine kingship in earliest Egypt, *cf.* Moret 1927 / 1932. I limit myself here to discussions of African divine kingship and ignore the studies of the topic in the Ancient Near East and beyond. Meanwhile my own research of the last decade into Africa's transcontinental continuities in pre- and proto-history suggests that we must not one-sidedly rely on the Egyptian influence, however important, but must also take into account influences from Ancient Mesopotamia (for which the work of Dierk Lange – *e.g.* 2004a, 2004b, 2011 – is of eminent importance), and more recent inroads from South Asia, South East Asia (*cf.* Dick-Read 2005), and East Asia.

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The Nkoya king has attained her[221] or his high office through a ritual of name-inheritance, an specific form of the more general *ushwana*. And while the high office imposes very considerable limitations and obligations (the Mwene cannot leave the royal capital, cannot eat with others unless these are also of the royal blood, cannot attend funerals, etc.), as the incarnation of an exceptionally powerful Name the Mwene is the highest expression of the ethnic, linguistic and cultural identity of the entire Nkoya nation, and a source of great pride and loyalty among the subjects – even although this identity in fact merely exists as an ideal, an illusion, and to some extent a linguistic practice, and there never was only one Mwene (but always a handful at least) for the entire population identifying today as Nkoya.

In the 19th c. CE (and no doubt in preceding centuries) the respect due to the Mwene was enforced by serious physical sanctions including the death penalty, and by human sacrifice. As a result the royal capital was the location *par excellence* were such basic values of village life as reconciliation and peacefulness were denied and confronted. Major signs of kingship were the royal paraphernalia especially the big drums (*mawoma*), the *mpande Conus* shell ornament, the royal bells / gongs (*zingongi*), the xylophone (*chilimba*), the *chimbuya* (a miniature battle-axe), the *mukwale* (the double broadsword) and the *muchamo* (crown). During the last thirty years however *Wene* has declined so much in power and wealth that its main manifestations today are merely symbolic and performative in the context of the annual Kazanga festival, whose format is not in the least historic but which educated Nkoya, mainly based in the urban areas far distant from Nkoyaland, have bricolaged out of shreds of historic traits and 'invented tradition' (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1993 / 1983), so as to present, within the one or two days of the festival's duration, an overview of the rich musical culture of the Nkoya countryside. The festival does not seem to be invalidated by its recent, organised and performative format. It only renders a transformed and highly compressed representation of what, only a few decades ago (in the time of my first Nkoya fieldwork), constituted the ritual-saturated natural annual cycle and personal life cycle of the Nkoya. In its present form it still manages to inspire many participants with strong emotions of identity, pride and beauty. The major factor in all this is the production of Nkoya music, which since the early 19th c. CE has become the court music throughout Western Zambia. Its lyrics evoke an ideally intact traditional society centred on royal courts which, despite their unmistakable parasitical and violent nature, still convey a sense of identity and cosmic order.[222]

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[221] There are strong indications (van Binsbergen 1992b) that until the 19th c. CE, many or most Nkoya kings were women. By that time, however, the ethnic designation 'Nkoya' (allegedly derived from a forested area at the Zambezi / Kabompo confluence) may not yet have been in general use, but only arose as a result of the incorporation of the ancestors of today's Nkoya in the state of the Luyana / Kololo. Some of the alternative names in circulation are: Mbwela, Mashasha, Wiko.

[222] A short account of the impact of Nkoya music on Western Zambia, and the South Asian background of this process, is given in van Binsbergen 2015b: 159 *f*.

Fig. 7.8. Displaced in the 'World of the Whites' (downtown Lusaka, Zambia, 1977)

7.3.10. The modern Zambia state

Probably we may also consider as an instance of transcendence: the modern Zambia state, the successor to the colonial state, and (to the limited extent to which the state manifests itself at the village level) vested with unassailable authority and with physical violence. Among the Nkoya especially in the first decades of Independence (which was attained in 1964), the state has mainly been considered not as belonging to all Zambian citizens including the small Nkoya minority, but as belonging to others, notably to the specific ethnic group

which has appropriated statal power (initially to some extent also the Lozi, but soon especially the Bemba- and Nyanja-speakers inhabiting distant regions in the extensive territory of Zambia).

