THE PERSON AND THE LIFE CYCLE IN AFRICAN SOCIAL LIFE AND THOUGHT

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THE SYSTEMATIC STUDY OF AFRICAN KNOWLEDGE

The study of the person, or self, is one of the most exciting areas of anthropological research today. Though it has recently become a central concern of psychological anthropology and gender studies, the person has been a significant theme in African studies ever since the 1930s; reflection on this theme promises today not only to shed new light on data already collected, but also to stimulate important new research.

It is not my intention to write an intellectual history here, or give an explanation of how and why people have become interested in the issues I will be discussing. If I do write now and then about the historical context of some of these ideas and approaches, it is mainly with the goal of helping the contemporary reader see the relevance for our topic of a wide variety of sources regardless of their context and rhetoric. Thus, though my presentation will be vaguely chronological, my discussion and analysis will generally examine the various works in relation to one another regardless of when they were written.

The reader should bear in mind that in the United States, at least, the field I am surveying in this review essay does not yet exist as a sub-area or sub-speciality of any discipline. It is a goal of this essay to demonstrate that a convergence has been taking place, particularly in recent decades, in the thrust of African research on an apparently wide variety of topics. What I want mainly to do, then, is show how a great many studies from different disciplines and concerning subjects as diverse as initiation, mortuary customs, and healing, all can be reread for data and illumination on how Africans experience and think about the person and the life cycle. It is in France more than anywhere else that these issues have become a veritable field of study.

A French Colloquium on the Person in Black Africa

Of the thirty-one papers in the volume published by the CNRS, La notion de personne en Afrique noire (1973), twenty-six are in French; prior to the last decade...
the topic was not a central one for British anthropology, and the American anthropologists who might have been interested had generally done their field work elsewhere than in Africa. 3 One of the great merits of the volume is that so many different perspectives on the topic are so well presented there. In the 1930s, '40s and '50s, the study of the person in African societies had gradually developed as a central theme in the research of Marcel Griaule and his co-workers among the Dogon and neighboring peoples of what is now Mali, then the French Sudan. These researchers had been fascinated by the elaborate ritual life of the people they encountered, and gradually came to see that their rituals not only were extraordinary artistic productions in themselves, but that they also pointed to a conception of the world and of man that was far more intricate and systematic than previously suspected. Unlike Durkheim (1960) and the British and American anthropologists who were so influenced by him, these French anthropologists did not appear to feel that the native beliefs had to be explicable in Western terms, nor did they make an effort to discover the social structures of which the religious beliefs and practices "ought" to be the collective representations and/or the necessary ritual reinforcees. What they did assume, however, was that the beliefs and practices had an intrinsic order that could be grasped even if the reality to which they were oriented remained obscure or incomprehensible. That the natives said and did what they did was all the justification that was needed for recording it. The anthropologists normally did not present their data, however, as a simple chronicle of what the natives were doing; on the contrary, they made enormous efforts to systematize the bits of information they got from here and there into a whole that was as coherent as possible. This work is very similar to linguistic description of a previously unrecorded language. Just as by systematic questioning of the speakers the linguist is able to organize his data in paradigmatic form, so the anthropologists sought to create chapters or whole monographs that were like paradigms of the natives' religious activities and ideas.

One of the first and most important studies of this type was Germaine Dieterlen's monograph Les âmes des Dogons (1941). It is a detailed account of the different spiritual elements that the Dogon believe to be a part of every person. Through a careful study of rituals, such as funerals, circumcisions, and sacrifices at various altars, Mme. Dieterlen found that the Dogon understand the human personality to be made up of many parts which not only come from various exterior sources, but also remain in some sort of relation to those sources. This is clearest in the case of the individual's relation to ancestors: a part of the "vital force" of any ancestor is reborn in one or more descendants; the latter then are the ancestor--which is symbolized by their observing his taboos as well as their own--while at the same time developing their own self and roles in the life of their communities. Since the publication of that book, Mme. Dieterlen and the other members of the Griaule team have continued their research and have discovered the Dogon ideas to be even more complex than those presented in Les âmes des Dogons. For example, not only are the living endowed with spiritual components that link them to other people, both ancestors and living relatives, but they also are linked directly to the natural world in a number of ways, such as through the seeds of different plants which each person has in his clavicles.

Probably the most exciting and well known study to bring out these ideas is Marcel Griaule's Dieu d'eau: Entretiens avec Ogotommêli (1948, not translated into
English until 1965). Griaule presents this book as the record of a series of thirty-three conversations with an old hunter who, blinded by an accident, spent much of his life thinking about and figuring out the world. This man decided to tell the anthropologist what he knew, and Griaule published these conversations in language accessible to the general public so as to impress people with the lucidity of Ogotommêli's exposition and with the intricacy and complexity of the Dogon cosmology it depicted. In the light of this book, and subsequent research as well (Calame-Griaule, 1965; Griaule and Dieterlen, 1965; Dieterlen, 1973; Zahan, 1979), it appears that in Dogon thought the whole universe and the human person are related to one another in multiple ways. To give just one illustration, not only are parts of the body linked to aspects of nature, as with the seeds of plants, but also the human habitation, the village, and even every day objects like pots, baskets, and the blacksmith's anvil all correspond to the human form, as many diagrams in Griaule's study indicate.

Another theme of enormous importance that emerges from Dieu d'eau and many other studies in the same tradition (e.g., Zahan, 1963; Calame-Griaule, 1965) is that of the qualities and power of speech and symbol. By and large these anthropologists did not attempt to analyze in Western terms the relation between African symbols or symbol systems and the "realities" to which they referred, but instead reported in detail concerning African conceptions of speech and symbol and what their functions are. What Griaule and the others found was the widespread notion of an intimate relation between speech and humanness and between speech and divinity. In Dogon cosmology, as in the Judeo-Christian one, the very formation of the world by God is intimately connected with speech. And human speech and culture amount to almost the same thing too, as is indicated, for example, by the fact that the Dogon think of the cloth with which people cover their nakedness as a materialized form of speech. Ogotommêli draws a series of correspondences between the parts of the loom and the parts of the mouth, such that the sounds made by the movements of tongue and teeth are parallel to the cloth made by the movements of shuttle and heddles. Western readers of this surely think of Homer's metaphor for the bard: "weaver of the wind."4

The British Africanist who was the most receptive to these studies was Meyer Fortes. He had been originally trained as a psychologist, and one of his earliest essays was on the psychological aspects of education among the Tallensi (Fortes, 1938). Yet unlike the anthropologists of the Griaule school, he believed it absolutely essential to ground the study of customs, behavior, personality, and so on, in a thorough understanding of the social structure of a people. That is why he wrote The Dynamics of Clanship Among the Tallensi (1945) before The Web of Kinship Among the Tallensi (1949).

At the same time as these studies were being done, a Flemish priest working in the then Belgian Congo was convinced that to be successful in his mission he had to build upon the understanding of the world by which "his" Bantu lived. Placide Temples' famous book La philosophie bantoue (1949--originally published in 1945) argued that the "Bantu" conceived of the universe as a hierarchy of interconnected forces. God was at the apex, followed by ancestral spirits, followed by humans, animals, and finally plants. All of these beings had "vital force," and thus participated in the same being as one another, but while any force could act upon a weaker force, it could not affect a force stronger than itself unless it was directed by a
still stronger one. Here, then, as among the Dogon, the Tallensi, and the Bambara, a key feature of the conception of human nature is that the person is not an entity separate from others, but rather participates in other beings (including persons) and is in part constituted by other beings. A number of aspects of Father Temples' book have been hotly debated, including the very fact that he called the book *La philosophie bantoue*, since there is no society, tribe, or other group called the Bantu. Most scholars today would grant that the book has been superseded by a number of more detailed and focussed studies on the thought and world views of speakers of particular Bantu or other languages (e.g., Kagamé, 1956, 1976; Lalèyè, 1970; Tshiamalenga, 1973) but this very circumstance is due to the fact that *La philosophie bantoue* evoked much discussion and inspired many scholars to pursue similar kinds of research. Marcel Griaule in his introduction to *Dieu d'eau* cites the work as supporting the finding of his own research that African peoples were indeed capable of elaborating elaborate philosophies.

Thirty or so years after the publication of *Les âmes des Dogons*, then, the number of people actively studying African conceptions of the person had grown from a small handful to three of four dozen among Francophone scholars alone and many though by no means all of them, were contributors to *La notion de personne en Afrique noire*. The essays in the book are ethnographic in the main, and of these perhaps a dozen altogether follow the Griaule/Temples approach of discovering or bringing out the ordered system of concepts of the person held by a given African people. It would overburden this essay to summarize all those interesting articles, but I will draw attention briefly to the one by Bisilliat and Laya, because methodologically it seems to represent an "Africanization" of this kind of ethnography. These authors present, with very little interpretation, the verbatim transcription of a series of interviews they held with a Songhay curer concerning the various parts of the human body (and person) and their functions. What this man has to say about things like blood, the liver, the shadow, milk, the head, the heart, the will, and so on, is fascinating, but the authors do not claim that these data can be taken to be "what the Songhay believe." On the contrary, they conclude their analysis with the following remarks (Bisilliat and Laya, 1973: 337-38):

What we have here is a true body of knowledge, gained by experience just as much as by initiation. This knowledge concerns the real world and does not, for the doctor, draw on anything mysterious--though he does frequently refer to God's will. Finally, this knowledge does not claim to be universal: it is just as much individual as it is traditional and social. All this leads one to think that a rigorous, internal coherence organizes this knowledge. But what is that coherence? Perhaps we may hope for some light on this question from future research.

While the emphasis on the individual and experiential component of this knowledge indicates a new direction in this kind of ethnography, the idea that it is somehow true and coherent is common. These remarks bring out clearly, however, what I believe is both a strength and a problematic feature of this approach. The strength of it is that it takes very seriously the native point of view, and gives it value by implying that that view has as much chance as any other of capturing the true nature of reality. The problem or question that these studies leave in suspense is
not so much, "what is that coherence?" which indeed further research of the same type might elucidate, but, "what does it really mean to call this knowledge 'true'?" (For ease of exposition from here on I will use the label "savoir africain" to refer to studies with such an attitude and approach to African ideas and knowledge.) While by and large the authors of the "savoir africain" school leave this question unasked, one gets the feeling from their work that in their mind all human beings see the same ultimate reality, but simply describe it in historically and culturally specific symbols. It is only because our Western symbols are different that we do not readily acknowledge the truth of African knowledge. Odd as it might seem, the very same idea underlies the thinking of other anthropological schools as well, at least until recently. That is, all anthropological studies of Africa take for granted the notion that there is a common reality lived in by all human beings, namely the reality described by our laws of physics and social science. What differentiates the social anthropologists of Britain and America from the "savoir africain" school is that the former take African ideas about cosmology, human development, illness, etc. to be more or less wrong about the facts; therefore it becomes necessary to explain sociologically or otherwise why the Africans cling to their beliefs. Evans-Pritchard's discussion of Azande witchcraft, oracles, and magic (1937) is an excellent example of this.

It is to Mme. Dieterlen's great credit that, if her work was a principle source of inspiration for the contributors to La notion de personne en Afrique noire, 7 it was in no way a procrustean bed. We find in that volume several essays written from perspectives that strongly oppose the "savoir africain" school (cf. especially Smith, 1973 and Olivier de Sardan, 1973, who use a sort of Marxist structuralism), as well as number from perspectives that are complementary to it, such as psychoanalysis (e.g., Ortigues, 1973), social anthropology (Fortes, 1973; Middleton,1973), structuralism (Cartry, 1973; Héritier-Izard, 1973; De Heusch, 1973), and phenomenology (Gollinhofer and Sillans, 1973; Rouch, 1973).

As might be surmised, the essays just referred to do not form an easy unity. Rather than attempting a discussion of them at this point, this essay will incorporate them as necessary into the subsequent analysis of different issues and approaches concerning the person and the life cycle in African social life and thought. At that time we shall be in a better position to assess the contributions they make to our understanding of this topic.

AFRICAN PERSON AND PERSONALITY
IN PSYCHOANALYSIS AND OTHER PSYCHOLOGIES

Well before the publication of La notion de personne en Afrique noire, another group of researchers had begun to explore the nature of the person and the personality in Africa, but from a very different perspective. This was the group led by the psychiatrist Henri Collomb at the Psychiatric Hospital of Fann, a suburb of Dakar. Not only was Dr. Collomb an important thinker in his own right, but also he encouraged others working in varied disciplines, and he began to look for ways of drawing on African traditions of healing that could be incorporated in the work of his psychiatric clinic. In 1964 he founded the journal Psychopathologie Africaine, which
immediately became the most interesting journal of the time concerning issues of African mental health, psychology, child development, traditional conceptions of mental illness, and practices for handling such illnesses. This was eight years before *Ethos* began to be published, and twelve years before the beginning of the *Journal of Psychoanalytic Anthropology*. The people working at the Fann clinic were primarily psychiatrists, some of whom were psychoanalysts, but sociologists and anthropologists were also well represented there.

Anthropologists who are physicians are lucky; they have a reasonable excuse to ask all sorts of indiscreet questions, and they are able in some measure to repay, with their medical knowledge, those who help them with information. The most influential psychoanalyst to benefit from this process is probably Marie-Cécile Ortigues, who worked at the clinic with Dr. Collomb for many years. The book she wrote with her husband Edmond Ortigues, *Oedipe africain* (1966), is based primarily on her own work with neurotic and psychotic patients, and draws as well on the research of the sociologists and anthropologists of the Fann team. The Ortigues accept the Freudian hypothesis that the formation and resolution of the Oedipus complex are essential tasks for becoming an adult in human society, and they seek in their book to show how this process works out in a society where both family structure and socialization practices are very different from those of middle class Western society. Like Jacques Lacan,8 the Ortigues argue that what produces the Oedipus complex is not the father who competes with the child for the mother; rather, the real separator between the child and the mother is the growth of the child's ability to symbolize. This ability leads the child to realize his separateness from the mother, and the father both fills that gap which the child perceives and is seen as responsible for upholding the symbol system that creates it (cf. E. Ortigues, 1973: 570-71).

The principal difference between the Oedipal experience in Africa and that in the West, according to the Ortigues, is that in Africa there is in fact no Oedipal conflict with the father. For the father is assimilated, in the thought of these Senegalese patients, with the ancestors, and is therefore really beyond competition. Nevertheless the experience of rivalry is very strong, and it is displaced from the father/ancestor onto the brothers, both actual and classificatory (Ortigues and Ortigues, 1966: 126).9

Oedipal themes seem to abound in West African folklore. Indeed, mother-son incest is, in Dogon mythology, the first "sin," the beginning of human evolution from immortal spirits to their present state (cf. Griaule, 1948; Griaule and Dieterlen, 1965). Marguerite Dupire and Dina Gertler have done detailed analysis of eleven West African variants of a fairy tale with Odeipal themes (Dupire and Gertler, 1977). They, too, work on the assumption that the Oedipus complex is universal and that the Freudian view of man as needing to express his repressed wishes symbolically is correct. In their article they treat the stories very much as an analyst would treat the dream of a patient; in this case, the patient is the society from which the particular version of the story comes, and the dreamer's free associations are the culture's beliefs, myths, and rituals. Thus the analyst's own interpretations are checked against the society's "free associations," namely its other cultural features. Dupire and Gertler interpret the story as a symbolic expression of Oedipal themes, but in a less distorted form than dreams take. In addition, they argue that the very telling of the story is, for the society, similar to having a dream for a person, in that it helps to resolve tensions and maintain psychic equilibrium (1977: 30).10
What all these psychoanalytic interpretations have in common is acceptance of a basic Freudian framework while maintaining considerable openness to ethnographic data. In other words, they are not seeking to test the validity of psychoanalytic ideas so much as to employ psychoanalytic concepts in order to make sense of the people they are trying to understand. Native concepts and ideas are used in order to discover how best to apply the Western ones to the situation at hand. If African healing is successful, for instance, it is because it can be shown to be a transformation of psychoanalytic principles itself—the same basic process, but in a different idiom. The dialogue carried out at the Fann clinic among the Western-trained staff, the traditional healers working there, and the patients was built on a certain confidence in this assumption. On the one hand, awareness of African world views was necessary in order for therapists to understand the reality within which the delusions of their patients were occurring; on the other, the whole clinic was organized in some respects like a Wolof village so as to make the patients feel more at home and to give them the chance to help others and be helped by them in group sessions of a kind with which they are familiar.

What is that reality within which delusions were occurring? The main point of interest for this essay is that in the thinking of so many African peoples almost all misfortune is caused by people with whom you have some relation—including spirits of dead ancestors. This makes it very hard for Western psychiatrists to draw the line, in African cultures, between normal and abnormal, since in those cultures everyone expects at times to be "attacked" by someone they know; such attacks are not, to them, symptoms of illness, but rather are understood as causing it. For example, to believe that someone is eating your soul or casting a spell on you is rational because everyone accepts it as possible; what makes you sick is the fact that it is happening. Thus we see that the common African understanding of the person, which perceives the self as connected to forces and entities outside it, carries considerable risks and dangers of its own.

In apparent disregard of such considerations, two other French psychiatrists, working among the Senufo in Ivory Coast, are not only convinced that Western concepts and interpretations are valid for understanding mental illness in Africa, but also have come seriously to doubt the usefulness of ethnographic data for this work (Lebigot and Mongeau, 1982a, 1982b). They found that such data were helpful at the beginning of their stay in order to gain a general orientation to the culture, but that from then on ethnographic information about the people had the effect of distancing the psychiatrists from their patients. As Lebigot and Mongeau put it, ethnographies "make us lose our capacity for astonishment and our proper reliance on our ignorances" (1982b: 57). In fact in their view, it was solely their psychiatric training that enabled them to comprehend and deal with the realities they had to face.

