

A Reflection on Semantic Approach to Ritual Symbolism and the Question of Efficacy

Osamu Note

1. Introduction

The Ndembu, a people who live on the western edge of Zambia, have descended from groups of communally organized hunter/warriors who invaded the region from the kingdom of Lunda in Angola. In this article I'm concerned with a Ndembu ritual described by Victor Turner.¹ An exorcism of an aggressive and punitive ancestor spirit, which is nonetheless regarded as a guardian of the Ndembu community, the ritual exemplifies the salience of mystical forces in religious life of an African society. The focus of this article is on the claim that to explicate the efficacy of rituals, we must take into consideration performative aspects in the sense clarified by Austin.² From this point of view, a ritual is primarily a form of speech, of which main function is to execute action with a substantive entailment to reality instead of merely conveying a message. The task of this article is to evaluate the validity of this assertion in the light of the material presented by Turner.

Much has been written about the significance of Turner's contributions to the analysis of ritual symbols,³ but relatively little

¹ Turner, V. 1975, *Revelation and Divination in Ndembu Ritual*, Cornell University Press.

² Austin, J. L. 1962, *How to Do Things with Words*, Oxford University Press.

³ See, for instance, Ashley, K. M. ed. 1990 *Victor Turner and the Construction of Cultural Criticism: Between Literature and anthropology*, Indiana University Press.

has been done to clarify and explicate their limitations in theoretical terms.⁴ The aim of this article is to suggest a perspective supplementary, if not alternative, to Turner's symbolist thesis, and is not to present an elaborate discussion purely for the sake of theoretical concerns. To facilitate my discussion, however, I assume a few remarks on his semantic approach to ritual are in order.

(1) Turner's symbolist thesis

In the history of 20th century anthropology Turner left a distinctive mark by embarking on the analysis of ritual symbols. In so doing he departed from the Durkheimian thesis on social implications of cultural representations.⁵ The thesis had postulated the integral function of collective action for the maintenance of social order; rituals facilitate subjective awareness of an entity - society as an abstract moral authority - in the form of collective psyche. Society internalized in individual mind is coercive, exerting integral influences over individuals so they behave as constitutive elements of a whole.

⁴ Fabian, referring to the possibility of such a polemic by Turner himself, writes, "For some years he had been moving away from ritual interpreted as social drama to a more literal concern with theatrical performance. Together with this apparent narrowing of focus, however, went a theoretical reorientation. It is as if he had become disenchanted with the rather flat moralism or sociologism that besets metaphorizing social conflict as "drama" (what I qualified as "positivity"), on the one hand, and with the temptations of noncommittal estheticism (one form of what I called political naivete), on the other. Turner began to feel the need to ground performance, to seek its foundations in those depths of human acting that are about survival."

Fabian, J. 1990, *Power and Performance*, University of Wisconsin Press, p.17

⁵ See, for instance, V. Turner, 1985, "Prologue: from the Ndembu to Broadway", in *On the Edge of the Bush*, pp. 1-15. The University of Arizona Press.

Contrary to this Durkheimian position, symbols in Ndembu rituals had their own formal principle independent of the social structure. Symbolic materials were multi-relational, and their semantic values were relative to the context of use and relation to other symbols. Whether defined in terms of sensory verisimilitudes or conventionally given lexical value vis-a-vis their material vehicles of signification, those concepts were specified through actual use, often combined with other expressive materials.

In a girl's puberty ritual, the milk tree was used as expression of the physiological state of a female initiate. Its natural attribute (white fluid) was related to a particular social category of person. In this case the milk tree functioned as an icon based on logic of homology (whiteness, milk, and fertility of a woman), but in addition to this semantic value, the symbol was endowed with a conceptual value denoting Ndembu matrilineal ideology (her marriage and maternity and the continuation of lineage). In the ritual the milk tree combined these two referents and served to integrate a young woman into lineage-based Ndembu social structure.⁶ In decoding other ritual symbols, Turner argued that attention should be directed to three main attributes of symbolic material as the loci for the articulation with other expressive materials. Some materials were used in ritual because of the etymological connotations of their names in order to obtain some physical effects (conspicuousness to induce spirits, for example). Symbols endowed with similar effects because of their substantive attributes (such as white fluid) were also

⁶ Turner, V. 1967, "Symbols in Ndembu Ritual" in *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, Cornell University Press, pp.19-47.

common. Other than those, artifacts were often mobilized in the ritual. They suggested that pragmatic objects for daily use were no less potent in semantic terms; not only for their physical appearances but also for their associated meaning, they served as a crucial link between the communal life of the Ndembu and their ancestral spirits.⁷

These formulations allowed Turner to organize ethnographic material in consistent fashion, but his explanatory efforts came to be couched within generalizations where meaning was attributed to a certain primordial consciousness:

Ritual symbols, more than other kinds of symbols with the possible exception of poetic symbols, exhibit this penumbral power, expressed in "vague ultimate reasons with their emotional accompaniments," and this is a major factor in their social cohesive efficacy.⁸

Revelatory as it may be, the reference to the "ultimate" factor for the explication of the efficacy of symbolic meaning is question-begging. Contrary to his meticulous attention to individual symbols, Turner fell back upon the primordial collectivity, "penumbral power" and reverted to an essentially non-semiotic element not easily amenable to empirical analysis. Yet, why was this move to an essence necessary?

In Ndembu rites of affliction physical irregularities were causally

⁷ Tuner, V. 1975, *Revelation and Divination in Ndebmu Ritual*, Cornell University Press, p.166.

⁸ Turner, V. *ibid.*, p.175.

connected with the power of an ancestor spirit. Victims who had incurred a spirit's wrath and suffered physical disorders were subjected to a cure through a ritual which functioned to abate the afflicting spirit. Rites of affliction would restore normative relations between ancestor spirits and the living. From Ndembu point of view, this redressive function was essentially a result of ritual performances in which various symbols were mobilized to engender curative effects. The explanation of the efficacy of ritual symbols presupposed understanding of the mystical belief that conferred curative power on those procedures. Turner dealt with such mystical beliefs based on analysis of cultural practices which intervened the nexus of the body and thoughts, and suggested a deeply existential bearing of Ndembu culture. Referring to the religious foundation of curative power of symbols, Turner wrote, "One reason for their persistence lies, no doubt, in the very fact that they are part of a religious system which itself constitutes an explanation of the universe and guarantees the norms and values on which orderly social arrangements rest. To query the premises on which Ndembu medicine rest would be to query the axioms underlying the Ndembu *Weltbild*."⁹ Yet the kind of analysis outlined in this statement was never fulfilled. While his semiotic focus on specific ritual processes was highly successful in articulating social contexts against which individual enactment took place, it remained unclear exactly how this empirical analysis could be correlated with other dimensions of ritual performance, especially "the axioms" of Ndembu culture. As a result, we are left with the

⁹ Turner, 1967, "Lunda Medicine and the Treatment of Diseases", pp.299-358, p.356.

feeling that Turner's semiotic studies of ritual symbols, though doubtlessly excellent, went too far ahead to accommodate an inquiry into the constitution of Ndembu belief. In fact his remarks "the darker strata of the unconscious, a set of ideas, images, concepts, and so on"¹⁰ suggest his selective impartiality with regard the significance of the dynamic over the systematic.