The *Mwene* / king is crowded by courtiers, followed by the royal orchestra, and welcomed by the priestess – centre front – of the royal shrine (associated with royal ancestors, boys' puberty rites and iron-working), Mwene Kahare makes his ceremonial entrance at the 2011 Nkoya Kazanga festival. His principal regalia are the leopard skin and, in his headband, the round *Conus* shells (*zimpánde*) healing from the Indian Ocean

Fig. 7.9. *Mwene* Kahare makes his ceremonial entrance at the 2011 Nkoya Kazanga festival

7.3.11. The 'World of the Whites'

Implied in the modern Zambian state is also: the 'World of the Whites' (*bu-kuwa*; Fig. 7.8), which in the colonial times manifested itself through colonial rule and through the Whites-dominated local trade in coveted manufactured goods; in postcolonial times the 'World of the Whites' has mainly manifested itself in the life of Nkoya people through their stay, over shorter or longer periods, in the distant towns of Central Zambia; and through a trickle of affordable

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manufactured goods (mainly second-hand clothing, in the recent pasts also bicycles and hunting rifles) making their way to the villages.

7.3.12. *The historic forms of veneration of the High God Nyambi*

The historic forms of the veneration of the High God Nyambi, which apart from clichéd invocations in exclamations and ancient song lyrics, mainly survives in oral traditions concerning the Shimunenge rain ritual; however, the latter has most probably no longer taken place since a century, for at the following reasons:

- the Myene (whose effective rise to power is locally considered – for whatever this is worth, against the background of Ancient Egyptian and African parallels of sacred kingship spanning several millennia – to have taken place only a few centuries ago) have pushed their own royal ancestors forward as the guardians *par excellence* of the land and of the conditions for food production through agriculture, hunting and fishing, and in this way have eclipsed the High God (van Binsbergen 1981: chs 3 and 4);[223]

- during the 19th c. CE local kingship was encapsulated, in the first place in the indigenous state of the Luyana / Kololo / Lozi / Barotseland further to the west, succeeded by the colonial and postcolonial state

- preceding the colonial state by a few decades in Barotseland, but soon implicitly in collusion with the latter, Christianity imposed its own version of the High God.

7.3.13. *Christianity*

Introduced in Nkoyaland (200 kms East of the Barotse royal capital) in the early 20th c. CE, Christianity has constituted practically the only channel for upward social mobility for a literate minority among the rural Nkoya from 1940 on, which was increasingly orientated on the distant towns of Zambia. Returning migrants brought from their distant places of work accessible versions of Christianity, such as the Watchtower / Kitawala movement, which in their hands

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[223] In the present, limited scope I cannot enter into a discussion of the *deus otiosus*, 'the retreated god', which has dominated the scholarly debate on divine intervention in African religions (*cf.* Shelton 1964; Nwanunobi 1984). Apart from presenting of a new-born baby to the rising sun in the father's act of naming his child (a rite with Ancient Egyptian parallels; *cf.* Renggli 2000; Stricker 1963-1989), and perhaps a few scattered statuettes (van Binsbergen 2011b), there are no traces of a High God *cult* among the Nkoya in historical times. The retreat of Nyambi to Heaven – as a flight (aided by a spider, and attended by a wagtail) from the first human, Kamunu, who made Nyambi's life unbearable, has been recounted in myths from South Central Africa, especially the Zambezi valley, see Jacottet 1899-1901 and van Binsbergen 2010a.

often served as a witchcraft eradication idiom. For the majority of the rural population, however, Christianity throughout the century elapsed since its local introduction has largely remained a more or less *alien* element; this facilitated the persistence, until a few decades ago, of the rural cults sketched above. Since the final decade of the 20th c. CE, however, the cults of affliction have waned (due to globalisation, the AIDS crisis, intercontinental forms of Pentecostalism) to such an extent that cult leaders can no longer support themselves as such. Some have made a career shift to Christian churches – a pattern reminiscent of developments in South Central Africa over the past half century. An interesting phenomenon has been that even among non-Christians, fragmented elements of the Christian faith, such as the celebration of Christmas and reliance on the healing power of Christian prayer, have installed themselves as a vague general Great Tradition hovering over the complex varieties of present-day non-Christian religion life in Nkoyaland.

