INTRODUCTION

ENDOGENOUS KINGSHIP

Why a book with the words 'Africa' and 'kingship' in the same title? An enormous amount of literature exists on African kingship, so much so that our opening question may have become a truism. Thirty years ago, Gillian Feeley-Harnik (1985: 275, n1) already gasped out that she had to limit her literature review to a representative portion of 'issues in divine kingship', a rubric on the intersection of politics and religion. Most anthropologists today prefer to act as if the subject is closed. Their misgivings remain unspoken: nothing conclusive has come out of the comparison of precolonial political systems in sub-Saharan Africa; the mass of literature on these societies without writing drew on oral traditions that had mostly mythical instead of historical purposes; the precolonial systems have lost all their relevance anyway; and so on.

The reality is that precolonial Africa never ceased to fuel exciting research collaborations. The debate on the history of kingship involves historians, archaeologists, linguists, political scientists and geographers. What has prevented a breakthrough, I submit, is the contribution that anthropology could make. Ethnographically based local models of rule shed light on endogenous processes and lived meanings, away from the safe classifications dictated by European history, such as king and priest, state and religion, government and ideology, rules and beliefs. These classifications encountered in the political sciences tend to lock up interdisciplinary collaborations in the default perspective that may be coined 'the polity prism'. Sounding like a scholar's prison, the polity prism takes the Greek *politeia,* citizenship, for granted, wherein society and political organization are the same. It inscribes itself in the tradition of the classics, basing power on government. Other perspectives on power should be explored. Comparative ethnography can equip historians with a palette of cultural perspectives to interpret sequences of events. The collaboration should

Medicinal Rule
A Historical Anthropology of Kingship in East and Central Africa
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disclose the recurring local distinctions and relations of wide-ranging regional and long-term historical relevance. In this part of the world, I will argue, these relations concern medicine rather than governance. Medicine is a perspective that might actually set Europe's own systems of rule in a new light.

Culture and the 'Anthropologizing' of Kingship

To use the label of 'king' for an African leader is not ethnocentric in itself – no word is. But the use of the word can be. If a study defines 'kingship' in terms of governance and applies it to a period when the 'king' headed a medicinal tradition, then the use of the term is anachronistic, and the assumption of its universal validity is ethnocentric. The European explorers of the sixteenth century setting foot on the Congolese shore, heading inland and stumbling on what looked like a palace in a city with well-clad personnel medicating objects had no doubt that these were priests and that the main inhabitant was a king. He was to be the spokesperson for 'his people' in the forthcoming exchanges with the throne in Europe, despite the relative anomaly of states in the region, the medicinal origin of his rule, and his limited say beyond the immediate surroundings. Soon his main role de facto changed into one of governance. The European delusion was self-fulfilling. Did Africanist research, which we will subject to exegetic analysis, commit this error?

Our[1] query about misconstrued kingships makes a hidden claim though: that the many societies in eastern and central Africa have some cultural commonality. If the institution of kingship cannot be the same everywhere, and in every epoch, then the same goes for a region of the world, *in casu* central and eastern Africa. The region witnessed the rise and fall of many types of society, some untraceable to us today. Very few were states headed by a king. These varied again in levels of centralization and autocracy, and in orientation on trade or on military conquest. Were these diverse sociostructural traits subtended by a shared cultural structure? One position this book will maintain is that surrounding groups co-determine the meaning of an institution.

To be on the safe side in our talk of kingship, we may want to drop the English term and stick to the word prevalent in a place, 'the local term'. Yet where does the local begin and end? *Ntemi, mfumu, makama* and *mwami* are some of the terms employed in neighbouring commu-

nities for the supreme customary authority. None could serve alone to speak for the institution across the region. And none of those exotic syllables contain pristine meaning. Even within a language community, a word will have its ambiguity masking original differences and developing new connotations – like the old word for witchcraft, *bulogi*, in disuse among Sukuma families after its negative association with the murder of innocent women. The solution I will propose for 'kingship' is not to reject the term but to accept a broadly defined version of the institution and embed it in an endogenous logic relating several systems of rule. By 'broadly' I mean a general category to talk of plural meanings, as in anthropological deconstructions of modernity and witchcraft: Africa has many 'modernities' and corresponding forms of witchcraft (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Geschiere 1997). The additional requirement of an embedding logic stems from our insistence on historical comparison.

The postcolonial message has been to leave the issue alone of cultural commonality and of concomitant radical difference between societies, and instead to focus on the multitude of particularities. Anthropology took a deep breath after decolonization and went through a historical turn, demanding we delimit the timeframe of our claims, and acknowledge the researcher's coevalness with the life of the respondents (Fabian 1983). Anthropologists have historians to thank for historicizing their discipline and raising reflexivity about cultural descriptions being products of the epoch (Clifford 1988). After the benefit that anthropology received, might the time be ripe for the converse move, for 'anthropologizing' history?

With the work of scholars from the Global South such as Appadurai (1996) came something of a geographic turn. Researchers no longer look at people in a place, but at places where all kinds of people live, and things pass through. Anthropologists reassured fellow disciplines that 'culture' does not matter (anymore); that we had been too traumatized by colonial ethnographies freezing cultures in time and, since the 1990s, by the culture concept associating people with certain ideas, feeding stereotypes in rightist circles (Bruman 1999). An extreme example of static analysis was Placide Tempels's claim about one philosophy shared by all Bantu-speaking peoples, a project that Mudimbe (1988) cogently crushed, subsuming it under Western inventions of 'Africa'. Ethnographers today seem content with networks or assemblages of things and actors becoming the unit of analysis (Latour 1993). The adjective 'cultural' is limited to an aspect: beliefs and institutions.

Recent developments, in particular the so-called ontological turn we will briefly touch on later, show that anthropologists are not willing to pay the whole price, that is to sacrifice the lifeworld, an endogenous reality with an internal cause – or 'logic' in the broad sense – requiring an adapted holistic methodology. Good ethnography captures the whole on which interconnected parts depend (Parkin 2007). True, a place or an epoch can be that whole instead of culture. To the latter's defence, however, the adjective 'cultural' has the advantage of, on the one hand, attributing meaning to a group uniquely producing it, and on the other hand of permitting the study of cultural systems, for example institutions, without identifying these with the people of the group. The members of the group are subjects, capable of acting according to their own variable frames of experience, which are parts from the whole we tentatively call 'cultural structure'. Events and places know a level of interconnectedness and permanence thanks to institutions embedded in cultural structure, which itself evolves through practice. Our aim is to combine this praxeology with a historical-geographic approach in order to attain the middle between the poles of four theoretical dimensions, schematized further on.

Introducing Medicinal Rule: A Regional Commonality

Signs of precolonial continuities do not cease to interrogate us. A few years ago, thousands of Tanzanians, of all layers of society, queued with their bicycles and four-wheel-drive vehicles to drink the cup of medicine from Babu Mwasapile, a Pentecostal preacher in a remote village of Arusha region. What attracted them? What persuaded government ministers to fly in by helicopter to have a panacean sip? A less embarrassing, easy answer than to evoke gullible citizens is that Babu had struck the right chord by the fusion of politics and religion into medicine. The massive popular interest attested to a special type of power that suffused the cup curing everything but nothing specific (although HIV was inevitably one on the propagated list of ills cured). The medicinal fusion brought everyone a century back to the shrine of the proto-king/healer.

On the negative side, nostalgia in the postcolony for such collective type of medicine most probably stems from the void left by the colonizer's and missionary's joint and all-out effort to remove medicine from people's highly intertwined network of symbols, norms, beliefs and daily practices, sometimes with the help of paramount rulers (see Part III). A postcolonial void, affecting self-confidence, morality and

creativity, is a sadder truth than the primitive gullibility alleged by Europeans. By being (mis)construed as the classic counterpart of both science and religion, magic so engrossed missionaries and colonizers that they stereotyped much of the African continent with it, alternating between the obsessive collection of these things of archaic power and their public destruction. In response to the colonial obsession, postcolonial studies downplayed its significance with the no less embarrassing result of dissolving the collective empowering practice of medicine into aspects of religion (ritual), politics (divine kingship) and the medical field (plants, therapy).

On the positive side, a certain model of rule should be acknowledged that is regionally important and has a history. Political sciences cannot understand how African systems of patronage, in which young people aspire to please 'recycled old elites' (Chabal and Daloz 1999: 43–44), deflect into exploitation without considering the gradual disintegration of medicine by those systems. Initiation into medicine, often spirit-led and granting adolescents a central role, had important democratizing effects for society, as we will see.

By 'medicinal rule' we mean an institution embedded in a certain lifeworld. Our working definition boils down to an everyday experience: to guide a group of non-kin members is a forest- and spirit-based initiatory power, made permanent and tangible in a charm or shrine, entailing cultic tradition. The medicine by which one rules does not fundamentally differ from any other form of 'domesticated fertility', which achieves a fusion of inside and outside elements – a transformation experienced by the subject as far from evident yet therefore fruitful. Fertility, of people and land, is an accepted term of cross-cultural significance underpinned by virtually inexhaustible literature on non-modern societies and kingship. The literature cannot be ignored, and will intermittently feature in this book, but the contribution we envisage is to start afresh from a regionally salient ethnographic basis. More generally, we ask ourselves what 'power' (commonly defined as influence) means in societies where fertility, or life, is the one and only mode of (re)production.

Those Africanists who did emphasize the regional commonalities, and tried to explain them, focused on either medicine or rule. Vansina (1990) on 'the equatorial African tradition' gave a detailed historical overview of the diverse political systems in central Africa. Chapter 4 will be devoted to explaining why he did not acknowledge their main commonality: that no chief or king ruled without medicine, namely charm or shrine and the initiation into ritual. Janzen's (1992) *ngoma* cast a regionally wider net to effectively show that the basic char-

acteristics of healing performances in western central Africa were applicable as well in southern and eastern Bantu groups. His examples include the Sukuma 'secret societies', which although influential down to the cities on the Indian Ocean, seamlessly concur with Zebola and Nkita cults operating all the way to the Atlantic coast. All groups had developed collective medicinal rituals for therapeutic, spirit-based communication to treat a wide range of both physical and mental afflictions. In Janzen's (1992: 78) exposé, however, the sociopolitical was the 'independent variable' determining the importance of *ngoma*: cults copied emblems of the state; a state in decline allowed for more cults, charms and therapies; a collapsed state handed over social control to ngoma-type orders, as in the *Lemba* cult enabling and controlling trade (Janzen 1982). The Bunzi shrine that 'gave impetus for the emergence' of a centralized polity in coastal Congo seemed an exception to the rule that Ngoma-type cults of affliction 'have either been brought under the tutelage of government and served the purposes of, and the legitimation for, sovereign power, or they have preserved and perpetuated segments of society not directly related to the state' (Janzen 1992: 75–76). We will argue instead that the cult is the regional model of rule in which the state originated. Gradually solidified into traditions, the cultic practices invariably initiate into medicine. They often, but not necessarily, give rise to a stable association, mostly with a hierarchy of initiatory positions. The dynastic clan presents a special case of medicinal cult.