The price to be paid for this dichotomous treatment of those intimately related aspects was not so insignificant. For instance, if it is true that symbols are expressive, and therefore subject to semantic analysis, how can we conceptualize their semantic values in connection with the effect of a ritual? While we may agree with Turner when he said that he gave symbolic action ontological status,¹¹ do we need, as Turner did, to posit some universal principle or essence, so we can explicate the ultimate mechanism of symbols? If the dynamic analysis is sufficient, why discuss "penumbra"? These points are particularly relevant in applying the performative thesis as we understand from Austin to Ndembu rituals.

(2) Performative and the question of ritual efficacy

The 20th century anthropology has been long indebted to Durkheim's polemic against the Frazerian notion of non-Western religion as a form of false science. It was Durkheim who put an end to this ethnocentrism in his study of the totemic religion in Australia; the relegation of religious belief to an error in epistemological terms is

¹⁰ Turner, 1974, "Social Dramas and Ritual Metaphors", in *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, pp.23-59. P.36.

¹¹ Turner, 1974, P.56.

insufficient to illuminate its existential depth. If Turner was right, however, that Durkheimian sociology itself falls short of providing appropriate analytical tools, what was the theoretical foundation which justified Turner's emphasis on semiotics? From a perusal of related documents we can see that Turner was well aware of the analytical shortcomings of the functionalist approach,¹² but in his attempt to go beyond the functionalist model, he was obviously driven to put a greater onus on semantic analysis. Reading Turner's work from our contemporary vantage, we realize that his concern constantly shifted from meaning to being, generating a hiatus which was never filled by his analysis of symbols. Then, should this outcome be the only consequence of his semantics?

I propose to combine two different perspectives on ritual. The first stems from the performative approach to ritual suggested by Tambiah and others.¹³ The second concerns itself with the conventional structuralist notion of cultural system. These are normally treated as separate, mutually exclusive theoretical positions, but I regard it as possible and necessary to mobilize them in complementary fashion. To justify this claim, it is useful to establish the applicability of the performative thesis to the Ndembu case by reference to the question

¹² Take, for instance, his remark on *Chihamba*: "At one time I employed a method of analysis essentially derived from Durkheim via Radcliffe-Brown. I considered the social function of *Chihamba* with reference to the structure form of Ndembu society. But this method did not enable me to handle the complexity, asymmetry, and antinomy which characterize real social process,... *Chihamba* is the local expression of a universal human problem, that of expressing what cannot be thought of, in view of thought's subjugation to essences." Turner, 1975, pp186-87.

¹³ Tambiah, S. J. "A Performative Approach to Ritual" in *Culture, Thought, and Social Action*, 123-168. See, also, Fabian, J. 1990, *Power and Performance*, University of Wisconsin Press.

of ritual efficacy.

As suggested in the preceding discussion, the efficacy of Ndembu rituals primarily rests on the communicative interaction between spirits of the dead and the living. The "meaning" of a ritual is in this sense both semantic and functional. Ritual mediates the distance between two different spheres, that of man and that of spirits, leaving at the same time a fundamentally indeterminate milieu common in communicative practice in general. This open-ended ambiguity justifies a perception of ritual enactment as a form of experimental attempt.¹⁴ Just as contemporary linguists emphasize inherent ambiguity in communications, the Ndembu seem to take the efficacy of rituals in a similarly non-determinist fashion. While this implies a serious conflict with conventional anthropological search for a system of meaning based on some theoretical frameworks, after post-structuralist, deconstructionist debates on representation, there is the prevailing recognition that attempts to fixate meaning based on a stable system or some form of encompassing model are in fact questionable.¹⁵ Following this position, we may take rituals presented by Turner as bricolage. Needless to say, this does not

¹⁴ Acknowledging the importance of symbols for curative effects, Turner says, "it seems to be the case, however, that some scope is permitted for experiment,..."

Turner, 1967, "Lunda Medicine and the Treatment of Diseases", p.343.

¹⁵ Take, for instance, Ricoeur's remark on communicability: "For the linguist, communication is a fact, even a most obvious act. People do actually speak to one another. But for an existential investigation communication is an enigma, even a wonder. Why? Because being-together, as the existential condition for the possibility of any dialogical structure of discourse, appears as a way of trespassing or overcoming the fundamental solitude of each human being."

P. Ricoeur, 1976, *Interpretation Theory: discourse and the surplus of Meaning*, Texas Christian University Press, p.15

deny the formalized fixture of Ndembu rituals, but as a form of communicative practice, ritual epitomizes what Ricoeur called "an enigma, even a wonder", not a formulaic device of which implementation would ensure a constant result. It is primarily through contingent performances that the effects of rituals becomes a possibility hoped for, if not given.

Then, what does this shift of focus imply? When the Ndembu conducted rituals, they had a particular purpose in mind and they expected rituals to fulfill this aim. Yet if they were also aware of potential limitations of communicative practice, what is it which constituted their trust in rituals? A look at Ndembu rituals through the lens of the Austinian performance helps us shed old essentialist skin and give up a pursuit of a theoretical model to explicate what makes communicative practice possible in a generic sense, but the emphasis on the indeterminate openness of rituals in terms of their efficacy leads to a question why the Ndembu relied on them to begin with. The point is that the indeterminate fluidity in terms of meaning communicated through ritual and its efficacy does not necessarily negate locally shared ideals concerning the communicability of intentions expressed in ritual symbols. While the actual execution of a ritual was certainly based on situationally contingent performances, there was a shared assumption about the selection of symbolic materials and their efficacy. Analysis of a ritual along the line set by Austinian "performative" thus calls for an understanding of a local theory (or "the axiom") concerning the presupposed efficacy of a ritual apart from an interpretation of its actual applications. If this does not necessarily imply a translatability of ritual action in simplified structuralist terms, it is useful to bring our target in focus, and

clarify what is at issue.

Whether or not an emphasis on the characteristically indeterminate aspects of human communication serves to indicate the reason beliefs in ancestor spirits, though fundamentally arcane to Western mind, can survive in certain societies, in society where communications with divinity (or supernatural forces) provide religious belief its efficacious reality, an important place is given to ritual for the realization of pragmatic purposes. The important point in this connection is that the efficacy of ritual as form of communicative action lies not so much in mystical belief in causative function of some magical act, but rather in a dialectic of symbolic statements. Austin's notion 'happiness' is useful to convey how the efficacy of symbolic statements is conceived. Some statements are "happy" rather than true (or false) because they are not concerned with representation of meaning alone. They are to effect some change in reality, and are comparable to doing things. It is true that the "performative" notion of speech does not necessarily offer us a new innovative framework for considering how meaning is possible, but it can tell us how communication can and does fail without necessarily endangering belief in the efficacy of speech act.¹⁶ The categorical distinctiveness of Austin's perlocution from analytically specifiable illocution indicates this fundamental fact inherent in the practice of human communication.