7.4. Conclusion

I have summarised the above description, and its religious implications, in the following Table 7.1:

no.	transcendence-relevant item as listed	is there a cult?	is there a material focus?	invisible beings venerated in this connection?
1	daily life among kinsmen	indirectly, see 5	indirectly, see 5	indirectly, see 5
2	sexuality	no	bed; forest	perhaps implicitly the ancestors
2a	birth and death	to some extent	bed; grave	perhaps implicitly the ancestors
3	acts of the priest-healer	yes, in the hands of the priest-healer	the priest-healer's paraphernalia and shrine	implicitly the priest-healer's ancestors, familiars and possessing spirits
4	possession healing cults / cults of affliction	yes	shrine	the cult leader's possessing spirits
5	prayer to the ancestors at the village shrine	yes	village shrine	the ancestors
6	forest	yes: at the village shrine, and around the dead specimen of big game	yes: the village shrine, and the dead animal	the High God Nyambi; the unilateral god Mwendanjangula; animal spirits
7	name-inheritance ritual	yes	reed mat	deceased ancestor
8	girl's puberty initiation	yes	the village dancing ground	the blood spirit K'anga
9	the kingship	yes: twice-daily by the royal orchestra; incessantly, in the respect subjects visibly show the Mwene; in the royal burial rites; and in royal enthronement	the royal capital with its royal shrine; the royal graves; the royal paraphernalia	the royal ancestors
10	the modern Zambian state	no	the district centre (*boma*)	perhaps the state president

11	the 'World of the Whites'	not really, but varieties of Christianity tend to be the hallmark of former labour migrants, who also tend to engage in Christian-inspired witchcraft eradication	perhaps manufactured articles such as Western clothing, and rifles, which constituted the main spoils brought home by labour migrants	perhaps the Christian God
12	the historic veneration of the High God Nyambi	*Shimunenge* rain ritual, no longer performed	no	Nyambi
13	Christianity	yes: prayer, church services, etc.	yes: small church buildings	Nyambi as the Christian God, His Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit (Moya); among Roman Catholics also numerous saints; in certain Independent African churches, the focus is on Moya only.

Table 7.1. Overview of contexts of transcendence among the Nkoya people

What can this nutshell spiritual ethnography tell us about the occurrence of transcendence thought among the Nkoya? Unmistakably, we have found at least the first steps towards transcendence thought. Let us consider them one by one:

a. Considering the absolute (yet locally to be relativised and negotiated) validity of the power institutions they constitute, Christianity and the modern state reveal a form of transcendence thought in a predictable, modernist way ('routinised transcendence'), much in line with what we see in modern North Atlantic region, from which Christianity reached Africa in recent centuries, and from which also the colonial state and its postcolonial successor derived their models.

b. Then there are, in the historical constitutional arrangements around the kingship, and in the historic conception of the High God, the first stirrings of transcendence thought which tally with the Ancient Near East, as well as with South and South East Asia; probably (van Binsbergen 2012d) this represents ancient historical forms of routinised transcendence thought that have been imported from these cultural contexts, distant though they are from present-day Nkoya life both in space and in time.[224]

c. Another complex, which the Nkoya explicitly recognise as relatively re-cently introduced, is that of the ecstatic healing cults, whose play with transcendence I have indicated above. In the form in which these cults manifest themselves today these cults are unmistakably tributary to South and South East Asia. However, we cannot completely rule out the possibility that in an earlier period, during the last few millennia (as es-pecially an effect of Islamic, Indian, Chinese and North Atlantic trade in African gold, cattle and slaves across the Indian Ocean), South and South East Asian cultic forms have undergone substantial African influ-

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[224] I have elsewhere argued in detail how influences from Ancient Egypt, the Ancient Near East, South Asia, South East Asia, and East Asia, have had an undeniable impact on Nkoya society, in such fields as mythology, kinship, music; *cf.* van Binsbergen 2010a, 2012b, 2012d, and in press (a).

