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THERAPEUTIC EFFICACY AND CONSENSUS AMONG THE ALUUND OF SOUTH-WESTERN ZAIRE

Filip De Boeck

In his seminal study *The Quest for Therapy* Janzen (1978) analyses a complex regional medical system among the Koongo of Lower Zaire. This medical complex consists of four interrelated and coexisting alternative therapeutic systems (Western medicine, *banganga* or traditional healers, kinship therapy and purification/initiation rituals). Several kinds of therapies and therapists are needed to terminate a case satisfactorily. The way in which the alternative therapies are chosen and used is largely the responsibility of the patient's kinsmen. Janzen therefore introduced the concept of *lay therapy management*, which has since found its way into anthropological writing (see Janzen 1987).

Throughout his study, one of Janzen's major concerns is with *consensus* in this pluralistic medical framework. In order for the medical care to be effective, a social and cognitive consensus is needed between the practitioner and/or healer, the sufferer and the kin group, who act as a lay therapy management group. All of us are familiar with the type of consensus upon which the authoritative relationship between a medical practitioner and a patient is built. This relationship differs considerably from that between a traditional healer and his client. According to Janzen the traditional healer will most commonly appeal for authority to the sufferer's therapy management group, 'which is asked to exert appropriate pressures toward compliance on the sufferer' (1978: 225). Alongside this second type of relationship a third possibility exists. A corporate group can itself become pathological and in need of therapy. When this happens, and the kin group itself becomes the focus of the therapy, another form of consensual context is needed. The members of the kin diagnostic group will try to determine collectively 'which ill feeling or conflict caused the illness, thereby permitting therapeutic action to proceed' (*ibid.*). It is on the basis of agreement that legitimate therapeutic action can be undertaken. Overall, for Janzen the collective orientation of Koongo therapeutics, based on social consensus, aims at discerning 'the social and psychosomatic causes of illness' (1978: 9) and to re-establish social order: 'Healing in the African context entails not only the amelioration of symptoms but also the clarification of diagnostic issues and the creation of social consensus' (1987: 79).

The issue addressed in this article is: what happens to the quest for therapy when some of the people involved in the conflict and believed to be at the origin of the cause of the trouble refuse to seek reconciliation with the other parties, and no consensus can therefore be achieved? Among the Aluund of the upper Kwaango, in south-western Zaire, therapy management very often does not result in the final solution of the social causes of misfortune and the re-establishment of social order by means of a consensus between the parties involved. And even when a consensus is reached, it must, by definition, appear as only partial and never final. The

therapeutic action therefore may prove to be of a partial, temporary nature on the microsocial level, and may lead to yet another quest.

Probably the different emphasis on consensus is due to some important differences between the Koongo and Luunda settings. Although there exist many striking similarities between both settings, one of the main differences lies in the structure of authority, which introduces a variable that possibly accounts for different outcomes. Whereas the Luunda setting is characterised by hereditary chiefship and a strongly centralised polity, the North Koongo (Manianga) setting as described by Janzen (1982: chapter 2) is an essentially acephalous society. A second difference lies in the absence of powerful divinatory institutions among the Koongo. In the Luunda setting, however, the understanding of lay therapy management as a process should take into account general patterns of control such as the (coercive) force and institutional control of the political and judicial context, as well as the role of the diviner's oracle with regard to therapeutic choice and management. These dimensions may help to understand representations of etiology and their management, because they contribute to a broader knowledge of the dynamics out of which the conflict or problem originated, as well as of the conflict's mode of action upon the sufferer (cf. Feierman, 1985: 82).

Among the Aluund two different but interlinked and overlapping strategies may, often simultaneously, be followed in the event of such problems as illness, misfortune or death.¹ The first strategy is situated within the political and judicial domain, the courts of political authorities and the councils of elders and customary judges that are responsible for the maintenance of the community's social order. These elders arbitrate disputes, 'slice' palavers and settle interpersonal and intergroup problems. The second strategy lies in the consultation of a diviner and the subsequent undertaking of therapeutic action by a ritual specialist. Whereas the first strategy focuses primarily on the social body, the second strategy is more concerned with the physical body. Nevertheless, very often the politico-judicial domain actively interferes and takes part in the pragmatic interpretation of the diviner's oracle, as well as in the explicit therapy, since their concerns—the undoing of the confusion and the restoration of the harmony between the physical and the social body—do usually overlap. The micro-sociology of the kin group (involving both matri- and patrilineal sides) interpenetrates both the domain of the therapy and that of the elders and judges.

I do not believe that the possible lack of consensus, the partial nature of diagnostic sets, therapy proposals and therapeutic action implies that the therapy itself should be ineffective. Following Tambiah (1985) and Devisch (1984), I view (therapeutic) ritual as a performative event which has an auto-implicative force. Ritual is thus a partly creative process, characterised by its generative potential to produce meaning and to integrate between body—self and social body. As performative 'utterance' ritual does not mimetically mirror social reality. Rather, ritual realises and invents itself in and through the performance, just like the 'telling of a tale invents/interprets itself', as the Aluund say (*kut ka chishimw kukaluum-bunun*). Its meaning-value is therefore of a different order. This does not

mean that ritual may not have a practical effect. But its therapeutic intentionality is embedded within the ritual as auto-implicative act. The Aluund say, for example, that in performing a hunting ritual the capacity to hunt will be 'invented' (*-luumb yaang*). This is the intentional effect of the hunting ritual in question. The effect is, however, presupposed by the illocutionary force of the ritual act. Similarly, 'healing is as healing does' (Sindzingre, 1985). The performance of the healing ritual practice pragmatically achieves the ritual's own aim. This view of therapeutic ritual does not contradict my previous claim that the kin group's social problems are not only treated outside the therapy in the politico-judicial domain, but are also part of the ritual therapeutic process itself. To say that ritual is self-constitutive does not mean that it is blocked off from social reality. Ritual is open to 'contextual meanings' that may make its 'basic core' (Tambiah, 1985: 125) flexible, precisely because of its idiomorphic capacity. Therapeutic ritual will creatively integrate and adapt to the specific, singular idiosyncracies of the problem, the specific situation and circumstances in which the problem occurred, the specific personal characteristics and life histories of those involved, and so on. In order to understand fully the capacity of therapeutic ritual creatively to produce innovative meaning, I will view ritual as processual action, as an organic whole which realises itself in and through its temporal, sequential unfolding (cf. Werbner, 1989). Therapeutic ritual will thus be presented as sequential praxis, unfolding itself in a network of interwoven meaning.

Since the logic of medical systems and therapeutic choices is a situational one in need of a contextualising alongside a systemising approach, I will illustrate my understanding of therapy management, therapeutic efficacy and social consensus among the Aluund by means of one particular and rather elaborate case, to which my attention was drawn by a 'revelatory incident', as Fernandez (1986: xi) has called the specific charged moments in human relationships which an anthropologist may encounter during fieldwork and which force him to reconsider his neatly built-up schemes of a more 'demiurgic' type. The case in question shares all the characteristics of the plural medical system. During the course of events the actors subsequently consulted diviners, herbalists, ritual specialists and also, though only marginal, primary health care facilities. Alongside these therapeutic instances the political authority and the council of elders were also actively involved. Before looking more closely at the case in question, I first provide a brief outline of the Luunda socio-cultural context, as well as Luunda etiology, divinatory diagnosis and possible therapeutic options.

THE SOCIO-CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF THE ALUUND

The Aluund occupy the most southerly point of the upper Kwaango, an area referred to as the Mabeet, or 'the Valleys'. Numerically weak,² the Aluund live dispersed in small hamlets and villages over an immense mountainous landscape of savanna, bush and rain forest along the Angolan border, near the rivers Koombo, Waamba and Tundwila.

As among the Koongo (Janzen 1982: 40) the overall social structure of the Aluund is characterised by a system of double unilineal descent, which

FIG 1 *The location of the Aluund and their neighbours in Zaire*

must be understood in the case of the Aluund not as the usual combination of patrilineal and matrilineal descent but as combining the matriline of both one's father's side (*ku utaatukw*) and one's mother's side (*ku umaakw*). The dual complementarity between agnatic and uterine principles is expressed in the Aluund's beliefs on the transmission of life. The basic raw blood-stuff of which life is made is passed on by the man through the male seminal fluids, referred to as the 'blood of children' (*mash ma waan*), but it is in the female womb that this raw blood-stuff is processed and cooked into vital life force (*mooy*). Hence one's dual membership. Agnatic belonging defines the social privileges and status of every individual, but lineage membership is reckoned in the mother's matriline, through a common, female ancestor, source of female regenerative powers, situated in the fourth or fifth ascending generation above ego, and represented by a senior woman, called *kanam*, in the third ascending generation of the matriline. Residence, however, is patri- and virilocal. The agnatic residen-

tial household unit, called the 'hearth' (*jii kw*), is headed by a responsible elder or *leemb wiji kw*, who will normally be ego's (classificatory) father or older brother. These units are segments of the lineage or 'womb' (*vumw*), equally headed by a senior elder or *leemb wivumw*, normally one of ego's maternal uncles.

