

Cosmological Efficacy and the Politics of Sacred Place

Soli Rainmaking in Contemporary Zambia

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All photographs by the author

No performance is pure efficacy or pure entertainment
Richard Schechner (1988:120)

In this article I analyze cosmological efficacy in light of the politicization and apparent secularization of contemporary annual ceremonies in Zambia, south-central Africa, which are framed by scholars as neotraditional (Lentz 2001), folklorized (van Binsbergen 1994), or retraditionalized (Gould 2005:3, 6) events. My term “festivalization” registers the formalization of Zambian performances such as rituals, harvest festivals, inaugurations, and initiations as annual festival events, but does not imply a pejorative attitude towards cultural change and so-called inauthenticity, as the words “folklorization” or “retraditionalization” seem to do.¹ Places of sacredness inevitably shift as ceremonies become increasingly formalized and as private rituals become semi-public or public events, and I argue that the natural suppleness of ritual enables the endurance of efficacious, albeit reconfigured spiritual and cosmological relationships.

FESTIVALS AND COSMOLOGICAL EFFICACY

Festivalization and the State of the Sacred. This article focuses on the Soli Chakwela Makumbi annual ceremony, which takes place in October in Nkomeshya Village near Chongwe, Lusaka Province, and is usually attended by local villagers, visiting urbanites, national politicians, and a few tourists. “Chakwela Makumbi” literally means “pulling the clouds,” and the current Senior Chief of the Soli people, Chieftainess Nkomeshya Mukamambo II (Fig. 1), is presented to the Zambian nation as the one who directs the cosmological forces and calls for rain each year. During the public festival she pleads with God (Lesa) and the Soli ancestral spirits (*mishimu*) to bless the earth with rain.

The public festival format of Chakwela Makumbi fits the general script² of the more than sixty annual ceremonies in contemporary Zambia referred to by Zambians as “traditional ceremonies,” many of which have been formally gazetted by the Zambian government since the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) came into power in 1991. These ceremonies now form part of a national calendar of heritage events (Gordon 2004, Guhrs and Kapwepwe 2007, Simbao 2006, 2008, 2010). Although contemporary Zambian ceremonies provide a “stage upon which chiefs and their entourages have collaborated to re-write histories, shape collective memories, and define their places in the postcolonial polity,” David M. Gordon argues that they “are surely more complicated than the sum of political interests or social functions that they serve” (2004:64, 65). The efficacy of Soli cosmology and the notion of *who* exactly “pulls the clouds” at this contemporary ceremony are much more complex than the public festivalized event suggests. In my article “Dialectics of Dance and Dress: The Performative Negotiation of Soli Girl Initiates (*Moye*) in Zambia,” I argue that contemporary ceremonies are riddled with slippages that potentially disrupt academic skepticism that frames these Zambian festivals as being nothing more than displays of standardizing and universalizing spectacle (Simbao 2010:65).

Analyzing the ambiguity of symbolism that fluidly shifts according to different and often contested needs, I explore issues of the sacred in relation to place and cosmological efficacy at a time of sociocultural globalization and momentous environmental change. Moving beyond Victor Turner’s notion of “unfolding, processual, dynamic dimensions of cultural change: the shifting relations among liminality, *communitas*, and structure” with its “implicit *consensual* dimension” (Weber 1994:527, 530), Donald Weber argues for a “borderland’ position” that



1 Chieftainess Nkomeshya Mukamambo II, Senior Chief of the Soli people in Lusaka Province Zambia, hosts the annual Chakwela Makumbi rain-making ceremony at Nkomeshya Village, Lusaka Province. October 2004.

2 Sylvia Masebo, then-Minister of Local Housing and Development, is one of many Zambian government ministers who regularly attend cultural festivals. Chakwela Makumbi ceremony, Nkomeshya Village, October 2004.

replaces reintegrative *communitas* with “resistive/resistant filiations of the border” (1995:525, 531). Cosmological engagements are complex and are at times disputed, meaning that interpretations of spiritual efficacy can be contested. As such, even graveyards, the most sacred sites of Zambian cultural festivals often used for rainmaking rituals, can be viewed as “contested sites”—a term Graham St. John uses for pilgrimage destinations, “where conflicting interpretations and reinforced divisions might frustrate the realization of *communitas*” (2001:50). Comparable to St. John’s reading of a contemporary Australian festival, contemporary Zambian ceremonies reveal “the presence of multiple publics maintaining sometimes conflicting, sometimes complementary interpretations of the event-space” (2001:50, 52).

These multiplicities and contestations cannot simply be attributed to changes caused by the increase of politicized heritagization³ and festivalization in the contemporary, globalizing postcolony, but are also due to the very nature of ritual with its “magmatic creative core that demands that human life—social, individual, maybe even biological—keep changing” (Schechner 1993:263). As such, change and accompanying contestations are nothing new, implying that the festivalization of culture need not be viewed as that which simply subsumes the sacred and cosmological efficacy of ritual.





3 Although Chakwela Makumbi frames the Soli chief as the primary rainmaker, behind the scenes it is often the ritual specialists (*bashikulu*) who “pull the clouds” in the Soli graveyard. Left–right: Headman Nkumbula, Headwoman Chitentabunga, and Headman Kalulu. February 2005.

4 During Chakwela Makumbi, as with many other annual ceremonies in Zambia, the highest-ranking chief hosting the event enters the arena last. Muzzle-loaders are shot into the air, alluding to the sound of thunder, as Chieftainess Nkomeshya Mukamambo II enters the arena. The chieftainess waves her flywhisk each time a shot is fired, symbolically spreading the thunder and rain amongst her people. October 2004.

Performance Sites of Contested Scripts. With the sociopolitical formalization of performances through the creation of annual festival events, sites of sacred cosmological engagement are being reformulated. Some places, such as graveyards, that were previously hidden from view are opening up, and while aspects of culture are being exposed and at times literally staged, new forms of privacy and secrecy are instituted. It is important not to assume that private or secret sites of performance are *only* sacred or that public arenas that stage cultural performances are nothing more than secularized sites of entertainment and political cachet that lack spiritual efficacy. As Chidester and Linethal (1995:15) argue, the “Sacred is often, if not inevitably, entangled in politics ... Sacred space is inevitably contested space, a site of negotiated contests over the legitimate ownership of sacred symbols.”

There are three key sites linked to Soli rainmaking in Nkomeshya’s village: (1) the performance arena, which is reconstructed annually for the public festival; (2) the graveyard, which is hidden from the general public and visited at other times of the year; and (3) the shrine, which is situated between these two spaces. This paper is framed around these three key sites, which I refer to respectively as places of display, seclusion or invisibility, and interplay. An important aspect of my research on traditional ceremonies in Zambia is the consideration of what takes place beyond the time frame of the formal festivalized events and outside the prescribed festival spaces. As such, my analysis of the Chakwela Makumbi ceremony includes (imaginary) places of legend (a fourth form of site, in this case) that inform or shape contemporary ideas about Soli society. It also includes events leading up to the festival, which demonstrate the complexity of the relationship between everyday life and the sacred, as well as representations thereof.





