INTERIOR SWELLING

On the Expansive Effects of Ancestral Interventions in Maputo, Mozambique

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What is on the inside of a relation? Might we imagine the inner workings of a relational form detached from the elements that it connects? In short, how might a relation look when seen from the inside? These are questions that apparently require an impossible analytical operation, since relations only seem to emerge as functions of the elements that they connect. If the relational form is deduced from its endpoints (*relata*) rather than from some interior properties, logically it cannot be examined in isolation. This reading, however, is based on a (widely accepted) conceptual premise that might not only be challenged but even perhaps transcended. In claiming that a relational form is predicated on the elements it connects, the implicit assumption seems to be that the latter are defined by their inherent exteriority; that is, in order to be related, two elements are necessarily outside each other *and exterior to the relation that keeps them tied together*. What happens, then, when the distinction between inside and outside is inherently fuzzy? How might a relational form be conceived if the elements connected cannot maintain their assumed exteriority? These are crucial, albeit paradoxical, questions well worth exploring.

Inspired by key social philosophers, such as Deleuze, Whitehead, and Bergson, a recent body of work within philosophy and the human sciences has exam-

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ined how social phenomena arise as provisional and often volatile assemblages of persons, things, and ideas.[1] As argued by Manuel DeLanda in *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*, these emergent constellations are constituted by "relations of exteriority," implying that "a component part of an assemblage may be detached from it and plugged into a different assemblage in which its interactions are different. In other words, the *exteriority of relations implies a certain autonomy for the terms they relate*."[2] Here, DeLanda highlights a key assumption guiding the large majority of recent relational studies: connected entities are ipso facto exterior to each other. Put somewhat differently, it is presupposed that in order to establish a relationship (however fleeting it might be), component A is outside and therefore at a relative distance from component B. In the anthropological literature—and particularly in studies of interpersonal connectivity—we find a parallel emphasis on the exteriority of related terms. Indeed, since Mauss's seminal study of gift-giving and reciprocity, a widely held assumption has been that any social relation is logically predicated on the interaction of two (or more) parties connected through distance.[3] Marilyn Strathern has consistently emphasized how relational distinctions between, say, donors and recipients produce durable social organizations.[4] As such, the source of agency is always outside the acting agent, who merely functions as the effect of other people's actions.[5]

1. K. Ansell Pearson, *Germinal Life: The Difference and Repetition of Deleuze* (London: Routledge, 1999); S. J. Collier, "Global Assemblages," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 23.2–3 (2006): 399–401; Robert Cooper, assemblage notes in *Organized Worlds: Explorations in Technology and Organization with Robert Cooper*, ed. R. C. H. Chia (London: Routledge, 1998), 108–30; Manuel DeLanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2002); DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (London: Continuum, 2006); N. K. Hayles, "(Un)masking the Agent: Distributed Cognition in Stanislaw Lem's 'The Mask,'" in *Accelerating Possession: Global Features of Property and Personhood*, ed. Bill Maurer and Gabrielle Schwab (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 229–62; Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1993); Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); G. E. Marcus and Erkan Saka, "Assemblage," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 23.2–3 (2006): 101–6; Aihwa Ong and S. J. Collier, eds., *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005); John Phillips, "Agencement/Assemblage," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 23.2–3 (2006): 108–9; Janet Roitman, "The Garrison—Entrepôt: A Mode of Governing in the Chad Basin," in Ong and Collier, *Global Assemblages*, 417–36; Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, "Inside the Economy of Appearances," *Public Culture* 12.1 (2000): 115–44; Philip Turetzky, "Rhythm: Assemblage and Event," *Strategies* 15.1 (2002): 121–38; Couze Venn, "A Note on Assemblage," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 23.2–3 (2006): 107–8; J. M. Wise, "Assemblage," in *Gilles Deleuze: Key Concepts*, ed. C. J. Stivale (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 77–87.

2. DeLanda, *New Philosophy of Society*, 10–11; emphasis added.

3. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W. D. Halls (London: Routledge, 2004).

4. Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Strathern, "The Relation: Issues in Complexity and Scale," *Prickly Pear Pamphlet*, no. 6 (1994); Strathern, "Social Relations and the Idea of Externality," in *Cognition and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Symbolic Storage*, ed. Colin Renfrew and Christopher Scarre (Oxford: Oxbow, 1998), 135–47.

5. Marilyn Strathern, "Qualified Value: The Perspective of Gift Exchange," in *Barter, Exchange, and Value: An Anthropological Approach*, ed. Caroline Humphrey and Stephen Hugh-Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 169–91, at 179.

I would like to stretch the analytical scope on relationality by examining how seemingly exterior entities might relate through a process of what could best be described as "interior swelling." By doing so, my objective is not so much to question the extensive work on relational exteriority but, rather, to consider the analytical purchase of a deeper attention to blurry phenomena that do not exhibit an absolute distinction between exteriority and interiority. The analysis is based on ethnographic data on a particular form of expansive social relationality in the southern part of Mozambique.[6] According to people living on the northern outskirts of Maputo, the social-cum-cosmological universe operates on the basis of competing spiritual forces that continuously threaten to subvert current states of equilibrium. Although incapable of achieving complete control, any human being might potentially "link up" to these spiritual forces and thereby significantly increase his or her agentive potential. Still, by allowing spiritual forces to operate from within (as it were), the exteriority of relations can no longer be withheld. Whereas conventional relationships are characterized by a distance between elements that are inherently outside in relation to each other, the "spiritualization" of one's agentive potentials creates an immediate interior swelling that brackets the otherwise functional distinction between interiority and exteriority. In contrast to the relational sociality in Melanesia, which Strathern describes—where individual personhood emerges as a "pluralized composite of social relationships" through the incorporation of exterior elements—in Mozambique it seems as if exterior elements are assimilated through their similarity to the agentive force.[7]

In other words, interior swelling occurs by aligning with elements that are a priori, though paradoxically so, parts of the assimilating force. This seemingly counterintuitive operation makes it difficult to maintain the argument for exteriority as a necessary requirement of relationality. At the same time, however, processes of interior swelling are always problematic, since outside elements (both material entities, such as land, or immaterial forces, such as another person's luck) tend to exert a level of inertia and thus impede a complete assimilation by given spiritualized agents. I want to examine these processes of interior swelling and discuss what implications the fuzzy distinction of interior from exterior might have for our understanding of social relationality.

