

NYANGA COSMOLOGY AND SPACE CATEGORIES

The spiritual bond between man and his total environment is powerfully expressed in Nyanga culture. It permeates many aspects of Nyanga thought patterns and behavior and manifests itself in several forms of conceptualization and symbolic arrangements that deeply affect the life style. It is reflected in daily recurring actions, as well as in special ritual enactments ; in ways of speaking and formulae, as well as in tales and epics ; in residential and architectural patterns, as well as in the internal arrangements of houses and the placement of objects and persons in the house ; in simple activities (such as cooking, eating, sitting, sleeping) and complex ritual arrangements (such as ablutions, burials, or circumcisions). The manner of formulating ideas in texts is pervaded with place and space indications. This is amply evidenced in a short passage from one of the Mwindo epics : « *There in this village of Shemwindo, Shemwindo had planted a ficus tree at the entrance of his village, and this ficus tree reached up to the place of Lightning, and inside it, it (the tree) had a hollow space. As the bird went about relentlessly acting like this and as its owner had failed to find a way in which he could stop it (from doing what it did), and because of the fear (he had) of being pointed at by his kinsman, Mwindo fled upward to the place of his sister ; he climbed up with the ficus tree that his father had planted at the entrance of the village. Mwindo Mboru, because of shame for his kinsmen, said that lo ! this wild animal was relentlessly acting like this, that he was going to the place of his brother-in-law to fetch there the weapon that could fight this wild animal. He said to his father that he was going to the place of his sister, to fetch there the weapon that would enable him to fight this wild animal* » (Biebuyck, 1976). In this and other texts, the sentences are riddled with locative-prefixes and expressions, together with various space and place indications. Moreover, in the great Mwindo epic there is a clear-cut, underlying space framework, which is essential to the total development of the heroic career. The actions of the hero alternate between the home village and various other villages, parts of the forest and the river, between the earth and the celestial and subterranean spheres. The significance of space and place distinctions is no less placed into perspective in a large number of jural,

social, political, economic and ritual concepts. However, Nyanga knowledge about space and place is not condensed in any kind of systematic philosophical treatise. Rather, it manifests itself in piecemeal exegesis (texts ; formulae ; statements ; terms) and in ways of acting and performing, pertaining to the most diverse experiences of life. In this study, I attempt to piece these various elements of knowledge together in a more systematic manner, thereby closely following the views formulated by the Nyanga themselves.

The cosmic map.

There is no specific Nyanga term that is equivalent to cosmos. However, the primary designation for village or inhabited space (*mbuka*), combined with the locative prefix *ha*, is used, both in conversations and in texts, to mean the world as a whole. The Nyanga vision of the world is centered in and around the village, but it is obviously not restricted to it. They use four distinct terms to differentiate between four « layers » or « spheres » of the universe : *butu* (transl. as the sky or firmament) ; *mwanya* (transl. as the air or atmosphere) ; *oto* (transl. as the earth) ; and *irunga* (transl. as the subterranean world of divinities and ancestors). The four terms are regularly used with a locative prefix (*mu* ; *ku* ; *ha*). These concepts occur in extemporaneous discussions and in texts. They are rarely placed together in one sentence, as is the case in the following invocation from an unpublished version of the Mwindo epic. While blessing his dogs and asking for personal force and honor, the hero speaks thus : « You, Masters of the subterranean world, you who are on earth, you who are in the sky, and you who are in the air, come and make your apparition here with me where I am, give me heroic power and much force... »

There are no mythical explanations as to how these four divisions originated, but the general thesis is that the cosmos was created and so ordered by the creator god, Ongo. In each of the four divisions there are distinctive, separate categories of beings, although on earth there is a certain admixture of them. Basically, this quadripartite division falls into two complementary sets referred to as « above » (*kwiyo*) for sky and atmosphere, and « below » (*kwantse*) for earth and subterranean world.

Each division of the cosmos is demarcated from the other, but certain beings in each of them maintain the unity and continuity

between them. A special problem pertains to the conceptualization of the earth and the subterranean world. The terms *oto* (soil) and *irunga* (fire of the volcanoes) do not express the concept of layering contained in their translation as terrestrial and subterranean spaces. However, heroes travelling to *irunga* enter this world through the roots of a fern, indicating that this place is indeed located below the earth. On the other hand, the dead travel to *irunga* along a wide road, which does not express a descent into the underworld, but a lateral movement from one place to another. Nyanga sages reveal that when they are in the village and look downstream (westward), they think about the world of men in terms of political divisions (*cuo*) ; and when they look upstream (eastward), they think about the world of the divinities and the dead (*irunga*). This aspect is also stressed in the usage of the locative suffixes of reference : *-ho* (here, i.e., in the village ; in the world ; among the living) and *-ko* (there, i.e., in the world over there ; the world of the divinities and ancestors). There is no real contradiction between these claims. For the Nyanga (also for the Hunde, Tembo, and other peoples of Kivu), the center of *irunga* are the volcanoes, which are located east of Nyangaland.

We must succinctly examine some conceptions pertinent to each of the four divisions.

Butu. The sky, as the most remote sphere, is inhabited by a closely-knit group of beings. Except for the Sun, which in its aspect of radiance and light is grouped as Kentse with the divinities, all other beings in the sky have a quasi-divine status. There is no cult for the moon, for the stars, and other beings associated with them. Kentse, however, is at the center of an active cult by women (Kentse is supposed to fall on earth to ask for the ritual dedication of a woman ; he manifests himself as a rainbow-like flame). These beings are grouped and identified as follows : Sun (Mwishi as a Star, a source of heat ; Kentse as a divinity, a source of light) has two wives : Kimpenya (glow) and Kamore (the luminous trail of a falling star). Sometimes a third wife, Nyesuba wa Butu, is mentioned. Sun's children are the Masia (Sunrays). Sun's junior sibling is Moon (Mweri), but according to the tales, Moon became the senior sibling because of their father's last will (Sun had arrived too late at his father's deathbed). Moon, who is occasionally called « Eye of the Creator God » has two wives (Star Itúmbítumbi and Nyamu-serea). Sometimes a third wife, Kahindo ka Mweri, is designated.

Moon has a sister (Star Kubikubi), children (the Stars, nkekeni), and other kinsmen, Ikondabakonda (Halo) and Mukuhi. Lightning and Rain are, according to the tales, also junior siblings of Sun and Moon, but they dwell in the lower level, called *Mwanya*.

Although *butu* is a largely undifferentiated entity, various versions of the Mwindo epic indicate a certain conception of superposition of domains. In his celestial travel, the hero consecutively moves away from earth through the domains of Clouds and Lightning into those of Rain, Hail, Moon, Sun, and Star. This is a world of desolation : from icy winds in the domain of Lightning, to wetness in the worlds of Rain and Hail, to heat and dryness in the other domains of Moon, Sun, and Star.

The sphere of *Mwanya* (air ; atmosphere) is located below *butu* and above the earth. It is clearly demarcated from the earth by the domain of Clouds (*Utundo*). In between the earth and the Clouds there is apparently a vast stretch of unconnected space, which the heroes cross in a hollow tree or on bridges built by Spider. But beyond the Clouds, there is a smooth transition from one domain into another along connected space. This aspect is particularly well-illustrated in a heroic tale in which a boy sets out on a celestial journey in search of his mother. From the earth, he travels over bridges built by Spider to the outskirts of the domain of Clouds. As soon as he arrives there, the need for further bridges is ended. He travels with his companion from realm to realm, as if there were interconnecting roads. *Mwanya* comprises a number of domains, which are thought of as superpositions. From the domain of Clouds, one successively enters those of Rain (Mbura), Hail (Mabungu ; Mauu), and Lightning (Nkuba). Clouds, Rain, and Hail are not divinized ; they are conceived of as beings of unspecified nature, which manifest themselves, as can be expected from a people living in the rainforest, in many different physical forms that affect the daily rhythm of life.