5 For the 2004 Chakwela Makumbi ceremony, Headwoman Muyansho painted a muzzleloader on the path leading to Chieftainess Nkomeshya Mukamambo II's throne, linking her rulership to her powers as a rainmaker. Nkomeshya is part of a group of politically astute "national chiefs" who regularly move around the country, and as such this link to the historical legend of the famous rainmaker Mukamambo I is an important way to secure ties to Soli forms of tradition. October 2004.

In terms of the various performances that take place at the annual Chakwela Makumbi ceremony—sacred ritual, political prowess performed by government leaders (Fig. 2) and traditional leaders, and cultural spectacle—slippage occurs in relation to the physical sites, revealing “negotiations over the ownership of the symbolic capital ... that signifies power relations” (Chidester and Linenthal 1995:16). According to Chidester and Linenthal, power is always asserted and resisted in the production of sacred space: “Since no sacred space is merely ‘given’ in the world, its ownership will always be at stake. In this respect, a sacred space is not merely discovered, or founded, or constructed; it is claimed, owned, and operated by people advancing specific interests” (1995:15).

As such, the construction and reconstruction of a Soli “script,” which might include the seniority of Soli chiefs, the degree of political leverage with the government or the authenticity of a particular version of Soli history, is linked to interpretations of the efficacy of rainmaking at the annual Chakwela Makumbi ceremony and at other times of the year. In other words, *who* is seen to bring the rain on the public stage is important, just as the use of legend to reconstruct the relationship between spiritual efficacy and political power is strategic, rendering the efficacy of performances at sacred spaces open to interpretation. “As an arena of signs and symbols, a sacred place,” write Chidester and Linenthal, “is not a fixed point in space but a point of departure for an endless multiplication of meaning. Since a sacred place could signify almost anything, its meaningful contours can become almost infinitely extended through the work of interpretation” (1995:18).

Who “Pulls the Clouds”? A scripted response to the question “Who brings the rain at Chakwela Makumbi?” would be “Chieftainess Nkomeshya,” who is a mobile and visible ruler whose power is broadcast nationally via print media, radio, and television. As the most senior of Soli chiefs today, she invites her subordinates Shikabeta, Bundabunda, and Mpanshya to her ceremony, creating an idea of Soli hierarchy that seems to work within a coherent unit, even though this hierarchy is contested in the Soli

history published by Manchishi and Musona in 1984. Despite the fact that the Soli Senior Chief is framed as the primary rainmaker today, historically it is not clear to what degree the Soli people were centralized and organized under chiefs, and in fact it has been suggested that the concept of chiefs did not exist at all.

In his 1950s fieldwork notes, John Argyle asserted that in the past there were a few people in this area with hereditary authority, and if someone attempted to proclaim himself or herself as a Soli chief, he or she would be killed.⁴ According to Headman Kabeleka, when Soli chiefs did come into being, the chief did not perform as the sole rainmaker, as is suggested by the Chakwela Makumbi annual ceremony, but the ritual specialists (*bashikulu*) played a significant role in rainmaking in a ritual context that was quite distinct from the current national framework of heritagized events. Similarly, Manchishi and Musona (1984:iv) suggest a less centralized past: “Offerings in the form of prayers to God (*Lesa*) through the spirits of their ancestors (*Mishimu*) are made usually by medicine men or village elders. If there is drought or a misfortune for example, elders will arrange for prayers (offerings). They go to a grave of some important ancestor and offer beer.”

The performance of Nkomeshya Mukamambo II as the key rainmaker at Chakwela Makumbi appears, then, to register a shift in the public presentation of Soli cosmology and social organization, as the chief is presented on this particular day as the focal point of rainmaking rituals. (Similarly, although the Priestess Bedyango of the related Leya people near the Victoria Falls traditionally called for rain through the collaboration of others at congregational *lwiindi* ceremonies, today the nationally renowned Leya chief, Chief Mukuni, publicly “pulls the clouds” at his annual festival). This shift to a public national stage, however, does not seem to translate into diminished spiritual efficacy, for every year the visitors at Chakwela Makumbi stand aghast as the clear skies cloud over and loud claps of thunder punctuate the quiet atmosphere of anticipation. Chieftainess Nkomeshya consistently manages to bring rain during the annual ceremony,



an act that has even been known to bring government ministers to tears. Despite changes in rainmaking rituals that might be viewed as being divorced from traditional modes of spiritually relating to the cosmos, it is hard to deny spiritual efficacy when one observes such occurrences firsthand.

The sociopolitical concern about *who* exactly “pulls the clouds” is reflected in current articulations of Soli legend, particularly the legend of an historic rainmaker, Mukamambo, who is now being reframed as an historic chief, Mukamambo I. This legend mirrors the current mobility so pertinent to “national” chiefs (Gould 2005:9) in Zambia, including Nkomeshya Mukamambo II, who established Chakwela Makumbi as a public rainmaking ceremony in 1998.⁵ This emerging pool of “national chiefs” has gained significant visibility in urban-based politics and these chiefs “share many of the cosmopolitan features of the professional elites of Lusaka” (Gould 2005:9). Although named chief in 1971, the following year Nkomeshya was handpicked as the Chilanga Constituency parliamentary candidate by the United National Independence Party (Nyaywa 1998:128) and enjoyed an almost twenty-year political career moving between the city, Chongwe *boma*, and the village, as well as shifting between the roles of politician and traditional leader.⁶ While this high political profile later facilitated the success of Chakwela Makumbi, due to the fact that she is the only female Nkomeshya chief since the nineteenth-century⁷ Mukamambo I, she is viewed by some to carry forth the legacy of this early Soli rainmaker who had a profoundly spiritual relationship to the natural environment.

⁶ Chakwela Makumbi, which means “pulling the clouds,” is a rainmaking ceremony that draws the sky to the ground. At the public, staged event, it is Chieftainess Nkomeshya Mukamambo II who is presented to the public as the one who prays to the Soli ancestors and to a Christian God for rain. October 2005.

On the other hand, the perspective that she perpetuates the legacy of the nineteenth-century Mukamambo I could be seen as a strategy to counteract contested ideas about which group of Soli people are the “proper” Solis,⁸ and which Soli chief ought to be the most senior chief (Simbao 2010:70, Manchishi and Musona 1984:10), linking cosmological efficacy to political potency.