The lineage-head of the dominant (land-owning) lineage will also normally be responsible for the village (*mwaant wa ul*). Among the Aluund a lineage is marked by its tendency to segment. In principle every residential unit may constitute the beginning of a future lineage. Normally it is the senior elder (*leemb*) of the lineage, who will take the decision to create a new residential segment when the old one becomes too big, or when one of its members has attained an important status as elder and in turn becomes the elder responsible for a family unit. Related residential units (*maji kw*) are normally located in other villages, and other people and families may constitute a part of the village without being related to the village's longest established lineage. This is true of almost all major villages of the Mabeet. These do not normally consist of *maji kw* that belong to one lineage only. Others, the *ayilaamb*, 'the strangers', or the *iin kweez*, 'the ones who come', settle in the village as well. They form separate residential household units but have to respect the senior elder of the village's oldest dominant lineage, and they come under his authority. They are under the obligation to hand over tribute (*milaambw*) (from the hunt, the field, the wine, etc.) but they do not share with him the income and resources of their *jii kw*'s individual members as is the case with household units that belong to this dominant lineage.

The largest villages in the Mabeet do not number more than 200 inhabitants. The political superstructure consists of the paramount authority of Nzav, assisted by some fourteen sub-regional title-holders, who followed Nzav during the migration from the Luunda nucleus in Shaba, some three to four centuries ago. All the major titles are distributed according to a system of perpetual kinship and positional succession. Only the paramount title of Nzav is inherited along strictly patrilineal lines from father to son.

PATHOGENESIS AND THE LUUNDA AETIOLOGICAL GRID

Chisaku, chisuung and chiteel

Popular Luunda aetiology and diagnosis distinguish between three possible 'causes' (*yisaku*, sing. *chisaku*) of illness, death and misfortune: death (*lufw*), sorcery (*ulaj*) and non-ancestral spiritual agencies (*mahaamb*). Among the Aluund, ritual institutions exist for more than twenty-five named *mahaamb*. Some of the more important are *yaang*, *naambu*, *ubwaang*, *kaleemb*, *ngol*, *njiing*, *chimbaand*, *zuw*, *chitot*, *mbuundjuk* and *kamwaadi*. Particular forms of disease and misfortune are associated with particular *mahaamb*, and these spiritual agencies can also be invoked to obtain something. *Mahaamb* may be either benevolent or malevolent and may consist of both a positive and a negative side. They may promote someone's well-being and luck, but they are also capable of provoking diseases of all kinds, death and misfortune, especially when they have been 'neglected', i.e.

when their ritual installation has not taken place for a long time. To install a *haamb* is to appease its anger.

But sometimes things may be more intricate and two 'causes' may be operative simultaneously. The Aluund consider, for example, the possibility that a 'sorcerer [*mula*] may hide behind a *haamb*'. The sorcerer may use a *haamb* instrumentally to harm the victim, so that the *haamb* will be blamed, while the sorcerer is not found out. Anyway, the popular aetiological concept of *chisaku* attributes the origin of the problem to the intervention of malevolent entities, according to a logic of linear or instrumental causality: ancestors, sorcerers and spiritual agencies. Each of these three 'causes' may involve either one's agnatic and/or one's uterine descent group. Some of the *mahaamb* are transmitted matrilineally, others bilineally, and some only within chiefly lineages. The ancestor as 'cause' may be someone from either the agnatic or the uterine group, for, although common descent is reckoned within the matrilineage, individual names usually derive from ancestors within the patriline. As to the sorcerer, he may be located either among the agnatic (*ku utaatukw*) or among the uterine (*ku umaakw*) relatives. The learning and the passing on of the knowledge to become a sorcerer (*-baweesh ulaj*) are possible either from 'father' to 'son' or from mother's brother to sister's son. As the Aluund observe, 'it is the one with whom you eat who will also kill you' (*mukween waadiaang neend waw ukukujip*). Ritual hindrance or straight sorcery occurs only between relatives with whom one is most closely related in terms of consanguinity, commensality, corporeal intimacy or conjugality. In fact a large degree of interdependence exists between close relatives both on the level of the residential segment (*jiikw*) and on the level of the lineage (*vumw*). This interdependence between the members of the lineage is understandable, since Luunda representations have it that a sorcerer, ancestor or *haamb* never acts without reason. The 'cause' has to be provoked (*-kokil yiteel*) to act against one. As such the *mwiin yiteel*, 'the one who provoked' the cause, bears as big a responsibility for the harm done as the actual agent (*chisuung*), i.e. the actual sorcerer, ancestor or *haamb* that was the origin of the cause and carried it out. As such, one's behaviour may put the lives of one's relatives at risk through provoking a sorcerer, ancestor or *haamb* into action. Hence the Aluund say that 'the big sorcerer is the one who provoked' (*mulaj mujim udi mwiin yiteel*). Therefore deviant behaviour (lack of respect, neglect of one's familial duties, refusal of hospitality, physical threats, insults and so on) from a member of one's household or lineage is very much dreaded, since it may provoke a sorcerer, a *haamb* or an ancestral spirit (*mufw*) to act against one through ritual means. Moreover, it is believed that a sorcerer never directly attacks the 'provoker' him- or herself. Aluund say that 'the provoker will not die' (*mwiin yiteel kakufaangap*). Instead the agent who effects the 'cause' will try to strike the 'provoker' by 'eating' and eventually eliminating one or more of his/her close relatives. No relatives are safe from this vengeful action, but one category of kin relations is especially vulnerable: that between a mother's brother (*mantw*) and his sister's son (*mwiipw*), since this relation forms the backbone of the matrilineage and thus of the transmission of the vital life flow (*mooy*) that continues the lineage. The

maternal uncle represents the location of *mooy* on the mother's side, in his capacity of 'mother without breasts' (*maakw wakaadi mayeel*). As such he also has the means to withdraw the vital life force from one, thereby bending the life flow back upon itself, like 'a dog that eats its own placenta' (*kabw waadi zamu dieend*), as the maternal uncle who kills his sister's children by means of ritual weapons is called. As such a maternal uncle has a strong, literally vital hold over his sister's children. His is the main authority in their lives.

Because of the structural tendency to locate the origin of the problem, especially when the cause of illness or misfortune is 'sorcery', within the matriline, it is said that 'it is not good to stay with those of the mother' (*akweetw ku umaakw kaamb kuyiip*). Although sorcery accusations and maledictions do occur between agnates (and especially between ego and ego's classificatory father and father's sisters, ego's 'female fathers' or *taat a mubaand*), they are far more frequent within the matriline, and especially between mother's brother (*mantw*) and sister's son (*mwiipw*). For if the former is the *mwiin chiteel*, the one who provoked because of his neglect or infraction of his obligations, the 'cause' (*chisaku*) attacks or will be aimed at the latter, and vice versa. It is said, 'If the manioc is within the enclosure, one has first to destroy the enclosure, so that the wild boar may eat the manioc' (*kaandiing aang udi mu mulal aapulaany bil mulal mband choom aadi leel*). The agent embodying the *chisaku* will, for example, attempt to attack the elder who is jurally responsible for the provoker in order to harm the latter. Also, in the case of a matrilineal cross-cousin marriage, a male ego's maternal uncle may at the same time occupy the position of wife-giver and become ego's *chiwaaj*, or relative by alliance. This relationship of *uwaaj*, namely the relation between in-laws, implies 'otherness' and thus a heightened formality, together with a sense of underlying hostility, as many Luunda tales that dwell upon the *uwaaj* theme attest. The *uwaaj* also adds a possible source of conflict between a maternal uncle and his sister's sons.

The *chisaku* constitutes a vengeful attack upon the kin group. This attack, provoked by a *mwiin chiteel* and carried out by an agency (sorcerer or ancestor) from within the kin group, may, however, paradoxically reinforce the solidarity between those relatives: 'If a wild boar feeds on the field of a younger sibling, you must chase it off, otherwise it will feed on the fields of the older sibling tomorrow' (*Choomb aang waadiaang mu chilaang cha mwaankaank muyiingilaw aang chaamwaamw diamashikeedi mu chilaang cha mukuluump chakadiay*). Ranks are closed for vengeful or therapeutic action, in order to prevent the *chisaku* eliminating the whole kin group. It is at the level of the lineage, and on the responsibility of the lineage head, that action is undertaken by relatives of the victim. Very often, however, the problem is presented at an interlineage level as well and the elders of the village's other lineages, as well as the head of the major and longest established lineage of the village, will be consulted. The council of elders may even advise a particular choice of action.

It appears that popular aetiology and diagnostics among the Aluund focus primarily on a clear-cut, fixed system of linear causal explanation, involving the search for the *who* (i.e. the agent or *chisuung*) and the *what*

(the cause or *chisaku*) of the problem. At the same time the concept of 'provocation' (*chiteel*) opens up this fixed aetiology to a more variable and dynamic or hermeneutic approach to the internal process of the problem, in terms of *how* and *why*. This second approach is realised for the most part in and through a divinatory aetiological analysis in which the first approach is also actively engaged. The two paths of causal explanation and interpretation do not correspond to a dual typology, but are simultaneously at work in various degrees.