6. This article is based on fourteen months of fieldwork in Mulwene on the northern outskirts of Maputo, Mozambique. The primary fieldwork was carried out between September 2004 and August 2005. Additional data were collected from September to October 2006 and again in February 2009.

7. Marilyn Strathern, "Making Incomplete," in *Carved Flesh, Cast Selves: Gendered Symbols and Social Practices*, ed. Vigdis Broch-Due, Ingrid Rudie, and Tone Bleie (Oxford: Berg, 1993), 41–51, at 48.

Mùnhù i mùnhù

During my everyday conversations with residents living in Mulwene, a peri-urban neighborhood on the northern outskirts of Maputo, we would often end up discussing the seemingly unfair behavior of others and, particularly, the attempts of others at increasing personal wealth through illegitimate assimilation and misuse of personal relationships. On many occasions, the conclusion would be that the moral constitution of Mozambican society had reached a new low, without anyone's being interested in improving the situation. With a small headshake, I would be told that "*mùnhù i mùnhù*"[8] (xiChangana [lit.]: "a human being is a human being"), at which point the discussion would have clearly reached its end.[9]

Based on my ongoing research into dynamics of conflictual relations among residents of the area, I initially understood the expression "*mùnhù i mùnhù*" as a proverbial reference to the widely held belief that all individuals will seek to improve their positions even to the detriment of others.[10] By concluding their analyses of social life in Mulwene with "*mùnhù i mùnhù*," my interlocutors were, in a sense, reminding themselves to maintain proper distances from social others, since approximation implicitly entails the possibility of misappropriation.[11] Toward the end of my first prolonged stay in Mulwene, however, I realized that there might be more to the expression than I had assumed initially. While discussing a particularly serious land conflict with Nelson, my closest friend in Mulwene, I made a passing reference to "*mùnhù i mùnhù*" as a crystallization of destructive selfishness. Nelson smiled and nodded a few times before responding:

> Well, Morten, any person is dangerous [*perigosa*]; that is something everyone knows. . . . But *mùnhù i mùnhù* has other meanings. It might indicate that I am actually admiring what someone else is doing. Per-

8. Depending on the contextual framing, *mùnhù* can refer to a person, an individual, or a human being. See Bento Sitoe, *Dicionário Changana-Português* (Maputo: Instituto Nacional do Desenvolvimento da Educação, 1996).

9. In general, conversations with my informants were made in Portuguese. Important concepts and phrases in xiChangana were later examined and discussed. A total of twenty-one distinct regional languages are spoken in Mozambique. Although Portuguese is the official language, it is the mother tongue of only 0.25 percent of the population, and only 39.6 percent know how to speak it. The most widely spoken language is Emakhuwa (26.3 percent), followed by xiChangana (11.4 percent)—which is the predominant language in Maputo—and Elomwe (7.9 percent) (www.ine.gov.mz).

10. See, e.g., Morten Nielsen, "Shifting Registers of Leadership: An Ethnographic Critique of the Unequivocal Legitimization of Community Authorities," in *State Recognition of Local Authorities and Public Participation: Experiences, Obstacles, and Possibilities in Mozambique* (Maputo: Ministério da Justica/Centro de Formacão Juridica e Judiciária, 2007), 159–76; "Contrapuntal Cosmopolitanism: Imitation and Distantiation as Forms of Relatedness Among House-Builders in Maputo, Mozambique" (paper presented at the conference "A Cosmopolitan Anthropology?," University of St. Andrews, September 15–16, 2009); "Mimesis of the State: From Natural Disaster to Urban Citizenship on the Outskirts of Maputo, Mozambique," *Social Analysis* 54.3 (2010): 153–73; "Futures Within: Reversible Time and House-Building in Maputo, Mozambique," *Anthropological Theory* 11.4 (2011): 397–423.

11. Morten Nielsen, "Regulating Reciprocal Distances: House Construction Projects as Inverse Governmentality in Maputo, Mozambique," DIIS Working Paper (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2009), 33.

haps my neighbor just bought a new car and I am wondering how he could possibly afford that. Then someone will say that "he [the car owner] is a person!" That means that he acquired the car in his own way [*na maneira dele*] and we shouldn't ask more about that. The thing is . . . it was most likely his ancestors [*defuntos*] who helped him out. They see more than past, present, and future, you know. They can see their entire family and everything that belongs to them. They knew that the car was his to begin with.

As Nelson told me, the intervention of ancestral spirits can most often be discerned from the way you are told that the acting agent is "a person." If formulated as a question and said in a high-pitched voice ("isn't he a person?"), it signals that the person mentioned is prepared to do whatever it takes to achieve a desired objective. "Ihh! Then it's bad"—Nelson lowered his voice: "He did something out of necessity and his ancestors helped him to see it. Anyone who has needs [*necessidades*] will do that [accept help from ancestors]."