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d. If we try to eliminate these three types of distant and relatively recent external influences upon the ethnographic data presented, what remains (as a theoretical, ideal-typical construct which in reality may never manifest itself as a complete and distinct cultural expression) might be considered the authentic, local Nkoya orientation vis-à-vis immanence and transcendence. This is a movement of thought which appears to be peculiar to all other institutional complexes of Nkoya life as listed, and amounting to the following:

1. experiential elements in the here and now,

2. in a complex interaction of concrete material acts, in the light of collective cosmological representations and symbols,

3. are endowed with such vectors of intensity, emotion and rapture

4. that for a brief moment they may give the Nkoya person involved the impression of peering into an aspect of reality which is scarcely or not at all at hand in everyday life, but which yet displays that reality in all its glory, mystery and fulfilment;

5. however, the person in question is not allowed to linger in that moment, and after the exalted experience an immediate return follows to the here and the now

6. however, as a result of this exaltation the here and now has obtained an additional lustre, which may long continue to inspire a sense of truth and beauty

7. and which, given the considerable plurality of situations in which such moments of exaltation may be produced, is likely to be renewed and replenished before its effect may ever be extinguished completed.

For whatever it is worth, I note that this characterisation of transcendence among the Nkoya would also largely fit the manifestations of transcendence in present-day North Atlantic society. For instance, my approach to Nkoya transcendence reminds us of the concept of the peak experience as developed in the humanistic psychology of Abraham Maslow (1964). Yet North Atlantic society may be supposed to be much more under the sway of logocentric-transcendence thought than the practically illiterate Nkoya society, where the state, organised religion and proto-science have made only minor inroads. Does this mean that transcendence thought is, after all, part and parcel of the human condition (or to be more precise: of the condition of

Anatomically Modern Humans), and that I have tended, in earlier work, to exaggerate the significance of the Bronze Age logocentric package? Or is the surprisingly manifest presence of transcendence thought in the Nkoya case rather to be attributed to the fact that, while on African soil and effectively illiterate, much of present-day Nkoya society is in fact heir to transcendence-saturated influences from Ancient Egypt, Ancient Mesopotamia, South Asia, South East Asia, and East Asia, – regions where the Bronze-Age package has flourished for millennia already?

The transcendent is not a domain where the Nkoya person may reside permanently, but which she or he nonetheless experiences, and experiences as more than just a promise: as the incidental, short-lived fulfilment of which the return to immanence irrevocably makes part, but which yet lifts immanence above its banality, ugliness, poverty, and need.

Although justifiably designated '*sacred* / divine king' in the anthropological discourse, and although construed – through enthronement, through all sorts of boundaries and prohibitions, through collective representations concerning the *Mwene*'s unique magical powers, cruelty and evil nature – to be separated from the other members of the community by an insurmountable difference, even the *Mwene* does not live in a permanent state of transcendence.

This is the case, not only because the local participants are constantly reminded of the ordinary human qualities of the incumbent of kingship: the *Mwene*'s body has the same needs (breathing, food, drink, sleep, shelter, sex, urination, defecation, etc.) as that of other humans, and is constantly susceptible to the risk of poison murder. The limitations to the *Mwene*'s transcendence are acted out daily, in the sense that the kingship is only in force in daytime. Its symbolic equivalent is the sun, and as soon as this has set, the royal orchestra falls silent, and it is no longer permitted to honour the *Mwene* with the usual salute of squatting and clapping hands – in other words, nightfall brings the anticipated, daily return to immanence.