Forms of divination

The Aluund know various forms of divination which lie on a continuum from linear causal explanation to an interpretation that scrutinises the problem's internal dynamics more closely. All divination, however, takes as a starting point the common aetiological grid and seeks to determine the cause, whether it be, for example, an ancestor or a sorcerer who harms the residential unit, as well as the provocation or *chiteel*. To divine (*-poong*) is to apply this double causal aetiological grid and 'to draw the path'. I will briefly describe three different modes of divination, since all three occur in the case that I will present.

The first type of divination used is *kakuunk*, an original Luunda form of divination which is very widespread and open to everyone, for no primary initiation or knowledge is needed, except for the knowledge concerning the ritual preparation of one's wrist in order to have a firm 'grip' (*chilam*) on the divining instrument. The *kakuunk* divination technique consists of rubbing the handle of an axe on the ground while posing questions to it. When the axe stops or 'shows its grip' the answer is affirmative. As a simple and therefore widely spread divination technique it is used for minor as well as major matters: for example, to determine whether to travel to another village will affect one's health, or to recognise a symptom or illness and to label it, to find the instrumental cause of illness or misfortune (in hunting, for example), and then to identify the agent, reconstitute the origin of the problem and suggest action to be taken (cf. Sindzingre and Zempléni, 1981).

The second divinatory form, called 'to cause the gun to provoke a quarrel' (*-sakeesh ut*) or 'gun of the bird' (*ut wa kajil*) is as widely used as the *kakuunk* and consists of shooting a bird by means of a muzzle-loader. The birds aimed at for this purpose are very common small birds, such as sparrows. People aim at birds perched in trees. As with *kakuunk* the normal starting point of the 'gun of a bird' is the possible *chisaku* or cause. Before shooting, a specific proposition (*lukas*) is spoken over the gun to 'charge' it (*-som ut*), while the rifle barrel is tapped with a twig. In case of an investigation into the cause of death, the gun will usually be charged with 'the gunpowder of mourning' (*fuundaang ja pa ntaamb*) that was put in contact with the deceased person's body (namely the right hand) by the *leemb* of the deceased. Such a gunshot is referred to as *chikas cha mufw*, 'the arm of the dead person'. Depending on the question that is 'fired' at the bird, hitting or missing a bird confirms or negates the proposition, which will usually be a question as to the identification of the *chisaku*. The way in which the 'bird of the propositions' (*kajil wa nkas*) was shot may

provide an indication as to the reason why, that is, the *chiteel* that provoked the 'cause'. Some possibilities are, for example, *nswaadi*, *kanu*, *pa mbuny* or *ku mukot*. In the case of *nswaadi* only some feathers have been touched, which means that the 'proposition does not hold' (*lukas karwiilap*) or only indirectly touches upon the problem. *Kanu* ('mouth') indicates that the bird was shot in the head or the bill, and signifies that the problem originates in an altercation. *Ku mukot* ('in the rectum') indicates that the problem arises from adultery or other disruptive actions (*makoj*, *maswaaaj*, *mphalu*) that create a confusion between the boundaries of the physical and/or the social body. When the bird is hit in the chest or the heart (*pa mbuny*) it indicates that the problem originates in the matriline because it passes on the vital flow of life (*mooy*) that is situated in the heart.

The third and most elaborate form of divination that occurs in the case I will present is the *ngoomb ya madiiy*, a particular form of oracular divination of Cokwe origin that forms part of a ritual complex or institution called *ngoomb*, the knowledge of which is passed on matrilineally and by means of an elaborate initiation. The *ngoomb* oracle may be consulted for the same kinds of problem, but usually the *ngoomb* diviner (*mwiin ngoomb*, *mwiin kupoong*) is consulted only when the problem has become really serious—most often after someone has died. Therefore the *ngoomb* diviner is called 'the one who leads the dead through the bush' (*mwiin ngoomb wabudish av mwi mpat*). Usually the consultants try other divinatory devices first. *Ngoomb* diagnostics are the ultimate divinatory recourse when the problem persists and previous investigations and therapeutic interventions have failed to solve it. Long journeys are made to consult it. The *ngoomb* oracle enjoys the greatest prestige and is considered to be the most trustworthy because it requires all the parties involved, whereas other forms of divination are carried out on a more individual basis. Nevertheless, its consultation is often postponed, for as likely as not the oracle's outcome may create further tensions within the consulting group. The subsequent case forms an illustration of this.

The delegation that goes to consult a *ngoomb* will have the character of a joint venture. The diviner's payment, called *chikodi*, *poong* or *mukolmon*, is raised by both the agnatic and the uterine side of the person for whom the divination is carried out. The delegation itself will consist equally of both agnatic and uterine representatives. Moreover, the consulting group will be accompanied by an independent observer (*kach a milool*), 'the one who delivers a report' and objectively 'presents the *ngoomb*' (*-lakul ngoomb*) to the head of the village's senior lineage.

The various divinatory modes all treat the same kind of problem, which may be viewed as a threatening transgression of, or confusion between, the 'boundaries' either on a personal bodily level or on the level of the social body, as spatially delineated by the residential and household unit. Examples include: gynaecological troubles such as sterility (*wuumb* for women, *ukob* for men), abortion (*-dioosh vumw*, 'to cause the womb to come out'), premature birth (*machoomb*), stillbirth (*-silmun*, *-chiingumun*), or the death of a newborn baby or small child (*kaanfiish*), various illnesses, death, theft (*wiij*), adultery (*makoj*, commonly referred to also as 'theft'), misfortune in hunting and harvesting. While all types of divination try to

reconstruct the linear causal history (who/what) as well as the structural reason and internal dynamics (why/how) of the problem, *kakuunk* and *ut wa kajil* are directed more towards the first type of aetiological diagnosis, without, however, fully excluding the second type. The *ngoomb* divination similarly starts with a temporal and linear causal explanation but aims at a more comprehensive and circumstantial understanding of the problem's internal dynamics. The diviner will diagnose the cause and the reason of the disintegration or transgression of the bodily or social boundaries and will direct the course of therapeutic action to be taken. This action will aim at the undoing of the disruption or transgression and the reintegration of the body-self, the social body and the cosmological order. The outcome of the divinatory seance is, however, open to a lot of negotiation and manipulation on a lineage—and possibly also an interlineage—level. It may be decided to consult yet another diviner, and one or more of the parties involved may try to cut short the proceedings if these are liable to create more tensions within the kin group, by pointing out, for example, the sorcerer and/or the provoker. As such, the divinatory session is but a small, although crucial, part in a broader process of decision-making.

Depending upon the nature of the problem, various modes of action may be decided upon. The denunciation of a sorcerer will involve judicial as well as therapeutic action. The sufferer will be treated by a herbalist (*mbuki*). In the case of a specific *haamb*, it will be installed by a ritual specialist or *mwiin haamb*. When an ancestor is involved, appropriate purificatory ritual therapy will be carried out by ritual specialists to appease the ancestor in question. Sometimes it is the diviner himself who will perform the therapeutic ritual as well. Even in the case of a *haamb* or an ancestor the council of elders will be involved.

THE CASE OF CHIYUK AND HIS KIN GROUP

The case evolves around the lineage of Chiyuk. A segment of this lineage resides in the village of Nzofu (see Fig.2). The members of this lineage were former slaves (*atubiindj*) belonging to the royal household of Nzav, but were 'set free' under the reign of Nzav Chingeendj Ntaambw, who died in 1983. Ntaambw was succeeded by the present Nzav Kateend II, who was enthroned in 1984. After they had been set free, Chiyuk decided to remain at Nzofu, together with his maternal uncle Kabiimbi (MoBro 1). A second maternal uncle of Chiyuk's decided to leave the village with his family group and settle far away across the Angolan border. In 1982 Kabiimbi died.

The death of Kanyeet and Kapodi

Kanyeet, a paternal cross-cousin of Kateend's father, Kateend I, and thus a paternal uncle or 'father' of Kateend II, occupied from the beginning of Nzav Kateend II's reign a key position as his adviser in the royal court. It is a common policy to marry a 'slave' who belongs to a residential unit of one's own lineage. In this way Kanyeet married one of Chiyuk's sisters, Kapodi, and together they had two children: a girl and a younger boy, Chibelkeny. In 1987 Kanyeet suddenly died. His wife, Kapodi, and her

FIG 2 *The protagonists*

son moved in with Chiyuk, who had lived alone ever since his wife left him, after many years of childless marriage. After moving in, Kapodi suddenly became ill and died in May 1988.