A few days later, I discussed the issue with Santos, who was living with his wife, Graça, and their three children in a small, two-room cement house near the marketplace in Mulwene. As Santos was currently unemployed, we would often hang out when I had no other planned activities in the area. "*Mùnhù i mùnhù* . . . that means that people are complicated"—Santos was walking toward a little shed next to the house but stopped while talking: "It's like this, Morten. . . . When a person really wants something, it is his obligation to get it. There's no backing out! [*Não há que recuar!*]. His spirits will help him see that it is rightfully his." I asked Santos if it caused problems when two persons desired the same thing. "Ah! How can it be a problem when you know it's already yours?"—Santos resumed walking toward the shed: "You have to be determined . . . you have to succeed [*tem que conseguir*]."

Hence, as I gradually came to realize, "*mùnhù i mùnhù*" did not merely refer to unwanted forms of selfishness and greed. Quite surprisingly, it seemed to map an internal relationship between ancestral spirits and their living descendants that afforded the latter particular agentive potentials. According to Nelson and Santos, deceased ancestors essentially conjured a kinship-based universe that allowed living descendants to identify their own constitutive components. Put somewhat differently, ancestral spirits revealed a world that was already interior to the acting agent. Still, as both my informants also emphasized, there seemed to be a capriciousness or latent tension inherent to the spirit/human relationship, suggesting that the elicitation of a kinship-based universe was anything but unproblematic. In order to unpack this complex relationship, we must turn to a detailed discussion of some cosmological principles widespread in the southern part of Mozambique.

Spiritual Omnipotence

In "Spiritual Agency and Self-renewal in Southern Mozambique" (1996), Alcinda Honwana argues that

> in western thought the notion of personal agency is autonomous, as humans are separated from divinity: they are either for or against divinity. But, in the context of southern Mozambique, human and spirits become one single entity, because spirits possess people, live and grow in people and are there on a permanent basis. Thus, *humans and spirits become part of the same agency as they share a combined and integrated existence*. Possessed individuals assume the personality of the spirits and the spirits adapt themselves to people; a dependency is created between the two making impossible the existence of one without the other.[12]

Through a series of detailed ethnographic analyses, Honwana convincingly shows how ancestral spirits and living humans constitute one sole agentive force. Not only do people assume the personalities of the spirits, the "spirits live and grow in people's bodies."[13] A dynamic interior assemblage of spirit and human is consequently established, infusing both with a social meaning that is projected outward as a reflection of the cosmological principles guiding social life in the local universe.

In his classic study of the Tsonga, Henri Junod examines the "omnipotence" of ancestral spirits resulting from their control of everything in the lives of their descendants.[14] Still, although the deceased ancestors are considered as "true gods endowed with divine attributes," their moral comportment is strikingly humanlike, as they are suspicious, jealous, and resent any lapse of attention.[15] Their capacity to affect or even condition ongoing practices is thus limited not only by their human affects but, equally, by the kinship-based relationality through which they assert themselves. As Junod tells us,

> the domain in which they [the ancestral spirits] exercise their power is limited, being only *that of their own family*; they watch over their descendants, bless or punish them, but they are absolutely indifferent to other men, and do not trouble their affairs more than they did when still alive on earth.[16]

This powerful influence over the living is based on the ancestors' superior knowledge of all that pertains to the lives of their descendants. As a transposition of the system of seniority that guides the social life of the living, there is among the spirits a functional hierarchy based on the individual ancestor's level of knowl-

12. Alcinda Honwana, "Spiritual Agency and Self-renewal in Southern Mozambique" (PhD diss., School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1996), 2; emphasis added.

13. Honwana, "Spiritual Agency," 6.

14. H. A. Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe*, vol. 2, *Mental Life* (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1962).

15. Junod, *Mental Life*, 425.

16. Junod, *Mental Life*, 425–26; emphasis in original.

edge.[17] And to be sure, everyday life in Mulwene is guided and often conditioned by an interior relationship between the living and a hierarchy of "omnipotent" ancestral spirits asserting their powers through the knowledge they possess of their descendants' lives.

As Daniel, my near neighbor, told me, the importance of these interior relations are particularly pronounced between the living person and his or her namesake. Name giving essentially constitutes an extension of the living person (xiChangana *nàvàlàlà*) whereby his or her personhood is formed in a dialectical reciprocal relationship between the living person and the deceased spiritual namesake (Portuguese *xará*; xiChangana *màb´ìzweni*).[18] During infancy, Daniel was seriously ill and therefore brought to a local healer (Portuguese *curandeiro*; xiChangana *nyanga*) who discovered that the illness was caused by his father's brother, who was already "growing" inside Daniel and thus needed to be acknowledged as spiritual namesake. Interestingly, the namesake is not necessarily the leader of the hierarchy of ancestral spirits operating within. "No, it's not always the namesake"—Daniel shook his head several times: "Inside me [*dentro de mim*] there are several spirits and one of these is the oldest. You know that in every family, one member is head? So, those who are inside me, they are all my ancestors. And within this hierarchy [*hierarquia*], the head of the family is also the leader of the spirits." Hence the ancestral spirits within Daniel are governed by Uankanela, the oldest female member of his lineage willing to identify herself.

