

CHAPTER 3



SEARCHING FOR MY BROTHER

Liminality and Blood Brotherhood in Rwanda

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If notions of kinship involve sentiments of ‘diffuse, enduring solidarity’ (Schneider 1968), it must be admitted that for many ethnographers, one’s ties to one’s interlocutors during fieldwork and after it are more likely to be diffuse rather than enduring. We are rarely in the field long enough to become one of them and we rarely succeed in insinuating ourselves very profoundly into their personal and social lives. After a relatively short time, a year, maybe two, we return from the field and are rudely reinserted into the vicissitudes of the academic machine –the writing of dissertations, articles and books, and the jockeying for jobs. For most of us, our careers take centre stage, and our fieldwork acquaintances recede into the background. In many cases, those to whom we owe our careers gain very little from the experience of having known us, despite giving us more than we could ever hope to repay.

Aware of the potential for exploitation in the ethnographer–informant relationship, I began my fieldwork in Rwanda in 1983 determined not to fall into the mould of the parasitic ethnographer (see Deloria 1969). I was determined to relate to Rwandans without prejudgement. I hoped that they would reciprocate in kind. Little did I know at the time that this would require more than just my good intentions. Indeed, it was clear to me almost from day one that Rwandans were very used to relating to Europeans and Americans who happened to be living there. We owned cars. We lived in houses with electricity, running water and flush toilets. We never had to worry about where our next meal was coming from. We neither farmed nor did much in the way of manual labour, with the exception of some Western-

ers who were there to provide vocational training. We usually had Rwandan servants to do the cooking and other domestic chores. Most of all, we had money. Often when a Rwandan related to a European or an American, he or she wanted something tangible from the interaction – a job, a ride, a favour, or money. In addition to the economic disparities between Rwandans and Westerners, there were political ones as well, and these too influenced my relations to Rwandans as an ethnographer (Rosaldo 1989). Despite all this, it remained possible to sustain relations that were more egalitarian and disinterested, but these only tended to emerge after months of interaction, and with a special few.

In my case, interactions with Rwandans became less fraught with such difficulties over time. In this chapter, I will discuss one such relationship, a relationship with a healer named Baudouin with whom I performed a blood brotherhood ceremony. After frequent visits to this healer in which I observed his divination and healing techniques, inquired about them, and asked many questions of his patients, he said to me:

Christopher, when you first began to visit me, you wanted information. Now you come to me as a friend. I too consider you to be a friend, a good friend. In former days when a man became good friends with another man, they would go through a little ceremony, called *kunywana amaraso* (to reciprocally drink blood) and they would become brothers. I know that you could not possibly go through with such a ceremony because you are an *umuzungu* (white person), and *abazungu* (white people) do not consider such things to be of importance.

My reaction to this was contrary to the healer's expectation: 'I am very pleased, and of course I will do it'. Besides being very touched by the healer's invitation, I saw it as an opportunity to shed some of the burdens of 'whiteness'. I will no longer be simply an *umuzungu* in this part of Rwanda. I will no longer be a liminal being. We performed this ceremony in 1985. I returned to Rwanda in 1987, saw him again, and corresponded with him from my return to the United States until October 1990, when the Rwandan Patriotic Front invaded northern Rwanda from Uganda. I returned to Rwanda in 1993, hoping to find him. I did not succeed; Rwanda was at war. I tried again in 2005 and again in 2009, but to no avail. To this day, I have no idea what became of him. In this chapter I will discuss this healer's practice, the blood brotherhood covenant, and Turner's notions of liminality and *communitas*.

What Is an *Umuzungu*?

The broadest definition of *umuzungu* is someone who comes from outside Rwanda. In practice, however, the term is never applied to Africans from

other countries, seldom if ever used to refer to people from the Middle East or North Africa, nor to Indians or Pakistanis, and never to Chinese, Japanese or Koreans. It is not used to refer to African-Americans, nor to other black people from Europe. While in Rwanda I only heard the term used in reference to white people of European or American origin.

Ordinarily, the term is not derogatory nor pejorative, and Rwandan children often addressed me in that way. They would joyfully call out '*umuzungu*', and then come up to shake my hand heartily, trying to be friendly. Occasionally, however, children were afraid of white people and would scurry away when they saw one. Parents might have told them stories that the *umuzungu* might carry them off or eat them if they did not behave properly. Such stories were commonplace, but most children older than five did not seem intimidated by white people.

In other contexts the term can be derisory, something akin to 'whitey' or 'honky'. For example, during my several stays in Rwanda, it was not uncommon for someone to call out to me with the words: '*Umuzungu, ca va?*' (a mix of Kinyarwanda and French), which translates as: 'Hey, white person, how goes it?' Quite often when this utterance was spoken, it was followed by some snickering from those within earshot. From the tone of voice and the laughter, I could tell that my interlocutor was not really interested in enquiring about my health and well-being, he was simply trying to goad me a little, perhaps even to provoke me to anger, so that I would look ridiculous in front of a small audience of Rwandans. It was a way of verbally aggressing the white person so addressed, to poke fun at him or her, a kind of weapon of the weak being used against someone perceived to be more affluent and privileged. Although I never responded with angry words or gestures to these challenges, they always annoyed me a little. Why should I be addressed by a term that is a racial category? Whether a shadow of displeasure ever briefly traversed my face, I do not know, but it usually seemed as though my aggressor was content to have added a tiny note of unpleasantness to my day.

