# Chapter 15. Rupture and fusion in the approach to myth

## *Situating myth analysis between philosophy, poetics, and long-range historical reconstruction, with an application to the ancient and world-wide mythical complex of leopard-skin symbolism*

On the basis of my engagement with myth over the decades, this chapter seeks to present some 'prolegomena' to the study of myth today. It does so, in the first place, by a short overview of philosophical contributions and implications of the study of myth. After formulating and discussing a possible definition of myth, the argument focuses on two complementary perspectives in the scholarly approach to myth: the objectifying perspective of *rupture*, versus the participatory and identifying perspective of *fusion*. After indicating the pros and cons of both, and giving an example (notably, the 'hero fights monster' mytheme) of extensive continuity in myth through space and time, the chapter concludes with a summary of the main results of my current long-range comparative research into leopard and leopard-skin symbolism, which is informed by loosely interlocking mythical complexes extending all across the Old World and part of the New World, over a time span from the Upper Palaeolithic to the present.

## 15.1. Philosophical approaches to myth

In scholarly discourse, myth is often taken for granted as a self-evident genre of symbolic production. As an Africanist empirical scientist I, too, have often fol-

lowed that approach. However, turned intercultural philosopher, it has been my task to deconstruct self-evidences (*cf.* van Binsbergen 1999a, 2003a, 2015). Hence the present argument.

It is not as if philosophy offers a wide and generally agreed-upon perspective on myth, or as if myth has been one of philosophy's central concerns in the last hundred years.[1] Students of myth in the literary and social sciences including history will find that philosophers may occasionally take for granted such conceptual usages as have been adopted by the very fields of scholarship whose foundations philosophy is supposed to examine critically. This is largely the case for *myth*, as it is for philosophers' none too innovative use of the concept of *culture* (*cf.* van Binsbergen 1999a, 2003a). At one level this may seem to be true even of a post-structuralist philosopher like Derrida. He does engage in debate with Lévi-Strauss on the interpretation of myth of the South American Bororo people (Derrida 1967a: 149 *f.*), and with Plato (Derrida 1972) on the interpretation of the myth of the Egyptian King Thamos and his servant (originally a god!) Thoth (inventing writing) as recounted in *Phaedrus* (274c-277a), and in so doing appears to take for granted conventional notions concerning the nature and confines of myth as a self-evident unit of analysis.[2] However, at a more fundamental level Derrida's deconstruction of the binary opposition so central to Lévi-Strauss's approach to myth, through the notion of *différance*, and Derrida's critique of *logocentricity*, do offer some of the essential elements for a meaningful approach to myth today.

Myth has certainly featured in main-stream Western philosophy from its very inception, in the Presocratic philosopher Xenophanes' (c. 570-480 BCE) attacks[3] on his contemporaries' mythical beliefs (without using the Ancient Greek word μῦθος *muthos*), and somewhat earlier even in Theagenes of Rhegion's allegorical interpretation of stories featuring divine beings.

The etymology of *myth* is charmingly uncertain. Most authoritative sources refuse to trace it beyond the Greek *muthos*. Partridge[4] adduces a Indo-European root *\*mud-* or *\*mudh*, 'to think, to imagine', and sees cognates of the Greek form in Lithuanian, Old Slavonic and Old Irish (to which Starostin & Starostin add: Tokharian, Old Greek, Baltic, Germanic, Slavic in general, and Celtic in general). Although Partridge explicitly discusses Latin *muttīre* ('muttering, mowing') as part of a complex centring on the English *mute*, he does not suggest a link with Greek *muthos* on this point. Such a link is however claimed

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[1] Thus symposia like Poser 1979 or Schrempp & Hansen 2002 do not offer much that is substantially new. Perhaps this is different for Scarborough 1994 or Lincoln 1999, *non vidi*.

[2] Also *cf.* Derrida 1971; van Binsbergen 2005c / 2015: ch. 6.

[3] Diels 1951-1952: 21, *Fragmente*, 14, 12, 15, 16; *cf.* de Raedemaeker 1953: xiii *f.*, 100 *f.*

[4] Partridge 1979, s.v. 'myth'; corroborated by Pokorny 1959-1969: II, 255; and Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008, 'Indo-European etymology'.

by van Veen and van der Sijs,[5] who thereby exhaust their inventiveness, in the sense that they, too, refrain from tracing the etymology beyond Greek.[6] Largely relying on and popularising Astour, Martin Bernal has placed controversial but often plausible proposals of Ancient Egyptian etymologies for Greek words at the heart of his *Black Athena* thesis.[7] If *muthos* was not among Bernal's original proposals, it might have been. For in Ancient Egyptian, *mdwj* 𓌃𓂛𓏥 means 'speak, talk; word, saying', and *mdwt* 𓌃𓏏𓀁 'speech, matter'.[8] In general, the combination of both a semantic and a phonological fit is considered a strong indication for a valid etymological connection.[9]

The word μῦθος was common from Homeric times onwards, denoting 'speech, spoken word, story, fable', usually without implications as to the truth or falsehood attributed to its contents (Liddell & Scott 1968, s.v. 'μῦθος'). What we classify today as *myth*, are stories told by Plato, *e.g.* the myth of the original duality and bisexuality of all human beings in *Symposium*,[10] the myth of Er at the end of *De Re Publica* / *Republic*, or most famous, the Parable of the Cave in Book VII of the same work. Gradually an opposition was installed between *muthos* and *logos*; the former would increasingly denote the furtive, oral statement in specific situations, a statement which could be just hearsay and need not be true; while the latter would increasingly denote the compelling expression of law and order, immutable philosophical truth, divine rule, the divine creative act, and hence a transcendent form of truth which was increasingly denied to *muthos*. The emergence of philosophical rationality in classical Greece has often[11] been described in terms of the transition from *mythos* to *logos*, a process in which Aristotle rather than his teacher Plato appears

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[5] van Veen and van der Sijs 1997, *s.v. 'mythe'*.

[6] *The Starostins'* Tower of Babel also identifies an Indo-European protoform *med, 'to think about, to reason, to decide', likewise with reflexes throughout the Indo-European realm, but impossible to link to Greek *muthos*; for our present purpose it is therefore immaterial that *med, contrary to *mūdh, can be given a higher level etymology at the Nostratic / Eurasiatic level, as *mVrV, 'feel', which has reflexes in Indo-European, Altaic and Dravidian; the *Tower of Babel* record on this point is muddled, however, for under 'Eurasiatic etymology' up to eight reflexes *mVrV are listed but none with semantics 'feel'...

[7] Astour 1967; Bernal 1987, 1991; *cf.* van Binsbergen 1997a / 2011e, *Index* , where Bernal's major etymological proposals are listed. *Contra*: Egberts 1997 / 2011/

[8] Gardiner 1994: 571; Hannig 2000: 1206. Because of the nature of Ancient Egyptian writing the vocalisation of its words is nearly always somewhat uncertain.

[9] Purists among historical linguistics would add, as a third condition, the explicit formulation of correspondence rules setting forth the systematic transformation of linguistic forms between the languages which a proposed etymology brings together – despite extensive attempts (*e.g.* Ehret 1995; Bomhard 1984; Bomhard & Kerns 1994) this third requirement is not yet met in the present case (Takacs 1999, 2001) – I am grateful to the historical linguist V. Blažek for this reminder.

[10] Plato 1975 / 1921: *Symposium*, Aristophanes' speech.

[11] *Cf.* Nestle 1941; Dupré 1973-1974; Hatab 1990; Heidegger 1984; Gadamer 1996; Brisson 1982; Detienne 1981; Edmonds 2001; Morgan 2000.

ultimately as

> '...'l maestro di color che sanno'[12] –

'the master of those who know', that is, of *those who have left myth behind them*.[13] In the process, the critical approach to what we now call 'Greek myths' was further developed, *e.g.* in the work of Euhemerus (300 BCE), who saw all mythical divine characters as originating in deified historical human beings.

However, literary criticism, not philosophy, became the field where scholars pondered over myths, and the concept itself was not philosophically belaboured until the late 18th century CE, when Schelling proposed a very subtle philosophical approach to mythology. He thus gave the decisive impetus to the development, as a major component of classical studies which were an emergent scientific discipline at the time, of a *science of mythology*, whose first major exponent was Karl Ottfried Müller.[14] It needs no longer surprise us that the word 'myth' was only first attested in the English language as late as 1830,[15] a quarter of a century later even than in Dutch (1804-1808).[16] Classicists, anthropologists (Frazer, Lang, Tylor,[17]) and comparative religionists (Max Müller 1873, 1880; Otto 1917) grabbed hold of the relatively orphaned concept of myth, and it is in the hands of such specialists that a common, consensual scholarly understanding of myth has arisen between 1850 and 1950 – as the expression of a mythopoeic constructing of world and meaning that, while not impossible to understand, still was considered to be worlds apart from the scientific rationality which the pursuers of these disciplines attributed to themselves. From this relatively recent context, so replete with Faustian rationality and condescending objectification, arose the notion that we *know* what myths are and how we can identify them – that they are *out there*, to be drawn into the orbit of our scholarly analysis.

None than the neo-Kantian philosopher Cassirer (1874-1945) has more emphasised the extent to which the articulation of a mode of knowing beyond mythical

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[12] Dante, *La Divina Commedia, Inferno* IV: 131.

[13] *Cf. Metaphysics* 1074b 1 *f.*, where Aristotle could be construed (*cf.* Dupré 1973-1974: 949) to use *muthos* more or less in our present-day sense, although it is more likely that he simply means 'oral tradition':

 'Our forefathers in the most remote ages have handed down to their posterity a tradition, *in the form of a myth* [ἐν μῦθου σχήματι] that these [celestial] bodies are gods and that the divine encloses the whole of nature.'

*Cf.* Hegel 1992: 20, where the same idea is expressed:

 'Die Mythe gehört zur Pädagogie des Menschengeschlechtes.'

[14] Müller 1825; *cf.* Momigliano 1984; Blok 1994, 1997.

[15] Little *et al.* 1978, s.v. 'myth'.

[16] van Veen and van der Sijs 1997, s.v. 'mythe'.

[17] Tylor 1948 (1971); Lang 1885 / 1893; Frazer 1918, 1890-1915.

thought was absolutely constitutive of the Enlightenment.[18] And it is mainly to Cassirer that we owe, in modern philosophy, an extensive body of reasoning on the nature of myth, on mythical thought as a phase in the intellectual development of humankind, and on the use of myth in the construction of viable, even dangerous, socio-political communities. For Cassirer (who wrote on Einstein's theories of relativity and the epistemology of the natural sciences with the same authority as on Kant and Heidegger), the only way to appreciate mythical thought is by contrasting it with scientific thought. This operation is claimed to highlight[19] what Cassirer considers to be the two principal characteristics of mythical thought:

1. unity of being between subject and world, as well as
2. the immediacy of experience.

Here Cassirer shows himself a true heir of the Enlightenment. No less rational-istic than that great twentieth-century CE anthropologist of myth Lévi-Strauss, Cassirer sees in myth *a way of thinking, of conceptualising, the world*, rather than a mode of religious existential signification.[20] However, Lévi-Strauss shows the anthropologist's fascination for the beauty of such mythical thought, for which he seeks to formulate a systematic poetics (in terms of *deep structure* and *transformation*, among other concepts), thus rendering possible the identification of specific mythical thought and the systematic comparison between different forms of mythical thought. Cassirer, by contrast with Lévi-Strauss, remains even truer to the tenets of the Enlightenment, in that Cassirer considers mythical thought an essentially *erroneous* mode of thinking about the world.

Whatever the merits and limitations of Cassirer's approach to myth, throughout the twentieth century CE philosophy has been mainly fascinated by other themes than myth, and has approached these from other perspectives than Neo-Kantianism; and as a result Cassirer's impressive edifice remains largely isolated. Some of it was circulated in the social sciences, in a somewhat attenuated and bowdlerised form, by Cassirer's admirers Suzanne Langer, Karl Mannheim, and C.W. Hendel. Few philosophical handbooks carry even an entry on 'myth'. Rather than reflecting on the processes of identity formation, and on the construction of world and meaningfulness through verbal articulation, which lie implied in the concept of myth, many philosophers contend themselves with using the word 'myth', without further problematisation, in the

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[18] Cassirer 1946, 1953-1957, 1955, 1961. Peter Gay's 1973 authoritative intellectual history of the Enlightenment cites Cassirer as his main inspiration.

[19] In ways clearly reminiscent of his contemporary, the French philosopher Lucien Lévy-Bruhl with his theory of *participation* in 'primitive thought', but, in Cassirer's case, methodically worked out by reference to the Kantian *a-priori* categories.

[20] *Cf.* de Vries 1961: 169 *f*. This book, available in international translations, and even though by an author haunted by his unfortunate WWII stance, is still a useful and authoritative guide to the study of myth analysis up to the 1950s; further: Segal 2001; Dubuisson 1993; Strenski 1987.

loose, modernist *i.e.* disenchanted, and one-sidedly pejorative, sense of *'a collective representation[21] that is patently untrue and that serves specific functions of justification and rationalisation for those who bring it in circulation and / or adhere to it'.*[22]

Cassirer wrote at a time when, inside Academia at least, scientific rationality went through an unbroken series of triumphs, when the cultural and somatic Other as representing a sizeable collectivity was largely absent from practical experience and nicely tucked away in distant colonies, and when the modernist heritage of the Enlightenment appeared to be humankind's main defence against such frightening forms of mythical irrationality as nationalism, state communism and national socialism as marked the first half of the twentieth century.

He died a few months after Horkheimer and Adorno, in their American exile (necessitated by German nazist... mythical thought!), published their *Dialektik der Aufklärung*,[23] where the taken-for-granted juxtaposition between myth and Enlightenment is reconsidered:

> '...schon der *Mythos* ist Aufklärung, und: die Aufklärung schlägt in Mythologie zurück'.[24]

In Horkheimer and Adorno's book, the (mythical!) image of the Homeric hero Odysseus tied to the mast of his ship while his comrades submit to the luring chant of the Sirens, for scores of pages conjures up the tragic interpenetration of rationality and mythical thought which is plausibly claimed to have produced nazism and fascism.

Cassirer did not quite engage in such dialectics. His attempt to deal, once for all, with mythical thought is impressive, but fails to convince in our post-modern, re-enchanted, globalised world of today, where the proliferation of identities has been raised to one of humankind's major industries, and where myths (from Christian, Islamic and Hindu religious fundamentalism, to New Age, to human rights and democracy as a justification for state violence, to the neo-liberal idea of the market) remind us every day that they, as myths, are here to stay. At the same time Cassirer reminds us, especially in his last book *The Myth of the State*, of the all-important political dimension of myths and their study: if myth creates a collective life world (and by implication often renders its built-in structural and physical violence invisible to the participants in that life world, the believers of myth), then the workings of myth are inevitably opposed to the assertion of individual knowledge, freedom, responsibility, and criticism: the ideals of the Enlightenment but also the foundations of modern human rights. Pitch sticks,

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[21] My choice of words is deliberate: such myths are considered to be the stuff out of which, in a way theorised by Durkheim (1912), society allegedly brings its members to venerate itself under the guise of the sacred.

[22] *Cf.* Barnes 1944-1945; Bouveresse 1996; Cassirer 1961; Davidson 2001; Dickie 1969; Hountondji 1983 (however, the reference to myth only appears in the subtitle of the English edition and was not there in the original French); Oosterling 1989; Vloemans 1930. For the application of the same conception of myth in political discourse, *cf.* Ivie 2002.

[23] Horkheimer & Adorno 1989 / 1944; *cf.* Freyberg n.d.

[24] Horkheimer & Adorno 1989 / 1944: 14.

and it is hardly surprising that some of the major students of myth in the course of the twentieth century, such as Jung, Eliade, Jan de Vries, and Dumézil,[25] had strong conservative tendencies often accused of bordering on fascism. To this political dimension we will return when, below, we discuss the role of the intellectual in the approach to myth, torn between, on the one hand,

- *fusion* with myth for the sake of individual sanity, the experience of beauty and a sense of social belonging; and, on the other hand,
- *rupture, i.e.* deconstructive critique of myth for the sake of society's sanity and transparency, and for the rational pursuit of valid scientific knowledge.

Leaning on Cassirer, but rather more promising and inspiring, is the approach of the German / Dutch philosopher Wilhelm Dupré,[26] who (unfortunately without the benefit of such inspiration as post-structuralist philosophy – Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Deleuze, Guattari – might have brought to his argument) goes back to Schelling's subtle understanding of myth as forming, and relating to, a whole,[27] and therefore as far from allegorical. Dupré tries to make (at least, that is how I read him) the most of myth's nature as

- context-informed, lived verbal expression *in the here and the now*, as against
- the ambitious, intimidating, transcendent, aspirations of *logos*.

Reflecting the writings of Eliade (1963: 192 *f.*), which were largely conceived before the work of such theoreticians of orality as Ong, Finnegan, Derrida, Goody, Havelock, *etc.*,[28] Dupré reminds us that the tension between *mythos* and *logos* is congruent with that between oral literature and writing. He stresses the kaleidoscopic nature of myth and of the world it creates. Myth revolves on a verbality which creates meaning and truth through articulation, and which appears to reside (especially in situations where writing is absent) in what (at least in my reading of Dupré) is implied to be an interlocking or alternation of immanence and transcendence, rather than external, transcendent procedures of verification and legitimation. The narrative then appears as the core, not only of myth, but of the human existence *tout court*:

> 'Im Erzählen der Welt wird zwar die Ungesichertheit und Sinnbedrohung des Menschen erst wirklich offenbar, zugleich bedeutet jedoch die Tatsache, daß all das erzählt werden kann, Teilnahme an jenem Sinn, der dem Erzählen, oder besser, dem Artikulieren grundsätzlich eigen ist. Aus diesem Grunde kann das Wesen des *Mythos* nicht auf diesen

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[25] *Cf.* Horstmann 1998; Frauenfelder 2002; Ellwood 1999; García Quintela 2001.

[26] Dupré 1973; this makes one curious after his 1975 book, *non vidi.*

[27] *Cf.* Witzel 2001, who (probably familiar with Schelling, as a German-educated intellectual working on myth) stresses that myths should be compared not in their constituent parts, but as wholes. Yet the modern comparative mythology which Witzel has largely engendred, tends to be lost in Dupré's *logos;* see below, next page, and p. 548n. Meanwhile, a fascination with mythemic modules has been part of comparative mythology ever since the emergence, early 1900s CE, of list of types in this field (Aarne & Thompson 1973; Uther 2004).

[28] Ong 1982, 1988; Finnegan 1970, 1988; Derrida 1967b, 1978; Goody 1968b, 1986; Havelock 1971.

This leads Dupré to distinguish four complementary tasks in our approach to myth:

1.  to understand myth and mythology [ not so much as antithetic to ratio, but rather ] as the matrix within which the play of ratio (*Verstand*) and symbol takes place – and it is out of this play that culture is constituted;
2.  to realise that inevitably there are not only many mythologies but (within each mythology) pluralities of myth, whose interrelations we have to investigate, for it is these interrelations that constitute the community in tension with the individual person;
3.  to identify the liminal situation where the *logos* of speech determines the *mythos* to such an extent that it begins to coincide with the latter as self-reflecting theorising – in other words, as *philosophy*;
4.  on the one hand theory has to illuminate the mythical, but on the other hand it has the task of verifying the mythical element within the horizon of humankind, it has to become a self-reflective theory of the development of the mythical, *i.e.* a philosophy of history.

Little wonder that Dupré's final conclusion is that

'das Problem des *Mythos* ist leztlich das der Fundamentalphilosophie.' (Dupré 1973: 955 f.)

Situating myth in the ubiquitous phenomenon of human verbal enunciation, of narration (as does McDowell 2002) implies that for Dupré myth is in itself a ubiquitous and self-evident aspect of the human condition, rather than a special (notably: defective) form of thought reserved for narrowly circumscribed circumstances.

Dupré's emphasis on the narrative element, which would make myth appear as primarily a form of orature, has a peculiar implication for mainstream myth analysis. Since so much of the latter deals, not with living myth orally presented in informal situations, but with established written texts and with pictorial and other artistic references to such written texts, it would seem as if in the academic practice the concept of myth has hardened, even fossilised, to the point where myths have come to appear as a distinct and self-evident genre of texts readily available for processing in the hands of scholars. The rediscovery of orature in the last quarter of the twentieth century CE has done something to remedy this one-sidedness.

Dupré's position is reminiscent of Barthes's, whose *Mythologies* (Barthes 1957) trace the structuring orientations behind late capitalist bourgeois life (so that for Barthes 'myth' comes close to the Marxian 'false consciousness' – the mythical orientations in question are held to be *mistaken* conceptions of reality).

A similarly central place is attributed to myth by Kolakowski, who defines as myth any mental construct that imposes meaning, order, direction upon the human world: [29]

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[29] Kolakowski 1984, *cf.* Kesselmeier 2000, on whom my summary leans heavily.