A number of historians working in East Africa have converged on 'public healing' as the category to situate *ngoma* (Schoenbrun 2006: 1419). Cults that resisted the conquest-state, like in the case of Nyabingi spirit mediums in Northern Rwanda, illustrate the political aspect of public healing (Feierman 1995). In Buganda the dynasty was founded on a shrine that vied with rivalling clans for the preservation of public health and environment (Kodesh 2007: 549; 2010). Public healing, however, shifts attention away from medicine and divination and onto the ritual and charismatic aspects of kingship. An office devoid of charisma, with mediums performing the public healing, would then suggest historical change from a priestly political to a purely political function, as Schoenbrun (2013: 635) has reasoned about King Rukidi from sixteenth-century Bunyoro. In practice, we know that kings have always been the medicine itself. They are 'the drum' – the literal meaning of *ngoma.* Hidden from the public eye, they serve together with knowledgeable healers, named in Sukuma chiefdoms the *banangoma,* 'children of the drum'.

Medicine envelops the ruler's reign. Before enthronement, a medicine for which sacrifices have been made transforms the commoner into a king. Afterwards, the success of his reign depends on rain medicine containing a body part of his predecessor, signalling continuity of power (cf. the Shambaa kingdom; Feierman 1972: 236). Because medicine is the air their reign breathes, kings have attempted to monopolize it. In some cases, such as Bunyoro in Uganda, the medicinal cult was integrated in the state. Even then, Emin Pasha in 1877 wrote about Chwezi healers at the court (according to him 'sorceresses') as a section within a larger group (Doyle 2007: 566, 568). Kingship was an instance of a spatially larger and temporally deeper endogenous history. Facing the diversity of political-religious-medicinal complexes that historians have brought to bear in intricate detail, the anthropologist is invited to trace the model that ties the instances together. We will appreciate how Vansina, versed in both disciplines, situated the meaning of institutions in a 'tradition' – that is, the historically as well as geographically widest context.[2]

The everyday relations between medicine, socialization and leadership will provide evidence to frame the historical data. Janzen's research concentrated on urban areas. The *ngoma* rituals were performed without the comprehensive (including political) impact they had in rural communities, where the national government was far away, and the representatives it sent to the villages (e.g. village executive officers in Tanzania) were ignorant of medicinally based social status. Other regional comparisons, such as Ranger and Kimambo (1972) for eastern Africa and MacGaffey (1986) for Kongo, held the stage for a while, yet each time connecting the religious to the political as two domains. Our attempt is to rethink kingship from the encompassing perspective of medicine.

Part of why bringing medicine and rule together has never seemed necessary is the work of arguably the most influential Africanist anthropologist. Victor Turner's (1968: 198) 'watershed division' between healing rituals and rites of passage in Ndembu villages was responsible for distinguishing between a religious-medical function of treatment and a sociopolitical function of status attribution. Chapter 2 will demonstrate how it artificially shifted attention away from the actual power, the 'cooling' that all these rituals do according to the participants. Cooling with the aim of balancing fertility is the meaning of *poja* in southern and eastern equatorial Africa (and of *lemba* in mostly western equatorial Africa). The meaning expressed in various metaphors prevails in the whole of Bantu-speaking Africa.

Socializing Medicinal Rule: The Ethnographic Experience

This book tells the story of a transition. It is not a historical account about a people at a certain epoch. We cannot accurately delimit the area or the people to which the transition pertains. Transition is a process with potential for wider relevance. In our case the process concerns the emergence of an institution, kingship, in a certain region. Emergence and origin are vague concepts. Only if confining ourselves to a specific institution of kingship, with a name and place attached, can we date its rise and fall. Even then, the same practice may have changed names over time. And the same label may cover different practices in the history of a society. In the end the task, fit for an anthropologist, is to figure out the meaning of the institution, and see whether and how that has changed. Ultimately, the matter will arise of the region of application. A wide number of groups speaking different languages may be practising and thus participating in the construction of the meaning of the institution.

Who decides on the meaning of a practice? I can think of no better answer than 'the people'. Unfortunately, that mass of voices from past and present, and often transcending borders we initially drew, will never reach us. Yet, ethnography permits a marvellous inlet to hearing culture speak about itself. Practices of socialization (re)produce collective meaning. Therefore, my analysis starts from fieldwork on an initiation in a Bantu-speaking community. The rituals reproduce the local model of rule to speed up adolescents' coming of age. The ethnographic experience offers the researcher a 'where' and a 'when', suitable for the literary methods in the humanities. In the following pages, I will briefly present the initiation, which has elsewhere been the subject of more extensive attention than required for our purpose (Stroeken 2010). The social sciences hand the methodology to analyse the experience. Explicated in a scheme, a two-dimensional anthropology relating matter to idea, and actor to structure, will discern the initiated (and transmitted) cultural structure, entitled 'forest within', and link it up with a sociostructural reality, the polycentric complex. The third step we envisage for an anthropology mediating between disciplines is a return to the humanities, testing the explicated ethnographic experience in various societies in the region.

What is the implication of kings being initiated by other healers? Those that transmit culture have power. They determine what the world is like. The Sukuma chief of Bukumbi evocatively described to

me his enthronement in the 1950s – how he was abducted at night at an impressible young age, momentarily buried, and taught medicinal secrets that would keep him alive in his career. The dependence on the medicinal initiator appears also where one would not expect it. In the Luba empire, seemingly the epitome of monarchic rule, the chiefs had to be initiated into Mbudye, the medicinal society of men and women. The condition applied to the supreme ruler as well, before his investiture and reception of the title of the Mbudye's highest rank (Reefe 1981). The incumbent was taught to use the memory board 'longhand of the sacred pool' (*lukasa lwa kitenta*) made of mnemonic beads of various colours that explicitly socialized kings into their duties. The other two *lukasa* boards taught members of the bottom rank of the cult about the early settlers and the organization of Mbudye. Where then did the power lie – in the dynastic clan or in the cult? And why do we assume these two to represent different domains?

In late 1996 I was lucky enough to be invited by my Sukuma host, the elderly healer Lukundula, to participate in an initiation (*ihane*), together with other young men of my age. The invitation was a relief for me because until then the Sukuma healers I wanted to interview had told me that they could not share anything substantial about their medicine unless I had been initiated. I had not understood well that they did not mean by this the completion of training into their medicinal society, which I thought was impossible anyway, but simply the *ihane*, the general training all adults begin with. I had thought (and read) that the institution was long extinct, but in this area relatively close to the city of Mwanza – possibly left alone for that reason by missionaries and inquisitive civil servants – it was vibrant. After brewing four drums of beer, I and five sons of farmers as well as the local schoolteacher could enter into the senior age-grade association of our village before a crowd of one hundred. During the rituals of *bunamhala,* translatable as 'elderhood' by which adulthood is meant, a cultural logic was conveyed with ahistorical overtones. In a region of cultivated steppe, small hillocks with boulders were designated as 'forest', *bu.* An ordeal in the forest staged the death of each novice's former self, the ultimate sacrifice and acceptance of indebtedness to the cult. Provided they paid the fee of a goat, and the ancestral spirits had accepted through an oracle of a rooster, the novices underwent three days of medicinal training in the forest and passed the public exam among the elders in which to prove their knowledge of the forty collected substances and their secret proper names. Medicinal knowledge epitomizes 'forest-mastery'. It is the only formal collective socialization they will undergo.

Our thesis on medicine being the model of rule is illustrated in the ritual consecration of the *ihane* novices after obtaining a medicinal bundle named *bu ya mu kaya,* literally 'forest of within the home' – in short, 'forest-within'. It prepares them to head families and, in principle, larger entities. The village headman was in the first place a *namhala,* an elder initiated into the medicinal association and of highest rank. *Bugota* is 'medicine': among Sukuma it could not get more 'political' than that. Making gifts of beer is rewarded with more secret knowledge, and with a higher title to match. For this reason, too, the elders' association deserves to be called medicinal. The extinct precursory initiation of young men, *busumba,* allegedly followed a similar structure with a riskier corporeal ordeal and fewer medicines than the elder's society. The pendant for elderly women, *bugikulu,* participated during the public scenes of the *ihane,* challenging with ladles the young men carrying spears. I remember how the spear had felt in my hands twenty years ago, when I entered *ihane,* and how hard the women's ladles could hit. A song followed on how we had wed 'male' and 'female' things of life.

The twin set of connected gourds from which the initiated drank beer was likened to experiences of fertility by one of the masters surrounding us: 'A game of African chess goes on as long as there is more than one pebble in the pit'. The forest-within medicine, concocted from the forty ingredients, was used afterwards by the masters to protect their fields against drought and disease. The meaning did not need to be explicitly conveyed to the participants. For me the 'animism' was somewhat unexpected. The perspective on the world that admitted only one mode of production, life, contrasted with my separation between political, economic, religious and other modes of production, which not only marks modernity (Luhmann 1995) but constitutes the scholarly take on society.

I should hasten to add that by a perspective on the world or a 'logic', *in casu* the mastering of the forest in order to no longer fear but harness the unfamiliar wild outside, I do not mean a certain thought or belief. It would be untenable to imagine people possessed by an idea and for this cognitive reality to ground their culture, while anyone of them at any given moment could easily invert it into the opposite idea. The rituals rather initiate the members into affects of the group – inarticulate energies underlying motives, convictions and desires. The preconscious grasp of parts connecting into a whole permits the ethnographer later to intuit which cultural relations in the past might be 'logical' possibilities. The ethnographic experience of context is holistic, best served by the literary style of the humanities. How-

ever, in order to function as a baseline for interpreting other studies of leadership, our task is to submit it to analysis and make the whole comparable across cultures.

The association of men and women that organizes the socialization has authority and impact on the members, more than any kind of power a king could summon. What did the association of *bunamhala* tell us about the world? At a general level, the major elements interrelated in the *ihane* were: divination and ritual communication with spirits, obtaining medicine of life and fertility from the forest, initiation of that knowledge after sacrifice, gift giving for personal status, and a cultic-associational model of sociality. The coming nine chapters will unite the elements into a logic of 'forest-mastery', and test its value as an endogenous model to reinterpret anthropological and historical analyses of chief- and kingship in the region.