Lightning is the master and most active agent of this sphere. His interaction with the terrestrial beings is intensive, either directly or through his agent, Hawk (*Kahungu*). Lightning is an important divinity in the Nyanga pantheon. They tend to see him in different manifestations : living in a rock from which water falls on a high mountain ; or manifesting himself as a sheep, a white rooster, a white heron, a monkey, a legendary animal (*ngere*) ; and, of course, also in the form of flashes (*bisheria* ; *mirábyo*). Because of Light-

ning's association with clouds and rocks, some Nyanga texts place certain other beings in the sphere of *mwanya*. In one text, the old spectre Mpaca, in a contest of force, successively plays the dice with Lightning, Rock (Murimba), Fog (Rundurundu), and White Stone (or Hail ; Mutero). Air (Muhehero) is sometimes mentioned as a separate being ; Thunder (Murungumano) is spoken of as the drummer of Nyamurairi (chief of divinities). Sometimes, Rain is associated with Nyakakungu, an old woman also called « The one-who-drags-rain-along, » who urinates rain.

Few descriptive details are given about this sphere. In one of the Mwindo epics, however, Lightning is married to the hero's sister. With his sister the hero travels through a hollow tree to the domain of Lightning in a village that has many of the characteristics of a terrestrial world : it is located near a river and built on a hill ; there is a wading place and also a place to draw water ; there are houses and a men's meeting place.

Lightning is a major divinity of the Nyanga pantheon. Sometimes he is referred to as a son of Nyamurairi (the chief of divinities) ; sometimes Wind (Iyuhu) is mentioned as his child. Lightning is the center of a male cult. He manifests his desires in dreams, appearing in various forms : as a glowing fire reminiscent of the burning of a field ; as fire that stretches everywhere and does not let anyone pass ; as mist passing while the rain is falling. There is an ambiguous characteristic about Lightning. On the one hand, he is fire ; on the other hand, he is an animal that went to live in the air, having left his mother Nyangurube and his kinsfolk, the animals, on earth. He is allied with the heroes, with the dragon, and with common people. He is a bringer-of-death and destruction upon his enemies. To appease him, people consecrate young women in his name or dedicate animals to him. When he strikes the village, a house, or a person, special healers must preside over the purification ceremonies.

Irunga is explicitly identified by the Nyanga as : « the place where all people go who have died. It is underneath the ground. It is the village of Nyamurairi ». In a beautiful song, the Nyanga speak of *irunga* as the remote homeland to which all people travel :

To *irunga* it is far.
A child arrives there,
And stays there (forever).
A young man arrives there,
And stays there (forever).

To *irunga* it is far.
 A parent arrives there ;
 An old person arrives there.
 To *irunga* it is far.
 A young woman arrives there ;
 A woman arrives there.
 To *irunga* it is far.

Irunga is a place of fire ; the Nyanga, for example, identify a large glowing fire as *marunga akasha*. The fire of the earth, manifest in lava (*buhindure*), is made by the divinities of *irunga*. In my earlier fieldwork notes, I translated this term simply as volcanoes, because several volcanoes (known to the outside world as Virunga) - some of them still active - lay east of Nyangaland, and Nyanga tend to specifically identify the area of these volcanoes with the world of the ancestral spirits and the divinities. These volcanoes, although invisible to the Nyanga in their forest habitat, are well known to them. Their ancestors lived in their neighborhood when they migrated from Bunyoro in East Africa and before they settled in the rain-forest. They are known also because the Nyanga maintain intensive trading relationships (*butea*-fiberrings were traded by them for goats and copper bracelets) with various related Hunde and Kumbure groups, located east of the Nyanga in greater proximity to the volcanoes. The Nyanga also experience the tremors and small earthquakes which result from volcanic activities. They refer to these tremors (*karingiri*) as if they were caused by the passing of the spirits of the dead when they ramble through the subterranean world in dissatisfaction over the behavior of the living. A strong tremor is ascribed to youthful ancestors ; a weaker one to old ancestors. If the tremor is particularly violent, it is attributed to big ancestors (it is an ominous sign that a big man may die ; pregnant women believe that their fetus will « faint » and therefore administer cold water to themselves, in order to awaken the child in the womb). The center of *irunga* is located in and around the area of the volcanoes, but its extensions are everywhere under the Nyanga earth. It must be noted that this center is situated to the east, i.e., upstream (see below) of Nyangaland.

Nyamurairi is the master of *irunga*. Sometimes he is referred to as the « son of Bareke », but this Bareke plays an unknown role. He is the chief of both the divinities and the ancestral spirits. Nyamurairi manifests himself in dreams as a venerable old man with a long

beard, smoking a huge pipe, sitting on a stool in the men's house or as a tall, black dog curled up in the ashes of the men's house. There is always a certain ambiguity about the identity of Nyamurairi, because he is sometimes confused with one of his most important servants, Muisa, who is said to dwell in a cold, desolate, subterranean place, living from ashes. The distinction between Nyamurairi and Ongo, the creator god, is also not always clearly drawn, e.g., when the Nyanga say that « he who went to God's place never returns. » Some Nyanga considered that Ongo is the Nyanga equivalent of Nyamurairi, a divinity of Hunde origin. Yet, both divinities occur in Nyanga texts, sayings, and formulae ; and both are quite distinct in Nyanga ontological thought. Ongo is the « hearth of the earth », the creator of all things, the ultimate cause and reason of everything. Ongo, sometimes named Ongomana (who fills everything, like the moon), has many titles and attributes : he is a potter and maker of things ; he is life ; he is « the one who puts to the test » ; he is « a changer of heart » (because he does good, then suddenly causes harm). The Nyanga say : « The strength of Ongo is to put life in everything and to produce all the astounding things that surpass our understanding, i.e. death, conception, lightning... » There is no cult for Ongo ; Ongo generally keeps aloof of terrestrial matters. Yet, the name Ongo frequently occurs in formulae and stereotyped statements. For example, « he has bitten on the staff of Ongo » is a euphemistic expression for saying « he is dead » ; « may Ongo help us ; let he who hates us precede us (in dying) ; we shall meet him over there » is a formula used to bless a big man when he sneezes. There are also some tales in which Ongo is an actor. In one such tale, a man returning from placing traps is overcome in the middle of the forest by heavy rain caused by Ongo. Subsequently, he discovers Ongo, sitting in a tree and roaring like thunder. Soon after, disaster befalls the man and his chief, because « Ongo is not to be seen by a human who eats food. » In general, however, Ongo has left the task of supervising the divinities, the ancestral spirits, and the living beings to Nyamurairi. Nyamurairi is most directly perceived as the bringer-of-death. When one recovers from near-death, the Nyanga say : « He came back from Nyamurairi » or « He came back from the place where others get lost. » To die, in Nyanga thinking, is « the crossing of the road » ; and this crossing is made possible by Nyamurairi and his helpers. When one is near death (itself ascribed to numerous immediate causes and agents activating these causes),

Nyamurairi sends two ancestral spirits to earth to fetch the « heart » of the person (while his breath or *muka* escapes, his shadow or *mpaca* vanishes ; and his body is buried). People do not see the spirits taking the « heart » away, but the dead person is shown by them a « large, clear road to travel to this faraway place whence none come back. » Sometimes these ancestral spirits, when wronged by the living, go on their own initiative to fetch the « heart » and take it back to Nyamurairi. Irunga is a friendly, familiar place. When the dead arrive there, they are received by their deceased kinsfolk in villages and surroundings that have all the outer aspects of terrestrial life. No living persons have access to this place. Only heroes of Mwindo's stature can successfully enter (through the root of a fern) and leave *irunga*, experiencing many hardships which only their superhuman qualities, their exceptional trickery, and divine conspiracy help overcome.