AN IMAGINARY PLACE

The Legend of a Rainmaker’s Geo-Mobility. Amongst Nkomeshya’s Soli people, the nineteenth-century Mukamambo I is mythologized as a woman who could not be pinned down physically or geographically, and when she finally chose to settle, she asserted her own story of origin. While the contemporary Mukamambo II’s recent movement between the city, the *boma*, and the village was viewed negatively by some (Nyaywa 1998:120–30) but is largely seen as political capital today, the historical Mukamambo I’s ability to miraculously change location is framed in contemporary oral history as a manifestation of both



7-8 During the ceremony, Nkomeshya dips her flywhisk in water that has been saved from the previous year's rains and sprays this water in the directions of the four cardinal points, symbolically sharing the rain with her people. She then sprinkles the water over the seeds that she later plants. October 2004.

her political and her spiritual powers.⁹ Depicted in this oral history as wearing ivory bangles all the way up her arms and from her ankles to her knees and adorned with numerous conus shell disks (*impande*), she could be heard from afar as the shells and ivory jangled with each step that she took. If someone tried to capture her, she would suddenly turn into a burning tree, and people would come to light their cigarettes, cook on her flames, and eat for a long time. When the flames disappeared people would say, "Was that not Mukamambo? Where has she gone?" but by the time they realized who it was, she had turned into a pigeon and flown away. People would then run after her, but she would start to snow (*chikunka*), filling the sky with a white blanket that confused her pursuers. Headman Kalulu of Nkomeshya Village says that for hours no one would be able to see where he or she was going, and when the snow stopped, Mukamambo would be far, far away.¹⁰

It is interesting to consider where stories of snow might come from in an area where no snow is found. In a poem about Victoria Falls, a British woman describes the mist of the Falls as being a "wreath of snow" and David Livingstone similarly describes the mist from the waterfall as snow;¹¹ Edward Mohr (1876:325) refers to it as a "white veil of spray." More recently, the Leya Mukuni who lives near the Falls and is related to the Soli people told me a story of a historic Leya chief who used supernatural powers to make whole villages invisible through the use of mist or fog in order to confuse the enemy.¹² As such, the story of Mukamambo I turning into snow might be a story about her ability to use her supernatural powers to veil visibility and create a thick fog in order to strategically evade her enemies. Mukamambo I was "as quick as the wind," says Headman Kabeleka, who also claims that each time she bathed she turned into a dona fish,¹³ and Kalulu says that when her enemies tried to shoot her





9 During the Chakwela Makumbi ceremony, Nkomeshya demonstrates to her people and visitors how to clear a field with fire, making way for new agricultural growth and new fertility. At times fire is also used as a metaphor for human fertility. October 2004.

with guns, water poured forth from their weapons, causing her enemies to run away. Associated with the elements of fire, wind, and water, Mukamambo I escapes the grip of categorization: one day she would appear as an old woman, the next as a young girl.

Mukamambo I would also use her spiritual powers to fight the Chikunda,¹⁴ and although the Chikunda chief kept sending soldiers to capture her, she kept on killing them. According to Soli legend, this chief could not believe that the person who managed to kill his soldiers was a woman, and so Mukamambo I went to see him and took off her clothes to prove she was not a man. When they tried to stab her she would not bleed, and only water poured forth from her body. Eventually the Chikunda captured her at Chitameleza, a place, says Headman Kabeleka, where “God would drop a lot of lightning and thunder.”¹⁵ They cut off her head, but to their surprise she continued to talk, asking to be taken “home” so that she could rest.¹⁶ According to legend, the Chikunda thought she migrated from the Congo and so they carried her head all the way to Lubaland, but she said, “No, this is not my home; I am not Luba,” and when they carried her to Tongaland she again refused. It was only when she was taken to the Soli home of Makuyu, named after the *makuyu* trees—where Chieftainess Nkomeshya’s rural palace is today—that she rested, and her head finally stopped talking.¹⁷ This story, relayed to me by Nkomeshya’s Soli people, valorizes the power of mobility and the ability to shape-shift and emphasizes self-defined agency in terms of identification with place.

AN INVISIBLE PLACE

While the supernatural powers of the legendary Mukamambo I were used to veil visibility, the festivalization of culture potentially increases the dynamics of visibility and invisibility, as certain aspects of ritual are more self-consciously made visible, while other aspects are deliberately hidden from a general and often less-informed audience. Behind the scenes and before the festival begins, an enormous amount of activity occurs, and at times some of the activities—even rituals—appear to contradict what is formally made visible. Rather than reading this as a form of degeneration, which renders festivalized culture fake or inauthentic, I argue that this highlights the ambiguity and contingency of all ritual symbolism.

Symbolic Contingency. In a time of complex environmental change, it is important to remember that rain is not automatically considered to be a blessing, for the relationships among humans, their natural world, and their ancestral guardians need constant tuning. As such, cosmological interrelatedness and symbolic representations thereof are neither predictable nor foreclosed, for in ritual’s reliance on performance, it becomes as emergent and contingent as performance necessarily is (Askew 2002).

During the preparations for the 2004 Chakwela Makumbi, for example, heavy rains threatened the success of the ceremony. The day before the event, the organizers decided to perform a rain-stopping ritual called Kukola Imfula, where the head of an axe was hammered into a fire by a lastborn—the one who puts an end to fertility.¹⁸ During the Kukola Imfula, the onlookers pleaded, “The rains, pass the other way. Don’t rain here. We can be embarrassed; we have a ceremony. Rain after the ceremony.”¹⁹ While such an appeal might seem contradictory considering the fact that Chakwela Makumbi is a rainmaking ceremony, it demonstrates how symbolism is not fixed, but shifts according to context and need. While the Soli history of both blacksmithing (Manchishi and Musona 1984:22–28, Roberts 1976:103)²⁰ and rainmaking suggests a symbolic connection between metal, fire, and the fertility that the rains bring, in this case the metal head of the axe was put back into the fire to stop the rains. A day later, at the Chakwela Makumbi, Nkomeshya used fire to demonstrate to her people and visitors how the dry grasses on the land were

cleared so that new seeds could be planted. Here, fire makes way for agricultural growth, and in other contexts the symbolism of fire evokes a metaphor for human fertility.²¹

As seen in the Kukola Imfula, the Chakwela Makumbi, and in the context of sexuality, fire can both cause or represent fertility and put an end to it; it can pull the rain clouds closer and drive them away. This mutability of symbolism and the interpretive layers of efficacy are significant. Symbolism in the aesthetics of traditional ceremonies needs to be read within particular contexts, and it is important to consider that meanings outside of the defined space and time of festival events can sometimes differ from or add to that which appears to be showcased for the general public. Further, subtle covert layers often exist amongst what seems to be an obvious public display. If, as Kerr (1998) suggests, different members of an audience read events and symbols differently due to social position and ranges of depth of knowledge, the heterogeneity of “the public” highlights the importance of the performances, regardless of whether they occur at the nationally accessible arena or in the Soli graveyard.²² As such, even within choreographed events staged for broad audiences that include less-informed urbanites, politicians, tourists, and other visitors, spiritual efficacy might occur and sacred spaces might exist despite being invisible to many.