The implication of the initiated cultural structure is that leaders have no ultimate powers. They depend on spirits or charms. Their dependence is sociostructurally reinforced within a polycentric society safeguarding the autonomy of initiated adults and their extended families. I experienced this situation in Sukuma villages of the 1990s. Each extended compound (*kaya*) was a centre regulating its social concerns, which comprised all aspects ranging from health to decision making to education (school for many boys being an interruption to cattle herding) to rituals and economy. Everybody was expected to master medicine from the forest, possess charms at home or at an ancestral shrine in the compound, and to transmit and have access to fertility. The autonomy of adults primarily manifests itself as the sociostructural outcome of polycentrism.

Half a year after my *ihane* I entered the Chwezi spirit cult (Stroeken 2006). The basis of the ritual was, like *ihane,* a ritual passage in the forest (seen in cults of affliction in western equatorial Africa as 'the passage through the white', cf. Janzen 1992). The emphasis was on healing and multisensory interventions, as patients suffering from depressive and dissociative symptoms participated (Stroeken 2008). The ritual period lasted much longer than *ihane,* and the transgression during the moment of ordeal went further, involving ritual incest. The head-making was more explicit: each received a Chwezi diadem at the end as a sign of new status. Whether this has been copied from the enthronement of kings and chiefs, or vice versa, is a historical question. What strikes the anthropologist is the common cultural structure. The novice picks up the diadem from the pool, purified with charms. This pool of charms is central in cults across Bantu-speaking Africa, from Kolelo in the south-east, Luba in the south, and Mongo in the centre,

to Tio in the west and Chwezi in the east and the Great Lakes. Another addition to the forest-within of *ihane* is the role of animal hides, from which the blindfold for the master of ceremonies is made. In brief, the spirit cult's symbolism explores the most feral qualities. This may be why cults look like they deviate from the everyday idiom of magic (cf. Evans-Pritchard's claim in Chapter 6), while in fact, they push magic to its limits.

To sum up, this book seeks to reconcile social sciences and humanities in a feasible methodology for (re)interpreting historical and cultural data. To systematize our comparison, the next section will analytically link the two socioscientific dimensions with the 'historical whole' that the ethnographer experiences. At the same time, the theoretical detour imparts to the non-expert reader some of the main tensions of the discipline.

A Century of Africanist Anthropology in One Oscillation

Africanist anthropology has, since the 1920s, been a token of the wider discipline by oscillating between cultural and social poles of analysis to explain patterns and change. In retrospect, much of what propelled the debates was the will to grant societies an endogenous dynamic.

Radcliffe-Brown's structural-functionalism concentrated on the social organism that is society, in an attempt to snap out of the cultural teleology of social evolutionism by Morgan, Maine, Tylor and Frazer. Their supposed stages of civilization, reflected in the greater rationality of practices, from magic to religion to science, lost all purport in light of the question Radcliffe-Brown asked about the functionality of practices. Magic did as good a job, for what it was meant to do in the studied societies, as science did in the West. Evans-Pritchard, who was most influential between 1930 and 1950, rejected social evolu-

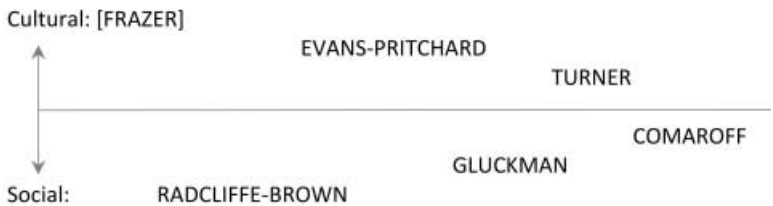

Figure 0.1 Social versus cultural tendencies in anthropological theorizing. Figure by the author.

tionism as well; however, unlike Radcliffe-Brown, he engaged with the lifeworld of the community in which he did his fieldwork. Zande beliefs in witchcraft were no less rational. Only their cultural premises were different. The anthropologist's hope of a natural science of the social was in vain. Humans are historical beings, caught in webs of signification, to be studied by the humanities. Radcliffe-Brown's view of society had been static, downplaying social change. But had Evans-Pritchard been any better at capturing the social processes at play? Zande and Nuer cultures were described as if isolated from the impact of colonization. From reading his work, the civil war after he left Sudan could only come as a surprise.

Max Gluckman tackled the pressing social matter profoundly with his extended case method, hinging the study of macro-processes such as colonization onto the ethnography of micro-situations. Under his tutelage in the 1950s, the British anthropology of Africa flourished. The shift was again to social structures, yet much enriched by the fieldworker's insight in lifeworld (see rapprochement to horizontal line in Figure 0.1). Urban and industrial environments in southern Africa had been neglected earlier. The critical, neo-Marxist stance in the extended case method brought the anthropologist in tune with the postcolonial era, the events of independence, and a new élan wherein Africa was no longer intellectually separate from the rest of the globe.

It would not take long though before the oscillation resurged. Research on industrial zones and town life may have been fashionable, and data collection through survey or from behind the table of a bar may have been practical, but all of it rather dimmed the alterity of non-Western cosmologies. Had alterity – the colonial spectre, the heart of darkness in Joseph Conrad's novel – been a figment of the ethnographer's imagination? Once the independence of African states was achieved in the 1960s, the issue of cultural particularity could be given a second chance. Symbolic anthropologists Mary Douglas and Victor Turner had a keen eye for the cosmologies of central Africa. At the same time, both made sure the cultural particularities they collected served to illustrate an encompassing theory – for example, the role of ritual in society. The distance between the social and cultural poles of analysis shrunk in the syntheses offered by their symbolic anthropology. Published during the Flower Power era, Turner's research on liminality and communitas in collective ritual had relevance beyond Ndembu society.

After the enthusiasm of the early 1970s about African states nationalizing and claiming authenticity irrespective of their inner cultural or 'ethnic' diversity, the critical voice of what became post-

colonial studies, and later subaltern studies, sounded ever louder. Mudimbe's *The Invention of Africa* and Clifford's *Writing Culture* built on the theoretical thrust produced by Saïd's critique of orientalism in the humanities. Anthropologists had already gone through the motions of critique on (neo)colonialism, if mainly from the social angle. Now they understood, with the help of historians, the cultural fact that any research is historically situated. From the late 1980s onwards, Jean and John Comaroff, James Ferguson, and many others, carried Gluckman's project through by culturally particularizing colonization and its cousins, the macro-social processes of modernity, globalization and neoliberalism. For Africanists there was no longer modernity except in the plural: African 'modernities'. Magic and witchcraft could perfectly well be modern. We had to give up the Eurocentric concept of modernity, which defined itself in opposition to traditional belief. Witchcraft had lost nothing of its relevance in Africa because it reinvented itself, always and everywhere, to match new circumstances of social inequality and injustice.

As the theoretical currents succeeded one another during the past century, the poles of culture and society intertwined more and more. Their one-dimensional axis now has validity mainly as a methodological pointer: if social structure characterizes a society in the way it differentiates groups, classes, relations, offices and positions, the researcher has to take into account the cultural structure as well, because beliefs, values, norms and ideas form a whole (structure) that determines priorities in life.

What is lacking in this schematization of theories on a one-dimensional axis is the issue of agency. Methodologically it is useful for ethnographers to zoom out to the fantastic construct of a lifeworld whose secrets can be unravelled. Its value has to be proven in instances of behaviour that become explicable only through that construct. Anthropologists observe and communicate with their subjects to verify whether the hypothetical cultural structure actually informs the way the actor experiences the world and makes decisions. Each chapter in our book confronts ethnographic studies by recalling this methodological challenge: what is the cultural structure underlying the author's interpretations, and could it have been really 'lived' by the cultural actors – that is, employed as a frame of experience? The next section introduces this second dimension highlighting agency.

The necessity to dimensionally specify our schematization also appears from its incapacity to situate the recent theories advocating an 'ontological turn'. Basically, the ontologist theorizes that each 'culture' corresponds to an actual world (a more fashionable cognate)

rather than to a different perspective on the same world that all humans share, and of which the empirical sciences would have expert knowledge. If we stick to the two poles of society and culture, the turn seems like radical culturalism and a leap away from social anthropology. But since the theory replaces culture by ontology, it as much deserts cultural anthropology. The double leap away from the evolution towards synthesis to a kind of infinity underlines the limits of our distinction between the social and the cultural. However insightful it may be as a division of explanatory factors, the axis fails to situate current theory, at least in the wider discipline.

Interpreting Culture: Anthropological Dimensions

To overcome the limits of our one-dimensional social-cultural axis, we must replace it by two anthropological dimensions that reproduce in a more refined manner the oscillation schematized above. Going by the chain of debates in our wider discipline on the explanation of cultural practices, the most liable candidates are, as a first dimension, the poles of materialism and idealism, and as a second dimension, the poles of structure and agency. Their combination results in four quadrants on which anthropological positions can be situated, in principle with coordinates determining different tendencies towards each of the four extremes (Figure 0.2). How do we proceed from one to two dimensions?[3] To take the example of the increased interest in schooling

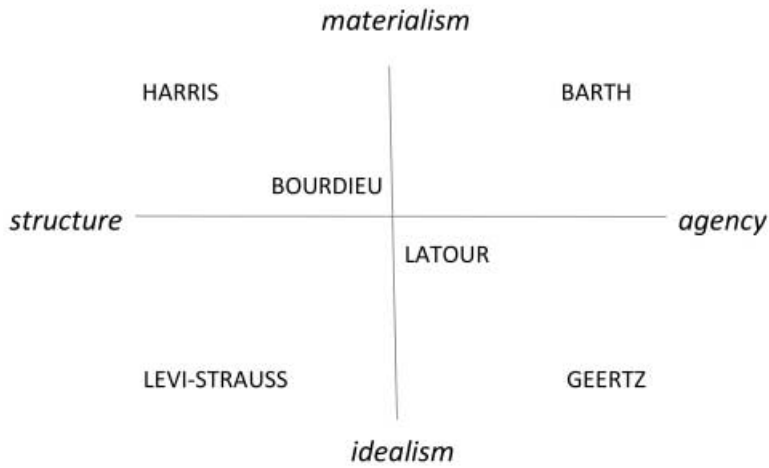

Figure 0.2 Two dimensions of anthropology. Figure by the author.

in rural Sukuma villages since the 2000s, an adequate explanation should combine the material factor of the improved quality of schools with another factor, the ideational change: medicinal knowledge and cattle-holding lost their value as criteria for social status. The polycentric system is dissolving as the centre of gravity has shifted towards public spheres, with some, such as education and agriculture, controlled by the national government, which was not the case under traditional central authorities securing the fertility of land and people.