Nyamurairi is surrounded by a host of female and male divinities. Some of them are his wives, others his children, still others his kinsfolk. Most of these divinities, manifesting themselves on earth mainly through the medium of dreams (in which they occur under various, mainly animal forms), dwell with Nyamurairi in *irunga*, but a few have chosen the earth as their permanent dwelling place, while Lightning went to live in the air. The Nyanga tend to view the relationships between the major divinities in terms of a political hierarchy that reflects the various positions of officeholders in a typical Nyanga state system. Nyamurairi is chief ; Hangi wa Ngoma is « father of the ritual wife » (*shemumbo*), because his daughter Kahombo (Good Fortune) is considered as Nyamurairi's ritual wife (i.e., mother of his successor) ; Muisa is « first-born of the land » (*ntangi ya cuo*) ; Buingo (Fate ; Long Life) is the head-counsellor (*shebakungu*). Several other divinities constitute the group of « royal initiators, » such as Meshemutwa (Chief-Pygmy), Muhima (Haidresser), Kiana (Burrier), Nkuba (Lightning, the Administrator-of-the-Poison-Ordeal), and Mukiti (Water-Serpent, Master-of-the-River). Nkango and Nyarusumba are servants of Nyamurairi. Other divinities, such as Muriro, Congera, or Ruendo are less clearly related to this hierarchy. All these divinities are the center of intensive cults, some practised by men, others by women, still others by both sexes.

Oto (earth) constitutes the fourth sphere of the universe. A great number of spatial subdivisions are recognized here. Earth is the

dwelling place of many different kinds of beings : the living humans (« those who are here ») and the evil spirits called *binyanyasi* (those who died in a special way, as the result of suicide, homicide, and incest) ; animals ; aquatic animals ; birds ; insects ; plants and crops ; stone and fire. There are the water-dwelling divinities, such as Mukiti (Water-Serpent) and his junior sister Musoka, and extraordinary aquatic beings, such as Nyangengu and Nyamomba. There are the extraordinary forest-dwelling beings, Mpaca (Spectre) and Kirimu (Dragon-Ogre). There are also the land-dwelling divinities, Iyuhu (Wind) and Kibira (Leopard), who left the subterranean world in search of the food that humans have (they appear in dreams as though wanting to make a friendship pact ; one does not refuse to give food to a friend). There is finally Munkenkebura (Rainbow), whose ambiguous status is linked with a multicolored snake living in the air or with a land-dwelling frog and who is closely connected with wind.

The ethnic population map and the Nyanga self-image

The Nyanga are well aware of their position in a broader, cultural continuum. Their ethnohistorical traditions situate the migration from east to west, out of Bunyoro or Toro in Uganda and into the rainforest of eastern Zaïre. These traditions trace early close connections with such groups as Bafuna, Banyungu, and Bashari, who are commonly classified as subgroups of the Hunde. These Hunde subgroups are now located to the east, south, and southeast of the Nyanga. Historical and early cultural linkages, and more recent exchanges of culture elements and intermarriages, account for the fact that only tenuous boundaries separate the adjoining Nyanga and Hunde groups. The Bakumbure, some of them also known as Babito, are established north east of, and among, the northern Nyanga ; they are classified as early close relatives. Some groups, such as Bakobo and Batembo of Nyaroba, established within the Nyanga tribal territory, trace very close connections with these Bakumbure. The Nyanga qualify their relationships with all these groups as friendship ; there exist numerous matrimonial, trading, and personal relationships cutting across these groups.

The ethnohistorical traditions also point to the fact that at the end of their westward migration, when the Nyanga entered the vast rainforest where they now live, the area was almost void of people. But the Lega migration, moving southwestward, had passed through

the region leaving behind banana-groves and at least one identifiable but assimilated group, the Banampamba. The large Lega ethnic unit is separated from the Nyanga by a buffer group of mixed composition, the Bakanu. For the Nyanga, the latter are Barea (= Balega); they maintain mild joking relationships with them. They also encountered in the dense northern parts of the rainforest a group of hunters called Bahimbi, still living among the Nyanga, who were already the result of ancient admixtures between Pygmies and Bantu (possibly Pakombe or Pere). The Nyanga also found scattered Pygmy-groups (Batwa) in the forest; close relationships developed with them. The Pygmies came to exercise a profound influence on various spheres of Nyanga, forest-oriented life. The role of these Pygmies as hunters, providers of honey, ritual experts, and friends of the chiefs has remained very important. The small groups of remaining Pygmies are attached to particular Nyanga chiefs; they exercise numerous privileges, some of the joking type (e.g., free cutting of bananas in Nyanga groves). As they settled and expanded in their new forest habitat, the Nyanga entered into contact with offshoots of the Komo and Pere in the north and west, Nande (Konzo) in the north and northeast. As a result of many contacts and cultural affinities, intensive joking relationships originated between the Komo-Pere and Nyanga (e.g., reciprocal taking away of food, chickens, etc.). There developed several «transitional» groups, such as Batiri and Baasa, which, although strongly Komo in culture, are generally grouped with the Nyanga.

There exists in this part of the Zaïre rainforest, and in the adjoining savanna lands east of it, considerable cultural unity in basic institutions and values. Cults centering around divinities which are identical or similar to those of the Nyanga occur widely among the Nande, Kumbure, Hunde, Havu, Tembo, reaching as far as the Shi. Circumcision rites of a common type, and acknowledged to have a common origin, are celebrated by the Komo, Pere, Nyanga, Lega, etc. Common political institutions are found among the Pere, Nyanga, Hunde, and Kumbure. Voluntary associations, such as Mbuntsu (Mpunju), Mpandi, and Mumbira, organized on a common pattern, are manifest in various ethnic groups (Nyanga; Komo; Lega; Nande; Hunde). As the result of multiple historical relationships, cultural exchanges, and intensive contacts, the core Nyanga units are literally surrounded by «transitional» groups situated between them and the Komo, Pere, Nande, Hunde, and Lega, which sufficiently

participate in a common culture, thereby not creating a vacuum or a sense of isolation and complete indifference on the part of the Nyanga. Therefore, the Nyanga do not have a narrowly defined self-image. This self-image is much stronger among the few Pygmies living among the Nyanga who, although thoroughly imbricated with Nyanga culture, consider all others as « ignorant non-initiates » (*barimi*). To a certain extent the opposition between Nyanga and Hunde is most strongly marked, since the Hunde are the only ones among the immediate neighbors of the Nyanga who do not practise the circumcision rites. Thus, there is a certain tendency to classify all Hunde as Bira, a term which the Nyanga themselves sometimes translate as « uncircumcised ones » and to oppose it to Barea, a term applied to the Nyanga as a whole and sometimes translated as the « circumcised ones. » This dual terminology, however, has so many dynamic applications to differentiate among Nyanga groups themselves that its possible reference to circumcised versus uncircumcised is overshadowed by the inherent distinction between « groups located upstream » (*bira*) and « groups located downstream » (*barea*).