> 'Er [der *Mythos*] umfaßt einen elementaren, wenn auch quantitativ geringfügigen Teil der religiösen Mythen, namentlich die sogenannten Ursprungsmythen, und erstreckt sich darüber hinaus auf bestimmte Konstruktionen, die (verborgen oder explizit) in unserem intellektuellen oder affektiven Leben gegenwärtig sind, und zwar auf diejenigen, die es uns gestatten, die bedingten und veränderlichen Bestandteile der Erfahrung teleologisch miteinander in Zusammenhang zu bringen, indem man sie auf unbedingte Realitäten bezieht (auf solche wie "Sein", "Wahrheit", "Wert").' (Kolakowski 1984: 6)

People construct myth in order to acquiesce themselves: in order to experience the empirical world as meaningful, in order to satisfy their desire for immutable values capable of underpinning their orientation in the world, and in order to escape from the temporal finiteness of their personal existence and of that of the world. In crucial contradistinction from Dupré (for whose approach to myth I highlighted the oscillation between transcendence and immanence), Kolakowski insists that any true myth represents a transcendent value, in which abstraction is made from the finiteness of human experience:

> 'Ich nenne jede Erfahrung mythisch, die nicht nur in dem Sinn die endliche Erfahrung transzendiert, daß sie nicht deren Beschreibung ist [...], sondern auch in jenem, daß sie jede mögliche Erfahrung relativiert, indem sie diese verstehend auf Realitäten bezieht, die grundsätzlich ungeeignet sind, durch Worte beschrieben zu werden, die eine logische Bindung mit der verbalen Beschreibung der Erfahrung eingehen.' (Kolakowski 1984: 41)

Kolakowski does not, in this connection, investigate the specific historical and socio-political conditions under which such transcendence may be attained as a technical accomplishment of thought. Perhaps true to a Polish / Roman Catholic original orientation, he implies it to be a universal and perennial human capability, per definition as universal as he claims myth itself to be. In one way he is right: such transcendence is already given with the *word*, on the principle posited by the great Dutch linguist Reichling that 'language is a vicarious act' (Reichling 1967). But such a view of mythical transcendence is not very useful, because it would no longer allow us to distinguish between language in general, and myth as a very special form of language. I would rather suggest that, given the transcendent capabilities of the word (by which the here and now, by a mere act of speech, can be subsumed under words (*any* words) that have per definition (...!) a much wider application than just the here and the now), myth uses this capacity to the full and, as it were, raises it to the power 2, by conjuring up a world that

- is not only *not* here and *not* now but that may have *no empirical existence whatsoever* anywhere at any moment in time (which brings myth into the realm of the hearsay, the imagination, the religious, and the poetic),

- that is brought to life and to credibility by using narrative modes analogous to (although not always identical with) the conventional methods of narration by which reliable, true reports on the empirical world outside the here and now are rendered; and finally a world that

- is not idiosyncratic, not exclusive to the narrating individual, but one whose narrative accounts are shared, circulated and reproduced within a wider community (which thus constitutes and perpetuates itself).

Thus myth creates an effective world that may or may not be real but whose main characteristic is that it appears as real to those who produce the tales on that world and to those who listen to it.[30] Producing this appearance of reality involves an active process of captivating and persuading the listener with specific literary means.[31] Principal among these means is *analogy* with the real life world of the here and now, even though this analogy may involve specific inversions, distortions, transformations. For the narrators and the listeners, therefore, the mythical world is scarcely distinguishable from, and scarcely discontinuous *vis-à-vis*, the empirical world.

It would be misleading to speak of transcendence, in this connection, as if it were a universal and self-evident condition. Only under certain conditions could the mythical world be said to be transcendent, in the sense of

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[30] There is an echo here of Geertz's (1966: 4) famous (essentially agnostic and constructivist) definition of religion, which we have already mentioned several times in the course of this book:

'Without further ado, then, a religion is:

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

Meanwhile, as far as religion is concerned, Geertz's definition leaves much to be desired. I am not convinced that religion comes in countable, discrete units (' a religion, implying several such to exist), for the same extensive reasons why I do not believe that it is useful to speak of 'cultures', plural (van Binsbergen 1999a, 2003b). Moreover, like many definitions of religion and myth, Geertz's definition is not really a definition but a nutshell theory: it tells us not only how to identify religion in empirical reality, but also claims to reveal its inner workings such as can never be immediately manifest upon empirical scrutiny. Geertz's personification of 'a religion' ('which acts'...) leaves unsolved the puzzle as to how, precisely, the cognitive elements that Geertz places at the centre of the religious process ('formulating conceptions'...) manage to inspire the specific moods and motivations that allegedly constitute ('a') religion. And if we are tempted (on the basis of sound comparative and theoretical considerations) to propose that all these cognitions, moods and motivations remain up in the air, utterly ineffective in shaping a religion and, through religion, a 'uniquely realistic' life world, *until they are put into practice by the believers' specific actions both in the ritual sphere and in everyday life,* then it is clear that apart from the personification of religion as an acting agent, action is the one major missing element in Geertz's definition of religion.

[31] For the nature-myth school of Max Müller, myth was primarily a 'disease of language', allegedly springing from the postulated imperfections of prehistoric and proto-historic language (*cf.* Rose 1961). This is an obsolete position in the sense that the oldest language forms directly or indirectly *attested* (*i.e.* over the past 10,000 years) are found to be every bit as advanced and as complex as modern languages. This, at least, is the result of a statistical analysis which Marsico (1999) conducted on a database of proto-languages, albeit with specific emphasis on phonological aspects of language. We have no attestations of earlier language forms but must inevitably postulate that the truly oldest forms, as spoken by Anatomically Modern Humans over 100,000 years ago, may have been less complex (*cf.* Aitchison 1996). In a long-range historical perspective (to which we have only access through conjectural reconstruction on the basis of *extrapolation* of attested forms), Müller's position has a point in that it rightly acknowledges the basis of myth in language-based forms of narration.

being strictly distinguished from the empirical world, at a totally different plane, absolutely incomparable to the empirical world and its inhabitants, and representing a totally different order. I submit that, in a pure form, such transcendence can only occur (*i.e.* can only be thought) in situations where people experience external forms of the exercise of authority and control, which are completely discontinuous with the ordinary and familiar forms of exercise and control informing their everyday life world here and now. Such external forms of authority and control are brought about mainly by writing, the state, an organised priesthood, and science – four devices that, separately or in combination, make it possible for an absent, dead, or even completely imaginary person (such as a testator, a king, the state, or a god) to exercise near to complete control over a situation here and now through the vicarious means of language. For all we know, writing, the state, an organised priesthood, and science only emerged in a very circumscribed spatial and temporal context: the Ancient Near East (including Egypt) by the end of the 4th millennium BCE. Only under such conditions would I expect myths to emerge that evoke a transcendent world absolutely incomparable to the ordinary life world – so absolutely that, for instance, a prohibition on graven images (like in Ancient Israel and Islam) may be entertained; yet even there the transcendent God is supposed to have created Man after his own image, as if even in a thoroughly literate and priestly context myth shies away from total transcendence. I consider the emergence of transcendence as a mode of thought the outcome of a long historical process, not as an immediate and inevitable implication of writing, the state, an organised priesthood, and science. The latter achievements did exist in 3rd millennium BCE Mesopotamia, yet one of the greatest specialists could still describe the mythico-religious orientation of that place and time as overwhelmingly *immanentalist*.[32] Meanwhile we should realise that the four conditions listed here do not always occur in combination. State formation has been a widespread phenomenon on the African continent from the late 4th millennium onwards, yet in many cases these were states without writing. That even so statehood would amount to discontinuity with the cultural orientation of the here and now of local communities, and hence might constitute a growth point for transcendent thought, is suggested by my study of the Nkoya state in terms of such cultural discontinuity (van Binsbergen 2003e, and in press (a)).

These are some of the ideas that, in the background, will inform the argument which follows now.

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[32] Jacobsen 1976. For a study tracing (largely on the basis of an analysis of myths) the emergence and evolution of the concept of magic in the Ancient Mesopotamian context, *cf.* van Binsbergen & Wiggermann 1999, reprinted in the present book as Chapter 8.

## 15.2. A provisional definition of myth

There is no dearth of definitions of myth. Above we have already considered elements towards such a definition. Dupré gives a succinct one:

> '*Mythos* im weitesten Sinn verstanden beteutet Wort, Rede, Erzählung von göttlichem Geschehen. Er begründet eine Tradition.' (Dupré 1973: 950)

Famous is Eliade's definition, whose extensive work on myth continues to impress for its profound insights, in my opinion, now that I am re-reading it after more than thirty years:

> 'le mythe raconte une histoire sacrée; il relate un événement qui a eu lieu dans le temps primordial, le temps fabuleux des "commencements". Autrement dit, le mythe raconte comment, grâce aux exploits des Etres Surnaturels, une réalité totale, le Cosmos, ou seulement un fragment: une île, une espèce végétale, un comportement humain, une institution [ s'est présentée ]. C'est donc toujours le récit d'une "création": on rapporte comment quelque chose a été produit [*sic*], a commencé à *être*. Le mythe ne parle que de ce qui est arrivé réellement, de ce qui s'est pleinement manifesté. Les personnages des mythes sont des Etres Surnaturels. Ils sont connus surtout par ce qu'ils ont fait dans le temps prestigieux des "commencements". Les mythes révèlent donc leur activité créatrice et dévoilent la sacralité (ou simplement la "surnaturalité") de leurs oeuvres. En somme, les mythes décrivent les diverses, et parfois dramatiques, irruptions du sacré (ou du "sur-naturel") dans le Monde. C'est cette irruption du sacré qui *fonde* réellement le Monde et qui le fait tel qu'il est aujourd'hui. Plus encore: c'est à la suite des interventions des Etres Surnaturels que l'homme est ce qu'il est aujourd'hui, un être mortel, sexué et culturel.' (Eliade 1963: 15)

While splendidly evocative and bringing out many points that are essential about humankind's most cherished myths (but not all myths are myth of origin or of aetiology), this famous definition has a number of unmistakable shortcomings. Instead of a definition aiming merely at identifying elements of empirical reality open to further analytical scrutiny, it amounts to a theory in a nutshell, in that it already postulates specific relations between the various features of myth that the definition allows us to identify, and, in so doing, imputes such generality, even universality, into these features and their specific relations as could of course never be ascertained by a mere application of the definition in itself, but as could only be established on the basis of subsequent, painstaking empirical research. Moreover, the definition narrows down the occurrence of myths to such times and to such human communities as have a well-defined and interculturally recognisable notion of the sacred, of primordial time, of origins, of supernatural beings (so, by implication, cultures that explicitly make the distinction between nature and the supernatural), of creation, of the world. And it imputes to all contexts where myths are found, the notion (a notion, moreover, to be explicitly identifiable *in the consciousness of the human actors* native to such contexts) that the world and humanity, not only of the past but also of today, is constituted by the events recounted in the myths. For Eliade's definition not only points out that the life world of the owners of a particular myth is (as could be argued from an analytical distance, by a scholarly outsider) constituted by that myth and other myths – but also that the

myth owners themselves *are conscious* of the fact that this is how their world is constituted. We can easily grant all or most of these requirements when refer-ring to the creation myths of the Ancient Near East, such as *Enuma Elish* (the Babylonian creation myth; Pritchard 1969 / King 1999 / 1902, *cf.* my ch. 8, above), or the creation stories of *Genesis* – products of a literate, state-based society with organised religion including a specialised priesthood defining, canonising, keeping, transmitting and publicly representing these myths as major components of the specialised professional science. But these specific socio-political features, however typical of the Ancient Near East, have only a very limited distribution throughout human history and across the continents. Most of these features, and many of the other specific stipulations of Eliade's definition, would be absent in the African situations I have studied at close range for decades, for instance among the Nkoya people of Western Zambia. Let us see if their situation can help us formulate a myth definition that is less theoretically presumptuous, and that therefore might have wider applicability than just literate, state-based societies with an organised priesthood.

A relative paucity of myths (by some conventional definition) as compared with other continents has often been claimed for Africa.[33] Like other parts of Africa that (albeit for little more than half a century) happened to be colonised by the British (1900-1964) and explored by predominantly British scholarship, the Nkoya people of Zambia have been understudied as far as their myths, legends, folktales and other forms of oral literature is concerned.

Especially in regard of parts of Africa once colonised by the British, much work has been done on the possibility (or, considering myths' dependence on latter-day political processes, the impossibility) of extracting, from African myths, objective historical information, especially concerning processes of state forma-tion.[34] After the enthusiasm for this approach in the 1970s and 1980s, we are now gradually realising that much of this work, including some of my own (1992), was based on the – less and less convincing – assumption that myths documented in Africa in the 19th and 20th century encoded actual historical processes of only a few centuries' time depth, and could be thus decoded. In fact, it is now dawning upon us that this mythical material is often millennia old and that it is usually impossible to sort out how much of this ancient and entirely mythical contents has been projected onto (by comparison, relatively recent) actual historical events. This objection has been advanced by Wrigley (1988), whose argument may be summarised as follows:

> 'The work of M. Schoffeleers on Mbona, presiding spirit of a famous rainshrine in

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[33] *Cf.* Finnegan 1970; however, *cf.* Okpewho 1983. Also: Soyinka 1976; Appiah 1994; van Binsbergen 2006a, 2006b, 2010a.

[34] *Cf.* Atkinson 1975; Bourdillon 1972; MacGaffey 2003; Mason 1975; Miller 1980; Morton 1972; Nugent 1997; Okpewho 1998; Olatunde Bayo Lawuyi 1990; Packard 1980; Pettersson 1953; Ranger & Kimambo 1972; Ranger 1988; Reefe 1981; Schoffeleers 1992; Shepperson 1966; Vail 1979; van Binsbergen 1980b, 1985a, 1992b, 1998b; Willis 1978, 1981; Wrigley 1988; Yoder 1980.

southern Malawi, is exploited in order to cast doubt on his reconstruction of 16th and 17th-century political history. It is suggested that Mbona was the serpentine power immanent in the Zambesi; that reports of his "martyrdom" at the hands of a secular ruler are versions of an ancient myth of the lightning and the rainbow; that his journey to, and subsequent flight from, Kaphiri-ntiwa, scene of the Maravi creation myth, is a variant of the visit made to the sky by Kintu, the "First Man" of Ganda tradition. It is not very likely that such stories attest the rise of a great military State c. 1600 and the ensuing suppression of religious institutions.' (African Studies Centre, n.d.)

*Mutatis mutandis*, the same criticism could be levelled against my own work on the ethnohistory of the Nkoya people of Zambia, especially my *Tears of Rain* (1992).[35] This research (conducted in close association with what was once the Manchester School of Gluckman and his associates) did touch on myth and oral traditions, but the main foci of my research in that connection have been ethnicity, kingship, and cults of affliction, against the background of social organisation at the village and urban-ward level. Despite my later work (especially 2010a) I never set out in the first place to produce a comprehensive account of myth and other forms of orature in late twentieth-century CE Nkoya society. Nor was the way in which elements of myth circulated in everyday life and rituals, conducive to such an endeavour: in nearly three decades of intensive association with the Nkoya people through nearly annual spells of field-work, hardly any myths were ever formally recounted in full in my presence (and, as I am reasonably sure, neither in the presence of any born Nkoya people). Instead, scraps of disconnected mythical elements were hinted at in songs, rumours, fireside stories and informal conversation, often disguised as allegedly historical events occurring in the lives of people still alive, either within, or at the border of, living memory. At first I fell into the trap of this historical illusion, producing my book *Tears of Rain* (1992) as a reconstruction of the last few centuries of precolonial Nkoya history based on these mythical elements. It was only in subsequent years, when reworking this material comparatively (across Africa and even intercontinentally) under favourable NIAS conditions (see above, pp. 19, 26), that I awoke to their truly mythical nature. It was only then that I began to realise that what I (along with my interlocutors) had taken to be oral history of the 17th-19th centuries CE, was is fact a recasting of millennia-old mythical material, small parts of which could be retraced to Ancient Egypt, the Ancient Near East, and Ancient South and South East Asia, and in its specific local Nkoya application probably devoid of all objective historicity.

A very central myth among this people details the origin of kingship (Nkoya: *wene*), which the Nkoya consider one of their most central institutions, at a par with female puberty rites, funerary rites, and courts of law. The following myth is known to a great many people and enshrined in the oral-historical collection *Likota lya Bankoya* which their first Christian pastor, Rev. Shimunika, compiled

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[35] As I began to realise by the end of the 1990s (van Binsbergen 1998b); Vansina 1993 however seems inclined to accept my original, 1992 argument as to the historicity of these mythical traditions – although he disagrees with of my use of the term *state* for the socio-political formations in precolonial Western Zambia.

in the middle of the 20th century:

### 'WHERE THE KINGSHIP OF THE NKOYA CAME FROM: THE STORY OF THE COOKING-POT OF KINGSHIP

**4** 1[36] The kingship of the Nkoya is said to have started with the large cooking-pot full of game meat. Many of the Nkoya in the past said that Mwene [ = Lord ] Nyambi is a bird; and that Mwene Nyambi has a child, Rain (Mvula), also a bird; and that two clans in this world are the relatives of Rain: the Nkwehe [ = Eagles] on the part of the birds, and the Mbunze [ = Hawks] on the part of the people.[37]

2 Shikalamo sha Mundemba was therefore the one who prepared the large pot with game meat he had bagged; he put the pot on the fire and started cooking the meat. The meat had been cooking from the early morning till midday, and when the pot of meat was still on the fire Mpungumushi[38] sha Mundemba called all the people. He said

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[36] Deliberately, Shimunika sought to enhance the authority of his compilation of myths and oral traditions by emulating, typographically, the only major text he knew: the Bible, divided in chapters (indicated by a large uncial-like letter), and verses. In my edition I have retained this feature; for extensive discussion of this interpenetration of orature and biblical literacy, *cf.* van Binsbergen 1992b.

[37] In our present search for a definition, we cannot give this text the full analytical attention it deserves. In fact at least three myths are involved here:

1. one regulating the differential claims of local clans to the kingship;
2. another one associating the kingship with Rain, the Demiurge (*Mvula*; among the Nkoya a popular etymology connects this with *kampulu*, 'leopard', the spotted animal whose speckles are like raindrops – the etymology may or may not be tenable from a professional linguistic point of view);
3. and finally one about the original cosmic characters to have been two specific birds of prey: the High God (as male, or more likely, female, or even both; gender is not expressed in Bantu languages, and this fact is – *cf.* van Binsbergen 1992b – a central aspect of my reading of Nkoya myths), and the latter's demiurge.

The third mythical theme is particularly interesting because, like the symbolic complex centring on speckledness which features centrally in my analysis of leopard symbolism (see below), it has a very wide distribution throughout the Old World. In the somewhat narrower but still very extensive Nostratic realm (whose precise composition is subject to disagreement, but which by many current conceptions ranges from Mauritania to the Scandinavian North Cape and the Bering Strait, and then on to Greenland) very few names of animal species can be claimed to have made part of the proto-Nostratic lexicon; but the speckled hawk (proto-Nostratic *ḫr, cf.* the Ancient Egyptian hawk or falcon deity Ḥr, 'Ḥorus') and perhaps the eagle are among them (Bomhard 1984; Bomhard & Kerns 1994). In South Central Africa (where the Nkoya are located), the speckled hawk is contrasted with the evenly black-and-white coloured fish eagle. Evoking the symbolic juxtaposition of speckledness versus homogeneous coat texture, this third Nkoya complex appears to derive from very old layers of a common Old World symbolic complex, going back to the Upper Palaeolithic. So does the bird theme in itself: A reconstruction of humankind's oldest mythical repertoire brought out that, out of a corpus of about twenty Narrative Complexes attested on African cosmogonic myths and on Old World mythology in general, only three Narrative Complexes can be argued to have been part of the original pre-Out-of-Africa package, from before c. 60-80 ka BP, and one of these three is th*e theme of the lightning bird, whose egg is the world.* Also *cf.* pp. 429-430, above.

[38] A nickname or title which is evidently not modern Nkoya, and in which the Luba words *mpungu* ('buzzard', 'fish eagle') and *mushi* ('village') can be detected; their present-day Nkoya equivalents are *chipungu* and *munzi*.

to them: "Anyone who can take the large pot of game meat off the fire will become Mwene of all the people in this area." All clans in that area tried very hard to take the pot of meat off the fire. 3 Some went to cut poles long and strong enough to take the pot of meat off the fire, but they could not go near, for the fire was very big and could burn them: it was very dangerous for them to go near. 4 All the clans: Mbunze, Lavwe, Ntabi, Nkomba, Shungu and Nyembo, tried to the best of their ability but they failed to take the pot of meat off the fire. Then the daughter of Shikalamo sha Mundemba fetched water in a tight basket; with the aid of this basket she managed to go around the fire, pouring water and extinguishing the fire. 5 With great efforts she got near the pot of meat and using her pole she managed to take the pot off the fire. Then she called her relatives and all the people, saying: "Let us eat." After they had eaten one of her relatives shouted: "Come so that you can lick the plates of the Sheta[39] who have gone around the pot of meat which was on the fire." Then Shikalamo sha Mundemba told all the people: "You have all failed to take the pot of meat off the fire, but my daughter Shilayi Mashiku has managed to do so. She has eaten the meat with her relatives. She is 'the bird[40] that takes good care of its young ones' and she is to be your Mwene. You who have licked the plates are the junior Myene henceforth known as Nkonze[41]. The Sheta and the Nkonze are the same people, all Myene." 7 When all the clans heard this they said to the people of Shilayi: "You are from now to be called Sheta, for you have gone around and around the pot of meat when it was on the fire." To the others they said: "You are from now to be called Nkonze for you have licked the plates of the Sheta." At the end of the ceremony it rained so heavily that the fire was extinguished. The people said: "Our Kingship comes from the Raindrop [ / *Tears of Rain* ] ."

On the basis of this one example, a useful definition of myth begins to articulate itself. Let us define, provisionally, myth as:

- a narrative
- that is standardised
- that is collectively owned and managed
- that is considered by its owners to be of great and enduring significance
- that (whether or not these owners are consciously aware of this point) contains and brings out such images of the world (a cosmology), of past and present society (a history and sociology) and of the human conditions (an anthropology) as are eminently constitutive of the life world in which that narrative circulates, or at least: circulated originally
- to this we may add that, if this constitutive aspect is consciously realised by the owners, the narrative may be invoked aetiologically, to explain and justify present-day conditions
- and that therefore it is a powerful device to create collectively underpinned meaning and collectively recognised truth (regardless of whether

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[39] 'The Dizzy Ones', affected by the circling around the pot of meat. Circular movements abound in mythical especially cosmogonic contexts; *cf.*, in the present book alone, Izanami / Izanagi's wedding by walking around the central pillar, and the spiral imagery at Nagara Padang.

