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

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

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

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

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

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

The Polity Prism

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

State Formation: Conquest or Alliance?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Endogenous Logic of Medicinal Rule

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

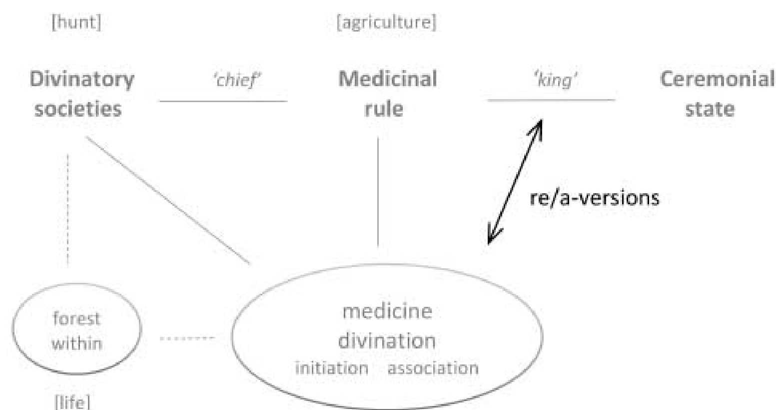

Figure 0.3 Endogenous transitions of rule in east and central Africa. Figure by the author.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Notes

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

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

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

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