The physical maps

The phytogeographical, pedological, orographic, and hydrographic maps, conceived by the Nyanga, are all significant for the understanding of Nyanga society, their space categories, and their legal system.

It is quite obvious that the Nyanga possess a vast storehouse of toponyms for rivers and brooks, the forest and its subdivisions, the mountains, hills, glens, and valleys. The forest is not an undifferentiated entity. There is, for example, virgin forest ; and there is older or more recent secondary forest. Some forests are more dense than others, and some are characterized by specific plant associations or dominant species. Different parts of the forest are used for different purposes, and some parts are subject to more intensive activity than others. In short, there are various biomes within the forest ; and the Nyanga identify them in terms of characteristic vegetation cover and density of the vegetation, degree of compost and ground cover formation, and physical location e.g., on a slope or toward the foot or top of a mountain or hill. In one area of very dense forest, the local inhabitants used eight different generic terms to distinguish between

various biomes on the basis of the forementioned criteria. Cultivation of plantains and other crops was preferred or avoided in several of these biomes. Specific portions of the forest are also identified on the basis of the predominance of certain vital natural resources, such as availability of much game (*irambo*), or potters' clay (*mpuro*), or iron ore (*nganco*), or concentrations of wild banana trees and/or raphia palms and/or *byuma*-nut trees (anyone of these places is referred to as *matimiro*).

The forest, and particularly the dense forest (*erubiribiri*), are places where the evil-inspired Dragon-Ogre (Kirimu) and the Spectre (Mpaca), who is capable of metamorphosis, operate their aggressive tricks. Their evil actions are set in motion particularly by people transgressing « the laws of the forest » - i.e., people who like to travel alone in the forest, people who are left alone in a hunting camp, or people who dwell in the forest late at night. The tales are filled with stories of similar encounters. In one epic-like text, Spectre states that at night « these hunting grounds in the forest belong to others, to the inhabitants of the forest. » This does not indicate that the Nyanga are afraid of the forest. Most of their activities occur in it ; moreover, they like its coolness and quiet which they contrast with the « heat » of the village. For longer hunts, and even for fishing and for trapping at some considerable distance away from the village, they like to build camps (*kitanda*). Again, these camps form the setting for many of the Nyanga tales.

The Nyanga forest is intersected with many larger and smaller rivers and brooks, which are all designated by a single generic term (*rusi*). Occasionally, a diminutive prefix is added to this word (*karusi*) to designate smaller rivers and a special term reserved for large rivers (*ngesi*) and for brooks (*mwera*). There are also separate terms for river sources, whirlpools, hot springs, meanders, and bailous, the riverbanks, and « across the river. » Of special significance is the « pool » (*iriba*), or widening of the river ; here in the dark, deep waters the Water-Serpent Mukiti is said to dwell with some of his comitatus. Mukiti is chief of the water, Master-of-the-river, Master-of-the-unfathomable. In one of the epics he is married to the paternal aunt of the hero Mwindo ; in another epic he provides the hero with a wife. In the tales he is sometimes represented as a man-eating, aquatic monster, or as an aquatic being capable of transformation, who lures women into the water and makes them into his wives.

A most important Nyanga category of thought relates to the distinction between « upstream » (*kunanda*) and downstream (*kumbo*). It must be remembered that the hydrographic layout is such that the main streams (Oso, Mweso, and Osokari) flow from the East to the West, cutting laterally through Nyangaland, and that some of the main tributaries of these rivers flow in a south to north direction. The Nyanga are well aware of this hydrographic feature and use the correlated « upstream-downstream and east-west, south-north » distinctions accordingly.

The Nyanga live on the western rim of the East-African rift valley. The land is mountainous and hilly. The orographic map is complicated because it merges physical and social aspects (resulting from the ethnohistory, the social organization, and the land tenure system). The generic term for mountain and hill is *ntata*, i.e., when the Nyanga say : « they showed him a mountain (*ntata*) with *mango*-trees on it. » In social and juridical practice, however, the Nyanga reserve this term for a « father mountain, » i.e., a place where in the early establishment period a social group fixed itself and from which, in the course of time, other dependent groups split to settle on adjoining mountains and hills. Thus, the concept of *ntata* (father mountain) is complemented with that of *mutundu* (child mountain ; or hill). This distinction has sweeping effects on the political system. Because of patterns of land usage (location of villages, fields, and banana groves), there are several generic terms to refer to the peak, the slope, the glen or vale, the valley or lowland. There are numerous specific names for hills and mountains, whose origins are found in certain physical characteristics (e.g., presence of many rocks ; swept by heavy winds), in vegetation characteristics (e.g., dominant type of shrubs or trees), or in certain activities (e.g., a place where they went for enthronement rites or for secret councils).

From the point of view of land tenure, Nyangaland is divided into a large number of landed estates (*butaka*), controlled by legally autonomous, property-owning kinship groups. As far as the actual land-usage is concerned, such a domain invariably comprises remote virgin forest, forest of immediate utility (closer to the settlements), banana-groves (old and new) and fields, villages and hamlets, and ancient village sites. Therefore, each landed domain controlled by an autonomous kinship group consists of a tripartite division in Nyanga conception : *kumbuka* (the inhabited space ; the village or hamlet) ; *kumundura*, the forest of immediate utility, which inclu-

des the *mahingiro* (old and new banana-groves and fields, grouped according to their age and degree of productivity into five categories) and the *kimma* (ancient village sites) ; *kubusara*, the virgin forest which comprises the earlier-mentioned, specific places defined in terms of the occurrence of many animals, or the availability of certain tree formations, of clay and iron ore.

Politically, Nyangaland is organized into a number of small, autonomous states, each of which is placed under a chief (*mwami*) with quasi-divine attributes. Each state comprises only a few villages and hamlets, without any intermediate political divisions. There is no political grouping above the small, autonomous states. However, close linkages may exist between the rulers of two or more such states when they recognize a common agnatic ascendancy.

The village layout

The general term for inhabited space is *mbuka* (always used with a locative prefix *ha-* or *ku-*). The term applies to the hamlet, the camp, and the village, and because of the centrality of the village, it stands for world. The full expression, « those who are in the village », and the abbreviated one, « those who are here/in it, » are commonly used to refer to the living, in opposition to « those who are *kwirunga* » (abbreviated as « those who are there »), i.e., the dead. The Nyanga recognize three categories of inhabited space : the regular village (*ubungu* ; sometimes *murungu*, if it is larger than usual) ; the hamlet (*kantsare*) ; and the camp (*kitanda*). The regular village is mostly inhabited by several local, interlinked kinship groups centering around a core group with dominant political rights in the village ; it may comprise on the average from thirty to fifty houses of different architectural and functional types. The villages are fairly permanent ; they relocate, however, for social and ritual reasons. One or more hamlets may depend on the village ; they are located at some distance from the main village. The size of the hamlet varies considerably, but generally it is inhabited by a small, closely-knit group of individuals who have varied kinship relationships and political and ritual linkages among themselves and with individuals in the main village. The camp is a temporary structure with some grass houses, for hunting, trapping, or fishing purposes. Few constructions are found outside these three types of inhabited space. But the blacksmith's large, circular house with four doors in which he forges (*ndukuto*) is built on an abandoned village site

(*kimma*), which has tremendous social and ritual significance. Some simple shrines can be found scattered near the banana groves. When the cycles of circumcision rites and initiations are organized, temporary circumcision lodges (*mufinda*), occupied for several months by the new initiates, are erected in the forest at some distance from the villages.