¹⁶ Listing some linguistic devices which may be referred to to distinguish performatives from normative "constative" utterances, Austin says, "The trouble about all these devices has been principally their vagueness of meaning and uncertainty of sure reception, but there is also probably some positive inadequacy in them for dealing with anything like the complexity of the field of actions which we perform with words." Austin, *ibid.*, p.76.

To hazard my speculation on the issue outlined above in a limited space, I suggest making reference to a set of basic categories found in inter-human relations among the Ndembu. As will be seen in the following discussion, these categories are extended to the economic and political spheres and thereby given pragmatic rationality. Ndembu ancestor worship provides an additional locus for their articulation with moral values and I will briefly look at the principles that regulate the relationship between human and ancestor. The connections among these instances (economic, social, political, and supernatural) are maintained through daily practice in a comparable fashion to the habitus discussed by Bordieu,¹⁷ but also take a conspicuous form as thoughts in Ndembu rituals. To substantiate this point, I will discuss structural correlations of ritual symbols with their epistemological foundations found in daily practice.

2. On the cultural foundation for the mystical belief in rituals

As mentioned earlier, the aim of this article is not to present a full re-analysis of a Ndembu ritual but to examine the validity of a particular theory in the light of Ndembu material so as to clarify certain inconsistencies in the original explanations offered by Turner. We have seen that one potential point of reference is his insistence on the dynamic as opposed to the static, active as opposed to stationary aspects of Ndembu culture. These oppositions run parallel to a distinction between concrete (visible) and abstract (invisible). As a result, the cultural axioms which underlie Ndembu belief in the

¹⁷ Bourdieu, P. 1977, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge University Press.

efficacy of ritual symbols were given secondary status to that of ritual processes, but this prioritization was not only contradictory to the analytical importance attached to Ndembu life world, but also a cause, if not the only one, for an essentialist tendency in Turner's later career. If this assertion is acceptable, how would it help us localize the issue neglected by Turner? Some symbolic aspects latent in the material offered by Turner give us an important insight into the epistemological implications of the dichotomous treatment of empirical evidence. To substantiate this point, let us take a look at the male and female dichotomy in Ndembu society.

(1) Male and female dichotomy

Ndembu society is highly mobile because of the instability of marriage and frequent fission of village communities. Marriage is virilocal, but the cohabitation of a wife with her husband is often interrupted by various factors. The most important among those is the matrilineal descent system where the identity of a woman as the conjugal partner of her husband is opposed to that of a procreator in relation to her lineage. This double bind puts a Ndembu woman in a force field where she has to reconcile two conflicting demands at the same time. This results in the fragility of marital relations, forcing a woman to shift her residence from the village of the husband to that of her male siblings and to her next husband's when she remarries. Other than this structural cause inherent in the matrilineality, the unity of the village community is also subjected to disruption by intra- and inter-generation competitions among male members. Their political ambition to attain village leadership is perpetually frustrated by adelphic succession. Political ambition of competing village members

and fragile marital relations constitute the main cause of social instability.

Because of the immanence of these structural contradictions, it is natural to expect their frequent manifestations in mundane social practice. One such arena replete with tensions caused by the structural principles is the sexual dichotomy in the economic production.

Among the Ndembu the cultivation of the staple, cassava, is women's job. Other than the initial clearance of the field whereby "[m]en work in short spectacular bouts of energy", it is women who engage in "regular patient labour ... in hoeing up mounds, weeding, digging up roots, soaking, carrying, drying, pounding, shifting, and finally in cooking the cassava."¹⁸ The acquisition of meat from hunting on the other hand falls under the male responsibility, tied up with men's pride and political aspiration. Importantly, the dichotomy in the division of labor is extended to the realm of biological reproduction, in which the male/female opposition is accentuated by the mystical sanction against interference with the roles of respective sexes; when a pregnant woman goes into a labor, a man's hunting equipment must be taken away from the house, otherwise "his luck and skill at chase will fail and she may die in labor or have a miscarriage." If a woman carelessly approaches a hunter's shrine, she will suffer menstrual disorders.¹⁹

Turner regarded those conflicting aspects of the gender relation as expression of the fundamental contradiction in Ndembu society underpinned by its matrilineal descent system. But this interpretation

¹⁸ Turner, 1957, *Schism and Continuity in an African Society*, University of Manchester, p.24.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.27.

limits the significance of the male/female opposition as a component of Ndembu culture, of which implications in fact extend far beyond the realm of social structure. Procreation and women's role in cassava cultivation for instance are structurally identical with each other in their complementary relations to the male principle. The homology of women's role in cultivation with procreation is reflected in the procedural specificity in cassava cultivation; the "bout of male energy" for the clearance of cassava fields and the long patient tending by women are metaphorically in line with the complementary principle of male/female in procreation commenced by a sexual intercourse followed by the long, gradual gestation process.

We recognize a similar homology in Ndembu notion of nature. An illuminating case is a ritual called *Musolu*. With the aid of village elders, a chief or a village headman officiates the ritual to bring on belated rain and ensure the fertility of crops and animals.²⁰ In this case, there is a juxtaposition of human procreation with the cycle of reproduction in nature obtained by a meditation of an ancestor spirit. Ndembu believe that rain is caused by their ancestors and suggest another mobilization of the male/female dichotomy in perception of nature. The power manifested in the form of rain is masculine in nature; first the spirit in this ritual is said to be male; second it is combined with the (female) gestation power of nature (earth) to facilitate the growth of vegetation, to multiply animal, and to ensure the continuity of human reproduction. The importance of spirits for human reproduction is also emphasized in conception. Ndembu say that conception is the result of the mixing of semen

²⁰ Turner, 1957, p.16.

with uterine blood, and that a spirit does an effective joining.