When a person dies and the body is buried, the spirit remains "as the effective manifestation of his or her power and personality."[19] Death cannot be understood as the end of a person's existence, since spirits endure in the bodies of their descendants. Although often—and mistakenly—taken as a manifestation of the (Western) human soul, the ancestral spirit exhibits a somewhat different form of unity with the living person.[20] At the moment of death, the ancestor is incorporated as part of an already existing hierarchy of spirits operating within the living person. The ancestral spirit's capacity to affect the lives of the living varies according to the level of knowledge of the descendant's life that he or she possesses. A person's interior constitution thus needs to be understood as a composite unity of differences, what Deleuze defines as a "disjunctive synthesis" that emerges from a "transforming addition that connects by creating differences."[21]

17. Honwana, "Spiritual Agency," 49; J. F. Feliciano, *Antropologia Económica dos Thonga do Sul de Mocambique* (Maputo: Arquivo Histórico de Mocambique, 1998), 270.

18. H. A. Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe*, vol. 1, *Social Life* (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1962), 38.

19. Alcinda Honwana, "Healing for Peace: Traditional Healers and Post-War Reconstruction in Southern Mozambique," *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 3.3 (1997): 293–305, at 296.

20. H. G. West, *Kupilikula: Governance and the Invisible Realm in Mozambique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 116–17.

21. Cf. the "disjunctive synthesis" that, according to Deleuze, emerges through a "transforming addition that connects by creating differences." See James Williams, *Gilles Deleuze's Logic of Sense* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 27.

This differential composition is obviated, however, when assimilating seemingly exterior elements. Through processes of interior swelling, the acting agent is reconstituted as a singular interiority expanding outward.

Interior Swelling

Junod describes how the absence of a clear idea of infinity among the Tsongas does not preclude its "technical" conceptualization as "that which does not reach the point where it ends."[22] This fuzzy layout of the world fundamentally conditions the reach of ancestral gods (*psikwembu*) by canceling out the notion of distance. Thus, a Tsongan informant tells Junod that their ancestors "are like heaven, the sun and the moon. There is no place where it can be said that the moon is not."[23] As such, the ancestral spirits are inherently "omnipresent" beings with the capacity to be everywhere in the world. Surely it is self-contradictory to posit omnipotent divine beings able to be everywhere at once but capable of exercising their powers only within the limited domain defined by the extension of their families. What needs to be explained, then, is the limited scope accorded to the exercise of divine ancestral power. To do so, we need to return to the meaning of "*mùnhù i mùnhù*."

In August 2006, a huge piece of land was cleared behind the new police station in Mulwene and plot markers put into the ground to outline at least two blocks of sixteen rectangular 15 x 30–meter plots. According to several of my friends living nearby, it was most likely the district administrator, Matusse, who had orchestrated the clearing and parceling out of land in order subsequently to distribute (or sell) individual plots to relatives and friends.[24] After my afternoon visit at Santos's place, he accompanied me across the ridge bordering the cleared piece of land. While gazing at the easily visible plot markers, I commented that I was not quite convinced that Matusse was the kingpin. "Morten . . . honestly [*sinceramente*]!"—Santos grabbed my arm and forced me to stop: "Isn't he a person? You know that he has mouths to fill, right? We all have our individual flaws [*defeitos*]. . . . Anyone who acts only in accordance with the law is not a person, because then he wouldn't have any needs [*necessidades*]. . . ." For a while, we walked in silence before Santos resumed talking: "Matusse has strong ancestors [*antepassados*], you know. They helped him see that he has a right to this land."

Although Santos's reference to ancestral spirits seems to serve primarily as a means to legitimize Matusse's alleged appropriation of land, it also unfolds a peculiar relational assemblage that emerges because its components (ancestral spirits/Matusse/land) have been aligned ipso facto. Put somewhat differently,

22. Junod, *Mental Life*, 425.

23. Junod, *Mental Life*, 425.

24. At independence in 1975, the Frelimo party nationalized all land and, since then, transactions in land have been illegal.

through the association an interior world emerges that seems to be already made of the connected elements. Given the previous analysis of spiritual omnipotence, Santos's comments seem to suggest that local kinship-based universes might be elicited that have no outside.[25] Through a process of interior swelling, they wedge themselves into the social fabric by assimilating new elements that appear to be already part of the acting force. Indeed, as ancestral spirits come to guide the actions of their descendants, a social configuration is established around the latter by gradually adding new components. In this regard, the cleared land emerges as an identifiable component at the moment when it is also recognized as being already part of the acting agent. It is folded inward, as it were, and thereby instantiates the agent's interior swelling. And, as Santos made succinctly clear, a proper person (*mùnhù*) is nothing but this expansive growth prompted by the intervention of ancestral spirits.

Donations with Price Tags

In August 2004, when I first met Inácio Tivane, he was already ill. After a public meeting in Mulwene that we had both attended, he was going to the local market to buy groceries, and I followed along. I quickly noticed that he looked quite feverish and several times had to stop to catch his breath. "It's not good, Morten"—Inácio rested his head against the trunk of a *nkanhu* tree: "I need to get my things sorted out so I can get well again." Apparently, his current illness was related to a still-unresolved land dispute between Inácio's family and a young soldier who was once allocated a piece of land by Inácio's now-deceased mother. "This really hurts me [*isto é que me dõe*]," Inácio looked past me and sighed: "I might die if this thing is not resolved soon."