The typical village comprises several physical and conceptual divisions. A central, open space (plaza or street ; *butara*) is delineated on both sides by a main row of houses (*mutanga*). The entire length of cleared forest space necessary for this purpose (*murambero*) is divided on both sides of the plaza in sites (*kibantsa*) where houses are built. The center of the village is dominated by an oval-shaped house with two doors ; this is the men's house (*rushu*) in which many of the routine village activities for males and numerous ritual celebrations take place. The houses on each side of the plaza are of different architectural and functional types. Behind the main row of disconnected houses, there are other structures, such as shrines, guesthouses, bachelor houses, coops, and stables. Behind the dwellings there is a narrow stretch of cleared space (*mukukuru*). Some banana trees and an *irao*-bush (both charged with ritual meaning) are planted here ; there may also be small patches of tomatoes and peppers. The family garbage heap (*hirare*), which has much symbolic connotation, is also located in this spot. The entire village is surrounded with a fence (*ukito*), in which two openings are left (*kisho*), one at each end of the village. Each entrance is closed off with a door (*kirindikoko*). The place just outside each door, where the village trail begins, is of special ritual importance ; it has a distinctive name (*ikura*, outskirts of the village or area of exit and entrance). Outside the fence there is another narrow clearing. The men's toilets (*bwia*) are constructed here, not far from the entrances to the village ; the women's toilets (*cara*) are found somewhat further away near the buttresses of a large tree.

The village site is chosen in proximity of a river or brook (that is not muddy, but has sand and pebbles), preferably near the top of a hill or on a light slope. Invariably, in Nyanga terminology, people « climb up » when they return to the village ; and they « go down » when leaving it. The site selected should not be level, but should provide enough space for growing some vegetables behind the houses. It must not be too rocky, and there should be no trees struck by lightning. The general layout is for the village to be

situated parallel to the river ; it tends to be on the right side (*kumario*) of the river (i.e., when one faces upstream, *kunanda*) ; therefore, the Nyanga are inclined to say that the villages are built *kunanda* of the river.

Each village has its *hitukuriro*, the place where women draw water, which is somewhat upstream from the locality where people bathe and cross the river (by wading or over a bridge). In tales and epics, *hitukuriro* is the place *par excellence* where actors and heroes meet strange beings, such as an old, scurvy woman who exposes them to a test in return for a magical object, a magical formula, or some kind of useful knowledge.

Only when excessive sickness and death occur, and placatory offerings by the headman remain without result, the Nyanga abandon their village to settle elsewhere, at shorter or greater distance, mostly within the boundaries of their landed estate. The old village is never fully abandoned, and the new one has always some articles brought from the old settlement. Kitchen stones, whetstones, broken and used objects, and the feet of the beds are discarded. The men's house is left intact « so that the spirits can go there, » as well as the shrines. The house of a pregnant woman is dismantled only after she has given birth « because to destroy it earlier is like wishing her death. » Besides their useful, movable belongings, the villagers also take with them the drying racks, the beds, and the doors. Some of the poles and rafters of the old houses may be reused for building or simply collected as firewood ; the phrynium leaves, with which the roofs are covered, may also be reused. In later years a village may return to its former site ; the tendency is, therefore, for each family to build again on its former site.

The house space

The Nyanga distinguish various kinds of houses, on the basis of architectural type and social or ritual purpose. They construct beehive (*kambara*), oval (*iremeso* or *kahombo*), circular (with cone-shaped roof ; *numba nkuruba*), and small, rectangular-shaped (*kinundu*) houses. All or any one combination of these house-types may be found in a single village ; any one may serve as a family residence. The beehive type of house is typical for the hunting camp ; the oval-shaped house is generally a shrine-house (e.g., where a man periodically sleeps along with his « spirit-wife »). Functionally, any house may be described as a place to sleep (*ndaro*), a guesthouse for

visitors (*icumbi*), or a bachelor's house (*kinkutu*). However, the bachelor's house tends to be a smaller, rectangular-type dwelling. When a man leaves his parents' home, his first house in the village is generally a small, rectangular dwelling, called a sleeping place (*ndaro*). As a bachelor he may share it with some other young men. When his first wife joins him, he keeps the house (now called *kinkutu*) for himself and uses it as a sleeping room for both of them. The incoming wife spends the first months of her new village life in her mother-in-law's house, where they jointly cook and work while most of the village activities involving the young men center around the men's house. When the new wife is well accustomed to the unfamiliar social surroundings and the housework, the husband is invited by his brothers and grandfather to build a house for his wife. Generally, the construction of a dwelling involves a slow process, in which many steps and avoidance taboos must be observed, culminating in the placement of the hearth by the wife's mother-in-law. Construction of a man's first house is really part of the final marriage rites. Ritual attention is focused on a house as a place of sexual relations, fertility, conception, and childbirth, and it must be built under ideal circumstances of harmony.

The Nyanga house (whatever its architectural type) is a monocalameral dwelling. It commonly has two doors: « the big door » (*rubi rubukiri*) or « door of the village plaza » (*rubi rwe kubutara*) is oriented toward the central, street-like plaza of the village; the « small door » (*rubi rukeke*) or « door of the backyard » (*rubi rwe kumukukuru*) is oriented toward the clearing, between the house and the village fence.

Functionally and conceptually, the monocalameral house is subdivided into four spaces. These areas are not demarcated by walls, screens, or other partitions, but by the placing of things, people, and activities.

As one stands in the back of the house looking through the main door toward the village plaza, one has toward the left the « sleeping space » (*buriri*), and on the right one finds nearest to the village the « cooking space » (*hibanda*), and nearest to the backyard the « storage space » (*isinga*). The free space, connecting the two doors, and located between the above-mentioned left and right space, is called « the opening; the clearing » (*mwangantse*). Specific activities, objects, and categories of persons are associated with each space.

In the « sleeping space, » there is a bed (*nkingo*). A man sleeps

here with his wife and their baby. If he is visited by a blood friend and his wife, then both wives sleep on the bed ; and the husbands rest on mats spread on the floor near the bed. If he is visited by his blood friend alone, the husband sleeps with his wife on the bed ; and the blood friend on a mat near the bed. The position of the spouses on the bed is prescribed : the wife sleeps near the house wall, the husband on the inside, their heads in the direction of the village. Accordingly, mating behavior is also prescribed : the wife sleeps on the left side (her strong side) and the husband on the right (his strong side).

