Macon, November 25th, 1947
Cango (initiation rite) for Rose; for Dembella

Vodun priests (Hunjan): Rose’s husband, Verneyis, and Tinvil

Visiting vodun priestess (mambo): Cira

One woman, Licia, who acted more or less in capacity of hunjan cango; i.e., as one who had been initiated and could thus assist in the ceremony.

(Even though according to J. she had had only her lave tete, the first of the two initiation rites in this region.)

Two men acted as laplace, male assistants.

The ceremony took place at Rose’s house at about 7:00 p.m.—it was dark, and the moon was up. The courtyard of Rose’s house consists of two rather small straw thatched huts, a cooking shed in the background. When we arrived, about a dozen people sat about on chairs—almost in one line around the front of one of the houses—the caille mystery (house of the gods) where Rose was lying. There was a general silence—no light, only the moon. The only conversation was carried on by Licia, who, all dressed in white, stood before two people, and rather dramatically was quoting what a loa had said and done in a dream. The master of the house, Verneyis, came to shake hands and thank us for having come, and the mambo did the same. Immediately two chairs appeared, and we too sat down to join the silent group. After a while, the mambo suggested that it might be time to start. She entered the house, and three-quarters of those present behind her—the two hungans, the Laplaces and their machets, Licia with a blue flag, I. and myself and one or two others. Cira had lit a small candle, and then, lifting piece by piece the various objects on the ground, turned

1 Cf. p. 206 above.
about and bowed before one of those present, who imitated her; she handed the objects over to the various individuals, I myself ended up with a plate of flour. The list included two piles of cut kindling and some leaves, the two pots called *wanpin*—(new ones) a bottle of olive oil, rum liqueur (a sweet, sugary liquid), candy, peanuts, two white plates, a spoon, a fork, a knife, and a calabash filled with water. When all items were distributed, we marched out of the house, three times around a circle singing. Then in the same manner as inside the house we returned the various items to the *voodoo*. After that, everyone sat down about a circle and Cira started the *priee vodun*, the *vodun* litany, which refers to the *lebe* divinities. The following being the verses repeated with different names, the chorus responding at every line:²

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ne la Papa Legba cho-eh
e la Pope leghasi-cho-eh
e la Papa legbas-eh
do com Agwe
e la Pope Legba
non a miin Bon diou zn³
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Continuing the same prayer, substituting the names Lokatigu, Damballa, Dambala Wedo, Agwe Faoyo, etc., etc., she enumerated all the *loa*, and at the end added: "Fire masonsi, hunsans" (1-2., brother masons, ³ masonyi, etc.) and so on in the entire *vodun* hierarchy. This continued for about

² Compare with *Priee Guinin*, quoted by Rigaud, 1946, p. 21.

³ Compare also with prayer quoted by Herskovits, 1937b, p. 192.

⁴ This reference to Free Masonry is quite striking from the point of view of syncretism.
ten minutes. In betweenTonvil rang his little bell\(^5\) once in a while.
The laplace had come out with the sword for Ogun\(^6\) which had stood in the
room where none had been lying. It had been placed in the ground and
the burning candle from inside the house planted before it. After Gira
had finished the vodun prayer Verneyis started his half French-Catholic
prayer, listing all the Saints, as Gira had listed all the loa. In
between there was some confusion about finding the chickens that were to
be killed, etc., and in general there was no great compulsion shown,
not even about the order in which the names were recited. Several mis-
takes were made, which were corrected by returning to a previous name,
and continuing from there.

Finally the mamo traced the verver\(^7\) pouring water from the cala-
bash—Verneyis repeating the verver with white flour over it. Stakes
were then driven into the circles of the verver to place the pots (wanzin)
on.

Meanwhile, the candle had given out and
several pieces of kindling were used as torches.
The chickens were brought and it turned out that
instead of a rooster and a hen, they were two
hens—a grave mistake. But it was too late to do anything about it. The
wanzin being placed on the stakes, Verneyis took one chicken after the
other holding it over first one pot and then the other sprinkled a bit of

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5 As in church—this is another example of ritual syncretism.