Have we explained practices exhaustively with the ideational versus material dimension? To believe so is to reduce reality to structures or statistical trends.[4] The exceptions on a pattern result from the actors having agency. For example, some adolescents leave school early to start a healing trade, which means that the ideational basis for this practice, reinforced by material reasons such as poverty, should be differentiated by a second dimension opposing structure and agency.

Explanatory frameworks that do not tilt practices towards one of the poles manage to approximate the middle of the dimensions. They avoid the stamp of an 'ism'. Much of anthropological debate has been about probing the opponent's paradigm for one's favourite pole, with the aim of decrying its neglect. The inconsistency of an author inadvertently shifting his or her approach during the same study towards the opposite pole will be maligned too. It is a game of antagonisms that this book is willing to play. The reader will forgive me the somewhat inelegant conjunctions spawned by the two dimensions. Between brackets I put the convenient historical tags to typecast each approach: actor-materialism (the early nineteenth-century Liberal), structure-materialism (the late nineteenth-century Marxist), structure-idealism (the twentieth-century functionalist), and actor-idealism (the postmodern phenomenologist).[5]

A century of debates in the discipline has resulted over time in a positive spiral towards the middle of both dimensions, like the gradual rapprochement in the social-cultural synthesis schematized above. Bourdieu, Latour and Ingold are located closer to the centre than their predecessors Evans-Pritchard and Max Gluckman. The centre means equal distance from the four extremes. Frederik Barth's game theory and Marvin Harris's cultural materialism are outliers, both privileging the role of material necessities in the (re)production of practices. The second dimension is necessary to specify that Barth starts from the actor's choices (*actor-materialism*) while Harris, like Marx's historical materialism, gives primacy to the (material) structures driving history (*structure-materialism*). The functionalism of Radcliffe-Brown, unlike Malinowski's reference to the biology of motivational primary

needs, insists on the ideational system shared by members of a society. His *structure-idealism,* like the structuralism of Levi-Strauss, passes over the situation in which an actor has to make decisions between cultural options, and the actor goes against the grain of society. To avoid such cultural essentialism, Geertz concentrated on ethnography of the lifeworld and the subject's acts of interpretation (*actor-idealism*). He did not do so to the extent that Ortner (2006) would, shedding light on subjectivities in various contexts. All these authors, or at least their seminal studies, can be compared to each other using the relative positions determined by the two axes.

Applied to the theme of kingship, the four approaches differ consistently (I do the exercise for the theme of witchcraft between brackets). An actor-materialist explains cultural systems from the material benefits for the actor: the king is an individual seeking power (the one accused of witchcraft is disempowered). A structure-idealist spurns such microsocial explanations and reaches for macroscopic heights of analysis to see the functionality of institutions: kingship (and witchcraft) maintains social harmony in ways that a single actor could not fathom. In response, a structure-materialist will be critical about those institutions by pointing to the economic and political structures that keep certain social classes united under the protection of the king (or regarding witchcraft: that push the underclass into a whirlpool of mutual accusations). Actor-idealists will emphasize, against all three quadrants, the subject's situated ideas and the agency ignored in both material and ideational structures. Kingship is an institution whose meaning depends on people's experiences of it, which may not all be conscious (witchcraft beliefs are not pre-given but take shape in certain situations). This fourth approach, 'actor-idealism', is our book's theoretical point of departure. We try to balance it with the other poles of interest. The experiential frames that an actor employs in concrete situations are significant for our analysis to the extent that therein persists cultural structure.

In the two-dimensional scheme the ontological turn belongs to the quadrant of actor-idealism. However, its nearness to the centre indicates that the two dimensions still do not suffice to register all nuance of the theoretical advance aimed at. Ontologists pursue the interpretive interest of Geertz, yet adamantly avoid, like Bruno Latour (1993), the dualism of nature and culture, of truth and belief, or Dilthey's dichotomy of explanation versus interpretation that kept Geertz on a leash called culture, held separate as it were from the natural world. Viveiros de Castro (2004), Holbraad (2007) and an increasing number of phenomenologists and ontologists carve out their position on a

third dimension, which is non-dualist, hence holistic and opposed to atomistic takes on culture.[6]

Their interest, though, is not in how a world, the whole of parts, changes. Their weak spot thus seems to be a fourth, temporal dimension, requiring historical research. The fourth dimension distinguishes diachronic from synchronic studies, for which Chapter 9 will propose an adapted methodology.

The praxeology of Pierre Bourdieu (1980) also belongs in the centre of the two-dimensional scheme. But non-dualist it is not. Praxeology was hailed in the 1990s as the culmination of anthropological and sociological attempts to reconcile phenomenology with historical materialism (the first dimension), while granting people's structured dispositions (habitus) a considerable dose of agency (the second dimension). Practices result from the dialectical relation between the habitus and the field, influenced by the forces of social class. Habitus, which was how Bourdieu operationalized culture, is produced, not fixed – and this in a field, not in a vacuum. However, internalized dispositions (habitus) and the environment (field or context) restore the old duality of a perspective and the world out there, which ontology seeks to bridge. The habitus and the field are respectively micro- and macroscopic entities. How could they 'interact'? Their mysterious dialectics of structure and agency, matter and idea, lack the holistic, visceral meaning of the humanities, of a 'where' and a 'when'.

Both ontology and praxeology are of little help to our study because of the same omission: the historically salient reality of a region. Institutions, such as kingship, cannot be understood without considering different epochs and adjacent places. An endogenous logic, through which a society finds within itself the reason for change, implies a historical whole with geographic scope. It cannot be a set of loose ideas, colliding like atoms, because subjects, including the ethnographer, experience this endogenous logic, for instance the forest-within, during initiation. To discern endogeneity, we propose a 'meso-anthropology'. Its focus on regional history is spatio-temporally intermediate, lying between society and a concrete community, as well as between universal meanings and meaning at the current moment. It seeks to reconcile the two-dimensional scheme, couched in socioscientific terms, with two criteria of analysis requested by the humanities: to bring out the history of an institution while retaining its holistic meaning.

Given our objective, our main frame of reference for a baseline will be the work *Paths in the Rainforests,* an unparalleled exercise of comparison conducted by Jan Vansina, who, until his death in February

2017, remained actively involved in discussing his book's numerous repercussions. Vansina (1990: xii) managed to derive from oral histories and linguistic reconstructions 'a powerful endogenous process, a cultural tradition that had its roots some 4,000–5,000 years ago, and that had maintained itself by perennial rejuvenation, until it withered as a result of the colonial conquest'. It is in honour of his pioneering synthesis that I present the following comparative exercise. Honour in an academic context is always hard won and ambivalent, I admit. The reader may expect relentless efforts on my side to find the imperfections in Vansina's synthesis. Chapter 4 concentrates on the question of whether he had actually distilled the endogenous factors of the tradition and its changes. Chapters 7 and 8 reinterpret the analyses of his two major monographs.

The main impetus of my critical effort stems from teachings of another senior, René Devisch (1993), who made it his vocation in the book *Weaving the Threads of Life* on Yaka ritual and society to develop a genuinely endogenous anthropology. The affect of life-giving was his angle to understand the forces of healing and witchcraft in the lived cosmology of Yaka hunters. My emphasis will be on the cultural structure emanating from the wider region.

Endogenous Process and Transition

An intimate link exists between culture, structure and endogeneity. If it were not for some cultural structure transmitted from one generation to the next and expressed in a variety of institutions, how could we claim that societies have endogenous processes? Structure does not mean fixity, no less than the abstract sequence of DNA should be confounded with its concrete expression after transmission. Exogenous factors meet with a group's inner receptivity for habits to change.

Sahlins (1968) captured the anthropological urge by demonstrating to a wider audience that although aridity was an exogenous push factor for the Neolithic transition from hunting to agriculture, whose beginnings in central Africa are dated to 2500 BP, it in itself was not sufficient cause for a change of lifestyle. Khoi-San hunters and gatherers knew how to sow plants and in the right seasons did so, to eat their favourite berries and wild grains, but to make agriculture their lifestyle was not endogenously logical, for they had developed a nomadic way of life adapted to desertification. By 'anthropologizing' histories we mean this exercise of 'endogenizing' the analysis, shifting attention from causality and directly observable (atomistic) factors to the

history of something as hard to delimit as a whole and its systemic modifications.

The endogenous factor in history has not yet been given a fair chance. That is why Jerardino et al. (2014) recently thought, going by their exclamation, that they would startle their colleagues. They observed that cultural influence rather than demic diffusion drove the Neolithic transition in southern Africa. The implied knotty processes of cultural exchange and acculturation countermanded the conventional wisdom that the spread of agriculture was a group trait advancing along with the migration of Bantu-speaking groups from west-central to central, east and southern Africa.

Endogenizing, however, means that we should go one step further and consider multilinear and non-linear explanations. The thesis advanced by Broushaki et al. (2016) attributes the spread of the earliest farming in Asia to independent inventions. A pause is in order to underline the last two words. They muddle up the neat diachronic descriptions of diffusions from the distant past. The charted distribution of the institution's earlier and later occurrences in the region, which initially seemed to reflect a direction of influence, appears to result from intervals between separate influences, even separate inventions of farming.

How could independent inventions happen so close together in time and space? The answer may quite simply be that the groups shared a cultural logic. Think of parallel inventions in music, art or theory in the globalized West: individuals with the same interest independently enact dormant possibilities of innovation. Among Sakata farmers of the central African rainforest, for instance, fertility is reproduced through the insertion of seeds in the garden, as well as through the male insertion of ore and air from the bellows into a female furnace (Bekaert 1998). Farming and iron smelting reproduced for the Sakata the same logic in embryonic form. This is what we mean by cultural structure.

Not surprisingly, the atomistic method cherished by positivists does not welcome the possibility of endogenous logic from which symbolically similar practices would spring. The atomistic unit of analysis is an actor adapting received or socialized practices in response to material needs. To give a taster of the sort of tensions lying in wait, Vansina (1990: 60) deems it very unlikely that the complex technology of iron smelting spread to equatorial Africa as an independent invention from northern Gabon, on top of its diffusion from the Great Lakes, even though that is what the archaeological data suggest. Why could it not happen in Gabon, I ask, if the technology was independently invented

in other parts of the world? According to the one-dimensional axis, Vansina's positivist methodology seems well balanced, taking into account both society and culture. The two-dimensional scheme reveals his bias towards actor-materialism, as illustrated later on.

Obstacles to the study of endogenous processes abound. Firstly, our academic specialization of research themes in Africa reflects the functional differentiation of modern society: Vansina focused on the political, Ranger on religion, Turner on ritual, and Janzen on healing. Yet, those classics dealt with the same phenomenon, which is as much political as religious as therapeutic. It is, in one word, medicinal – an adjective seeking to capture the holism of cultural practice. A second obstacle is the scientific emphasis on social structure in the study of processes. Complexification of networks, and economic or ecological factors are easier to conceptualize and analyse than changes in cultural 'logic' that require an insider's experience and ethnography. A third hindrance to comprehending medicine is the aforementioned mix of fascination and a fear of the fetish.