10 Although Nkomeshya’s people know how to plant seeds, for they rely on their own agricultural production all the time, Nkomeshya still presents this skill to them during the Chakwela Makumbi ceremony. However, rather than merely being a demonstration, this act of planting can be viewed as symbolic imitation that “wakes up” the ancestral spirits who are needed for agricultural fertility and growth. October 2004.



A PLACE FOR DISPLAY

Mutability of Ritual Practice and Display. While there is a tendency for scholars to view annual traditional ceremonies in Zambia as manifestation of pseudo-culture (van Binsbergen 1994)—an apparent formula construed by the contemporary drive to heritagize culture in our contemporary age of globalization—it is important not to allow this surface layer of public scriptedness to eclipse, on the one hand, historical or contemporary contestations, and on the other hand, the deep, fluid ritual activities and cosmic connections that are still able to occur in such contexts. Further, it is important not to assume that the performativity of ritual cannot pierce the veneer of this scriptedness. Richard Schechner's assertion is germane here: "It is clear that rituals are not safe deposit vaults of accepted ideas but in many cases dynamic performative systems generating new materials and recombining traditional actions in new ways" (1993:228). Even though these ritual performances are repeated year after year, a performance "script" never results in the same performance, following Schechner's idea of restoration of behavior, in which "performance originals disappear as fast as they are made" (1985:50). Rituals, he argues, change either by slow slippage over time or by "official revisions" made by the owners-heirs of the "authorized original" (1985:43–44), and the disputes that most readily occur behind the scenes of traditional ceremonies stem from differing opinions around who the owners-heirs are and what the so-called authorized original is. As "dynamic performative systems" (Schechner 1993:228), there is no fixed original ritual event that can be known, and as Butler argues in relation to gender, "a script can be enacted in different ways" due to the "non-referential" characteristic of performativity (1988:526, 522). Performativity, in J.L. Austin's (1962) sense of *doing* things with words, is often critical to ritual.

While Chieftainess Nkomeshya Mukamambo II successfully commands the sky at the annual staged event, which is transmitted nationally by the Zambian National Broadcast Corporation, ritual specialists (*bashikulu*) (Fig. 3) play a significant role behind the scenes, particularly at the Soli graveyard, which is hidden from public view. Even though the performed public event on the official day of the ceremony might appear to merely be a theatrical form of pseudo-ritual with somewhat muted spiritual relationships to the cosmos, a broader consideration of performance that regards Soli rainmaking within and beyond the parameters of the annual festival reveals that deep cosmological links are maintained, even during staged performances that tend to be interpreted as mere spectacle. This suggests that spectacle is not necessarily a form of degenerating ritual, as John MacAloon (1984:243) asserts. Similarly, cosmological efficacy is not ineludibly eliminated by contemporary forms of globalization and festivalization, for while MacAloon suggests that "Ritual is a duty and spectacle is a choice" (1984:243), Richard Schechner argues that "No performance is pure efficacy or pure entertainment" (1988:120). Rainmaking is based on contingent interpersonal relationships and performances that allow for improvisation and unpredictability,²³ breaking down the apparent dichotomy between "real" hidden rituals at the graveyard and "fake" rituals staged for a general public and national television.

As with most other ceremony "scripts," the order of entrance

into the performance arena is extremely important: the general audience is seated, then invited guests are seated; politicians enter from the least to the most important; and finally traditional rulers enter, also from the least to the most important (Fig. 4). Chieftainess Nkomeshya, who is referred to as the Guardian of the Seeds, finally makes her grand entrance into the arena waving her royal flywhisk as she walks along a pathway that leads towards a painting on the ground of a muzzleloader (Fig. 5).

As the chief was escorted to her throne during the 2004 and 2005 ceremonies that I observed, guns were fired into the air, suggesting thunder associated with rain clouds.²⁴ With each volley, the chief would wave her flywhisk in the air, spreading the sound of the thunder. As Headman Kabeleka suggests, when God brings rain, he does not do so quietly.²⁵ When Nkomeshya spreads the thunder, she in effect disperses the blessings and prayers for rain amongst all her people. Performance and sound amplify the painting of the gun on the pathway, evoking Nkomeshya's rainmaking powers and the action of her flywhisk.

Later in the ceremony, the chief used her flywhisk to further bless the agricultural pursuits of her people. After long government speeches, she knelt in front of bowls of seeds to begin a heartfelt and emotionally arduous prayer. Continually switching from Soli to English, Nkomeshya's prayer was directed to a Supreme Being (Lesa) framed as a Christian God, reflecting her devout Catholicism. Even though I have seen her pray directly to ancestral spirits in the Soli graveyard, this staged prayer was exclusively Christian, reflecting the fact that Zambia is officially a Christian nation. Nkomeshya's prayer (Fig. 6) was lengthy and all-encompassing, drawing in as many people as possible in a gesture of international cosmopolitanism:

I am presenting these seeds to you Lord. I am asking for these people to go back to their fields, to step in the mud. My Lord, we are asking the clouds in the sky to form, we are asking for raindrops ... I am asking so that the UNDP [United Nations for Development Program] should hear, my Lord. The whole world, all are of your creation, whether Whites, Indians, Blacks or what, all are your people, you gave them to us because in time of trouble they do help us.²⁶

After this prayer, rainwater that had been collected from the previous year was poured into a large dish. This rainwater never touches the ground and is kept in the Soli shrine for many months, and it is believed that Soli ancestral spirits reside in it. Nkomeshya then dipped her flywhisk into the rainwater and vigorously flung it into the air four times, spraying the water in different directions: north, south, east, and west (Fig. 7). Finally Nkomeshya dipped her flywhisk into the pot and sprinkled the rainwater over the seeds, thus symbolically dispersing the power of the ancestral spirits over the seeds that were now ready to be planted (Fig. 8).²⁷

While this performance in a contemporary festival arena might be viewed as a mere representation of ritual devoid of spiritual efficacy, it is important to consider how modernity redefines the sacred through the instigation of "counter-practices" (Kiong and Kong 2000:36) rather than obliterating the sacred in ritual. As Kiong and Kong write, in terms of both public and private sacred spheres, "new conceptualizations of space and time may be invented to cope with changing social circum-



11 The graveyard (*malimbo*) is a key space of Soli cosmology, and as the home to the deceased chiefs, it is believed to control the rains. After months of waiting for rain, in February 2005 the ritual specialists (*bashikulu*) went to fix the hole in Nyeleti Bimbe's gravestone in order to appease the offended ancestral spirit. February 2005.