« The opening ; the clearing » or the free space of the house is used for various purposes : people sit there to talk and women to eat with their younger children and guests. Children who are weaned can sleep on a mat in this location, and also kinsfolk who are one's « age-mates » (*uhiso*), that is, individuals who are in a compatible kinship position (e.g., grandparents or grandchildren) and with whom there is a mild joking relationship. One's juniors or one's wife's juniors (male or female) and « strangers » may also spend the night in this place. If one of the spouses is seriously ill, he or she sleeps in the « cooking space » near the fire ; and one's father, mother, senior, or in-laws may then sleep in the clearing. A man's paternal aunt may spend the night here, when the man is ill. If the wife is sick and she is visited by her paternal aunt, they will spend the night together in the « clearing, » while the husband stays in the « sleeping space. » A sick wife may also be taken to her parents-in-law's house and sleep in the « clearing. »

Several objects have a fixed place in the « cooking space. » There are the big and the small hearths (*riko ikiri* and *riko ikeke*) ; they are combined and consist of four stones. Here, the wife does all the cooking, sitting or squatting between the hearth and the village side of her house, without turning the back to the village. In the cooking space, near the hearth, there is also the stone on which she pounds dried bananas (*katunduriro* and *musheresha*, the pounding stone) and the stone on which she grinds the pound bananas (*osho* and the grinding stone, *cana cosho*). This stone is placed on an antelope or goat's hide (*coero*). Against the wall on the village side are her pots placed in small pot-holes. Hanging from the roof, across the « cooking » and the « clearing » areas is a shelf-like device (*utango*). Wood and baskets are placed on this shelf, above the « clearing » ; drying, slit bananas hang from it above the hearth on the side of the « cook-

ing space. » People may sleep here near the hearth, such as one's weaned children, individuals who are « age-mates, » or an ill husband or wife.

Above the « storage space » is a table-like structure (*butara*), on which wood, tools, and other belongings are stored. A notched beam (*mutairiro*) is lodged against it to allow the woman or husband to climb onto the table. The people who can sleep in the « cooking space » may also spend the night here. (It should be recognized that as soon as one's children « become intelligent, » they sleep in a bachelor's house).

The house is essentially the sphere of the wife, since her husband spends much time outside this dwelling, in the men's house, and in his personal shrine-house (if he has a spirit wife). In some rituals, however, the « cooking space » is specifically identified with the woman and the « storage space » with the man. For example, at the end of the *busiku* purification rites (connected with the death of a grandchild), the wife is seated on a stool in the « cooking space » and the husband in the « storage space. »

The diversity of architectural types in Nyangaland is a close reflection of the convergence, in this part of Central Africa, of various cultural traditions : Pygmies, archaic Bantu groups, and offshoots of the interlacustrine Bantu. The simple physical layout of houses and villages and the complex conceptual divisions into which they are organized stand in sharp contrast to the complicated internal layout of houses which may be observed, e.g., among the neighboring Lega. The Nyanga house and village architectural models admirably fit patterns of marriage, family organization, residential preferences, and local grouping. The vast majority of Nyanga live in monogamous unions ; large numbers of nubile women are unmarried, or rather « married » to various divinities, living in their fathers' and brothers' villages in prolonged, legally sanctioned, « free » unions with married or unmarried men ; individuals move in and out of their home village as the result of such « lover-sweetheart » relationships, but also because of bloodpacts and clientships. On the other hand, the complicated conceptual subdivisions of the houses allow the code of etiquette in interpersonal relationships to function harmoniously, by assigning specific portions of the house space for the fulfilment of these interactions. The lack of any significant physical groupings of houses, together with the self-containment of each house, allow the addition of new dwellings and the reassignment of existing dwell-

lings to comply with exigencies of residential mobility and natural growth of the families. Finally, the house and village plans conform fully with the dyadic division of space which appears as one of the major organizing principles through Nyanga thought.

The upstream-downstream dichotomy and its correlaries

The binary opposition between downstream (*kumbo*) and upstream (*kunanda*) constitutes one of the most important codes of Nyanga symbolism. It affects certain ways of formulating ideas, of behaving and arranging objects ; it entails a number of connotations that transcend its primary directional meaning. Some other pairs of opposites are closely related with this basic dichotomy. They include : east-west, north-south, village-forest, life-death, right-left, up (sky)-down (earth) oppositions. The term *kumbo* is frequently used in a more general significance of « below » (e.g., « below the body » to refer to the pubic area ; « below the hill » ; « below the trail » for the direction one goes). *Kunanda*, however, does not as clearly express the idea of « above/on » ; the concept *ntata* is preferred in such contexts (e.g., he beat me on the head (*hantata nemuntwe*)).

The opposition *kumbo-ntata* obviously bears, in its primary meaning, on the directional flow of the rivers. It must be noted that the major rivers (Oso ; Mweso) flow laterally in an east-west direction. Thus, the East which is descriptively referred to as « the place of ascent of the sun » and the West as « the place where the sun fell down to deposit its burdens » are explicitly identified as upstream (*kunanda*) and downstream (*kumbo*). The North and South are regularly identified as halves (*uharo*). Facing upstream (i.e., eastward), the North is described as « left half » and the South as « right half. » Similarly, facing upstream, the right side of a river is called the *kunanda* (upstream) bank and the left side the *kumbo* (downstream) bank.

Downstream is, in Nyanga thought, the way in which the spirits travel. Upstream is the locus from where people come (it must be remembered that the Nyanga immigrated into the forest coming from the East, i.e., from upstream). Downstream is symbolic of death (*kokwu*) and upstream of life (*karamo*). This is immediately apparent in burial practices. The head of the corpse faces downstream « because the dead do not fly, but descend with the river » ; the feet face upstream « because this is the place from where the people

came.» During the ablution rituals, following a death, the celebrants stand on a stone in the river, at the first ablution dam (*buoma*) facing downstream ; they throw water over their bodies « so that the difficult (evil) things may descend with the water » and « so that the spirit of the dead may also descend with the water and not return again to annoy us in the location where we remain on earth. » Subsequently, the celebrants wade upstream to the second dam. Facing downstream they throw water over their bodies as in the previous instance ; then, looking upstream, they bathe the entire body to cleanse them from evil, saying, « I have recovered from difficult things that are now behind me. » Likewise, when a child is born, they hold it facing upstream during the coming-out purification ceremony, because « from the source, from upstream comes life. » This symbolism is carried further to include the upstream (right) and downstream (left) riverbanks. During the ablution rites, following the death of a child or grandchild, the celebrants wade downstream through a number of dams made of leaves, then turn back and go upstream. They must have intercourse (followed by extravaginal ejaculation) on the downstream bank, cross the water, and mate again (followed by intravaginal ejaculation) on the upstream bank. Villages are built on the upstream bank of the river, because that is the side of life and vitality. The central building in the village is the men's house, which has an upstream (also called « big ») and a downstream (also called « small ») door. In formal sitting arrangements, the headman of the village is seated near the upstream door and the second person in authority (*muhunga*) near the downstream door. The village has two entrances (upstream and downstream) ; a visitor arriving in the village from the downstream side, turns around the men's house and enters it by the upstream door, and vice versa.

We have already noted a certain overlapping of meaning between downstream and left and upstream and right ; the north is a left half and the south a right half ; the upstream riverbank is on the right and the downstream riverbank on the left. To some extent the left, like downstream, is symbolic of death, weakness, evil ; and the right, like upstream, of life, strength, force, salvation. But, whereas the downstream-upstream dyad expresses these opposed ideas in an absolute and systematic manner, the left-right dichotomy is much more nuanced in its contextual meaning. First of all, right (*mario*) is also explicitly identified as *kubume* (malehood) ; and the two

terms are indiscriminately used as synonyms. Left (*marembe*), however, is not synonymous with female. There is no abstract term for femalehood. I believe that the Nyanga in identifying right with malehood mean to say that right is the male side *par excellence*, without saying that left is either female or the female side *par excellence*. The general Nyanga ideology is that a man's (vital) force (*cara*) is in/on the right, and a woman's in/on the left. This is most directly illustrated by sleeping and mating behavior. A woman sleeps on the left-hand side of her husband (the heads pointing toward the village), and mates preferably lying on her left side. She cleans the husband's genitalia with her left hand. In addition, women breast-feed their babies holding the child's head on the left arm; they stir banana paste moving the ladle from left to right. In various circumstances, men adopt a negative attitude toward the left (a concept which is not emphasized in the women's relation to the right). For a man, the left hand is used for gestural scorn. If the man feels pain or nervourness on the left, he considers this as an ominous sign of death or other disaster. This negative male attitude toward the left is strongly symbolized in the purely male world of the circumcision rites. There are, e.g., two trails leading into the center of the circumcision lodge; the left trail is used, before and after the operation, by the young men; it is called the « trail of the ignorant ones » (*barimi*); the right trail is that of the masked circumcisor (*kitumbu*). In certain rituals, particularly connected with death and burial, the use of the left is indicative of the reversal of things (e.g., at the funeral ceremonies for a father or mother, the celebrants drink water from the left hand).