During the next days, I spent a considerable amount of time with Inácio, either in the huge plot of land that he shared with his two brothers and their families or in one of the small liquor stalls at the marketplace, where we would meet up for a beer to avoid the ruthless afternoon sun. According to Inácio, his current hardships could be traced back to 1985, when nearly all buildings in the military compound (*paiol*) near Mulwene's southern borders were destroyed in a devastating fire. Many young soldiers who had been occupying small pieces of land within the compound were left homeless and potentially at risk of losing their jobs if they had to move to another part of Maputo. At the time, Mulwene was inhabited only by *nativos* living off the produce of small-scale agricultural

25. Cf. Marilyn Strathern, "Environments Within: An Ethnographic Commentary on Scale," in *Culture, Landscape, and the Environment: The Linacre Lectures 1997*, ed. Kate Flint and Howard Morphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 44–71.

farming and by a group of newcomers building houses in the southern part of the area. Hence, given the possibility of finding vacant land in Mulwene, the commandant soon approached Boavida Wate, the land chief in the southern part of Mulwene, who agreed to find plots for the unfortunate soldiers. Wate immediately contacted Inácio's mother, Inés Tivane, who owned a vast piece of land near the compound. Inácio's father had died several years earlier, and as Inés was no longer able to cultivate the land herself, she soon agreed to cede two sizable plots to the commandant.

In 2000, Mozambique was hit by the worst flooding in the country's history. More than 700 people died, and over 550,000 lost their homes to the heavy rains.[26] In Maputo, the municipality chose to resettle flooding victims in Mulwene, which, at the time, was one of the only remaining areas with vacant land near the city center.[27] During the following years, the neighborhood was radically changed through a rapid influx of newcomers who had realized the possibility of acquiring relatively cheap land in an area with improved infrastructure and a functional transportation system that could take them into and back from the city center. This process of intensified urbanization had significant consequences also for residents living in the area prior to the flooding in 2000—residents such as the two young soldiers occupying plots ceded by Inés Tivane. As the area was gradually being parceled out, the majority of residents were allocated regular 15 x 30–meter plots by local authorities.[28] In 2002, Inácio and his two brothers consequently acquired three adjacent plots that they converted into one very large piece of land measuring 45 x 30 meters. During the same process, the two soldiers were allocated individual plots near the military compound. As Boavida Wate later told me, by occupying plots that were parceled out by local authorities, the informal agreement between the two soldiers and Inés Tivane was irrevocably annulled and replaced with a formalized recognition of use rights by the neighborhood administration. As almost a confirmation that their occupancy was legitimate, when one of the soldiers later solicited a building permit for a projected construction project, it was immediately issued.

26. Frances Christie and Joseph Hanlon, *Mozambique and the Great Flood of 2000* (Oxford: International African Institute, 2001), 37.

27. Morten Nielsen, "In the Vicinity of the State: House Construction, Personhood, and the State in Maputo Mozambique" (PhD diss., Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen, 2008), 40–58.

28. As I have described it elsewhere, this process of land distribution was highly contested and continues to ignite heated debates among residents in Mulwene. See Nielsen, "Filling in the Blanks: The Potency of Fragmented Imageries of the State," *Review of African Political Economy* 34.114 (2007): 695–708; "Shifting Registers of Leadership: An Ethnographic Critique of the Unequivocal Legitimization of Community Authorities," in *State Recognition of Local Authorities and Public Participation: Experiences, Obstacles, and Possibilities in Mozambique*, ed. Lars Buur, Helene Kyed, and Terezinha da Silva (Maputo: Ministério da Justica/Centro de Formacão Juridica e Judiciária, 2007), 159–76; and "Mimesis of the State." Ideally, residents previously occupying land in the area would be allocated one 15 x 30–meter plot per occupant above the age of eighteen. In reality, however, this principle was consistently broken and manipulated by differently positioned agents; for example, *nativos*, local community chiefs, and municipal officials attempting to make a profit by parceling out and subsequently selling plots of land to needy newcomers.

Two years later, in 2004, Inácio Tivane realized that the two 15 x 30–meter plots occupied by the young soldiers actually belonged to his own family. "I was really sick," Inácio told me: "Initially, I thought that it was malaria but it wasn't. . . . It was my ancestors telling me that I needed to get back what was rightfully mine." I asked Inácio how they could be his plots. Not only was his family's land located in a different section of Mulwene; his mother had moreover donated the plots to the young soldiers who were subsequently resettled in an area nearer the military compound. From my perspective, then, there was no "interior" relation between Inácio's family and the newly assigned plots. "You know that I have three other brothers as well, Morten?"—Inácio wrinkled his forehead and looked directly at me: "There are thirteen persons living in our three plots and still several members of my family are without a place to live. . . . How can it not be my land? You know, you should talk to Boavida Wate. He'll confirm that my mother handed over [*entregou*] the two plots to the soldiers but that they never paid her anything in return. . . . They should have paid her something!"

At Inácio's suggestion, I later visited Boavida Wate, the former "land chief" [*chefe da terra*] who had initially identified the two plots for the commandant. And indeed, as Inácio expected, Wate confirmed that the two soldiers never paid anything to Inés Tivane. "I went there with the mother," Wate told me: "Those military people were given the land by the mother [*foi dado com a mãe*]. Inácio wasn't even here; he was working in South Africa at the time. Those military people came crying at the Tivane house and then they called me. I showed them [the soldiers] the site . . . 'my sons, you can stay here. Build your houses and stay here . . . .'" Hence, whereas Inácio was now claiming that the soldiers were required to compensate his mother financially, Wate maintained that the two plots were donated by Inés Tivane. A few weeks after my conversation with Wate, this difference of opinion was further emphasized when I visited one of the soldiers with Inácio, Boavida Wate, and the local quarter chief, Fernando Sitôe.[29] Inácio wanted the young soldier to know about his hardships and thereby—so Inácio hoped—persuade him into ceding a part of the plot to Inácio's younger brother, who was desperately looking for a place to stay. Unfortunately, the soldier remained adamant about his rights to the land and even complained to Sitôe that Inácio was pestering him with these unfounded claims.