Many psychoanalysts have posited a "group ego" in order to explain phenomena of personality and mental illness in Africa. As the Finnish analyst Anja Forssen (1979: 148) describes it for the Zaramo of Tanzania, for example, this implies a contrast between typical Western and African personality structures.

Many of the "basic states" or functions observable in our own society, which can be interpreted as interaction between various personality structures of the individual, appear among the Zaramo to occur between the
individual and the community.... The ultimate goal of development is not an individual with highly structured and differentiated ego and superego functions. For example projection, introjection and undoing seem to be constantly applied defense mechanisms, whose reinforcement is served by traditional taboos and collective rituals. By this means, the collective ego and superego come to the support of the ego and superego structures of the individual.16

Using a cross-cultural approach from a psychoanalytic perspective, H.B.M. Murphy independently corroborates some of these findings in a novel way (Murphy, 1978, 1979). In these articles Murphy argues that the advent of guilt feelings as a component of mental illness in Africa is relatively recent, while such feelings were common in, say, seventeenth century England. The reason for this is that in England, then, and in Africa now, the "group superego" is breaking down. This results in a rise in guilt feelings because people can no longer project onto others so easily the responsibility for bad events; but it also can lead to an outburst of witchcraft accusations, in which case the reason is that the group superego is defending itself through the actions of those who participate in it. The thinking here is remarkably similar to the work of Robert I. Levy (1974) on guilt in relation to social system and social change in Tahiti, but Murphy seems unaware of those studies.17

We should now ask ourselves how these images of African personality compare with those which have been suggested by scholars using other psychological approaches in their research. Here we will find, however, that much of the research done is not as relevant to the topic of the person and the life cycle as is the case with psychoanalytical research. A major topic in post World War II research, for example, was the assessment of African intelligence, but much of this work seems dated now, since the need for it arose mainly in colonial situations (cf. Biesheuvel, 1952a, 1952b, 1952c; Irvine, 1963; Ombredane, 1957, 1969; Verhaegen and Laroche, 1958). Studies of mother-infant interaction and of infancy generally focus on very specific features of the relation or of behavior, such as "attachment" (cf. Ainsworth, 1967)18 or sitting and smiling (Kilbride and Kilbride, 1975). 19 Indeed, the value of a study like Ainsworth's today is likely to be more in the ethnography than in the psychology: that is, although the author was interested in understanding the formation of the mother-child bond, the study contains sufficient interview material with mothers to allow us glimpses of how the women perceived their babies and what effects they (the mothers) thought they were having on them through the care they gave them.20

One might think that studies in a Piagetian, cognitive, or other developmental school would have much to offer concerning at least the life-cycle. But Piagetian studies--and there have been a good number--deal primarily with quite specific mental functions rather than with the whole life span or with the whole person (cf. Dawson, 1969; Evans and Segall, 1969; Greenfield, 1966; Greenfield, Reich and Olver, 1966; Jahoda, 1958a, 1958b; Munroe and Munroe, 1977; Dasen, Inhelder, Lavallée and Retschitzki, 1978; Price-Williams, 1969; Retschitzki, 1980). Judith L. Evans' review of the psychological literature on African children to about 1969 (Evans, 1970) covers a number of these works and gives a good sense of the main non-psychoanalytical approaches that have been tried in Africa until recently.21 Studies
that attempt to test the ideas of Kohlberg or Witkin could be expected to be of somewhat greater interest because their hypotheses have to do with a person's general orientation to the world. In the case of Kohlberg's ideas, however, the studies have tended to be very critical of any attempt to apply them in non-Western settings; in fact, a number of scholars have done psychological studies in Africa which seriously call his ideas into question (e.g., Edwards, 1975; Shweder and LeVine, 1975; for Witkin, see Wober, 1969).

One of the most fascinating and imaginative psychological studies was done almost thirty years ago in South Africa by K. Danziger (Danziger, 1958). It was designed to get at the variation between blacks, whites and Indians in their perceptions of themselves and of how their future lives would unfold, but Danziger also found out something of how members of these racial groups conceived of the differences between each other. For this reason the study has bearing on how the sociological context in which we study members of another culture affects our understanding of the people. White and non-white students (who were taking segregated classes at the time) at the University of Natal were asked to write their autobiographies viewed from a perspective of fifty years in the future. They were also given a brief questionnaire on their values and life-goals. From these instruments some clear differences emerged between the two groups; the most striking one was that the white students tended to see their goals in purely private, personal terms, while for the Africans and Indians (especially the former) the goals tended to be social rather than private.

This is already interesting in itself. In addition, the students were then told what the main differences were in the responses of the two groups and were asked to give an explanation of them. The explanations given by Africans and Indians had mainly to do with the political, economic, and social discrimination against them, while those explanations given by the whites focused more on the inferiority of the non-whites and on their more primitive and tribal outlook.

Thus while the non-whites seemed acutely aware of the inherent conflict in South African society, the whites did not see such conflict but instead saw the position of the Blacks and Indians as the result of group inferiority or of the natural adhesion of each group to its own traditions. Notice that this attitude on the part of the white students is not far apart from that of a great many researchers in the colonial period who were studying the person, the personality, and the mind of Africans. Most of the people we have discussed thus far gave little or no thought to how the larger system of power-relations that included the people they were studying might affect the people's behavior in their presence as well as their own understanding of that behavior.

It was mainly in profoundly troubled situations that such awareness was forced upon the researcher. A good example of this phenomenon is the vivid and moving account by a Russian-born, South African psychoanalyst of his attempt to psychoanalyze a black diviner-healer (Sachs, 1969). Wulf Sachs began to analyze this young man originally out of curiosity, and after having worked with him for a number of years he published a version of his study called *Black Hamlet*, since he perceived the man as vacillating all the time, much like the Shakespeare character, and for similar Oedipal reasons. The relation between Sachs and his subject continued, however, and the psychoanalyst gradually became more and more aware of
the acutely oppressive conditions under which blacks lived in South Africa. He eventually began to take an active part in helping his "patient" work against that oppression. This experience completely changed his view of the man and of why he seemed such an indecisive person, and so he wrote a revised and expanded version of the book with the new title *Black Anger*.

Research by scholars working in the field of "culture and personality," while of considerable importance in African studies generally, has not, until recently, been as germane as one might think to the topic of person and life cycle in Africa. This is primarily because the goal of such research has been to discover cause-and-effect relations between two (sometimes more) aspects of the culture. Among the many correlations that have been sought we find: the possible relations between socialization practices and some aspect of adult personality, between such practices and some feature of the culture, such as initiation ceremonies or religious beliefs, or between aspects of the group's economic or ecological situation and cultural factors like those just mentioned. Some of the most important studies of this type are Barry et al. (1959), Edgerton (1971), Erchak (1976, 1980), Goldschmidt (1975), Kilbride and Kilbride (1983), LeVine (1966, 1973), LeVine and LeVine (1966), and Munroe and Munroe (1971, 1977, 1980). While many of these studies have generated interesting hypotheses and data, the inherent narrowness of their focus is a serious drawback. The Munroes' recent work (1977, 1980) manifests both the strengths and weaknesses of the approach. In their 1977 study the Munroes go about as far as is possible in fieldwork towards isolating and operationalizing variables. They report a complex ecological investigation to test the validity of the following causal chain: having a large plot of land means more work for the woman; more work for the woman means less patience with the children; less patience with the children means stricter demands on their compliance; stricter demands on their compliance means less rapid cognitive growth. The data of the study can be shown to support this hypothesis, but it seems to me that the authors are in a double-bind: the variables must be isolated so as to create the hypothesized causal chain, yet by the end of the chain the effect of the chosen beginning can no longer really be assessed; at each link the variables that have been studiously ignored are nonetheless operating, and this makes very doubtful the significance of the study, despite its ingenious methodology.22

**THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY**

British social anthropology has tended to be non-psychological, even anti-psychological, yet in reality many ethnographic studies and theoretical analyses in that tradition are centrally concerned with aspects of the person and the life cycle. Social anthropological studies of African peoples generally emphasize one of two aspects of the person: either his or her powers and obligations, which are ways of categorizing the nature and degree of the individual's connectedness to other people, or the social roles that the person fulfills. We find that these are not only an aspect of his personality, but also are in certain instances represented in the world view as souls or other components of the person, though never the only components.23
This survey does not attempt to include all the important work done in this tradition but rather simply gives a few illustrations of what we can gain by rereading this research with the above ideas in mind. Good examples of studies that emphasize the person's powers and obligations are Evans-Pritchard's *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande* (1937), Monica Wilson's *Good Company* (1963 [1951]), and Paul Bohannan's *Justice and Judgement among the Tiv* (1957). Among all these peoples, as is the case throughout much of Africa, witchcraft is a substance in the human body--pythons in the belly in the case of the Nyakusa, and *tsav*, a growth on the heart, in the case of the Tiv. These substances in the body are the locus of a power that can leave the body to "eat" the "life" or other spiritual power of another person, and ultimately thus bring about the person's death. In addition, this power is not necessarily evil, but is so only when it is used anti-socially. Otherwise it is part of the very protective force that sustains and maintains order in the community. By looking at how witchcraft and anti-witchcraft operate in these communities we can get a very revealing picture of how the people conceive of persons in their relations with significant categories of others (e.g., different kinship, affinal, or neighborhood ties), in their relation to what we would call nature, and all of this at different stages of the human life-cycle.

Anthropologists studying the legal systems of different societies have been much concerned with the allocation of responsibility (cf. Gluckman, 1972). Study of this issue clearly can teach us much about people's understanding of what a person is. We might think that the notion of collective responsibility would imply a sort of merging of the individual self with that of the group, but as Sally Falk Moore shows in a very perceptive essay (Moore, 1972), collective responsibility does not in the least mean there is no individual responsibility. There is always a group within which the person is responsible as an individual for what he does, and this is proven by the fact that such a group can sanction him. Moore writes (1972: 95):

Retaliatory vengeance killing between groups is not at all equivalent to criminal penalty. What is equivalent to criminal penalty is the kind of individual assessment of character inside the corporate groups which can lead ultimately to expulsion or execution. This exists as much on an individual basis in pre-industrial society as in any complex one.

A good example of this process in action can be found in Jomo Kenyatta's account (1962: 288-94) of how a witch is dealt with among the Kikuyu, a people who have "self-help" and "collective responsibility." The witch is clearly a person who does not consider himself bound by his moral and kinship ties to the community, and so preparatory to killing a witch the person's relatives renounce and symbolically withdraw their participation in his being. He is then socially dead before his physical execution occurs, and it is for this reason that upon physical death he does not--and never can--become an ancestor (Kenyatta, 1962: 292-93).

Jack Goody's *Death, Property and the Ancestors* (1962) illustrates well how a fine-grained analysis of social roles--in this case the redistribution of a deceased person's social roles among the living--can teach us much about both person and life-cycle in that society even though such was not the author's principal intention. An interesting and possibly useful concept that emerges from this study is that of the "Prince Hal complex" (Goody, 1962: 282). Goody uses this felicitous phrase to
designate the inherent conflict in the situation where the young man’s accession to a new role in the society necessitates the death—or at least the demise—of the person currently holding that role. He points out how we find in Africa many variations on the process (1962: 277-79). It seems that in pastoral societies the transmission of control over resources normally begins well before the death of the father, while in many agricultural societies, including the LoDagaa and the Tallensi (cf. Fortes, 1949, chapter 8, “Tensions in the Parent-Child Relationship”), this transfer does not occur until the father’s death.24 For Goody, then, the Freudian Oedipus complex is a variant of the Prince Hal complex, a variant concerned not with power and ownership, but with sexual rights.

SYMBOLIC AND STRUCTURAL STUDIES OF RITUAL

The study of ritual and other clearly expressive forms of behavior has come to assume a larger and larger part of anthropological research in Africa in the last few decades. Whereas in the earlier days of colonialism rituals were studied simply insofar as they were an important part of the “moeurs et coutumes” of a people, the more recent studies have approached these aspects of culture as if they were a mode of communication. Rituals, then, are not recorded to be a collection of artifacts that can be exhibited in a museum, but are viewed as a way a group of people have of sending a message. Perhaps the single question an analysis of a ritual is most often trying to answer is simply, "what is the message?" or, "what is being said?" The answer that we find time and time again has to do with who the participants are—who they are as members of their group, and who the people as a group, tribe, nation, etc., as a whole are. That is why such studies, regardless of their analytical goals, so often provide stimulating insights concerning the person and the life cycle.

A brief comparison of two pioneering scholars in this field, Audrey I. Richards and Victor Turner, will illustrate the point. The former's study of the initiation ceremony for Bemba girls, carried out in 1931, was an early effort to present a ritual in sufficient depth to bring out the many levels of meaning and feeling in it (Richards, 1956). Though Richards saw the main task of anthropological interpretation as being to produce a functional explanation for the rites, the richness of her description captures what it was like to be there, and makes it possible for readers to gain insight into Bemba ideas of what it means to be a woman, what means to grow up, and what the natures of men and women are. Victor Turner, on the other hand, was one of the first Africanists to use the study of ritual precisely to investigate these kinds of questions. Prior to this work anthropologists had tended to focus, as we have just seen, on how rituals functioned to strengthen social solidarity and group cohesion. In his The Forest of Symbols (1967) and subsequent work, Turner showed how rituals expressed people's sense of the meaning of womanhood, of childhood, of adulthood, etc., and of the transitions between these states of human being.

Children’s Rituals

Though anthropologists writing a comprehensive ethnography of a people will usually include descriptions of children’s games, if they have noticed any, in the last
decade or so there has been a more serious attempt to understand the meanings and functions of such play. In some instances it is clear that we are dealing not with sheer play, but with true rituals. Simon Ottenberg, in his study of Afikpo children's masquerading (1982b), attempts to understand how these activities affect the child's social and psychological maturation. His analysis shows that these children's groups play an essential part in educating people for adult life and responsibilities well before initiation occurs; this implies that the initiation ceremonies themselves can therefore not be understood as primarily educative.

A number of other anthropologists have been more interested in what these children's rituals mean to adults. Guy Le Moal, in a recent article (1981) describes how from the age of five on (four years old in some cases) boys and girls together form play groups that imitate, both in structure and in activities, the models of initiated age classes. These play groups are totally free of adult supervision, and proceed to organize themselves internally by lineage specialties (e.g., "earth chief", "priest", "blacksmith") and to carry out rituals of masking, sacrifice, and trance for which the whole village is audience. Le Moal thinks adults accord so much importance to these performances because of their cyclical sense of time: in a sense these children are the parents' own ancestors.

Though Le Moal does not develop the point, evidence from research we have already referred to (e.g., Dieterlen, 1941) clearly supports it. Other studies of such play present complementary perspectives. One of these is Nancy Leis' article, "The Not-So-Supernatural Power of Ijaw Children" (1982). This article focuses on adult ideas about what children are, and it has the additional attractive feature of discussing very neatly an instance of anthropological "reading into" the data an interpretation which the Ijaw themselves could not accept. Leis had assumed that because Ijaw attributed special power to children, that power was ipso facto supernatural, whereas the people themselves saw it as quite everyday. "Because children could do things their parents could not," she writes, "I viewed the power as, so to speak, 'superadult.' But of course it was not super anything. Parents raise children, not the reverse, no less among the Ijaw than among ourselves" (Leis, 1982: 153). The basis of this special power of children is that on their arrival in this world they are still in close rapport with the world of spirits that they have come from. When a child is playing "by himself" (we should say) and talking with his "imaginary" playmates, the Ijaw assume that he is not alone, and actually sees those playmates, visitors from that world. Though the child is a part of both worlds, and thereby has the power to return to that world of his own will or to encourage his playmates to come and be born in a woman, he still has the mind of a child; he "doesn't know any better," and in particular does not realize how much pain he can cause his parents by dying and thus returning to the spirit world (Leis, 1982: 158). This explains some of the ways in which parents treat their young children, and their responses to their fears, illnesses, and deaths. For example, a father will sometimes chop into pieces the corpse of an infant if he has had a number of children die in infancy, because he suspects the same infant of coming back again and again and wants to teach it to stay alive next time (Leis, 1982: 157).

If a baby should live after several of its siblings have died, his parents will nonetheless be apprehensive and treat him differently. They might not buy him any new clothes, they might let him cry alone in the corner of a
room from time to time and put ashes on him so that he appears unkempt. On one occasion, my companion during a walk through the village stopped to take a baby from its mother, put the child on the ground and pretended to beat it. She explained that this child was suspected of being one of those who kept dying and returning, and she was simply helping to demonstrate to the baby how much it had already hurt its parents. These actions may appear quite punitive, but they are not. The baby is not harmed or its physical needs neglected (Leis, 1982: 158).

Once children have grown to the age of four or five, they lose these special powers. They have no memory whatsoever of their earlier ties to the spirit world. Leis' discovery, through discussion with the Ijaw, of her misinterpretation of their beliefs, leads her to be very cautious about interpretation generally. "The data are tempting," she says.28 "Nonetheless, to succumb to the lure of hidden structures or of the subliminal in order to explain the Ijaw conception of the 'power' of children would be to ignore the realities of parenthood and childhood" (Leis, 1982: 168). We shall return below to a consideration of anthropological approaches that attempt specifically to discover and grasp such "realities."