The term '*umwirabura*' is not derogatory. I learned it from a Rwandan interlocutor who had used the term while enquiring of me whether there were any black people like himself in America. I had answered that, yes, there were. The new word gave me an idea. Now whenever any Rwandan said '*umuzungu, ca va?*' to me, I responded with '*umwirabura, ca va?*', which could be translated as 'Person of color, how goes it?' My thoughts were, if you are going to address me with a racial term, I shall respond in kind. After all, Aesop's moral at the end of the fable about the fox and the crane was: 'One good turn deserves another'. This response made other Rwandans laugh if they happened to be listening, and that turned the tables. My aggressor would be the one laughed at and not me. Sarcasm, repaid with counter-sarcasm in Kinyarwanda and spoken by a white person to boot, rarely failed

to amuse those present. Because of their own history of social position based on ethnic difference, Rwandans were particularly sensitive to utterances referring to ethnicity.

The subject of ethnicity is a classical one in anthropological and social science discourse. Theories about it run the gamut from primordialism, whereby ethnic differences are perceived to be primarily of a bio-genetic nature, to constructionism, where ethnic differences are depicted as historically contingent, malleable, and fashioned according to the political exigencies of the historical and social context (Eriksen 1993). In the more extreme versions of primordialism, behavioural, intellectual and moral traits correlate closely with ethnic differences. In the more extreme versions of constructionism, ethnic differences seem to be reinvented almost from one day to the next. For the most part, anthropology has rejected primordialism almost entirely in favour of more constructionist views. If the anthropologist can show that the ethnic differences in question are constructed entities, it is hoped that the differences can be deconstructed as well, and that people of various ethnicities – once made aware of the adventitious nature of their categories – will cease to find them salient in their political and social lives. However, when there are pronounced somatic differences between ethnic groups, the salubrious effect of deconstruction is less apparent.

During my periods of fieldwork in Rwanda, I always felt that my lack of melanin was a handicap. How could I be anything other than an *umuzungu* to the people, and tainted with all the negatives associated with whiteness? White Europeans and Americans were responsible for the enslavement of Africans, then colonialism and neocolonialism. Was it not to be expected that I would have to endure the logical consequences of the ‘white man’s burden’? As William Faulkner once said, ‘The past is not dead. It’s not even past’. In earlier times, and in other ethnographic areas, anthropologists have often had to confront their irrevocable markers of difference and their host communities as well. Very often the latter have responded positively to the situation by bestowing a new name on the anthropologist or by formally adopting him or her into the group (Kan 2001). Anthropological accounts of adoption into native American groups are not uncommon (*ibid.*), but this is much less the case in Africa. Sometimes adoption is performed out of perceived mutual economic interest; sometimes it is done out of affection, sometimes a mix of the two. I have no idea if this healer’s intentions were purely disinterested when he invited me to become his blood brother, but I had very little to offer him and his family in return. I was a graduate student at the time with very limited means and an unknown future. I had to take his statement seriously about our friendship and its evolution over time. If anyone needed something, it was more me than him. I needed a healer to cure me of my whiteness.

Curphametra, Butaro and Baudouin the Healer

I began fieldwork on Rwandan traditional medicine in 1983, and became affiliated with the Centre Universitaire de Recherches sur la Pharmacopie et la Medecine Traditionnelle (Curphametra). They were an academic division that was part of the Universite Nationale du Rwanda, and were based in Butare, southern Rwanda. Their interest in traditional medicine arose from a desire to valorize it and to determine if there were pharmacologically active substances contained in the plants used by healers and herbalists. They had both Rwandans and Belgian ‘cooperants’ on their staff – biologists, pharmacologists, biochemists and medical doctors. They possessed a relatively well-equipped laboratory where they would pulverize medicinal plants, extract the biochemical substances, and then test (in vitro) varying concentrations of the substances against pathogens to determine their efficacy as therapeutic substances. Their goals included the discovery of new and effective remedies that could replace those that were presently being imported from other countries and sold in pharmacies at prices that average Rwandans could not afford, the founding of a local pharmaceutical industry, and the potential export of medicinal substances to foreign countries.

As their interest in traditional medicine tended to focus on pharmacology rather than on magico-religious representations, they were pleased to have an anthropologist willing to investigate the more humanistic side to traditional Rwandan medicine. At the beginning of my research, I spent several months interviewing patients and healers who came to the Curphametra’s dispensary in Butare for traditional medicine. They also introduced me to several healers and ritual specialists outside Butare. Because I had expressed interest in a traditional local religion called the ‘cult of Nyabingi’ practised in northern Rwanda, they agreed to have one of their researchers accompany me to the commune of Butaro, in what was then known as Ruhengeri Prefecture.

The first thing we did when we arrived in Butaro, which was then a difficult five-hour, kidney-jarring drive from Kigali, was to enquire at the local administrative office. We did not get to meet the burgomaster as he was absent, but we did happen to meet one of his assistants, a tall, well-built man of about 35 years of age. He said, yes, studying *umuvuzi wa Kinyarwanda* (traditional Rwandan healing) was a good thing to do in Butaro as it was an important part of life there, and yes, it was good to study the cult of Nyabingi as well. There were numerous *abagirwa ba Nyabingi* (Nyabingi priests or priestesses), but people in Nduga (central and southern Rwanda) tended to look down on the cult, and to fear Nyabingi as a harmful spirit. She was not that, he explained, and there was no reason to fear her, as she was simply an intermediary to *Imana* (God). As to healers in the commune, he regret-

ted that he could not, in good conscience, introduce us to the most reputed healer in Butaro commune, because if the healer did not like me, as I was an *umuzungu*, he might decide to kill me by mysterious means and no one would ever be able to determine who had committed the crime.