Being the senior responsible for the lineage group (*leemb wivumw*) and as such also of his widowed sister, Chiyuk became the 'owner of the dead person' (*mukwamufw* or *mwiin mufw*), and was expected to show his sense of responsibility and undertake some action to find out what had caused Kapodi's sudden death (*lufw lwa lwiinkaanku*), sudden death being always interpreted as a clear sign that something peculiar is at work. However, Chiyuk was an elderly person in poor health. A couple of months earlier, a travelling exorcist (*kabum*) who had swept the whole Nzofu area clear of ritual weapons had pointed out to Chiyuk that he was 'tied' by a sorcerer (*amukasaang kal*) (which meant that Chiyuk was weakened by the attack of someone who was trying to harm him) and that it had already been proposed that he be 'eaten' by sorcerers during their nightly meetings at

their secret meeting place (*buumb*). This explained the poor state he was in. The exorcist carried out a purification ritual to undo the knot that tied him to the sorcerer, whose identity remained obscure. Moreover, in addition to his poor health, Chiyuk was generally acknowledged in the village as someone who 'sleeps without dreaming', who, in other words, lacked the foresight, intelligence and rhetorical skill that characterise a true elder (*mukuluump*). A truly reasonable elder (*kach a nguund*) would have raised his voice to treat the problems of the family unit.

Because of the former slave relationship between Chiyuk's lineage and the lineage of Nzav, Kateend II, as 'father' of Chiyuk, had given the latter some gunpowder to carry out a 'gun of a bird' after the death of Kapodi. Chiyuk had neglected to do so.

The treatment of Chibelkeny

Among the Aluund a child is considered to be extremely vulnerable, and particularly so in the case of an orphan child, 'the one who is set down' (*mwaan a kush*). During the burial of the mother the *leemb* will leave a shoot of a banana plant, representing a child, on the mother's grave, while saying, 'We give you this banana plant, we stay with the child. Leave with this plant and turn your back on the child. Do not watch it any more!' Immediately after the burial, the child will be washed with protective herbs and kaolin by one of the child's maternal aunts, maternal grandmothers or older sisters. This herbal mixture will be prepared in a piece of gourd. The gourd, which represents the womb from which the child sprang, will be broken by the female relative in question, in order to disrupt the harmful link that still exists between the child and its deceased parent. The same female relative will now take care of the child. Her behaviour is extremely important for the child's further well-being. Since she integrates the child into the close corporeal intimacy of her own household, and thus of her 'womb', she should take care not to perform a harmful action or to speak words which might disrupt the physical and social boundaries that delineate this new and still vulnerable bond that unites her intimately with the child. Especially during the first days following the mother's burial, she may not criticise the child or its parents, and particularly not when washing or feeding it. Neither is she allowed to have sexual intercourse, for the mixing up of male and female bodily boundaries would rouse the deceased mother's anger and would make her try to take her child away from this milieu of transgression, and to drag the child with her into the underworld (*kaluung*). After the mother's burial the child's *leemb* will therefore formally address the female relative to remind her of this, saying:

Raise this orphan child well. Do not play with men.

If you step over [the child] (*-luut*) with men, it is your concern.

If you do that and the child dies within your lineage, because you are with many in your lineage.

That is the reason why you will step over the child.

(This can be explained as:

1. Do not have intercourse with men.

2. -*luut*, lit. 'to step over', and thus 'to hinder', 'to dominate' and 'to harm'. The verb is used to refer to illnesses that are considered to be the immediate result of illegitimate sexual activity by the marriage partner or a close relative. *Nluut* denotes the fact of 'being stepped over' because of a harmful transgression of this kind.
3. Perhaps you do not care because you think: there are many children in my lineage.
4. and therefore you might consider disregarding the prescription (*chijil*) of not making love to a man.)

One of the most grave diseases caused by the illegitimate sexual act of 'stepping over' is *mphalu*. The clinical picture of the disease, the *mphalu* syndrome, is easily recognisable: severe diarrhoea or dysentery (*pulpul*), vomiting (*-luk*), emaciation or 'the turning of the legs into a bed's transverse beams' (*miseleeng ya meend*), and dehydration or 'drying out' (*-wum*). *Mphalu* may finally result in death.

After the death of his mother Chibelkeny was taken care of by his elder sister and her husband. Three weeks after the death of Kapodi, however, Chibelkeny too became ill. The child suffered from severe diarrhoea and emaciation. Under the pressure of the council of elders at Nzav's court, and to avoid accusations against him, Chiyuk gave Chibelkeny's sister money in order to buy medicines at a dispensary some 40 km from the village. It turned out that the dispensary had run out of medicine two months before, and the girl returned empty-handed. By chance, a herbalist healer of Cokwe origin arrived in the village a couple of days later, in order to ask Nzav to intervene in a certain dispute in which he was involved. Seizing this opportunity, the court's elders prompted Chiyuk, the boy's maternal uncle, to consult this herbalist healer (*mbuki*). Chiyuk agreed. Thereupon a *kakuunk* divinatory session was performed by the healer himself. The outcome of the session pointed in the direction of the cause *mufw* (ancestor). Given the boy's symptoms and the previous death of Kapodi, the healer diagnosed the boy's illness as *mphalu*, caused by his deceased mother Kapodi, because of the transgressive behaviour of the boy's sister, with whom he was now living. The *mwiin chiteel*, the sister who had provoked her mother's anger, had made Chibelkeny sleep in the conjugal bed, so that he witnessed how she and her husband made love at night. Since the boy was not totally free from the bond with his deceased mother and therefore of his original household or hearth, the behaviour of Chibelkeny's sister created a confusion of household spaces. This confusion provoked the deceased's anger. The *kakuunk* divinatory session was carried out privately, but its outcome was made public during the subsequent treatment of the child that took place in the doorway of Chiyuk's house, where the healer formally made a public address (*misakidil*):

We say: the herbal mixture that we prepare for our child Chibelkeny, who is in our midst, is not made during the night [it is no sorcery]. If it is, the child may go to the underworld. We did not prepare the medicine during the night, we prepare it during the day. It is true, we made this mixture for the child. Chief Nzav came from Kool [the Luunda heartland in Shaba] and this is a child of Nzav. If we came together to kill the child, let it become night! No,

we call him to life, by means of this medicine. These words are true. Chibelkeny, the day your mother died and you went to live with your sister, she did not take care of this child. She left it and gave it things to eat without first treating it [Chiyuk neglected to rub the child with protective herbs after the burial]. No medicine was given to the child before eating, or before it went to sleep with its sister. She didn't take care of him. And so the child became sick with *mphalu*. It is *mphalu* that hinders him. They [the boy's relatives] say the disease is caused by sorcerers [the healer here voices the suspicion that Chiyuk is at the source of all the deaths in his family. These suspicions were strengthened by his irresponsible neglect] but I have seen that no things of sorcery remain with Chibelkeny. There is, however, something of the dead. His mother is trying to harm the child with *mphalu*. If it is not as we have seen it in the *ngoomb*, let it become night (*bwi*)! If it is as we have seen it, let it turn light (*too*)! Therefore we have chosen this preparation. If it is a medicine for misfortune, *bwi*! If it is the herbs for *mphalu* to administer to this child, *too*! If we killed a rooster and poured out its blood so that Nzaamb [the Luunda godhead] would bring us a curse, let the child die! [If we bring a curse upon this child by treating it in this manner, that it may die.] If we did not kill a rooster, but merely purified the body of our brother with herbs, let him receive life and speak for me [and say that I was a good healer], too!

While uttering these words the *mbuki* spat out (*-seengul*) a mixture of herbs over the boy's fontanelle and face. Then the boy's body was washed with herbs and he was made to drink a potion of the same preparation. Finally, his body was rubbed with a chicken, so that the deceased's shadow (*chiswiil*) which stuck on his body (*pa mijiimbw*) would be transferred (*-shemunween*) from his body to that of the chicken. The treatment lasted four days, and took place at sunrise and sunset.

In July 1988 Chibelkeny died, totally exhausted and wasted away. His death turned into a dramatic event. On the assumption that he was dead, the first night of mourning (*-toongam lufw*, 'to wake with death') began, but during the night Chibelkeny began to show signs of life, causing panic among the mourning women (*-pwiidil*, 'to enter (die) and to return'). For the following two days the female relatives, among whom was Naanfooy, Chibelkeny's maternal aunt or 'mother', tried to revive the boy by administering herbal baths. On the third day Chibelkeny finally died in the house of Chiyuk.

The consultation of the diviner

After the mourning, Chiyuk's relatives pressed him to react. With the gunpowder he had previously received from Nzav but had never used he carried out a 'gun of a bird', which again pointed to the cause *mufw*. Subsequent statements were 'fired' but no specific name of the agent was revealed. Desperate, Chiyuk again turned to Nzav for advice. The court's council decided to consult a *ngoomb* diviner. The choice fell upon a famous diviner, at three days' walking distance from Nzav, across the Waamba river. Nzav also selected the delegation. As Chibelkeny's maternal uncle, Chiyuk represented the boy's matriline. Honoré, a classificatory son of Kanyeet's, represented the boy's patriline. Finally, Chididi, a classificatory paternal cross-cousin of Nzav's and dignitary of the royal court, acted as independent observer. It is to be noted, however, that Chididi was also

Chiyuk's brother-in-law (*nkweedi*), married to the latter's sister, Naanfooy, Chididi's second wife (*ntimin*). In this capacity it was Chididi who finally paid the larger part of the diviner's fee (*poong*), for Chiyuk spent all the means he had on the payment of the herbalist, while Honoré contributed a small sum but decided not to accompany the delegation, because he feared that he would be chased from the local Protestant community if he consulted a diviner's oracle.³

The *kakuunk* session dealt with the two types of diagnosis (the causal and the hermeneutic), but primarily relied on existing *a priori* links between the clinical picture of the disease and the circumstances, thus reconstituting the linear and temporal causal chain: diarrhoea/emaciation + mother's death (cause *mufw* + agent Kapodi) = *mphalu* because of the *chiteel* provoked by an elder sister. The *ngoomb ya madiiy* essentially dealt with the same points (cause, agent and provocation) but did not rely so much on existing *a priori* links and more inventively scanned the horizon for the probable sources of conflict that had given rise to the problem.