To demonstrate how this equation of conception with the cycle of reproduction in nature provides an insight into local belief in the efficacy of magical medicines, let us take a tree which secretes red fluid. The tree is used to produce medicine in a ritual called *Nkula*. Ndembu ascribe the therapeutic power of the tree in stopping menstruation blood to its quickly coagulating red fluid. Suggesting the way in which some natural attributes can be transferred to human biology, this belief in the contagious power of nature may sound irrational. But the identification of procreation with natural reproduction sets the human biology within an ontic order controlled by mystical forces.²¹ In this sphere, the difference between the human body and things in nature is relative. For medical purposes, many other types of trees are utilized, and local explanations of their efficacy likewise suggest extensive applications of a similar principle; *mutun'ulu* has many roots "in the same way a woman should have many children", "[k]ata wubwang'u fruits split for two sections, representing twins... they use it because they hope for many children."²²

Other trees used in the ritual bear many fruits or have spreading roots so that "the patient would have many children", but trees

²¹ Turner writes, 'Ndembu have a tendency to regard like or shared experience as creating a mystical bond between all person (including, so Ndbmbu believe, the dead), things, and activities comprising the experience or closely associated with it. From the point of view of Western science, such a bond or association may be merely adventitious or superficial; form the point of view of the Ndembu, persons and things which "were together" in space and time at a moment of critical significance for an individual or a group may acquire a deep and permanent relationship of "mystical participation," to use Levy-Bruhl's useful term.' Turner, 1967, p.351.

from which bark ropes and strings are made should never be included since "these would tie up... their fertility."²³

Ingredients made from trees are pounded in a meal mortar and taken as medicine by a patient. Based on the preceding discussion, we can speculate that the processing by means of a meal mortar is motivated to emphasize the transferability of natural attributes to the human body. Food preparation by women is analogous to gestation in that women, by their domestic food production and biological reproduction, ensure the continuity of social life, and if a female body is the locus for social reproduction, it is a meal mortar which represents the locus for the appropriation of natural fertility for human life. In this sense, pounding medicine with a mortar is a charged procedure, of which efficaciousness is in increased potency of the tree medicines.

After the administration of the medicine, the patient is prohibited from touching water for a period of time, because "it leaks and is a soft thing.... If she touches water medicine will not stay strong."²⁴ The period of prohibition ends with the germination of maize and beans planted at the time of ritual performance. A Ndembu explanation that "[m]aize and beans stand for the bearing of children" can be interpreted as the temporary reversal of the object/subject relation where the patient takes on a secondary position as a passive body to the active principle of natural attributes. The essence of the trees does not take effect immediately and the patient now follows the flow of time in nature (germination) to regain her

²² Turner, 1968, *The Drums of Affliction*, Cornell University Press, p.60.

²³ Turner, 1968, p.61.

²⁴ Turner, 1968, p.77.

reproductive power. As an index of this temporal order, the germination denotes the time when the bodily appropriation of the natural attributes is completed.

(2) Hunting and political power

Underneath Ndembu notion of natural objects, especially of their potency in ritual contexts, there is an unstated but prevalent assumption about the relativity of the difference between man and nature. The relation is that of affective reciprocation rather than a dichotomy or an opposition of two mutually exclusive spheres. Cycles of reproduction in nature are conceptualized in terms of human gestation, but this metaphoric understanding of natural phenomena is more than a metaphor, for it provides a rationale for the appropriation of natural attributes to the human body. Juxtaposed with the male/female dichotomy, nature in Ndembu cultural scheme thus appropriates its elements from experience at hand, while it serves to articulate and justify the roles that men and women are supposed to assume in respective social domains. To exemplify this point, we have looked at women's role in gestation and food preparation. A discussion about hunting as a symbolic manifestation of masculinity is appropriate to emphasize the complementary nature of the gender difference.

Among the Ndembu, hunting is an activity strictly for men. Tied up with the social status of men, its importance lies in the political or ritual domain rather than in the economic in purely material terms. There is, however, a certain degree of ambivalence attached to hunting. Ndembu men inherit their skill in hunting from their fathers, which contradicts the fundamental matrilineal descent

principle. The locus of men's power in hunting is *ihamba*, a tooth extracted from their ancestor hunters. To maintain their hunting power, hunters must keep their *ihambas* with care; if they lose the teeth, not only does their hunting potency diminish, but also they themselves incur wrath of an ancestor spirit, which by deploying mystical power, can drive the lost *ihamba* into the hunters' body and cause physical pains. While it works for the benefit of its possessor, *ihamba* thus represents "an aggressive, usually but not invariably masculine power."²⁵

This reference to masculinity is important to illustrate the implication of hunting in its historic present. Before fire-arms became common, bow and arrow hunters collectively chased game, and the socially organized communal aspects of hunting seem to have been essential to the political expansion of the Ndembu in the pre-colonial past. Capello, a 19th century Portuguese traveler in Angola, provides a brief description of the hunting camps dispersed around the village maintained by chief *N'dumba*. A pictorial representation of the encampment scene suggests the communal nature of hunting.²⁶ That these socially organized hunters could be mobilized as effective warriors is reflected in Ndembu cultural idiom equating hunting with political power. The Lunda empire in Congo (with which the Ndembu are connected) was founded by a mythological hunter. Ndembu chiefs follow the tradition set by this mythological figure by acquiring potent hunting medicine at their installation ceremonies. A chief as a hunter par excellence emblematically accentuates his political

²⁵ Turner, 1968, p.180.

²⁶ Capello, H. 1832, *Benguella to the Territory of Yacca*, Sampson Low, p.217.

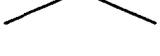
status over other ethnic groups. While the female principle in reproduction is connected with the socio-biological continuity of a local community, the political power manifested in hunting is the source of Ndembu ethnic autonomy.

Nowadays, many gun-hunters chase individually, and even though the rule of communal sharing is still preserved, as the use of guns has become more common than before, the social control of masculine power has become increasingly tenuous. Gun-hunters often break away from social mores by ignoring the rule of communal sharing, a behavior which is regarded as a symbolic challenge to incumbent political leaders. Interestingly, gun-hunters are normally associated with sorcery, which brings them structurally closer to a chief who usually possesses a magical formula to develop several familiars. A chief is said to assume the shapes of an elephant, a hippopotamus, a crab, and an *ilomba*, a giant snake with the face of its owner. The potency of a chief's magical power rests on his privileged position authenticated on the basis of the kinship structure. Since the acquisition of mystical power presupposes serious breaches of Ndembu mores, commoners' illicit acquisition of a familiar often results in their expulsion from village communities; hunters are believed to be able to gain strong medicine through incest with their sisters, which is regarded as a prime offense among the Ndembu. A chief's power is also realized by similar practices. Other than a familiar a chief's mystical power in hunting is engendered through seclusion in the installation ritual whereby he is allowed to have the company of his sister, a behavior which is highly incestuous by the Ndembu standard. Social structure thus selects an individual from the community and succession rites separate him from the rest by conferring inordinate

power of which acquisition is normally prohibited. Yet it's the ritual breach of fundamental Ndembu norms which accentuates his iconic status as the other above and over the community, providing a reference to commoners' political ambition. Those who try to gain political status by overriding the kinship order still have to possess certain magical attributes, but because of the technicality involved for their acquisition hunters with mystical power immediately trigger communal suspicion of socially negative perverse act. As a practice, hunting may induce male aggression. But as a part of cultural system, it functions to generate an order by limiting excessive expression of male principle.