12 At Nyeleti Bimbe's grave, an all-black, male goat was skinned, and the bones, skin, and gall were used to fill the hole in the gravestone before it was sealed with cement. It was believed that the hole in the gravestone had affronted the ancestral spirit, who in turn withheld the rain. The color black represents rain clouds, and shortly after the ritual, the rains appeared. February 2005.

stances" (2000:40). The formalization of rainmaking rituals in the creation of the annual Chakwela Makumbi ceremony does not obliterate the sacred within the festival, nor does it mean that other secret forms of rainmaking do not take place. Instead, there is a malleability and mutability to ritual practice (Kiong and Kong 2000:41), and the exposure of aspects of Soli rainmaking to a national or even international audience does not simply eradicate local needs (and contestations) in a top-down manner. As Kiong and Kong argue, "Modernity is not an omnipotent force that changes social, cultural, and spatial conditions unilaterally. Conditions of modernity are mediated through local circumstances, and the specific intersection of forces of modernity with local conditions is only meaningfully examined if grounded in specific empirical contexts" (2000:41).



13 On occasion, Nkomeshya prays for rain at the Soli graveyards, too, and in order to coax the rains that were overdue, a “proper” gravestone had to be laid at the grave of Nkomeshya’s aunt. Women danced and sang, and lay prostrate on the ground as a demonstration of respect to the ancestral spirits. March 2005.



Efficacy and Symbolic Imitation. After her prayer at the 2004 Chakwela Makumbi ceremony, Nkomeshya led a group of people to a field at the side of her palace and demonstrated how to clear a field with fire (Fig. 9), how to dig a hole in the earth with a hoe, and how to plant a seed (Fig. 10). When I saw this performance for the first time I assumed it was merely a staged act for urbanites and visitors attending the annual festival who might be unfamiliar with rural self-subsistence. Even when I was told that Nkomeshya performs this demonstration to indicate to her own people that the time has come for them to go and plant their seeds, this explanation did not seem to make sense, for surely

people who live directly off the land know exactly when and how to plant their seeds. It was only when I compared this action to similar performances in historic Leya rituals that predated current festivalized events that I understood this demonstration as more than a staged act for visitors.

Describing a related *lwiindi* ritual that he observed in southern Zambia in the early 1970s, Mubitana writes that after the blessing of the seeds through prayer and the pouring of libations, “the women then pick up their hoes and start to cultivate, *in a symbolic manner*, the area around the *kaanda* where the blessed seed is now scattered in *symbolic imitation* of the sowing that is



to begin in a few weeks or so” (1977:70; my emphasis). At the contemporary Chakwela Makumbi ceremony, Chieftainess Nkomeshya performs almost exactly the same actions. That a similar type of demonstration was performed before *lwiindi* rituals became festivalized as annual and national ceremonies suggests that these actions may have been performed by ritual specialists for their communities to demonstrate that “in ritual, doing is believing” (Myerhoff 1984:157). Further, this symbolic action could be read as a way of “waking up” the spirits, indicating to them that planting is soon to begin and special care is needed. This suggests then, that seemingly staged demonstrations at traditional ceremonies should not necessarily be read as pseudo-ritual presentations, for traditional forms of symbolic imitation might indeed play a role in efficacy too.

As Nkomeshya dug with her hoe at the 2004 Chakwela Makumbi, she explained her actions to a responsive crowd:

Nkomeshya: What I am doing here, I want to dig the land, which the Lord has given unto us so that we plant the seeds. In His mercy the seeds will germinate for all of you to have food. In God’s presence, there is no one who is poor. In God’s presence, there is no one who is rich. All are his children and with God. There’s no one bad. All those who don’t believe in Him at a time like this, they all receive water. It is up to them to choose whether to use the water or not. If you think you are too smart, refuse the water; continue being smart and in the future your smartness will be over, because no one has bones in the stomach. How many have bones on their stomach?

14–15 For the 2004 Chakwela Makumbi ceremony, Headwomen Muyansho produced various spiritually informed paintings made from clay (*ink-andashi*) at the performance arena. “Mukamambo II” was written across a threshold on the way to Nkomeshya’s throne. October 2004.



Crowd: No one!

Nkomeshya: The time we've been seated there until now, the bones we had on our stomachs, God has melted, isn't it?

Crowd: Yes!

Nkomeshya: We are going to plant these seeds. We are symbolizing this, so that these people, when it rains, they go straight to their fields and plant.²⁸

During this performance at Chakwela Makumbi, the chief not only used symbolic imitation as a way of leading her people to the fields, but also as a way of instigating broader cosmological awareness of the need to plant and the need for rain. As such, the staged performance was not simply produced to illustrate Soli customs to an uninformed audience, but was also used as an integral part of doing ritual and igniting efficacy. While such staged performances do not necessarily render ritual impotent, conversely, ritual that takes place in secluded areas more typically associated with sacredness, such as graveyards, is neither irrefutably efficacious nor devoid of human interpretation.

A PLACE FOR SECLUSION

"*The Sky is Dry.*" The shift to a national stage with the emphasis on Nkomeshya as the key Soli rainmaker does not mean that covert performances have ceased to exist, for private rituals performed by the ritual specialists still take place beyond the time-

16-17 According to Headwoman Muyansho, the cow represents agricultural wealth for the Soli people and is also a symbol of Nkomeshya's clan. (At the 2004 ceremony Nkomeshya wore a cowskin-patterned robe). The painting of the clay pot represents the sacred pot that is used to store the rain from the previous year, and the gourd represents the traditional beer that is poured on the ground in the rain shrine in order to "wake up" the ancestral spirits during an appeal for rain. October 2004.

frame of the annual ceremony in a context in which the only spectators besides the living ritual participants are usually the ancestral spirits themselves. The graveyard (*malimbo*) is a key space in Soli cosmology, and as the home of the deceased chiefs, it is believed to control the rains. In Nkomeshya Village in February 2005, the December and January rains had not yet arrived, and scorching heat threatened the destruction of the already planted maize. At the chief's command, the ritual specialists went to inspect the graveyards and they found them to be overgrown and damaged. They decided that they needed to clear the grass, fix the damaged gravestone belonging to Nyeleti Bimbe, and appease the offended ancestral spirit by performing a ritual (Fig. 11).

As we walked to the graveyard to fix the gravestone and perform the necessary ritual, *bashikulu* Kalulu sang on top of his voice:

Mutupeko menshi afwe oh!
Give us water oh!
Bona wee
See now!



Onam kwilu ncho kwayuma amwe nga ni chain?
Look the sky is dry. What's the matter with you?