One of the most interesting and perceptive articles on African children's play is a brief essay by Christiane Cartry published in the Festschrift for Germaine Dieterlen (Cartry, 1978). Cartry sensitively describes a number of games that Gourmantche children play, and in particular a game of having a baby that little girls play a great deal. In this game all the little girls take part, in ways that depend on how they are related by kinship to the girl playing the part of the mother-to-be. Some gather firewood, others grasses, some stay inside the hut where the baby will be born, others remain outside because they could be witches. Elder children teach the younger ones what to do, and the whole game or rite unfolds with great seriousness. The birth itself is gone through with a mimic of the usual pain and the chanting of praise songs by the other girls. Finally a doll is born, wrapped in cloths, and presented to the other girls waiting outside. Real mothers help their daughters with items and lore needed for the game, such as what kinds of plants help in delivery, and where they can be found. Real mothers also give shouts and songs of joy at the end of the ceremony. In fact, the entire village, especially the old women, have been guardedly watching and listening the whole time. "The attitude of the adults towards the children is above all that of pride and respect" (Cartry, 1978: 74). By the time the girls are grown up themselves, they will have played all the roles in this game, probably more than once.

Why do the adults watch so attentively? Because the parents want to know who the child is and how he or she should be treated. Children are thought of as strangers and they reveal their nature in their play. Like the Ijaw children (and many others in Africa) Gourmantche children choose their destiny before being born (cf. M. Cartry, 1973), and may for a variety of reasons choose to stay only briefly on earth. Another idea we shall discuss in more detail further on is that the child does not belong to the mother; in fact it does not belong to any individual but to the extended family, particularly to those who make up its agnatic kernel (Cartry, 1978: 78).

Greatly encouraged by the grownups, these rituals induce the children to indicate their place in the adult world that they will be growing into. But
are these rituals really play? Yes, if play, as Caillois tells us, includes a
putting into play of oneself—a feature which takes us far away from our
Western societies with their glut of interchangeable toys in which the child
cannot recognize himself and where play becomes a sort of accretion to his
body that connects to no network of meanings (Cartry, 1978: 78).

Rituals of Transition and Initiation

Studies of initiation rituals can be roughly classed either as explanatory or
interpretive; that is, they either try to explain why the ritual occurs in a particular
society, or they try to "read" the ritual for the images and ideas it conveys about
humanity. In African studies, the most frequent type of explanation has been the
psychoanalytic one. Simon Ottenberg has been a particularly sensitive and
interesting practitioner of this approach. In his most recent work he is trying to
situate male initiation among the Igbo in the context of the life cycle of boys from
birth to maturity. In infancy, Igbo children have a kind of exclusive access to their
mothers and effectively take the place of their fathers because the mothers (but not
the fathers) have a post-partum taboo on sexual intercourse. Thus, both mother and
father have reason to have ambivalent feelings towards the infant, and the latter is
likely to develop a strong Oedipus complex from living through that situation.
While psychoanalysis tries to explain initiation ceremonies as a societal means to
resolve the complex in the boys of the group, for Ottenberg "initiation and
circumcision are not the only steps in its attempted resolution" (Ottenberg, n.d.: 6).
The boys' secret societies that he describes in his previously mentioned essay
(1982b) play a crucial role in resolving the Oedipus complex because in fact it is
those groups rather than the fathers who are the main socializing agents for Igbo
boys from about the age of five until their initiations. Yet even after initiation,
Ottenberg argues, the fact that young men continue to participate in the secret
societies (an activity which separates them both from women and from their own
fathers) suggests that the Oedipal conflict is not fully resolved (n.d.: 14). The point
is not, however, to explain these practices—initiations, secret societies, etc.—mono-
causally, but to integrate in a single discussion of male growing-up several different
approaches which had heretofore been seen as competing (n.d.: 28).

Victor Turner's own studies originally assumed a Freudian view of man, but his
analyses of initiation in particular have developed van Gennep's concept of the
liminal period in rites of passage. Turner (1967: 105) seems to feel that "liminality"
is necessary to human life in two ways: it is necessary in social life because (in the
form of "communitas" or "anti-structure") it shakes us out of our ruts and routines,
and allows us to relate to one another as full human beings rather than as categories
of people; it is necessary in the growing up process because the often bizarre
juxtaposition of sacred symbols in these rites "may be seen to be aimed not so much
at terrorizing or bemusing neophytes into submission or out of their wits as at
making them vividly and rapidly aware of what may be called the 'factors' of their
culture." For Turner (1967: 106) the main value of this experience is two-fold: first
it "breaks, as it were, the cake of custom and enfranchises speculation," while at the
same time it brings home to the youths that "ways of acting and thinking alternative
to those laid down by the deities or ancestors are ultimately unworkable and may
have disastrous consequences." Thus, to take this argument one step further, when
the child assumes an adult role in society it means that he must perceive his culture
as something that grown-ups are responsible for maintaining rather than as the
immutable given it might have seemed to be until initiation. The liminal experience
forces the child to see his culture from behind the scenes, and thus begins to induce
him or her to accept this responsibility for maintaining culture in his turn.

There is a subtle difference between this kind of analysis and a structural one. In
strictly psychoanalytic interpretations and in Turner's studies of the Ndembu the
symbols affect, both consciously and unconsciously, those who experience them. In
a structural analysis, however, the goal is not so much to demonstrate that initiation
transforms a boy into a man, but to reveal what the native understanding of this
process is. Luc de Heusch's article on rites of passage among the Thonga of
Southern Africa exemplifies this well (De Heusch, 1980). De Heusch's essay is
based almost entirely on the rich ethnographic study by Henri Junod (Junod, 1962).
This analysis shows that in Thonga thought there exists a system of correspondeces
linking notions of cooking and heating on the one hand, and making a person on the
other. Through this study, then, we come to understand the logic underlying how the
Thonga treat new born infants, and why the treatment varies as it does for various
"abnormalities" (such as twins, albinism). When a child is born it is "hot," like a
newly fired pot, so it must be allowed to "cool down" gradually. To understand how
babies are treated, then, requires an understanding of the cosmological system, for
only this allows us to know what the Thonga classify as hot or cold. The question
still remains, though, as to what the nature of the reality is that we are calling a
"correspondence." In our languages we would say, "a baby is like a pot"; the Thonga
would say the baby is a pot. We will attempt further on to elucidate what such
usages might mean.

Perhaps the most meticulous and fully worked out analysis of this type that has
been done is that of Dominique Zahan in his study of initiation societies among the
Bambara (1960). Zahan's work combines most fruitfully two strong tendencies in
French anthropology: on one hand a complete and accurate description of the rites in
question, of the context in which they occur, and above all of the interpretations and
explications given by the most knowledgable natives; on the other hand a structural
analysis that brings out the philosophical and, in this case, theological meanings of
these native interpretations. The N'domo and the Koré are the two main Bambara
initiation societies (out of six altogether), and this book was the first of a set of
volumes that was eventually to describe all six of them. Every plant, every
animal, every object, every gesture used or referred to in these rites is given its
various contextual and cosmological meanings in Bambara thought. Zahan describes
his method as follows (1960: 15):

For example, to understand the symbolism of the hyena I had to draw
upon the knowledge which the Bambara have of this beast's physiology and
psychology, of its habits, and of how to hunt it. To this end I have also
had to examine the literature on the animal. It is only at the end of such an
inquiry that my informants' explications, simplistic at first, of the element
"hyena" in [the rites] became intelligible and that I was able to deepen these
in discussions with my collaborators.
From this detailed description of the rites and of Bambara commentaries on them emerges a Bambara conception of human nature in relation to the cosmos, and of the meaning of the human (male) life-cycle in particular. The drawback of this approach, particularly when looked at from the perspective of today, is that, as Hountondji has written (1983), the work is not so much ethnography as it is philosophy in the guise of ethnography, and it is impossible to be sure to what extent it is Zahan who is philosophizing and to what extent it is his informants who are. In addition, as is the case with most studies that I have labeled as of the "savoir africain" school, there is no attempt to relate these ideas to the economic, social or political life of the people who are supposed to hold them. Finally, Zahan appears to be assuming that there is an underlying, coherent "Bambara thought" from which all the ethnographic details spring. Since these details are indeed fascinating and thought-provoking it is regrettable that Zahan so often says nothing about what his sources are, or whether, and under what circumstances, alternative interpretations are given.

The most exciting study on African initiation to appear in recent years must surely be André Droogers' The Dangerous Journey (1980). Some readers might be put off at first because the author does not write from a clearly defined theoretical perspective but is quite eclectic. Yet in the end this becomes a strength of the book. The author tells the story of an initiation among the Wagenia of Kisangani, Zaire, with colorful detail, wit, and subtle insight, but he argues no overarching hypothesis. Why is this good rather than bad? Because we thus see the rites not without theory at all but in the light of several different theories; none of them are adequate to explain the rites by themselves, but all enrich the picture and our understanding of the initiation process among the Wagenia. One of the most important theoretical contributions, in fact, is the point that the rites resist analyses of various kinds. They resist causal analysis and they resist symbolic analysis. Do the rites function to maintain the society? Well, up to a point, yet since the age of the initiates was so variable the effects on the different boys were radically diverse. Do the rites express important meanings to the society? Well, yes, but there are numerous songs, symbols and acts which nobody knows the meaning of any longer, but which people may do simply for tradition and for fun. The book also has an excellent section of photographs, some of which are quite funny because they show the strange melange of costumes the initiates wear in their parades (e.g., military caps, dark glasses, a bishop's cape and mitre, etc.). The following passage is typical of Droogers' argumentation (1980: 161):

For the question still remains why the Wagenia, contrary to other tribes, used precisely circumcision as a symbol marking the transition which the boys were going through. These other tribes most likely are just as preoccupied with sex and procreation as the Wagenia. So it seems impossible to give an explanation for everything. In the final analysis we are at a loss to say why specific symbols were used and why certain others were not. Man defies prediction precisely because of his capacity to rearrange symbols.

Turner (1967: 267) had argued that initiation was necessary to turn boys into men because of the growing group of young men hanging around their mothers and/or not incorporated into the shared responsibility of the men's sphere. In the Wagenia case, however, Droogers found (1980: 351),
This group was so big, in fact, that tensions were averted in other ways. The boys automatically adapted themselves as they grew older. The older ones among them were already playing men's roles. The initiation was held anyway, but was rather more reflective than effective. To me the boys' outgrowing the category to which they had been assigned as children, rather than the above-mentioned threat, seemed to provide the impulse for initiation. This posed a threat to the symbolic order of the society, to the concept people had formed of their society, rather than to that society itself. Hence one should query whether, even where the interval is shorter [it had been 14 years instead of the customary 10 for the Wagenia in 1970], initiation is, in fact, explainable from its effect on society, and whether it is not rather a reflection of a change which will take place anyway.

Droogers concludes most interestingly with a discussion of the importance of play in which he draws on the thinking of Johann Huizinga. Initiations are occasions for fun because they are somewhat marginal to life and yet take play seriously. Their seriousness creates a rigid enough framework for people to get away with play, which paradoxically can mean not taking their normal role behaviors (or even the rites themselves) too seriously.35 It is partly because they offer this opportunity that Droogers (1980: 368) thinks many incomprehensible elements continue to be performed. "The belief that only understood customs survive is a fallacy. Provided they satisfied the propensity for playful activity, they might remain in vogue for a long time, even if no one could explain any longer why things were done that way."

Healing Rituals

In the last two decades there has been an enormous growth in the literature on African illness and mental illness. The majority of studies done in the colonial period, and probably until this day, have been undertaken by medical and psychiatric personnel trained in Western schools and hospitals, and the primary goal of these studies has been not to discover African concepts of disease--or the person for that matter--but to refine Western psychiatric and medical understandings in the light of African data and to adapt Western practices so as to apply them more effectively in curing African patients. Three important review essays in the medical anthropology of Africa have recently appeared: those of Ellen Corin and her collaborators on "Western" and "Traditional" psychiatric perspectives concerning Africa (Corin and Murphy, 1979; Corin and Bibeau, 1980), and Steven Feierman's massive research overview paper presented at the 1984 African Studies Association annual meeting on "The Social Origins of Health and Healing in Africa" (Feierman, 1985). While a number of the studies discussed in those essays will be referred to here also, the focus there is on the diseases, their diagnosis and therapy, and the "social origins" of both getting sick and getting well. This section, however, is concerned with research on traditional African healing practices that uncovers, either in passing or as a direct goal, people's notions of the person and the life cycle.

The most important pioneers in this approach are undoubtedly Andras Zempléni and Jacqueline Rabain, and their work continues to be outstanding in the field today. These researchers worked for a number of years at the Fann Clinic in Dakar and published several highly important essays in *Psychopathologie Africaine*. They were among the first anywhere, and in Africa particularly, to take as their goal not to
explain a people's mental illnesses in Western terms but "to show how a culture constructs and describes, explains and makes use of a pathological syndrome by means of its own stock of concepts" (Zempléni and Rabain, 1965: 331). This seminal study is remarkable both for its ethnographic richness, including case studies and photographs of children who exhibit the nit-ku-bon syndrome, and for its penetrating analysis of the meanings by which the Wolof and the Lébou of Senegal describe and interpret the characteristics common to these children. Zempléni and Rabain show in this study not only what conceptions Wolof and Lébou parents, grandparents and curers hold concerning the nature and development of children, but also what the expected behavioral norms for children are, and how deviations from those norms are interpreted. Thus the nit-ku-bon child (literally, "person who is bad") exhibits an excessive fragility, timidity, and lack of desire or even willingness to relate spontaneously to others. He or she is disturbingly self-contained, for, as we shall see further on, not only are relations between a child and those around him supposed to be easy and spontaneous, but also the person is not thought to be a closed, self-sufficient unit. Rather the person is always seen as made up of many parts which come to him or her from ancestors and other powers in the world, as we saw earlier in the discussion of Griaule's Dieu d'eau. This withdrawal of the person into himself is given multiple interpretations by the Wolof and Lébou. For example, it could mean that the person is an ancestral spirit, rather than merely existing in relation with spirits, which is the more normal human condition. But the people are never quite sure what the nit-ku-bon is, and this is revealed by the great diversity of charms which curers recite to protect these children and lead them back to "normalcy" (Zempléni and Rabain, 1965: 377).36

It can be seen from this brief discussion that studies of this kind have an advantage over those I have classified with the "savoir africain" approach. It is that the ethnographer's presence and his or her direct observations give us two views of the phenomena we are studying. In a work like Dieu d'eau or even Sociétés d'initiation bambara (Zahan, 1960) we are presented with native understandings of the world and of the person, but with little sense of what experiences, what features of the world, what qualities of persons, the people being reported on are living with and trying to make sense of in their everyday life. In the works of Zempléni and Rabain (and of others discussed below) this presentation of the researcher's perspective along with that of the subjects creates a dialectic--a dialogue, it would be fashionable to say today--that greatly enhances the reader's possibilities for additional interpretation or questioning.37

Among writers in English, Victor Turner has given us some of the richest available descriptions of rituals of healing, and these descriptions (e.g., Turner, 1967, chapters 1, 2, 9 and 10; 1968, 1975) contain much material which pertains to the notion of the person in Ndembu thought, though Turner himself was not focussing so much on that topic as on the ritual process itself, and on the social field in which ritual occurs. In these essays, particularly the later ones, Turner describes what he was doing and how he was obtaining the information he relates, and he refers frequently to descriptions and interpretations given him by Muchona, his most knowledgeable informant.

Christopher Davis-Roberts has gone even further in making use of her own experience and participation in events as a path to deeper understanding of the native
point of view. She has published one essay on the medical concepts of the Tabwa of Zaire in which she gives an excellent account of how the Tabwa healing procedures imply certain beliefs about the relations between words and things, body and soul, and suggests that for these people a person's illness is not an attack or a punishment, but an urgent message of some kind in which the body and its functions are the language in which the spirits communicate (Davis-Roberts, 1981). But Davis-Roberts was not satisfied with this accomplishment because she felt it missed completely the magical dimension of Tabwa experience; so she wrote another article (Davis-Roberts, 1982) in which she used the very form of the essay to capture the Tabwa sense of how magic works by including in the narrative elements that are analogs to the ingredients which Tabwa include in their amulets. This is a brilliant piece, for just as the amulets contain bits of this and that animal, or trace of event, which function like stories in highly concentrated form ("tiny fragments of thought," she calls them, 1982: 34) so does her essay contain bits of her own life and fieldnotes which function to reveal to us the very process of trying to discover how the Tabwa make sense of reality.38

Mathias Makang Ma Mbog, in a number of articles that appeared in *Psychopathologie Africaine*, confirms and sheds a different light on some of these points. For instance, in his essay on delirium and African society (1972a) he argues, like Davis-Roberts (1981), that illness is a way in which God and the ancestors communicate their wishes to man. According to Makang Ma Mbog, deliriums (i.e., hallucinatory experiences) have to be understood as being of a piece with religion and with divination39 and have therefore an ultimately beneficial value.40

Possession has been a very frequent manifestation of psychopathology in Africa. Most African societies deal with it not by curing or getting rid of it but by incorporating it in the social framework of cult and ritual. Cult members tend to be women more than men, and one problem social scientists have set themselves is to explain this fact. Among the most popular of such explanations is the widely accepted and discussed thesis of I.M. Lewis that being possessed is one of the few means available to the weak and downtrodden members of a society "to press their claims for attention and respect" (1971: 32). Thus a cult of possession can be seen, from a Western point of view, as an indicator that there is a fundamental injustice in the social system of the society, and at the same time as a safety-valve to dissipate the harmful consequences of that injustice. Edwin Ardener examined a cult of possession among the Bakweri of Cameroun with quite a different question in mind, namely is it possible that the women of a society could have significantly different views from the men's about fundamental aspects of reality. His conclusion was that they could and did indeed, for while the men see the possession cult as "curing" the women, the latter see it as initiating them into the cult for life, and thus into a relation with spirits that the men know nothing about (Ardener, 1972). These two approaches seem so compatible as to be variants of each other, in that the women studied in both essays, in the public realm at least, occupy positions inferior to those of men. For both Lewis and Ardener the women (or the oppressed) do not have an overt, direct means of expressing their perceptions and needs; while Lewis argues that the cult of possession allows people a public expression of these, in the case Ardener analyzes such expression does not involve the whole social group, but is deliberately concealed from men. The implication in either case, however, is that the cult activities give the women important satisfactions.41
But at what price? This is the question Roger Gomm raises in a provocative article about "bargaining from weakness" (Gomm, 1975). Contrary to Ardener, Gomm sees men and women as caught in the same mesh of meanings. He points out that the diagnosis of a woman as possessed is not something that women control but is subject to manipulation by everybody in the group. When a woman is possessed in Digo society, she may be able to get something she had been unable to obtain by other means, but the cost, Gomm's analysis shows, is a reinforcement of her subservience in the system; the symbolic meaning of possession, when it is involuntary, is helplessness. This analysis is confirmed by the fact that for the Digo, women who become members of possession cults, or who otherwise control spirits, cannot play the game of getting what they want on the ground that a spirit, speaking through them in an exorcism ceremony, orders it.