[40] Here the bird theme with which this passage began, comes back. It would look as if calling rain was predominantly a female affair (even the gender of Mwene Nyambi and of Mvula is left sufficiently unspecific to allow it to be interpreted as female), and one which evoked (through the bird theme) major representations of the supernatural.

[41] 'Lickers'.

such truth would be recognised outside the community whose myth it is).

## 15.3. Discussion of the definition

This definition helps to bring out some of the contradictions we have to consider in the study of myth.

I have avoided, in this definition, to introduce an element which many students of myth have considered important: the distinction between gods (who are supposed to be paraded in myth, constituting its distinctive feature) and heroes and ordinary mortals (who are supposed to feature in epics, which are held to be different from myths. My reason is that such a distinction between gods and mortals is predicated on the concept of transcendence, which we take for granted in Late Modern times and in the Western intellectual tradition but which yet, as I have argued, only emerges in its true form under very specific conditions of relatively limited distribution: writing, the state, priesthood, and science. I submit that typical of mythical narratives is not, statically, the evocation of gods, but the *tension* between two kinds of ontological conditions:

- one god-like and moral, and the other
- human / only-too-human (a Nietzsche book title),

in such a way that the image of the world oscillates between occasional but unsystematic transcendence and a more standard condition of immanence.[42]

The definition mixes *emic* elements (*i.e.* elements that are consciously recognised by the owners of the myth themselves in their very own concepts and language), with *etic* elements (that can only be formulated in the meta-perspective of scholarship and that tell us what a myth does provided the owners do not realise that this is what it is doing: constituting a life world, actively creating meaning and truth as if these were not self-evident and universal givens). According to a widespread view in philosophy and the social sciences today, human life worlds are not given but culturally created within narrow horizons of space and time, and meaning and truth – when considered from the scholar's meta-perspective – are therefore far more contingent and relative than they would appear to be from the perspective of the local horizon constituted,

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[42] In the background this argument on transcendence and immanence, and its application to myth, is inspired by similar criticism which could be levelled against a related juxtaposition, that between sacred and profane, which Durkheim (1912) made into the distinctive category of religion, and the cornerstone of his theory of religion as veneration of society through the intermediary of arbitrary symbols. *Cf.* van Binsbergen, forthcoming (b) and in press (f), with extensive discussion of the relevant literature. An extensive argument on transcendence is also van Binsbergen 2012h.

precisely, by myth.[43]

The paradox which now opens up is that at the emic level myths may appear as universal and cross-culturally recognisable statements on the human condition, while at the etic level myths appear primarily as the kind of illusions that allow *others*, against all odds and against our better judgement, to create and maintain a human society. *Analytically*, from the *etic* perspective, myths are in the first place *other* people's myths, and the task of scholarship in the field of myth is to describe and compare mythical contents and develop a meta-perspective in the light of which a more fundamental scientific truth may become detectable behind the particularistic myths that inform specific, narrow horizons of time and space. Ever since Xenophanes and Theagenes, and especially since Euhemerus, narratives have (through a process of labelling) become transformed into myth under the estranging gaze of the analytical scholarly outsider, for whom the myth does not contain truth, at least not the truth the owner and narrator consciously recognise. Hence, the construction of a specialist field of

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[43] This is the standard view, based on a presentist perspective of mainstream sociology and anthropology, in which

- all culture is axiomatically considered to be individually acquired through a social learning process,
- life worlds are recognised to be *recent*
- and, under the onslaught of cultural globalisation supported by new technologies of communication and information, *ephemeral*.

Under such conditions it is often possible to trace the relatively recent origin of specific myths, *e.g.* the foundation myths of world religions. 'Relative' is here taken against the time scale of the 200,000 years of the existence of Anatomically Modern Humans. However, there is evidence suggesting that in this long time scale, these axioms may need to be reconsidered. The converging evidence from human cultural (near-)universals and from mythological archaeology reconstructing the oldest myths of Anatomically Modern Humans, brings out a picture of such unusually immutable cultural inertia of key myths and key cosmologies (an inertia which otherwise we have mainly seen in the case of lithic tool industries, remaining constant for tens of thousands of years; or in cupmarks, geometric patterns, and the conceptualisation of granulation *e.g.* in leopard-skin symbolism – all suggestive of similar time spans, *cf.* van Binsbergen 2004a, in press (e), 2011g; van Binsbergen with Lacroix, 2000 and forthcoming) that we must seriously consider the theoretical possibility (however awkward and counter-paradigmatic) that some mythical contents may be species-specific, and inherited through biological rather than social means. This, of course, is reminiscent of Jung's notion of the collective unconscious, with this (extremely contentious) proviso that for Jung such a collectivity did not necessarily encompass the whole of (Anatomically Modern) humankind, but could also be situated at the more restricted levels of major clades ('races', 'gene pools'), nations, clans, and families – so that ultimately, Blacks, Jews, Gentiles, Chinese, Native Americans, Nkoya, Dutch, might have substantially different forms of collective unconscious. Whether such a gene-pool-specific 'collective unconscious' coincides, after all, with the tacit *sous-entendres* of one's culture (rendering this entire Jungian train of thought futile and unnecessary – and being a child of his age and discipline he had no access yet to the modern social-scientific concept of *culture*) would be the least of our worries; the answer is probably affirmative. The greatest danger waiting at the end of this train of thought is that *it implies the total fragmentation, dissolution, annihilation even of what in my opinion is the implied basic tenet of intercultural philosophy, globalisation, social science, art and human understanding: the fundamental unity of humankind* (van Binsbergen 2015: 8 *f.*; http://www.quest-journal.net/shikanda/topicalities/vicarious/vicar_block_A.pdf). That is too high a price to pay.

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scholarship of myth risks to imply, in principle, a violent hierarchical re-ordering of the world on the basis of a radical distinction between

1. the collective owners / narrators of a myth, and
2. the scholarly analyst of the myth.

Here the analyst claims a privileged position which, if adopted by owners / narrators of myth, would destroy the latter's position as well as the very myth itself. In recent decades, more than two millennia after the Ancient Greek de-bunkers of their contemporaries' myths, such hierarchical analytical construc-tions often coincide with the juxtaposition between

- 'the West' (where most analysts of myth reside in fact, or – if residing elsewhere – which they have taken as a reference group)

- and 'the Rest'.

Hence the deconstruction of myth (especially of such myth as underpins other cultures than the Western one) has been argued[44] to belong to the overall in-stallation of North Atlantic hegemonic violence, by materially and physically coercive means as well as by the claim of a monopoly on scientific rationality – without which there would be no *science of myth* as distinct from the narration and living of myths. The emic / etic distinction and the superiority claim in-volved in the etic deconstruction of myth, is typically modernist, and as such obsolescent in a postmodern world. In our largely postmodern world, myth analysts' claim of a privileged position (just like any such claim in the analysis of social and political life, the arts, religion *etc*.) has become profoundly prob-lematic.[45] *Such a claim would appear to amount to a myth in its own right.*

## 15.4. Rupture and fusion

But meanwhile the modernist pretence of having access to such a privileged position has brought us, as scholars interested in the study of myth, a wide but converging variety of insights into the literary, historical, psychological, cultural and socio-political manifestations and workings of myth. These insights carry their own fascination and justification. Perhaps more than anything else they respond to the Kantian admonition *sapere aude* ('have the courage to shed your ignorant naivety'), of which the Neo-Kantian Cassirer has been the most vigor-

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[44] Clearly somewhat myopically, considering the only recent installation of North Atlantic global domination (18th century CE or later), and the great antiquity of Greek criticism of Greek myths (from 6th century BCE onwards).

[45] For a Foucaultian critique of such a claim, based on the concept of genealogy (which is ultimately Nietzschean), see: Rabinow 1984; Foucault 1977. *Cf*. also Kimmerle 1985; and: Nietzsche 1887. The impossibility of an epistemological Archimedean point is also argued in: Rorty 1979; and from a totally different point of view in: Putnam 1978, 1981. Such impossibility, in other words, is a received idea in present-day philosophy.

ous representative in the twentieth century. We would therefore be reluctant to sacrifice these insights on the altars of post-modernity and of, usually ephemeral, political correctness (such as is embodied in the emphasis on the hegemonic implications of an analytical perspective on myth that claims greater insight than the myth owners themselves can have). The scholarship of myth, in the broadest possible sense, has been at the core of the construction of modernity from the Enlightenment onwards. The hallmark of modernity is the self-proclaimed capability of exploding other people's myths, and of replacing them by more valid truths characterised by scientific rationality, objectivity and universality.[46] Here the scholar's principal approach to myth is that of *rupture*: the double movement by which the analyst of the myth

1. dissociates herself or himself from the owners of the myth, and
2. by which the myth (analytically diagnosed to contain a particular meta-message about history, cosmology, psychology *etc.* of which the owners are necessarily unaware) is torn apart from the life world in which it was originally cherished; is subsequently transformed; and is finally reproduced in the (meta-)terms of a different (typically North Atlantic or global) life world.

This analytical, reductionist assault on myth has been very much the dominant trend throughout the social-scientific study of myth since the late nineteenth century. It has produced a number of seminal approaches, such as:

- Bachofen's and Graves's meta-narratives explaining away important mythical material in terms of a lost world of gender equality and even female domination over men;[47]

- Max Müller's (1873, 1880) meta-narratives explaining away important mythical material in terms of recurrent astronomical processes involving the great luminaries Sun and Moon, and other observational regularities of the sky;

- Frazer's (1890-1915, 1918, 1970) meta-narratives explaining away important mythical material in terms of kingship, magic and primitive science;

- Jane Harrison's (1903, 1948) meta-narrative explaining away important mythical material in terms of the universal precedence of myth over ritual, or ritual over myth

- Freud's and Jung's meta-narratives explaining away important mythical material in terms of universal human drives, dilemmas, contradictions and collective images;[48]

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[46] *Cf.* Harding 1997 and my extensive, largely positive, reaction: van Binsbergen 2002b / 2015: ch. 13.

[47] Bachofen 1861; Graves 1964, 1988. *Cf.* Borgeaud *et al.* 1999.

[48] Freud 1918, 1963; Jung 1987; Jung & Kerenyi 1951.

- Lévi-Strauss's (1960, 1968, 1969-1978, 1971, 1973.) meta-narratives explaining away important mythical material in terms of (essentially content-less) binary oppositions and transformations as constitutive of any human thought and of society in general;

- historical approaches seeking to extract what little objective history may lie hidden under myth, and which we have already discussed above.

What often amazes the literary scholar (and *a fortiori* the literary writer), and even more so the owner of myths both in the North Atlantic and outside, is the sustained Faustian and hegemonic tendency to appropriative, subordinating reduction inherent in such primarily analytical approaches to myth. I am not implying that these approaches specifically declare myths to be untruths and falsehoods, to be mistaken science; yet, clearly, they are only satisfied once the myth is deconstructed and transformed into some totally different statement which is no longer recognisable to the original owners of the myth.

Being ourselves owners, admirers, beauty-stricken commentators, and scholarly and literary transmitters, of myth, we realise only too well that not *rupture*, but *fusion*, is existentially our most rewarding approach to myth. While the rupturist approach to myth may be situated in the Enlightenment, the fusionist approach is rather rooted (together with so much of enthusiastic scholarly research into myth and folktales from the early nineteenth century CE onwards) in subsequent Romanticism.

Our tasks as global intellectuals studying myth is thus situated between rupture and fusion, in the *field of tension* between

1. *celebrating* such myths as create and communicate – well in line with current notions of human dignity and self-realisation – beauty, cosmological meaning, sociability, self-respect, power and freedom (often through their transformative incorporation in literary, musical, dramatic and graphic artistic expression; or alternatively, through their underpinning an equitable social arrangement, a justified socio-political cause, or even more in general, because the myths in question are enshrined in the collective representations of our society); and
2. *exploding* the kinds of myths (ranging from, *e.g.*, the male *myth* of the (through menstruation and child-birth) polluting female body, to the White *myth* of lazy, dirty and incompetent Blacks, the fascist myths of power, order and superiority, *etc.*) that so very often, result in the opposite of human dignity and self-realisation, – and having this result in principle by virtue of – *mutatis mutandis* – the very same mechanisms as summed up under (1).

## 15.5. The scholar's adoption and celebration of myth

A field of tension,[49] in order to be sustained, requires *both* poles of a contradiction to persist. This means that the scholar must at the same time

      a.  deconstruct myth, and,
      b.  (deferring such deconstruction), *adopt* and *celebrate* myth.

At first glance, the adoption of myth and the pursuit of scholarship (as under (b)) would appear to be incompatible and mutually exclusive, but that is a premature and unjustified conclusion.

On the contrary, as literary scholars are well aware, we may engage in the identification and celebration of such literary, pictorial, ideological and political myths as may be argued to express and reinforce current notions of human dignity and self-realisation, in other words, such myths as may be invoked as demonstrations of more or less dominant and more or less unchallenged collective representations in the current wider society. In North Atlantic society, numerous are the literary critical studies that help us to identify and appreciate the overarching myths informing the details of a novelist's, poet's or playwright's literary product.[50]

Such myths may be described by critics in abstract terms that convey fundamental themes in present-day North Atlantic society: the quest for power, integrity and existential redemption; the conflict between individual drives and collective Super-Ego-type censorship, or between passionate love and official duty; productivity, creativity, transformation, trust, wisdom, gender balance, identity as the partial and contested outcome of life-long struggles; the fragmentation, performativity, absurdity and human failure inevitably attending such struggles and rendering them, in part, incredible. Here the models of man and of action that are proffered in the mythical narrative, overlap or even coincide with such models as inform social life in the mythological scholars' own society. Of course, mythical models and social models, more or less, pattern and instigate the actual behaviour of human beings without ever totally determining it.

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[49] For the relevance of the concept of the 'field of tension' for the study of situations of interculturality, *cf.* van Binsbergen 2003b: 40, 280. Such situations invariably present the aporia that truth and meaning can only be constructed and maintained within one culturally distinct domain, which they, in their turn, construct in the first place – so that truth and meaning in principle cannot be negotiated across cultural boundaries. The notion of the 'field of tension' allows us to more or less overcome this aporia: it takes a relative view of boundaries (which are always both firm barriers, and invitations to cross them, at the same time), and it reminds us of the fact that even within one cultural domain, truth and meaning are divided against themselves in ways to which the situation of interculturality does not necessarily make an absolute, qualitative difference. Thus the 'field of tension' invites us, as a practical compromise, to build a liveable human and social world in the face of the irresolvable oppositions invested in each of the many culturally distinct domains out of which our present-day world consists; the field of tension ushers us beyond the prisons of intransigent local cultural thought constructs.

[50] *Cf.* Allen 1970; Bodkin 1934; Grassi 1957; Hunger 1974; Lurker 1958; Panofsky 1962; Seznec 1994; Strelka 1979; Strich 1910; van Gorp 1982; Wheelwright 1942.

The application of ancient mythical material in concrete present-day contexts of literary and pictorial production, political oratory, *etc.* often takes a very specific form: *that of the deliberate (typically archaicising) re-circulation of undisguised, stereotypified, ancient mythical contents in latter-day artistic products, with specific mythic protagonists in stereotypified interrelationships and evolving struggles with their respective opposites.* Here usually not the belief in the true historical existence of these protagonists and their mythical history is at stake, but the exemplary, emblematic use to which they are put, allowing the latter-day artist or orator to juggle with standardised positions and relationships triggered by the mere mention of the all-familiar names of the mythical protagonists. The device is an example of intertextuality (latter-day literary products selectively and usually somewhat innovatively referring to ancient mythical texts). In the North Atlantic tradition, this peculiar re-circulation of clearly identified myths[51] pervades Hellenistic, Ancient Roman, European medieval and modern literature and is very far from extinct – to judge by such twentieth-century authors as the Irish James Joyce (*Ulysses*, recycling the mythical contents of the Odyssey) and the Flemish Hugo Claus (*Omtrent Deedee*, recycling the myth of the castration of Kronos and the birth of Aphrodite).[52] Numerous other examples could be given outside the North Atlantic region, from mythical complexes as far-flung as the West African Sundjáta epic, the South and South East Asian Mahābhārata, Alexander / Iskander myths throughout Central, South and Southeast Asia, *etc.* (*cf.* Lombard 1993). The strange attraction of this inveterate literary device of 'bringing ancient myth to life' appears to lie in the deliberately ambivalent nature of the relationship between the mythical and the modern: the ancient standardised narrative shimmers through its modern trappings, adds extra force and meaning in it, organises the plot to some extent, yet must at the same time be craftily domesticated, customised, brought to local present-day life, and innovated so as to prevent that the ancient myth becomes intolerably dominant and freezes the life force of modern literary characters and their actions.[53]

Literary scholars cannot convincingly handle such mythical material if they insist on the analytical rupture between themselves and the myth they, and the

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[51] While the emphasis here is on Graeco-Roman myth, we are reminded that also Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and other world religions have produced mythologies which, over the centuries, have frequently been recycled for literary purposes.

[52] We only have to remind ourselves of the work of such poets as William B. Yeats (Ireland) and Adriaan Roland Holst (the Netherlands).

[53] This, at least, was the conclusion of my first, unpublished, exploration in myth analysis (van Binsbergen 1966b): a re-study of classical Greek myth in Hugo Claus's novel *Omtrent Deedee* in polemic response to Weverbergh 1963, *cf.* Claes 1981, 1984. By the same time I also investigated – in an extensive study of Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962) – the opposite case, of how a literary writer moves , not from ossified myth to living narrative (Claus), but from narrative to *mythopoiesis* (van Binsbergen 1966c). However, these early literary studies were to share the fate of my North African ethnography, constituting a continuous reference point in my own thought, yet remaining shelved to this very day.

literary authors under scrutiny, are handling. Their literary comments are likely to become positively mythographic and mythopoeic ('myth-making'), at the same time as scholarly and distant – and they may seek to convey and emulate, in their writings, something of the tension and the beauty that informs the mythically-orientated writing under scrutiny, in the first place.

A rather similar situation occurs in a particular form of anthropological engagement with living myth: when it is not the analytical, cross-culturally comparative stance of ethnology that prevails, but the active participation, as observer as well as temporary member, in present-day contexts in which the owners' ceremonial or ritual enactment of myth constitutes the backbone of a social event. This situation is very far from exceptional, and need not be exotically constructed.[54] Imagine a young sociological field-worker whose Ph.D. research takes her to join the supporters of a prominent soccer club in their European peregrinations. The club's identity, its symbolism through colours, verbal associations, standardised narratives of historical triumphs and defeats, and other attributes, will combine with those of the club's present and past protagonists and corresponding features of the opponent clubs to bring out mythical dimensions of heroic struggle, defeat and victory towards which the field-worker will often employ fusion, rather than rupture, as a personal position. And for those of my readership who insist that such a North Atlantic present-day example does not apply because myth – in their stereotypical opinion – has to be savoured in a typically exotic setting of totemism, magic, divination and bloody sacrifice, it is enough to be reminded of the many anthropologists,

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[54] Although it may very well be so constructed; *cf.* Venbrux 1995: an account of present-day anthropological field-work in North-western Australia, where violently conflictive relations between kin are – or so is Venbrux's conviction on the basis of prolonged and traumatic participant observation – constantly informed, and articulated, by reference to mythical characters to whose mythical roles present-day protagonists in family dramas are irresistibly drawn. There are obvious parallels with the literary devices of James Joyce and Hugo Claus as indicated above. But also in everyday experience in the North Atlantic such mythical projection occurs frequently, *e.g.* when an adversary is called 'a Judas', a treacherous woman 'a Jezebel', a doubter 'a doubting Thomas', nudity becomes 'Adam's costume', *etc.* Moreover, the interpenetration of myth into everyday experience is both one of the central concerns of magic, and one of our main sources for myth in the first place. For instance, when throughout the traceable history of Ancient Egyptian magic the experiences of Isis and her infant Ḥorus in the marshy Delta environment of Chemmis are invoked to cure snake bite and other dangers, it is not so much the myth that heals the current danger, but rather the current danger that keeps the myth and its protagonists from dying. The ancient therapist's view was, no doubt, that the incantation of myth remedies current distress through the intervention of the myth's protagonists; the modern mythographer's interpretation would rather be that it is the curative recitation that keeps the myth and its protagonists alive through attaching it to a context in which meaning and redress are created through a process of symbolic production. The parallel with what Venbrux describes is very close, and we would certainly be wrong to attribute to his Australian Aboriginal research associates some kind of atavistic mythical thought which has elsewhere been banned or overcome by civilisation. Myth is the basis of any civilisation, and of all human social life of Anatomically Modern Humans.

including myself,[55] who have braved the tenets of their academic rationality and have actively adopted, on the basis of a considerable amount of cultural learning and of initiation, in the enactment of local African, Asian, Oceanic and American myth during field-work outside the North Atlantic. Back home, will they relapse into the appropriative, reductionist rupture in contrast to the fusion characterising their actual field-work? Or will they find the forms, literary more than scientific, and beyond the claims of a monopolised access to privileged truth, that will allow them to salvage, to render into discursive and evocative writing, the living myth they have encountered and embodied in the field; and will they do so in a fashion that invites the recognition, and the identification, of the owners of those myths? (*Cf.* van Binsbergen 2003a)

Literary scholars often write about texts whose authors they have never met, whose authors may have long been dead. Ethnographers temporarily and vicariously living mythical contents within present-day local horizons (be they the Manchester United supporters scene, or Nkoya cults of kingship, or West African Pentecostal church services hinging on the diabolical qualities of globally circulating artefacts, and of moneys, that have not first been whitewashed through the church's selective blessing; *cf.* van Dijk 1999; Meyer 1998, 1999) have more immediate reason to appreciate that the personal, practical participation in living myth, involving also the intersubjective understanding of myth at the owners' / narrators' own terms, *is primarily an act of sociability* (*cf.* van Binsbergen 2003b, *cf.* 2000c / 2015: ch. 8). By not explicitly and not publicly breaking out of the spellbound world constructions of shared living myth, one affirms one's fellowship with the myth owners. Since many anthropological scholars (and North Atlantic students of myth in general) believe to have eradicated myth from their own professional sub-culture, and increasingly from North Atlantic culture in general, fusion as a mode of sharing myth is also a form of countering North Atlantic hegemonic assumptions, and creating a possible context for inter-cultural understanding; it admits the fundamental humility of the human condition, notably the unattainableness of a privileged position in intercultural encounters, unless through violence (which destroys the encounter).