A divinatory *ngoomb ya madiiy* session normally takes some two to three hours in all. Upon the arrival of a delegation, a plate (*cheeng*), named 'the calling of the voice' (*-taambik a mbiimb*), is handed over in silence to the diviner. The plate belonged to the deceased person. The night before leaving for the diviner, the deceased's *leemb* put this plate on the person's grave, while invoking the dead person:

You, dead man, you died your death. We do not know who has killed you. Now we go to the diviner to find out who has eaten you. Do not hide from us the name of the sorcerer who killed you.

On the plate is also left a knot of the *mutuungul* plant (*Zingiberaceae*, *Afromamum stipulatum*). The knotted *mutuungul* plant 'ties' and retains the deceased's shadow and smell.⁴ The plate indicates to the diviner that he is consulted on the subject of a death. It is a sign that invites the diviner to reflect on the name of the dead person, whose shadow is held by the knot in the *mutuungul* plant. Only after the diviner has given the name of the deceased person by his 'smelling' (*-huung*) of the plant has he shown that he really is in the possession of visionary skills, conceived of as 'the leaping up of his heart' (*lwaansh*), as well as a heightened olfactory sense (*fimbu*). Only then will the consultants proceed with the divination.

The diviner then starts to reconstruct the nature and the specific course of the illness, the outcome of the divinatory means employed, as well as the kinds of therapy that were used, before he continues to analyse the composition of the kin group. He starts his analysis by identifying the composition of the delegation party, proceeding by means of short phrases to which the consultants answer with *diaya*. The high or low tone in which the answer is given indicates the confirmation or negation of the diviner's statements by the consultants and may consequently be used as a guideline for the diviner, although it is a frequent tactical ploy of the consulting party to mislead the diviner and to give wrong answers by way of testing him.

Given the structural tendency to locate the source of conflict within the matriline, all the diviners whom I observed invariably started their aetiol-

ological search by investigating relationships among 'those of the mother's side'. Most of the time, *ngoomb* diviners proceeded according to a fairly standard formula, fully illustrated in this case. The starting point was Chiyuk, whom he could identify as the deceased *leemb*, because it was Chiyuk who had handed the plate over to the diviner, in his capacity of 'owner of the dead person'. From Chiyuk he then moved on to the father's side and commented upon the absence of the paternal representative (Honoré), whose absence possibly indicated a conflict, and thus a possible source of origin of the evil. Having found no ill feelings or disputes between the patri- and the matriline, he returned to the matriline and started to analyse the relations between Chiyuk and his only surviving sister, Naanfooy, as well as those between Chiyuk and his maternal uncles. Having found out that the first maternal uncle, Kabiimbi, died years ago, he continued with the second maternal uncle (MoBro 2), and analysed the reasons for his departure from Nzofu, as well as the fact that this maternal uncle had not been present at the mourning of Kapodi and Chibelkeny. He concluded that there existed tensions between Chiyuk and the second maternal uncle, which, however, did not lead to a death.

Having thus 'straightly hunted down the track like a male dog' (*kut kwa mulum a kabw kwa kukechun*), he then 'collected the grains', i.e. the *chisaku* and stated that the main cause was a *mufw* or ancestor.

When the diviner states the cause, the consulting party always retreat to take counsel together. When they agree with the diviner's interpretation, the diviner's fee (*poong*) will be paid, and the diviner will proceed to deliver the agent (*chisuung*) that carried out the cause, as well as the reason or *chiteel* that provoked the agent's vengeance, thus revealing the internal logic of the case to the consultants.

To the satisfaction of the consultants, the diviner came up with the same cause that resulted from the 'gun of a bird' that was carried out by Chiyuk. Therefore they decided to continue with the remainder of the session.

This second and most crucial part of the session is also much shorter. The diviner merely states what he has been made to see by the oracle in the course of the seance. In this particular case the causal agent, responsible for the deaths of Kanyeet, Kapodi and Chibelkeny, turned out to be Kabiimbi. To support the assertion the diviner also has to provide the provocation. The provoker in this case was Naanfooy, Chiyuk's sister and second wife of Chididi. Before marrying Chididi, Naanfooy had been one of the wives of paramount title-holder Nzav Chingeendj Ntaambw. One day Naanfooy did not attend to a fire that was burning in one of the houses within the chief's enclosure. The house caught fire and burned down. In the fire were lost a great many of Nzav's powerful hunting charms, belonging to the *haamb yaang*. Furious at this loss, Nzav asked Naanfooy for a compensatory payment, in the form of a human life, in order to appease the anger of the *haamb*. Shortly afterwards, Naanfooy's maternal uncle, Kabiimbi, died. After his death Kabiimbi got angry with Chiyuk, Kanyeet and the other members of his kin group, when he saw how they continued to live on good terms with Naanfooy. Therefore he decided to revenge himself on Naanfooy by returning and killing (*kweezil*) her relatives.

The diviner's interpretation was fully accepted by Chiyuk. He even

provided the reason why Naanfooy had offered Kamiimbi as a compensatory payment to Nzav Chingeendj Ntaambw. Somewhere near the end of the previous decade Chiyuk had made a journey to Angola, where he had earned a little money and had returned with a number of fine pieces of cloth. Upon his arrival he had given all the cloth to his maternal uncle, Kabiimbi:

My *leemb* Kabiimbi used everything himself, he did not give anything to the sisters. The sisters were not content. Therefore they spoke to Kabiimbi: 'You, you are an evil person, I give you *lukamu* [misfortune through cursing]. Why have you eaten everything that Chiyuk brought from Lukeez [Angola]? Do you consider that Chiyuk is for you alone? Chiyuk is for all of us. But you have eaten everything yourself. You are a dying man. You, Nzav Chingeendj Ntaambw, kill him. Why should he eat everything which Chiyuk has brought?' And so Kabiimbi died.

Instead of redistributing the accumulated wealth, as any responsible *leemb* would do, Kabiimbi had kept everything to himself. This had aroused the anger of Naanfooy and her sister, and they had uttered a curse over Kabiimbi's head.

The outcome of the oracle was confirmed the following morning by a 'gun of a bird'. It is customary for the *leemb* to bring some gunpowder (which has been brought in contact with the dead person) to the consultation. The morning after the consultation, the *leemb* charged the diviner's gun with this gunpowder and uttered a proposition over the gun. If a bird is then shot by the diviner it means that the oracle is confirmed. If not, the oracle was worthless and another diviner will be consulted.

The presentation of the outcome in the elders' council

The outcome of the oracle was formally presented at the court of Nzav by Chididi. During his exposition of the oracle, however, he left out the role of Naanfooy. It was widely known that Chididi was particularly fond of his second wife, and a lot of jokes used to be made among the elders about his love for her. His preference for Naanfooy had already caused severe tensions between Naanfooy and Chididi's first wife, Maansoonj, who was much older than her co-wife. Their quarrelling had reached the point where they were no longer willing to live together under one roof, and Naanfooy had temporarily moved to the house of one of the neighbours, a relative of her husband's.

Instead of mentioning the fact that it was Naanfooy who had been responsible for the death of Kabiimbi, Chididi related to the assembled elders that it was the *haamb yaang* who, furious about the loss of the hunting charms, had attacked Kabiimbi. In this version Naanfooy remained the main provoker but unintentionally so. Rather, Chididi's version shifted the blame from Naanfooy's shoulders to those of Nzav Chingeendj Ntaambw. As the owner of the *haamb* the final responsibility for Kabiimbi's death lay with him.

As a general rule, the Nzav titleholders cannot be the subject of a divinatory investigation. If the course of events points to Nzav as probable provoker or agent of a cause, any possibility of consulting an oracle is

forcibly blocked, and the investigation is shifted away from divination to purely politico-judicial means in the private council of court dignitaries, where the matter will normally be dropped.

Therefore Chididi's version of the facts was received with irritation and suspicion at the court of Nzav. After Chididi had delivered his report, a new meeting was agreed upon in which my own tape-recordings of the divining session would be heard in the presence of all the interested parties, including Naanfooy. The tapes unequivocally established the guilt of Naanfooy and reduced the involvement of Nzav in the matter.

The news of Naanfooy's guilt spread rapidly through the village and led to a public fight between Naanfooy and the victorious first wife of Chididi, who saw her rival defeated in this way, and could hardly conceal her joy when the news was broken to her. In the following days the conflict between the two co-wives reached a climax. Contrary to the advice of the court's dignitaries and the expectations of Maansoonj, Chididi backed up Naanfooy and drove his first wife away from his homestead. Maansoonj went to live on her own in a small hut at the other end of the village.