The well-trodden path, following an approach summed up in the conjunction 'actor-materialism', is to imagine kingship as an invented idea whose influence gradually spread, and to explain the diversity of kingships from the integration and adaptation of the invention in different places and contexts. In contrast, this book explores the harder way that brings together data hitherto kept separate. We trace a cultural structure originally shared by a wide number of people now scattered. We disentangle the process through which this structure evolved into various institutions, including kingship. The major advantage of discerning a transition is that it permits one to trace an endogenous logic amidst complex historical interactions. Our comparative data will distinguish three endogenous possibilities: divinatory societies, medicinal rule, and the ceremonial state, all interrelated in the last section of this introduction in terms of earlier forms and offshoots.

History and Anthropology

Jan Vansina merits a special place in our theoretical discussion, for his celebrated use of oral traditions to reconstruct Africa's past poignantly raises the question of whether the historian can do without the anthropological contribution. Where on the scheme would we situate Vansina's historical interpretations? It suffices at this stage to give some examples of his analyses of Rwandan kingship. What is

striking is that they do not take cultural structures into account. Vansina (2004: 40) writes that Rwandan people considered the king's leadership as legitimate 'because his lineage had been the first to clear the land of his whole country'. We do not contest that the traditions mentioned bush clearing, but the Belgian historian does not ask himself whether landownership is a concept compatible with agro-pastoralists in the region used to usufruct. Moreover, oral tradition recounts that not the first king or his lineage elders but divination determined the place to clear bush. Is it not the goodwill of spirits, bound to autochthonous peoples, to the forest or to clan ancestors, that keeps the king and his rainmakers in charge?

We notice a certain actor-materialism in Vansina's (2004: 48, 66) claim that the early kingdoms emerged from the demand for military protection in return for the farmer's food. Cattle-herding comrades growing into chiefs figured out that recognizing one ruler was a solution, and so they did. Might their coalition not have had cultic or medicinal origins? The chiefs' success in forcefully seizing all the lands is explained from the materialist tropes of land deficit and cohabitation of farmers and herders on the hills, which '*required* a single managing authority for all. This figure emerged in the form of the strongest of the herder lords who could call on a permanent military force' (ibid.: 42, my italics). Political centralization is presented as an event, a materially based decision. This approach pays no heed to the cultural process that explains gradually changed minds in society.

When culture does appear in Vansina's history, it is not a preconscious structure informing people's actions, but an ideology employed. For many colleagues, his addition of an actor's perspective made history less objectivist. It meant an advance from cultural materialism, which for instance explained the Neolithic transition from ecological change alone. Combining materialism and an orientation on the actor, his supposition was that cultural change results from humans acting according to their self-interest – a view maintained in classical economics, rational choice and game theory, among others. In this view, individuals are invariably strategic rationalists. Vansina (2004: 55) asserts that Ndori was the first 'king' of Rwanda, an immigrant of Hima descent who, rather than taking over the throne, imported kingship. He reasons:

> For the population to accept Ndori as king, a more solid legitimacy than that which flowed from his victories was needed. Since he came from a land in which the institution of ritualists was as well known as in central Rwanda, he eagerly sought to acquire the legitimacy it could bestow and to have himself proclaimed king.

Strategy implies that Ndori would not have believed in the rituals himself. The actor-materialist historian identifies with an individual actor conscious of all material circumstances and rationally responding like the author himself would. His theoretical position leaves little room for cultural process, and thus for the reader to really appreciate the radical break with past beliefs that Ndori may indeed have made. There are no structures with explanatory value, save the one rationality of *homo economicus* oriented on material needs and applying presumably universal logic. As a result, paradoxically, it is this one cultural structure of pragmatism that buttressed Vansina's reconstruction of African history. The antidote is to 'anthropologize', which is to situate oneself on the scheme of axial poles.

As a student of Vansina, David Newbury (2007: 221) is well placed to draw a nuanced picture of Vansina's position in the field. He portrays a courageous academic plagued in his early career by fellow historians discrediting the reliance on oral tradition and therefore deriding him as 'an ethnologist' (an offence according to him), while criticized on the other side of the fence by anthropologists for his literalist approach to oral traditions. Newbury (ibid.: 224) lucidly remarks that both currents in the 1970s, literalists and structuralists, were still after a single 'Ur-text' in the collected narratives, whether it was events for the one, or values for the other. Soon more 'liberal' historians would take over the humanities with the empirically stronger insistence that 'historical narration was still passed on through time, rather than reinvented around core clichés'. The above scheme aides in situating this postmodern stance embraced by Newbury: actor-idealism. The advantage of the scheme is to nuance, in turn, the claim of theoretical superiority. Actor-idealism is just another quadrant with its own potential weakness such as insensitivity to the facts of nature and economy, and to the structure subtending events – to the ongoing past with its degree of cliché and core.

The humanities underwent a postcolonial transformation conducive for historians and archaeologists to collaborate with anthropologists. An 'anthropologizing' moment in the discipline of history was the ideational structures, or epochal mentalities, studied by the Annales school (Burke 2015). Towards the 1990s, this wider focus on the *longue durée* was called history's cultural turn (Kalb and Tak 2005). Historians and archaeologists realized the importance of contextualizing behaviour in the past, and therefore sought to reconstruct the ideational systems of those actors in that epoch. Archaeologists such as Hodder and Hutson (2003: 14–19) understood that grand 'processual' approaches implied a materialism that basically ignored

the mediation by culture. Their postcolonial stance was to move from matter, as directly reflective of society, to materiality, as a rapport practised and constitutive of the identity of both the thing and the user. The fourth current described as actor-idealism permits such radical materiality. Subjects experience the world in a way that is not fixed (as in cultural essentialism) but situated. In an actor employing experiential frames, culture is an event mediating between cause (e.g. ecological disaster) and effect (e.g. a changed lifestyle). Because of its preconscious reproduction, a cultural structure may have relevance to understanding similar practices and objects from several centuries back. As I intend to show next, historical studies ignore cultural structures at their peril.

To elicit the difficult wedding of foci, with sacrifices made at both ends of the table, of semantic dearth by the anthropologist and of missing material evidence by the archaeologist, let us look into a constructive attempt by archaeologist Robertshaw to interpret Urewe culture, 'the mother' of the Eastern Bantu expansion and of the first ironworking sites in East Africa. Urewe pottery in rock-shelters in Bunyoro-Kitara is the lead for Robertshaw (2012: 104) to string parts together 'of a religious complex involving caves, wells, and pythons'. He cites Tantala's work on 'priests' of pre-Chwezi provenance, whose cult would have evolved out of the ritual role of elders in the worship of python gods of rainmaking, fertility and spirit possession. The two series of archaeological associations suffice to feed the next paragraphs of anthropological interrogations.

Despite peering together at a period more than a thousand years ago, the ethnographer of lifeworlds in the same area to the west and south-west of Lake Victoria will shiver at the amalgamation of cultural structures. What would s/he bring to the table then? A series of critical remarks, each however inferred from cultural structures possibly helpful for the archaeologist to work with in the domain of interpretation. Each anthropological critique follows from an ethnographically based distinction, opposition or equation.

First of all, the adjective 'religious' evokes a semantic field that is European and unduly overshadows the importance of the medicinal in these parts of the world. Secondly, in the idiom of all spirit cults in the area, beginning with the Chwezi cult, there is no necessity for possession to evolve from elderliness. On the contrary, the spirit-induced call has a penchant for the adolescent heart. The spirit cult is intergenerational. The power structure that ranks cult members, with elders topping the hierarchy, is quite separable from the bodily experience of possession, led by initiated drummers. We have no reason to assume

that this was once different. Thirdly, the word 'priest' has a clerical connotation that leaves out the mediumistic experience in contemporary Chwezi cults. Again, the burden of proof should be on the archaeologist for employing liturgical terminology without explaining why the mediumistic experience could not have had relevance in that epoch as it has today in the region. 'Priest', fourthly, excludes alternative or subversive activities at play in the caves. Just as the rock art of hunters in the Kalahari Desert was done outside the regular living quarters, the activities in the caves of the savanna may have deviated from those at the shrines in familial dwellings. Fifthly, we should make the point that unless an imposing form of chieftaincy existed, or people were very isolated, which the demographics and spread of the sites seem to belie, there could have been multiple cults in parallel. This has been the case since time immemorial among Sukuma living near Lake Victoria. Sixthly, from the latter group's medicinal cults under the name of Zwilili, Yeye and Nunguli that honour snakes, we know that the snake-charmer cults have a different concept of spirit from the Chwezi cult. The python is an ancestral spirit communicating with the living through bodily pain. The snake charmers also have a distinct concept of fertility, expressed in the rainmaking symbolism of the thirty cave drawings taught to the novices. To aggregate the medicinal idioms of spirit cult and python cult is to deny the local distinctions and quite plainly universalize the Western idea of an amalgamated occult realm.

Two simple sentences by the archaeologist have just prompted a long series of remarks by the anthropologist. Should the collaboration be deemed impossible? We have no other choice, I am afraid, than to reconcile history and anthropology. Whether the same cultural structure drove medicine and initiation centuries ago the ethnographer can never tell for sure. Historical sources have to come in. But what ethnographers can commit themselves to is that an endogenous logic did exist. Even on anthropology it dawned slowly. The following pages browse, inevitably shallowly, through some of the seminal comparative studies of African kingship to illustrate the European preoccupation with centralization, sovereignty, conquest and the neat division of sacred and secular, and surmise the blind spot: the medicinal and cultic basis of rule. Chapter 8 will revisit the mantra of divine kingship.

The Polity Prism

Centralization has long preoccupied political science in Africa, as much as conflict does these days. In their standard volume *African Po-*

litical Systems, Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940) introduced a number of sociocultural factors to contrast two groups of African societies, the first with central government, the second without. The second, 'stateless' societies (Logoli, Tallensi, Nuer) fascinated for transcending the bilateral, transient kin group with lineages that created corporate groups with political functions. Instead of growing into hegemonies, the lineage segments struck power balances, settling disputes in shifting alliances (ibid.: 14). The first group of 'primitive states' (Zulu, Ngwato, Bemba, Banyankole, Kede) had not kinship but territory as their defining principle (ibid.: 11). Their centrality of government correlated with cultural and socio-economic heterogeneity. A case in point was the Kuba kingdom, composed of patrilineal as well as matrilineal groups, moreover speaking different languages. Drawing on the Zulu and Banyankole kingdoms, the authors speculated that the cultural heterogeneity had resulted from conquests before the formation of the state (ibid.: 9). The authors critically remarked that the kingdoms were less affected by the advent of colonial administration than the segmentary lineage systems with their precarious dynamic (ibid.: 16).