(3) The chief and familiars

If the preceding summation of the cultural logic inherent in hunting is acceptable, it then allows us to postulate that the constitution of Ndembu political power centers on a chief's double attributes. These are based on two sets of opposition between two distinctive categories, man and animal. In hunting, a chief is considered a human who hunts animals. As a sorcerer, he kills humans through the deployment of magical familiars (animals). His double identity can be expressed in a set of man/animal oppositions, which stand in an inverse relation with each other when juxtaposed with the killer/victim opposition. The identification of a chief with a killer in these two domains is coextensive with his power over nature as well as over human society. His political ascendancy in those domains is normally manifested in the form of material tributes (such as gifts of animal parts), but it is important to emphasize the referential significance rather than the practical value of his double identity.

	Hunting		Sorcery
Killer:	man		animal (<i>ilomba</i>)
Victim:	animal		man
	collective	————	individual
	openness	————	secrecy
	positive	————	negative

Ndembu political power is based on a set of categories organized in structural fashion so that the existence of supernatural forces (magical doubles) becomes a publicly recognized reality. No one else in theory can appropriate the political power, but the fact that accusations are often made of sorcerers followed by social sanctions indicates that considerable value is attached to the acquisition of magical power and political leadership. Exclusive magical power attached to political leadership serves to denigrate imitative practice by commoners, while enunciating its potency at the same time.

In the following I attempt to establish that the focus on the cultural constitution of political power is of importance to discuss Ndembu imaginations of supernatural forces in religion. Ndembu religion is largely identical with other African ancestor worship in which salient is the concern with those imagined forces "which though not themselves human are believed to have left by once-living people."²⁷ The Ndembu include the souls of recently died relatives and ancestors dead in the distant past in the category of *mukishi*

²⁷ Beattie, J. H. & Middleton, J. 1969, *Spirit Mediumship and Society in Africa*, xix.

(shade), and consider they possess power over the living. Some spirits are bestowed with extra-human cosmogonic qualities by being related to thunder or rain, or equipped with abilities to control the movements of animals. They are believed to be able to convey wishes of the living to the God Nzembi. At the same time, ancestor spirits are known to play both positive and negative roles affecting the state of the living differently. They utilize their power to affect the source of Ndembu life (animal and vegetation as well as the physical conditions of the living directly), while its negative aspect is usually manifested in the forms of physical pains, menstrual disorders and lack of fortune in hunting. When these maladies take place, the Ndembu ascribe them to the deed of a particular ancestor based on divination.

It is not so easy to grasp fully belief of this kind in terms of subjective reality, but from a brief discussion of Ndembu cultural system, we can see that seemingly irrational perceptions of empirical facts are actually based on a set of rules with a degree of cognitive consistency, and therefore they are not totally beyond our comprehension. Ndembu say spirits are invisible, but they can appear in dreams to talk to the dreamers. While this may suggest an important role of metaphors in internalization of Ndembu beliefs, a question remains as to particular modalities in specific phases of interaction with spirits. In this respect, the preceding discussion about sorcery gives us a useful clue. My rationale for this assumption is this: if the "mission of metaphor" in the religious reinterpretation of empirical facts is essentially based on extension of "divers and causally unrelated" facts capable of occupying "the same frame in experience",²⁸ one can safely relate spiritual affliction

'syntagmatically' to a different but structurally similar reality in order to deduce the visionary or other kinds of experience in the religious domain. In so far as the man/spirit interaction can be characterized by the opposition between the real and supernatural entities as well as the opposition in the victim/offender dichotomy, the metaphorical representation of affliction is safely deemed analogous to the man/animal inversion in sorcery. While a simplistic identification of spirit/human relationship with sorcery must be avoided because of the fundamentally religious principle at work to govern the conduct of humans, manifestations of sprits in the religious domain suggest complex ramifications of an evil imagery with the moral principle conveyed by punitive, afflicting spirits. These conflicting aspects inherent in Ndembu religion manifest themselves most clearly in a rite of affliction, whereby the spiritual attack is transcended by a re-enactment of spiritual deed. To substantiate this assertion I briefly discuss Chihamba and see how this ritual is organized based on the symbolic elements of Ndembu culture so far discussed.

3. Chihamba ritual

My discussion about the cultural system which underlies Ndembu belief in ritual efficacy is highly hypothetical. But as Turner himself admitted we cannot fully capture meaning of Ndembu rituals by reference to the morphological analysis of ritual symbols alone without an adequate overview of the local knowledge on nature and

²⁸ Fernandez, J. W. 1974, "The Mission of Metaphor in Expressive Culture", *Current Anthropology*, 15(2): pp.119-45, p.126.

other fundamental concepts related to bio-physiological principles into which the very efficacy of a ritual is incorporated. The preceding discussion partly supports this assumption by showing that social structure is itself a partial manifestation of a larger system of signification. The system constitutes the cognitive basis for the Ndembu, especially for the conception of nature, the human body, and the socio-political complex which regulates the symbiosis between sorcery and political power. The ritual to be discussed in the following provides an empirical data to test this hypothesis.

A detailed description of the ritual is given by Turner. The task of the following discussion is not to provide a re-analysis of the ritual but to outline a strategy for a supplementary interpretation of the ritual. In so doing we must anticipate that the relation between the conceptual categories derived from the normative Ndembu life discussed so far and the ritual is not a mechanical reflection of one thing in the other. The fact is that the efficacy of ritual lies not so much in the purely causal effects of objects on the human body but rather in the 'perlocutionary' bearing of a message brought to a spirit, and this makes it difficult to arrive at a final, conclusive explanation of why some rituals are good to do. From Ndembu point of view, the result of ritual is determined by factors beyond the semantic question of ritual symbolism. This is not to deny the technical operability of rituals. When attacked by an ancestor spirit, for instance, Ndembu respond in three different ways. The first type is a passive acceptance of affliction through dying ritually so that the afflicted can be ritually "re-born". The second response is a more positive one applied to Ihamba where the afflicting ancestors' tooth (ihamba) is extracted through ritual surgery. The

third one is retaliation by the ritual killing of an afflicting spirit. This third method is indicative of the extent to which the fundamental contradiction between man and animal can be extended to the realm of ancestor worship. While the efficacy suggested in those different reactions to spirits rests on technically specified operationality, one purpose of ritual performances is to enunciate the awareness of spiritual force, so as to communicate a message to an ancestor.

I emphasize this communicative aspect of ritual first to clarify the relative importance attached to the efficacy of specific ritual symbols in formalized purely exegetical terms. Even though local exegeses on efficacy of specific symbols may sound highly technical, the purpose is not necessarily to cause a change based on principles of imagined or proven causality. We may confirm this secondary importance given to sheer technicality in theatrical performances of Ndembu rituals in general, of which efficaciousness primarily rests on their perlocutionary force. This in turn relates to my second point about the possibility of failures. Indeed, being a communicative overture to a supernatural entity, a ritual may or may not fail, but this does not seem to jeopardize the local belief in its efficacy. Ritual as a system of meaning is organized by symbolic utterances. It works not because of erroneous science of Ndembu. It can be effective as it fundamentally concerns itself with the dialectic between the human and the spirit. If this definition of ritual seen from the lens of performative theory of language use is acceptable, it is time to see how a specific use of ritual is made to cope with afflictions by ancestor spirits.