The opposition between the terms *hambuka* (in the world; in the village) and *kwirunga* (in the subterranean world) is not sharply delineated. In Nyanga thought both places are a person's *kurwabo* (lit., in their place; in their village), and the forms of existence in both worlds are quite similar (similar physical and human surroundings). However, the distinction between the two concepts is strongly marked in the use of the locative suffixes of reference - *ho* (here; in the world) and -*ko* (there; in the subterranean world), which are constantly applied somewhat as euphemistic expressions to avoid saying *hambuka* and *kwirunga*. To be alive is commonly rendered as « being here » (« they are here »--*bari ho*) and to be dead as « being there » (« they are there »--*bari ko*) or « to finish being here » (*usira ho*). One of the circumlocutions used to wish a

big man well when he sneezes is as follows : « May the one who hates us precede us *there* (i.e., die first) ; we will follow him *there*. » One elaborate form of greeting is contained in the following statement : « We are shivering here (*ho*) ; there is none to carry himself over there (*ko*), » i.e., we are all well and alive ; nobody is near death. When faced with a complicated child delivery, the midwives exclaim : « There will not come out, what is alive » (*Kariho*, lit., what is here). There is a remarkable passage in one of the Mwindo epics, in which the fine shading of these two locative expressions is clearly illustrated. At a certain stage of his heroic career, Mwindo decides to die. The narrator states : « Mwindo fainted (which is one way to say Mwindo died) ; he was there ; he was there (*urinko, urinko*). » He arrives at the entrance of Nyamurairi's village, but Nyamurairi does not want to receive a person who decided his own death. Therefore, he charges his servant Nyarusumba to send Mwindo back to earth, saying : « Tell him to return there » (but the locative of direction--*ko*--is not used, but rather and correctly so, in the spirit of the -*ho* and -*ko* dichotomy, the locative *ho* ; he says : *wakuruki ho*, let him return here, i.e., to the world).

The opposition between village and forest is symbolically represented in various ways. In tales we find a recurring theme of opposition and incompatibility between homonymous characters, such as Ierere of the village and Ierere of the forest, Itumba of the forest and Itumba of the village. Ierere of the forest crudely tricks Ierere of the village and is easily destroyed by his village homonym upon being detected in the village. In another text, Itumba of the forest and of the village have cultivated a field in the same spot ; people on each side come to harvest ; a dispute erupts ; those of the forest easily destroy the people of the village. These two significant tales strongly mark the incompatibility of the two places. The inhabitants of the village are strong in their own place ; those of the forest are more powerful in their domain. The village offers security and protection ; people can leave young children in the village without fearing major disturbance. The forest is a dangerous place, filled with anxieties, unexpected events, strange happenings. When night falls, the forest is doubly dangerous ; it belongs, as Spectre says in a heroic tale, to « the masters and inhabitants of the forest. » The hunting camp, unprotected and built in the heart of the forest, only provides a relatively secure haven. In the tales and in storytelling about strange events and occurrences, the hunting camp is a setting *par excellence*

for extraordinary, unusual, abnormal events, encounters, and situations (e.g., incest ; murder ; attacks by Spectre or Dragon-Ogre). This opposition is symbolized also by the perennial, irresolvable conflict that opposes, in Nyanga tales, the dog « who likes to eat cooked things, » and the leopard « who likes the raw. » This opposition is further strongly symbolized in certain phases and by certain personages of the circumcision rites. The general ideology is that the young initiates, during the long seclusion period in a lodge, which follows the actual operation, become *sui generis* beings of the forest, acting according to the rules of the forest. This is explicitly stated in the doctrine of the circumcision. The first night following the operation, the young men are not yet submitted to the specific rules of the forest because « they still smell the ways of the village. » The two key personages, who lead the circumcision rites are Shebatende (Father-of-the-initiates), who protects and cares for the young men and represents the village, and Kitumbu (the masked circumcisor), who is castigator and enemy and represents the forest.

In general, the identifications of life - upstream and death - downstream are extended respv. to the village and the forest. In sleeping arrangements, the head faces the village and the feet the forest. The etiquette requires that a person sitting in a house does not turn the back towards the village. When cooking in her house, the woman sits on the side of the village, without turning her back to it. In certain ablution ceremonies, a couple cleanses itself from ritual pollution and separates itself from evil and death by mating on the riverbank opposite to the village (i.e., the forest side) ; it subsequently reintegrates its normal life-oriented cycle by mating on the riverbank closest to the village (i.e., the village side). The green banana leaves on which the grandparents of a newborn child mate behind the house must face the village. The umbilical cord and the placenta are buried outside the village, in different locations ; both must face the life-giving village.

Such oppositions as heavy and light, cold and warm, have some application in the circumcision rites. The young men are considered to be heavy and cold before the circumcision ; they are light and warm afterward. Their lightness is particularly symbolized at the coming-out ceremonies, when after a long seclusion they reenter the village, while carrying living hummingbirds attached to their costumes. The opposition between the raw and the cooked is sometimes established in tales, mainly in contests between two inveterate ene-

mies, the leopard who likes the raw and the dog who prefers the cooked. Dyadic oppositions between named, symbolic characters are one way of constructing tales. A considerable number of Nyanga tales evoke events centering around such sets of characters as Words-do-not-harm and Words-do-harm ; Noise-makers and Those-who-enter-council ; Closed-eyes and Looker ; Mr. Hatred and Mr. Respect ; Mr. Blessing and Mr. Bad-Luck.

The set of opposites between up (high ; sky) and down (below ; earth) corresponds also to the downstream-death and upstream-life dichotomy. The sky is an emptiness ; there is nothing to sustain. In various circumstances, to look upward (into the sky) has a weakening, ominous effect. For example, when women carry the placenta into the forest, they must not look upward, lest the child will die (« they would let the child's strength fly away »). When a bride is escorted to her husband, she and her companions must not look into the sky and its emptiness, lest she will irretrievably remain childless. « To have one's heart up/in the sky » indicates strong emotions ; « to set the heart down » means rest and appeasement.

The symbolic content of up and down is partially reversed in the usage of the verbs *itaa* and *ihita*. The two verbs, in their primary meaning, directly refer to the upstream-downstream dichotomy, the first meaning to go upstream and the second to go downstream. To travel upstream entails the notion of a movement toward the sources of life and salvation ; and to go downstream is the road of death and danger (« difficult things go downstream ; they do not go upstream »). However, the verb *itaa* (to go upstream) is also used for the act of going (returning) to the village (a symbol of life) ; villages are built toward the top of hills and mountains. Even if they are not, though, the movement toward the village is still described as *itaa*. The verb *ihita* (to go downstream) is the equivalent for leaving the village and going into the forest, which is an act of danger.