## 15.6. The scholar's critical battle against myth

Such sociability through participation in living myth is far easier to achieve in expressive domains such as ritual, drama, orature, visual arts, than when myths consciously and explicitly address, discursively, the structure of the life world, as an unmistakable form of cognitive knowledge production. We have seen that the fundamental act of rupture in the study of myth consists in questioning the truth value of myth (by such standards as objectivity, universality and rational-

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[55] The list of such professionals who succumbed, through initiation, to myth in field-work includes: Matthew Schoffeleers, Paul Stoller, R. Jaulin, John Janzen, René Devisch, Michael Jackson, Frank Cushing, *etc.*

ity – the three fundamental qualities which the epistemologist Sandra Harding (1997) identifies as the central claims of Western science). Where, on the one hand, the fusionist student of myth would see affirmations of identity, standardised models for action, and the active creation of meaning and of empowerment often after long periods of oppression and denial,[56] the rupturist, on the other hand, would prefer a literalist approach, where the myth is taken, not as myth in terms of our above definition, but as a pseudo-scientific statement of fact, to be assessed, deconstructed and (inevitably) exploded, with the same scientific rationality that constructs the rupturist position in the first place. It is in this way that the great majority of Afrocentrist, feminist, New Age, ethnic, nationalist and so-called fundamentalist (both Christian, Islamist, and Hindu) writings and related discourses have been relegated (by a host of unsympathetic critics who tend to occupy positions of power in academia, the media, and government circles) to the domain of myth – not in recognition of the uniquely pivotal position of myth in the construction of any society including postmodern globality, but pejoratively, in contempt of the, allegedly, pseudo-scientific overtones such discourses tend to carry. Allegedly, I say – for it is only one little step for such rupturist critics to be made to realise that also their own sacrosanct fortress of scientific rationality, objectivity and universality constitutes nothing but a myth – certainly in the sense of my definition as given above, and very likely also in the very pejorative sense (as 'untruth') which these critics give to 'myth' and, by implication, extend to the forms of contestation, alternative reflection and liberation enumerated above.

Here it becomes very manifest that *one person's myth is another person's truth.* There is no way in which a responsible intellectual producer can opt to dwell exclusively on one side, at one pole, of the field of tension between rupture and fusion. Complete fusion will mean a total abandonment of the great achievements of critical thought since the Enlightenment (and in fact, as the names of Xenophanes and Theagenes demonstrate, since the very beginning of Western philosophy).[57] As intellectuals, we simply cannot allow ourselves, or even others, to live with an unchecked proliferation of myths that are not subjected to critical scrutiny. On the other hand, complete rupture will lead to the destruction, not only of the myth-underpinned life worlds of others, and of their identity (however much admitted to be constructed), but also of our *own* life world, in which scientific rationality, universality and objectivity can only exist to the extent to which these are themselves raised to the status of myth, and help to cosily cushion that life world amidst North Atlantic modern myths (such as democracy, the market, and human rights) – the latter myths being largely invisible to us, *as myths,* like the very air we breathe in.

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[56] *Cf.* Toelken 2002, with regard to Native American handling of myth today.

[57] It is here that the uniquely constitutive role of Kant needs to be appreciated. But does Western philosophy have, independently, the monopoly of such scepticism? Probably not. *Cf.* Gupta 1981; Chinn 1997.

## 15.7. A near-universal mytheme: 'hero fights monster'

Bodies of mythological knowledge are among humankind's oldest[58] attested and best studied systems of knowledge. The recognition of the similarity of mythological patterns as found in distinct linguistic and cultural traditions was already a fact in Antiquity, when it inspired the practice of the *interpretatio graeca* (*cf.* Griffiths 1980): the projection of Greek mythological proper names and concepts onto the mythologies and ritual practices of the Egyptians, Scythian, Celts, *etc.* at the periphery of the Greek world – a practice well-known from the works of Herodotus and Plato. World-wide, the available mythological material is of an incredible wealth. This extensive corpus includes cases of myths of the most far-reaching continuity and convergence, and in this respect borders on the same spatial globality which Harding has,[59] rightly, identified as a crucial factor in the universalism attributed to Western science. To make this point, I prefer to select only one *mytheme*[60], that of 'hero fights monster', and to study it by reference to just one, highly reliable and authoritative, source: the account of Fontenrose's explorations into the charter myth of the famous Delphic oracle in Ancient Greece. The mytheme involves two archetypal characters, the hero and the adversary, to which often a third is added: the usually passive heroine. The table demonstrates the truly amazing, nearly universal distribution of this mytheme across world cultures.

| | selected protagonists (*italic* = female) | selected enemies (*italic* = female) | selected passive heroines |
|---|---|---|---|
| **African interior** | Perseus | Ketos | *Aso, Andromeda* |
| **Egypt** | Ammon, *Athena / Neith*, Geb, Horus, *Isis*, Min, Osiris, Ra, (Set), Thoth, *Uto* | Apep, Bata, Busiris, the Sea, Set, (Thoth) | *Anat, Asherat, (Isis), Nut* |
| **Canaan, Israel, Ugarit, Syria** | *Anat,* Aqhat, Baal, *Beltis*, El (Il), *(Judith),* Kadmos, Melqart, *Paghat,* Perseus, Phoenician heaven god, Yahweh | Holofernes, Humbaba, *Judith,* Ketos, Leviathan, Mot, Orontes, Phoenician hawk dragon, Satan, Tannin, Yam, Yatpan | *Andromeda, Asherat, Kassiepeia, Omphale, Phoenician earth goddess* |
| **Anatolia, Cilicia, Hittites, Cyprus** | Baal Tarz, Hittite Weather God, Hupasias, *Inaras,* Kumarbi, Marsyas, Perseus, Sandon, Teshub, Telipinu | dragon, Illuyankas, *Medusa*, Okeanos, Syleus, Typhon, Ullikummi, Upelluri | *Aphrodite, Semiramis* |
| **Mesopotamia** | Anu, Ea, (Enkidu), Enlil, Gilgamesh, *(Inanna) / (Ishtar),* Lugalbanda, Marduk, Nergal, Ninurta, Shamash, Tammuz | Apsu, Asag, Bilulu, (Enkidu), *Erishkigal*, (Gilgamesh), Girgire, Humbaba, Imdugud, *Inanna / Ishtar,* Kingu, *Labbu*, Seven Demons, *Tiamat,* Zu | |
| **India, South East Asia, Persia** | Fredun = Thraetaona, Indra *(Kaikeyi)* | Azi Dahaka, *Danu,* Garuda, *Manthara,* Nahusha, Namuci, Ravana, Sinhika, Viparupa, Vritra | *(Kaikeyi)* |

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[58] *Cf.* Witzel 2001, 2003, 2012; van Binsbergen 2005b / 2006a, 2005b, 2010a. In these long-range studies certain myths are elaborately argued to have a time depth of well over 100,000 years.

[59] Harding 1997; *cf.*, specially on the point of global distribution of myth, van Binsbergen 2010a.

[60] *I.e.* 'smallest meaningful unit of mythological narrative'.

| China | Chu Yang, Li Ping, No Cha, Shen Yi, Yi, Ying Lung, Yü | Ch'ih Yu, Chu Wang, dragon, Fung Po, Ho Po | *Hsi Wang Mu* |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Japan** | Agatamori, Amewakahiko, Izanagi, Raiko, (Susanowo), Takemikazuchi | Susanowo | Amaterasu, Izanami |
| **North Africa and Southern Europe** | *Athena / Neith*, Herakles, Melqart, Perseus | Antaios, Atlas, Cacus, Evander / Faunus, Geryon, Ophion | |
| **Greece** | Apollo, *Artemis, Athena,* Diony-sos, Erechtheus, Eros, *(Hekate)*, Herakles, (Hermes), *Io,* Kadmos, Kronos, Pan, (Poseidon), Uranos, Zeus [Keraunios][61] | Acheloos, *Aigis,* (Apollo), Ares, *Delphyne, Despoina,* Diomedes, (Dionysos), Drakon, *Echidna,* Gigantes, Glaukos, Hades, *Hekate, Hera,* (Herakles), (Hermes), *Hydra, Kampe,* Kepheus, Keto, Ker, (Kronos), Kyknos, *Lamia,* Laogoras, Laomedon, Linos, Neleus, Ocean = Okeanos, Ogygos, *Pallas,* (Perseus), Phlegyas, Phorbas, Poine, Poseidon, Python, the Sea, *Sphinx, Styx, Sybaris,* Tartaros, *Telphusa,* Thanatos, *Thetys,* Titans, Tityos, (Uranos), Zeus [Chthonios], Zeus's hawk[62] | *(Artemis), Deianeira,* Demeter, Ge, *Io,* Kelto, Leto, Moirai, Persephone, Rhea, Xenodike |
| **pre-Christian Northern Europe** | Bearson, Beowulf, Hagen, Odin, Ogier the Dane, Parzival, Sigurd / Siegfried, Sigmund, Thor | dragon, Fafnir, Firedrake, Grendel, *Grendel's Mother, Hel, Holda, Lorelei,* Midgard Snake, Regin-Mimir, *Valkyrie, Venus, Ymir* | *Audumla, Brynhild, Krimhild, Lohengrin* |
| **Christian Europe** | St Evenmar, St George, St Michael | Satan, St George's dragon, *the Woman of Rev. 12 & 17* | |
| **Americas** | Coyote, Gucumatz, Hunahpu, Xbalanque, Tahoe | Nashlah, Xibalba, Vucub-Caquix, Wishpoosh | |

Table compiled on the basis of scattered information contained in: Fontenrose 1980. Italics denote female characters.

Table 15.1. A near-universal theme of systems of mythological knowledge: 'hero fights monster'.

What could explain the persistence and global distribution of this mytheme? At the end of his long quest for comparative data, scanning the local and cultural specifics of the mytheme 'hero fights monster', Fontenrose falls short of inspiration, and all he can offer us is an appeal to the universal human condition in the face of death. Yet, as we shall see in the next sections, this persistence of global distribution also imply an invitation to engage in the study of long-range comparative world mythology on a grand scale – as in the work of Michael Witzel and his Harvard-centred network, including my own recent work.

## 15.8. Living with the tensions: Towards a specialised scholarship of myth

The field of tension between rupturist and fusionist approaches to myth, signalled above, is too productive than that we should try and resolve that tension by a radical retreat from living myth – which is impossible anyway because we cannot live without collective representations. Yet the contradictions of scholarship produce a relative compartmentalisation in time and place that allows us to engage, as specialists (and only for that part of our existence where we can identify as specialists), in the detached study of myths as if they were exclu-

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[61] To which could be added, *e.g.,* Agenor, Argos, Eurybatos, Euthymos, Koroibos, Lykos, Pyrrhichos, Silenos.

[62] To which could be added, *e.g.,* Admetos, Akrisios, Aktaion, Amykos, Amyntor, Asklepios, Autolykos, Dryopes, Erginos, Eurynomos, Eurypylos, Eurytion, Eurytos, Euphemos, Geras, Heros of Temesa, Koronos, Ladon, Laistrygones, Lakinios, Lityerses, Lykoros, [Peri-]Klymenos, Phineus, Phorkys, Polydektes, Satyros, Theiodamas, Tiphys, Titias.

sively *other* people's. In this respect the possibilities suggested by Table 1 alone are dazzling: there is the suggestion of an underlying pattern informing an incredible variety of cultures in the Old and the New World, across millennia. Is the study of myth a road to the recognition of very old layers of a very widely shared worldview? Or does it, instead, reveal the innate tendencies built into the universal human mind? Detached myth analysis is not only constitutive of the Western intellectual tradition and especially of the Enlightenment – it is one of the most fascinating intellectual activities one could engage in.

Over the past decades, I have personally, intensely, and from a variety of different angles grappled with the study of myth. In certain aspects of this work I have identified as a fusionist:

1.  using my position as a North Atlantic scholar to proclaim and defend an attenuated form of Afrocentrism, as reformulated by me in the context, and in the terms, of scientific rationality,[63]
2.  and using my anthropological field-work to become a practicing diviner-priest (*Sangoma*) in the Southern African tradition, propagating that practice worldwide through the Internet, and seriously, incisively, analysing that field of knowledge in its own right with a methodology inspired by both mainstream North Atlantic science, and by *Sangoma* science (van Binsbergen 1991a, 1998c, 2003b).

But in many other respects my studies as a mythical scholar have tended to rupture, to analytical distance. This has been the case for my early study of myth in a North African sacred landscape,[64] and, largely,[65] for my attempts to unravel – mainly on the basis of local myth and oral tradition – the precolonial post-1500 CE history of state formation, gender relations and ethnicity in Western Zambia (*cf.* van Binsbergen 1992b); but particularly for my more recent probings into long-range mythical ramifications:[66]

1.  mythical continuity of dualist mythical structures informing the worldwide history of, mainly, geomantic divination (including the Arabic, African, and European Renaissance forms) ever since its remotest traces in the Ancient Near East[67]
2.  mythical continuity between Ancient Greece and Ancient Egypt, in the context of

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[63] *Cf.* van Binsbergen 1997a, 1997c, 2000a, 2000b; 2005a / 2015: ch. 12; and my web page 'Afrocentricity and the Black Athena debate', at: http://www.quest-journal.net/shikanda/afrocentrism/index.htm .

[64] *Cf.* van Binsbergen 1980b, 1985a, forthcoming (b). I am honoured that Vansina's study (1985) of homoeostasis in the use of myth for historical reconstruction uses this study of mine as an example; also *cf.* Vansina 1993. However, blood being thicker than water, the Tunisian field-work features prominently in my poetry, and the only full-length book I published on Tunisia so far is a novel (1988b), hinging on the tension between the affirmation and the living on local myth, on the one hand, and its scholarly deconstruction (detective-fashion) in the face of methodologically reconstructed historical truth, on the other hand.

[65] Largely, for here again a combination of a rupturist and a fusionists perspective was pursued, in that I not only wrote the standard history of the Nkoya people, but also joined them in active defence of their ethnic identity and interests at the regional and national level in Zambia, and in the process was adopted as son of one of their kings, Mwene Kahare Kabambi.

[66] For a related long-range recent approach to myth, *cf.* Witzel 2001, 2012.

[67] *Cf.* the present book's chs 9 and 10; and references cited there.

the *Black Athena* debate[68] (an idea I now consider obvious – cf. Table 2 below – and perhaps even almost pedestrian, for being over-obvious, because from a long-range perspective comprising dozens of millennia and all continents, like my latest work on leopard symbolism, the affinities between the Egyptian and Greek mythological repertoire are only too predictable, both straddling Afroasiatic and Indo-European, in the same narrow horizon of the Eastern Mediterranean basin and the Extended Fertile Crescent)[69]

3.  mythical themes which connect South Central African kingship with South and South East Asia and the Ancient Near East (van Binsbergen 2010a)
4.  mythical themes emerging in long-range patterns of animal symbolism across the Old World, as exemplified in clan names, divination systems, and systems of astronomical nomenclature (van Binsbergen 2002a, 2012d, and in press (h))
5.  mythical themes emerging in long-range continuities in leopard nomenclature and symbolism as a perspective on the world history of shamanism (van Binsbergen 2004a and forthcoming (e).)
6.  African cosmogonic ('creation') myths, the Out-of-Africa package from c. 200 ka Before Present (BP) onwards, and the mythical implications of Back-to-Africa return migration from Asia as from ca. 15 ka BP.[70]

In conclusion, it is the leopard theme that I will now discuss in some detail.[71]

## 15.9. *The leopard's unchanging spots*: Example of an interdisciplinary approach to an African mythical complex

Using such auxiliary approaches as Lévi-Straussian structuralism, long-range comparative linguistics (in terms of such macro families as Nostratic, (Dene-) Sinocaucasian *etc*.), population genetics (Cavalli-Sforza and his school), archaeology, the history of art, the study of ancient astronomies and other specialist knowledge systems, cultural anthropological perspectives on the distribution of specific traits (especially with regard to ritual and belief) in space and time, and multivariate statistical analysis, I have engaged in a form of long-range myth analysis whose main results may be summarised as follows:

1.  Rather than exclusively committing oneself to one pole of the rupture / fusion tension in the study of myth, a combination of these stances is the most productive for innovative research; thus, in the best fusionist

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[68] van Binsbergen 1996d, 1997a / 2011e, 2000a, 2000b, 2005a / 2015: ch. 12.
[69] In the late 2000s I have returned to comparative mythology in the context of the Ancient Mediterranean, because it is here that important clues may be found as to the provenance and interethnic relations of the Sea Peoples who, at the end of the Bronze Age, destroyed the Hittite empire and threatened Egypt; *cf.* van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011. To my delight, Goto 2006 covers much of the same ground but far more succinctly and with a different objective.
[70] *Cf.* Cavalli-Sforza *et al.* 1994; Cruciani *et al.* 2002; Hammer *et al.* 1998.; Coia *et al.* 2005.
[71] van Binsbergen forthcoming (a), forthcoming (f); an extensive slide presentation covering much of the proposed book's argument is available at: http://www.quest-journal.net/shikanda/ancient_models/leopard_harvard_return.pdf = 2004a.

tradition, my leopard project started out on the basis of an existential puzzle imposed on me by a high priest in Botswana during my final confirmation as a *Sangoma*, but it has triggered an analytical rupturist endeavour whose value, if any, is no longer dependent on these anecdotal origins; the same incidentally applies to my geomantic studies.

2. Continuity in myth, across continents and across millennia, is not merely the perspectival illusion of those who, constitutionally, happen to be 'lumpers' rather than 'splitters'[72] – on the contrary, such continuity is a very well established empirical fact (*cf.* Table 15.1). But of course, the scientific value of such an assertion is fully dependent upon the theoretical and methodological care with which such a position, or its opposite, is elaborated. The main finding in my leopard research to support the claim of continuity is: the disconcerting constancy, not only in the lexical nomenclature of the leopard from Khoisan (now in Southern Africa) to Sino-tibetan (East Asia), Afroasiatic (northern Africa and West and Central Asia) and Indo-European (Europe, West and Central Asia), but also and particularly of the mythical significance of the notion of *speckledness* – as if throughout the Old World (and probably also in the Na-Dene domain of the New World) a 15,000-years-old mythical cosmology may be traced hinging on the juxtaposition of speckledness versus textural homogeneity, dark versus light, evil versus good, female versus male.

3. Classic diffusionism, cultural anthropology's main stock-in-trade in the late 19th and early 20th century, lacked a theory of cultural borrowing and cultural integration, and was therefore rightly replaced by the (now again obsolete) paradigm of structural functionalism stressing narrow horizons of time and place, virtually total cultural integration within such a local horizon, and participatory field-work as the standard anthropological technique to explore such horizons. Diffusion as a paradigm deserves to be revived, provided the well-known and well-taken criticism levelled against it by structural-functionalism is seriously answered at the theoretical and methodological level. And it is being revived (*cf.* Amselle 2001), notably in the context of studies of (proto-)globalisation, and of a rapprochement between anthropology and archaeology.

4. One methodological problem in this respect is the recognition, or rejection as the case may be, of underlying similarity or identity in the face of manifest dissimilarity on the surface. Here Lévi-Straussian structuralism remains a uniquely powerful and intersubjective analytical tool. It allows us to see myths in adjacent spaces and times as systematically interrelated through specific transformations, underneath of which the same deep structure may be systematically detected. It has managed to create

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[72] The expression has a long history in historical linguistics, *cf.* Baxter & Ramer 2000. For instance, Martin Bernal, in the context of the *Black Athena* debate he so timely and passionately initiated, prided himself on being a lumper rather than a splitter (Martin Bernal, contribution to the discussion, Leiden conference 'Black Athena Ten Years After', September 1996).

order throughout New World mythologies, illuminates Indo-European mythologies (*cf.* Oosten 1985), helps us to argue Egyptian / Greek continuities in myth, and deserves to be systematically extended to African and Ancient Near Eastern mythologies, as in my work in progress.