I found a place to stay near the commune's administrative centre, and set about trying to find *abavuzi* (healers), *abagirwa* (Nyabingi priests and priestesses) and a research assistant who could help me with the linguistic side of things. My Kinyarwanda at that time was passable but not great, and the language spoken in Butaro had the added complexity of sometimes being more Rukiga than Kinyarwanda. After a few days, I found and hired an assistant who could speak Rukiga, Kinyarwanda and French. He accompanied me on visits to healers and Nyabingi priests and priestesses, and one day suggested that we also visit his uncle, Baudouin, who he said was a frequently consulted healer.

Next day we set out from the Butaro communal office and drove to the 'centre commercial', Gatsibu, a drive that took us over a number of rough mountain roads, sometimes crowded with cattle, sheep and goats. If one were to walk to Gatsibu it would take about an hour and a half if one knew the various *inzira za kinyarwanda* (Rwandan footpaths), but by car it took a little over twenty minutes. Once we had arrived, we hung around a small drinking establishment where I met quite a few of the locals, including the 'conseiller de secteur' (the lowest level of elected office in Rwanda); he was a pleasant middle-aged man, whom I found to be friendly and helpful, but I wondered about his sincerity. Was his apparent kindness just self-interested amiability? Later, I would learn that it was not – he was simply a friendly, engaging person. I also met a healer there with whom I talked about Rwandan traditional medicine. He told me that he would teach me everything he knew about traditional medicine if I could obtain a sufficient number of bags of dry concrete for him to finish a building project. I said I would look into the cost of cement in Kigali and figure out if I could do it. This was more like it, I thought to myself, 'I'll tell you anything you want to know, *umuzungu*, as long as there is something in it for me'.

After imbibing a few cans of sorghum beer, we decided to push on. There was no sense getting to Baudouin's place in mid-afternoon, as he preferred to work with his patients later in the day and until late into the night. It was all uphill from Gatsibu as we scaled hills of varying steepness. We followed the '*inzira za Kinyarwanda*' that course over practically every one of Rwanda's numerous hills. Rarely do they take a direct route from base to summit, instead they follow the contours of each hill. We passed many people tilling their fields as we hiked, and to each we would say, '*Mwakoze*' (You've been working?). Each person responded with '*Yego*' (yes). [In central and southern Rwanda, one says '*Muraho*' (Are you al-

right?) rather than *mwakoze* in similar circumstances.] The ascent to Baudouin's household took about an hour, an aerobic workout that many found arduous. But at the end of our hike I was pleasantly surprised by Baudouin's compound, which was composed of several fairly well-constructed houses, fashioned with pillars and beams made from the local trees of appropriate size, flat planks for siding, plywood, and corrugated iron roofs. How did they get this material up here, I wondered. One dwelling on this compound, about twenty or so feet uphill from all the other houses, was circular rather than rectangular. It was of daub and wattle construction, employing only the local saplings, and with a thatched roof. This was Baudouin's mother's house. She was in her early seventies, and preferred to live in a house that was 'traditional' in all its aspects. She spent a good deal of her time seated on a stool right outside her entrance, watching the activity below. Baudouin was clearly very attached to his mother, and grateful that he could have her living in close proximity. Along with my assistant, we walked up to her house and paid our respects.

Baudouin had five wives ranging in age from late twenties to early fifties. Each had her own dwelling space, and all but one had children. The eldest wife had two adult children, a man who was in his early thirties and a daughter who was a few years younger. All told, there were at least a dozen children present at each of my visits. I found Baudouin's large household to be remarkably harmonious despite the five co-wives and numerous children, although about two years after my last visit to him in 1987, he told me in a letter that his youngest wife, who was from Burundi, had decided to return there. The younger children played together and I seldom witnessed strife among them. Chickens roamed about looking for insects, and there was a mutt who did his job as a watchdog very well, barking when people came close, but demurring when it was clear that they were welcome. Baudouin was not a doting father, but whenever a young child would come up to him, while we were all seated around a fire in the hut where he received patients, he would gently listen to the child with his hand on the child's shoulder. They stayed away when he was working with patients.

A Twa man also resided at Baudouin's compound and acted as a kind of domestic servant. Baudouin might send him to Gatsibu or elsewhere on occasion to accomplish some errand. He would also trek into the forest between Rwanda and Uganda, about an hour's hike away, to procure medicinal substances. My assistant told me that the Twa have special knowledge of the forest and that, in essence, he was not a simple servant of Baudouin's household, but something of a partner to him. Baudouin could not practice traditional medicine without the Twa's help. Despite this, the practice of *kuneena batwa* was observed in the household. The Twa man would receive food and drink there, and would be present while others were eating or drinking, but

separate containers and bowls, specifically for him and any other Twa that might be present, were always used.

Baudouin could perform several different techniques of divination, and his knowledge of medicinal plants was extensive, but his most frequently demanded therapeutic procedure was *kuraguza amahembe* (to divine by horns, 'talking horns'). Healers in the Butaro region who practice *kuraguza amahembe* have a less than clear status with regard to the local notions of good and evil. The use of *amahembe* (horns) is ambiguous because the 'horns' can be used to cure a sufferer of his affliction, or to send an affliction against someone else or even kill him. In this latter instance, the practice is called *kwohereza amahembe* (to send horns) rather than *kuraguza amahembe* (to divine by horns). *Kuraguza amahembe* is widely practised among healers in Butaro, as well as in other parts of northern Rwanda and in southern Uganda. Healers who perform it (often called *abacunyi*, sing. *umucunyi*) suffer a certain notoriety, for it is believed that they can cure or kill. It was for this reason, as it turned out, that the administrator whom I had met in Butaro at the communal office had warned me against going to see the most powerful healer in the area. He was talking about Baudouin. But I never perceived anything in Baudouin's demeanour that suggested aggressivity. On the contrary, I found him sensitive, intelligent and friendly.