There can be no general theory of possession cults that will establish once and for all why they exist or what they have to say about the position of women in society. Rather, the value of these issues and these articles, for our purpose here, is to indicate that the creation of meaning in a society--including the meanings of womanhood, manhood, personhood, etc.--may usually or even always involve a power struggle. Just as being a good chess player requires being able to perceive each piece and each part of the board as both figure and part of the ground for other figures, so do humans in society attempt to achieve their goals by thinking of and using all their relations and all the elements of their cultures (and new ones they derive or invent) in just the same way. Of course, who the power struggle is between is just as shifty as everything else is.

A recent article by Ellen Corin (1980) reinforces this point. Corin suggests that in analyzing rituals and African personality we have perhaps focused too much on their collective meanings and their larger social effects, and have ignored the important individual dimension. Using examples from societies she has studied, she shows three ways in which African societies particularize, rather than collectivize or diffuse, the individual personality. One is through the person's relations with particular people, such as the paternal grandfather in a matrilineal society; one is through the diagnosis and understanding of illness inasmuch as it is caused by individual acts or omissions; the third is through participation in cults of possession.

In view of this, I think that the oft-described hierarchical and "collectivising" structure of traditional societies, whose impact on the personality is well-known, constitutes only one of the levels, the most visible one, of the functioning of the social structure. It is important to see that the society itself has fixed in place the mechanisms allowing the person to particularize his position and to defend himself against the homogenizing and "collectivising" pressure of the clanic image (Corin, 1980: 146).42

Corin does not deny the enormous weight and significance of the group in shaping and maintaining the individual person. But she makes a point that parallels S. F. Moore's remark cited earlier concerning the distinction between collective and individual responsibility. She writes, "The question of traditional representations of etiology seems, then, to include two aspects which it is important to distinguish:
that of the dynamics out of which the conflict originated, and that of the conflict's mode of action upon the person" (Corin, 1980: 151). This remark is very important. It implies, once again, that there is not one correct understanding of the person in Africa, or of the person anywhere for that matter, but that the fullest understanding we can attain is likely to involve working with several points of view at once.

Death Rituals

We have already seen how the analysis of death rituals by social anthropologists often provides rich insights into the notions of the person and life cycle held by members of a society. Here we will briefly examine the contributions of psychoanalytic, structuralist, and interpretive studies of such rituals. Probably because of Freud's famous reflections on the mourning process (Freud, 1957), the starting point for most psychoanalytic interpretations of funerals has been that process. For example, the essays by Makang Ma Mblog (1972b), Ahyi (1979), and Mahaniah (1977, 1979) all show how the funerals they are studying help the participants in various symbolic ways to work through their grief. The main drawback of all these analyses, however, is that they are plausible and no more. None of them actually shows that grief-stricken individuals are helped through the mourning process by means of the rites. As it happens, Walter Goldschmidt, who also takes a psychoanalytic approach, argues that Sebei funerals exacerbate rather than assuage the guilt felt by mourners (Goldschmidt, 1973). This occurs because it is at funerals that issues of inheritance must be settled and thus the close kin have to put forward the ways in which they benefit from the deceased's death. The ostensible chief concern of funerals is dealing with the pollution caused by the death—not the soul and not grief, as we might normally expect. Goldschmidt’s explanation of this is that pollution is the conscious, hence distorted, manifestation of the repressed recognition people have of the benefits the person's death gives them. While this is a plausible and interesting explanation and makes creative use of psychodynamic concepts, it, too, remains at the level of plausibility only. Goldschmidt did not describe the scene "thickly" enough to show what Sebei funerals are like, nor did he discuss the fundamental question of why it would happen that Sebei funerals exacerbate the potential inner conflict between grief and the desire for gain.

It seems implicit in all of these articles that there is a basic, universal meaning to death and that the ethnographer's task is to discover how people respond to that basic meaning and why they make the response they do. Only rarely, and more recently, have authors begun to examine death and the rituals surrounding it so as to understand its meaning for the people themselves. Robert LeVine's essay, "Gusii Funerals: Meanings of Life and Death in an African Community" (LeVine, 1982), is perhaps the best work of this category. It is surely a commonplace of Africanist research, ranging from Griaule up to the present, that the social and political importance of the deceased is reflected in the splendor and other features of the funeral. What LeVine does that is new is to bring out how people think about the funeral they expect to get and how they actually feel about the meanings of life and death that are symbolized in the variations that particular funerals exhibit. Gusii are preoccupied with the question of who will bury them and what their funerals will be like. This is not, as we might guess, because Gusii are obsessed with death. On the contrary, it is because they are concerned to live full, valuable lives. Since
community evaluation of a person's success in this is expressed through variations in the ritual, people put into their attitudes to the occasion all their feelings about where they are in life and whether they have managed to live up to Gusii ideals. For instance, if a woman dies without having children, this is a particularly horrible fate: everything has failed—the bride, the marriage, the bride's family. "Thus the dead woman's kin (in 1955-57) came to such a funeral in a state of rage, attempting to destroy her furniture (if it was too heavy to carry away) so that the co-wives would not get it, and sometimes assaulting the co-wives as well. Nothing could express more poignantly the sense of total calamity experienced at the failure of a woman to become a mother before death" (LeVine, 1982: 50).

If LeVine's article both brings to life for the reader what the emotional tone of Gusii funerals is and helps us understand the source of those emotions, Susan Drucker-Brown's study published at about the same time (Drucker-Brown, 1982) focuses on a type of emotion unusual at Western funerals but always expressed at them in many African societies, namely humor. Mamprusi grandchildren are supposed to mock and satirize the solemn events dominating mortuary rituals for their grandparents, and even obstruct their normal performance. Drucker-Brown's interpretation of this feature of the rites is very interesting. On the one hand, as we might expect, she sees it as a continuation of the joking-relationship which exists in that society between members of alternate generations. In fact, some of the joking that goes on during the grandparents' lifetime concerns the latter's infirmity, death, and the eventual "fun" that the grandchild will have at the funeral (Drucker-Brown, 1982: 714, 717). Second, she makes the intriguing suggestion that joking between alternate generations, both in this case and elsewhere, allows the expression of those emotions that are suppressed in the relations between parents and children: in this society the comportment of children towards parents is highly deferential and marked by rules of etiquette that parallel those of court behavior (Drucker-Brown, 1982: 719-21). Finally, upon the death of a parent a person's status often changes dramatically, which is not unusual the case when a grandparent dies (cf. Fortes' [1974] discussion of the relations between parents and the firstborn child). Drucker-Brown (1982: 726) emphasizes the new obligations towards the dead that the person incurs which would presumably inhibit free emotional expression:

This is not to assume that joking grandchildren do not feel sorrow and grief. They often do and may be allowed to refrain from grandchildren's joking until after the burial has taken place. However, just as the observer cannot know without close acquaintance what a particular mourner feels, one cannot know whether grandchild joking 'releases emotions' felt by particular grandchildren or children. The point is that the institutionalised expression of emotion, the requirement that certain emotions be enacted at funerals, makes a range of emotion manifest. It is appropriate that the grandchildren present tokens of rebellious and angry emotions to be consciously observed by the public, because they do not, like other members of the group of funeral-owners, immediately acquire long-term responsibility towards the dead and unlike the parental generation who have lost a parent, they continue to be children of living parents.
There is a theory lurking here, but unfortunately Drucker-Brown has not developed it. She is quite right to refrain from presuming to know what people are feeling, but phrases like "the requirement...makes...manifest" and "It is appropriate that..." only urge the explicablebility of the phenomena without actually explaining them. Works to be discussed in the next section (Olivier de Sardan, 1973; Smith, 1973) may help us construct the theory we need; for the present I will simply suggest that in the Mamprusi situation we are looking at a kind of division of "facework" labor (cf. Goffman, 1967a, 1967b) that is inseparable from the social labor of maintaining a hierarchical social structure.44

While in some cultures it is ceremonies of birth or of initiation that are used to express symbolically the people's key cosmological ideas and notions of society and person, in others funerals play this role. A striking example of such a society is described in Annie Lebeuf's article (1978) on burial among the Batéké of Congo. The essay describes in minute detail how the corpse is prepared for burial, the extraordinary wrappings of leaves, vines, and cloth that enclose it like a gigantic cocoon, and the meanings that native informants give for each step in the process. Lebeuf (1978: 339) suggests that these practices have three major goals: "to separate the deceased from the world of the living, to put back together again a dehumanized persona, and to situate it in the world of the dead for the benefit of those of both worlds." The intricate and massive wrappings of the body she interprets as symbolizing symbols, knowledge itself, since cloth here, as among the Dogon (cf. Griaule, 1948), symbolizes speech and culture (A. Lebeuf, 1978: 337, 340). Thus the dead become the locus of knowledge for the Batéké, while the living are that of action, such that each group is forever in need of the other (A. Lebeuf, 1978: 340). Now, fascinating as these descriptions and interpretations are, they suffer from the same limitation as do many other works of the "savoir africain" school, namely a lack of relation to their human contexts: we have no idea how people actually behave at a Batéké funeral, we have no idea of the meaning and importance of knowledge in various spheres of Batéké life, nor do we have any sense of the conditions in which the author learned what she did and of how the Batéké might respond to her interpretations of their ritual.

John Burton, in an article (1978) contemporaneous with Lebeuf's also describes how a person is transformed by mortuary practices from a human into an ancestor. Though the Atuot have far less spectacular rites, Burton's analysis is ultimately more useful because he shows how the two grades of post mortem existence--ghosts and ancestors--function in the minds of the living as they carry on everyday life and social relations. Death itself, of course, transforms a man from a person into a ghost, a being who retains the "heart," the social personality, of the deceased along with his expectable desire for vengeance for his death or other wrongs done to him. It is another death, that of a cow killed on the grave, that brings about the next transformation. The blood of the cow seeks out the man's heart and makes it possible for the ghost to become part of the community of ancestors (Burton, 1978: 605). Interestingly enough, however, it is the living cattle that are the tokens by which the ancestors "survive," in a sense, in the minds of the living. When Burton told one of his companions that one reason he was writing was so that others after him would read his work when he was gone, the Atuot man replied, "This is the same with our ropes. Every cow has its own rope and each rope is our writing. The writing of our ancestors are these cows in the camp" (Burton, 1978: 614).
In yet another article published that year, Michael Jackson (1978a) managed elegantly to combine and analyze several of the themes we have been discussing. Jackson, too, focuses at first on the expression of emotions but emphasizes yet another aspect of such expression. He points out that at African funerals it is frequently others than the most bereaved who display the emotions appropriate to bereavement. In addition, we find other "gaps" manifested at funerals: that between the times of physical death and social death of the person, and that between the behavior of "joking relatives" and the other relatives of the deceased. Jackson (1978a: 287) argues that these features of funerals "assist the polarisation and separation of two aspects of the identity of the deceased: his idiosyncratic and his social personality." This idea neatly combines the point Burton was making about the Atuot ancestors and portions of Drucker-Brown's discussion of Mamprusi joking at death. Why should such polarization and separation be necessary? Jackson continues (1978a: 287):

The mimetic performances are simultaneously an attempt to revivify or retain memories of the person and to expunge those memories. The inept and ridiculous aspects of the women's imitations of the person may serve to turn people's attention to the more abstract and socially-defined attributes of the ancestral persona. It is only when memories of the dead person's mannerisms and deficiencies are denied through repression or masking that the dead can exemplify, as an abstract category, the values and customs of the society.

At the end of his study Jackson suggests a most thought-provoking set of parallels between the emotional, economic, and intellectual processes that all occur simultaneously at African funerals (1978a: 294-95):

With reference to mortuary rites, there is a remarkable similarity between the psychological process of withdrawal or detachment prior to a new attachment being made, the socio-economic process of withholding and then redistributing property and offices, and the intellectual process of suppressing or denying the idiosyncratic personality of the deceased in preparation for a new "ancestral" role.

**SYMBOLIC ANALYSES OF THE PERSON IN RELATION TO SOCIAL STRUCTURE, HISTORY AND MODE OF LIVELIHOOD**

A major theme that E.E. Evans-Pritchard returned to several times in his work is the relation between thought and social structure. While he refused to go so far as to say the latter determines the former, he nonetheless demonstrated a close parallelism between the two. A classic and brilliant example of this is his discussion (1940: 94-108) of how in Nuer society the way people understand their historical and legendary past is profoundly shaped by the particular place they occupy in the segmentary lineage structure. In a very similar way he argued in *Nuer Religion* (1956: 117-22) that the apparently bewildering (to an outsider) plethora of spiritual
beings active in the Nuer world was organized in a hierarchical structure quite congruent with the various levels of social organization from which appeals to God and other spirits could be made. While the idea of person is not the ostensible subject of the book, it runs as a theme throughout it because ideas of what a person is come up again and again in the context of discussions of spirit, morality, ghosts, and so on. In fact, the book makes a very significant contribution to the anthropological study of the symbolic process, and Evans-Pritchard comes upon some of his most important ideas through elucidating Nuer concepts of the person.45

For example, from his discussion of the meaning and power of curses (Evans-Pritchard, 1956: 165-73) we can derive the understanding that the very essence of being a person, for the Nuer, is to be a member of a lineage and to be in proper relationship with those among whom curses are effective. The curses can be seen sociologically as a means of social control, but social control itself is not just maintaining law; it is a part of the process of being human and maintaining others in their humanity (see also Riesman, 1977, chapter 7). In addition, this notion of the person as existing primarily in virtue of his relation to others explains two further ethnographic points for the Nuer, first that "it is only when [a child] begins to take part in activities of the social life that he is said to be a person (ran), and Nuer sometimes indicate that the sign of having become a person is the removal of the second lower incisor teeth, which is done when the child is about seven or eight years of age" (Evans-Pritchard, 1956: 156). Second, having a soul is essential for being a person, while animals are normally not thought of as having souls or as being persons (Evans-Pritchard, 1956: 157).46

Godfrey Lienhardt's study of Dinka religion, Divinity and Experience (1961), indicates in its very title the intention to connect the inside and the outside. The whole book is a sustained and penetrating investigation of the relation between thought and experience among the Dinka. As is the case with Nuer Religion, Divinity and Experience shows how Dinka ideas about spiritual beings are closely tied to Dinka social structure and life experience. In fact, those beings are the experience itself, and to call them divinities is simply to acknowledge their power and importance in one's life. For instance, Lienhardt's (1961:110) Dinka friends told him that for his clan divinities he "should invoke Typewriter, Paper, and Lorry, for were these not the things which always helped my people and which were passed on to Europeans by their ancestors? So, clan-divinities are explicitly regarded by the Dinka as representing, for their clansmen, qualities and strength which a man derives from his agnic line of descent."

But what conception of thought itself do the Dinka have? How do they imagine the relation between thought and world, thought and event? Lienhardt's interest in these questions brings us genuinely new insight into how an African people understands the relation between self and the world outside. His findings are strikingly parallel to those of Benjamin Lee Whorf (whose work he was apparently unaware of) concerning the Hopi Indians of Arizona (cf., Whorf, 1956: 57-64, 134-59). Like the latter people, the Dinka do not seem to perceive their thoughts to be representations or imaginings of external realities, but rather to be aspects of those things themselves. Thus "In the example of the man who called his child 'Khartoum' it is Khartoum which is regarded as an agent, the subject which acts, and not as with
us the remembering mind which recalls the place. The man is the object acted upon" (Lienhardt, 1961: 150). Similarly, a ghost, for the Dinka, is inseparable from a person's experience of it; it has no existence of its own outside that experience. "Ghosts are to be understood as reflections of a kind of experience, not as a class of "beings"" (Lienhardt, 1961: 153). Thus it becomes possible to say that for the Dinka there is no such clear division as we believe there to be between the self and what is outside it.47

In a number of instances research coming out of southern Africa has been a decade or so "ahead" (given my predilections) of that being done in other regions. The studies on the Zulu by Berglund (1976) and Ngubane (1977), for instance, share with the "savoir africain" tradition a commitment to honoring the native understanding of the world and giving it a truth value equal to that of our own ideas about the world. But these two works succeed much better than most of the latter studies because they pay so much more attention to context--both that in which the activity and thought they describe occur and that in which their research was carried out. In addition, fluency in the language of the people being studied largely accounts for the greater clarity and immedicacy of these works. It is fair to say that none of the European researchers in the "savoir africain" traditions was fluent in the language while carrying out his or her fieldwork. Though Berglund and Ngubane had differing goals, they both describe in great detail Zulu notions of personhood, focusing particularly on how people understand and experience the multiple transactions between persons and their surroundings. For instance, Ngubane's analysis (1977: 24-26) of the "tracks" that all living things leave in their environment sheds much light on Zulu ideas about how beings affect one another.