Reading the well-known Graeco-Roman myth of Aristaeus's bee cultivation and bugony (the generation of bees from rotting bull's carcases) from the perspective of Ancient Egypt, I present in Table 15.2 an example of the kind of analysis that suggests very extensive Egyptian-Greek continuity in myth.

| episode in the classical Greek myth | comment | interpretation in Ancient Egyptian terms |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Aristaeus, | = 'The Best', and as such a standard epithet of several principal Greek gods | Osiris, being the final compromise produced by the confrontation between the Neith cult and the Heliopolitan, masculine, bureaucratic offensive |
| 2. son of Apollo | | Ḥorus, Ḫprĭ, or Rē͏ᶜ, the Sun-god and male creator-god |
| 3. and Cyrene, | = 'Sovereign Queen' / Libyan town of Cyrene | Neith |
| 4. (Aristaeus, ) master of bee-keeping, | | *bit*, 'bee', high-priestess of Neith and Ruler of Lower Egypt |
| 5. has, or covets, illicit sex | narrative adornment, but perhaps also | an evocation of attempted amalgamation of the Neith cult with the Heliopolitan theology |
| 6. with Eurydice, the wife of | 'Wide Justice', an evocation of the Moon, to whom human sacrifice was made by way of poisoning with snake's venom; in Ancient Mesopotamia, it is the all-seeing Sun which is the heavenly personification of justice | Nut; Tefnut (by contrast to Ḥorus, Ḫprĭ, or Rēᶜ) |
| 7. Orpheus. | 'Hereditary Prince' (Ancient Egyptian: *irpᶜt*; Bernal 1987: 71 *f.*). Orpheus is claimed to have visited Egypt (Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica*, IV.25.2-4) | Geb (Bernal 1987: 71 f.); Shu. Graves's idiosyncratic etymology (1964) of Orpheus' Greek name as 'Him of the River Bank(?)' cannot be supported, although it does suggest a link with Osiris and Neith as water-gods |
| 8. Eurydice then flies, | | confrontation of the Heliopolitan theology and the Neith cult |
| 9. trips on a snake, is bitten and dies. | an extension of the Neith motif to that of the primordial snake enemy, Apophis, whom Neith produced by spitting (Hart 1993, s.v. Apophis) | power of the Neith cult evoked |
| 10. Eurydice's sisters | other goddesses of the Sun-god's entourage | Isis and Nephthys (or *Wȝḏyt* and *Nḫbt* as the Two Ladies (*nbty*) accompanying the pharaoh as Ḥorus?) |
| 11. subsequently kill Aristaeus's bees. | *i.e.* his power as *bit*, or the power of *bit* in itself, or his *bit* retinue, the Neith priest(ess)hood, curtailed | Heliopolitan theology curbing the Neith cult; Neith priestesses killed as funerary human sacrifices at First Dynasty royal tombs |
| 12. Aristaeus, on the advice of his mother Cyrene, | | insistence on the power of the Neith cult or of Libyan (more of less, = Delta) culture in general |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **13. fetters the Pharos-based oracular sea-god Proteus.** | Proteus = 'The First', *cf.* above, row (1). | a narrative adornment, evoking the Delta and oracular possibly indicative of divination as a cultic innovation; but since Neith is called 'One' and often considered' the First', and a water goddess, the male minor god Proteus may well be a transformation of Neith rendered harmless |
| **14. Aristaeus thus learns that the bees have died in retaliation for Eurydice's death.** | | the Neith cult's powers curbed by the rise of the masculine, bureaucratic pharaonic state as religiously and symbolically underpinned by non-Neith related themes; the Neith priestesses killed |
| **15. Aristaeus kills four bulls and four cows as propitiatory sacrifice.** | Neith cult has to symbolically defer to the Heliopolitan theology revolving on the Ennead headed by the male Sungod who, as the 'Bull of the Ennead', has usurped Neith's creative prerogatives | the bull element has to be transmuted into the original bee / *bit* element through a process of transformation. The bull element evokes the Heliopolitan cult with its Nine Gods (minus one), but probably also the various Egyptian cults of divine bulls, *e.g.* Apis, and *K3mtf*, – in the latter name, 'bull of his mother', again a reference to the mother goddess can be detected) |
| **16. Aristaeus, on Cyrene's advice,** | | insistence on the power of the Neith cult or of Libyan culture in general |
| **17. leaves the bovine carcasses in a copse** | the arboreal element stems from Thracia, where some of the goddesses involved in the Greek version appear as dryads, *i.e.* tree (specifically oak) goddesses | the bull element (evocative of the Heliopolitan cult) has to be transmuted into the original bee / *bit* element through a long process of transformation |
| **18. for eight days.** | | the Heliopolitan Ennead (Nine Gods), minus its leader and progenitor, Atum |
| **19. After a funerary sacrifice to Orpheus, who had meanwhile died,** | narrative adornment but also → | evocation of Neith as the mistress of death and the underworld |
| **20. on the ninth day** | | the Heliopolitan Ennead |
| **21. the carcasses are teeming with bees** | | the bees as the sign of life resurrected from death; but also a symbolic triumph of Neith's living emblems over the dead and decaying substance of the masculine, bureaucratic state cult; all this amalgamated in the character of Osiris who is at the same time the expression of masculinisation, and (as Neith's vizier, and as the ultimate larva resurrecting from death) the continuation of the Neith cult in a new form. |

To which a late version of the myth adds: 'after having tried, in vain, to rescue Eurydice from Hades with the power of his music; his head [perhaps embalmed in honey?] was set up as an oracle but was ultimately silenced by Apollo'. If, by a widely accepted etymology, the name Eurydice has lunar connotations (line 6, above), the drama of her death may have astronomical implications concerning the interplay of Sun and Moon *e.g.* in night/dag, or in eclipses; however, the puzzle then arises that Aristaeus is both a partisan (killing the Moon) and (as associate of Neith) an opponent of the Sun / Re[c].

*Remarks*:

1. Main classical sources on Aristaeus are: Virgil, *Georgica* 4; Pindar, *Pythia*, 9, 26-70; Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*, 2,500 f.; Pausanias, *Descriptio Graeciae*, 10, 17, 3; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 15; Nonnus, *Dionysiaca*, 5. Cf. Rose 1958: 142.

2. This table formed part of my unpublished book manuscript repeatedly announced, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, as: *Global Bee Flight: Sub-Saharan Africa, Ancient Egypt, and the World — Beyond the Black Athena thesis* (van Binsbergen 1998). After my work on the *Black Athena* debate from 1996 on, this marked my increasing distancing from Bernal's vicarious and (in his special case of a Sinologist turned ancient historian of the Mediterranean) empirically unfounded Afrocentricity, and my active re-engagement in the study of the Ancient Mediterranean as of vital interest to African history. However, my work in this connection soon made such progress as to render the earlier book MS obsolete. Parts of it were replaced by: van Binsbergen 2011d, 2012d and 2015; and van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011. The original MS contained a large section on the reconstruction of Egypt's Early Dynastic socio-political dynamics, which has so far remained unpublished.

3. With the typical inconsistency of transliteration, I am tempted to drop the Egyptological transliteration of divine names, without vowels, whenever a standard North Atlantic rendering is available.

4. Of course, the priestly and/or divine bee complex is not peculiar to the Predynastic and Early Dynastic Delta, but (as exemplified by the priestly offices called *melissa* in Asia Minor and the Aegean especially in the cult of Artemis and of Cybele, the role of the bee as saviour in the Hittite Telepinu epic – Pritchard 1969 – and bee motifs on Minoan Crete – Woudhuizen 1997) pervades the entire eastern Mediterranean, in a linguistic context that is Palaeo-Mediterranean or Indo-European speaking, rather than Afroasiatic (Ancient Egyptian is generally reckoned to belong to the latter language family, but not without problems, *cf.* Kammerzell 1994, Ray 1992, and references cited there). For Gimbutas (1982, 1991), the bee is an attribute of the mother goddess – which suggests that even the extensively pocked or indented walls of the Neolithic temples of the Malta islands could be interpreted as representing beehives; however, my leopard research as summarised in the present chapter suggests that, beyond specially apical references, in the Malta case an interpretation in terms of the more universal theme of *speckledness* (also an attribute of the mother goddess, as I demonstrate) is more convincing. Note however the correspondence in colour scheme (black / yellow) between certain popular bee races, and the leopard.

5. For the killing of the eight bulls, there is an alternative interpretation possible, in terms of the Hermopolitan Ogdoad, i.e. the eight deities of Khemnu (Greek: Hermopolis, modern: al-Ashmunein), who appear in neat, gendered pairs; but I do not see the point.

6. Atum is a male primordial god who produces the first creatures, Shu and Tefnut, in a way which involves bodily fluids and which is variously described (masturbation, spitting; *cf.* Rē's creation of humankind from his tears) but always in terms implying the absence of female reproductive organs. In my 1998 reading of early Egyptian history in the context of the abortive *Global Bee Flight*, Atum represents the male usurpation, in the course of the consolidation of the early Egyptian state, through the Heliopolitan theology among other means, of a hypothetical female-centred cosmology exemplified in the Neith cult.

Table 15.2. The Graeco-Roman myth of Aristaeus interpreted in the light of Ancient Egyptian religion: Evidence of Egyptian-Greek continuities.

Such a structuralist historical reading of myth complexes may help us towards solving the perennial question of how to demarcate the effects of parallel invention and of innate parallel programming of the – Anatomically Modern – Human mind, as against diffusion. Another problem is how to pinpoint the specific kind of diffusion that is informing such widespread continuity. Accepted anthropological wisdom is that not so much populations travel, taking both their gene pool, their language, and their distinctive culture with them, but that populations remain more or less immobile or move only very slowly across the earth's surface, whereas the travelling of ideas, objects, and isolated individuals is largely held responsible for such diffusion as in fact has unmistakably taken place.
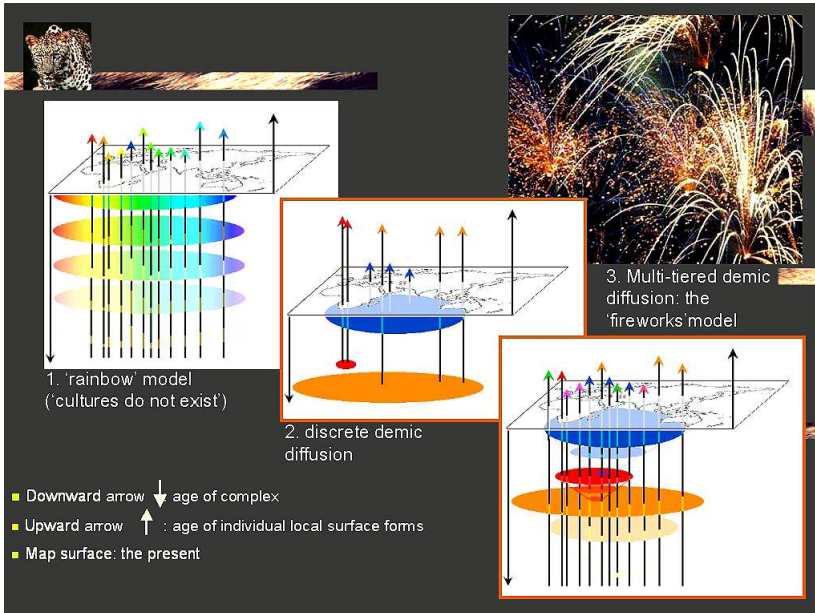
(3) the 'fireworks' model: within a previous tier a kernel is engendered that grows into the next tier, which is highly different yet represents some continuity with the tier from which it has sprung – like cascading fireworks. The 'fireworks' model (3) is here contrasted with (2) the 'rainbow' model (which is in line with my earlier theoretical position to the effect that 'cultures do not exist'): differences and boundaries between cultures are fluid, both horizontally (in space) and vertically (in time); and with (1) the model of discrete (or simple) demic diffusion, which is based on the simple succession of totally discontinuous cultures. (This illustration derives from van Binsbergen 2003c).

Fig. 15.1. A model of multi-tiered demic diffusion.

My leopard research, however, suggests that the model of demic diffusion, which increasingly informs present-day archaeology and genetics, has also some utility for the long-range study of both myth and language families. The distribution of myths, therefore, can be demonstrated to be related to that of genetic patterns and language (macro-) families. However, in order to account for such unexpected long-range continuities as the nomenclature and symbolism of the leopard bring out, a multi-tiered model of demic diffusion seems required, where relatively constant nuclei are carried from one major wave to the next, somewhat comparable with the genetic immortality of human procreative cells from generation to generation. I have called this multi-tiered model the 'fireworks model'; Fig. 15.1.

The succession of tiers brings out a historical sequence whose phases (each coinciding with a particular tier) do not necessarily have the same contents and

structure. While in every tier, myths create life worlds and make these saturated with truth and meaning for the myth owners, these life worlds are demonstrably different. My long-range, comparative research into leopard symbolism has yielded evidence to postulate the following sequence informing a systematic succession of cosmologies in identifiable spatio-temporal contexts throughout the Old World:

1. the mythical cosmology hinges on the mythical leopard–ungulate juxtaposition, which reflects Lower and Middle Palaeolithic situations (4,000,000 to 40,000 BP) directly inspired by natural conditions (for the ungulates are the leopard's nature prey), in a context closely associated with early shamanism; inspired by the unpredictability of a hunting mode of production, images of the leopard help to gives rise to the widespread mythical figure of a divine trickster

2. The mythical leopard–lion juxtaposition hinges on speckledness and brings together, because of the power of human symbolic thought, two species that (although competing for the same preys and therefore occasionally mortal enemies) usually avoid each other under natural conditions (despite being potentially fertile tiogether) but that are eminently 'good for thinking' (Lévi-Strauss), in considerable abstraction from naturally given situations; this reflects an Upper Palaeolithic condition (40,000 to 10,000 BP)

3. The leopard–lion juxtaposition was subsequently, in early Neolithic times (Çatal Hüyük, the fertile Neolithic Sahara), worked into an elaborate, utterly dualistic (also gendered) 'cosmology of the lion and the leopard', traces of which are found all over the Old World, in Kammerzell's (1994; cf. van Binsbergen 2003h) lexical pair *prd / *prg ('leopard', where the -pard element itself is an example of this root) versus *rw / *lw- / *LB' / *leu ('lion'), and mythically elaborated in von Sicard's Luwe (cf. von Sicard 1968-1969; with a great many name variants) mythical figure, paired with a female companion Mwari (also with a great many name variants). Significantly, we are here in the domain of the few language families that have gender: Afroasiatic, Indo-European, and Khoisan; for all three families a West Asian origin c. 15,000 BP may be tentatively postulated.

4. Cosmological / astronomical notions accrue to these figures, so that the leopard's skin comes to represent the star-spangled sky especially the circumpolar northern sky and the night, while the celestial axis, noon, and the ecliptic comes to be associated with the lion; the pole, spear, stick, club (representing the celestial axis) is one of Luwe's

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most conspicuous attributes.

> This cosmology is implicitly immanentalist, in that its paired constituent elements are complementary, and readily transform into each other, without very sharp boundaries. However, the emergence of writing, the state, organised priesthood and science in Late Neolithic times created the conditions for the emergence of transcendentalist modes of thought. When transcendentalist thought emerges, the ancient cosmology of the lion and the leopard offers the mythical framework for dualist cosmologies of death and rebirth, often expressed through leopard- or tiger-*skin* garments (what I have called *pardivesture*), whose converging symbolism can be traced throughout the successive civilisations of the Ancient Near East (Indus, Sumer, Egypt, Greece, with ramifications into South Asia and China). A cluster of leopard-associated goddesses (Cybele, Hera, Aphrodite, Circe), and male figures vicariously associated with them (Dionysus, Orpheus, Jason, Menelaus, Antenor), merges with goddesses combining feminine attributes (spinning, childbirth) with military prowess: Neith, Athena, Anath, Anahita, with more distant resonances in the weaving goddesses Proserpina and Harmonia, with the African spider goddess Anansi / Nzambi / Nyambi, and with the leopard or tiger associated South Asian goddesses of death and transformation Durga and Kali. From this complex but consistent repertoire springs the Osirian / Orphic/ Dionysian / Christian tradition – a prime source of transcendentalism that has largely shaped Europe and the Near East in the last few millennia. All this testifies to a gradual but most fundamental shift in gender power, with male gods and male prerogatives replacing female ones in the millennia between the early Neolithic and the early Iron Age.[73]

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[73] Ye Shuxian 2003 makes clear that also for China there is evidence of the early prominence of a female goddess (identified by him with the Nu Wa 女娲 of Chinese tradition), to be subjugated and eclipsed by a male god (identified with the culture hero Fu Xi 伏羲 of Chinese tradition). This is in line with the Chinese strands in my own analysis of leopard symbolism, which tends to revolve on the mother goddess and/or her junior male companion. These strands include: the conspicuous place of the Dene-Sinocaucasian linguistic group in leopard nomenclature in four continents; and 'Dionysian' and 'Osirian' themes (not necessarily to be taken to have diffused from a postulated origin in the Ancient Near East and South East Europe) in classical Chinese iconography and symbolism, especially in the imperial context, where also the leopard, 豹 *bao,* is conspicuous.
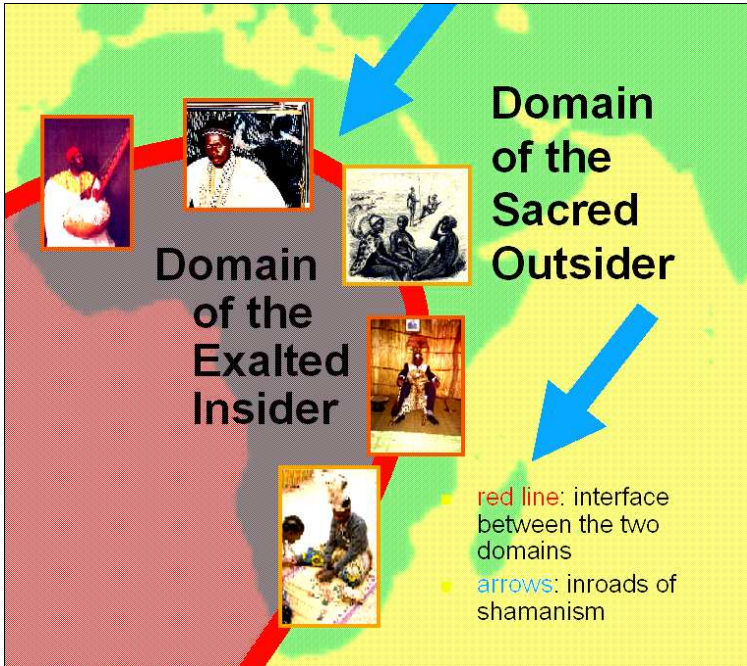
The five prominent instances of pardivesture ('the ceremonial or ritual wearing of leopard skins') in Africa during the second millennium CE are, from west to east and from north to south: bards; Islamic saints; Nilotic leopard-skin chiefs; kings; and diviner-priests in the Southern African *Sangoma* tradition. My intercontinental comparative and historical analysis of leopard symbolism suggests that these five instances may be interpreted as being situated at the interface between two very extensive cultural domains, and as resulting from the recent (2nd millennium CE) interaction between these domains: (a) the implicitly transcendentalist domain of the leopard-skin wearer as the Sacred Outsider (usually with shamanistic connotations), widely distributed in the Old World except in West and South-West Africa; and (b) the implicitly immanentalist domain of the leopard-skin wearer as the Exalted Insider (usually without shamanistic connotations), in West and South-West Africa. This illustration derives from van Binsbergen 2003c, but with indebtedness to: Frobenius 1954: 208 *f.*, map 27. Note that here both insider and outsider are implicit *emic* categories, and have nothing to do with the insider-outsider debate within anthropology (*cf.* p. 66n). In the black-and-white rendering, in print, the legend's 'red line' is inconspicuous: it separates the two (not 50!) domains depicted in contrasting shades of grey, and is straddled by the five depictions of pardivesture.

Fig. 15.2. The five prominent instances of pardivesture in Africa during the second millennium CE.

In post-Neolithic Africa the Luwe complex is widespread but fragmented and little incorporated in current cultures, as if it were a remnant of a West Asian / Northeastern African context which (at least, according to my tentative reconstructions, which are in part inspired by recent genetic findings as to a Back-into-Africa

return migration from Asia – Coia *et al.* 2005; Hammer *et al.* 1998; Cruciani *et al.* 2002), appears to have coincided with the emergence of Khoisan and Niger-Congo as language families. The cosmology of the lion and the leopard has not survived in Africa as an integrated dualist complex, instead the leopard has largely shed its complement the lion, and has taken on (or reverted back to) the immanentalist shape of the Exalted Insider – power-hungry and treacherous. Nonetheless, Sacred Outsiders, full of leopard-skin symbolism, are to be found in an eastern and northern fringe of sub-Saharan African, as an interface with the Eurasian domain of transcendentalism centring on the Sacred Outsider. (Fig. 15.2)

These are some of the findings which I have been trying, for the past decade, to work into a book draft provisionally entitled *The leopard's unchanging spots: Long-range comparative research as a key to enduring patterns of African agency*. I have no illusions about the reception that is to be expected for such a book.[74] In African Studies and in anthropology, myth is no longer the hot issue it was in the 1950s and 1960s; new researchers' myths, such as globalisation and multiculturalism, have taken that place. And I have obliged by incorporating these themes into my work. Given this unpopularity (especially in African Studies), my current mythical studies (in the stricter sense of the word) are likely to be relegated, in their own right, to the status of pseudo-scientific myth, and to be denied validity. In terms of the framework sketched above, however, that would be rather high praise, even though probably unjustified.

Ultimately, such an analysis conveys the following lesson: *Myth cannot be studied in isolation – far more illuminating is an interdisciplinary approach that combines a number of long-range research efforts, from genetics to archaeology and from linguistics to comparative ethnography, and that combines rupture with fusion.*

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[74] A first indication is already given in the scornful and dismissive treatment of my 'neo-diffusionism' in the otherwise commendable book by my friend Jean-Luc Amselle (2001: 31 *f.*, 98 *f.*).