In the meantime, the paternal kin of Chibelkeny (in this case Honoré, who represented the boy's classificatory fathers) firmly opposed further ritual action to appease the spirit of Kabiimbi, for the religious reasons mentioned above. Chiyuk hoped for further developments, in the course of the matter, since he feared that he would be the next to die if nothing was done. This fear was instilled in him by the previous statements of the travelling *kabum* exorcist (cf. p. 169), the full truth of which only now became obvious. In keeping with his gentle character, Chiyuk feared a further dispute with his sister Naanfooy, who, understandably, was opposed to any more ritual action. For her to give in would mean acknowledging her guilt, and hitherto she had always firmly denied being the instigator of Kabiimbi's death. Her relationship with Chiyuk and the other members of the family quickly deteriorated after the consultation with the diviner.

Once more the matter would have been dropped were it not for Nzav. Partially involved because of the role of Nzav Ntaambw in the matter, and because he was acting as a *leemb* for Chiyuk, the paramount chief tried to direct the course of the crisis into its final stage. He tried to bring matters to a close, in order to avoid possible accusations of having failed to act on behalf of Chiyuk, since he had accepted responsibility as a *leemb* of Chiyuk from the beginning, and could not now back out. He also wanted to clear the Nzav lineage of all suspicion as to the cause of Kabiimbi's death. Last but not least, the final initiative on any further ritual action lay in his hands. In the case of an interfering ancestor the proper thing to do is ritually to appease its spirit in a rite called *kuboob*, which can take place only with the consent of the responsible elder of the village's predominant lineage.

After the public meeting in which the tape-recordings were heard, Nzav appointed a court dignitary, actually one of his classificatory sons, to carry out a 'gun of a bird'. Three propositions (*nkas*) were put to the dead person (*mufw*), and three times a gun was fired.

A first proposition, at which no bird was shot, ran:

You, dead person [Kabiimbi], if it was *yaang* that ate you, *ngaambu* [let the bird die]. If it was not *yaang* that ate you, *ngeendj* [let the bird live].

The second *lukas* ran:

If you died because of Nzav, *ngaambu*. If Nzav was not involved in your death, *ngeendj*.

This time the outcome was *nswaadi*: the bird had been slightly hit. This was interpreted as a sign that there had been a dispute involving Nzav Ntaambw and Kabiimbi, but that the dispute was not the root cause of Kabiimbi's death. Finally, a third proposition was voiced as to whether a *kuboob* ritual should be held in conformity with the oracle's outcome:

Ngaambu to you, bird, if the ancestor accepts that the ritual specialist treats him. If he does not accept this, *ngeendj*.

As a result of this last proposition a bird was shot. The ancestor, Kabiimbi, had hereby indicated that he agreed to be treated in the *kuboob* appeasement ritual.

The result of these 'guns' was presented at the court in a council at which all the senior elders of the village's lineages were present. The guns once more cleared the Nzav lineage of all suspicion and clearly indicated the direction of therapeutic action to be taken, for the third gun had confirmed that the ancestor consented to be treated by a ritual specialist. Consequently, it was decided to send for a *kuboob* therapist who lived across the Angolan border, and who had gained renown by treating and healing an important member of the Angolan branch of the Nzav lineage.

The kuboob appeasement ritual

Sequence 1: preparatory gifts. It was not until three months after the divination, in December, 1988, that the ritual specialist arrived. It is the reciprocity that exists within the matriline, and most clearly between a maternal uncle and his sister's children, that serves as a model for other forms of vital exchange, as between a diviner or a therapist and his client. Therefore it is the kin group's *leemb* Chiyuk, in his capacity of 'owner of the dead person', who will offer a first gift to the *kuboob* therapist. This gift consisted of a chicken, called 'the chicken of the womb' (*nzool wivumw*). The gift marks the alliance between the therapist and Chiyuk and integrates the therapist within the latter's kin group. On the morning of the day the ritual would be started, a couple of days after the therapist's arrival, a goat was killed and prepared at the house of Chiyuk. The goat was paid for by all the members of Chiyuk's residential unit. A piece of the goat, the so-called *mpeemb wa chijimu*,⁵ was tasted by the therapist, together with all the members of Chiyuk's kin group. The sharing of this meal within the spatial intimacy of the household (*muunz*) confirmed the bonds of solidarity that should exist between the therapist and his clients, and 'set the therapist down' in his clients' household. Being commensals established the fact that the therapist had become a full member of the kin group, for it is only 'those that are born together that share their meal with one another' (*kuvaadik kudijan*).

After the ritual meal the *leemb* gives a therapist a piece of cloth. This cloth is called *njil ya majaan*, 'the path of the burial place', and allows the therapist to accompany the *leemb* to the grave of the ancestor.⁶ After the grave has been located with the help of some ritual means, the *leemb* formally presents the therapist to the ancestral *mufw*, who is the subject of appeasement:

I am your *leemb*, I have come to you to present this healer, the one who will perform *kuboob* on you, because the little children and all the people have become ill.

After their return from the burial place, all the members of the household involved gather behind the *leemb*'s house on the *twiil*, the women's meeting place where manioc is pounded. The *twiil* at the back of the house is a space with strong feminine connotations, alluding to the uterine powers of vital regeneration and transmission of life. These powers are concretely represented by the mortar (*yaand*), which is a metaphor of female fecundity, linked to the vaginal opening and the womb. The choice of this place to perform the ritual purification stresses the fact that the rite aims at a reintegration of the uterine kinship links that form the backbone of the descent group. Normally it is there that the person divined to be the provoker will offer a gift, called *buluk* (from the verb *-buluk*, which literally means 'to open up', and thus 'to ask for reconciliation'). This gift leads the way to the actual purification of the members of the household. The provoker holds a small plate in the right hand and a piece of cotton thread (*waand*) in the left. On the head of the provoker is placed a cobblestone as a sign of submission to the ancestor. Thus equipped the *mwiin chiteel* crawls on hands and feet up to the *leemb* of the ancestor while exclaiming, *Nabuluk*, 'I ask for reconciliation'. Thereupon the provoker offers the plate and the thread to the *leemb*. As with the diviner, the plate invites the *leemb* to reflect upon and accept the demand of the *mwiin chiteel*. The cotton thread makes it clear that no ill feelings persist, that the knot is untied.

In this particular case, however, Naanfooy persistently refused to perform this act of submission to the ancestor, Kabiimbi. Therefore the participants once more resorted to the 'gun of a bird' to release the blocked situation. A first proposition was presented to the *mufw*:

You ancestor, that the gun hits if you want this *buluk* to come from Chididi [Naanfooy's husband], *ngaambu* [let the bird die].

The same proposition was put to the *mufw* in relation to Nzav. No birds were shot in response to these two statements. Finally, an affirmative answer came in response to the question as to whether the ancestor wanted to accept the conciliatory gift from the therapist. This possibility is referred to as 'the buying of the dead person' (*-laand mufw*). By himself handing over the gift to the *leemb* the therapist 'buys' or obtains the right to carry out the appeasement ritual without the consent of the provoker.

Sequence 2: the purification of the kin group. In the afternoon preparations are started for the purification ritual at the back of the *leemb*'s house,

where the therapist digs a hole in the ground in which a mortar (*yaand*) is planted. The mortar's opening is pointed in the direction of the *mufw*'s grave. Around the mortar the therapist ties the stem of a *mutuungul* plant.⁷ Then the therapist takes a piece of *katan*, a liana that grows in the rain forest, and cuts it in as many pieces as there are members of Chiyuk's kin group. Normally it is the provoker who receives these pieces from the therapist.⁸ The provoker counts all the pieces and drops them one by one into the mortar, while uttering a name of one of the kin group's members for each piece. The therapist then deposits all the plants and herbs that he gathered at sunrise to make the herbal preparation *mutaleesh*, 'that which causes to appease'. The herbs are pounded by the provoker and mixed with some water and kaolin. The therapist encircles the space around the mortar with ritual protection and applies some kaolin around the brim of the mortar.

After these preparations Chiyuk's assembled family members gather round the mortar, touching it with the right hand, thus expressing the unity of agnatic and uterine principles that underlie one's dual membership. The right hand, which is the 'hand of fatherhood' (*chikas chika taatukw*), is joined to the mortar, which represents the womb. After a formal explanation by the therapist, the *leemb*, Chiyuk, addresses the kin group:

Chiyuk says that it is good. If I hide something [if there is a reason of conflict that I did not mention], *bwi*! If all my words are uttered, *too*! We gather round this mortar. If it is for you, *koj* and *leemb* [formal address of the ancestor], that we are here, *too*! If today I let these children enter the mortar to abandon them so that they suffer and die, *bwi*! No, today I plant the mortar so that these children will be strong, *too*. Today, that they may treat me so that I shall be strong. The only person I abort is Naanfooy. But that all the other children may be treated so that they shall be strong!