The procedure for employing the *amahembe* in curing varies somewhat from healer to healer, but tends to follow a definite pattern. First the healer determines whether his patient's problem is the result of an *uburozi* (poisoning, spell). If the patient has already consulted another diviner and poisoning has been confirmed, the healer proceeds directly to *kuraguza amahembe*. If poisoning has not yet been determined, the healer may employ a separate divinatory procedure to establish the nature of his patient's disorder. Baudouin employs a weight wrapped in a piece of cloth called *ihiriza*. He asks a 'yes' or 'no' question, then shakes the *ihiriza* inside an animal skin pouch and throws it upon a circular basket-woven utensil that is ordinarily used to toss grain into the air to separate it from the chaff. If the weight comes to rest in an erect position, the answer is 'yes', if it comes to rest in a reclining position, the answer is 'no'. Sometimes healers will also administer an emetic as both a divinatory and a healing procedure. If the patient vomits within a few minutes of ingesting the medicine, he is considered to have been the victim of a poisoning. If the patient does not vomit, it means the medicine has not found any poison in his body.

Kuraguza ihriza is but one method of preliminary divination; others may also be used before resorting to the *amahembe*. If preliminary divination yields an unfavourable result, the patient may decide to do *gushikisha* (to have divination done by the 'talking horns'). The object of sending the *amahembe* is to capture the voice of one's persecutor (or the object of one's

desire or curiosity) while he or she sleeps at night, and to bring the voice back so that the healer and his patient can interrogate it. The aural aspect of the method has earned it the jocular title by which healers sometimes refer to it, *telefoni y'ikinyarwanda* (Rwandan telephone).

To perform *gushika*, the healer invokes the *amahembe* spirits and instructs them to seek out the enemy of his client. Usually there is a pause at this point, for the horn must be allowed time to find the enemy. As the latter may reside far from the healer's residence, in another Rwandan Prefecture, for example, or even in Uganda, Burundi, Tanzania or Zaire (now DRC), this pause may last over an hour. Often the healer occupies himself with other matters during this time, sometimes he goes into temporary seclusion, though frequently he waits with his clients, talking, joking and drinking with them.

The *ihembe* itself consists of a horn taken from an *inzobe* (*Limnotragus spekii*), an antelope that lives in swampy areas, or from an *impoongo* (*Tragelaphus scriptus*). This antelope is also found in low-lying areas, and is frequently seen walking in water. It is said to drink water through its legs. Rwandans say that it does not need to lower its head to drink. It only has to enter the water, and it becomes, in a sense, continuous with it. Another type of horn, less frequently employed, is that of a blind cow that has given birth to both a male and a female calf. Perhaps the reasoning behind this usage is that such a cow has been a fertile being, having given birth to calves of both sexes. The quality of being blind (i.e. the inability to perceive mundane reality) may be associated with the ability to perceive extraordinary reality, a capacity to 'see' into a person's heart. I asked Baudouin about this but he was non-committal: 'Maybe yes, maybe no', he said. He was not exactly a Muchona the Hornet, like Turner had known, though in many ways his character and intelligence resembled that of Muchona (Turner 1969).

Possessing one of these horns is not, in itself, sufficient to exercise the power to perform *gushika*. This capacity must be acquired from someone else who possesses it. The healer must purchase it, as well as the necessary medicines, to make the *ihembe* work. The healer must also make frequent sacrifices to his ancestors and to Nyabingi so that they continue to protect and aid him in his endeavours. Another healer in the Butaro area, named Albert, explained to me that his *ihembe* had not been functioning well. He attributed this to an adulterous wife in his household who had inspired the enmity of Nyabingi and Albert's ancestors. This episode in Albert's life disturbed his relation to the spiritual world and diminished the effectiveness of his *ihembe*. Now he was temporarily abstaining from performing *gushika* and was waiting until he had sufficient money to purchase a goat as a sacrifice to his ancestors, and a bull for Nyabingi. This action, he claimed, would put him back in good graces with the *amahembe* spirits.

Baudouin, explained to me that one requires the aid of spirits besides one's ancestors (*abazimu*) and Nyabingi to perform *gushika*. These spirits he termed *imandwa*. One such spirit is called *Nzamuzinda*, a spirit who speaks at night and especially about problems concerning *abazimu* or Nyabingi. Baudouin explained that because this spirit cannot speak in the presence of fire, he could not employ him as his personal *ihembe* spirit, for Baudouin always had a fire burning in the hut where he consulted his patients and performed *gushika* for them. Instead, Baudouin called upon a spirit called *Munihuzi* to aid him in doing *kuraguza amahembe*. Baudouin purchased the power to communicate with and employ *Munihuzi* from another healer in the south-eastern Rwandan region of Gisaka. Without *Munihuzi's* spiritual aid, Baudouin would be unable to perform *gushika*.

Kuraguza amahembe is performed inside a hut, either at night or in darkness behind closed windows and doors. The client spits on the *ihembe* horn, then hands it back to the healer. The client's spittle is referred to here, and in most divinatory circumstances, as *imbuto*, a word which in other contexts means 'seed', 'child' (in relation to his parents), or 'sperm' (Jacob, III: 147). The healer takes the *ihembe* and places it in a small sack made from the pelt of an animal called *intutuzi*. The sack is attached at midpoint to a spear, which is inserted into the ground with blade upward. The healer asks his client to state his name, the nature of his problem, and what he desires to learn from the *ihembe*. If someone has sent an *uburozi* (poison, spell) against the client, the *ihembe* will be asked to seek out the poisoner. When the *ihembe* returns with the voice of the *umurozi* (poisoner), the healer and his client will ask him or her what poisons s/he used, what the motivation behind the malevolent act was, how the poison(s) can be neutralized, what other members or properties of the client's household – wives, children, livestock, fields – have been touched by the *uburozi*. In some instances, the *ihembe* retrieves the *uburozi* itself. In these cases, the poison is later found somewhere within the healer's *urugo* (living compound, enclosure).

