

tion among tens of thousands, possibly hundreds of thousand of people of the urban middle class in Central Africa. Did this happen? If it did, how did this influence the political and religious itinerary of the societies of Congo, Rwanda and Burundi in the second half of the twentieth century? If it did, how did it help to explain Mobutuism, its politics of authenticity (which, much like clerical intellectualism, amounted to a virtualisation and thus effectively an annihilation of historical African cultural and religion), the specific form of proliferation of church organisations which took place in Congo, and the general emergence of a modern social order in which Christianity and literacy have become the norm, and African historic religion has been eclipsed or at best has gone underground, mainly to emerge in highly selective and virtualised form in certain practices of African Independent Churches (as well as in a travesty, in middle-class and upper-class modern magic). Is perhaps the violence (more specifically the death) which forms the refrain of Mudimbe's spiritual itinerary, and which I am inclined to interpret as, among many other possible referents, *the parricidal murder on African historic religion*, akin to the extreme and extremely massive violence which has swept Congo, Burundi and Rwanda throughout the second half of the twentieth century CE? Anthropologists like Devisch and my former PhD student Danielle de Lame have struggled with the interpretation of the latter form of violence in Central Africa (Devisch 1996, 1995a; de Lame 1996), and their interpretations, while adding a social scientific dimension to the psychoanalytical and philosophical hermeneutics of Mudimbe, certainly do ring somewhat naïve in the light of Mudimbe's essayistic philosophising, although the latter does lack sociological imagination and manifests the literature scholar's disinclination to think in terms of large-scale and enduring social categories, structural relations, and institutions.

We might yet take seriously Mudimbe's claim that *Tales of Faith* is about any post-colonial individual (Mudimbe 1997: 198), and not just about himself and a handful of fellow clerical and post-clerical intellectuals from Central Africa. Despite his exceptional erudition, cosmopolitan orientation, and unprecedented success, Mudimbe's predicament is to a considerable extent that of the modern Central African middle classes in general. A glimpse of what lies at today's far end of the itinerary that started with Kagame *c.s.*, may be gathered from the following impression, which I owe entirely to Julie Duran-Ndaya's PhD research under my supervision:⁵⁴⁸

O. GLIMPSES OF *LE COMBAT SPIRITUEL* IN PRESENT-DAY CONGO (AFTER JULIE NDAYA). In July, 2000, Kinshasa was the scene of a major church conference of the Combat Spirituel (Spiritual Combat) movement. The conference involved close to 20,000 people, many of whom have travelled to Kinshasa from Western Europe and other places of the Congolese diaspora. Obviously we are dealing here with a highly significant social phenomenon at a massive scale. The movement caters for upper middle class and professional people, especially women. Women also play leading roles in the move-

⁵⁴⁸ This passage based on Duran-Ndaya 1999, *cf.* Ndaya 2008.

ment's organisation. The movement's doctrine and ritual combine an original re-reading of the Bible with techniques of self-discovery and self-realisation under the direction of female leaders. The spiritual battle which members have to engage in, is a struggle for self-realisation in the face of any kind of negations or repressions of personal identity, especially such as are often the fate of ambitious middle-class women in diasporic situations. In order to achieve this desired self-realisation, it is imperative that all existing ties with the past, as embodied in the traditional cultural norms of historic Central African society, and as represented by the (male) ancestors, are literally trampled underfoot. Thus a major part of regular church ritual is to go through the motions of vomiting upon evocations of the ancestors, and of violently and repeatedly stamping upon their representations. The catharsis which this is to bring about is supposed to prepare one for the modern, hostile globalised world. Some members experience very great difficulty in thus having to violently exorcise figures and symbols of authority and identity, which even in the diffuse, virtualised kinship structure of urban Congolese society today have been held in considerable respect. But while this predicament suggests at least some resilience of historic African religion (otherwise there would be no hesitation at trampling on the past and the ancestors),⁵⁴⁹ it is practically