Then the therapist takes a whisk (*chisaampu*), made from the green leaves of the *mutuungul* plant,⁹ dips it into the mortar containing the herbal preparation and waves it eastwards and westwards. In doing so he places his clients' being-in-the-world between birth and death, by linking their individual life cycle to the cosmic cycle of the sun, the origin of life with its 'waking up of the world' in the east (*mwiingaangyeel kwacha*) and its descent in the west, where it disappears into the underworld (*kaluung*). Thereupon all those present are made to drink of the herbal preparation from the plate that was presented as *buluk* gift to the *leemb* as a sign of their reconciliation. After the drinking the therapist again plunges his whisk into the mortar and sprinkles (*-kupul*, to sprinkle while touching the body with the whisk) the purifying medicine (*nsoompw*) over the people while they hold the mortar. Finally, he hooks the little finger of his right hand into the little finger of the *leemb*'s right hand and washes (*-ikos*) the *leemb*'s right arm, shoulder and back with the preparation from the plate. The same is repeated on the left side of the *leemb*'s body, and subsequently on all those gathered around the mortar. This purification continues until the first crowing of the rooster (*pa mandeemb*) the next morning. During the purification people stay awake the whole night (*-noongam*, *-loondam*) at the back of the house.¹⁰

The hooked little finger (*muny wakanaans*) is a typical therapeutic gesture 'that causes the patient to stand upright' (*-tuumbweesh*), which is the enacted embodiment of his restored health, of his rebirth and subsequent growth into a fully grown human being, by an upward movement that mirrors the rise of the sun and the rooster's upright position.¹¹ Therefore, healing is also spoken of as an 'awakening' (*-laankuk*) or a 'rising from death after having been treated' (*-saanguk*). By hooking his little finger into that of his client the therapist furthermore undoes the knots that tied his client to the disruptive and transgressive forces of evil. It is a clear sign of the client's new ties, which link him with the healing powers of the therapist, 'who is with plentitude and vital life force' (*mbuki udi ni lusuku ni mooy*).¹² 'To cause to heal' (*-yeelweesh*) thus consists of making whole. The therapeutic intervention is an integrative act that interlinks and at the same time restores the proper boundaries and harmonious order between individual body, social field and cosmological field, and in turn 'ritually turns the disruptive forces back on themselves' (*-kay*; for a similar concept among the neighbouring Yaka see Devisch, 1984). This is also the reason why the therapist cries a message in the village (*-ch mukaand*), before he starts the therapy, in which he asks people 'to unhook the bed' (*-kulul mulaal*) during the night prior to the treatment. The 'unhooking of the bed' euphemistically refers to a prohibition on sexual intercourse, for sexual relations imply an 'intertwining of legs' (*-bindjik meend*), as the sexual act is referred to, and thus a transgression of the normal boundaries, as well as a mixture of what is normally apart. Significantly, love-making is also referred to by the verb *-iyeesikish*, which means 'to cause to mix' or 'to cause to bring together'. A transgressive sexual act would undo the restoring force of the ritual therapy.

Sequence 3: the appeasement of the mufw. The next morning, at sunrise, the therapist, the *leemb* and normally also the person divined to be the provoker set out for the grave. The therapist has transferred the pounded leaf medicine from the mortar to a halved gourd. When approaching the grave the therapist blows on his *nsoomu*, a ritually prepared horn from the small duiker *nkay* (*Sylvicapra grimmia*), to announce to the *mufw* their arrival. At the grave the therapist drives a pointed stick (*muloongu*) of the *mupep* tree into the head of the grave, which is marked by a tuft of grass, the 'head of the deceased' (*mutw wa mufw*), planted there at the end of the burial. The *mupep* tree (Euphorbiaceae, *Hymenocardia acida*) has the same purifying capacity as the *kapwiip*. Moreover, its name refers to *kapeep*, the life-giving 'breath' or 'wind' which animates and revives. The therapist then addresses the ancestor:

I am the healer, I come to treat you, so that this medicine [*moon*] will reach you. Even if you were killed, all of them are kinsmen. Do not hinder me so that I may treat you and that this medicine may enter you. It is not me, the therapist, who has killed you, it was your kinsfolk who killed you. They gave you to me so that I would be able to appease you. Today all the small children and all the elders are in your grip, and the whole village is dying off. I am the therapist, even if you possess many ritual arms, today I will treat you. Today I treated these children. Go away like the rain in streaming water. Even your wife who has died, if it is she who disturbs these children, let her do so no

longer. Today I give the kaolin of plentitude and vital life force [*mpeemb wa lusuku ni mooy*] to these children.

Thereupon the therapist pours the pounded leaf medicine down in the hole made by the *mupep* stick. On top of the hole is normally laid the stone which the *mwiin chiteel* carried on his head. The therapist takes the plate that was offered as a conciliatory gift and turns it upside down over the hole, thereby blocking the way out of the grave. Finally the therapist strikes the grave a couple of times with the *mupep* stick, to enforce his action by way of a 'conditional' curse (*-shiingan*): if the *mufw* disregards the therapist's acts he will be cursed.

Before the therapist sets out to the grave, some ritual manioc porridge has been prepared (normally by the provoker) from the manioc root's bark (*luku lwa yimbwaand*). After piercing the grave and returning with the *leemb* to the village, the therapist will bury this manioc porridge on the path which leads from the grave to the village, together with the remaining pieces of *katun* liana and the chicken or *nzool wa chijimu* that was given by the *leemb* upon the therapist's arrival in the village. This chicken will be buried alive, tied by means of the grass *kaswaam*. The chicken is a 'gift of blood' (*chimeeng*) offered to the dead person (*mufw*). The chicken's 'blood flow' (*chikulu cha mash*) will 'soak the soil' and invigorate the *mufw*. The *chimeeng* gift thus implies a compensatory transfer of vital life flow from the therapist and his clients to the *mufw*. The transfer compensates for the loss of the *mufw*'s life, which was caused by his kinfolk. The place of burial of the *chimeeng* and the manioc porridge forms a ritual barrier or *nkiindji* (from the verb *-kiidjik*, 'to close', 'to bar') which blocks off the path to the village and thus the possibility of the *mufw*'s return. While closing the hole he has dug the therapist strews it with kaolin and invokes the ancestor:

See today this chicken, that you may eat it. It is the blood that I give you. Do not stick any longer to the body of your people. Do not live across [transgress] this *nkiindji* to go to the village and to hold on to a person, we implore you twice, we implore you thrice.

Sequence 4: kukocheek—the closing of the therapeutic ritual. Upon returning to the village, the therapist leads all the participants to a *kapwiip* tree in the bush, where he will purify both them and himself, so that the shadow of the dead person should no longer stick to their bodies but be left behind at the foot of the tree. The purification takes place by means of the powder (*luseeng*) that he scrapes from the tree's bark and mixes with kaolin. He applies the mixture in a vertical line on the forehead, chest and both the arms. The vertical line again stresses the participants' capacity to stand upright, as a sign of their restored health.¹³

Thereupon the therapist proceeds to plant a *nshiind*. The *nshiind* consists of a number of small sticks from different trees, tied together and planted in a hole in front of the *leemb*'s house.¹⁴ In fact the *nshiind* is considered as a kind of refuse heap (*kazuuk*) in which the *yisaku*, the causes of the problem, are 'swept away' (*-koombidil yisaku*). By getting rid of the cause that lies at the root of the conflict and the dissension within the kin group the final reintegration, at which the therapeutic ritual performance has

been aimed, is formally confirmed. The therapist digs a hole in front of the *leemb*'s house in which he deposits a piece of the *kudiil* fungus. The verb *-diil* means 'to nurture' and therefore also 'to raise'. The *kudiil* fungus has very positive connotations and represents the vital life force, *mooy*. Moreover, its white colour makes it resemble kaolin (*lupeemb*), which also carries connotations of blessing, fecundity and life force.

All the assembled family members hold the sticks that compose the *nshiind* with their right hand and plant it in the hole, while the therapist curses the cause and its agent: 'I curse you, do not return any more, do not come back to kill anyone with your sorcery'.

The next morning the therapist carries out a 'gun of a bird' in order to know whether the treatment has been carried out well. If such is the case, a bird is shot. The therapist will normally give the bird to the *mwiin chiteel*, who will roast it together with some salt. All the participants will eat a small portion of the bird as a sign of their restored unity. The giving of the bird also mirrors the opening gift of the *leemb* to the therapist. It accentuates the reciprocal relation of exchange, called *-iisikish*, between the client and the therapist. The gift of the bird also enables the *leemb* to compensate the therapist for the carrying out of the ritual and to hand him a final gift. This gift consists of a goat, referred to as *mpeemb wa chitelek*, which will help the therapist regain his strength after the services he has performed.

CONCLUSION

The case that has been presented has shown how a concrete problem was solved by means of various interacting strategies. Nevertheless, social consensus was never reached in a decisive manner between the members of the kin group. I have tried to show that the kin group does not direct therapy management alone. Had it been only the kin group the matter would never have been finalised. In reality the therapeutic strategy, including ritual specialists and diviners, is combined with the political and judicial context of the council of elders and the chiefly court. The player and the oracle actively direct the course of events.