Chorus:

Mwana Kalulu ulalilinga chain oke?
Baby Kalulu what are you crying for?
Ndalilinga imfula ame
I want rain

ame ndapenge kung'anda kwakame wo!
I have suffered at home, wo!
Wo! Ndandanga menshi amwe
Wo! I want water

Oh lya woo!
Oh lya woo!
We mwana leka kulila,
You child, stop crying
Tumutwale kuli Mukamambo
We take her to Mukamambo
kuli kakuyu yakutekelela
where they are watered mukuyu trees.²⁹

At the graveyard, the four ritual specialists slaughtered an all-

black male goat on top of Bimbe's gravestone and poured the blood and gall into the hole (Fig. 12). As with the Leya and Tonga rainmaking rituals, it is essential that the animal is entirely black, for black is the color of rain clouds. As Kabeleka explains, "The goat must be a male black goat. It's these days that we buy red or white coffins, but long ago the dead slept in black coffins only and the rain long ago, they used to call it *likumbi lishipa* meaning dark clouds. So that's why we use black things, because black stands for dark clouds as well as the color of the coffin."³⁰ The specialists then skinned the goat, roasted it on a fire, ate the meat, and stuffed the skin, bones, and gall into the hole in the grave. Dancing on the gravestone Kalulu sang about Chakwela Makumbi—"pulling the clouds"—and offered up prayers, begging the deceased chief for rain.

On our way home from the graveyard there was a very light sprinkle of rain, and the ritual specialists announced that they would all dream that night to find out when the real rains would come. Dreams act as a kind of liminal space in which the ancestors and living ritual specialists reach out to each other in order to understand why the rains are being withheld. That night the ancestor Chief Mapulanga appeared in their dreams, angrily waving his flywhisk. Mapulanga informed all the ritual specialists that it would rain within eight days, and before these eight days were up, the rains did indeed soak the earth.



18 Paintings of a calabash and a bow and arrow were also painted at the Soli shrine (*ntangu*) just behind Nkomeshya's palace. The words "Muka Mambo II, Nkomesha Bimbe, Soli" were written across the threshold. Built between the Soli graveyard and the ceremony arena, the shrine serves as a counterbalance, drawing the ancestral spirits from their abode to the public space of the living. October 2004.

Layers of "Real" Rainmaking. In this instance, the real rain (the rain that sufficiently soaked the earth) only arrived a while after the covert performance of the ritual specialists that called upon the ancestral chiefs directly. This brings to mind Myerhoff's reflection that "rituals have consequences that reach past the moment when they occur; their outcome is usually to be known only in due time" (1984:170). As such, efficacy can be a result of an accumulation of spiritual efforts and supplications. It is important to note that Chieftainess Nkomeshya's rainmaking role is not limited to the national stage of the annual ceremony, for on another occasion she too attended to the Soli graveyards. In March 2005, Headman Kabeleka announced that we were going to celebrate together by placing a "proper" gravestone on Nkomeshya's aunt's grave. It was believed that the lack of a "proper" gravestone was causing her spirit anguish, and in turn she was holding back the rains. This time we went to the

women's graveyard, which is separated from the site where the men are buried, and we sang the song about "pulling the clouds" as we danced around the grave. A group of women periodically rolled on the ground, first to the right and then to the left, clapping their hands in a gesture of respect (Fig. 13).

Once the marble stone had been laid, Chieftainess Nkomeshya prayed at her aunt's grave, and in contrast to the public Christianized prayer at the main arena of the Chakwela Makumbi ceremony, she spoke directly to the deceased relative, asking her why she had stopped the rain. Nkomeshya complained that people had planted seeds, but the earth was very dry and there was hunger. She appealed to the aunt and the ancestors to be ambassadors and to speak to God, seeing as they were in the spirit world. She spoke directly to them with amazing emotion in her voice and expression on her face as if she were looking the ancestors directly in the face. She then knelt down at the foot of the grave and started to plead, waving her arms around and holding her hands up in a prayerful gesture. After a long prayer she moved to her mother's grave and pleaded with her as well, ending her prayer by clapping in respectful thankfulness, saying "*twakabomba*" (we thank you). Amazingly, even though it was very hot and had been hot and dry for a number of days, during Nkomeshya's prayer large grey clouds came over us, and it started to thunder. A ferocious wind suddenly whipped up, seeming to appear out of nowhere, and all

the trees surrounding the clearing of the graveyard swayed and whirled, recalling the story about Mukamambo I who “moved like the wind.” Very soon it began to rain.

While I have thus far contrasted the rainmaking in the graveyard (associated with the ancestral spirits) to the rainmaking on a national stage (associated with Nkomeshya and a Christian God, Lesa), it is important to note that the Chakwela Makumbi also actively calls ancestral spirits to the main stage of the ceremony. Such references, however, are veiled in aesthetic codes that might elude the gaze and comprehension of the average visitor. Although displayed at the arena (the space of supposedly overt performance), a number of paintings produced on the ground that are believed to be inspired by the spirits, reveal ambiguous, veiled ways of engaging with the spirit world.

A PLACE FOR INTERPLAY AND COUNTER BALANCE

Drawing the Sky to the Earth. The paintings at the festival arena consist of various symbols of fertility and rainmaking, drawing the sky—and its rain—to the ground (Fig. 14). The day before the 2004 Chakwela Makumbi ceremony, Headwoman Muyansho created paintings on the ground at the arena which she says were spiritually informed.³¹ Using clay (*inkandashi*), she painted a crocodile, a cow, a calabash, a pot, a bow and arrow, various abstract patterns, and some text, such as the word “*mukamambo*,” which was written on a threshold at the end of the pathway that leads to Nkomeshya’s throne (Fig. 15).

According to Muyansho, the cow (Fig. 16) represented farming, for cows are an important sign of agricultural wealth for the Soli people, and it also represented Nkomeshya’s clan, the clan of the cow, which was further embodied in the cowskin pattern on Nkomeshya’s robe. Near to Muyansho’s painting of a cow was a painting of a calabash (Fig. 17), which represented the traditional beer that is typically drunk and poured on the ground for the Soli ancestors during rainmaking rituals. A painting of a clay pot (Fig. 17) recalled the container used for storing the previous year’s rainwater. This water houses ancestral spirits and was sprinkled on the seeds that were about to be planted. Just before the public component of the Chakwela Makumbi began, rituals took place at the Soli shrine (*intangungu*) (Fig. 18) that is behind Chieftainess Nkomeshya’s palace.