# Chapter 16. Religion and development

## *Reflexions on the collection edited by Philip Quarles van Ufford and Matthew Schoffeleers*

This chapter investigates the claim made by Phillip Quarles van Ufford and Matthew Schoffeleers (1988) that there is a close parallel between the social scientific study of religion and that of development. These authors argue that it was essentially religious motivations that triggered the emergence, after World War II, of development thinking as a major framework for North-South encounters in the modern world. Hence they seek to study development as a form of religious discourse. After situating this intention in the context of university research in the Netherlands at the time, I question the epistemological basis for subsuming the study of development under that of religion, as if the latter would present a superior, privileged viewpoint. I stress the extent to which development is a powerful hegemonic devise on the part of the North Atlantic region for continuing to conquer the world albeit now with apparently non-violent means. In an attempt to apply the 'development as religion' thesis to the capricious development trajectory of the Nkoya people of western Zambia throughout the twentieth century, I call attention to local ideals of well-being and achievement, which may be totally divergent from those defined by North Atlantic development thinking, and which therefore amount to an endogenous development model. This case study also highlights the role of the state: as long as local and regional historic identity claims in Western Zambia were rejected by the state, the population was dismissive of the same kinds of outside development initiative which at other times, when such claims were honoured, were locally welcomed and allowed to take effect. I admit that a perspective from religious anthropology is eminently suitable to bring out endogenous models of development. Such a perspective is also argued to illuminate what I claim to be a

crucial development nexus of African religious: the highly constructive environ-
mental conservationalist implications of African cults of the land. The chapter
ends with a brief assessment of a selection of studies in the book under review,
which seek to apply the 'development as religion' thesis in a number of ethno-
graphic settings in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

> Quarles van Ufford, P., & Schoffeleers, M., eds, *Religion and
> development: Towards an integrated approach*, Amsterdam:
> Free University Press, 1988, ISBN 90.6256.673.1, 293 pp.

## 16.1. Introduction[1]

On the occasion of the retirement of Professor J.W. Schoorl as professor of the
sociology of development at the Free University, Amsterdam, the members of
the department of cultural anthropology and sociology of development pro-
duced a *Festschrift*, entitled *Religion and development: Towards an integrated
approach*; the editors are Phillip Quarles van Ufford, a development sociologist,
and Matthew Schoffeleers, an anthropologist of religion (Quarles van Ufford &
Schoffeleers 1988).

The book is excellently produced, carefully copy-edited, and is almost free from
the homespun Anglo-Dutch which is the hallmark of academic publications in
the Netherlands. As far as form is concerned, the reader can only complain
about the absence of indexes of subjects and authors, and about the fact that
the few pages specifically dedicated to Schoorl's own, impressive contribution
to the establishment and growth of Third World studies in the Netherlands[2] are
the only parts of the book to appear in Dutch and therefore largely inaccessible
to an anglophone readership.

But then, the book as a whole is not about Schoorl's work and its impact. Most
of the fourteen contributions, including the editors' ambitious introduction,
make hardly any reference to Schoorl's publications.[3] His impact has been as
much in the field of academic leadership and administration – creating and
maintaining the conditions under which his department has formed, through-
out the 1980-1990s, a productive and congenial productive base for scores of
Dutch scholars – as it has been in the field of scholarly production. Acknowl-
edging this fact, the editors decided to present primarily that organizational
inheritance to the wider world: a broad panorama of the department's research
in progress, organized around the themes of 'religion, power and development'

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[2] 'Woord vooraf' (Preface), Quarles van Ufford & Schoffeleers 1988: ix-xiii; and Schoorl's list of publica-
tions, Quarles van Ufford & Schoffeleers 1988: xiv-xvi.

[3] In the various lists of references as attached to the individual contributions: Quarles van Ufford &
Schoffeleers 1988: 30, 70, 165, 229, 264; in fact, only Geschiere & van der Klei, in a footnote on p. 225,
and Sutherland, pp. 158, 162-163, engage in a somewhat adequate, slightly more than perfunctory
discussion of Schoorl's work.

that has formed its major focus throughout the 1980s, in a way that particularly reflects Schoorl's inspiration. Around this focus, the book's aim is to bring together, for cross-pollination and even amalgamation, the two main descriptive, analytical and theoretical orientations available in the department: cultural anthropology and the sociology of modernization.

In the editors' words:

> 'Exchange of insights and the growing willingness to communicate led the staff [ of the department – WvB ] to move towards a theoretical perspective able to accommodate the various disciplinary interests in ways beneficial to each. Some of our work is presented in this book. We hope that it will interest kindred minds uncomfortable with the rift between anthropology and development sociology and willing to work towards their reintegration.' (Quarles van Ufford & Schoffeleers 1988: vii)

Ironically, one is reminded of mainstream anthropological analyses of funerary ceremonies:[4] although the group has suffered a loss by the demise of one of its members, much emphasis is laid on the continued viability of the remaining group, and its identity is brought out both by the evocation of central symbols that bind them together and by the specific articulation of the group's ties with the outside world, with other groups and individuals – such as the illustrious international colleagues whose names are cited in the preface, and who played a major role in the conferences and workshops which, ever since 1979, helped to shape the outlines of the department's research programme and to generate internal and external debate. What could be a better tribute to the departing scholar than a book demonstrating that he leaves behind an active, creative department, with an integrated research programme geared to both development issues (the modern intellectual's touchstone of societal and moral relevance), and religion (on which the identity of the Free University Amsterdam as a denominational – Protestant – institution revolves)?

Meanwhile the book's topic, focusing on religion, suggests that it commemorates not only Schoorl's contribution but also Matthew Schoffeleers', who as programme coordinator has been a major driving force behind the department's successful research programme, and who as reader (1975-1979), subsequently professor (1979-1988) of the anthropology of religion has done a great deal to raise the department's religious studies to international standards. Among other things, this edited collection is one stanza in Schoffeleers' own's swan's song: he took an early retirement from the department in 1988, but subsequently occupied a part-time chair in Utrecht, from which he ultimately retired in 1998. Meanwhile André Droogers succeeded him in the Free University chair of religious anthropology.

In stature, scope and physical perfection the book does justice to these two fine scholars, and to the research efforts they have shared with their colleagues in the

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[4] Selected studies in this tradition include: Aries 1981; Bloch 1998; Bloch & Parry 1982; Borneman 1996; Derrida 1996; Gable 2006; Gang Chen 2006; Geschiere 2005; Hertz 1960; Huntington, & Metcalf 1991; Stefaniszyn 1950; Tew 1951; Tylor 1871; Vitebsky 1985.

department. The twelve regionally-based case studies cover four continents (North America and Australia being the only omissions), with a concluding thirteenth contribution on the succession of dominant idioms in the study of women and development. The introduction seeks to cover the entire history of the anthropology of religion and of the sociology of development, as a mere stepping-stone towards the integrative perspective on religion and development on which the collection revolves. All this makes the collection more than just a book: it is a proud summing-up of an aggregate hundred years of research, and a programme for presumably a similar volume of research efforts in years to come.

Repeated reference is made to the difficulties that beset current academic work in the Netherlands: problems of funding, and personal agendas overburdened with teaching and administrative commitments (*e.g.* p. vii, p. 51 n. 1). If this collection is more than just a book, it is particularly a meta-scholarly political statement, meant to publicize and justify the department's research during the 1980s, and thus to secure continuing staff establishment and research funding for the imminent future.

This puts the reviewer in a painful dilemma. The social sciences have evolved procedures to review 'just a book', and, in this connexion, for the sake of the testing and accumulation of scholarly insights, incisive criticism is expected, within the limits of codes of honour and graciousness. However, no accepted scholarly procedures have been agreed upon (nor does this seem to be possible) for the dispassionate, public, published critique of such essentially political statements as research programmes involving a score of researchers, millions of Euros, a time span of almost a decade, individual timetables making extensive research activities problematic, job insecurity, the struggle for survival of university departments *etc.*

But then, the decision to disguise meta-academic statements as contributions to academic debate has, in the present case, not been made by the reviewer, but by the editors themselves. Introduced onto the plane of scholarship, the claims advanced in *Religion and Development* deserve to be assessed as contributions to scholarship, for the latter's sake but also in order to improve them and make them less vulnerable when they will eventually be voiced in the political arenas of national university policy and research funding – where, as most of us have painfully experienced, utterly non-academic and often inconsistent standards may be applied.

## 16.2. A unifying theoretical perspective?

The book's preface, introduction, and blurb are so insistent that a reviewer simply cannot refrain from assessing the extent to which the book lives up to the expectations kindled there:

> 'Religion is a crucial factor wherever people define, initiate, adopt, oppose or circum-

vent development processes. In virtue of this, development activities and the responses to them are like a dialogue carried on in code. To learn how and why religion plays its varied roles, to understand the discourse, to become sensitive to the human dimension in social transformation, cultural anthropology and the sociology of development should join forces.

Moreover, an integrated approach in terms of religion will correct the self-awareness of the two disciplines, and put them on the way towards fruitful rapprochement.

This, at any rate, is the thought that inspired a five-year research programme at the Free University, Amsterdam. It is the contention also of the editors of the present volume. The collection of essays offered here is meant to demonstrate its truth.' (blurb text on back cover, Quarles van Ufford & Schoffeleers 1988)

The central focus of the book, therefore, in the editors' perception, is on *religion*: religion as a touchstone, to measure and understand hitherto underplayed cultural and symbolic aspects of development or of the resistance to development – and religion as an all-encompassing category under which even the idea of development, the organizational efforts clustering upon this idea and the specific activities undertaken in the name of development, can be subsumed:

'to get at the religious depth-dimension of development studies and people's reactions to development activities' (Quarles van Ufford & Schoffeleers 1988: 1)

and

'treating development studies and activities *as a quasi-religious phenomenon*' (Quarles van Ufford & Schoffeleers 1988: 1; italics added – WvB).

In both perspectives, it is religion which, as a supposedly more profound and primary concept, is alleged to help us understand development – and scarcely the other way round. In their desire to integrate anthropology and the sociology of development, both editors, each with his feet firmly in either discipline, yet seem to agree that fundamentally the interdisciplinary relation should be one *not of coordination but of subordination*. The anthropology of religion is presented as being eminently equipped to understand the rhetorics, power games and legitimating tendencies of the development idiom in its impact on North Atlantic and particularly on Third World societies; and this should be so, in this editors' opinion, because development is said to have in common with the more obviously religious phenomena that it upholds (and this allegedly suffices, for them, to define these phenomena as instances of *religion* in the first place) two images of the world: one this-worldly, immanent, the tearful valley of everyday misery, – and one other-worldly, transcendent, ideal, after which the former should be modelled.[5]

'By means of acquainting themselves with the experiences and analyses of the developed world – as enshrined in the latter's development models – the inhabitants of de-

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[5] In passing I note that this juxtaposition is predicated on Durkheim's distinction between *sacred* and *profane,* on which Schoffeleers (1978a, 1978b; *cf.* Taylor 1998) has done some work. For a recent perspective on this paradigm, and comments on its potentially ethnocentric, North Atlantic and Judaeo-Christian-Islamic bias, *cf.* my imminent book *The Reality of Religion: Durkheim Revisited.*

veloping countries are supposed to obtain a clearer idea of the problems facing them and the possibilities of overcoming these problems. These models are salvific in that they contain not only a promise but also a prescription to make that promise come true. The development experts are the 'priests' (Berger 1974), who mediate between the two worlds'... (Quarles van Ufford & Schoffeleers 1988: 19).

The editors' argument on this central point, based on an essay by Mary Douglas where she makes a point about religion as involving transcendence, and about bureaucracy as a form of transcendence (Douglas 1982), is far from elaborate – after just over a page it rushes on to discuss the present collection's various contributions in terms of this and related perspectives.[6] Although this review article examines the editors' overall perspective rather than the individual chapters, below I shall briefly return to these and examine the extent to which they converge with the editors' view. But let us first have a closer look at the editors' enamoured Judgement of Paris,[7] which (rather more than Solomon's; *1 Kings* 2: 16 *f.*) makes them attribute such great relevance to religious anthropology for the sociology of development, without attempting to make this relationship balanced and symmetrical.

My doubts on this point are twofold: first on grounds referring to the organization, politics and economics of the social sciences; and secondly on epistemological grounds.

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[6] In passing I note that the major omission in this part of the argument appears to be Max Weber, whose study on Protestantism and the rise of capitalism offered the classic paradigm of 'religion and development' (Weber 1976; ironically, this omission does not reflect a blind spot in Schoffeleers' work in general, *cf.* Schoffeleers & Meijers 1978). Mary Douglas' assertions in her 1982 paper are simply not sufficiently convincing to consider bureaucracy – the dominant form under which the state and development present themselves in the modern world – a form of transcendence and therefore of religion (Quarles van Ufford & Schoffeleers 1988: introduction, p. 18). Reference to Weber's distinction between charismatic, traditional and legal authority (Weber 1969), his discussion of bureaucracy (Gerth & Mills 1974: 196-244) and in general the massive Weber-inspired literature on bureaucracy, would have enabled the editors to avoid this far too facile short-cut from development to religion. Instead, they do quote Weber, out of context, as an exponent of the type of Eurocentrism and progressism that was to become part and parcel of an uncritical variant of the sociology of development (Quarles van Ufford & Schoffeleers 1988: 11-12). This must be, in Weber's otherwise enlightened work, merely an insignificant echo of his times and intellectual climate in general: his own extensive studies on Oriental societies and their religions (in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 1985 / 1919, and in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, 1922) can still be fruitfully consulted by readers seeking a comparative, profound and non-Eurocentric perspective!

In the same vein, the editors attribute to Durkheim (along with Mauss) a belief in the complete *otherness* of alien cultures –

'an idea that was to become characteristic of French anthropology as a whole (Fabian 1983).'

Is this the same Durkheim who, in what the editors rightly identify as his quest for the moral reconstruction of North Atlantic society at the *fin de siècle*, turned to Australian aboriginal religion in order to identify and explain 'the elementary forms of the religious life' – implying, in his assumption of universal human comparability, not the fundamental otherness but on the contrary the fundamental sameness between 'their' society and ours (Durkheim 1912)?

[7] Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca,* E 3.2.

## *16.3. The political context of departmental research*

Some major underlying incentives for the attempt to integrate anthropology and the sociology of development remain outside the scope of the editors' explicit argument. They derive largely from the meta-academic political realm of Dutch academic policy at the national level in the 1970s and 1980s. From the late 1970s onwards, Dutch researchers in the social sciences and the humanities have been told to give up their fragmented individual research, to bundle their efforts, establish linkages within their departments as well as at the inter-departmental and inter-university level, work towards integrated research programmes with a common theme if not with a shared theoretical and methodological perspective. The units of assessment and funding in academic research shifted from the individual level to that of the integrated research programme, such as the one that led to the volume here under review. Within the framework of the *Voorwaardelijk Financiering* – Conditional Funding – system as imposed by the Dutch government,

- the persuasive phrasing of such an overall programme,

- its claims to academic and societal relevance,

- the neatness with which the interrelatedness between its various sub-programmes and that between the participating individual researchers are argued on paper,

have all come to influence, directly and dramatically, success in funding, and even in survival of a staff establishment. And finally, with the development idiom pervading the political scene and public opinion in the Netherlands from the 1970s into the 2000s, funding success in the social sciences and humanities became more and more related to the extent to which a project or a programme might manage to assert an explicit development component.

This is one reason why the editors should go to such pains to argue that, in their book and in the research programme that volume reflects, the relationship between anthropology and the sociology of development should be so harmonious and integrative. Thus, the 'alarming' disciplinary heterogeneity of the programme could be transformed into a very strategic division of labour. The sociology of development would be capable of providing, automatically, the development component to whatever research undertaken within the programme; while the anthropology of religion would live up to the expectations of theoretical and existential profundity, conjuring up the 'founding fathers' of the discipline if not of the social sciences in general, and meanwhile offering us, in the perspective of 'development as religious discourse', such relativist distance and ideological critique of development as might satisfy even the most entrenched anti-development purist of academic production for its own, non-applied, academic sake.

Yet, in an ideal world of relatively plentiful research funding and of a national

government that takes pride in the academic work being conducted at its universities, one should be able to admit that the growing-apart of sub-disciplines and, subsequently, disciplines, is only the most predictable of results of an increase of scale, intensifying rates of production, increasing bureaucratization and professionalization, in academic life over the past fifty years. The editors tend to hold a idealist view of the various disciplines as revolving on a set of leading ideas and founding fathers – although they do seem to realize, at other points in their argument, that these leading ideas are subject to *fashionable* paradigmatic changes (*e.g.* Quarles van Ufford & Schoffeleers 1988: 12). And their own eclectic and cursory treatment of such founding fathers as Marx, Weber, and Durkheim suggests that these names, far from defining an unequivocal body of ideas and paradigms, may be invoked to back up a great many essentially different social-science approaches. *It is in association with formal positions in a state-supported bureaucratic organizational space that academic disciplines emerge, wax and wane, engage in competition or drift apart, persist, change, or disappear: around the condensation cores of professorial chairs, departments, institutes, national and international professional organizations, journals, and the scope for competition, expansion and innovation these positions offer.* It is part of the meta-academic idiom to dissimulate these material facts – this *Primal Scene* in Freudian terms[8] – of academic life, and pretend that what we are basically engaging in as academicians is the pursuit of immaterial ideas and ideals. Elsewhere however, applying Mart Bax's seminal paradigm of the *religious regime*,[9] the editors do admit that the two disciplines might rather be seen as 'interrelated regimes' (Quarles van Ufford & Schoffeleers 1988: 18), as *ideological and organizational conglomerations involved in both an internal and*

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[8] *Cf.* Freud 1953-1974 vol. 17 (1918; the case of the Wolfsman), also reprinted in Gay 1995; Roheim 1920; Flugel 1955: 139n.

[9] Perhaps significantly, a contribution from this distinguished member of the department could not be included in the collection presently under review, a regrettable omission which the editors have compensated by specific discussion of Bax's work, Quarles van Ufford & Schoffeleers 1988: 8-9; *cf.* Bax 1987. Decades after this chapter was written, Mart Bax came under fire from the media and academic integrity commissions, for allegedly having based his accounts of former Yugoslav pilgrimage and violence, not on personal field-work and archival records, but on fantasy. One of the things I detected in that discussion, beyond academics' personal, institutional and paradigmatic rivalry and journalists' well-known hatred and contempt of established, accomplished academicians, was the 'fallacy of misplaced concreteness' (Whitehead 1997 / 1925: 52, 58): science journalists are not active researchers themselves, are not answerable to the professional / disciplinary canons of any particular scientific discipline, and naïvely, and tacitly, take the competitive empiricist industry of natural-science publishing as the only legitimate scientific habitus in existence; that the so-called facts of physics or chemistry are very differently constructed, reified and verified from field-work data in anthropology, never entered into the discussion of Bax's merits or demerits. The scientific facts which journalists naively demand, may not even exist in anthropology! However, the commissions consisted of prominent anthropologists! I was never sufficiently close to Mart Bax to be a competent and reliable judge of his character, field-work, writing and integrity. I have no expert opinion on his Balkan field-work. However, his PhD thesis on Irish Roman Catholicism, under the same supervisor as I had myself (Matthew Schoffeleers, one of the two editors of the book here under review) was generally considered a masterpiece, and I cannot very well imagine that within a few decades Bax's understanding of method and quality had gone down the drain to the extent the allegations claim they had.

*an external power struggle*. This aspect might have been developed further to render the treatment of the relation between the two disciplines less static and less idealistic. More in general, closer assessment of the economics, the organizational sociology, and the internal politics, of academic production – against more of an awareness of the relation between academic production and wider political and ideological structures in modern society – is missed in this argument that seeks to define and to alter the relationship between religious anthropology and the sociology of development. They are simply two disciplines which (for clearly discernable knowledge-political reasons which may have nothing to do with any essential, generic difference in kind), have carved out substantially different 'ecological' niches for themselves on the present-day academic scene, with substantially different relationships *vis-à-vis* meta-academic idioms of legitimation and political support in the wider society. The obvious alternative solution, of divorcing the two disciplines and breaking up the Procustean bed of the joint research programme, is not even explicitly contemplated – again, I should think, for knowledge-political rather than for any systematic philosophy of science. The specific set-up and political situation of the department which produced this volume appears to have persuaded the editors *not* to problematize the desire to integrate and amalgamate the two disciplines involved.[10] Their argument, and their innovative efforts, would stand even stronger if they had perceived this danger, and had explicitly acted upon it.

## 16.4. A note of caution

The epistemological argument is simple. The subordinative relationship between the sociology of development and religious anthropology as advocated by the editors of the book under review, reminds one in a very disconcerting way of a similar subordination which has too long haunted the social sciences:

> *the pretension that our conceptual and methodological apparatus as social researchers is not some relatively ephemeral social product wrought with myriad limitations springing from the make-up of our own society in recent centuries, from its history of global expansion, and from our spe-*

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[10] That the editors are prepared to go to extremes to bring the two disciplines together is clear from the fact that a considerable part of their introduction is taken up with the discussion of superficial parallels in these two disciplines' history. In passing, a third sub-discipline, *women's studies*, is taken aboard, probably because this is the only way to accommodate a chapter that is not in the least interpretable in terms of 'development as religion'. The main parallels between the three (sub-)disciplines appear to consist in

(a)  the fact that their history as summarized by the editors can be divided into three phases, and

(b)  in an overall sort of tendency which could perhaps be called 'routinization of charisma' (Weber 1969).