After leaving the plot, I accompanied Sitôe, who was heading toward the neighborhood leader's office, and asked whether he thought that Inácio's claims were legitimate. "Well, I think that the military guy is right"—Sitôe shook his head and smiled: "The Tivane mom [*mãe Tivane*] gave that land to the commandant and now Inácio wants to be compensated. He's not right, you know, but who argues with the ancestors . . . ?" I said goodbye to Sitôe near the entrance

29. Mulwene is divided into 56 quarters (*quarteirões*), each with approximately 100–120 households.

to the marketplace and returned to Inácio, who was sitting in the shade outside their house while his wife was preparing lunch for the family. Judging from his sweaty face and increasingly skinny appearance, I concluded that he was still suffering from some illness. Perhaps in order to keep his breath, Inácio responded only in short staccato sentences, and still it was quite obvious that he was frustrated about the situation.

> I don't even want to begin talking about witchcraft [*feitiçaria*] and all that. . . . But the pain that the spirits in my heart inflict upon me. . . . Something will happen. It's not that I want to do witchcraft on them but something will happen, that's for sure [*é certo*]. If he [the soldier] says that he doesn't want to cede a part of the land, at least he should pay for her [Inés Tivane's] gravestone. . . . He should go there [to the grave] and put up a gravestone. I don't want his money. He has to pay her.

The young soldier never compensated the Tivane family financially or put up a gravestone at Inés Tivane's gravesite. Inácio continued to be ill for several weeks before finally visiting a local diviner, who confirmed that the spirit of his dead mother wanted her son to get back the two plots from the young soldiers, as they rightfully belonged to the Tivane family. However, as Inácio told me in 2006, it would have been impossible to get their land back without resorting to witchcraft, and so he preferred trying to find a reasonable solution through Sitôe, the local quarter chief. After prolonged negotiations, Sitôe found a vacant plot that was allocated to Inácio's brother in April 2006. Not long after, Inácio told me that his health was slowly improving; when he visited the diviner during his summer holidays, she declared that the current arrangement had finally satisfied his dead mother.

To be sure, ancestral interventions do not always have desired or even expected outcomes. According to widely shared cosmological beliefs in southern Mozambique, the world is constituted as a chaotic whole of competing and counteracting forces that continuously threaten to undermine any provisional equilibrium.[30] Likewise in northern Mozambique, the Muedan cosmology (as described by H. G. West) has it that all phenomena contain both constructive and destructive properties and that it is always uncertain whether they operate in beneficial or malevolent ways.[31] To maintain proper distance from those important but also potentially malevolent forces in the world, which both empower and weaken one's agentive potentials, is therefore of crucial importance.

It is in this capricious environment that omnipotent deceased ancestors

30. Nielsen, "Contrapuntal Cosmopolitanism," 398; cf. Junod, *Mental Life*, 367–68.

31. H. G. West, "Sorcery of Construction and Socialist Modernization: Ways of Understanding Power in Postcolonial Mozambique," *American Ethnologist* 28.1 (2001): 119–50; West, *Kupilikula*, 116–17.

extend the agentive potentials of their living descendants through processes of interior swelling. In a sense, spiritual interventions operate by circumventing a set of cosmological principles that stipulate the importance of proportional distance to any element in the surrounding world. When Inácio discovered that an ancestral need for land had caused his illness, the two plots occupied by the soldiers were configured as already belonging to the Tivane family. Hence, rather than maintaining proper distance from inherently capricious entities, the plots were assimilated or, rather, folded inward through a process of interior swelling. Spiritual intervention is inherently a risky business. Given the instability of the world, it is always uncertain whether such attempts will eventually backfire and leave the initiating agent exposed to the intrusive strategies of others. From this perspective, by assuming that the land was already on the inside of the Tivane family, as it were, Inácio was exposing himself (and his family, for that matter) to the workings of outside and potentially malevolent forces. By allowing his ancestral spirits to intervene in the lives of the living, he was testing the force of fundamental and deep-seated cosmological principles.

As the meanings of "*mùnhù i mùnhù*" reveal, it is by challenging the workings of the world that proper personhood is actualized. Consider, for comparison, Roy Wagner's illuminating analysis of the so-called figure-ground reversals among the Barok.[32] During mortuary feasts, the Barok world is symbolically overturned and negated. At the entrance to the stone enclosure where public rituals are conventionally held, a large forest tree is erected upside down with its roots in the air and its branches seemingly buried in the ground. Around the base of the tree (as if hanging from the inverted branches), nubile women sit like opened fruits and thus take "the role normally ascribed to men, marrying into other clans and giving them nurturance," while atop the taproot that was previously identified with the maternal ancestress of the clan, a big man stands on a pile of pigs slaughtered for the feast. Hence, as Wagner tells us, the mortuary feast

> is . . . no simple inversion, but a methodical and consistent figure-ground reversal (*pirewuo*) of the meaningful imagery of Barok life. It does not simply negate, it consummates its denial by demonstrating also that the inversion makes as much sense as the order that inverts it—that a feast on tree roots is indeed a feast . . . that a man can be taproot of a maternal line, that young women, who constitute lineages, can also be seen as nurturance bestowed elsewhere.[33]

By overturning the world and thus reversing figure and ground, the Barok become aware of their own creative inventions. What is revealed during the

32. Roy Wagner, *The Invention of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); "Figure-Ground Reversal Among the Barok," in *Assemblage of Spirits: Idea and Image in New Ireland*, ed. Louise Lincoln (New York: George Braziller, 1987), 56–62.