6 As the god of war, Ogun has a sword as one of his ritual objects.

7 Cf. discussion of these ground drawings pp. 171-172, and pp. 200-201
above.
the various foods over them, then turned with each chicken in the four cardinal directions, presenting it. During all this time, songs were sung for the various loa, a great number of those present starting songs. Finally the hungan broke the wings of the chickens, and killed them, then sprinkled the two wanzin with the blood. When the chickens were dead two of the women started to prepare them. Fires had been lit under the wanzin, and maize was being boiled first in one, then in the other. Licia got possessed by Ogun Fer, who drank a great deal of trampe (a very powerful concoction of raw rum and herbs fermented in it). Ogun embraced a number of people affectionately and demanded attention, but while everyone was polite they went on with the preparations at hand and Ogun soon departed. Then the mugbo with Licia and the laplace entered the house; and then came out again. The laplace first—presenting his machet—turning, and saluting, Licia with the flag similarly. Then Cira, with rose, the novice, behind her. Rose was completely covered by a sheet, her arms around Cira's neck, and she walked hesitatingly—almost as if Cira were dragging her. They went to one of the wanzin. Cira took leaves and oil—she oiled Rose's left hand well, putting the leaves on it. Verneyis reached into the pot and with a wooden spoon handed a bit of maize to Cira who took it putting it on Rose's hand, closing her hand over it, then another and another. Rose was trembling—and Verneyis encouraged her saying, "ne meloin aye," ("You needn't be afraid"). Then Cira and Rose circled about the two wanzin, and returned into the house. Various of those present—those

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8 Dancing with a machet is part of the ritual role of the laplace in many vodun ceremonies.
already canzo—then took some of the hot maize rolling it in their hands; by this time the fire had ebbed and the maize cooled off. The wanzen was cleaned out. Then maize was boiled in the other wanzen and the same procedure repeated with Rose, still only with the left hand. This time in circling, she began to tremble as if possessed and Verneyis called gruffly several times, "a Lord!" to restrain the log that seemed to be about to "mount" (i.e., possession was thought to be oncoming). Next one of the wanzen was oiled inside and out and again placed on the fire while the inside was lighted also. Sira again came out with Rose, this time passing first her left hand then her left foot over the flame, and then a fourth time, repeating the same procedure over the second wanzen. Then Rose was returned to the house and various of her objects such as the necklace as well as the flag, etc., were held over the flames. When the fire had died down, a hole was dug between the wanzen, and the hunchen made the veryer inside of it. Then the wanzen were placed in it, as well as a white napkin on which were placed the plates with the prepared chickens, that had been cut into four pieces, as well as all the food and drink. Six women of the assembled group, on their hands and knees around the hole, equalized the mound of earth and then pushed it in at the same time. The women under the direction of the malo began to dance over the loose earth to press it lightly, singing a song for Gea (because this represented a burial and a grove), while stamping the ground. While the song for Gea was sung, Antoinette was possessed by Gea, who wanted to know what this was all about, and after having

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9 This is another example of spontaneous possessions in situations interpreted by the individual as dangerous. Cf. discussion p. 179 above.
greeted all individuals, sat down on the chair next to mine, where A. had been sitting all evening (after a little while A. passed her hand over her eye and forehead and excused herself for having fallen asleep; when told that Papa Gede had come she absolutely denied it). Meanwhile Licia was again possessed by an Ogun. But as with Ode though being polite everybody more or less ignored the loa, continuing what they were doing. And even while Ogun was still walking around, greeting various people, the mambo declared the ceremony as finished saying in effect, well, we finished early tonight.

Addenda

Rose had been preparing for nine days prior to the canzo by lying on a mat, in retreat, as is the rule. She was lying in her own house because, her husband being a hunyan, she was ipso facto in the house of the nyeste. Normally, the canzo-to-be lies in the humfort of the hunyan in question. While a person is lying in retreat, various friends come to sit and visit. Thus, several days prior to Rose's canzo, J. and I went to visit her. She was lying on a mat covered with a white sheet, and about her was wrapped another sheet, this one with embroidery. About her neck was the long canzo necklace, she was dressed in white and about her head was a white kerchief. Behind her the sword for Ogun was planted in the earth and on a little night table was a crucifix. Beside her were all kinds of toilet articles. When we came in, she greeted us by

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10 This possession was not in very good form, for this was not a service of A's family, and the gods are not expected to come to ceremonies other than those given by their individual servant's family or cult group.