In the beginning the problem is solved on an *a priori* basis. The first diagnosis in the case concerned the treatment of *mphalu*. The healer diagnosed the cause to be 'death' (*lufw*) and from there proceeded on the basis of an *a priori* causal chain. Given the symptoms, and the previous death of the mother of Chibelkeny, his diagnosis was very probable indeed. When the boy died the council of elders intervened and subsequently a *ngoomb* oracle was consulted. Since the *a priori* causal diagnosis had obviously failed, a more elaborate hermeneutic interpretation seemed necessary. The outcome of the divination pointed out a broader discord within the matriline of Chiyuk's kin group. Given the nature of Luunda aetiology, according to which evil attacks only when provoked, the *mwiin chiteel* or person responsible for this problem was also located within the matriline. I suspect that the Koongo (as Janzen describes them) would, on the contrary, avoid pressing on with the identification of the 'provoker' to safeguard consensus and reduce tension. According to the Aluund, however, it is precisely by analysing the internal dynamics of the conflict

in terms of the 'provocation' (*chiteel*), and by pointing out and thus locating the source from which the conflict originated, that the diagnostic judgement of the oracle proves its worth.

Furthermore, the case illustrated how social consensus is never reached by means of an internal process within the kin group. Rather, the council of elders actively intervened every time things seemed to have come to a standstill. It is also important to note the crucial role played by the 'gun of a bird'. These 'guns' legitimise decisions and trigger further action, precisely because they enable the participants to evade the question of social consensus. In doing so the *ut wa kajil* allows the participants actively to redirect the course of events. In fact it is an instrument that may be manipulated according to circumstances. Most important, however, it is an authoritative statement from outside the kin group. Like the council of elders, it relocates the problem of social consensus and triggers future ritual action, precisely because it allows participants to side-step the task of reaching an internal consensus within the kin group.

Clearly, in this particular case, the closing purification and appeasement rituals took place without prior social consensus between Chiyuk and Naanfooy and did not resolve the tension. Does this mean that the therapeutic ritual was inadequate or ineffective? To be sure, the disagreement between the *leemb* and the provoker will probably cause further problems in the future. I do not believe, however, that therapeutic ritual should be assessed on the basis of its purpose only. Rather, ritual efficacy is situated within the rite as a performative event. The sequential development of the ritual practice positively restates the social problems and achieves the meaningful creation of a new integrative order on a symbolic level.

NOTES

¹ Research was conducted among the Aluund of the Nzofu territory in the upper Kwaango, along the Angolan border, some 1,300 km to the south-east of Kinshasa, during a period of nineteen months from September 1987 till March 1989. Nzofu is the *musumb* or royal village of paramount Luunda chief Nzav Cheend a Mashiind.

² The Aluund of the Kahemba zone, an area of 20,000 km², number an estimated 30,000. The most recent estimate I know of, a demographic study of 1974, mentions 94,000 inhabitants for the whole zone.

³ In this particular case the *poong* consisted of two pieces of cloth and 5,000 zaires, which equals a total of 8,000 zaires. By way of comparison, a 'cantonnier', who keeps the roads in repair, earns 1,000 zaires a month, which is the equivalent of some US\$5. The divinatory session itself took place in August 1988, almost two months after the death of Chibelkeny.

⁴ For the connotations of the *mutuungul* see also note 7. Also presented to the diviner are the birds that were shot with the *ut wa kajil*, in order for the diviner to 'see' the answers that the birds have given.

⁵ The term *mijimu* denotes physical pain. The same term may be applied to the herbal preparation that is used to ease the pain. In the same way the goat or *mpeemb wa chijimu* will make it possible to relieve the pain and restore the lineage's feeling of solidarity.

⁶ Other names given to this cloth are *mwindaamb* or *nkuung*. The totality of gifts is referred to as *chitelikin*, that which makes the force return to the therapist after his dangerous (because boundary-transgressing) task, or as *mikasw*, which makes reference to *lukasw*, the hoe with which the therapist will dig up the roots and plants that he needs for the treatment.

⁷ The stem of this plant, which is characterised by its very long root, is hollow and measures about one metre. When it dies, it falls down with its leaves and with the stem still unbroken. Therefore it may represent the life of a man who has been mown down by death. In this case the plant represents the life of Kabiimbi.

⁸ The role of the *mwiin chiteel* was performed by another female relative of Chiyuk's.

⁹ The leaves are kept together by means of the grass *kaswaam* (Poaceae), which, according to the Aluund, has the capacity to 'tie in' and retain evil influences.

¹⁰ During purification people wear a cord, made of *mwiinzomb* fibres (Myrtaceae, *Syzygium guineense*), around the waist. It is also possible for the nocturnal purification to take place not at the back of the *leemb*'s house but at the foot of a *kapwiiip* tree (*Swartzia madagascariensis*). The connotations of this tree, 'the elder' of all trees, according to the Aluund, are manifold. Let it here suffice to say that the *kapwiiip* acts as a depository of dirt, pollution and evil and as such has purifying qualities. Therefore it is called *muhoongolok* or *motoond wa yibi*, 'the tree of evil'.

¹¹ During the purification the therapist therefore sings the following song: *Samafuku, mwaang yisaal sandeemb*, 'Samafuku, destroyer of the nest/*musaal*'. My informants explained this song as follows: as the rooster scratches the nest open in search of food, so the small child 'breaks through' the *musaal* by crawling out. The *musaal* is a ritual fence in a woman's seclusion hut (*maseeku*) where she gives birth after having been affected by a *haamb*. The *musaal* denotes the sheltered and womb-like quality of the seclusion in the hut. The mother and the child will remain in seclusion until the child is able to crawl outside the fence. The song thus stresses the process of birth and growth towards uprightness. Therefore the therapist is also compared to a mother hen that hatches out the egg/patient (*mbuki udi nzool, muyeej udi diiy*, 'the therapist is a hen, the sufferer an egg').

¹² On the Luunda notion of knotting and tying in relation to health see De Boeck (1991).

¹³ Before gathering herbs, or applying them to the patient's body, the therapist carries out the so-called *luhaandjweel* (from the verb *-haandjul*, 'to fall down'). He takes a leaf from a shrub and puts it on top of the circular hole he makes with the thumb and the index finger of his left hand. Thereupon he slaps his right hand on the leaf while calling out, *Biaaa*, imitating a gunshot. Because of the slapping, the leaf will tear in the middle, similarly making a popping sound like that of a gunshot. The calling out and the gun-like sound are said to 'awaken the herbs' that will be used during the treatment (see also Turner, 1967: 350). Then the therapist throws the leaves on the ground. The position of the leaf indicates whether it is a favourable moment to carry out the treatment. When the leaf falls with its outer face downwards (*chibwiiik*) the indication is negative. When it falls with its inner side (*chalukan*) to the ground the indication is positive.

¹⁴ In this case the *nshiind* consisted of the sticks of *kapwiiip*, *musehe* (*Vangueriopsis lanciflora*), *musenen a mpomb* (Rubiaceae, *Diodia scandens*), *kadi makuw* (unidentified) and *muyooomb* (Amnardiaceae, *Lennea antiscorbutica* or *L. welwichii*). Owing to shortage of space I cannot discuss the specific connotations of each tree. But together they form a balanced environment and create a meaningful context which demonstrates the aim of the ritual and creates a ritual space.

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Abstract

This article reconsiders John Janzen's notions of social consensus and therapeutic efficacy within a pluralistic medical framework, and combines a semantic and praxeological approach to an extended case of affliction: that of a group and its leaders being confronted with sickness and death and reacting through health-seeking strategies. First, it is argued that an understanding of representations of aetiology and their management necessitates an expansion of a narrow sociological and restorative view of the therapy management group into a broader multi-dimensional knowledge of the dynamics out of which the conflict or problem originated, as well as of the mode of action upon the sufferer. The possible lack of social consensus among the members of the kin diagnostic group does not imply that the therapy should be ineffective. Rather, therapeutic ritual is viewed as performative event or processual action, which realises itself through its temporal unfolding, in a creative process of meaning production which pragmatically achieves the ritual's aim.

Résumé

Cet article reconsidère les idées de John Janzen sur le consensus social et l'efficacité thérapeutique dans une structure médicale pluraliste, et réunit une approche sémantique et praxéologique à un cas prolongé d'affliction: celle d'un groupe et de ses responsables, qui étaient obligés de regarder la maladie et la mort en face, et qui réagissaient en essayant de trouver des stratégies pour regagner la santé. D'abord, on prétend qu'il faut comprendre à fond les représentations de l'étiologie, et qu'une expansion d'un point de vue sociologique et restaurateur trop borné soit absolument nécessaire. Le groupe qui dirigerait la thérapie gagnerait ainsi une connaissance plus approfondie, et multidimensionnelle, des dynamiques qui produisaient le conflit ou le problème, aussi bien que de la méthode d'aider la victime. Le manque possible de consensus social parmi les membres du groupe diagnostique familial ne signifie pas que la thérapie puisse être inefficace. Il faut plutôt regarder le rituel thérapeutique comme un événement performatif ou une action de processus, un rituel qui se réalise au moyen de son développement temporel dans un procédé créateur de production significative qui atteint pragmatiquement le but du rituel même.