33. Wagner, "Figure-Ground Reversal," 61.

mortuary feast, then, is essentially the power [*lolos*] that people have of creating and transforming images. Indeed, as Wagner concludes, the mortuary feast is a "revelation of a transcendental power over society, rather than a statement of the things society is about, its principles, forces, ideals or goals." As such, figure-ground reversals constitute "an image of transformation formed by the transformation of an image."[34] In a similar manner, in the southern part of Mozambique the capacity to circumvent deep-seated cosmological principles is revealed through spirit interventions. As seemingly exterior elements are folded inward, the workings of the world are challenged, and otherwise potentially malevolent forces come to operate to the benefit of the acting agent.

It is now clear why my friends in Mulwene consistently emphasized that spirit intervention was a complicated affair (Nelson told me that "*mùnhù i mùnhù*" was "bad," and Santos argued that it means "people are complicated"). Irrespective of whether it was a district administrator parceling out plots to benefit his family or a local resident claiming property rights to a piece of land that had never belonged to his family, it was undoubtedly a risky business to challenge fundamental principles structuring social life. The potential risk notwithstanding, it was this manipulation of the fuzzy boundaries between inside and outside that was not only revealed but also normatively valorized through processes of interior swelling.

Transpersonal Consumption

As Marshall Sahlins has argued recently, kinship denies the necessary independence of related elements of all kinds, as well as the necessary substantiality and physicality of the relationship."[35] Referring to the work of J. Prytz Johansen, Sahlins describes how current members of the Maori tribal group use a "kinship I" to refer to the group as a whole. Hence "the members of Maori tribal groups are not only identified by their ancestors but themselves characterized by the latter's legendary idiosyncrasies of behaviour, appearance, speech, and the like."[36] From a different though parallel perspective, Strathern has described the composite nature of personhood among the Hageners in Papua New Guinea.[37] A person is both individuated and plural by containing, as internal differentiation, the female and male elements of its making. When a person (or a group) engages in a productive relationship with an "other," it must therefore detach a part of itself to establish an external differentiation. Among Hageners, then, the person

34. Wagner, "Figure-Ground Reversal," 62.

35. Marshall Sahlins, "What Kinship Is," pt. 2, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17.2 (June 2011): 227–42, at 227.

36. Sahlins, "What Kinship Is," 228.

37. Strathern, *Gender of the Gift*; "Qualified Value," 179. See also Marilyn Strathern, "Writing Societies, Writing Persons," *History of the Human Sciences* 5.1 (1992): 5–16, and "The Whole Person and Its Artifacts," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33.1 (2004): 1–19.

appears to be extended beyond its physicality to include "others" who are at the outset defined as exterior beings. As Strathern argues, "in being multiple, [the Melanesian person] is also partible, an entity that can dispose of parts in relation to others."[38]

The assemblage of ancestral spirit and living descendant seems indeed to deny the independence of the related elements. Through the conjunction, a unique transpersonal being is constituted that potentially expands the agentive potentials of both. Spirit interventions seem, however, to challenge the notion of transpersonal agency (or "mutuality of being," as Sahlins describes it) at the threshold of the surrounding world and, in particular, with regard to those seemingly exterior elements that the acting agent is assimilating. Whereas most studies of transpersonal agency appear to suggest that related elements maintain their autonomy, it seems rather that interior swelling obviates this exterior distinction. Here we might return to Strathern's work on composite personhood in Melanesia. Among Hageners, the source of a person's agency is always located outside him or herself in relationships to people and things in the surrounding world. To elicit a desired effect from an "other," it is consequently important to manifest oneself in a particular way. Indeed, "one . . . has to make or create oneself in a form that can be consumed by others."[39] To capture the dynamics of interior swelling, we need to turn Strathern's statement on its head and instead argue that spiritual intervention is a way of creating oneself *in a form that can consume others*. It is not, however, merely a question of consuming or assimilating components defined by their exterior differentiality. Rather, interior swelling is a way of folding inward what is (in the act) constituted as being already on the inside of the acting agents. As a form of consumption, interior swelling is therefore essentially similar to what is conventionally understood as "endocannibalism."

According to the existing body of work on Amazonian and Melanesian cannibalism, we need to make a distinction between exo- and endocannibalism.[40] Whereas exocannibalism refers to the incorporation of a hypersubjectified enemy

38. Strathern, *Gender of the Gift*, 185.

39. Marilyn Strathern, *Property, Substance, and Effect: Anthropological Essays on Persons and Things* (London: Athlone, 1999), 259.

40. Beth Conklin, *Consuming Grief: Compassionate Cannibalism in an Amazonian Society* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001); Carlos Fausto, "Feasting on People: Eating Animals and Humans in Amazonia," *Current Anthropology* 48.4 (2007): 497–530; Peter Hulme, "Introduction: The Cannibal Scene," in *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*, ed. Francis Barker, Hulme, and Margaret Iversen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1–38; Shirley Lindenbaum, "Fore Narratives through Time: How a Bush Spirit Became a Robber, Was Sent to Jail, Emerged as the Symbol of Eastern Highlands Province, and Never Left Home," *Current Anthropology* 43.S4 (2002): 63–73; Lindenbaum, "Thinking about Cannibalism," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004): 475–98; L. B. Steadman and C. F. Merbs, "Kuru and Cannibalism?," *American Anthropologist* 84.3 (1982): 611–27; Aparecida Vilaca, "Relations between Funerary Cannibalism and Warfare Cannibalism: The Question of Predation," *Ethnos* 65.1 (2000): 83–106; Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *From the Enemy's Point of View* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), and "Exchanging Perspectives: The Transformation of Objects into Subjects in Amerindian Ontologies," *Common Knowledge* 10.3 (Fall 2004): 463–84.

through the eating of outsiders,[41] endocannibalism (that is, eating members of one's own group) denotes a transformative process intended to eradicate the corpse and thereby sever relations both between the dead person's body and spirit and between living people and the spirits of the dead.[42] Whereas exocannibalism involves the assimilation of the animating properties of a person, endocannibalism refers to the collective consumption of the inanimate traces of a member of the community in order to create commonality among the eaters (rather than with the eaten).