Conclusions

The Nyanga have an extremely strong space and place awareness. As a forest-based people who place enormous significance in hunting, trapping, and collecting, and who are also deeply involved in extensive forms of agriculture (centered around banana groves), they spend a large amount of time travelling and laboring in the most remote corners of their land. They have an intimate knowledge

of the forest, its life-giving as well as its harmful properties. This knowledge is based first of all on hard-core experience of the physical milieu, including hydrography, orography, pedology, vegetation cover, availability of animal and other resources. This set of experiences is enhanced by Nyanga ethnohistory and ethnic awareness. The main migration is from the East to the West, i.e., in a general downstream direction. Before the migration, the Nyanga shared, as part of a wider cultural unit, a common spectrum of common ethnic elements present also to a great extent, in religious ideas and rituals, among the Hunde and Kumbure, and to a lesser extent among more remote groups. The center of this religious system is the acting and extinct volcanoes which border Zaïre and Rwanda, and the various divinities associated with them. The core of Nyanga philosophy revolves around the concept of *karamo*, or a state of salvation from sickness, danger and disaster ; a state of health, of wellbeing, and of strength. The origin and reason of *karamo* are identified with the upstream direction, the East, whence people come, where the world of the divinities and the spirits is located, i.e., the place where *karamo* is activated. The major rituals are oriented toward a constant recapturing of this *karamo*, and have a physical basis which symbolically orients all salutary action in the direction of the source of *karamo*. Nyanga culture is a mixture of the cultural patrimony typical for ethnic units located east of them and cultural elements borrowed through intensive contacts with pre-established forest-dwellers, offshoots of which are situated among them and the bulk of which is situated west of them (Pygmies ; Himbi ; Lega ; Komo). The life-giving elements in that culture, however, continue to reflect the past, i.e., places and events located in the eastern homeland.

There is a curious paradox in the fact that the Nyanga do not consider their eastern, historically closely-related neighbors, collectively known as Hunde, as ritually superior. The Hunde are jointly classified in the Nyanga taxonomic system as Bira ; the opposite term being Barea which the Nyanga apply to themselves as a whole in contrast to the Hunde. Whatever the original meaning of the two terms may have been (it is possible that Bira originally referred to a place, a state, or a country), they clearly have reference to a major cultural distinction between the Nyanga and the Hunde. The Nyanga practise the circumcision rites, which they have derived from the Komo-Lega tradition ; the Hunde do not know them. Therefore, the contrastive set Barea--Bira, bearing on the Nyanga

and Hunde as a whole, has the connotation of circumscribed vs. uncircumscribed. However, the two terms can be applied to any two Nyanga groups among themselves, to indicate their relative positions in the downstream-upstream scheme. A group that is located « below » (i.e., downstream) another one may be designated as Barea and one which is « above » (i.e., upstream) the other one as Bira. This projects the general Nyanga-Hunde geographical position to the level of any Nyanga subgroups. The equation of downstream-death-evil does not apply in these instances to the concept of Barea. The implication is mainly one of relative positioning in the space model. However, among the southernmost Nyanga, the two terms imply at the same time some cultural differences, or rather a greater mixture with Hunde elements. The further one moves southward in Nyangaland, the more visible the many recent Hunde linkages become. On the other hand, I have emphasized that the South, as the right hand side of Nyangaland, is assimilated with the East (under the term « upstream »-- thus, in both cases, the label Bira maintains its connotation of « upstream » people.

The Nyanga opposition between upstream-downstream is based on physical, empirical contrasts (Needham, 1973, p. 331). It is fundamental to all other sets of opposites, that are analogically associated with it. The elementary symbolic identification of « upstream » with life, strength, salvation, and harmony is rooted in Nyanga knowledge about migration patterns, culture-historical facts, and cosmology. Unfortunately, the space symbolism of the immediately adjoining and culturally and historically closely-related ethnic units is unknown. However, there are good indications for the Hunde (Schumacher, *Die Kivu Pygmäen*) about similar patterns of space symbolism connected with the volcanoes and the East. Symbolic oppositions linked with the upstream-downstream dichotomy are mentioned, but not analyzed, in relation to ethnic identifications among other forest-dwelling Bantu groups, such as Mbole, Lengola, Ngengele, or Binja. The extent of the symbolic associations contained in these oppositions and their influence on ritual procedures and patterns of living and acting are unknown. Similar oppositions between upstream and downstream and analogies with east and west, south and north, up and down, or life and death are found among Bantu groups in East Africa (e.g., Kaguru, Gogo, or Nyoro ; See Needham, 1973, pp. 151, 279-280, and 328). This would indicate, as Needham (1973, p. 330) has acknowledged, the existence, at least with

reference to space categories, of « fundamental and enduring features of Bantu symbolism, » which must be further explored. Among the Nyanga, this basic space symbolism manifests itself mainly in those spheres of activity in which the search for *karamo*, the strengthening of life is paramount. This search is obviously of sweeping significance ; it would be a mistake, however, to reduce all, or even most, Nyanga symbolism to a correlated series of dual oppositions. In the political code, for example, the complementary unity between the chief and his ritual wife, at the central level, and that between the *mutambo*, *muhunga*, and *mukungu* elders, at the village level, is of enormous importance. In the ritual and narrative codes, much elaboration is made regarding the numerical symbolism of seven and two times seven.

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NOTE

Research among the Nyanga was done under the auspices of the « Institut pour la recherche scientifique en Afrique centrale » (IRSAC, Brussels). Further information on the Nyanga can be found in the following sources :

Texts : Daniel BIEBUYCK & Mateene KAHOMBO, *The Mwindo Epic from the Banyanga*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1969 ; paperback, 1971 ; Daniel BIEBUYCK & Mateene KAHOMBO, *Anthologie de la littérature orale Nyanga*, Brussels, Académie royale des Sciences d'Outre-Mer, 1970 ; Daniel BIEBUYCK, *King and Hero. Epic Literature from the Nyanga*, (in preparation).

Nyanga art and circumcision rites : Daniel BIEBUYCK, *Nyanga Circumcision Masks and Costumes*, in *African Arts*, VI, 2, 1973, p. 20-25 ; p. 86-96 ; *Mumbira. Musical Instrument of a Nyanga Initiation*, in *African Arts*, VII, 4, 1974, p. 42-45 ; p. 63-65 ; p. 96.

Nyanga hunting and trapping methods : Daniel BIEBUYCK, *De hond bij de Nyanga : ritueel en sociologie*, Brussels, Académie royale des Sciences d'Outre-Mer, 1956.

Nyanga patterns of land tenure : Daniel BIEBUYCK, *Rights in Land and Its Resources among the Nyanga*, Brussels, Académie royale des Sciences d'Outre-Mer, 1966.

Nyanga political organization : Daniel BIEBUYCK, *L'organisation politique des Nyanga : la chefferie Ihana*, in *Kongo Overzee*, vol. XXII, 4-5, 1956, p. 301-341 ; vol. XXIII, 1-2, 1957, p. 59-98.

Important studies on space relationships are found in the following : Edward T. HALL, *The Hidden Dimension*, New York, Doubleday, 1966 and O.M. WATSON, *Symbolic and Expressive Uses of Space. An Introduction to Proxemic Behavior*, Reading, Mass., Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1972. Rodney NEEDHAM, ed., *Right and Left. Essays on Dual Symbolic Classification*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, offers an excellent set of studies on symbolisms of classification.