Referring to the historical shrine (*kaanda*) of the Leya people, who are related to the Soli, Mubitana says that the fact that it was deliberately built away from the graveyard and was placed in the village created a “counter balance” in order to “draw the ancestral spirits from their abode at the graveyard to the abode of the living” (1977:67). Similarly, this Soli shrine was built away from the graveyard and was placed closer to where people live. The ritual specialists dressed in black and painted their faces with clay (*nkundwe*) that was mixed with ash,³² a substance with rich symbolic value in terms of shift and transformation, suggesting the movement from hot to cold, and from life to death and to the afterlife. As they entered the shrine, they chanted the names of deceased Soli chiefs and poured libations of beer onto the ground where paintings of a calabash, a bow and arrow, and a pot echoed the paintings at the arena. Across the threshold of the entrance to the shrine were the painted words “Mukamambo II, Nkomeshya, Bimbe, Soli.” As the ritual specialists physi-

cally crossed the threshold—a symbol of liminality, ambiguity, and mediation (like the space of dreams and graveyards)—they connected the two worlds, the world of the living and the world of the dead. Crossing the threshold, they spoke to the ancestors, saying, “Thank you, thank you, it’s us your grandchildren who have come here. We have brought the beer as we did some time back. We’ve come to ask that even this year, this Chakwela Makumbi, we want a lot of rain, enough that we must grow a lot of food. We don’t want hunger. We want to grow a lot of maize, so that we eat with happiness.”³³ They then sang songs in praise of the ancestral Mukamambo as they threw seeds onto the shrine and poured libations of beer.

Stepping back across the threshold as they exited the shrine, the ritual specialists chanted, “We thank you Lord, because it is you who knows all the spirits. Move in this area of the Soli people. It is you who is responsible for all the spirits. Today, we are thanking you very much because your children are gathered here to ask for rains. We thank you, we thank you, Mukamambo, forever!” Through song, performance, and spiritual intercession, they invited the ancestral spirits into the world of the living, beckoning them to move amongst the living and observe the performances. Just as thresholds activate a crossing-over from the spirit world to the human world, so too does the shrine create a counterbalance between the hidden graveyard and the arena of annual spectacle, drawing the spirits into a public performance space that might easily be interpreted as not being conducive to sacred activity.

CONCLUSION

In their article “Religion and Modernity: Ritual Transformations and the Reconstruction of Space and Time,” Kiong and Kong consider literature on religion and modernity and critique the secularization thesis that suggests that “religious values have been replaced by secular ones” tending “towards a static understanding of ritual.” What this thesis fails to address, they argue, “is how the functions, meanings and forms of rituals, change, and social, economic, and political circumstances shift” (Kiong and Kong 2000:30).

Shift, be it to do with power, symbolism, or the environment, is significant to the Chakwela Makumbi ceremony, which is about “pulling the clouds,” that is, drawing the sky closer to the earth so that people can engage with their environment in a way that enhances the possibility of survival. Key to the oral history of the Soli people is the story of a powerful woman who commanded the sky and whose relationship to the cosmos was regarded with awe. The legend of Mukamambo I is all about shift; the mythologized change of location, change of activity in the environment, and the change of the physical shape of this celebrated figure. Mukamambo I could turn into snow to veil visibility and win battles; she could fly like a pigeon, pour forth like water, and bring thunder and rain. Despite the fact that the contemporary Chakwela Makumbi ceremony has, in many ways, scripted the social, political, environmental, and spiritual history of the Soli people in line with a national (and global) trend to heritagize culture, it is important to recognize the ways that it too embraces shift and allows cosmological engagement to move beyond simplistic scriptedness.

Efficacious relationships to the cosmos still persist, and these relationships are fluid and open to complex interpretation. While certain performances at festivals appear to be mere illustrations for ignorant audiences, such performative actions can successfully ignite the cosmos in particular contexts of supplication. Symbolism is not fixed, and as such, the drawing of the sky to the earth through the production of various rituals, drawings, sculptures, and performances perpetually generates new possibilities for cosmological engagement. Even though the spaces of Chakwela Makumbi seem to be divided into spaces of display that are separated from spaces of seclusion and invisibility, it is important to recognize the physical spaces of interplay and counterbalance (such as the Soli shrine) as well as the symbols and actions of counterbalance (such as thresholds, paintings, and forms of

supplication), which draw the sacred into everyday, contemporary spaces. As such, it becomes evident that “a sacred space is not defined by its spatial limits,” but rather “it is open to unlimited claims and counter-claims on its significance” (Chidester and Linenthal 1995:18). Such an understanding of cosmological efficacy and sacred space renders the Chakwela Makumbi and other festivals in Zambia and beyond open to spiritual surprise, interpretive openness, and the possibility of counterclaims that are so important to sacred spaces, rendering them political too.

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Notes

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1 As I argue in my PhD dissertation (Simbao 2008:4–5), while many ceremonies have long performance histories (often in the form of rituals, harvest festivals, initiations, and inaugurations), the recreation of performance in contemporary annual events inevitably involves the embellishment and overlooking of certain aspects of cultural heritage. Rather than being an “invention of tradition” (Ranger 1983, revisited in 1993) or even a process of renovating tradition (Kodesh 2001), practices of embellishing and overlooking simply are characteristics of tradition. As Kwame Anthony Appiah (1992:32) writes, the phrase “invention of tradition” is a pleonasm, as tradition has always and will always involve perpetual processes of change that combine in new ways with aspects of continuity (Appiah 2006: 107).

2 In their book *Ceremony! Celebrating Zambia's Cultural Heritage*, Guhrs and Kapwepwe provide an overview of the numerous traditional ceremonies that take place in contemporary Zambia, many of which have been formally gazetted by the Zambian government. Due to the fact that, broadly speaking, most ceremonies have similar formats and that this format is largely repeated from year to year, one could argue that they present a scripted form of Zambian tradition. However, in my work I emphasize the slippages and contestations that occur and argue that no performance script can actually be repeated, for performance exists ontologically in its disappearance (Phelan 1993:147).

3 The recent drive to festivalize and heritagize culture is manifested in the proliferation of monuments, memorials, “natural” heritage sites, intangible heritage performances, and museums worldwide. As Jean and John Comoroff (2001:629) suggest, “Heritage has become a construct to conjure with as global markets erode the distinctive wealth of nations, forcing them to redefine their sense of patrimony—and its material worth.” I refer to this construct as a *process of heritagization* rather than an act of simply protecting existing cultural heritage, as this reveals the fact that cultural inheritance, or “cultural patrimony” (Appiah 2006:118) is actively designated and performed. Even though an inheritance is usually passed on within a “family” (however this is defined), the process of heritagization highlights the fact that people outside of this “family,” such as UNESCO, are often the ones designating and defining the beneficiaries.

4 John Argyle's 1958 fieldwork report, “First

Report on Field Work amongst the BeneFutwe Branch of the BaSoli” in the Institute for Social and Economic Research (INESOR) Archives, Lusaka.

5 It does not seem as if Chakwela Makumbi existed in the form it takes today prior to 1998. John Argyle, who conducted research on the Soli people in the 1950s, states that the previous Nkomeshya chief never mentioned such a ceremony (personal correspondence, September 13, 2007). However, this does not mean that the modern ceremony is not based on certain rituals that used to take place.

6 See Simbao (2008:20–208) for more detail about her political career and how this affected her mobility and the establishment of her cosmopolitan identity.