(1) Chihamba ritual – general features

Of the Ndembu rites of affliction in which an ancestor spirit is believed to be the cause of physical disorder, *Chihamba* is considered the most serious. The solemnity of the ritual is emphasized by several factors. The victim usually suffers acute pains in the whole body, which sometimes lead to death. In order to conduct the ritual, permission from chief Kanongesha, a supra-local chief over the entire region of Mwinilunga must be obtained. The ritual conducted to counteract the affliction includes dramatic performances ending with the killing of the spirit. The ritual is characteristic of conspicuous use of white color, with which the spirit itself is identified (*Chihamba* is said to be a white spirit). There are certain ambiguities concerning the identity of the spirit, especially in relation to *Kavula*, another supernatural entity in *Chihamba* ritual. *Kavula* (an ancient term meaning “lightening”) is in fact identified with the *Chihamba* spirit, but informants’ opinions are perplexingly contradictory. The local exegesis indicates that reference is being made to the spirit as one of the great chiefs in an ancient period, closely related to the chief of the Lunda empire in Congo.²⁹ The presentation of the ritual is dramatic, involving various stage sets such as a whitened blanket over a wooden frame, representing *Kavula* that shakes by the manual operation of the frame; the dramatic performances associated with slave hunting; and the identification of the victim with slaves owned by the spirit. A ritual described by Turner lasted for four days, exhibiting three distinctive phases in the entire sequence.

²⁹ Turner, 1975, p.103.

Part one

The first phase of the ritual consists of inaugural ceremonies, the collecting and preparation of medicine and other preparatory procedures. This part takes two days, preceding the "killing" of the spirit on the third and the post execution rites on the fourth day.

The first day

On the first day of the ritual, the organizer of the ritual (the husband of a woman who was divined to be the victim) brings beer to commence the ritual. An arrow is sent by the village headman to a person to confirm his appointment as a senior adept in the ritual. In Turner's case, the husband of the patient (the victim) jointly plays the roles of the major adept with other adepts. In the order of seniority, male adepts dip the arrow in the beer and lick the arrow head. After this, the arrow is draped with a white bean necklace and is put away. Arrows and beads are used to represent a spirit when its manifestation is supposed to be unusually dangerous. The arrow, a metonym of hunting, and white beans, that of fertility, evoke the power of a chief or headman whose power in hunting and rain ritual is his critical attributes. Licking the arrow seems to have some contagious effects. As we shall see later, the adepts play the role of servant or warrior of *Chihamba*, and if the arrow is considered a symbol of the spirit as a chief, we may safely consider the act of licking a metaphoric expression of the adepts' allegiance to the chief/spirit.

The second day

In the morning of the second day, the adepts pray at the village

shrines, which is normally omitted in a rite of affliction. The prayer in this ritual suggests a certain distinction made between *Chihamba* spirit and other ancestor spirits with whom the Ndembu usually have clear sense of genealogical connection. That the permission must be obtained from the higher authority (chief Kenongesha) to conduct the ritual also suggests a greater degree of ceremoniousness of the ritual. To confirm this point Turner cites Melland,³⁰ who characterizes *Chihamba* as "the most remarkable of the purely tribal spirits, distinguished from 'family' or 'lineage' spirits."³¹

After the prayer, the adepts start the preparation of ritual items. The arrow mentioned above is inserted in the ground near the patient's hut to denote the identity of the victim caught by the spirit. Hand rattles called "*yilenga*" are collected in a winnowing basket (*lwalu*), licked by the adepts, then blown with white clay powder for blessing.³² The rattle, made from carved wood with adzes, is said to sound like thunder and is utilized as a critical element in the killing of the spirit. The sounds of the rattle "rouse the spirit" for the spirit itself is identified with lightening. This metonymic equation of the rattle with lightening is explained by the analogy that "the strokes of adzes resemble those of lightening." The rattles are put in a *lwalu* which is usually used for collection of food (cassava) and in fact treated like food by being blown for blessing: blowing on food is "a sign of gratitude to the ancestor spirits who have given them good crops".³³ The use of metonyms related to the

³⁰ Melland, F. H. 1923, *In Witch-bound Africa*, Seeley.

³¹ Turner, 1975, p.171.

³² *Ibid.*, p.48.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.50.

spirit, the rattle and food, is reasonable given the Ndembu notion of fertility. As mentioned earlier, biological procreation is put in homology with the cycle of reproduction in nature through the insemination by a spirit (rain on the earth) and its role in conception.

After the preparation of the rattles, the adepts start off to the bush for the collection of medicines. They begin with a particular kind of tree, *Mucheki*, which is regarded as "*ishiken*", the senior or the first tree in relation to other plants to be collected. Through sacralization (circling around the tree), the tree is empowered to obtain potency on the medicine mixture used in the ritual. Before the extraction of taproot from the tree, an adept makes an invocation to an ancestor spirit (in this case a great grandmother of the patient) who appears to play an intermediary role between the victim and the *Chihamba* spirit.

That [is you] white clay, *Nyamakanga*'. Today if you catch this person *Nyamkola* in *Chihamba*, today release her. [At] her drum they must dance for you well. And also tomorrow there must be an increase in number of [her] vegetable medicines well and quickly. You must give her strength. That is [you] white clay, that is also [your] beer. You who were curing well, [o] *Chihamba*, come, fly [hither].³⁴

The invocation is designed either to transfer the spirit's power into or to transmute the ancestress herself into the root. It brings the ancestress close to the community in a tangible form. Though the

³⁴ Ibid., p.54.

reason *Mukechi* is chosen for this purpose is not clear, the whiteness of its root justifies its placement in a shrine later with an effigy of the *Chihamba* spirit (a root of other kind of tree), which, as mentioned, is associated with white color. The names and attributes of the trees collected after the invocation are as follows:

Munkalapoli: little thorns which catch people while passing in the bush,

Musoli: its shoots attractive to animals at the beginning of the rainy season, *Musoli* from *ku-soli*, "to make seen",

Mucha: many fruits at the beginning of a rainy season, as an indicator of its onset,

Museng'a: many flowers full of honey to attract bees,

Mutubu: from *ku-tubu* meaning to leap out.