⁵⁴⁹ On second thoughts, I wonder whether the trampling on ancestral representations must necessarily be understood as an unequivocal act of disrespect and rejection (as it would be in North Atlantic eyes), and could not *originate*, at least, in a positive spiritual expression in its own right. The linguistic, cultural and historical continuities between Congo and Botswana, North and South of Zambia respectively, are very considerable and extend even to shared trans-continental influences from South Asia – although what I learned in decades of Zambian field-work (the matrilineal and often effectively ambilineal, undercurrent in Zambian life, with the numerous multiple, parallel and intersecting kin ramifications its produces between people over a very extensive social and geographical field, with the general impression of intoxicating unbounded resourcefulness, possibilities, joking and manipulability) proved much easier to apply in a Congolese diasporic environment (in Europe – I have never been to Congo) than in the emphatically patrilineal, formal, paternalistic and restrictive Botswana social milieu of speakers of Tswana, Kalanga and Ndebele, with its firm boundaries and its lack of flexibility and of humour. Anyway, in the light of such qualified continuity, I cannot help making the observation that in various Botswana settings, the human act of trampling the earth (I may be forgiven for hearing echoes of geomancy here, cf. Fig. 5.1 above, and van Binsbergen 2011: 228, with Ancient Egyptian and Coptic parallels, also cf. *Exodus 17:6 f.*) is at least ambivalent, and predominantly positive, a sign of respect and of acknowledgment of the living's dependence on the dead. The idea has a much wider application: who wants to draw the attention of the Earth as a repository of ancient power, has to strike it; thus in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (Fontenrose 1980 / 1959: 72, Homer 1914 / 7th c. BCE) the Greek goddess Hera, furious that her husband Zeus had parthenogenetically produced a child (Athena, born when Hephaistos hammered upon Zeus' head!), strikes the earth with her flat hand and calls upon Heaven, Earth, and the Titans, to grant her a similar privilege – and the result was Typhaon or Typhon, Apollo's great adversary at the site of Delphi; by the same token, the earth is forcefully opened to make an exit for Kore / Persephone, Demeter's daughter and Hades' captured spouse (*Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 1 – Homer 1914 / 7th c. BCE; Kerenyi 1969; Fauth 1979c). A forceful stamping movement (leading, as I found to my own detriment, to injury if executed for hours on the concrete floors now standard in Botswana housing) is the main element in *sangoma* dancing, and one that is constantly emphasised in *sangoma* training – supposed to call forth the ancestors whose main dwelling place is under the surface of both the earth and of natural waters. The same movement is seen in Tswana traditional dances which are taught at primary and secondary schools, and performed by many dancing troops in the country. When my close friends, a Christian couple of two highly-educated members of the Botswana upper middle class, brought me along to visit their parents' graves at the Southern Botswana traditional town of Kanye, they did not –

impossible for diasporic Congolese to tap, for further spiritual guidance, the resources of historic African religion in the form of divination, therapy and protective medicine: in the years 2000s, for instance, not one reliable and qualified Congolese specialist in historic African religion (*nganga*) appeared to be found in The Netherlands or Belgium.

The make-up of this topical situation is reminiscent of that of the clerical intellectual mutation proclaimed by Mudimbe half a century ago: the literate and Christian format appropriated as self-evident yet subjected to personal selective transformation, the rejection of an ancestral past and of African traditional religion, the total inability to derive any spiritual resources from the latter, and the effect of being propelled into a mutant cosmopolitan cultural and spiritual solution which is African by the adherent original geography and biology, but not in substance.

Perhaps it is illuminating to conclude with a perspective that combines universalism and particularism: a tracing of the surprising parallels that, from two so very parts of the globe, seem to be manifested in the lives of Mudimbe and myself (cf. van Binsbergen 2015).

12.11. A comparison between Mudimbe's itinerary and my own

My own intellectual itinerary started out from a different but similar initial position from Mudimbe's, for a long time ran parallel to his, but precisely with regard to African historic religion reached the opposite outcome, largely because that form of religion was not part of my historic cultural heritage as it might have been of his.

Mudimbe is a capable, creative and courageous thinker – one who can stand the vertigo of high anxiety, being fundamentally homeless and alone without other illusions than the quest for a placeless science and truth. To him, the rest is 'incredible', is *belles lettres*. Mudimbe's *Tales of Faith* amount to an 'act of faith' in the sense of its literal Spanish equivalent, *auto-da-fé*, the most terrible destructive act to which Roman Catholicism as a regime of control was capable of in the context of the Early Modern conquest of the New World. The mutation which produced clerical intellectualism and thus gave us Mudimbe, was also an *auto da-fé*, serving to eradicate historic African religion from visibility

for they were emphatically Christian – bring any water, liquor, meal, meat, meatstock or calico (which well into the colonial era constituted standard ancestral offerings in Zambia and Botswana), but they did make a point of repeatedly trampling and stamping on the graves – as a form of illumination, rather than as a sign of disrespect. Could it be that the trampling within *Le Combat Spirituel*, even though now meant as a transgressive negative act symbolically equivalent to vomiting, is in its *pejorative interpretation of today* yet a transformation of a bodily expression that historically may have constituted a *positive* cult, even in Congo? Such redefinition of function and meaning while the overt behaviour in question remains more or less unaltered, is very typical of religious change under conditions of (proto-)globalisation.