Often recruited from the circle of ordinary villagers and raised outside the royal capital, the incumbents of *Wene* tend to have difficulty persisting in their royal role consistently, and cannot bring themselves to stay away from dancing festivities and funerals, or from scouring the surroundings for incidental sexual partners; this brings shame on them but does not diminish their royal status. The daily routine around the kingship is in the hands of a retainer, who oversees the protocol but has no sanctions at his disposal. Besides a council of elders scrutinises how the kingship is being discharged. They are entitled to the sanction of regicide, and regularly take recourse to it. Nonetheless regicide is not considered justified

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in case of small human weaknesses of the Mwene and the latter's infringement of protocol, not even major infringements such as royal incest and sorcery as are supposed to be part and parcel of *Wene*, but only in case of fundamental infringements of the socio-cosmic order which is invested in the king: a male *Mwene*'s impotence (which is supposed to threaten the well-being of the entire realm), or a *Mwene*'s repeated refusal to heed the council's advice. But however brought about, by constitutional regicide, illegal poison murder, or natural causes, a *Mwene*'s death is an unspeakable cosmic disaster, and in the first place a source of great shame to the *Mwene* and the latter's[225] subjects.

The Nkoya language does not clearly have a general abstract term for these moments in which transcendence breaks through (could we think here of Durkheim's effervescence?), but body language, intense facial expression, tears, and other signs of emotion leave scarcely any doubt when such a moment is at stake. Moreover there is the term *ngula*, 'top, treetop, exaltation, glory', by which not only the High God is indicated (as *Nyambi ya Ngula*, 'God of Glory') in what I suspect is a Christian-contaminated expression,[226] but also the epiphany of the High God in historic times, Mwenda*njangula*.[227]

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[225] Since the *Mwene* can be male or female (traditionally mainly female), and since gender is not morphologically or syntactically expressed in the Nkoya language, I am using this somewhat cumbersome construction to avoid the repeated use of 'her or his'.

[226] We cannot assume with certainty that the expression *Nyambi ya Ngula* 'God of Glory' is an authentic historic African concept, uncontaminated by transcendence-saturated Judaeo-Christian thought. The collection of Nkoya oral traditions entitled *Likota lya Bankoya* (van Binsbergen 1988c, reprinted with revision in van Binsbergen 1992b) was compiled in the 1950s by Rev. Jehosaphat Shimunika, scion of a Nkoya royal family. Before World War II he had started his career as a Nkoya traditional healer, yet soon changed course so as to become the first Nkoya pastor (with the South Africa General Mission which had operated in the region since 1914) and the first, and until recently only, translator of the Bible into Nkoya. In oral-traditional Nkoya discourse the expression 'sacred' scarcely occurs, the only case I have found is the following:

Niho a muyakile ha munkupele na kumupana byuma bya wene: shilimba, ngongi, na batuyamana baya balilenga Bamyene, mwaka, hefu, kampulu, na liyowo limo lya nanyundo (Likota 27: 2)	'She granted him royal power over the *munkupele* hourglass drum, and gave him the regalia: the xylophone, and the bells, with dispensation with regard to such animals *as were sacred to the Mwene*: eland and leopard. Also she allowed *Mwene* Kashina to have one rhinoceros horn [an object sacred to the *Myene* – WvB].'

[227] As we have seen, *Mwendanjangula*, is a mysterious divine being which has only one side to its body; belief in such a unilateral being has (often called Luwe; *cf.* von Sicard 1968-1969; Schoffeleers 1991) a very broad distribution both in Africa and in the other two continents of the Old World (*cf.* van Binsbergen 2010b, and the distribution map below, Fig. 9.4); and (considering this figure's puzzling hybrid reference, in addition to historically indifferent *weather*, to a number of modes of production at the same time: hunting, pastoralism and petty commodity production / metal-working) it appears to originate in West Asia in Neolithic times (van Binsbergen 2010a, 2010b, 2011b; Wainwright (1963) opts for a different, albeit adjacent, origin: in Ancient Egypt.