These medicines are brought back to the village in a winnowing basket covered with cloth "to hide" the contents.³⁵ Only *Mukechi* root is taken out for scraping its bark, some of which is pounded with salt. The salt is the "renowned" *ibanda* salt and "is liked by *Kavula*."³⁶ Tuner refers to an importance attached to salt in the pre-colonial past when the control over salt deposits was frequently the cause of wars. The medicine is put in a pouch made from a rat skin. This nocturnal animal is said to cause fear by walking on dead leaves and sticks. The native explanation which ascribes positive effects to the medicine, *isaku*, (to strengthen the body of the patient) seems contradictory, given the contagious logic inherent in the medicine to

³⁵ Ibid., p.59.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 61.

cause fear, but this query can be resolved by reference to another medicine made from the ingredients hidden in the basket. The effect of this medicine (*nsompu*) is related to the physical movement of pulling out or inducing to appear. The medicine is made at night and put in a pot near a fire of *Mukula* tree wood. The tree is a type of red fluid tree and is said to stand for the blood of the spirit, so the placement of *nsompu* near the fire is highly suggestive of its purpose to expel or bring out the spirit as opposed to the referential value of *isaku* medicine. *Isaku* is referential in that it represents features of the spirit firstly as a powerful chief in the past (from the use of salt) and secondly as a dead person to cause fear (*isaku* skin — evoking an image of a ghost which roam around at night). The distinction between the two medicines is also implicit in the subsequent procession of the ritual. Before the administration of *nsompu*, an invocation is made to the ancesstress spirit and to all of “our dead”.³⁷ In Turner’s description of the actual procession, the invocation is followed by the interrogation of patients by *Kavula*, but one ritual specialist mentions that this is not a correct order since this interrogation should take place after the “killing” of *Kavula*.³⁸ Another informant supports this view by denying the presence of *Kavula* during the interrogation: “on the night of *ku-tumbuka* [night dance] at *Mukanza* village, *Kavula* was not present. The adepts just spoke to the candidates.”³⁹ This informant’s account explains better the meaning of the night dance than manifested in the actual progress of the ritual. During this communal dancing, the patient is given

³⁷ Ibid., p.63.

³⁸ Ibid., p.66.

³⁹ Ibid., p.65.

nsompu without being known by the spirit. As a liminal phase of the ritual, the night dance is characterized by illicit sexual activities, gaiety, and lack of order, demarcating the beginning of the second phase of the ritual.

Part two.

The second part of the ritual consists of dramatic performances related to the "killing" of the spirit. My interpretation of this particular enactment stems from the formulation presented earlier concerning the dialectic of man and animal. *Chihamba* spirit catches the victim in the form of a hippo or a bird, but it nonetheless conveys a moral message to the living through affliction. The contradictory aspects inherent in man/animal inversion juxtaposed to the affliction in the ritual give rise to the double function that has to be fulfilled, i.e., the recognition of the moral message and the transcendence of the affliction. The procedures to achieve these conflicting tasks in *Chihamba* involve a persuasion of the spirit, realized by the most drastic means (killing). The plot must be kept secret, and in this respect, the native exegesis is highly unreliable, since:

The spirits are all-hearing, all-seeing, all-pervading, all-powerful The chronic inability to speak the truth, which is so well-known a feature of these races, is sometimes misunderstood. It is not viciousness... but it is a virtue taught to all at childhood: the reason being the necessity to deceive the overhearing adverse spirits, and put them 'off the track.'⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Melland, *ibid.*, p.129.

At dawn of the third day, women adepts deliver pieces of red cock feather to each hut in the village. An informant explains this is to "please the *Chihamba* spirit". But in the light of the final episode, the real message of this color symbolism appears to inform people of the execution.

(i) The preparation and performance of *Isoli* rite

A site of the ritual performance and a foot path that leads to the site are sacralized. The site called *isoli* is screened off in a rough circle with shrubs. A meal mortar is dragged along the path towards the tree near *isoli* by the male adepts, who go through the motion of copulation when they pass the mortar between their legs. Passing things or a person between the legs symbolizes fertility in the ritual context, but in this case, the symbolic insemination of the mortar (through the act of copulation) is also related to the life-giving power of *Chihamba* spirit. A primary symbol for the role of women in social reproduction, a meal mortar in this context can be seen as a metaphor for the female body. The insemination by the male adepts brings about this latent significance of the mortar. The mortar transmutes into a symbol of communal life first by reference to its instrumentality in the collective cassava consumption (in a village women take turns to prepare cassava meal for the whole village), second by reference to additional symbols attached to it. Agricultural equipment is assembled and buried in the ground beneath the mortar, and treated as a unit to represent *Chihamba* spirit. Since agricultural production and human procreation both constitute the basis for the continuity of Ndembu communal life, the use of the inseminated mortar and agricultural tools is appropriate.

They stand for the reproductive 'fecund' condition of the community and as such they can be seen to represent Ndembu society itself. Once this symbolic statement is established, the identification of the mortar with the spirit is a logical consequence given Ndembu belief in the overall dependence of the community on spiritual power.

Within the *isoli*, a contraption is made to represent *Kavula*, which now takes an elongated square shape of a whitened blanket put on a wooden frame. *Kavula* embodies "something white rising out a grave." It shakes and rattles to drums as the adepts manipulate the frame, presenting a striking resonance with the uncanny image of the spirit as a ghost insinuated by *isaku* medicine.

Simultaneous with the preparation of the *isoli*, some of the adepts begin to chase the patients (the victim and candidates who wish to become *Chihamba* doctors through participation in the ritual) in a highly formalized manner, singing songs that refer to slave hunting in the pre-colonial past. When caught by the adepts, the patients are grouped together and asked cryptic questions about the nature of *Kavula*. If the answers are not correct, the candidates are declared to be slaves of *Kavula*. This goes on for several hours until they are finally drawn to the *isoli* to meet *Kavula*. Before their encounter with *Kavula*, the patients are washed with *nsompu*, then instructed to roll in the dirt and bang on the ground when they approach the *isoli*. *Kavula* asks the candidates his own name and promises to cure their disease. The patients then hit *Kavula* with rattles while drums are being played. *Kavula* shivers and shakes in convulsion. The patients are chased by her adepts and brought back to the *isoli* to look at the blood of *Kavula* (from the fed chicken hidden in the mortar). The patients are told that they are acquit and given cassava

meal. The rite of *isoli* ends at dusk of the third day.

(ii) Remarks

Turner interprets the killing of the spirit by focusing on the dominance of the white color symbolism. In so doing he draws upon Melville's white whale and the white symbolism in Judaism and Christianity connected with the death of sacred entities. I disagree with this interpretation because the efficacy of the ritual depends not on a single symbol but on multiple representations.