The types of livelihood, such as fixed cultivation versus shifting cultivation, varied independently within each type. About the lineages of stateless societies, the authors emphasized their segmentary logic (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940: 21). The leopard-skin chief among the Nuer was merely a mediating figure negotiating between the lineages. His safeguarding of the earth's fertility was a form of mediation too, with the spirit world. The inverse reasoning would apply for states. There rule without mediation is possible. A single head embodies people's norms and beliefs.

It can be disputed whether the kings sought to embody the unified beliefs, especially since the community of a conquest state was always culturally heterogeneous, but the theory of an ideational superstructure getting the many minds aligned appealed to Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940: 17, 21), escaping the bland functionalism of their teacher Radcliffe-Brown. They claimed that mystical aura reinforces secular sanctions to maintain the axiomatic character of moral and legal norms. The problem, though, with their religious focus, was to presume a section of reality that can be isolated as non-political.

The separation of church and state is ethnocentric in the description of stateless societies. So is the governmental-administrative model of rule, which assumes every society, and every social unit whether family or festival, to be politically organized. Political aspects can be

studied in any group, because decisions will be made and interests defended. This perspective refracts incorrectly, though, once we treat those aspects as forming a system that can be equated with society and be called interchangeably the polity. The polity prism assumes that power, defined narrowly as individual influence and epitomized in the ruler's office, characterizes social structure. Many alternatives are possible to such power: desire or affect or the cosmology of healing could encompass that power. The polity prism tends to obscure the fact that a system looking like a kingdom could grow from an entirely different model than the European one.

Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940: 16) did sense the limitations of their governmental focus, although they invented a separation that presumed the African king to be the sum of secular and sacral domains:[7]

> An African ruler is not to his people merely a person who can enforce his will on them. He is the axis of their political relations, the symbol of their unity and exclusiveness, and the embodiment of their essential values. He is more than a secular ruler; in *that* capacity the European government can to a great extent replace him. His credentials are mystical and are derived from antiquity. . . . Into these sacred precincts the European rulers can never enter. They have no mythical or ritual warranty for their authority. (ibid.)

The authors find in the king's ceremonial role under European administration a conservation of the ritual function, as if the colonizer in all his anthropological wisdom had managed a clean cut of a lived reality rather than caused a new reality to arise. 'It is an interesting fact that under European rule African kings retain their "ritual functions" long after most of the secular authority which these are said to sanction is lost' (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940: 21). The precolonial king's charm imposed its rules in the form of spirit obligations and thus decentred the ruler. By separating secular and sacral power, the medicine was now an object without actual power. The matter of the charm became a travesty, a fetish ready for collection and museum display. And the king became a ruler escaping dependency on the object. He could disregard the spirit's will, which paved the way for legitimate autocracy. Part III will describe such transition towards the ceremonial state. For instance, the medicinal rule of chiefs transformed radically after Shaka expelled all rainmakers from his kingdom (Gluckman 1940: 31). The medicine was not coincidentally the focus of Shaka's intervention to become an autocratic ruler – in other words, a king without medicine.

In this book we interchangeably speak of 'kings', 'paramounts' and 'chiefs', if the latter operate in a system without paramount, for all

these terms refer to the traditional office of a supreme authority. By this we do not necessarily assume the customary holder to have actual authority. None of our data will warrant to describe chieftaincy as a secular office nor kingship as sacred. Both draw on reciprocal relations with the spirit, through medicinal initiation, sacrifice and divination. If divine rule is the sole system that deserves the label of kingship, we should not use the word in equatorial Africa. We follow Claessen (2011: 6) in subsuming the king under the cross-cultural category of 'chief'. For Claessen, though, the king would differ from a (paramount) chief in the legitimacy to enforce personal decisions. One could then argue that precolonial central Africa had no kings. Autocratic heads of state existed but it was not institutional for their rule and interventions to deviate at will from tradition and common opinion like the despotic kings of Europe. Claessen (ibid.: 5) summarizes the ethnographic literature on chiefs and chiefdoms to list the following elements as defining: an ascribed top position with the capacity to redistribute profits; a sacred effect on living beings; and collective public endeavours including warfare. The medicinal aspect, linked to the chief's supreme responsibility, is lacking in his account.

The comparative study of African political systems by Fortes and Evans-Pritchard set the scene for decades of fruitful interdisciplinary exchange with historians. A series of debates ensued, which began with discarding the racist Hamitic hypothesis on kingship as an institution diffused by the pastoralists of current Ethiopia and Somalia. Torday and Wrigley, among others, objected that a nomadic people limits its cultural and administrative luggage (Ogot 1964). This in turn raised the enigma of Nilotic kingdoms in East Africa. The Shilluk and Bunyoro so-called 'divine kings' were exceptions in the Nilotic spectrum, where stateless societies formed the bulk. An intermediate case was the Alur 'segmentary state'. Murdock remained intrigued in 1959 by the presence of Cushitic Iraqw in central Tanzania: might they be the remnants and evidence of an immigration some two thousand years ago, when the Bantu had not yet moved that far east?

The oral traditions of the Interlacustrine kingdoms, however, are unambiguous in that, before the Nilotic Bito invasion, a Bantu group had formed the Kitara kingdom and a Bantu linguistic mixture had developed, from which sprang Hima-Tutsi dynasties (Ogot 1964: 286). The Chwezi were the dynastic clan ruling Kitara. After the invasion, the Bito founded the Bunyoro-Kitara empire. The neighbouring kingdoms of Ankole and Rwanda were reactions of revolt (ibid.: 292). The historian Bethlem Ogot proposes one explanation for the rise of both the Shilluk kingship and the Bito empire:

> A dominant minority imposed its rule over several disorganized local groups, in the same way that the Franks had done in Gaul or the Normans in England. This minority rule gradually acquired solidarity and permanence, perhaps due to the people's sedentary life, coupled with external pressures, probably the attacks of the Fung and the Dinka. Lienhardt has suggested that the Shilluk kingship might have 'strengthened as a focus of opposition to foreigners'. (ibid.: 294)

In the dialogue with anthropology a classification of types of state formation developed. Ogot's quote suggests a process of subjugation (or colonization) and replication, 'planting out sub-dynasties from a central source' (Ogot 1964: 296), which was recognized too by Southall (1956) in the expansion of Lwo clans. An inverse process with the equivalent outcome of political centralization was collateral growth, or what Kopytoff (1999: 91) coined 'levitation', whereby a lineage grows and the founder or his successor heads the expanding hierarchy. Between subjugation and levitation, the coalescence of villages into an encompassing unit is possible, with conservation of the village headmanships creating a two-tier polity.

This processual typification of state formation ignores two characteristics central to our thesis. First of all, it does not consider cultural forces of assimilation or symbiosis entailing centralization and migration. A minority, such as the cattle-holding clans that ruled in the Great Lakes, is presumed to have imposed its hierarchy, if not through war then through ruse at a time of political chaos. Secondly, in the classification of processes, the pivot of theory is the Western concept of 'state'. Could comparative historical research make a difference?

The fourth International African Seminar, which took place in Dakar in 1961 under the auspices of the International African Institute, was an occasion for much excitement heralding a decade of fruitful interdisciplinary exchange (Vansina, Mauny and Thomas 1964). With Mauny and Thomas as chairmen, Vansina as general rapporteur, and anthropologist Daryll Forde as an ever-avid supporter, every bit of data was scrutinized in order to reconstruct Africa's past, all in an atmosphere comparable to the epiphany of disciplinary convergence that anthropology had undergone in the 1950s (epitomized in Max Gluckman's famous series of talks on BBC radio). The historians noted with enthusiasm the contributions by other disciplines such as archaeology and linguistics. They did not mind conceding that '[o]nce more the topics discussed show that the historian cannot be concerned solely with gathering raw data. His task is to discover their *meaning*. This can *only* be done through the knowledge of categories and criteria derived from the social sciences after their immediate sig-

nificance has been outlined by ethnographic research' (ibid.: 90; my italics). Bradbury (1964: 149) noted along similar lines the need of sociocultural models so that historians contextualize their information from oral traditions and do not mistake history for 'the rationalization of myth'. General progress was to be made through a two-way exchange whereby the historian projects the anthropologist's 'plane of the ethnographic present' onto a timescale. By the latter, Bradbury meant that ethnographers systematically wrote in the present tense to record the beliefs and practices of African societies.

A few years later the tone hardened. Jan Vansina (1966: 247) concluded his overview *Kingdoms of the Savanna* on the history of Central Africa, with an unmistakable instruction: 'The regularities outlined are evident and the link with structural features of the political system are obvious. It is the task of anthropologists to work them out in greater detail'. The possibility of other structures rooted in the subject's motivations and appearing from the anthropologist's ethnography was not entertained. The division of tasks had changed. What happened in the meanwhile? In the background may have simmered the usual interdisciplinary skirmish over funds whereby Vansina could exert pressure as a towering authority after his directorship of the Institute for Scientific Research in Central Africa (IRSAC) in Rwanda. More to the front was the budding consensus during decolonization that many anthropologists had fed colonial ideology by representing African societies as static worlds without history. Despite the historian's warning, many ethnographers until the 1980s imperturbably retained the present tense. It was as if, integrated in the community and speaking the language, they possessed a deeper truth – something that was bound to irritate other scientists working in the same area.

In this respect, Chapter 7 will consider the deeply engrained Western cosmology of linear time that sharply opposes past to present, with concomitant grammar. Is use of the past tense not suggesting more historical accuracy than ethnographic data permit? And is historical accuracy not secondary for the anthropologist searching for cultural structure, something of a less factual nature? Since such structure envelops both past and present, can we use both tenses? Bantu verbs have a habitual marker for a third tense regarding cyclical or repetitive occurrences. Might that suit ethnography better? The habitual tense does tally with the reversible transitions this book will evince. A view on history as 'trend' instead of 'linear flow' requires an adapted language (cf. Braudel's distinction in Chapter 4). The Rwandan concept of oral tradition situates history in trends rather than in sequences of

events (see Chapter 9). To endogenize, must African studies not heed the local views? The past and the present constitute a bone of contention that historians and anthropologists still grapple with today.