When the *ihembe* returns, either with the enemy's voice or the poison, many healers claim to see a streak of light that places itself in the *intutuzi* pelt. Another way of discerning its return is the sound of an approaching motor-bike, but which cannot be seen. Sometimes it is only a squeaking sound that alerts the participants to the *ihembe's* return. This squeaking sound is said to be the voice of one's enemy, captured in the horn. The patient and the healer interrogate the voice and together they interpret its squeaky replies. An interrogation session may last up to an hour or two. The voice never poses questions of its interrogators. The price of this treatment varies, but it can cost up to 2,000 Rwandan francs (RWF) (about \$20) or more, with an average fee of about 500 RWF (about \$5). If the healer's ministrations resolve the patient's problem, the latter is expected to pay another visit to the healer and

reward him more generously. Patients tend to respect this stipulation, for I often encountered people whose problems had ameliorated and who were merely visiting the healer a second time to bring him a gift of felicitation. Judging from the number of people who sought his services and the material quality of his life, Baudouin was well off for a Rwandan peasant in that area.

Baudouin's practice straddled two moral universes, one good – moral, moist and fertile – and the other evil – immoral, desiccated and infertile. He was a perennially liminal figure. Even his homestead was spatially liminal as it was unreachable by car, and was a long, hard hike away from Gatsibu. People respected him and they may even have enjoyed his company, but they also feared him. For example, before setting off on the long hike to his compound I would always park my VW bug a bit off to the side of the 'centre commercial' Gatsibu; sometimes it was left there for a couple of days. Once I asked my research assistant if the car would be alright there. Would not someone come by and steal the rubber from the windscreen wipers, or unscrew the wing mirrors, or try to steal the fuel? These were all things that I had endured elsewhere in Rwanda. He laughed. No one would try to do any such thing, he explained, because they would know that I was a friend of Baudouin. If someone caused me or my car any harm, he could do *kuraguza amahembe* and determine the culprit. Then he would probably follow that up with *kwohereza amahembe* and the perpetrator might very well find himself either very ill or very dead.

Baudouin, I believe, saw me as an *umuzungu* unlike others that he had met in the area. There were priests and nuns from Europe and Canada who lived permanently in the nearby mission, and occasionally there were 'co-operants' (development workers) from Europe and the United States. But these others did not spend nearly as much time with Rwandans as I did. They were not interested in things like *ubuwuzi bwa kinyarwanda* (traditional Rwandan medicine). They rarely ate, drank or socialized with Rwandans. They never stayed overnight in Rwandan dwellings. And my purpose in being in Butaro was not to tell people how to do or change things, such as their religious, farming or healing practices. Rather I was there to learn about them and the way that they thought about and did things.

Moreover, Baudouin knew that I was a student. I had told him that the first time we met. I was unmarried, had no children, and not much in the way of a solid social insertion in the land that I had come from. Like him, but in a different way, I was a betwixt-and-between person. Along with my curiosity about him and all the things that he knew, we appreciated each other's humour. I sometimes made him laugh, and vice versa. I could imitate the sound of a trumpet and pipe out a few well-known Rwandan folk songs. That always provoked a great deal of laughter from him and any others who might be there at the time. And I could speak some Kinyarwanda. He probably saw

in me a person, *hors categorie*, a liminal being like himself. That might have been part of the reason why he treated me with affection and proposed the blood brotherhood ceremony.

Kunywana Amaraso – to Reciprocally Drink Blood

It was just a few months before my scheduled return to the United States in 1985 that Baudouin proposed the idea of performing the blood brotherhood ritual called *kunywana amaraso*. I had known him and been visiting his compound for almost a year by then. When there I was often given hot food to eat, something rather unusual. It was quite common when I visited healers or other Rwandans that I would be given something to drink, but rare that I was given something to eat. Also, on occasion, I stayed overnight at Baudouin's. There was a room to the side of one of his wife's houses that had a couple of beds, each consisting of four wooden posts, cross pieces, and a surface of woven reeds. There were also some blankets; no pillows or sheets but comfortable enough to sleep on if sufficiently tired.

At first I was perplexed by Baudouin's unusual generosity. What was in it for him? My very first interaction with him was when his nephew brought me to his compound. A bit fearful because of the warning given me by the burgomaster's assistant, I found Baudouin to be charming and affable. I stayed a few hours with him, had a very interesting conversation, and then as we were taking our leave, I gave him about 5 dollars in Rwandan money, basically the fee he charged his patients to do *gushika*. He looked at the money, a bit perplexed, and then handed the money to my research assistant, his nephew. It was as if he did not really want or need it. On subsequent visits, I brought gallon jugs of sorghum beer, bottles of Primus (the local brand of pilsner beer), or sometimes, a bottle of whisky. We would drink it together and others present would share in it as well. His daughter conducted a business in the sale of bottled beer and Ugandan Waragi (a distilled spirit made from plantains), and was sometimes present when she was not out hawking her wares elsewhere on the hillside. Sometimes I would buy a few bottles of her beer or a bottle of Waragi to share around. Baudouin did not seem to be interested in me for pecuniary reasons, although the frequent presence of an *umuzungu* at his compound may have enhanced his reputation.