(1)   (2)

(1) from Angola, early 20th c. CE, as unilateral figure with female bosom, height ca. 20 cm; collected in Angola in 1998 – a photograph was kindly sent to me by an American visitor of my website, but regrettably, a computer crash removed his name from my records; (2) from Kaoma district, Zambia, height 26 cm, probably middle 20th c. CE, in the upper register Mwendanjangula appears as the principal heaven-associated deity in a wooden statuette used by the *Bituma* healing cult; pair-wise also other mythical characters of the Nkoya are represented (for extensive description and analysis, see van Binsbergen 2011b).

Fig. 7.10. Two renderings of the divine being Mwendanjangula

So far my tentative interpretation of Nkoya life in terms of over a dozen situation in which transcendence is more or less furtively constructed soon to be followed by grounding in immanence. This description has only vague and largely implicit grounding in the explicit ('*emic*') discourse in which the Nkoya describe their own experiences. Therefore my reading of transcendence in the Nkoya context may be criticised are merely the external imposition of an analytical model that is alien to the local situation. However, in the light of my above remarks on Turner and the Louvain School, and of my reconsideration of my position *vis-à-vis* that school's intercultural epistemological position, I submit that such positivist criticism wrongly ignores the possibility of – as I believe I did myself – getting to know a culture through prolonged participa-

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tion in the local community, and internalising that knowledge, not only cognitively but also emotionally, as an integral part of one's own existence – more or less in the way one only through participation and personal experience gets to know the society into which one is born, not only as a young child (inevitably that element is absent in knowledge gained through field-work) but especially as an adolescent and as an adult. It has been especially in the course of my own numerous and often prolonged spells of participation in moments of the collective production of transcendence, in the course of more than four decades, that my Nkoya hosts have spontaneously recognised and affirmed my own Nkoyaness.[228] Ultimately, the justification for allowing oneself 'to speak as a Nkoya', even when one was not born as one, lies in the fundamental conditions upon which all intercultural philosophy and all knowlege formation across cultural boundaries is predicated: the fundamental underlying unity of humankind. It is this condition which often allows us to understand our research hosts, and them us, however much such understanding tends to be hampered by layer upon layer of locally specific cultural differences.

This concludes my three attempts, in three consecutive chapters, at vindicating Durkheim on the basis of anthropological, prolonged fieldwork – which ideally also involves use of the research hosts's language,[229] and growing detailed knowledge of their culture and daily life.

In the Preface to this book I sketched how in the first half of my career I drifted away from the Durkheimian inspiration, and gradually adopted, or developed, long-range approaches which allowed me to focus (albeit unsharply and with limited resolution!) on massive continuities in space and time, across the continents and across millennia, even tens of millennia. In the next Part, IV, I set out to try and address Durkheim's concerns in regard of *elementary forms of religious life*, from a long-range perspective, informed mainly by comparative historical linguistics, and further by the new Comparative Mythology which has arisen in recent decades. This will lead to further vindication of Durkheim's religion theory.

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[228] Both in my poetry and in my scientific texts I have repeatedly described such moments in intimate terms in which my own involvement was brought out and self-reflectively problematised.

[229] Admittedly, this condition (while fulfilled in the Nkoya case) is not fully met in the case of my Ḥumiri research. I had learned the basics of Qur'anic and modern international Arabic from an Amsterdam university course offered by the Palestinian refugee Muḥammad Suʿudi , in 1964-1965. Two years later, during the Ḥumiri fieldwork, this helped to impress the (largely illiterate) villagers with my ability to recite the most common texts (الفتاة *al-Fatah* and الشهادة *al-Šahadah*) by heart, and to read the Qur'an aloud; but it was insufficient to understand in detail, let alone speak, the Berberised Maghribine Arabic dialect of the villagers. For daily social purposes I could soon get by in the dialect (and still can, as turned out during my last visit, in 2002, with my eldest son), but for formal interviews I was largely dependent upon the skilful services of my inexhaustible interpreter, Mr Hasnawi bin Taḥar. With all his qualities, including that of musical performer, he appears as a major character in my fieldwork novel *Een Buik Openen* (1988).