If endocannibalism can be understood as a form of physical self-devouring to reproduce or extend a collectivity, is interior swelling not its relational manifestation? What might from the outside be taken as a relationship between exterior elements is consumed by the acting agent who, paradoxically, swells up from the inside. Through the self-devouring process, internal differentiations between ancestral spirit and living descendant are consequently obviated as the acting agent extends him or herself outward. Strikingly, although the extension of agentive potentials is made possible through the intervention of an omnipotent ancestral spirit, the interiorizing act (such as Inácio's attempts at claiming property rights to the soldiers' plots) is necessarily initiated by an individuated being. Through processes of interior swelling, assimilated elements are constituted as being already inside the active agent, which is a way of reversing a causal sequence so that the force making possible the interiorizing act is created in and through the latter. Taking the example of the Tivane family in Mulwene, we might describe this seemingly counterintuitive dynamics by saying that the "kinship I" that structures Inácio's claims is an aftereffect of making the claim ("We own the land and therefore we want it back!").

If interior swelling can be seen as an extension or enlargement of the agent through the assimilation of what is already "inside," then what might the analytical implications be for our understanding of relationality in social life? When the distinction between "inside" and "outside" is inherently fuzzy, the relational form changes accordingly. What initially appears as *a relation based on distance between differentiated elements* is obviated when the interiority of the acting agent is extended outward. Here we might think of Gilles Deleuze's discussion of the Leibnizian notion of interior "folds" and "inflections." According to Deleuze's reading of Leibniz, subjectivity needs to be seen as folds or inflections of the surrounding world. We are all constantly traversed by actions, events, and images that make us essentially nothing but clusters of "powers to affect and to be affected."[43] The individual thus emerges as a particular folding or inflection

41. Viveiros de Castro, "Exchanging Perspectives."

42. Lindenbaum, "Thinking about Cannibalism"; Steadman and Merbs, "Kuru and Cannibalism?" Cf. Sahlins, "What Kinship Is," 231.

43. Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (London: Athlone, 1993); see also *Deleuze and the Fold: A Critical Reader*, ed. Sjoerd van Tuinen and Niamh McDonnell (New York: Palgrave, 2010).

of the world: the individual expresses a world that is already contained within it. Deleuze illustrates this configuration with an example often used by Leibniz: "Adam sins." Understood as a Leibnizian fold, this sentence can be rephrased as a verbal proposition of the form "sinning is what happens in Adam."[44] Here, the general attribute "sinner" is anchored in the particular event of sinning that Adam enfolds and actualizes. Put somewhat differently, sinning is the predicate contained in the subject Adam. Rather than being somehow dependent upon a pregiven and defined subject, an individual point of view thus emerges as a fold or inflection around the event contained in the predicate (such as "sinning"). As Deleuze argues, "a subject will be what comes to the point of view, or rather what inhabits the point of view."[45]

Following Deleuze, we might argue that interior swelling enfolds an exterior world and thus transforms a relation based on distance into the swelling of an individuated being. Although made possible by the intervention of ancestral spirits, the act of folding-in the world reverses the causal chain so that what is created in the moment is what was already there. So, a tentative reply to the question with which I began, "What is on the inside of a relation?," might be that any relational form contains the entirety of the encircling world, while its immediate actualization is predicated on the particular configuration of the inside/outside distinction.

Conclusion

In his discussion of figure-ground reversals among the Barok, Wagner argues it is possible that

> the ambiguity itself . . . is more important than the specific interpretations. The fact of the matter is that whatever interpretations we make . . . it will always be open to doubt. Only the image itself is certain and therefore the image itself is all that is needed. It has the power of eliciting (causing to perceive) all sorts of meanings in those who use and hear it, as well as the power of containing all the possible meanings that may be so elicited. . . .[46]

Wagner here guides our attention to the role of fuzziness as an imaginative force. In being enveloped by and subsequently acting on experiences and impressions that are fundamentally undetermined, new imageries afford themselves as emergent forms of meanings that may potentially be actualized.

Among people living on the outskirts of Maputo, it is a similar capacity to

44. Mogens Lærke, "Four Things Deleuze Learned from Leibniz," in Tuinen and McDonnell, *Deleuze and the Fold*, 25–45, at 29.

45. Deleuze, *Deleuze and the Fold*, 19.

46. Wagner, "Figure-Ground Reversal," 56.

stretch or obviate the meanings of inherently undetermined relational configurations that is being elicited through acts of interior swelling. By folding-in a seemingly exterior world, deep-seated cosmological principles about the need to maintain distances from potentially malevolent forces are challenged and potentially circumvented. Fleeting as it might be, as fuzzy boundaries between inside and outside are manipulated, the relational universe momentarily collapses into the swelling of an individuated being. As such, a social universe that emerges as an inside is expanded outward.

A key assumption guiding recent relational studies is the exteriority of related terms. As we have seen, however, this exterior differentiation might nevertheless be difficult to maintain when the relational form (the "relationness" of the relation, if you will) is inherently fuzzy. But given the notion of interior swelling, we can argue that a relational form may be obviated from the inside; that is, by aligning a seemingly exterior world with a set of interior properties. From this perspective, a relational form collapses not because of its inherent weaknesses but, rather, because of an intensification of its inner qualities.