Many times in this paper we have touched on the common African idea that persons exist in relation to others; they not merely need them for survival, but also derive a sense of identity from those to whom they are related. As the Dogon materials hint, however, these "others" through whom a person finds his sense of identity are not an undifferentiated mass, nor are they equivalent to G.H. Mead's (1964: 216-28) "generalized other." In some societies, it is true, the lineage to which one belongs may present its own persona that members should live up to, as seems clearly the case with the Nuer and Dinka (see also next section). Even there, however, one's lineage membership is by no means the only important social relation through which individuals become definite persons. Let us look briefly at some of the varied relations which contribute to the definition of a person in African societies.

We have already seen how initiation rites mark, and sometimes help effectuate, a change in status and/or identity for the young person. This is most often demonstrated and firmed up by the creation of new relations for the person, such as through marriage, as in the Chisungu ceremony (Richards, 1956), or through joining an age-grade, as in many East African societies. In many cases, however, the most significant way of gaining new relations is to have children oneself. Meyer Fortes (1974, 1978a 1978b) has discussed the significance of this point in a number of articles and has shown that the rites and taboos concerning the relation of parents and first-born children are usually best understood as signaling and coping with the transition to parenthood on the part of the adults. We have seen from LeVine's (1982) discussion of the meaning of Gusii funerals how absolutely crucial children
can be for living a life that feels completed and worthwhile; while men, no matter what their infirmity, can in many societies find a way to become at least the sociological fathers of children, this is rarely possible for women. 48 Chantal Collard's recent article (1980) on birth order and siblingship sheds interesting light both on how the Guidars of Cameroun perceive the effects of children on their parents, and on the effect of birth order itself on character. Among the Guidars it makes a difference whether the first-born child of a couple is a girl or a boy, because forever after that the parents perform many other rituals in their lives using either the male number (3) or the female one (4) as a consequence. Collard comments (1980: 47):

Therefore not everything goes downwards along the lines of filiation; certain effects come back upwards and affect not only the parents as individuals, but even the in-law relations they have. Thus, among the Guidars, one is more or less man, more or less woman, and on the symbolic level a couple's relationship is more complicated than a simple dyad.

With regard to birth order itself, the Guidars, like many other peoples, have pre-established names for the child occupying each position, but they go farther than many in having a large stock of lore about the character each child is supposed to have. These personality features are represented in folklore by particular animals which are associated with each name and by stories about those animals and about bearers of those names. Interestingly enough, from an outsider's point of view, these preexisting ideas about character appear to affect the way parents think about and treat each child, particularly in the case of the first born, but the Guidars would not in the least accept the notion that it is parental behavior that is shaping their children's character. Collard (1980: 62) concludes, "Like people in our own society who believe in signs of the zodiac, signs which are also often animal symbols, Guidar parents do not think they can modify the character of their child; that does not depend upon them." 49

There is a rapidly growing body of studies on gender in Africa, and many of these have important implications for understanding personhood and the life cycle. Prior to beginning her own fieldwork among the Nuer, Sharon Hutchinson, using already published materials, wrote a very sensitive study of the male-female relationship among them. In Nuer social life, men and women observe not only a strict division of labor in connection with cattle and religion but also a differentiated code of behavior in which the man is always supposed to show greater self-mastery than woman. Hutchinson also shows lucidly how men's and women's interests and chagrins vary over the course of the life cycle in their relations with one another, with cattle, with relatives, and with children. Particularly striking is her observation (1980: 376) that while a woman's procreative power and her bonds with her children are conceived of as part of her natural essence and specific to her, "the reproductive power of men, in contrast, is neither innate nor exclusive, but rather communal: the procreative power of a man is merged with that of his agnatic kinsmen through the ancestral herd. Corporate solidarity and continuity are founded upon this principle of 'communal fertility' through cattle." 50

Relations between the sexes are among the first aspects of social life to be affected by historical changes. Akiga's account is tragi-comic of how when a new fad
in male facial scarification was introduced by young men who had travelled outside Tivland, all the women went for it and rejected the men who had the lumpy faces characteristic of the older process. At that point in Tiv history the lumpy-faced men were generally the older ones and their scars symbolized to the women aspects of the traditional order from which they were trying to free themselves (East, 1965: 44-47). Very often increased tension between the sexes manifests itself in new kinds of illness, particularly among women, and new explanations of misfortune. A number of recent articles discuss these points. For instance Harold Schneider (1982) writes of were-lions among the Turu of Tanzania that attack people and livestock. These creatures are always males in the form of a lion and are believed to be like remote-controlled zombies under the command of a powerful woman. This power is one manifestation among several of augmented power and independence for women in Turu society, yet men hate women for it, and the official lower status of women in the society remains in force.

Randall Packard’s (1980) analysis of change in the explanation of misfortune among the Bashu of Zaire is a truly exemplary piece. In a few pages he manages to outline both the changes in the world and those in the world view so as to show how they articulate with one another and with the past that they evolved from. The emergence of a new source of misfortune, female witches, appeared at first to be explainable as a male way of controlling upstart females, because accused witches had to undergo painful exorcism. Belief in these kinds of witches flourishes even more in recent times, however, while the “punishment” has lapsed due to pressure from the Church and state. Thus the idea that men were accusing women of being witches only because it was to their advantage to do so is an insufficient explanation. What is brilliant in Packard’s piece is that he asks why the female threat to society was expressed in the form of witchcraft rather than in some other way, such as sorcery. The answer he gives shows both how Bashu ideas about nature and about women would have made women sorcerers a self-contradictory concept and how the continued prevalence of these witches today both is and symbolizes, in terms of the traditional world view, an ever more chaotic situation.

It is often through cults of possession that the new powers that be in the world, namely all the forces created and unleashed by Western imposition on Africa, are represented and symbolically dealt with (cf., J. Rouch’s film [1957] "Les Maîtres Fous"). Susan Reynolds White’s (1981) essay on the interpretation of misfortune in Bunyole gives another example of this phenomenon, and sheds additional light on the anomalous quality of such rites and beliefs in relation to the dominant religious practices of the group. What is anomalous is that the possessing spirits are encountered strictly accidentally, not through anybody’s breach of custom or antagonistic relation, and that the cure normally consists simply of getting rid of the spirit by means of treatment that a professional healer administers to the patient, usually a women or a child. Thus neither the sickness nor the cure seem to follow the logic of traditional Nyole thought in which misfortune follows from some breach in proper human relations, and in which cure requires participation of the larger group concerned in those relations. Whyte’s interpretation of this situation is that being possessed by, and cured of, these various spirits is the sole context in which women are understood to act as individual agents rather than in their capacities as dependents of a man or of the lineage. For instance, while ancestral spirits will
attack a man by causing his wife or children to be ill, in the case of these possessing spirits "the person who suffers is considered the real object of attack. Thus the suffering victim is not represented in terms of relationship to and dependency upon another person. Women are represented as individual women, not as wives and daughters" (Whyte, 1981: 363). Whyte says that both this etiology for illness and the dominant one are equally known to men and women; this is not a case of two different understandings being held of the same phenomenon as with the Bakweri described by Ardener (1972). On the other hand, Whyte has not yet satisfactorily explicated how this etiology articulates with the others in the Bunyole world view, nor has she gone as far as she might in explaining why this alternative understanding of misfortune would be reasonable to people in the first place.51

In social anthropological studies of African peoples the term social structure usually refers to the relatively stable system of positions, for individuals and for groups of individuals, that characterizes a given society. Thus studying the person in relation to social structure is what we have been doing all along in this essay, for what we have been finding is that the person, in African societies, can be understood in large part as constituted by those relations to which his position in the system is connected. Yet there are other ways of conceiving social structure and of understanding the person in relation to it. One of these is Marxism, which exists in many guises but where a basic concern is always to understand as fully as possible what the "social relations of production" are. This means understanding the nature of the society's resources, who controls them and in what degree, and how that control impinges on people's decisions about what to be doing at any given moment. To my knowledge very few studies exist yet in which this way of thinking about social structure is combined with a focus on the person.

One of the earliest and most original attempts to move in this direction in African studies is J.-P. Olivier de Sardan's contribution to La notion de personne en Afrique noire (1973). This essay touches on a variety of topics concerning the person in Songhay society, but the most interesting idea for our purposes here is that there is a profound relation between the personality that an individual displays in going through life and the social class within the society to which he belongs. Songhay society can be roughly divided into two classes, masters and captives, and it is the meaning of being a master or a captive that is in fact expressed both in the stereotypes and in the actual bearing of a member of either group. Olivier de Sardan (1973: 430-31) points out that a "master" belongs to a family and has a history, all of which form a set of standards he must live up to or suffer shame, while a captive is deprived of shame itself because he has neither family nor ancestry, but lives only in a state of eternal dependence on his master. The stereotypically "noble," "dignified" behavior of the master, and the "shameless" behavior of the captive are thus understood as an expression of their different social statuses. I have tried to develop this notion considerably in my own recent work (Riesman, 1983).52

In another important article in the same collection, Pierre Smith (1973) begins from quite a fresh perspective on society to formulate a provocative conception of the relation between person and social structure. His interpretation of many West African practices, from circumcision and excision to the maintenance of "joking relationships" between different ethnic groups, is that their aim is the maintenance of an identity, whether ethnic, professional, sexual, or individual. Bambara and Dogon
people understand their rites of circumcision and excision, for example, as removing that part of oneself that contains one's soul of opposite sex. One is born both male and female, but at maturity one has to be one or the other. Smith comments (1973: 468-69).

They are telling us clearly, then, that to marry and to have children, to fulfill one's potential as a social being, the person must renounce a part of himself, and in particular the part of himself that represents the other with whom he wishes to enter in relation. The double, that sort of negative of oneself which one might all the same be tempted to develop, must be cleanly put aside to make room for the partner. Here complementarity entails a mutual renunciation.

Not only, then, does being a person require renouncing some part of what you might have been, but maintaining your relations with other people can be seen as a way of reminding yourself of who you are. This seems to be explicitly recognized by Africans, in Smith's view, in the functions of the griot (bard, praise-singer). The job of the latter, as they often say themselves, is to beg, and according to Smith it is their begging that in turn permits the nobles to express their noble character through generosity.53 But everyone, not just nobles, has certain relationships which symbolize in one way or another this notion of mutual renunciation. In the heat of a quarrel, for example, a blacksmith or a joking relative can quickly calm things down. Such people, "by their mere presence," as Smith (1973: 477) cleverly states it, "constrain you to 'get back into yourself' [rentrer en vous même ], to 'get ahold of yourself' [vous reprendre ]". Clearly this is a most significant essay, and it is regrettable that neither Smith nor anyone else, to my knowledge,54 has developed these ideas much further.

Although Robin Horton's work has not been directly concerned with the person and life cycle, his way of understanding African religion in relation to the socioeconomic context in which people are living offers us some guidance on how to understand the experience of self and concepts of the person in relation to that same context. Hence this section concludes with a brief discussion of those ideas and will try to show how they are relevant for our concerns.

In a number of important articles, Horton (1967, 1971, 1975) propounds what he calls the "Intellectualist Theory" of religion. The basic tenet of this theory is that traditional religious beliefs must be understood as being "theoretical systems intended for the explanation, prediction, and control of space-time events" (Horton, 1971: 94). To say this is not to deny any sociological functions religious systems might have, but the common practice of search for such functions usually diverts us from looking at the content of the beliefs themselves and from figuring out how African peoples use "the peculiar properties attributed to spiritual beings" (Horton, 1971: 94) as concepts for understanding their worlds. The idea that religious beliefs are used by people to understand their world makes it immediately apparent that for us to comprehend the beliefs we have to know what it is about the world that the people are trying to explain. Horton argues that generally in Africa people experience life on two planes, microcosm and macrocosm; the former is the world of kin and other face-to-face relations, while the latter is that of relations with strangers, people of other cultures, foreign institutions, the world as a whole. Thus religion itself is
"two-tiered," with ancestors and/or other spirits being used to explain events in the microcosm and a high god serving this purpose for the macrocosm. The particular qualities of the spirits, of course, are dependent on the kinds of problems life in the microcosm brings up for people.

One implication of this theory is that in societies where the macrocosm has important, direct effects in people's lives, the high god will have a more important role in their religion than is the case in societies where people can mostly live in their microcosm without troubling about the rest of the world. This theory explains African conversion to world religions as being due primarily to the radical and traumatic intrusion of the macrocosm into people's lives. It is not simply a matter of the people recognizing the truth or power of the new religion but rather that their changed circumstances (sometimes caused in part by the presence of missionaries) required new explanatory principles for understanding. If this is a correct explanation, why then do some African peoples who appear to be living pretty much in their own microcosm place great emphasis on a high god, such as the Mbuti Pygmies or the Nuer? Horton argues that these and other cases are not exceptions at all, but are well explained by the theory. In those two cases, for example, people are always moving around over large territory, and coming into relation with more distant acquaintances and strangers. Their lives are not dependent on just one circle of people and one spot in the world.56

A second implication of the theory concerns the idiom in which people think about causation in the world. Our Western scientific idiom is impersonal, while traditional African ones are personal; this simply means that Africans see the causes of events as being person-like forces, while for science the causes are impersonal ones like gravity, electrical attraction and repulsion, and so on. In both his 1967 and his 1971 essays Horton briefly discusses how and why in the West the idiom of explanation shifted historically from personal to impersonal. The suggestion is that a personal idiom becomes nightmarish when diverse microcosmic worlds interpenetrate as they began to do over the last five hundred years. Though I don't think Horton has worked out the theoretical basis for his assertions as fully as necessary, his approach hints at a powerful theory that could explain how people's experiences of the world and of themselves mutually affect one another, and how altering these experiences spurs people to develop new understandings of themselves and the world.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES
AND ARTISTIC EXPRESSIONS

Much of the discussion so far implicitly assumes that our understanding of the self—whether in general or in any particular culture—is severely limited without the aid of a phenomenological perspective. Why the social sciences have been, by and large, so unphenomenological, is puzzling, but to explore this puzzle would take us too far afield here. Suffice it to say for now that there is an inequality of power in any human interaction in which one person does not feel it necessary to recognize or understand the consciousness of the other. That this point applies very well to most social scientific studies of Africa has been fully and elegantly demonstrated by V.Y.
Mudimbe in a number of recent works (Mudimbe, 1974, 1982, 1984). This interpretation perhaps also helps explain why the pioneers in phenomenological studies of Africa have been women or, occasionally, men not trained in the social sciences (who might thus feel relatively "powerless" vis-a-vis their professional colleagues), such as Michel Leiris (cf. Leiris, 1934).

With the exception of Leiris' book and perhaps a few novels, there seem to have been no works by non-Africans before the 1950s that included as a significant assumption the idea that African individuals would have their own consciousness, their own inner life. In the 1950s, with Elinore Bowen's Return to Laughter (1954) and Mary Smith's Baba of Karo (1955) we have the first published attempts to build on such an assumption. In recent years two more works by women about the lives of African women have gained much attention: Sarah LeVine's Mothers and Wives (1979) and Marjorie Shostak's Nisa (1980). Their publication, and their favorable reception by anthropologists, represent a shift from the situation in the fifties. Then, the material was not considered legitimate anthropology at all (hence Laura Bohannan's recourse to a pseudonym), or it was legitimate insofar as it exemplified "the culture" of the people; Baba's life story was of interest primarily because the teller served as a good window through which to see otherwise obscure features of Hausa culture. Today, while anthropologists would still attempt to use these books, as well as LeVine's and Shostak's, to obtain data about the cultures in which the women lived, such works offer an even more important treasure for those favoring a phenomenological perspective.

First, with their richness of individual detail they induce us to experience empathetically the lives of the people about whom they tell. This is salutary for social scientists because we perceive a depth and humanity in those lives that normally escapes our attention, seems to disappear, when we are trying to discover the norms of a society and how and why they function as they do. Second, such works allow and actually encourage us to reflect on humanity and culture in a very different way from what has been the dominant social scientific mode until now. Because people are often guided by rules and customs, and because a people's customs can be systematized and compared with those of others, it has been common to think that our systematizations of people's norms correspond to an actually existing entity--"the culture"--that exerts force on people such that their behavior comes out relatively homogenous and predictable.

Works that give us a sense, albeit imperfect, of how life is experienced and lived from within the mind of a person, however, make us realize that to view culture as acting on a person is too simplistic. We cannot any longer take for granted that we know why a person is doing something when his action happens to coincide with the supposed dictates of his or her culture. This quandary gives new life to the social sciences because it brings us back to the root question that is always before us, namely what is man? The form the question is taking by means of these more literary and phenomenological approaches is, what is culture? More specifically, how are acts given their shapes, definitions, and values, both at a given moment and over the long term? What are the possibilities and limits of understanding another person--whether of one's own culture or another--and how does the process of seeking such understanding affect the creation of culture itself?