Then one day I had an idea – why not ask him if he would like me to take photographs of his entire household, get them developed, and give him the prints. He very much appreciated that idea and so one day I took pictures of all his children together, then one of each of his five wives, a picture of them all standing side by side, pictures of them with their children, pictures of his Twa helper, and pictures of his mother. I was unable to return to his house-

hold for several weeks as my VW bug was under repair and I was stuck in Kigali; but when the car was fixed I returned to Butaro with Baudouin's photos. He was very happy with the results, especially so because his mother had passed away in the intervening time, and now he at least had photos of her.

There were other healers, diviners, and Nyabingi *abagirwa* that I frequented while in Butaro. I enjoyed visiting and talking with them. Occasionally I would see them by accident on market days close to the Butaro communal offices. I would usually invite them to a place where sorghum beer was being sold, and buy them a few drinks. It was an excellent method for becoming friendly and loosening the tongue. With Baudouin, however, it was different. I visited him at his compound, stayed for hours, sometimes a couple of days, and ate and drank there. On one occasion I brought him two young women from Kigali who were interested in his services as a healer. We stayed for two days at his compound and then I brought them back to Kigali. They had sought his help because they were looking for employment and were finding it difficult.

During one of my visits, while we were chatting about his healing practice, he told me about blood brotherhood, *kunywana amaraso*. He suggested that we do this ceremony. I accepted and then he said he would give me a bull. What would I give him in return, as *kunywana amaraso* requires an exchange of gifts. The gifts should not be the same things and no account was going to be made of their comparative value. I suggested that I bring some cases of Primus beer and a couple bottles of whisky. He agreed and we set a date.

When the day arrived, I went to Baudouin's with a few others, including my research assistant. All of us were carrying some of the drinks that I had promised to bring. When I got there, I was completely amazed. There must have been close to a hundred people present. Some were Baudouin's relatives and friends from nearby Uganda, some were from Butaro, both men and women. All the women were dressed in their finest attire, African *kanzus*. Some of the men were wearing African attire as well. Others were wearing what African men usually wore, namely Western clothing that had made its way to Rwanda via the used clothing trade. But they were carefully dressed, and no one was wearing work clothes.

A Ugandan relative of Baudouin spoke to the assembled crowd, explained the occasion, and showed everyone the bull that Baudouin was going to give me. It was a young bull about three years of age. Standing next to the bull, I stroked its flank. It seemed quite docile and friendly, but I wondered what I was going to have to do with it. Then I gave a short speech in Kinyarwanda. I told everyone how happy I was to see them there, that this was a very touching occasion for me, a tribute to Baudouin's warmth as a person, and I thanked them for their kindness in welcoming me into their midst. I asked

them to pray that circumstances would work out properly so that I would be able to come back to Butaro after first returning to the United States to finish my work there. At the end of my short speech, people clapped and cheered, and women ululated. I was quite overwhelmed. I had not expected anything like it. Then a man stepped forward. He had a small razor blade in his hand. He made a small nick on Baudouin's abdomen and passed it to me to lick off the blood. Then he made a nick on my abdomen with the razor blade and Baudouin licked it.

After that we went inside one of the houses on the compound. One of Baudouin's Ugandan relatives was a man who spoke good English and seemed fairly well educated. He explained to me what was going on and what I was expected to do. He said that I must have done very well to become integrated into this community, and that now I was considered one of their kin. Baudouin made some comments about what blood brotherhood was all about and I made some comments. I did not really know what to say so I just made it up as I went along. We then went to another room in the house, we stopped at the threshold and Baudouin reached with his hand above the door jamb to pick up a bit of dust. He touched me behind the ear with his hand and then said that this was now my house too. I could come whenever I wanted, and stay for as long as I wanted. But I should observe discretion when talking about other members of what was now my family as well as his. He then lay down on a bed in that room. I was told to lie beside him. He put his arms to my shoulders and I was told to do the same. Baudouin then proceeded to say that we could never have jealousy between us. If I slept with one of his wives, there would be no animosity between us because of it. Similarly, he could sleep with any of my wives. At the time, he had five wives and I had none. I thought to myself, he is really getting the bad end of the deal here.

Then we all relaxed and began to drink sorghum beer, bottled beer, and some took small shots of whisky. We sat around and chatted. I then walked around the compound some, and one of his wives asked me to buy a few cigarettes for her, which I did. She was now, in a sense, my wife, and I had better do what her other husband would do. Then the newly elected *conseiller de secteur* came up to me and asked me to pay a tax. I was startled by this. I have to pay a tax? Whatever for? My research assistant explained to me that whenever there was a transfer of wealth in cattle, a tax had to be paid to the commune. I found this to be a little crazy, but someone else explained to me that bovine wealth was different from other forms of wealth, as in a way it was thought of as belonging to the entire community, so any transfer of bovine property had to be accompanied by sharing a bit of that wealth with the commune. I paid the tax. The *conseiller de secteur* had a packet of receipts. He wrote something on one of the receipts, tore it off the pad, and handed it to me. It was proof that I had paid the tax.

The celebration continued, and people seemed to be having a great time. Women danced, sang and ululated. Some of the men joined in the dancing. Many of the dance steps were moves that I had only seen *intore* dancers do. One man played a drum. He was an astonishingly good drummer, providing the beat that people were dancing to. This was an amazing moment of *comunitas*. I had indeed experienced a 'rite de passage' in the fullest sense of the term. I was no longer the same person, the perennially liminal *umuzungu*. People present came up to me, clapped me on the back or shook my hand. It was all very moving and far beyond what I had expected it to be. I felt that I owed something to Baudouin that I could never repay. This was the man who was supposed to kill me if he did not like me. Yet he proved to be one of the most generous and expansive people that I had ever met in my life. Nothing in my life, before or after, has come close to that experience.