*cific academic relations of production, – and as such essentially similar with the social phenomena we seek to study with that apparatus[11] – but instead constitutes an absolute (t r a n s c e n d e n t ?) touchstone for these other social phenomena, apparently exists at a different, typically higher, plane of existence (of objectivity, of illumination) from the latter.*

In the form of an equation:

$$\left( \begin{array}{c} \text{reli-} \\ \text{gious} \\ \text{anthro-} \\ \text{pology} \end{array} \right) : \left( \begin{array}{c} \text{socio-} \\ \text{logy} \\ \text{of devel-} \\ \text{opment} \end{array} \right) = \left( \begin{array}{c} \text{social} \\ \text{science} \\ \text{appara-} \\ \text{tus} \end{array} \right) : \left( \begin{array}{c} \text{society} \\ \text{under} \\ \text{study} \end{array} \right)$$

Perhaps the hope of having access, as a globally privileged, intellectually better-equipped minority, to such a higher plane of reality, constitutes an essential element in all specialized intellectual production. But surely, from here it is only one step to calling also the social sciences, and *a fortiori* the anthropology of religion, a form of religion *tout court.* Here again – like in religion proper – the officiants (the scientists); the production and manipulation of symbols; the creation of value and of patterns of evaluation on that basis; and the organizational projection through which the value thus produced can be turned into societal and political power. If religious anthropology is to teach us how to understand the more profound aspects of development and counter-development, where is the ulterior analytical framework that helps us to understand what, after all, is religious anthropology? Can the subordination be reversed?

It is significant that the editors of the collection under review here do not explicitly invite us to explore, symmetrically, the extent to which a sociology-of-development perspective *might illuminate our religious anthropology*, in its turn. Yet this is precisely what many of the contributions which they brought together, succeed in doing; here I think particularly of contributions like Hans Tennekes' on modernization processes in modern Dutch Protestantism (chapter 2), Joop van Kessel's & André Droogers' contribution on the sociology of development and the significance of religion in Latin America (Quarles van Ufford & Schoffeleers 1988: chapter 3), and Philip Quarles van Ufford's piece on the Dutch Reformed Church mission in Central Java, 1896-1970 (Quarles van Ufford & Schoffeleers 1988: chapter 4). Is, after all, the relationship coordinative rather than subordinative, and should we not be looking for a meta-scientific position that can cast light on both? Philosophy? Sociology of knowledge (*cf.* Mannheim 1953a, 1953b)? Societal praxis? Development?

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[11] *Cf.* Asad 1973; Copans 1974, 1975; Leclerc 1972; Fabian 1983; van Binsbergen 1984c / 2003b: 75 *f.*, 2003b, 2015, 2011f; and in general the growing body of literature on 'reflexive' anthropology.
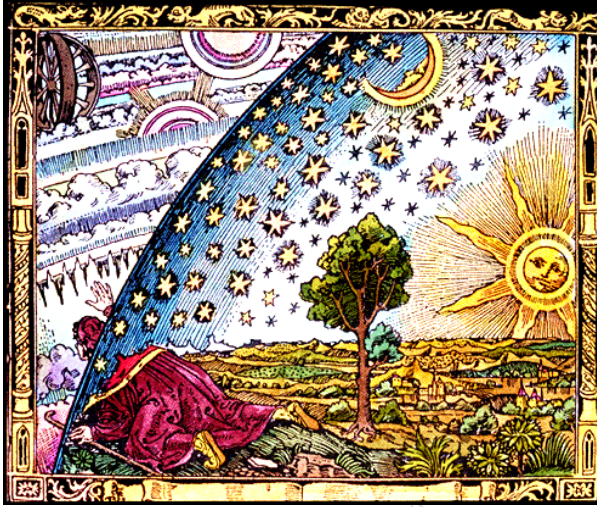
*cf.* van Binsbergen 2012d: 4

Fig. 16.1. An Early Modern scientist (but sometimes claimed to be the Presocratic philosopher Empedocles) literally breaking through the confines of his intellectual horizon.

Considering what a modern, soul-searching anthropology has painfully learned about the nature of the anthropological enquiry in field-work, about the transcultural encounter which defeats and renders ridiculous all attempts at social scientific imposition in terms of the subordinative model,[12] – considering the growing awareness that, in general, the production of scholarly knowledge on the Third World should take the form of a dialogue rather than a North Atlantic hegemonic monologue, I am tempted to suggest that a real touchstone of either discipline does not lie in any of the entrenched academic disciplines within our intellectual horizon. It lies in the eminently practical attempt to break (like the Early-Modern scientist depicted in the popular Fig. 16.1) through that horizon and to allow ourselves to be guided by the pre-scientific transactions, expectations and evaluations as will be engendered between ourselves and that mystical category of 'the people' – be they the members of our research population in some Third World setting, or the development experts with whom we associate ourselves (without necessarily sharing their idiom of redemption, but neither explaining away that idiom as merely instrumental for power aspirations), or even the fellow-members of our department in their day-to-day attempts at academic production and survival.

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[12] C*f.* van Binsbergen & Doornbos 1987; van Binsbergen 2003b, 2015; and extensive references cited there.

This concern is in fact central to many of the contributions in the book here under review (it is most articulate in van Kessel & Droogers' paper), and turns out to have inspired the editors in a more courageous way than their own pronouncements in the introduction would suggest. It is here particularly that *Religion and Development* opens up a new discourse.

## 16.5. Development and religion: Beyond intellectual irrelevance and alienation

For strangely enough, when we subtract the meta-academic implications from the Quarles' and Schoffeleers' argument, the concept of 'development as religious discourse' does ring true to a considerable extent, casting light on the moral fervour, the normative aspirations (sometimes bordering on moral blackmail *vis-à-vis* the sceptics – not to believe in development is was a modern heresy *par excellence* in the period 1970-2000), and the kind of redemptive claims that many of us are familiar with in the context of a development idiom, as used by either North Atlantic experts, Third-World recipients, or the Third World elites who mediate between the two. This *'new piety'*, with all its Eurocentric and neo-imperialist overtones, managed to captivate a considerable portion of late-20th c. CE political, ideological, religious and academic discourse.

Here it becomes clear that it was not just for opportunist, university-political reasons that the editors of the collection here under review sought to integrate a theoretically-inspired religious anthropology with a sociology of development which, , critically or naively, starts out from the popular common-sense concept of *development*. When they speak of 'development as religious discourse', it is not only *other people's* religious discourse (which could then be intellectually appropriated and taken to pieces by religious anthropology), but also *their very own*: as Christians no doubt, but also – and this is generally more relevant in an academic context – as conscious participants in a global society, seeking to lend meaning to their intellectual production, and to discharge their intellectual responsibility by applying themselves to the conditions of the poor, the oppressed and the suffering.

The development perspective is analysed as religious discourse, *not primarily* in order to debunk and expose it in its intercontinental economic and political ramifications: where it does generate power for North Atlantic interests, for salaried expert personnel and for associated elites in the Third World. There is in fact, as I shall point out below, slightly too little attention to these aspects of development in the book here under review. But what does come out in a stimulating manner is the attempt to explore the extent to which we as researchers can share in the development discourse, deepen it without destroying it, trying to make it more effective and more attentive to the voice of the ordinary Third World people we, as anthropologists (including religious anthro-

pologists) have such direct, intimate access to. This aspect of the book amounts to an exhortation to use our scholarly insights in order to better understand the development idiom, as well as the complex, too often ignored responses of the people at the grass-roots level, whose symbolically-coded expressions tell us (more than questionnaire surveys can do) about how they experience their present conditions and the planned change they are subjected to, and what sort of betterment they envisage themselves.

Here Quarles' and Schoffeleers' book begins to suggest attractive, sophisticated alternatives to the type of development-orientated research as used to be mainstream until c. 2000 CE. Such research, especially in the context of consultancies, has too often taken the interests and preoccupations of the commissioning agencies for granted, and shunned fundamental theoretical, and politically sensitive, questions. It is particularly important for such alternatives as suggested in *Religion and Development* to be pursued in research at Third World universities, where because of the paucity of academic research funds and pressure of routine work, consultancy research during the long vacation has increasingly become the main, or only, intellectually barren, and methodologically flawed, option available to local scholars in the Third World.

Therefore, despite the shortcomings of their introductory *tour de force*, the editors of the collection here under review merit praise for exhorting us to explore the ultimate ideological consequences of this aspect of current North-South relations.

Yet one wonders if here, again, an idealistic strand can be detected in their reasoning. A number of awkward questions come to mind.

## 16.6. Awkward questions

Where does the concept of *development* come from in the first place, and what explains its gaining such tremendous global appeal and power precisely as from the 1960s?

To what extent is the modern development idiom merely a secularized version of a religious, missionary idiom of an earlier epoch, rather than a new religion in its own right? (*Cf.*, in Quarles van Ufford & Schoffeleers 1988, the chapter by Quarles van Ufford, and that by Dick Kooiman on multiple religious affliation in nineteenth-century Tracancore, extreme South-West India.)

The editors make the obvious link with decolonization of the Third World; but what remains of the idea of 'development as religious discourse', once we are prepared to expose much development effort as an *attempt to expand the capitalist mode of production beyond its recent Third World periphery, or – if cultural rather than material imperialism fits the bill – as an attempt to facilitate the cultural hegemony of the North Atlantic region?*

Religious anthropology may be well-equipped to gauge the depth of the development idiom as semi-religious, to explore its symbolism and the organizations and transactions into which it ramifies; *yet one seriously doubts if the works of such prominent religious anthropologists as Turner, Fernandez and Douglas do really offer us a sufficient, or even a necessary, basis for the critical ideological discourse analysis of the development idiom as yet another idiom of subordination, manipulation and legitimation.*

In this connexion we need a number of concepts which the editors failed to include in their summary of the anthropology of religion since 1960: the state, class formation, accumulation, modes of production, ideology, hegemony, ethnicity, regionalism, patronage. With these concepts, among others, and with the sophisticated use we have learned to make of them when applying them to national and intercontinental power relations (*cf.* Doornbos & van Binsbergen 2017), we might be able to understand the creation, and maintaining, of such social and political power as springs from and settles around the development idiom. At the back of all this is current world politics and the super-institutions, like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which have dominated the development scene at the material and political level. One cannot analyse the idiom without coming to terms with the material realities, where power and privilege are created and redistributed, and countries have been beaten – notably in the context of Structural Adjustment Programmes – into regional (*i.e.* sub-continental) and intercontinental submission, and made to sink into debt ever deeper. These international connections could have received some more attention in the book here under review.

While we need to pay the keenest attention to the *state* in this context,[13] much more is involved than an *a priori*, 'classic' (Quarles van Ufford & Schoffeleers 1988: 20) opposition between church and state over development activities and institutions (Quarles van Ufford & Schoffeleers 1988: 19) – which is nearly the only form in which the state enters into the editors' introductory argument.[14] On the one

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[13] As is actually done, in the book here under review (but regrettably with exclusive reference to the internal operation of states within their national territories), in the chapters by van Kessel & Droogers already referred to above; by Selier & van der Linden on mobility, housing and policy in Pakistan; by Koster on religion, education and development in Malta; by Venema on modern Islamic revival in Tunisia; and by Geschiere and van der Klei on the Diola uprisings in 1982 and 1983 in Southern Senegal – one of the most significant contributions in the entire collection.

[14] This has to do with the editors' reliance on Victor Turner's (1969) argument concerning *communitas* and anti-structure, which would make religion appear as an eminently critical, prophetic force, challenging the *status quo* and the state which could be considered the latter's expression. Although some of the contributions in the book here under review (the excellent chapters by Tennekes (1988), van Kessel & Droogers (1988), and Schoffeleers (1988)) clearly demonstrate that this prophetic challenging of the state is part of Christianity in both the First and the Third World in the late 20th c. CE, this is by no means a universal constant. The forms and effects which Turner attributes to *communitas* may also be observed in political discourse and collective action in the context of 'secular' politics in modern Third World states: mass rallies; public humiliations, amputations and executions; *etc.* – the state itself makes use, and partly reconstitutes itself, by virtue of the very mechanisms by which it is said to be threatened. From here to the revival of politically naïve (not so say irresponsible) populism of the

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hand, the development industry, since the mid-20th c. CE, has largely been a matter of interstate interaction – to such an extent that even the private organizations involved define themselves by reference to the state – as NGOs (*non-governmental* organizations). Hence development activities are intrinsically, and often in a rather sinister way, tied up with the ruling, exploiting local elites that have appropriated state power in large parts of the world, and positioned themselves as go-betweens between foreign states and development organisations, on the one hand, and people at the national grassroots level, on the other hand (van Binsbergen 2000a / 2003: ch. 3). Alternatively, an examination of the role of organized religion in African countries would show that the contribution of religion to state formation is far more complex, and often far less conflictive, than the mechanical assumption of church / state opposition would suggest.[15] The world religions have greatly contributed to what Schoffeleers himself (1991; *cf.* my chapter 5 above, in response) has elsewhere discussed under the heading of *acquiescence*: the formation, among local people, of attitudes, values, images, skills and organizational forms on which the colonial and post-colonial state could rely in its penetration into rural and urban peripheries, and as such they could be said – on one level of abstraction – to belong to the state rather than, or even while, being opposed to it. For instance, the contribution of organized Christian religion to African political independence movements was typically slow to gain momentum, and often tinged with opportunism. And whereas all over Latin America, and in the Republic of South Africa, mainstream Christian churches may have become very vocal in their confrontation of oppressive state policies, in other parts of the Third World acquiescence and accommodation more readily characterize the relations between world religions and the state. Islamic fundamentalism since the 1970s of course shows the lasting prophetic potential of world religions challenging the secularizing state (*e.g.* the Iranian revolution of 1978-1979 CE), but on the other hand its theocratic tendencies make it eminently amenable to the state once it has managed to appropriate its central institutions – as again the Iranian case demonstrates; but let us agree that the rise of Islamism in the last few decades is too complex and too serious a phenomenon to subsume under facile intellectual categories without a very detailed comparative argument, for which this is not the place.

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2000s and 2010s CE seems only a little step. And when challenge of existing statehood spawns a violent escapist millennary movement, creating an alternative Islamic State away from any tradition of rationality, human rights and humanitarianism, one is brought to realise that, after all, religious anthropology may not be particularly well equipped to come to terms, analytically and theoretically, with some of the most striking aspects of religious expressions in the 21st c. CE.

[15] This has been a major topic in African research for the past half century, and I shrink from offering more than the most limited bibliography: *cf.* Wallerstein 1964; Rotberg 1967; Rotberg & Mazrui 1970; Fasholé-Luke *et al.* 1978; Mudimbe 1997, however, *cf.* chapter 5 of the present book, and my extensive criticism of Mudimbe, in van Binsbergen 2005b / 2015: ch. 12, pp. 383 *f.*; Doornbos & van Binsbergen 2017; all with extensive bibliographies. Specifically for Zambia I can add a few more references: Berger 1974; Cook 1978; Cross 1978; Gewald *et al.* 2008; Legum 1966; Meebelo 1971; Mulford 1967; Rotberg 1965, 1967.

## 16.7. Popular culture and endogenous models of development

To look at development as religious discourse ties in with a major movement in the final decades of the 20th c. CE, calling attention to the *cultural dimension in development* (*cf.* Geldhof *et al.* 1987). By that time, Third World states went through a phase where the more or less deliberate, state-facilitated construction of a national popular culture, with its constructed images and expressions mediated through consumer electronics, became a major legitimating and stabilizing force for the ruling elite.[16] The concept of development – worn to a cliché – has rapidly invaded local discourses all over the world, dragging North Atlantic images of achievement, gratification and prestige in its trail.[17] It features prominently in the transformed images as upheld by modern popular culture – but so do selected elements of neo-traditional local culture, and of the world religions.

In such a context it becomes interesting to assess

- to what extent people's expectations and preferences reflect models of a better life as ingrained by exposure to world religions, or alternatively

- to what extent people's expectations and preferences reflect *endogenous concepts and models of desired 'development' springing more directly from a neo-traditional socio-cultural heritage.*

It is on this point that the contribution from religious anthropologists would be particularly valuable for the study and the practice of development; for they are trained in reading between the lines of formalized normative statements, habitually see the web of social relationships behind the rhetorics of words, and habitually probe for experience, for often non-verbal symbolism to convey meanings and contents that are too subtle, if not too politically sensitive and dangerous, for words. The identification of obliquely phrased *local agendas for desired change* is time-consuming and difficult – partly because their overt expressions tend to be phrased in terms which seem to ignore or oppose modern state penetration and participation in capitalism, and instead may rely on values and institutions which at superficial analysis may only appear to the researcher and the development agent as a irrational desire to return to an isolated, nostalgic, unadulterated past existence at the local level.

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[16] *Cf.* Abu-Lughod 1995; Allman 2004; Appiah 1993b; Bagalwa-Mapatano 2004; Bratton, Michael *et al.* 1999; Crais 2003; Gellner 1987; Haugerud 1995; Held *et al.* 1999; Kaarsholm 1991, 1992; Mazrui 1985, 1990; Momba 2000; Parkin *et al.* 1996; Salazar *et al.* 2002; Spivak 1987; Taylor & Williams 2008; van Binsbergen 1994b / 1995b, 1998d.

[17] Meanwhile we should not forget that it has only done so in recent decades. In this respect one is puzzled by the extent to which the editors of the collection under review here manage to discuss the precise and imaginative historical contributions by Sutherland on power, trade and Islam in the archipelagos of South East Asia, 1700-1850, under the heading of 'development discourse' (Quarles van Ufford & Schoffeleers 1988: 22-23).

## 16.8. An endogenous development agenda and its consequences: the case of the Zambian Nkoya

My decades of research among the Nkoya (an ethnic minority from Zambia's Western Province) as from 1972 has only very gradually made me aware of their possessing just such an agenda (van Binsbergen 1986, 1991b, 1992a), – in the disguise of neo-traditional attitudes and structures that might superficially be interpreted as signs of 'uncapturedness' (Hyden 1980; Geschiere 1984), 'peripherality', 'backwardness', 'a virgin condition with regard to the state and capitalism'. The Nkoya's specific, and changing, responses to the development efforts directed at them by the Zambian state and agricultural, medical and political agencies associated with that state, have been largely determined by the extent to which this local agenda has been perceived by the Nkoya to be either implemented or thwarted – as a result of external conditions.

The Nkoya's clinging, in the 1960s and early 1970s, to medico-religious representations and practices which were largely kinship-based and (in terms of possession and sorcery) expounded a transformed local cosmology rather than cosmopolitan medicine; their reliance on village and neighbourhood courts of law and moots rather than on the state-created Local Court; their passionate identification with neo-traditional chieftainship even if deprived of its executive power and its precolonial and colonial role in the adjudication of local conflicts; their rejection, alternatively, of national-level party politics hinging on the ballot box and democratic representation; their persistence in unsophisticated kinship-organized subsistence agriculture and hunting (redefined by the modern state as poaching), and their rejecting of cash-crop production; their lagging behind in a pattern of labour migration and urban-rural family separation at a time when urbanization, to the tune of increasing autonomy of nuclear families, had been general Zambian practice for decades – my prolonged field research brought out that all these aspects of Nkoya 'intransigence' have not been simple static datums of Nkoya culture based on ignorance or rejection of the wider society beyond the narrow confines of the village, but rather have constituted deliberate retreatist strategies in the face of a world that has denied and suppressed such Nkoya ethnic and political identity as was forged in the course of a hundred years of a collective experience of incorporation, repression and humiliation – largely at the hands of the precolonial Lozi state and its colonial successor, the Barotseland indigenous administration.

This strategy (from which only a small minority opted out – by personal social and spatial mobility, often involving a temporary change of public ethnic identity and language use) was informed, but certainly not dictated, by a cultural orientation which could be considered to belong to the realm of the *longue durée*: in all probability having an existence of several centuries at least (*cf.* van Binsbergen 1992b, and in press (1)). The

specifically Nkoya form of retreat was in line with such key concepts in their culture as:

- *wumi* – 'the good, healthy life of the human individual', only possible in harmony with nature and the supernatural, *i.e.* ancestral, world;

- *kukala shiwahe*, a similar concept as *wumi* but with emphasis on human relations, between the members of a village;

- *shishemi*, '(self–)respect' for the ordained order of nature and society but also, given this framework, the unwillingness or even inability to negotiate or to compromise;

- *lizina*: 'the personal, ancestral name', a small collection of which is a group's most cherished possession, and of which any individual is only a temporary repository;

- *wulozi*: 'sorcery', the disruption of the cosmological order by evil, especially bent on killing the *lizina* and the living prsons bearing them;

- and more important than any of these concepts: *wene*, 'kingship', the incarnation of the most exalted *lizina*, epitomizing the political, social and natural order, impossible to redistribute except at the death of the current incumbent (the *mwene* or king), and with the royal orchestra, particularly the named and venerated royal drums (*mawoma* and *zingoma*), as its most powerful epiphany and *palladium* – drums which were traumatically captured and taken to the Kololo[18] capital (now the seat of the Barotse Indigenous Administration) in the nineteenth century, never to be returned.

In the first half of the 20th century CE, being Nkoya had come to mean: retreating from wider involvement, and, in the face of Kololo / Lozi political encroachment and arrogance, doggedly hanging on to the mere skeleton of what *wene* had been in the previous century.