One of the most important things these works tell us--a quality that might be obscured for some by the sheer human interest of these life-stories--is that life is
indeed lived much of the time by the seat of the pants. The fact that a culture has moral precepts does not cause people to live by them, nor does it necessarily help them understand a particular problem they face or indicate what action to take. Sarah LeVine, somewhat astonished at the pain and confusion she found in the lives of the women she interviewed closely, reasoned all the same that her sample was not skewed; she lived in the community long enough to know fairly well many people other than her subjects, and "concluded that as a whole they were representative of contemporary Gusii women of their particular age and stage in life" (LeVine, 1979: 387). Nisa, a much more mature woman than those in the sample studied by LeVine, describes herself as often not understanding what is happening to her and not knowing what to do. She, like many of the women LeVine describes, often allows herself to be guided by her feelings. One of my first reactions to this is to think, "How immature and ignorant these people are!" But then I ask myself, "What does this reaction tell me about myself and about them?" It suggests that I must have a different sense from them of what life is all about and how to live because I see myself as being guided by projects, schedules and obligations, and as making choices on the basis of knowledge that exists somewhere in my culture even if I do not have it personally. And then I catch myself and wonder whether that difference that I am tempted to call "cultural" is not perhaps an artifact of the way I have my knowledge of those people; in other words, maybe one of the most fundamental differences is not between myself and them, but between how I know myself and how I know them.

The importance of this point shaped my own research among the Fulani of Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso). In the field my goal was to understand the world of the Fulani from within as much as I could and to discover particularly the significance of freedom, in both their terms and mine, for the way they lived and perceived themselves and society. To convey what I found—and even to find it in the first place—it was necessary to be introspective for two reasons: first to reveal to the reader something of myself and of how I got my information so that he or she could better judge its probable accuracy as well as the validity of my interpretations; second, to work out those interpretations, which could only be the product of my interests, problems and questions, as applied to the thoughts, feelings, and actions of my Fulani hosts (see Riesman, 1971, 1974, 1975, 1977).

One of the most exciting and fully developed works to depict phenomenologically what it means to be a person in an African society is Jacqueline Rabain's L'enfant du lignage (1979). While the focus is on childhood from about three to six (weaning to initiation in an age-grade), Rabain studies not only the child's own experience, but also that of the adults in relation to the child and thus at least touches on all stages of life in Wolof society. She believes, as I do, that it makes no sense to study behavior—for example, child rearing methods—and then attempt to find correlations to other behaviors or phenomena, because in so doing one completely overlooks the meaning of the acts for the people themselves (cf. Riesman, 1983). Therefore, for Rabain (1979: 25):

To describe how the child is socialized, to grasp how it acquires its social ways of being, amounts to recording and studying the teaching and learning of the cultural code; this code we shall define for the moment, very generally, as collection of verbal or non-verbal rules of conduct by which society recognizes someone as a member.
For ethnographers it almost goes without saying that another culture is another way of perceiving, yet all too often we still presume that our taken-for-granted, Western concept of a thing represents the underlying reality for the people we are studying; at best this amounts to a lost opportunity to expand our understanding—at worst it means a seriously skewed interpretation of what people are doing. In her book Rabain deliberately puts into question many of our almost unconsciously accepted ideas about what a family is, what a mother is, what a child is, etc., by making these issues the focus of her study of the Wolof. As she puts it (Rabain, 1979: 30):

To study the life and relations of a three-year-old child within the world of his family is not only to describe a series of behaviors, but is also to wonder about what a child represents for a Wolof father and mother, about what it means to be a person of such and such an age and sex in a given group in the lineage. It is to ask ourselves what forms the culture proposes to a person for particularization.

The fineness and sensitivity of Rabain's interpretations are unusual. Through careful analysis of observed situations she makes plausible inferences as to the meaning for the participants of what is occurring. For example, her chapter on the role of objects in the life of the child is a wonderful study of non-occurrence; the significance of objects really is that, contrary to their role in our society and in the lives of our children, they have very little importance for the Wolof. Children are never given things as a replacement for a human relation, nor are they taught to enjoy playing with things as a way of occupying or developing themselves (Rabain, 1979: 121-37). Similarly, the meaning of the mother's giving the child the breast is not, as we might suppose, that the mother wishes to indulge or gratify the child, but rather it is that the child does not in fact belong to her; it belongs to the lineage, and the mother is entrusted with its care. Thus to give the breast is to respond to the commands of the lineage.60

What we must read between the lines here is this reaffirmation of custom to which mother and child are subject. To the mother it is said: "Your child is not your possession, your thing, it is a relative, it is our child." To the child it is said: "You do not own your mother, you cannot have her to yourself, she and you are subject to our law" (Rabain, 1979: 42-43).61

What is the relation between the cultural codes that these investigations bring to light and the actual character and the lived experiences of the people who create and maintain those codes? Two approaches to the question seem pertinent: first to look more closely at some of the codes themselves, the demands they make of people and the ways in which people uphold, bend, or break them; second, at the end of the essay, to focus more directly on the problem of how code, character, and society are related to one another.62

Perhaps the commonest feature of these codes, not just in Africa but in all societies, is the notion of self-control. Not all societies, however, stress this issue
equally or in the same way. I have argued elsewhere (1977: chapter 7) that the Fulani
placed supreme importance on self-control because to follow their code required not
succumbing to natural urges and needs, like eating, defecating, and expressing
emotions by weeping, crying out or even laughing. Deng (1972), in a very rich
study, analyzes the ethos of the Dinka so as to bring out a strikingly similar picture:
there the concept of dignity represents the quality of comportment for which people
strive. Kane’s moving, nostalgic novel about Fulani in Senegal, L’aventure
ambigué (1961), depicts from the inside the life of a young man imbued with those
chivalric ideals and who finds them impossible to realize either while going to
school in France or upon his return home when both he and circumstances are so
changed by the impact of the West. What appears in all of these analyses, however,
is an almost paradoxical fact. It is an implicit feature of the code that to be a person
is a struggle, since adherence to the code presupposes the existence of those unruly
needs and impulses that we are trying to master. Thus to become human is to
become something we in a sense are not.

Another common feature of the codes is also paradoxical, namely what Victor
Uchendu (1965) in an all too brief analysis called “transparency.” "Transparent
living," for the Igbo means acting in such a way as to appear open, not secretive, so
that people can feel safe in taking one’s words and actions at face value. The paradox
in this, as Ivan Karp (1980) has shown in a brilliant article, is that achieving the
harmony between the inner and outer selves which transparency would require is not
something that happens automatically. It is an achievement and, as such, it can be
faked for evil intent. A good beer party, whether among the Iteso or among
ourselves, is no mean feat, for it involves a subtle balancing of maintaining decorum
and letting go of inhibitions, and all with an air of effortless grace.

The cultural code of behavior, however, is by no means the only standard by
which individuals measure how they are doing in life; in many cases, in fact, it is
probably not the chief one. Instead, success, as culturally defined, is usually the
crucial subjective measure. A good example of this appeared above in Robert
LeVine’s analysis of how Gusii funerals express various judgements about the
accomplishments of the deceased. In an earlier article LeVine (1980) addressed more
directly the question of how people perceive their "life-plan" at different stages of
their life and what strategies they employ along the way to achieve as meaningful a
life as possible. Having many children, for example, is for both sexes the single
most important mark of success; LeVine shows that all along the life course Gusii
men and women monitor themselves and take necessary protective and/or
compensatory actions according to how they perceive themselves in relation to the
norm for their age and sex.

The best study to bring out and describe the meaning of success in an African
society is Hoyt Alverson’s book (1979) on Tswana values and self-identity.
Alverson devotes a major portion of his study to the task of discovering what the
Tswana perceive as their goals in life, and how they make sense of their actual
experience and accomplishments in relation to those goals. One of the most
important ideas his analysis brings out is that in Tswana thought success is not just
an endpoint, a particular achievement; rather, it is the whole process of living and
working at the "great works" that every Tswana man "wants-to-do." Thus so long as
one is continuing to strive for these, "failure as we define the term is by definition
impossible, because striving is by definition a part of success" (Alverson, 1978: 120). One can be overwhelmed by circumstances, and hence disappointed, but "the idea of personal responsibility, and the resulting blame, that can inhere in our notion of failure is almost never present in the Tswana concept." (Alverson, 1978: 120). These "great works" that men "want-to-do" are themselves processes. They are (Alverson, 1978: 122):
1. to be free of want (poverty);
2. to be doing agriculture and animal husbandry (for oneself);
3. to be building a family and home (for oneself);
4. to be keeping community and the law;
5. to be building one's "name."

Alverson discusses very interestingly the meanings of each of these goals, often contrasting the Tswana connotations of concepts with the Western ones. For example, while for us to follow the law is understood as a practical way of keeping order in such a complex society, for the Tswana it means to follow moral precepts, and hence is inherently good (Alverson, 1978: 143-44).

Given the "great works" listed above, one is moved to wonder about the abject poverty and the socio-economic oppression that, from a Western perspective, confront most Tswana. It is a great merit of this book that the author wondered about this too and held long conversations with many Tswana concerning how they perceived their particular situations. One of the most interesting findings to emerge is simply that Tswana differ enormously among themselves with regard to how they interpret the "same" things--work in the gold mines of South Africa is a prime example. Alverson includes many verbatim texts of these conversations, and he argues strongly (following Alfred Schutz) that even though almost all Tswana are in subordinate positions in the larger society and have little opportunity to boss people around, most of them retain the power that counts for a meaningful life, namely the power to "invest [their] own behavior and that of [their] superordinate with meanings which cannot be determined by the latter" (Alverson, 1978: 256).64

Two scholars of religion in Africa, James Fernandez (1982) and Benetta Jules-Rosette (1975), have written works that dramatically confirm the fundamental importance for human existence of this power to determine one's own meanings. Both describe religious movements in which the participants create new and profoundly meaningful understandings of the world while living in disturbed, perhaps chaotic social contexts. The reader of these works can find many insights concerning how members of the groups studied understood the person and the life cycle, particularly in case of the Fang and the Bwiti religion as interpreted by Fernandez. Even more important, however, is the methodological significance of Jules-Rosette's study. This researcher converted to the Apostolic Church of John Maranke and studied the conversion process, the rituals, and the political life of the church from within. Jules-Rosette found it legitimate and actually indispensable to study her own experiences as a pathway to understanding the meanings of the rituals she was analyzing. She is convinced that had she remained an outsider many of those meanings would have remained inaccessible to her and even totally unsuspected. In her chapter on song, for instance, she writes (Jules-Rosette, 1975: 128):

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Only through participation could I enter into the states that those songs evoked and simultaneously created. Through participation, I observed that songs are purposeful courses of action through which Apostles attempt to bring about a state of inner unity and peace. Yet the most forceful validations of my conclusions were based on my own acceptance of these states as possible and meaningful experiences.

Though I accept Jules-Rosette's statements here as being honest and true for herself, I would reject any implication that insights obtained by other means could not be valid. Such insights would be different. But is there no way, then, to judge whether they are better or worse? Assuming that the scholars we are comparing are equally senstive and accurate in their observations, I would say no, because to paraphrase Heraclitus, you cannot step into the same culture twice. What we have been discovering in this section, through these phenomenological studies, is that culture as subjectively experienced by Africans is not so much a constraining or shaping force on behavior, but that it is a means, as is language itself, by which humans try to understand their predicament and create a meaningful life. Whether the ethnographer becomes a convert or not, he or she is always a kind of participant--perhaps a very strange one--and always engaged with his or her subjects in creating a world of meaning. The danger for ethnographic validity is that the anthropologist may easily mistake the meanings arising from his special relation with the people for the meanings by which they were living before he got there. In the case of Jules-Rosette this is not such a serious problem for the simple reason that being a foreigner and a convert was part of the history of most members of the church. Here, then, it seemed to make eminent sense to study oneself in order to know the other.

The Creative Process

This essay has shown throughout how the study of rituals and art-forms offers a great wealth of materials for understanding African thought on the person, the lifecycle, the nature of male and female, the meaning of life transitions, and so on. It is when we examine rites and other art works as some kind of message (see above) that they reveal such concepts and ideas to us. The essay has only skimmed the surface of the available resources, and has done little more than hint at the variety and the significance of the multiple approaches that scholars have taken. Let us now focus briefly on a more recent question concerning such expressive forms that researchers have begun to ask. To put it broadly, the issue now shifts away from that of decoding the message and instead becomes one of discovering how meaning is made in the first place. Many of the works discussed in this section are directly or indirectly concerned with this question. One of the major themes of Fernandez's book (1982) on Bwiti, for example, is to show how members of the religion imbue their acts and symbols with meanings which then lift the participants above their mundane concerns and induce them to experience the "oneheartedness" they so fervently desire. Victor Turner's work on "the ritual process" (Turner, 1969) and in particular on the liminal period in rites of transition (Turner, 1967) has a similar goal.

Recent work by a number of art historians is very promising because these scholars are equally interested in what the messages say and how they are created. For instance, Henry and Margaret Drewal have published some enormously stimulating
studies of Yoruba art and ritual (H. Drewal, 1977; H. and M. Drewal, 1983) in which they give full exegesis of the content of the images and the meanings of the music and dance movements. In addition, they also attempt to describe and account for the felt quality and effectiveness of the ritual. Speaking of the power of the "Great Mother" mask in the Gelede ritual, H. Drewal writes (1977: 560):

What has the greatest impact upon all present is the invisible--the obstructed view and concealed medicine [the mask is presented heavily shrouded and surrounded by other dancers]--that gives the mask a special aura of power. Iyanla's awesome power resides in its unknowableness. Like women, as perceived by men in Yoruba culture, Iyanla is secretive.67

One of the best available approaches to understanding the meanings and feelings members of another culture have is to try to participate in their music and dance. Again and again the ethnographic literature shows how indispensable music is for enabling a group of people to achieve at one and the same time a sense of unity and a solid sense of their unique ethos. For example, singing and playing on the sacred harp are a central part of the rites by which Bwiti cult members attain and symbolize their "oneheartedness." Many ethnographers have found that actually participating in song and dance leads to their most significant breakthroughs in perception.68 For Jules-Rosette, for instance, not only did singing help create her feeling of belonging to the church, but also it was a way of expressing that belonging and hence gave her the direct experience of human creativity within the apostolic community. Perhaps the most beautiful writing about African music is still Colin Turnbull's (1961) description of his participation in Mbuti molimo ceremonies in the Ituri forest. His evocation of that music induces readers to sense the joy, the fun, and the awe and wonder of such human diversity making beautiful harmony with itself and with the forest. When we listen to his recordings (Lyricord LLST 7157) we know what he meant.

John Miller Chernoff (1979) has succeeded as well as anyone in capturing the inner feeling of participating in music-making--in Africa or anywhere. His book is an intensely personal description of what it is like to be an apprentice to a master musician. One of the things that makes the work particularly valuable, however, is the way in which Chernoff is able to translate the normally ineffable musical experience into words that illuminate the quality of human relations among the performers and between performers and audience. This sort of insight is rare, but it rings true to my experience of human relations at their best in an African community. For example, contrary to the situation in most Western popular and classical music, African music does not accentuate one or more strong beats in a measure. In fact the musicians will often play around the place where Westerners would expect the strong beat, and the audience is expected to supply that beat itself, by dancing or clapping, or just feeling it. The complicated cross rhythms are very hard to practice in isolation, but come easier when everyone is playing his part; on the other hand, if you listen too hard to one of the other parts, you may get thrown off your own. You have to strike a balance such that you hear your own part always in relation to the mix of other parts. Chernoff draws from this the following conclusions (Chernoff, 1979: 125-26):
The styles that a drummer plays and the style that he displays are, we must recognize, essentially a commentary on the quality of the rhythmic relationships which have been or can be established in a situation. The quality of these relationships is the relevant aesthetic issue, and in African music, this issue is addressed at every event when a structure of individual rhythms becomes a process which is both mediated and immediate. In this sense, a style is another word for the perception of relationships, a dynamic aesthetic attitude which focuses the music on the occasion.

What is exciting about this analysis is that we see playing the music as participating in a relation, and that relation expresses in music the qualities of feeling that Africans value in the conduct of social life itself. The truth of this point is dramatically reinforced by Chernoff's beautiful description of a moment when, spurred on by the other drummers in the group, he really took off and played in perfect rapport with the most difficult rhythms he had yet learned. In their playing and in their delighted smiles his fellow drummers showed their pleasure and understanding. People in the crowd immediately began jumping up and down and cheering him on. Chernoff (1979: 140) interprets the deeper significance of this as indicating:

that they recognized a dramatically important moment in my life and that their support went further than I had ever imagined, that they believed I could make it if I tried. They gave me the confidence to laugh when I was on the line, and I showed my understanding at that moment, giving them an effective demonstration of my involvement with their art.