I thought long and hard about all this. Maybe I should just stay here in Butaro. Why go back to the United States and face all that one has to do to finish a PhD, get a job, and so forth? Weeks later, Baudouin and I would talk about this; 'Just buy some land', he said. But for now there were other things that needed to be accomplished.

My Departure from Rwanda, and My Return

Just a couple of months after performing *kunywana amaraso* with Baudouin, it was time for me to go back to Charlottesville and begin writing my dissertation. Before my departure I noticed that many in Butaro knew about the *kunywana amaraso* ceremony. Many now referred to me as '*umumwanyiri wa Baudouin*' (Baudouin's blood brother). I was no longer simply an *umuzungu* to them, and no one ever addressed me as such. On one occasion a woman approached me, said she was a relative of Baudouin's, and asked me to do a favour for her, which was to get her husband out of jail. I told her that I was not sure I could do that, but would do what I could. A day or so later, I asked Baudouin about it and he laughed heartily. Yes, the woman was related to him, but not all that closely. And her husband was not the best person in the world and probably deserved to be in jail. He found it amusing that she had asked me to intervene on her husband's behalf, because there was nothing I could do.

Later I asked him what he thought I should do with the bull, which one of the local herders was keeping for me in exchange for a nominal fee. Baudouin suggested that I sell the bull in the market place and use the money to help defray the cost of my ticket back to the United States. With some of the proceeds of that sale, I bought a sheep and brought it to him a few days later. He thanked me, but did not slaughter it at that time as he had already slaugh-

tered a goat, because he knew I was coming. We had goat meat kebabs and, of course, *ikigage* (sorghum beer). I took my leave, and several days later I was back in Charlottesville.

I corresponded with Baudouin after my return to UVA, the University of Virginia. A little over a year later (1987), I went back to Rwanda to see if some of my hypotheses about Rwandan traditional medicine could be confirmed. I also found a VW bug to rent from the Catholic missionaries' Economat General in Butare. With this, I was able to visit Butaro. I found a place to stay and then went on to Gatsibu. I was surprised by the number of people I knew from before, and by their enthusiastic reception. Several of them came up to me and shook my hand, *Umumwanyi wa Baudouin!* I was an old friend that they were surprised and happy to see. It was very moving. From Gatsibu I made the trek to Baudouin's compound and found things very much the same as when I had left him in 1985. I was able to visit Baudouin several times during the summer of 1987. On one occasion I brought a Belgian woman who was married to a close Belgian friend of mine, a surgeon who worked with the Belgian 'cooperation' (development group). Baudouin gave her a chicken, which she brought back to Kigali.

I returned to Rwanda again in 1993. At the time I was employed by Family Health International as a behavioural researcher. My job was to study Rwandan sexual networking with a view to lowering the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV. I had continued to correspond with Baudouin every so often during the intervening time but only up to 1990. I received his last letter in the autumn of that year, while I was employed as an instructor at the University of Chicago. I responded but did not receive a reply. That October I was having a small morning snack when a University of Chicago graduate student saw me and told me about what he had just heard on the news: Rwanda was at war. A large group of Ugandan soldiers had deserted the Ugandan army and invaded northern Rwanda – it was the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). In 1993, after the Rwandan government had been at war with the RPF for three years, the two sides arrived at a truce, the Arusha accords. In the autumn of 1993, the truce was still holding.

Baudouin's part of Rwanda had come under the control of the RPF. It was for this reason that he had been unable to correspond with me after October 1990. But now I was living in Kigali, Rwanda I thought I might be able to obtain permission from the two antagonists, the RGF and the RPF, to traverse the demilitarized zone between them and enter Butaro. But that proved to be impossible, only a privileged few who were living in Butaro, some of the European Catholic priests, for example, were able to do this. Then a friend of mine who worked for the International Red Cross and whose job involved visiting the camps of internally displaced persons (IDPs) told me that he was aware of a camp where many of the IDPs had come from Butaro. We could

visit this camp and maybe I would find my *umumwanyi* there. So one Saturday this friend and another Rwandan, who was Tutsi, decided to visit the camp. When we arrived a small mob of people who were living at the camp surrounded the car. We were nonplussed but we asked if anyone present had come from the *Kindoyi Secteur* of Butaro. One of the men came forward and we explained to him that we were looking for Baudouin the healer who lived in that sector. Yes, the man knew him. I explained to him that I was Baudouin's *umumwanyi* and that I was trying to find him. Yes, Baudouin had indeed taken refuge at this camp shortly after the RPF incursion. But after a few months, RPF associates had come to the camp and told people that they could return unmolested to their places of residence in Butaro. One of the people who had taken them up on this offer was Baudouin. The man explaining all this was not in any way menacing, but we were not sure about the others, whose numbers were increasing by the minute. We were becoming nervous, especially my Tutsi friend, because we could not tell whether the intentions of the small mob around us were peaceful or not. We gave several people some money, passing it through the open window and drove off.

I returned to Rwanda on subsequent trips in 2005 and 2009 to help my wife, who was Rwandan, with affairs related to her parents, who had been killed in the genocide. On both occasions I was told that it was unsafe to visit Butaro because of strife there. Had Baudouin, who was already in his fifties when I knew him in the 1980s, been able to survive all that had occurred in that part of Rwanda until then? It was very unlikely, but I never learnt what became of him.