The white color symbolism is indeed an important factor in this rite, and as far as its thematic contents are concerned, Turner's approach may not be off the track since the psychological effect of *Kavula* in the form of white spirit should not be underestimated. According to Austin, however, the meaning of a statement or action is not exhausted by a single semantic (lexical) value, since not only does the meaning of representation depend on the context, but also it is motivated to achieve some purpose in perlocutionary sense. Since Turner was well aware of the significance of the context of ritual communication, the distinction between Turner and Austin seems relative. Yet there is an advantage in relying on Austin's performative. It is an explanatory freedom gained from the acceptance of failures in speech act. The meaning of performance, influenced by multiple factors, is fundamentally indeterminate especially when it comes to its perlocutionary significance. Subject to the contextual exigency, the presence of the other, the efficacy of communicative utterance constitutes additional non-interpretive complex, of which problematic can not be dealt with solely in hermeneutic terms. It is indeed appropriate to apply illocution to ritual symbols and attempt to

extract their formal contextual properties, yet in so doing, one implicitly identifies ritual with communication for the sake of saying things. What is called for in this connection is the acknowledgement of a causal hiatus between the semantic order (illocutionary aspects) of ritual and its final outcome in relation to a supernatural entity.

As a type of symbolic message, the killing of the spirit may or may not bring about an efficacious result. Its message lies primarily in the identification of the village community with the spirit. This identification is then followed by the equation of the affliction with the attack on the spirit itself. As I argue, what enables us to derive this illocutionary significance of the ritual act is the basic principles inherent in Ndembu cultural logic concerning the biological reproduction and the cycle of rejuvenation in nature. If Ndembu acknowledgement of spiritual power in this bio-physical domain serves to justify the symbolic identification of the community with a spirit, the killing of the spirit, though undeniably drastic, can be a logical extension of this equation. When the spirit, the life source of the community, hit the patient, the affliction is logically equivalent to an attack on itself.

The interaction between *Kavula* and the patients in the ritual helps us substantiate this point from a different angle.

In *Chihamba*, when *Kavula* meets the patients, it verbally abuses the patients in sexual terms (the role is played by one of the adepts). *Kavula's* verbal harassment in fact draws upon the metaphorical kinship relation assumed in relation to the patients, that of grandfather and grandchildren, which is usually an emotionally close and endearing one among the Ndembu:

... in custom the grandparents are the genial advisers and instructors of the grandchildren in many matters. The relationship between grandparents and grandchildren, like that between cross-cousins, is summed up in the Ndembu term *musensi* [joking relationship].... Joking partners may revile one another, exciting amusement but not anger. They may claim any articles of one another's property...⁴¹

Importantly, the characterization of the spirit/human relationship in kinship terms provides an additional justification for the killing of the spirit by the patients, since the outcome of a grandfather/grandparents conflict, if it takes place, is normally a fierce and ruthless fight. Turner gives us one such episode:

When *Chababa* succeeded, he told his grandson *Izamba* (classificatory) to have a private medicine-body (*chiswamu*) somewhere near his own. Each made a separate *chiswamu*. Each *chiswamu* was *nkalajobu*, a big crab.... *Izamba's* crab made sounds like the sound of rain to show that it was growing strong. *Chababa's* made the same sounds.... *Izamba* and his crab said, "This chieftainship which is my grandfather's must be given to me, because *Chababa* is no longer clever. One day I shall try to kill him to be given the chieftainship." So the *yiswamu* crabs met and fought. They fought and fought. *Chababa's* grew tired of fighting.... *Chababa* died in the river in his *chiswamu*. He was buried. Later *Izamba* came and wished to succeed. Everyone agreed that he had wanted

⁴¹ Turner 1957, p.245.

to be chief.⁴²

The poignancy of this episode lies in the fact that *Chababa* had been fond of *Izemba*, who ruthlessly fought and killed his grandfather to become finally a chief himself. Perhaps weakened by his love of his grandson, *Chababa* succumbed to the cultural idiom that binds the alternate generations while *Izemba* claimed *Chababa's* chieftainship with no qualms, incurring no public accusations.

For the Ndembu familiar with this kinship idiom, the performance in the ritual would have classificatory implications with distinctively psychological entailments. First the verbal interaction with *Kavula* establishes a classificatory kinship relation with the spirit. Second it generates a psychological bond. The extension of kinship-based emotional complex to the man/spirit relation functions to bring about contextual forces, legitimating the death of the spirit as a grandfather through machination by his grandchildren. In the sequence of the ritual which precedes the killing (slave hunting followed by an encounter with *Kavula* in *isoli*), *Kavula* is invariably depicted as a chief. It is not very difficult to imagine that the performances related to this treatment of the spirit as a figure of political importance evoke memories of the past, constituting another logical justification for the final execution of the afflicting spirit.

Part Three

The third phase of the ritual consists of the transfiguration of the spirit into an objective form based on two successive rites, *yibi*

⁴² Turner, 1968, p.137.

and the making of *Katonga*' shrine. The aim of these rites is the containment of the transfigured spirit in a visible entity. With the killing of the spirit serving as the preliminary measure, the domestication of the afflicting spirit is traced to the belief that the manifestation of hidden emotions prevents negative social consequence such as the deployment of a magical double. Since the ancestral attack partakes on the structurally demarcated milieu of the evil, signified by the inversion of man/animal opposition, after the reversal to the normalcy through the domestication of a punitive spirit, the community is imbued with a sense of felicity, even though the final efficaciousness of the ritual remains to be seen.

4. Conclusion

The argument presented here is primarily based on a semiological analysis concerned with local logic, or "the axiom" which underlies the efficaciousness of ritual symbols. While the article is not able to clarify the correlation of the formal, illocutionary force of ritual with its perlocutional efficacy, the limitation is necessary to think about the local perception of how rituals can be and are efficacious. Rituals are crucial elements for mediating the dialectic of man with supernatural entities. Rituals are to cause changes in physical condition yet essentially through the power of others. The Frazerian notion of rituals as a false science missed this communicative path chosen by Ndembu ritualists. While the intellectualist approach to ritual and magic in British anthropology transcended this limitation by re-focusing attention from the false ontology to the extra-scientific causality which regulates what scientific mind might regard as accidents, it was not until Turner that we come to see how this

'science of contingent events' is realized by means of symbols. Concerned with the efficacy of individual rituals, however, Turner tended to overemphasize the importance of temporally organized performance and conceptualize the efficacy primarily in terms of mystical belief. In the performative theory, however, the efficacy of a performative is essentially subject to heterogeneous factors, not a logical extension from an illocutionary act. In this article an attempt was made to establish the utility of this performative perspective and claim that the efficacy of ritual in the final analysis cannot be derived from a focus on semantic, illocutionary idioms. In so doing I suggested that we see ritual efficacy as a problem of different order, which depends upon numerous historic factors, and therefore not easily amenable to the rules of communicative practice. To substantiate this point, I looked at a cultural system which might function to sustain Ndembu belief in the efficacy of rituals. The relationship between this system and an actual performance is not that of a direct correlation, with no mechanical causality involved. The performative theory of language use serves to clarify this non-determinist position and helps us distinguish what we can expect from semantic analysis of rituals from what we cannot.

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