7 The dating of Mukamambo I is unclear. Brelsford (1968:77) suggests that she might have died in 1889, but he also states that this is not a certainty. Oral stories assert that she lived in the eighteenth or even the seventeenth century.

8 According to the oral history of Nkomeshya's village, Nkomeshya's Soli are considered to be the “proper” Soli, amongst the earlier people found in Zambia. Headman Kabeleka asserted the Nkomeshya Soli “have always been there” and were not part of the migrations from Lubaland. The Solis from the villages of Chief Bundabunda, Chief Mpanshya, and Chieftainess Shikabeta are said to have migrated with the Lala and Lamba from Lubaland and were incorporated by the “proper” Soli so that they could help to fight off the Soli enemies—the Chikunda (interview with Kabeleka, Nkomeshya Village, Chongwe Village, October 2004). Others, however, disagree. For example, the research done by Manchishi and Musona frames the Bundabunda Soli chief as the one who was supposed to be the most senior of Soli chiefs. They argue that the ordaining of Nkomeshya as Senior Chief was actually a mistake on the part of the colonial administration.

9 This description of Mukamambo I and her astonishing mythological powers is based on two conversations, one with Headman Kabeleka (Kabeleka Village, October 27, 2004) and the other with Headman Kalulu (Kalulu Village, February 4, 2005).

10 Interview, Headman Kalulu, February 2005.

11 In Macnair (1954:153) Livingstone is cited as saying that “the mass of vapor leaps quite clear of the rock, and forms a white unbroken fleece all the way down to the bottom. Its whiteness gives the idea of snow ... the snow-white sheet seems like myriads of small comets rushing on in one direction” The artist Thomas Baines's (1864:488) description is remarkably

similar: “a jet ... formed comet or rocket-like trains of spray and vapor, till the whole, before reaching the abyss, was transformed into a broken, snow white, fleecy stream, bearing but little resemblance to actual liquid water, and reminding me more of the descriptions I have read of the Staubbach in the Alps than anything else.”

12 Interview, Chief Mukuni, Lusaka, July 19, 2005.

13 According to Headman Kabeleka, Mukamambo I could turn into a dona fish (Mami Wata) whenever she was near water, and so when she went to Livingstone (near Victoria Falls), she would transform into this mermaid-like creature; see Simbao 2008.

14 Nkomeshya's Soli people talk about the Chikunda as the historical enemies of the Soli. The Chikunda were well known as traders and were actually slave soldiers who escaped from black slave armies of Portuguese estates on the lower Zambezi. They were what Roberts (1976:125) calls “a new African ‘tribe’ ... formed under European pressure, but ... thoroughly African in its customs and institutions.” (See also Lancaster 1974). Today the Chikunda have their own traditional ceremony, Dantho, run by Chief Mpuka in Luangwa District. (See the document “Historical Background of the Chikunda People of Luangwa-Feira” in file: Mbambala Ceremony, ZCSLP/101/15/77, Lusaka Provincial Cultural Office archives).

15 Interview, Headman Kabeleka, Nkomeshya Village, Chongwe District, October 27, 2004.

16 Thanks to Allen Roberts for pointing out that talking severed heads is a common theme of regional folklore (see Siegel 1985), and that beheading is an important trope (see White 1997, Lalu, 2009, and Roberts 2012).

17 Interview, Headman Kabeleka, Nkomeshya Village, Chongwe District, October 27, 2004.

18 As the blacksmith White Chinondo says, one can't use the metal part of a hoe (*makasu*); it has to be the head of an axe (*kembe*). A hoe is usually associated with female fertility and an axe is usually associated with male fertility. Interview, White Chinondo, Chitentabunga Village, February 3, 2005.

19 Recorded in Nkomeshya Village, October 24, 2004.

20 As in many other African contexts of blacksmithing, there are restrictions on Soli blacksmiths around sexual conduct during specific times, and in the past women were not allowed to enter the smithing area, which was usually located far from the village (Manchishi and Musona 1984:23). Roberts (1976:103)

says that in the nineteenth century, the Soli were well-known blacksmiths and that many furnaces can still be seen along the upper Chongwe valley.

21 According to Mrs. Malasha, fire is used as a metaphor for human fertility when a matron has to check on the sexual well-being of a newlywed couple if they have not produced a child within a year. The matron would traditionally make the young wife put matchsticks in her hair, and after each round of sex, the husband would take one of the matchsticks out. The next morning, if the matron were given the matchsticks (indicating that the man was capable of sexual intercourse) she would shout out, "There is fire in this house!" If, however, she were not given the matchsticks, she would presume that the man was "infertile" (or impotent). See also Moore (1999) for discussion of the metaphorical relationship between fire and gender in southern and eastern Africa.

22 Even amongst Nkomeshya's four ritual specialists who perform rituals in the graveyard (Headman Kabeleka, Headwoman Chitentabunga, Headman Kalulu, and Headman Nkumbula) there are varying degrees of knowledge on certain topics. Nkumbula mentioned that he grew up in the city and therefore doesn't have knowledge of certain things.

23 For example, during the 2005 Chakwela Makumbi ceremony, Chieftainess Nkomeshya became overwhelmed with spiritual burden and unexpectedly collapsed during her public rain prayer.

24 Interview, Headman Kabeleka, Nkomeshya Village, Chongwe District, October 27, 2004.

25 Interview, Headman Kabeleka, Nkomeshya Village, Chongwe District, October 28, 2004.

26 Prayer recorded October 30, 2004. Interestingly, she suggests in her prayer that the water that floods the Lozi floodplains (creating the impetus for the Kuomboka ceremony) is a result of her prayers: "it becomes unbearable for the Litunga to remain in the first capital because Mukamambo has called for the rains." This is important in the context of the scriptedness of ceremonies, as the Kuomboka ceremony is often seen to be the premium ceremony, while others are considered to be mere copies. Here Mukamambo positions her rainmaking powers as the very catalyst for the Kuomboka.

27 A centering device of this sort called a *lilindwe* was used by earlier Tabwa to produce or prevent rain. See Roberts 2000.

28 Recorded at Nkomeshya Village, October 30, 2004, trans. Idah Phiri.

29 Recorded February 14, 2005, trans. Idah Phiri.

30 Interview, Kabeleka, Chalimbana, March 19, 2005.

31 Muyansho says that it was the ancestors' idea that she produce paintings at the arena and the shrine, and she says that each year the paintings are different, "depending on which spirits come. The spirits tell me which design to paint." Certainly the designs that I saw in 2004 and 2005 were very different. In this section I discuss her designs from the 2004 ceremony. (Interview, Nkomeshya Village, January 25, 2005).

32 The munga tree is burnt for this ash, as it has a very fine ash that is not poisonous.

33 Recorded at the shrine just behind the palace, Nkomeshya Village, October 30, 2004.

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