Taking a closer look at Vansina's (1966: 245) three 'leitmotivs which occur over and over again', we find that the 'structure' he observed in central African history is a material, macroscopic reality. On it, contingent events operate such as the slave trade, whose impact on dynastic rise and fall is emphasized by Vansina. The leitmotivs bear no relation to a lifeworld, cosmology or other ideational structure that local actors may share and reproduce in their practices. The first structural feature of the savanna kingdoms would be the primacy of the figure of the king, causing personalities to very much shape local history. The second feature is the relatively informal system of succession, stimulating civil strife. The third feature, applicable to the major kingdoms, is the system of peripheral territories operating as tributaries with internal autonomy, headed by local or vassal chiefs. Their structural 'indirect rule' has, as a material consequence, the possibility of secession by the outer provinces, especially if undergoing exploitation by the centre, like in the Kuba and Lunda kingdoms. The three leitmotivs are, however, secondary outcomes. They obtain salience only if embedded in practices and the experiences of actors. The relative autonomy of Sukuma agro-pastoral farmers and their extended compound, whereby authority is grounded in unwritten traditions and in an invisible world nobody can monopolize, interacts with the polycentric social structure. The side effect are Vansina's leitmotivs: (1) a rather centrifugal type of power (2) by an influential personality (3) whose succession is not much formalized.

State Formation: Conquest or Alliance?

Conquest attracts as an explanatory concept for it seems universal, needing no cultural translation. Conquest was in most precolonial African states the number one cause for the rise of centralized government – the statement of Vansina, Mauny and Thomas (1964: 88) will not shock. We may see before us a group of warriors, young men sent away or leaving the community after their initiation in the forest, expanding their territory with every victory, their descendants needing government to control the growing population. That scenario is not what the authors had in mind. As far as the data tell, the conquest consisted in an invading group immigrating and making their domination accepted by the autochthones:

> A typical example is the rise of the kingdom of Kongo. The foreign conquerors married in the local groups. But they were accepted and the kingdom was really founded only when the religious head of the autochthonous groups recognized the king. He cured him from a mysterious illness, gave him his daughter in marriage and accomplished the ritual of enthronement. Through these acts the conquest became legalized and accepted by the conquered. (ibid.: 88)

The choice of focus is revealing. Why emphasize conquest over popular acceptance of the newcomer's rule? Exchange established an alliance. That was the decisive factor in centralization. The quote mentions marriage, curing and ritual, each a practice whereby an insider embraces the outsider's knowledge in order to foster life – not oppression. Furthermore, how could the locals have organized a ritual of enthronement, if they had just been introduced to kingship? The groups must have shared a cultural model so that they jointly created a ritual or reworked one from the transcultural cults. Acculturation by a gentrifying group, whose language and culture seem more refined, is a common process worldwide in the growth of societies, and could very well sum up the long-range history of the Bantu languages' success.

The historians discussed two other cases of state formation.[8] Both are logical alternatives to conquest: a process from within or an external power wished for. In the internal development towards a state, one corporate group such as a clan manages to impose itself on the others. This could happen through social reorganization. The Zulu example expounded by Gluckman ([1956] 1970) is that of age sets transformed by Shaka into military units. The other possibility featured in a monograph by Southall (1956: 98). The Alur invited princes to immigrate and organize their community into a state. The commoners were willing to pay tribute, although they got no army for it. What did they get in return? The historians do not mention the medicinal knowledge of the Alur, which made their kingship desirable. The historians' three cases rely on a view of power as in its essence conflictual, pitting in-groups against out-groups, whereas the opposite, endogenous process seems more plausible to explain the successful expansion of Bantu-speaking peoples.

Acculturation is a more likely driver of change in central Africa than conquest or mere mobility. First of all, the numbers of actual immigrants, even in the wars for which the conquest state of the Lunda was famous, were very small. Vansina himself noted that the mobility was limited to localized sections of clans, not much larger than the bands of hunters, which led him to argue:

> [the] grandiose tribal migrations elaborated by authors such as Goulds-bury and Sheane, Lane-Poole or Grévisse, are unlikely. Population movement would occur at the level of clan section migration. Clan sections would be very mobile, but they would move in all sorts of directions. Over the large area, then, the whole population could be seen as a static mass. This view is supported by the cultural evidence, which shows that from one point to any other in the area there is no sharp break in culture but only a gradual change. (Vansina 1966: 88)

Were the agricultural immigrants culturally attractive to their hosts, the bands of hunters and smiths? Initiation (re)produces a cosmology, especially if easily transmittable thanks to 'contagiously' fractal patterns of meaning, which Bantu languages with their noun classes and monemes facilitate. Sociostructurally, the diversity in the region is enormous, but culturally any anthropologist confining the subject to a language group will be embarrassed to admit that as the comparison of cultural systems progresses in the four directions of the compass no sharp break can be observed between any of the Bantu-speaking peoples, and quite far beyond.

The king's rule typically fading from the centre to the periphery (cf. Vansina 1966: 155) is an indication that in the few cases when the savanna groups happened to centralize to organize government and become 'states', their origin and sense of purpose was not the centralized state as encountered in Europe. Territorial rule was divided among chiefs, amounting often to a decentralization like that of the Tio kingdom of which Vansina (ibid.: 108) admitted that it was 'pushed so far that one can legitimately ask if this was indeed a state or not'. The least one can say is that Vansina's kingdom is an umbrella term with relative validity for all types of polity in the region. It may work for scholars who are content with an outsider's account of kingship worldwide, but as our concern is cultural meaning, more purchase should be gained with an indigenous concept of rule. It would be an advance in comparison to non-anthropological histories such as Vansina's description of the rise of the Lunda kingdom as a natural kind of process without cultural reference: 'Also, the people began to believe in the chiefs' influence on the general fertility of the land and gradually to believe in the whole concept of divine kingship' (ibid.: 86). One would nearly forget that those people had a history of traditions and spiritual experiences on which they drew to innovate.

In brief, what has been lacking in precolonial political analyses is a sensitivity for the cultural 'logics' in history. African kingship will always look divine to the European observer splitting medicine into politics and religion (cf. Chapter 8). An antidote is needed – and that

we offer in the study of endogenous process. Making sense of disparate data in a region spanning the continent from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic, it explains in large part how the chieftaincy of medicinal rule could evolve into the kingship of a centralized state. Until now, disregard for endogeneity and commonality has been the safe bet: 'Surely, equatorial Africa is too culturally diverse'. But the data demand a courageous claim.

The Endogenous Logic of Medicinal Rule

As outlined in Figure 0.3 in the next section, and elaborated in the coming chapters as well as recapitulated in the conclusions, we argue that historically the regional model of rule rests on four interdependent elements forming an endogenous logic of innovation: after (1) divinatory communication with the ancestral or nature spirit an individual is (2) initiated and allowed after sacrifice (ordeal, transgression, blood offering) to (3) initiate others ritually into medicinal knowledge coming from the forest, which (4) bestows social status in return for gifts (fee, feast) to an association. The *ihane* village initiation we described enacts that logic. The medicinal knowledge combined with ritual cooling, purifying the novices of all 'heat', including witchcraft affect, gives the novices the status to 'rule', in the culture-specific sense of heading a social unit such as the band of peers, a family, compound or house. A social cephalization takes place. The 'village headman', 'chief' and 'king' are applications of this basic model, epitomized by the cult founder of great renown with many followers. Divination and medicine will emerge as the elements preceding and subtending initiation and gifts for association.

Medicinal rule has been an endogenous force in the social changes of centralized states. Its four elements played a key role in the tensions pivotal to the historical changes in the area, as portrayed in the three parts of this book, of which we give examples here between brackets: (a) the royal struggle against diviners (Rwanda), the attack on divination by autocratic associations (Lele), and the royal discomfort with spirit mediumship (Buganda); (b) the royal aversion to initiation (Tio); (c) the delegation of medicine by the royal founder's distant successors (Kuba, Sukuma, Bemba), and the abolishment of rain medicine (Zulu); and (d) the tension between chiefs and initiatory associations, and the creation of ethnic castes instead of a transcultural cult (Rwanda). A king's invention of an institution to escape initiation or to thwart diviners could typically be undone a few generations

later, so the pivots have returned in recorded history. Their origins perhaps date back millennia. The four elements have been pivots between which histories in the region have tended to alternate, their rootedness in endogenous logic causing reversions, besides aversions. Discussed in this book, seeking in the sequence of events an 'ongoing past', are reversions of (and aversions to) divinatory, initiatory, medicinal and cultic tenor. The fact that social changes typically arose in the form of an attack on one of these elements of medicinal rule bears testimony to the model's salience.

The cultural aspects of the colonial intervention itself tend to bear out the hypothesis about medicinal primacy, because at the heart of it, as Chapter 3 will highlight, stood the uncontrollable mobilizing force of local medicine (cf. Rose-Hunt 1999). Several anti-colonial rebellions in eastern Africa drew on claims of magical prowess, in part because of the shared tradition of medicinal rule but possibly also because the rebellions identified medicine as the weak spot in the European occupation (which the colonizer inadvertently confirmed by employing 'witchdoctors' against Mau Mau rebels; Luongo 2006). The colonizer intended to remove the medicinal side of chieftaincy through deontological norms, the schooling of chiefs and a careful selection of the incumbents. My interviews with a Sukuma chief and oral literature will reconstruct a century of succession struggles in the chiefdom of Bulima, seen from the perspective of the main contender. The life history of the late chief illustrates the political role of medicine in conflicts with the colonial administration. The externally designated incumbent of the throne does not know how to make rain. Bulima's fate is contrasted with the clean 'cultural break' in another Sukuma chiefdom, that of Ndagalu, on the occasion of the royal shaving ceremony. In the first case, traditional and colonial expectations clash over medicine, having reverberations many years later in the last appointed incumbent's refusal to climb the throne and his preference to work as a car mechanic in Dar es Salaam. The Ndagalu case stages a chief coming to greet his people, only to bury chieftainship for good, as he conspicuously evades the practice of medicine.

From Divinatory Society to Kingship: Soil, Root, Stem and Shoot of the Transition

The trouble with process is the suggestion of linearity. The metaphor of the tree and its bifurcations has been useful in studies of evolution to evince multilinearity in chronology. I push the analogy with ger-

mination a little further by differentiating the sequence of transition in terms of its soil, roots, stem and shoots. Soil evokes conditions necessary for the transition. It contains elements of a cultural structure, such as ideas, implanted like seeds. Roots point to the growth of these seeds into one or several institutions. The stem is the main body of the transition whereby the new institution emerges from the roots. Shoots and branches are bifurcations into institutions derived from the same cultural structure. As a disclaimer, we should keep in mind that 'transition' is a certain perspective on history chosen by the scholar. There is no intrinsic reason why the institution under study should be called the stem. The stem may for other institutions be the root or a bifurcation from earlier practices.