Turner's Ideas of Rite De Passage, Liminality and Communitas

Turner's ideas about rites de passage, liminality and communitas were inspired by Arnold van Gennep and Ferdinand Tönnies. Van Gennep's *Rites de Passage* (1909), among the hundreds of books that he putatively authored based on observations of rural France, is his only contribution to anthropological theory. Despite this, it was an extraordinary contribution. His model has proven to be applicable to many ethnographic areas all over the world. In this relatively short book, van Gennep sketches out the three stages of a rite de passage, and introduces the concept of the limen and liminality. Turner's work concentrates especially on the middle stage of the rite de passage, the period of liminality. From Tönnies (1963), Turner expanded upon the idea of *gemeinschaft*. Simultaneously affective and social, *gemeinschaft* refers to the sentiments that cause social units to cohere and perdure in time. Tönnies uses the family as one of his core examples. Ideally, members of a family share a warmth of sentiment that keeps them committed to their spe-

cific family, and differentiates them from other families. *Gemeinschaft* can also characterize other more encompassing social groups that individuals become a part of. Periodically, *gemeinschaft* requires revivification. Ceremony and ritual provide the means by which members of a family or a larger social group rekindle the sense of 'belonging-ness'. Clearly Turner expands upon the notion of *gemeinschaft* as the underpinnings of his thoughts on *communitas*.

During a rite de passage, the period of liminality is characterized by what Turner called 'anti-structure'. Customary social roles are put into temporary suspension, hierarchy is attenuated or disappears, and the individuals who are undergoing the rite de passage meld into a group, where individuality, selfishness and competition are suppressed. In some instances, anti-structure entails the complete reversal of ordinary social roles and identities. The high and mighty are humbled, the lowest become the highest, and gender roles are reversed or rendered ambiguous. Group consciousness prevails over consciousness of self. Some critics of Turner have pointed out that this may be an over-idealized view of the liminal state and of *communitas*. When Tönnies used the example of the family to illustrate *gemeinschaft*, he was quite knowingly using a social institution characterized by hierarchy. It is possible to have *gemeinschaft* of the type that Turner emphasizes, egalitarian *gemeinschaft* or *communitas*, but hierarchical *gemeinschaft* is closer to Tönnies' original idea. Critics of Turner's ideas on liminality have pointed out that rites de passage do not always produce selfless *communitas*, but may instead reinforce hierarchy and social differentiation. Anti-structure may merely be the temporary pressure release valve that enables structure to reassert itself more strongly in the end.

Turner's tendency to extend his model of liminality and *communitas* to other ethnographic areas besides Africa has also left him open to the criticism that he essentializes both concepts. But Turner does not, in my view, reduce these concepts to essences. Liminality and *communitas*, are open-ended and variable in Turner's model. They cannot be defined by a list of fixed traits and characteristics. That would be a static way of defining these concepts and would seem to be antithetical to Turner's avowed project to portray social and cultural phenomena, not so much as Durkheimian 'social facts', but as processes being worked out over time in the ebb and flow of social life. If there is error here, it is more on the side of imprecision than on the side of misplaced concreteness. What is inside liminality? How is it defined? These seem to be concerns that would empty Turner's work of its dynamism were they to be pushed too far. But there may be merit to the criticism that he over-universalizes his concepts. Liminality, anti-structure and *communitas* may be very common in rites de passage and in many different ethnographic areas, but are they necessary concomitants of all rites de passage?

What I find most interesting in the case study presented here, in which I could be said to have been both subject and object, is Turner's emphasis on the idea that the temporary suspension of structure can be emancipatory, sometimes in a lasting way. It can free ritual participants of a burden, the burden of an ascribed social category that they no longer wish to embody. That is what this has the potential to do for individuals. As for the other members of the social group, liminality, anti-structure and *communitas* have the potential to demonstrate to them that their own categories are often arbitrary, and can be impediments to alternative ways of imagining their social being and the social being of others. Liminality can change the ontological underpinnings of both individuals and social groups (Kapferer 1988). In my case, becoming a blood brother to Baudouin freed me from the ascribed category of *umuzungu*. It freed those who witnessed the ceremony or who heard about it later of their propensity to think of me solely through the lens of one of their established social categories, that of *umuzungu*. At the very least, they could entertain the idea that not all white people were alike. Could that have led some to reflect upon their other established ethnic categories, particularly those of Hutu, Tutsi and Twa? Maybe. Maybe not. But it is certainly not far-fetched to advance that idea as a hypothesis. Although I remained an *umuzungu* to some Rwandans elsewhere in the country, that term was never again used in my interactions with people in Butaro.

I cannot generalize from my experience of *communitas* during the *kunywana amaraso* ritual to every instance of rites de passage out there in the world. But I can affirm that the sense of liminality that I felt during my early fieldwork in Butaro was diminished by virtue of my having undergone this ritual. I was not the same person after it as before it. During the *kunywana amaraso* ritual there were many signs from Baudouin's entourage that their feelings were sincere about my becoming part of their social group, and part of a Rwandan family. I was treated that way for better and for worse. It definitely changed the way that other people in the Butaro area related to me. The *communitas* that I experienced came very close to Turner's depiction of it. It was egalitarian *gemeinschaft*, not hierarchical *gemeinschaft*.

Those of us who have done anthropological fieldwork of the old-fashioned kind (i.e. actually living with people for extended periods of time and conscientiously trying to diminish the enormous social distance that separates us from our interlocutors), realize that our assumptions about the world are placed in abeyance. We are in a sense entering a liminal state

without full consciousness of this. If fieldwork succeeds in teaching us something, it effects an almost teleological suspension of the axioms of our own culture about civilization, morality and the nature of reality. When we have to return to our own societies, as most of us do, we return as transformed people. We no longer embody the unstated idioms, the tacit mean-

ings, and maybe even the unconscious structures of our natal cultures in the same automatic and uncritical way. We are no longer members of our cultures in the same way that we once were. A change in cosmology may accompany the performance of fieldwork, especially when we undergo a rite de passage such as the one that I experienced. And when our cosmologies change, we become liminal beings of another sort.

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