In short, what was at issue was not technical proficiency or emotional expressiveness but my personal understanding of certain fundamental principles which can best be described as ethical.... To Ibrahim and the crowd, my education in African music was an education in my awareness of spiritual and ethical principles, the prerequisites of the clear mind and experienced judgement I would need to play really well.69

Some of the most significant anthropological work on the making of meaning has been done elsewhere than in Africa, such as India (Ramanujan, 1973, 1983; O'Flaherty, 1976, 1980a, 1980b), Indonesia (Becker, 1976, 1979; Geertz, 1973a, 1973b), Sri Lanka (Kapferer, 1983), or the Philippines (M. Rosaldo, 1980). Suzette Heald is one of the few anthropologists to employ similar approaches to the study of ritual in Africa. Earlier this essay left hanging two important questions: (1) what could it mean to say that some "non-scientific" understanding of an aspect of the world was true?; and (2) can an outsider's interpretation of the meaning of any action be valid if that interpretation is not accepted by, or makes no sense to, the actors? Heald's recent article on Gisu male initiation ceremonies helps us to advance significantly on both questions. It is an exciting piece of work because Heald effectively shows that Gisu initiation procedures are best understood within the framework of Gisu "vernacular psychology," that is, Gisu understandings of what the difference is between boy and man, and what it takes to turn one into the other. Concomitantly she finds it "necessary to register disagreement with the thrust of an interpretation which tends to see Gisu circumcision as primarily acting to validate authority, specifically the authority of elders" (Heald, 1982: 33, n.6). In Heald's
description we see that the Gisu initiation not only expresses the notion of transformation symbolically, but that it has observable effects on the character of the boys in the process. The startling implication of this is that Gisu vernacular psychology is "true" in the sense that holding those psychological ideas is a part of being human for the Gisu, so that being human and understanding what it is to be human are inseparable parts of a single process. This idea has great transformative potential for our Western psychologies as well.

Mary Douglas, in her seminal book Natural Symbols (1973), is dealing with a different aspect of the problem of how meaning is made. Rather than examine how the rituals or art of a particular group of people achieve their effects on people's minds and emotions, she seeks to discover regularities in such processes at a higher level of abstraction. Using mainly African examples she argues that there is a close relation between the kind of ritual the members of a society find meaningful and the actual experience the people have both of the group as a unit and of their individual relationships within it. Thus people's subjective experience of social life both limits and shapes their ability to respond to ritual forms. A contrast as extreme as that between staid, Episcopal formality and Pygmy abandon and spontaneity is not at all to be explained as the difference between modern and primitive or between complex, industrial society and rudimentary, hunting-and-gathering society. For one thing, as Douglas points out, there are religious groups in contemporary society whose worship is more Pygmy-like than high church; in addition, she offers new possibilities for thought, new directions for research, with her ideas as to what aspects of social experience would be the ones most crucial in the shaping of human ritual and artistic sensibility. While her concepts of "grid" and "group" have not been fully adequate to the task of identifying and portraying those variables of social experience, yet Douglas's overall approach offers some of the best clues we have as to ways in which structural features of society might be affecting perception. 70

Important as it is to continue research in that direction, we mustn't lose sight of the fact that the whole of experience participates in the constitution of the person and that the significance of social structure itself varies from place to place and over a person's life-time. For these reasons the fullest understanding of personhood in any human group ultimately involves grasping the articulation of history, economy, and political processes with one another and with those operating in the self's more immediate environment. A Marxist approach of some kind is the most likely to help us to understand the former, macro-level articulations. Wim van Binsbergen (1981: 69) argues that now "what we need is a new, Marxist theory of symbols, which does full justice to the relative autonomy of the symbolic order," and which would be able successfully to account for the mutual effects of the material and symbolic orders on each other. Many scholars, Marxists and others, have considerably advanced our thinking about this problem in recent years (e.g., Sahlin, 1976; Bourdieu, 1977; Godelier, 1977; D'Andrade, 1984; Rappaport, 1984), and there seems to be a convergence of interest here with a number of the strands of Africanist scholarship we have discussed. For this reason we seem on the verge of some valid theoretical formulations of the sort that van Binsbergen was calling for. 71

While it would be nice to be able to conclude with a formulation of my own that would fit everything into place, to attempt that here would be premature, both
for the state of the art and as a presentation of my own current thinking. If I were to try it now, the result would be so schematic as to be almost meaningless. Rather, I want to summarize here and put into perspective some features of personhood in Africa that have emerged from time to time in this paper.

Throughout this essay our attention has oscillated between social scientific explanations of people's institutions and behavior on the one hand, and the people's own understanding of humanity, society, and events on the other. That distinction is based in the positivist notion that the "real" world, everything perceptible to our senses, exists quite independently of how we apprehend and interpret it. The distinction has also seemed reasonable to researchers when working in a context where their subjects could not "talk back" to them. However that may be for physics, this is an untenable basis for understanding the person. The main reason for this is that being a person and understanding what a person is are the same sort of process. In fact, the very reason why you and I are struggling with these thoughts today is so that we can be whoever we are more fully. Just as Newton hoped to discover God's design in the order of the cosmos, and thus be better able to further that design, so are we, as we study personhood in African societies, hoping perhaps to find a design for living that will imbue our own lives with greater meaning than they now have. The point from which we have to start, then, is that being a person is essentially a process of making meaning. It follows from this, as so many African instances have shown us, that other people are an integral part of that process. This not merely because we need others for sheer survival--life in our own society at times seems to belie that idea--but because meaning only exists in its communication.

For every African society we have examined we can view the culture as people's way of representing and expressing the connectedness between themselves. People engage in cultural works with both joy and urgency because they sense, sometimes dimly sometimes acutely, that the connectedness only exists in the knowing about it. If this is correct, then, perhaps the chief problem humans everywhere face is dealing with those who do not know about it--namely children, deviants, and strangers. Even normal grownups, in a sense, do not know about it because there is no such thing as just a person. People are always growing and changing, and, as is strongly emphasized in most African social systems, people are always children in relation to somebody else. This means that who they are is something they are always discovering, always working out; what varies so much from one society to the other is not this process, but rather the kinds and number of categories of person that exist, the ways in which they articulate in the social system, and the conditions for becoming one kind of person or another. If there is indeed a sense in which nobody knows about who they are and how they are connected to others, that fact could explain the dualities we find so frequently in African concepts of the person, especially that between the inner, private self, often indicated by a secret name, and the public one. For it is the public self, a consciously upheld demeanor and set of relations, that constitutes the known, that which has been learned from one's elders and the others around one. But it also embodies the knowledge that the individual shares with others concerning what it is to be a person is the first place; in passing on that knowledge to others the individual helps both himself and them to be persons. While I have identified the unknown with the inner self, in fact it is both
within and without at the same time, just as the public self is. African imagery commonly expresses this idea in terms of a close association, even identification, between a component of the person and forces in the world outside—perhaps a spirit or an ancestor—forces which by definition are not really knowable.

NOTES

I would like to thank Martha Gephart and the members of the Joint Committee on African Studies of the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies for their unstinting support and confidence in me while working on this essay. For their advice at a preliminary stage of the work I would particularly like to thank Jane Guyer, Allen Isaacman, V.Y. Mudimbe and Michael Watts. Ivan Karp's knowledge and suggestions have been helpful throughout my work. This version of the essay has benefitted greatly from comments on an earlier draft by him, as well as from comments by David Parkin, Paul Stoller, Christopher Davis-Roberts, Jean Comaroff, and Andras Zemplényi. I am sure this work is not the article any of those people would have written; I am not even sure it is the one I would write if I were doing it again. In any case, I take full responsibility for its contents.

The topic I am trying to deal with is so vast that many excellent works could not be discussed or even cited here. In addition, for reasons of time and space, I have had to pass over in silence many others that deserved criticism. I do not at all claim that my bibliography is complete, but rather I hope readers will take it, and the ideas in this essay, as offering starting points for their own thinking and studying.

1. For example, see Shweder and LeVine (1984) and Whitehead and Ortner (1981).
2. The time is certainly ripe for such a history, and some thinkers have begun to explore it, particularly with regard to the relation between anthropological understanding and the political contexts in which it has been developed. Cf. Thornton (1983), Asad (1973), Jaulin (1970), Geertz (1983), Fabian (1983). I am grateful to Jean Comaroff and Christopher Davis-Roberts for stressing the importance of this point.
4. Thomas (1973) presents a well organized summary of African ideas on the person as of the early 1970s.
6. Chantal de Préneuf's fascinating article (1968) about "the man who makes trees cry," is a study in depth of a Fulani healer. She focuses not only on his knowledge, but also on his personality, his way of dealing with clients, and his world view. It is a pioneering ethnomedical essay. Préneuf was surprised to find, as Bisilliat and Laya did, how personal and idiosyncratic her subject's knowledge was, but her conclusions about the relation of that knowledge to the real world and to the cultural systems of the region are quite different from theirs. For some precursors to these works, see Ba and Cardaire (1957), Bodenstein and Raun (1960).
7. For some reason Dieterlen's first attempt at organizing such a conference was less successful. She and Meyer Fortes edited the proceedings of it for the International

8. For an excellent outline of Lacan's ideas and their relevance for understanding the self, see Coward and Ellis (1977).

9. Another French scholar, Daniel Schurmans (1971), came to similar conclusions, but by a somewhat different method. Rather than using clinical evidence, he worked with traditional Wolof therapists to discover their understandings of mental illness and thereby to gain insight into Wolof personality structure. On the basis of his research Schurmans argued that the psychological meanings of particular social situations or relations, e.g., mother-child, brother-brother, do not automatically inhere in the relation but are created by the cultural code. Once we understand the peculiarities of the Wolof code, it becomes possible to see how the Oedipal situation in an African society and in the West are actually variants of the same process (Schurmans, 1972).

10. For some recent studies of similar themes see Gorog et al. (1980).

11. This openness can be seen in the wide variety of approaches taken by authors publishing in *Psychopathologie Africaine*. In connection with our interests in this essay, some of the more useful ethnographic articles are: Bisilliat et al. (1967); Gravrand (1965, 1966, 1973, 1975); Corin (1976); Durand-Comiot (1977); Gollnhofe and Sillans (1974, 1975); Guéna, Préneuf and Reboul (1970). I discuss at length work by Rabain and Zempléni in later sections of this essay.

12. British and American psychiatrists were using a rather similar approach at that time. Cf. Field (1960), Leighton, Savage, and Prince (1967). This was, and still is, a standard framework employed by many other health-workers in Africa. Cf. Jeliffe et al. (1963).


14. Diop et al. (1964) summarize well the different forms the theme of persecution takes in African mental illness. See also Zempléni (1975).

15. Interestingly enough, an anthropologist (Maranhao, 1984: 275) who has also practiced family therapy argues against such therapists using anthropology for almost indetical reasons. On the other hand, the psychiatrist I. Sow (1977, 1979) argues strongly against the imposition of Western concepts of mind and disorder on African mental illness. In his *Anthropological Structures of Madness in Black Africa* (1980) he draws heavily on works in the "savoir africain" tradition, as well as on many studies by members of the Fann team, to create a genuinely African framework for understanding madness in Africa.

16. For English speakers, the best known psychoanalysts who have worked in Africa are probably the Swiss team of Parin, Morgenthaler and Parin-Matthey, for many of their articles have now been published in English and their psychoanalytic study of the Anyi of Ivory Coast, *Fear Thy Neighbor as Thyself*, was translated and published here in 1980. Their work has had a very mixed reception and has generated much controversy. Though there were also brief preliminary and follow-up visits, it seems shocking and presumptuous to anthropologists that the authors would write about "the Anyi" on the basis of two months of field work.
and interviews in depth with just seven people. D. Paul Lumsden (1982a, 1982b) lambasts the authors for many inaccuracies and misperceptions that result from this fact.

17. An important source for Murphy's thinking was Zempléni's study (1975) of how people under the care of the prophet Albert Atcho were induced to revise their understanding of their illnesses such that they no longer saw themselves as persecuted by neighbors or relatives.

18. Melvin Konner's work (e.g., 1976, 1977) is a part of this tradition as well, but his project is to use careful, ethological study of !Kung infancy as a way of imagining what infancy has been like for the human species since our evolution into Modern Man.

19. Further work along these lines can be found in Kilbride and Kilbride (1974, 1983), and Lusk and Lewis (1972).

20. I think now that the picture of childhood I presented in my ethnography on the Fulani (Riesman, 1974, 1977) must be too rosy, for I had no children of my own while carrying out that research. On my second field trip, accompanied by my wife and two small children, I was much more aware of children's feelings and problems. Yet another example of how the ethnographer's particular personality and experiences can greatly affect what he finds noteworthy or sees at all. For more sobering ethnographic views of African childhood see Zempléni and Rabain (1965), Goldschmidt (1975), Draper (1976), LeVine and LeVine (1966), LeVine and LeVine (1981).

21. For more psychoanalytically oriented bibliography see the review essay on Africa in F.L.K. Hsu's *Psychological Anthropology* (Munroe, Munroe, and LeVine, 1972).

22. The scientific approach exemplified by the Munroes has been very tenacious despite many setbacks and critiques. Even in 1980 these authors (Munroe and Munroe, 1980) were writing what seems to me a last-ditch attempt to save the appearances. It is a classic methodological morass because there is no good way to measure either infant experience or childhood affect in the first place. Second, once you have these measured, what do correlations between the measures mean? The authors assert that their findings fit in with the theories they have concerning how experiences in infancy affect the later personality, but to my mind the data do not clearly show any such thing. For example, quantity of holding by the mother seems to predict several measures of positive affect on the child's part later; on the other hand, number of different caretakers predicts these measures about equally well. When Holthouse and Kahn (1969) tried to argue in a similar manner for the effects of Hausa culture on Hausa personality, Frank Salomone (1969) pointed out such grave weaknesses in the analysis that it then appeared completely untenable. Why nobody noticed still remains to be investigated.

23. John Middleton's (1975) contribution to *La notion de personne en Afrique noire* argues that the Lugbara actually define as "persons" only those individuals whose positions will allow them to become ancestors upon their death, for they alone have souls.

24. For an excellent study of such conflict in acute form, see La Fontaine (1967).

25. One of the best general studies of African childhood is still that by Raum (1940) on the Chaga. It contains a wealth of data on play of several kinds, as well as on initiation. Read's (1960) study is less rich in detail, but gives a good analysis of Ngoni ethos and its transmission.
26. Ottenberg's more general essay (1982a) on how masquerades function psychologically is also worth reading in this connection. For a rich ethnography of West African children's masquerades see Carnizzo (1978).

27. John Herzog (1973) reached a similar conclusion in his study of the effect of being initiated on the self-concept of Kikuyu young men. He found, through responses to a questionnaire, that going through initiation had no immediate effects on boy's self-concepts; on the other hand, after a year's time the boys had come to view themselves more the way men do. Why? The most cogent explanation Herzog gives for this is that the ceremony's principal effect is to mark youths as adults; this badge allows the boys to associate with other initiated men--peers and adults--be treated as men by them, and thus come to view themselves the same way also. In this example we see how difficult it is--and possibly distorting to our understanding--to isolate the "effects" of initiation from everything else going on as the boys are transformed from children to adults.

28. Many people of course have been tempted by the data. Suzanne Lallemand (1978: 316), describing a situation among the Mossi very similar to what Leis encountered, ventures a most provocative interpretation of the fact that the child's loss of contact with the spirit world occurs in conjunction with his being weaned from the mother. She writes: "That communion with the hidden forces of the world is but the translation of the fullness of the carnal tie uniting the child to the mother who bore him, just as the later nostalgia for that communication with the powers of the beyond must be expressing the bodily longing for the mother, whose receptiveness and profound empathy are manifest without the least need for verbal exchange."

29. Typical examples of this are Whiting, Kluckhohn and Anthony's classic study (1958), Burton and Whiting (1961), Cohen (1964), Young (1965), and the recent reformulation by R.L. Munroe, R.H. Munroe, and J.W.M. Whiting (1981). Paige and Paige (1981) present a good summary of this perspective, but then argue instead that a "political" explanation of such rites is more satisfactory.

30. Sory Camara's (1973) analysis of family relations, initiation, and folk tales among the Malinké suggest rather convincingly that there are indeed individual psychodynamic problems which must be resolved if a boy is to become a man in societies where the mother has a long, close relation to her children. He argues that the long, painful initiation process and many folk tales are in fact dramatizations of this developmental problem and that by expressing it they help to resolve it.

31. Gollnhofer and Sillans (1978) describe an initiation rite into the Bwete secret society among the Mitsogho of Gabon in which the symbols utilized practically cry out for Freudian interpretations. Their essay combines a Freudian analysis of sexual and body symbolism with an understanding of the ritual process similar to Turner's, though they do not cite his work. They show that the building in which the rites occur corresponds in its parts to organs and parts of the human body (both male and female); the movements of the boys within the initiation house represent intercourse, conception, formation of the fetus, and finally birth itself. The article leaves the impression that the men conducting the ceremony, at least, are quite conscious of these symbolic meanings, whereas most symbolic analyses assume that such meanings would be unconscious (cf. Molet, 1976).

32. The other projected volumes, as far as I know, have never appeared.

33. Cf. the recent essay on Minyanka thought by J.-P. Colleyn (1982), who suggests that there is no single system of thought among them but rather a collection of systems, each held by a different subgroup within the larger society.
34. Even the iconoclastic Robert Jaulin fails, in his study (Jaulin, 1976) of Sara initiation, to show clearly how his highly structural interpretations of initiatic "death" and actual death derive from observed facts. The greatest virtue of this book is the ironic and often funny description Jaulin gives of his attempt to get himself initiated: the rebuffs, the run-arounds, and finally the ceremonies he participated in and the fictions that had to be maintained, the rules that had to be bent, so that he could be included. The fact that special fictions may have to be created for a European to take part shouldn't mislead us: there are already many fictions being maintained. Almost all initiatory "secrets" tend to have this quality (cf. Bellman, 1984), starting with the obvious point that novices usually have to learn that masked figures are actually just people they know. The most unusual African fiction I have come across, however, is the one S. F. Moore (1976) provocatively describes among the Chagga. In the 19th century (no longer today) these people maintained the story that all initiated men (until old age) did not defecate at all, but completely digested their food. Women and children were told that after circumcision, boys went through a further ceremony in the bush where their anuses were sewn up and plugged with a stopper. Moore uses a sensitive structural analysis to discover the implications of this for Chagga thinking concerning male and female nature, and the life cycles of each sex.