After Northern Rhodesia had gained Independence, as Zambia, in 1964, this cycle was broken as from the late 1970s. Then Lozi domination at the national and regional level suffered dramatic setbacks; and a trickle of middle-class and even some upper-class Nkoya 'elites' began to effectively mediate, as politicians and agricultural entrepreneurs, between the state centre and the the village, *restor-*

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[18] The Kololo were a Nguni-speaking ethnic group from Southern Africa, who in the context of the *mfecane* (general ethnico-political turmoil) in Southern Africa in the first half of the 19th c. CE, migrated to the Zambezi valley and there captured the Luyana state, which was culturally, linguistically and demographically continuous with other states in the wider region, ruled by the ancestors of today's Nkoya royal titles. Imposing their language and military organisation upon the Luyana subjects, what soon emerged was the Barotse / Lozi language (still largely Nguni) and the Barotse / Lozi political administration. The latter's expansion incorporated the surrounding region in the second half of the 19th c. CE, and forced the kings (*myene*) to submission as royal chiefs or subject chiefs under the Barotse / Lozi Paramount Chief or king (*Litunga*). In is only in the context of this fairly recent incorporation process that the name Nkoya emerged as an ethnonym.

*ing and expanding the influence of Nkoya chiefs* (the state-encapsulated heirs to wene) *at the local and regional level, furthering recognition of the Nkoya ethnic identity at the regional level, and thus rendering the modern political party (which had been reduced to Kaunda's ruling One Party: the United National Independence Party UNIP), the state and its development initiatives acceptable.* Hoping to restore a (partly invented) glorious past of powerful and splendid states in the centuries preceding Lozi domination and colonial rule, and viewing traditional kingship as the cornerstone of a meaningful life-world whose other components are the cult of the land, a time-honoured mythical cosmology, absence of witchcraft, murder and incest (that is, other than royal...), an effective medico-religious life, all-overwhelming kinship, and the kin-based rural economy, this was the agenda for whose implementation the Nkoya has been impatiently waiting throughout the colonial period and the first ten years of independence.

From the urban centres and the district capital, political and cultural 'brokers' who had one foot in the world of Nkoya-ness and one in the wider Zambian society and polity, have stimulated agricultural and educational development and political participation in their home area, where they increasingly take an early retirement on newly established farms: land secured through a combination of modern and neo-traditional claims, and worked by farmhands recruited on a mystifying (covertly exploitative) combination of kinship and wage labour. So here we see the transformation from urban social climbers to rural *kulaks*, with which we have become familiar elsewhere in Africa in the 1970s and 1980s (*cf.* Thoden van Velzen 1977). For nearly all of these elites, the principal venue of their access to the economic and political centre was the education they received at mission schools operated by the South African General Mission (and to a lesser extent the Roman Catholic Mission) in the area. To this day, their interactions are cast in an idiom in which evangelical, neo-traditional and ethnic references merge and in which the collective, brilliantly improvised prayer is a principal rhetorical form. The Nkoya history produced and published as part of this process had to emulate, typographically and stylistically, the Bible; ithe *Bible* itself t was first translated (*Testamenta* 1952) by a Nkoya prince who as a young man had been known as a traditional healer, Rev. J. Shimunika – half a century later, when the foreign (Lozi and Mbunda) elements in Shimunika's use of Nkoya began to give offence, and the Nkoya ethnic association (see below) had grown into maturity, a new more accomplished Nkoya Bible translation was published (2010).

From 1982 onwards the Nkoya elites' efforts were specifically bundled in the Kazanga Cultural Society – a newly formed, urban-based ethnic association effectively linking urban and rural cells, serving as a channel for information and financial support to migrants and rural destitutes, propagating Nkoya language and culture, and focusing its attention on the organization of a newly concocted annual Nkoya cultural festival which, as an expression of ethnic identity and as a tourist attraction, was to rival the famous *Kuomboka* ceremony of the Lozi; the latter celebrates the neo-traditional royal institutions of the Lozi ethnic group as incapsulated in the colonial and post-colonial state.

The appeal to and partial implementation of the Nkoya's own, historically-informed agenda of desired change may have opened up their society for recognizable forms of 'development' in the more usual sense; yet it increasingly becomes clear that the emphasis on ethnic recognition and chieftainship, rather than on class analysis of their position as peasants and marginalized, temporary urban migrants, has made it *the wrong agenda*: one much too vulnerable to well-intentioned but essentially exploitative interests – on the part of the very brokers who brought development and ethnic rehabilitation, and on the part of other members of their class but from other ethnic groups than the Nkoya. Starting out from the Nkeyema Agricultural Scheme / Rural Town on both sides of the tar road linking (since 1972) the Kaoma (formerly Mankoya) District capital to the national capital of Lusaka, these multi-ethnic kulaks' new market-orientated and partially wage-labour-based agricultural enterprises expand ever further into the outlying Nkoya villages, for the first time in history creating a significant pressure also on other land than riverside gardens, and threatening to eclipse the village communities and their historic modes of production, whose very persistence was the ultimate aim of the local agenda in the first place. The villagers' very hesitant small-scale attempts to engage in cash-cropping and to organize themselves for medical improvement, are overshadowed, and ultimately crushed, by the elites' expansion. The remoter villages have now become places of out-migration, not so much to the towns any more, but to areas like Namwala and Mumbwa District which offer better opportunities to peasant farmers.[19] The Nkoya brokers' skillful manipulation of the Nkoya cultural idiom, through their explicit association with the kingship (they invariable stress their close kinship ties with its present-day incumbents) remove these exploitative aspects from overt dialogue if not from consciousness.

This complex and contradictory pattern of 'development' cannot be understood without access to the Nkoya's own endogenous notions of a desirable future, – notions which at first made them withstand explicit development efforts from the outside, and which one or two decades after Independence (1964) allowed them to be manipulated into forms of 'development' which underneath their pleasing ethnic formulae are turning out to be exploitative and disruptive.

## 16.9. Land, cults, protest and development

Speaking of endogenous models of development, from a book co-edited by

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[19] An interesting perspective on the political economic contradictions of this process is offered when, around 1990, South African farmers, worried by the transition to majority rule in their country, sought and temporarily found refuge in Nkoyaland, where Mwene Kahare offered them communal land in the prospect of creating job opportunities for his people. The episode soon ended when the strangers introduced only too familiar racist forms of social and employer interaction in Nkoya lands, reduced original villages to the status of undesirable squatments, and began to register their farms with the Surveyer General in Lusaka as if their were private property. *Cf.* van Binsbergen 1999f, 2012a.

Matthew Schoffeleers one would have expected more of an explicit treatment of the central contribution religious systems have often made to the upkeep of ecosystems in a precolonial, pre-capitalist setting. Under pressure from 'Green' environmental concerns now increasingly captivating national politics in the North Atlantic region, the development idiom has increasingly taken on environmentalist overtones. Well, concern for the land, for nature, is one of the few constants of African religion over most of the continent. Schoffeleers' edited collection *Guardians of the Land* (1979) duly explored this dimension of regional cults and pilgrimage systems in South Central Africa, in line with convergent work by *e.g.* Ranger (1985a) for Zimbabwe and van Binsbergen (1981b) for Zambia. The patterning of essential agricultural tasks, such as the onset of firing the bush and the beginning of the planting season, has combined with perhaps more symbolic agricultural activities such as the tabooing of agricultural labour on certain days, rain-calling, and crop and harvest ritual; all this serves to underpin, if not to create in the first place, a mode of agricultural production where man's reticent, respectful use of natural resources has for centuries guaranteed the relatively stable persistence of the ecosystem.

Now, much of what is called rural development has amounted to either

a. the disruption of time-honoured ecosystems under the impact of cash crop production, enlargement of scale and so-called rationalization of agricultural production, changing gender relations in production, labour migration *etc.* – in short the impact of the capitalist mode of production, or

b. the subsequent attempt to partially redress such ecological disruption.

It remains to be seen if such redress can still make effective use of the regulative potential of territorial cults. Their hold on rural society has usually diminished because of: the introduction of new foci of power; new systems of circulation, movement of people, and distribution; and new forms of organization including Christian churches. When the latter then adopt (in response to local expectations as much as in reminiscence of the rural European agrarian world many expatriate missionaries in Africa would hail from) an ecological, territorial dimension (harvest ritual, prayers for rain) in their own Christian ritual, this could be seen as an attempt to recuperate some of the lost potential of the old cults. The concerns of religion and development would then merge to a very illuminating extent. Religion in this context is not a way of upholding a transcendent, and *alien*, ideal for the transformation of the world, in order to make it resemble that model more closely: the 'developed', *i.e.* industrialized, urban, capitalist North Atlantic world, *etc.* Religion is here primarily an immanent, this-worldly and *local* model for the production and reproduction ('conservation'!) of human society in an immediate natural environment whose essence is that it is only partially transformed by human hands – the typical village setting in much of the Third World up to the 1950s.

In the South Central African case the specific, cosmologically anchored views of social, economic and political well-being as found in territorial cults tend to be at

variance with the changes which, often under the aegis of 'development', occur when the communities involved are opened up to capitalism and the modern state. In Zambia, the cultic response was largely accommodating to these changes in this respect that older symbolic and organizational material was redefined into new, healing cults which were eminently compatible with the new status quo; however, the massive Lumpa cult as founded by Alice Lenshina in 1953, while representing another installment in this ongoing redefinition process, did challenge the colonial state, capitalism and Christian missions in a very articulate way, leading on to the violent 1964 uprising which meant the end of Lumpa (van Binsbergen 1981b). A similar redefinition process, not so much of the ancient cult of the land but of notions of morality, sorcery and evil which appear to have formed its complement for centuries, was channeled into an even more widespread cultic response in South Central Africa: the Watchtower movement, which constituted the main anti-colonial and anti-traditional expression in the 1920s-1940s, and which has since settled down to a theoretically theocratic movement of economically active citizens who reject but do no longer combat the secular state (*cf.* Long 1968; Cross 1973; Fields 1985). The continued presence of the routinized Watchtower response among the Nkoya since the 1940s accommodated (and enabled me to pinpoint) much of the retreatist response described above, even though the theocratic and symbolically purist Watchtower perspective implied a particular selection and partial transformation of the underlying general cultural orientation of the Nkoya adherents. In Zimbabwe, alternatively, phases of acquiescence alternated with the territorial cults' essential support for protest and violent struggle marking both the beginning and the end of the colonial period (Ranger 1967, 1985b; Lan 1985; Kriger 1992).

With regard to the cult of the land, a similar case is explored in the book here under review by Peter Geschiere and Jos van der Klei in their analysis of the Diola uprisings in Southern Senegal, 1982 and 1983.[20] It is somewhat regrettable that a similar line of reasoning failed to inform Venema's otherwise interesting analysis (Quarles van Ufford & Schoffeleers 1988: chapter 7) of Islamic revival in Tunisia in general and in the North-western highlands of Ḥumiriyya in particular (which incidentally also feature in chapters 1 and 2, above). Here, where the Berber-derived (and probably ultimately Pelasgian) cult of the land has taken the form of the veneration of saints and shrines in an idiom of popular Islam,[21] the thwarted economic development of that region, 1950s-1960s CE, did lead to a far greater entrenchment in local, popular religious expressions (partially controlled by the Islamic brotherhoods)[22] than is suggested by Venema's dis-

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[20] That a cult of the land very similar to that of the neighbouring Diola may also form the main element for a particularly well-balanced symbiosis between a viable neo-traditional socio-ritual order at home and massive outside participation in the capitalist mode of production through labour migration, is brought out by my work on the Manjacos of Northwestern Guiné Bissau (van Binsbergen 1984b and 1988a; the present book, chapters 6 and 7); a similar point in van der Klei 1984, 1989.

[21] van Binsbergen 1971a, 1980a, 1985a, 1985b, forthcoming (b).

[22] And not *fraternities*, p. 22.

cussion – only to give way to a greater emphasis on formal[23] Islam, and even to a limited but expanding fundamentalist presence, from the late 1970s onward.[24]

These examples in themselves contradict the editors' depiction (Quarles van Ufford & Schoffeleers 1988: 4 and *passim*) of religious anthropology in the post-colonial era as entirely concentrating on the a-political analysis of symbolism. It is not the only place in the introduction where they fall victim to sweeping generalizations and over-elegant distinctions. Meanwhile the actual insights gathered in this field do converge with the fundamental thrust of their argument, corroborating the significance of the study of even traditional and neo-traditional religion for an understanding of development processes.[25]

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[23] And not *orthodox*, p. 130.

[24] *Cf.* the present book, chapters 1-2, and my work on North Africa as cited in the end bibliography of the present book. In 2002, during my latest visit to Ḥumiriyya (for whose funding I am indebted to the African Studieds Centre, Leiden), this shift to formal Islam had taken considerable proportions. In 1968 I had found popular Islam flourishing around dozens of lesser shrines (sometimes only superficially Islamised, and hard to distinguish from ancestral tombs – and many of them unmistakably megalithic constructions probably from the Bronze-Age) in the valley of Sidi Mḥammad. At its centre the domed chapple (*qubba*) of Sidi Mḥammad Jr dominated the central village's festival ground, overlooked, at scarcely 1 km distance, by the likewise domed chapple of Sidi Mḥammad Sr, on the uninhabited sacred princinct on a hillock overlooking the Wad al-Kabir; both shrines had been built by a European contractor shortly after 1900 CE. In 1968 Qur'anic education was in the private hands of a local villager, who had built a little school on the Northern outskirts of the village of Sidi Mḥammad. Virtually no other adult in the valley was known to ever read the Qur'an, and none was known to perform the mandatory prayer (*salat*) five times a day, let alone observing any of the other four pillars of Islam. The pious visit (*zyara*) to the numerous lesser shrines locally counted as discharging the *hajj* obligation. The forested valleys then still abounded with wild boar, which although prohibited food from an Islamic point of view (حرام  *ḥarām*) were frequently hunted and consumed – on one occasion even by young men on the feast of the Prophet's Birth (*Mawled al-Nabi*), when a delegation was sent to the village store of neighbouring Mayziyya to buy red wine (likewise *ḥaram*) for a further festive touch. Also in 1968, the population was nominally Islamic and presented its popular religion in naïve Islamic terms; however, for at least two millennia the Eastern Atlas mountains have been known as a refuge for a trickle of heterogeneous immigrants, the flotsam of history, and there are several indications that (like elsewhere in rural North Africa) some of that immigrant population used to be Jewish (*e.g.* prominence of the man's name Kashrūd, 'the state of being כשר *kosher*'; spontaneous reference to the injunction that a kid should not be 'seethed' in his mother's milk', *cf. Exodus*, 23:19; Frazer 1918: III, ch. 2, pp. 164 discussed this item of folk-lore at length and revealed its wide distribution, yet we cannot ignore that it was part of a lesser known redaction of the Israelite *Decalogue*). In 2002, when with my eldest son I made the round of the lesser shrines in the valley, *most seemed no longer to display the tell-tale signs of recent worship*: the interior tidied and in good repair, with fresh half-burnt candles, and fresh paper-wrapped packets of incense and candles tucked under simple earthenware saucers. By contrast, a well-endowed, new Qur'anic school had been built at the centre of the festival grounds, eclipsing the *qubba* as a centre of attention, and headed by a well-educated young *mullah* from town, living on outside subsidies, an making good progress in spreading his fundamentalist version of Islam, at least among his young pupils.

[25] One thing that might easily have been drawn within their scope is what I would like to call the *Food for Thought* perspective, after a book title to be published a decade later by Haverkort & Hiemstra (1999). Themselves accomplished agricultural scientists and development workers, those authors (representing a growing movement in both the South and the North) lay the claim that in such vital fields as agricultural production, health care, and other technologies, the best result may be achieved by combining modern, cosmopolitan scientific insights with time-honoured local remedies even if the

## 16.10. Further permutations of the relation between development and religion

With all their emphasis on the subordinative relationship between religious anthropology and the sociology of development, in actual fact the relationship between religion and development in the book under review shows several other significant permutations. An examination of the chapters makes this clear.

In a very loose sense the first seven contributions do deal with 'development as religion', but they do so in rather a predictable if fascinating way: mainly by looking at obviously *religious* institutions such as Christian churches, mission bodies, and varieties of Islam in East Asia and North Africa, and assessing the extent to which an implicit or explicit *development* idiom, cast in religious or in more secular terms, enters into the religious discourse and religious action of the participants involved. A borderline case is Selier & van der Linden's piece, discussing the half-hearted development efforts of the Pakistan government with regard to housing, agricultural production and migration, which leads these authors to the conclusion that such a policy apparently seeks to gain popular legitimacy not so much by its deeds but by its words. Hardly a word on religion or religious anthropology here; in a skillful way, the chapter deals with (thwarted) development only.

What one misses in this part of the book, having read the introduction, is *an empirical study of 'development as religious discourse' in a context that is not already obviously religious*, in the more established sense, in the first place. The study by Selier & van der Linden, or the discussion of changing paradigms in the study of women and development by Lilian van Wesemael-Smit, could have done just that, but these contributors fail to make even the remotest application of the editors' ambitious theoretical schemes. One would have expected that the editors had commissioned one or two chapters specifically devoted to the careful, empirical *in vivo* study of the development industry, to development debates at international and intercontinental meetings, or to the precise mapping-out of the micro-history of specific projects, with real actors, their organizational apparatus, their ideologies, the transactions they engage in among themselves as dispensers, brokers or beneficiaries of development, the perceptions and power relations that are created and transformed, and the moral fervour and missionary zeal generated in that process. Ironically, all this happens to sum up the speciality of one of the editors, Quarles of Ufford (*cf.* Quarles van Ufford 1980, 1986; Quarles van Ufford *et al.*

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latter apparently lack all empirical, scientific grounds – *e.g.* combining Buddhist priests' prayer against locust devastation with a judicious use of pesticides. Haverkort & Hiemstra's argument goes beyond the predictable *placebo* effect: not only is the local population more at ease with development interventions that, to the extent possible, leave their own customs intact and apply them; Haverkort & Hiemstra's strong suggestion is that the immaterial religious intervention, in ways that still baffles science, may even have a tangible positive effect on the growth and health of the crops. Although such discourse has a suspect New Age ring about it, I tend to agree, having myself applied similar ideas in the field of divination (again, without all empirical and theoretical grounds, yet with sometimes impressive results; *cf.* van Binsbergen 2003a: ch. 7, 2015).

1988), who could have matched his historical overview of the Dutch Reformed Mission in Central Java, included in the book under review, with an excellent chapter on the development industry along the lines suggested here. With regard to a somewhat narrower subset of such research (notably into 'the difference between what is so loftily intended and what comes out of it in the field') the editors realize that

> 'Development organizations are often less than enthusiastic about this type of research.' (Quarles van Ufford & Schoffeleers 1988: 16)

They would be! But that in itself is a very good reason to undertake it, especially when the central claims of the book could be very much more substantiated by the results of such prospective research. The claim so proudly stated in the book's blurb is as yet rather unfounded as far as its own contents are concerned. For however interesting the discussions of world religions and development are – they are about 'religion as development' much more than about the illumination which a religious-anthropology perspective might bring when applied to a *secular* development setting that is not already dominated by world religions from the outset.

The second part of the book, covered by the chapters 9 through 13, shows examples of an even more familiar permutation of the relation between religion and development. Here the book's emphasis shifts from 'religion as development' to 'development *or* religion'. The editors identify 'the religious dimension of survival strategies', in societies experiencing the inroads of such forces as commonly associated with development: the modern colonial and post-colonial state, and the capitalist mode of production. Surprisingly, the editors treat this part of the book as one large residual category, which they barely manage to integrate in their general theoretical perspective, and for which they even have to resort to a superficial common-sense categorization in terms of physical, political, cultural and psychological survival, without any systematic foundation in social theory. In fact, what we have here is various endogenous notions of desired change or development as conceived in (more or less transformed) neo-traditional terms. Clearly, the contributors in this section (Kooiman, Schefold, and van Wetering) are eminently capable of subjecting their data to adequate analysis, but apparently the time or the editorial power was lacking to persuade them to present their material more fully in terms of the overall thesis of the book. In particular, that section hardly addresses the inspiring theme of development as a possible solution to scholarly irrelevance and alienation – perhaps with the exception of Schoffeleers' sociological contextualizing of the controversy between Black theology and African theology in the Republic of South Africa (Quarles van Ufford & Schoffeleers 1988: chapter 10).

All this makes for considerable heterogeneity in the book here under review. Rather than attempting to conceal this under the cloak of their introductory claims, the editors should have felt sufficiently confident of the quality and the novelty of the collection as a whole, and set out to explore the systematic advantages of such a variety of perspectives. Now the claim of unity, so obviously unwarranted, can only do undeserved damage to the book and presumably to the research programme on which it is based.

## 16.11. Conclusion

That Phillip Quarles van Ufford and Matthew Schoffeleers did mark, with the book here under review, the beginning of a new discourse on development is obvious. My critical remarks mainly anticipate on the range on new questions that are now opening up for further enquiry and debate: both on the level of theoretical reflection, and in the way of specific research tasks, whose outcomes could demonstrate the potential of the approach advocated.

Here empirical operationalization towards anthropological methods in the narrower sense appears to be a necessary step. It is remarkable that some of the contributions which treat the central inspiration of this book most fully (I am thinking here of the chapters by Tennekes, van Kessel & Droogers, and Schoffeleers) are discussions of existing publications and the deductive construction of a possible interpretative framework, rather than reports of empirical anthropological field research. The more empirical pieces on religion as development are largely based on historical documents, whereas the field-work pieces largely deal with the 'religion *or* development' theme which in the editors' treatment is somewhat peripheral to the book. The application of the methods of participant observation to development in action, in a secular present-day setting, as suggested above, appears an obvious next step.

In conclusion, I should remark that for the further elaboration of these themes, particularly in view of the blind spots identified in my review (epistemological implications, the state, Weber, the international framework of political economy, endogenous agendas of development, *etc*.) fruitful cooperation might be sought, not only with those scholars abroad whose names rightly feature in the preface to the book under review, but also with colleagues in the Netherlands, with whom the Free University research group not only shares a number of research interests and specific activities, but also the same meta-academic political space – for it is largely for that highly specific local space that the book's main argument appears to be written.