The *soil* of the transition to chiefship and kingship in equatorial Africa is the cosmology of hunting bands and the new ecological circumstances of climate change, deforestation and desertification. An embryonic form of centralized rule germinated during the initiation of hunters that entered divinatory societies, such as those described by Mary Douglas (1963) among the Lele, and by Victor Turner (1967) among the Ndembu. The initiation boils down to the experience of possession by a spirit in the forest sharing medicinal knowledge about the forest and imposing a new identity upon the incumbent with moral obligations. Its basic structure can be encountered today across central, eastern and southern Africa, in medicinal associations, drums of affliction, *ngoma* societies, collective initiatory rituals, and in the personal accounts of traditional healer-diviners on the origin of their medicinal knowledge. It is succinctly portrayed as well in the

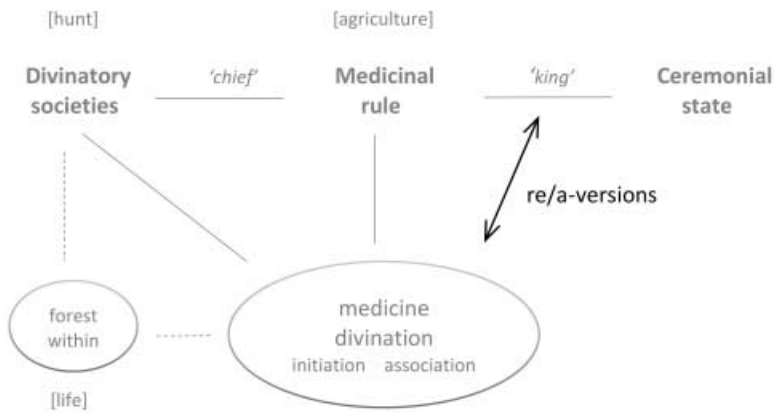

Figure 0.3 Endogenous transitions of rule in east and central Africa. Figure by the author.

first Congo travelogues of the seventeenth century. The divinatory societies, or spirit-based associations, that interconnect bands of hunters represent an institution at the *roots* of the transition leading to the new institution. The two chapters of Part I, 'Divinatory Societies', compare ethnographic and historical cases.

The hunters' societies initiated members of other villagers in return for fees that were redistributed in the community. I propose a rationale on how the new institution of chiefship originated from there. The transition reaches its *stem* as the new institution takes mature form. We choose not to name it 'kingship'. Headman or chief embody 'medicinal rule', the title of this book and of Part II, because they have what is expected of the leader, namely a mastery over and communication with the outside, the forest, spirits, witchcraft and foreign groups. Ethnographers have translated that mastery as healing because across Bantu-speaking Africa the diviner-healer (e.g. *nganga, sangoma*) has become the expert of these activities. All the initiations, whether rite of passage or rite of healing, are called practices of *kupoja,* or 'cooling'. The Bantu verb signifies the regulating of life, which is more than healing. It comprises both the remedying of 'heat' and the acquisition of social status and fame. To be powerful is to have – literally to 'be with' (*kuwa na*) – the medicine. Treatment of an affliction, with the medical purpose of cure, is an offshoot of medicinal initiation, tapping from the powers that the ritual exudes. Ritual rebirth of a group during initiation releases medicine from which individual patients can benefit at the periphery of the occasion.

Part II exhibits in five chapters the wide variety of medicinal rule in central Africa, the Great Lakes, and eastern and southern Africa. Although always materially expressed in medicine, the institutionalized power of headman and chief in the rainforests of the west mostly concentrates on a shrine and rituals for protection against witchcraft and for guardianship over women's fertility, whereas in the savannas towards the north-west, the south and especially the east it more often relies on collective agricultural ceremony, protective charm and rain medicine. The chiefs or 'forest-masters' among Tio in the northwest of Congo exemplify with their shrine representing the chiefdom the primacy of the ruler's medicinal qualities over his personal ones. Autocratic tendencies, clear-cut geographical boundaries and administrative policy are uncommon in the 'stem' of the institution. The chiefs are initiated in a moment of great transgression as incumbents of the highest rank of spirit possession. They collect fees in return for protective rituals that 'cool' the world. In some cases, historical links can be traced with actual cults turned dynastic clan. The forest-

masters are as much proto-healers as proto-kings. Carrying a title with stem *kum* (in many linguistic variants) they literally have 'come out' and are 'famed'. Their medicinal rule constitutes the local model for kingship, quite unlike the European concept of rule.

The challenge for us as scholars is to think through the proto-meaning of the institution. What was *kum* like before bifurcating into 'healer' in some eastern Bantu languages and 'chief' in some western Bantu languages? In search of an answer we examine cases of medicinal rule, including roots and offshoots, at the borders of the cultural and linguistic 'whole', which for Vansina exemplified the equatorial tradition. The exploration of the fringes will bring us among others to Tio and Loango west from the inner Congo basin, to Azande and Alur north-east from it, to Bushong and Komo somewhat east, to Lele and Ndembu in the south-east, to Bemba, the Lundu and Rozvi states further in that direction, and to Rwanda, Buganda and Sukuma-Nyamwezi on the eastern side (see Map 0.1 at the beginning of this Introduction). Most of these groups have been the subject of a seminal monograph that deserves to be exegetically examined. Systematic reinterpretation will permit a check of the plausibility of our thesis across the region. Some cases are representative of Vansina's baseline research of the Congo basin (Chapter 4). Others extend the research far beyond the basin. The renowned quality of the ethnography is a criterion of selection for our sample of groups. Taken together, the monographs admittedly still cover just a fraction of the available literature and archival data. In my exegesis, I will add page references between brackets in the text as frequently as possible, sometimes quite frankly to anticipate the likely disbelief of colleagues, because the data in the monographs do not always correspond to the interpretation that has become conventional in the discipline. The endogenous quality of the interpretation is our main concern.

Strictly speaking, the term 'king' is best reserved for the paramount of a ceremonial state. We think of the Kuba, Kongo, Rwanda, Bunyoro and Buganda kingdoms depicted in Part III. As an *offshoot* of medicinal rule, the king interestingly undermines the root affect. He and his palace control ritual in order to overrule divinatory communication with the spirits. With the help of a subjugated caste of priests, the king rids himself of reciprocity with the spirits and governs as an autocrat, possibly to enrich himself. He has unequivocal procedures at his disposal, in ceremony and succession, conserved and recited by court historians, to avoid dependence on people councils, on the capricious wishes of the spirit world or on the fertility from the wild outside,

which he in his non-human, constant transgression may rather want to embody.

Confirming the hypothetical interconnections, the offshoot labelled kingship was already noticeable in the very roots of the transition. In the recent past, Lele communities of hunters in the rainforest had been replacing about every ten years the fortune magic of their divinatory societies by the rule of the witch-finding cult that supersedes people's reciprocity with the spirits, and transcends village communities. Such shortened sequences are of special interest in our study for revealing the pivotal elements of the cultural model. They could be coined the 'radicles' of kingship. Similar examples are the recurring tensions between which social changes pulsate and to which temporary revolutions revert, as if they are too fundamental to disappear: the divinations prohibited by autocrats; the ritual initiations the incumbents try to evade and abolish; and the spirit mediumship the dynastic families disparage. An extended, long-term version of a pivotal tension, leading to the bifurcation of divination and kingship, is revealed in Rwanda's oral traditions from four centuries of dynastic history. All these cases illustrate the historically grown cultural structure that endows chief- and kingship in eastern and central Africa with another meaning than the European institution.

Notes

1. I will employ the first-person plural as the verb form to refer to you and me reading this book. The singular form is reserved for the author's personal position or experience.
2. An example of a multidisciplinary reconstruction of history is the online website by Rhonda Gonzales, 'Societies, Religion, and History: Central East Tanzanians and the World They Created, c. 200 BCE to 1800 CE', http://www.gutenberg-e.org/gonzales/index.html. The absence, however, of wider context, such as Vansina's equatorial tradition, limits the validity of hypotheses about that narrowly delimited 'world' and its cosmology.
3. A standard illustration for undergraduates of medical anthropology is the mortality statistic of the Titanic disaster. Proportionally more victims fell among the lower than higher classes. To explain the outcome, we must consider the proximity of the lifeboats to the expensive cabins above deck. The 'social effect' corresponds to material advantages (e.g. the nearby lifeboat) for the higher social classes. This social effect must be juxtaposed with the cultural expectation to save 'women and children first', which accounts for the statistical fact that more men died than

women and children. The 'cultural' effect results from an inculcated idea. An explanation allowing for both effects in equal measure will be situated on our scheme in the middle between the extremes of materialism and idealism.

4. In our example of the Titanic, the many 'deviant' cases are visible too in the statistics of survivors and casualties, such as those passengers below deck alert enough to save themselves and those on deck too inebriated to wake up for a walk to their lifeboat.
5. The fourfold typology has relevance beyond anthropology; see Andrew Feenberg's (1998) four approaches to technology, respectively instrumentalism, determinism, substantivism (dystopia) and constructivism (critical theory), whereby the latter two came up thanks to insight in a second dimension, namely the cultural values within technology.
6. In Africanist anthropology, we should note, the ontological turn has not taken off, despite its promise of truly capturing the local endogenous dynamics. The theory tends to unnerve Africanists whose postcolonial turn was the historically logical culmination of the schematized oscillation and centripetal spiral. The acknowledgment of a shared postcolonial condition globally is crucial for the Africanist's critical project. The decolonizing project controverts the existence of separate worlds, each with their own morality and priorities. The quest for radical difference in local terms, like Marilyn Strathern's (1988) for Melanesia, and Viveiros de Castro's for Amerindians, could not preoccupy those working in the multidisciplinary field of African studies, which has in its ranks political and economic researchers doing pretty well without ethnographic fieldwork and without the perspectival shift and openness to alterity.
7. The irony is that the founding father of functionalism, Radcliffe-Brown (1940: xxi), who in his preface to the volume was eager to reprimand the two editors and rising stars at the academic firmament, figured that out in his own way: the political and the ritual are one office, hence the state should not be the Africanist reference. His ensuing solution to conceive of all polities, centralized or not, as regulators of sanctions was a simplification to obtain common ground, complying with Evans-Pritchard's take on the Nuer lineages as feud-settling alliances, while conveniently forgetting that Nuer leadership was an earth- and fertility-bound role, despite the pastoralist mode of livelihood.
8. Lemarchand (1977: 304) distinguished four types of kingship: theocratic kingship (Ethiopia), stratified kingship (Rwanda, Burundi), ethnic kingship (Swazi, Lesotho), and incorporated kingship (Buganda, Ankole, Yoruba). His focus, however, is on the recent past, as can be derived from the last two types. The typology differentiates insufficiently for our region of study, central and eastern Africa. More informative anyway is a typology of kingdoms anchored in processes of origination, like that attempted by Vansina, Mauny and Thomas.