35. Apart from an extensive literature on "joking relationships," anthropologists have paid only sporadic attention to humor. For some recent discussion of humor in African ritual, see Phillips (1978), Stoller (1984), Karp (n.d.), and Drucker-Brown (1982). I discuss the latter two in the next session.

36. In subsequent studies (e.g., Zempleni 1966, 1967) Zempleni has continued his exploration of Senegalese understandings of the person through analysis of rites of possession. The symbolic richness of these rites is further indicated by the fact that multiple interpretations of them are possible. For example, Michaux (1972) gives a strikingly different interpretations of ndöep rite from Zempleni's (1967), yet both interpretations are illuminating of Wolof ideas concerning the person. While Zempleni finds a parallel between the possession rites and marriage, such that the possessed person is like a spouse of the spirit, Michaux instead shows that the rites effect their cure by symbolically representing the possessed person as being weaned, and thus creating a certain distance (though not a complete break) from the possessing spirit.

37. The fact that an author presents himself and his questions does not ensure, however, that the work will indeed engender this kind of dialectic. In Boiling Energy: Community Healing Among the Kalahari !Kung, Richard Katz (1982) gives detailed and often moving accounts of conversations he had with healers and of ceremonies he has witnessed. What is lacking here, and what is present in the works by Zempleni and Rabain, is an awareness of the historical, social, and educational context in which these rites are occurring. Katz presents us with many tantalizing observations and bits of conversation, yet the image of !Kung society that comes through his book is not only fragmentary but, despite the subtitle, fragmented, individuated, and out of context. Perhaps the main reason why we get this impression is the fact that the author lived with the !Kung for only three months and did not learn to speak their language (Richard Lee was his interpreter). In addition, Katz's interest in "altered states of consciousness" as a way to spiritual growth put him at cross-purposes with his informants at times (e.g., 1982: 281-94). For another critique of this book see Comaroff (1983).
38. Jean Comaroff, in her work among the Tshidi (Comaroff, 1980), has found a conception of the self remarkably similar to that which Davis-Roberts hints at among the Tabwa. According to the latter (Davis-Roberts, 1982: 41), "There is thus a respect in which what might be described as the 'essence' of the person--his/her soul--is here depicted not as a privatized interiority, but as the abstracted objectification of being-in-the-world." Comaroff (1980: 644) found:

No interior entity exists which sets apart the experiencing self and exterior impingements upon it. Memories, dreams, and much of thought are rendered as the products of external forces acting upon the person. Tshidi depict the self as enmeshed in a web of influences, a field of relations with other people, spirits, and natural phenomena, none of which are set apart from the self as static and objectified states of being and all of which are linked to the self in terms of continuous strands of influence.

39. Andras Zempléni has suggested (pers. com., 1985) that studying divination would be an excellent way to approach African ideas about the person for several reasons: divinatory texts present legendary figures that represent a people's own conception of the range of human types, they respond to those daily life crises that are vital for the Africans themselves, and they tend to be scarcely affected by the anthropologist's particular vision. I regret that I haven't had time to explore this area here. Important examples (among many) of such study are Maupoil (1961), Bascom (1969), Adler and Zempléni (1972), and Jackson (1978b).

40. In a subsequent article, Makang Ma Mbog (1972c) further develops the point that religion and mental illness have no clear separation. He suggests that traditional African healers can overcome resistance to treatment more easily than can Western physicians because patient and healer are both aware that God and the ancestors know everything anyway, so there is no point in the patient's holding back what is in his mind. Thus Makang Ma Mbog in these essays appears to be interpreting African experiences and concepts with abasically Freudian understanding of the person; yet the ethnographic details are not constrained by the theoretical framework and so the reader can draw upon them to use in a variety of analytical perspectives.

41. Walter Sangree has written a fine, "thick description" of a women's cult of possession among the Igbo (Sangree, n.d.). In it he shows how women's experiences in this cult change as their life situation changes--both in the short term and in relation to the life-cycle as a whole.

42. Corin (1971) adumbrated this idea in her earlier article on the relation with the father. For further discussion of ways in which a person can maintain his individuality see Oliver (1965) and chapter eleven of my ethnography, "How to Resist Others" (Riesman, 1977).

43. Anyone seriously interested in African death rituals should read, at least in part, L.-V. Thomas' Cinq essais sur la mort africaine (Thomas, 1968). This book is a vast compendium of information on many kinds concerning the rituals and emotions surrounding death in African societies and the meaning of death in relation to the person and cosmology in numerous African systems of thought. Thomas uses a number of different theoretical perspectives, but his over-all approach is in the "savoir africain" tradition, and he draws most heavily from sources within it. While this fact limits the usefulness of the work, these essays contain many ideas and many references to original sources (some of which I have discussed here myself) that can serve as starting points for further research.
44. Ivan Karp's analysis (n.d.) of women's laughter in the Iteso marriage rituals gives another good example of such a division of labor: the women control a ritual whose message is, paradoxically, that they do not control themselves but belong to men. The inescapable self-contradiction here is half-expressed and half-hidden in the almost uncontrollable laughter of the participants.

45. A fascinating and well-known example of this is his analysis of the meaning of twins to the Nuer. While Nuer are quite aware that each twin is an individual self, they say "that they are one person and that they are birds....It is significant that in speaking of the unity of twins they only use the word ran, which like our word 'person,' leaves sex, age, and other distinguishing qualities of individuals undefined" (Evans-Pritchard, 1956: 128). In everyday life twins carry on just the same as non-twins, but their unity of person is manifested in certain rites and taboos. For example (Evans-Pritchard, 1956: 129):

> When the senior of male twins marries, the junior acts with him in the ritual act he has to perform; female twins ought to be married on the same day; and no mortuary ceremonies are held for twins because, for one reason, one of them cannot be cut off from the living without the other. A woman whose twin brother had died some time before said to Miss Soule, to whom I am indebted for the information, "Is not his soul still living? I am alive, and we are really children of God."


47. Geneviève Calame-Griaule (1965) takes a completely different approach to studying the relation between inside and outside among the Dogon. Her book on speech in Dogon culture is a comprehensive encyclopedia, thematically organized, covering on the one hand Dogon ideas about the origin, evolution, and nature of speech and culture as mediators between man and world, and on the other Dogon conceptions of how speech should be used in nearly every imaginable social context. Its four sections are: 1) The Dogon theory of speech, 2) Speech as revealed in myth and symbol, 3) Speech in everyday life (social phenomenology), and 4) Speech in relation to non-verbal expressive forms. Unfortunately the whole work is pervaded by the concern for discovering and presenting the system that presumably underlies everything the Dogon do; while each connection or assertion is supported by an observation or an informant's statement, Calame-Griaule does not succeed in integrating the data into a believable image of an ongoing human society. Even the section on speech in everyday life, the longest part of the book, is not the phenomenological study its title implies because Calame-Griaule does not in fact describe daily life. Instead she takes up one type of situation after another (e.g., marital relations, riddle-telling, dispute settlement, widowhood, greetings, etc.) and shows what the Dogon say about the role of speech in each of these. Interesting as the individual observations are, reading them is rather like figuring out a jigsaw puzzle in which all the pieces have been put in piles according to similarity of shape. Fortunately, for those who wish to understand the social and economic context of studies on the Dogon by scholars in the "savoir africain" tradition, there exists Denise Paulme's (1940) excellent ethnography of Dogon social organization and family life, *Organisation sociale des Dogon*.

48. Thomas Beidelman's (1980) account of adulthood in two East African societies also illustrates this point clearly.
49. One could write a whole book easily on the role of animals in African thought. Many works of the "savoir africain" school analyze animal images in great detail. For some other approaches see Buxton (1968), Ben-Amos (1976).

50. Alma Gottlieb (1982) has done an excellent analysis on different kinds of fertility among the Beng of Ivory Coast. She shows very neatly that while a superficial look at their customs would lead us to think the Beng, like so many other peoples, believe menstruation to be polluting, this is actually not so. In the Beng view human fertility and forest fertility are powerful forces which must not mix: that is why menstruating women should stay out of the forest; for the same reason, sexual intercourse occurring in the forest would be even more dangerous and polluting.

51. The Mancagne of Casamance have responded to rapid socio-economic change by giving their traditional therapists, mostly women, a central role in the maintenance not only of sanity but also of their cultural identity (Trincaz, 1975).

52. For an interesting study of the hero ideal in shaping people's character, behavior, and ways of interpreting events, see Bird and Kendall (1980).

53. Martha Kendall (1982) gives a fine "thick description" of several actual encounters between griots and nobles among the Maninka.

54. One person who comes close is Michael Kenny in a recent article (1981), though he was apparently unaware of Smith's work in writing it. Kenny suggests that we in Western societies are not the only ones who need an image of "the other" in order to enhance our sense of ourselves. The Dorobo, East African hunter-gatherers, appear to play a similar role in the thought of many peoples near whom they live. This role is not played so much in actual social intercourse--the case in most of Smith's examples--but rather in the socially constructed image, often inaccurate, which the surrounding peoples create of the Dorobo. As Kenny concludes (1968: 490-91):

It is the function of the hunters to bring others to consciousness of their own condition; the behavior of the Ik, as reported by Turnbull, is much like that which neighbouring peoples believe to be typical of all Dorobo at all times. Social science, it seems, aspires to replace myth.

If the Dorobo do not exist in fact, they are invented--and are always there, just out of the light of the cooking fire, or out of sight, but not out of mind, on the wrong side of the tracks.

55. A number of fine studies exist, however, concerning the maintenance and/or permeability of ethnic boundaries. Gunnar Haaland (1969) a colleague of Frederik Barth's, carried out in Sudan an excellent study of socioeconomic factors determining whether an individual will maintain his identity as a Baggara or as a Fur, or will change it to the other. Grayzel's (1977) unpublished Ph.D. thesis on Fulani occupational specialization within a regional economic system is a masterful analysis of the interplay between culture, ethnic identity, and economics. Jean Gallais (1962) was one of the first to point out that Western ways of classifying and studying African populations distort the reality by drawing clear ethnic boundaries where in fact the situation is, and always has been, rather fluid. In 1978 Emily Schultz and I organized and contributed to a symposium analyzing the relations between the Fulani and their neighbors in half a dozen different local contexts, so as to bring out multiple "other" perspectives on a single ethnic group. These papers were subsequently published (Schultz, 1980).
56. Karin Barber’s (1981) recent essay on the Yoruba in relation to their gods could almost have been written with this theory in mind, though the author does not explicitly refer to it. Not only does Barber show how the characteristics of the diety one worships have much to do with one's sex, one's profession, family, and town, but also how the very quality of the man-god relation mirrors salient features of Yoruba social life. In particular, Yoruba society is characterized by considerable social mobility and a kind of Big Man and followers organization. Just as a Big Man without followers is nothing, so is an orisha without devotees; Yoruba seem quite aware that their devotion to an orisha is in part responsible for the orisha’s power in turn to benefit them. In this sense, then, Yoruba perceive themselves as making their own gods.

57. Fox (1967) and Codere (1973) published autobiographical material by Africans in the meantime. The latter book is in fact a most unusual experiment that seeks to show how individuals are connected to larger historical processes by presenting multiple autobiographical accounts of the same time period.

58. David Parkin and collaborators have fully explored this point and many of its ramifications in *Semantic Anthropology* (Parkin, 1982). Cf. especially Parkin's introduction, pp. xxv-xxvi.

59. In this connection see Renato Rosaldo's unpublished essay "While Making Other Plans" (n.d.), which forcefully argues this point.

60. Henri Collomb (1977), founder of the Fann clinic, corroborates many of Rabain's interpretations in a long, ethnographically rich essay on "putting the family to death." This phrase, from the Serer people, refers to the goal in male initiation ceremonies of removing from each initiate any family peculiarities he might have, so that he becomes instead a fully developed member of the larger social unit.

61. It is striking that the prestigious reference work *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Human Development* does not mention Rabain's study (Ruth H. Munroe, Robert L. Munroe and Beatrice B. Whiting, 1981). Work by Collomb and by the Ortigues is not mentioned either. Charles M. Super (1981) cites research by Zempléni and Rabain in passing for corroboration of factual data, but he gives no sense of the originality of their approaches or their findings. None of the work done at the Fann clinic appears to have been noticed by the contributors to the important earlier survey on cross-cultural child development, *Culture and Infancy: Variations in the Human Experience* (Leiderman, Tulkin, and Rosenfeld, 1977).

62. Almost any good ethnography, regardless of the researcher's theoretical premises, will contain material on the society's code of conduct, but relatively few studies include attempts by the author to approach that code from the native point of view. In fact, our best sources for that point of view are usually works by Africans, particularly novels and oral literature, but scholarly studies as well. Chinua Achebe's well-known novels *Things Fall Apart* (1959) and *Arrow of God* (1964), for example, give the Western reader a very strong impression not only of the ethos of Igbo culture, but also how people of varying temperaments and social conditions come to terms with the cultural code as they struggle through their lives. Michael Jackson shows in his rich collection of Kuranko stories, *Allegories of the Wilderness* (1982) and in his brilliant essay (1978c) on birth order in convention and myth, that tales and their telling constantly bring to people's minds the dilemmas of living a valid human life.

64. To temper my admiration for this work I should indicate briefly two important criticisms: first, I think Alverson's (1978: 165-214) discussion of the meaning of evil for the Tswana is quite weak. Even if his characterization of this is correct, which I doubt but have not the knowledge to assert, he has not given us anywhere near the full accounting that he does for some other topics. Second, though he interviewed women and occasionally reports what they say, he does not do so systematically and in particular fails completely to give the reader a sense of the meaning of life for them as compared with men. This is a surprising lack given the thrust of the book; we would expect at least an excuse.

65. Perhaps the impact of the ethnographer's presence is easier to perceive when he is making a film. Jean Rouch has been most sensitive to this, and has constantly incorporated his presence into whatever he was filming. In an important and amusing article he speaks (following the Soviet filmmaker Vertov) of how the photographer " ciné-looks" at what he films and thus not only sees differently but also becomes a different person for the people he is filming; he enters what Rouch calls a " ciné-trance." The people being filmed are inevitably affected, as we know well, by this strange process. Similarly, but more subtly, the ethnographer and his subjects undergo equivalent transformations (Rouch, 1973: 543):

In the field, the simple observer changes; when he is at work he is no longer the same person who greeted the Elders at the entrance to the village. In a modified Vertov terminology, he "ethno-looks", he "ethno-observes", he "ethno-thinks", and the people in front of him similarly shift gears. Once they have given their confidence to this strange, habitual visitor they "ethno-act", they "ethno-speak", they even "ethno-think."

66. But there is another reason for studying oneself in order to know the other, a reason that is independent of special shared history such as we find it in the case of Jules-Rosette's study. That reason is that for anthropologists at any rate the study of other people's lives is how we find meaning in our own; therefore, if we want to understand how others create and maintain meanings for themselves we must compare their cultural works not only with apparent equivalents in our own culture, but with the process of doing anthropology itself. For recent deliberate attempts to do something of this sort, see Cesara (1982), Riesman (n.d.) and Stoller (n.d.). Roy Wagner's provocative (1981) essay on anthropology raises important points in this connection, and has much to say about many issues discussed in this essay.

67. One of the most successful attempts to integrate an art historical approach with an anthropological one is Anita Glaze's Art and Death in a Senufo Village. Through a richly woven analysis of art and ritual on the one hand, and everyday life and politics on the other, Glaze illuminates the male and female life cycles in Senufo society, both on the level of experience and on higher levels of meaning in the religious and cosmological systems of Senufo thought.

68. Michael Jackson's recent essay "Knowledge of the Body" (1983) is a sensitive and very stimulating discussion of what it means to know something by doing it, from music and dance to mundane acts like lighting a fire. He writes (1983: 339):

It is because actions speak louder and more ambiguously than words that they are more likely to lead us to common truths; not semantic truths, established by others at other times, but experiential truths which seem to issue from within our own Being when we break the momentum of the discursive mind or throw ourselves into some collective activity in which we each find our own
meaning yet sustain the impression of having a common cause and giving common consent.

69. Paul Berliner’s *The Soul of Mbira* (1978) is more of a scholarly book than Chernoff’s and contains much more "objective" data. From it the reader can get a well-rounded and highly detailed picture of the functions and meanings of music on many occasions in the life of an African people.

70. See Douglas (1982) for more recent work in specifying and applying the grid/group dimensions of analysis. None of these studies refers to Africa, however.

71. Jean Comaroff, in her recent book *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance* (1985), is attempting the very sort of synthetic approach that I think is needed. She sets for herself (1985: 263), and to a considerable extent realizes, the challenging aim to take "account of the interplay of subjects and objects, of the dominant and the subservient, and [to treat] social process as a dialectic at once semantic and material."

72. From another point of view all these "identities" are just as socially constructed as those of normal adulthood. Indeed, we have devoted much attention to adult conceptions of the child throughout this essay. An unpublished paper by Suzette Heald (n.d.) neatly shows how major types of deviant behavior that plague Gisu society are in fact created by the interplay of normal social processes and cultural values.

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