11 Although this canzo was for Damballa, cf. p. 173 above.
clapping her hands before her and bowing. And then spoke with us carrying on a rather normal conversation. At my surprise, later J. explained that X. could speak to her, J., because she herself was already a *hunsi canzo*, while I was a stranger. To the others, who are neither initiates nor total outsiders, she could not speak, and had to call them for any of her needs by means of a little bell beside her.

J. was not present at the actual *canzo* ceremony because she felt ill, and so A. and I had gone alone. The next morning we discussed it. A. and J. were horrified at the way the thing had been handled. Of course, one's strength as an initiate depended on the strength of the *hunyan*, and V. was not very strong. He hardly had any *hunsi*—even Licia had only her *laya tete*—she had not been *canzo* at all. No, they thought, it was unheard of to come out four times during the ritual, and having only the left hand and foot exposed to the fire, and only pressing one's hand over the boiling maize. From the very beginning it was false. Thus taking the various things out of the house and "balance" around the circle should be done only by *hunsi canzo*—all dressed in white—and that I, a foreigner, had been permitted to participate was simply ridiculous. It could never have happened at V's (their uncle, the family *hunyan*, A. and J. being sisters). To do it right, one should come out twice, first for the maize in both *wanzin* and then for the fire in both. The maize is to be put first in one hand then in the

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12 Note the retention of motor behavior.
other, inside the mouth—to be eaten, behind the neck, making the sign of the cross,\(^{13}\) on the back of the legs—making the sign of the cross, on the forehead, and once more making the sign of the cross, and then pointing it in the four cardinal directions. Both hands and both feet are to be passed over the flames of both wanzin coming out for the second time.

J. herself had had four wanzin rather than two because she was canzo for Papa Simbi, and that is what he had asked for.\(^{14}\) Because of the repeated idea that the canzo does not hurt, and has miraculous properties,\(^{15}\) I asked J. who answered very calmly, "Oui, il fait mal mais faut prendre." (Yes, it hurts, but one has to take heart.) And as an afterthought she added that R. should have been baptized during the ceremony—while A. joined in saying that the necklace too had not been long enough. And after the burial of the food there should have been singing and dancing.

Inventory:

According to J., the following items are necessary for a ceremony and have to be paid for by the hunti canzo-to-be: kindling wood and leaves for the fire, two (or more) wanzin—(earthenware pots, of prescribed form, which have to be new), olive oil, five chickens: a cock, and a hen for the wanzin, two for the mange tete and one for the mange.

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\(^{13}\) Note again the element of syncretism.

\(^{14}\) Note: it is the gods who specify what they want—just as they choose their servants.

\(^{15}\) It is asserted by individuals not connected with vodun that the canzo initiation is magical and miraculous, for people here touch fire and boiling maize without getting hurt. As seen in the case of R., the initiate is expected to be fully conscious and not possessed by the gods during the ordeal.
caille (feeding of the gods of the house, i.e., of the family) which follows the next morning: rum, liqueur, huile masket (oil for lighting), peanuts, bread, candy; a candle for the week of the retreat, perfume, toilet soap, powder, a new towel, kerchiefs, two white dresses, a night shirt, an undershirt. During the retreat the individual may eat only unsweetened acasan, calalu without salt, and milk. White (rather than the usual brown) sugar to make the liqueur; white rice and milk, yam, bananas, red beans, for the day after the canzo when the hunsi canzo of the given numfort visit and sing. A big hat and new shoes for the obligatory pilgrimage which follows and canzo rite. For the hunsi canzo to get up the day after the canzo, the mange tete and the mange caille are performed in the morning and the loe for whom the person became canzo is expected to dance in his head all day. The following day the individual is to start on his pilgrimage, going from church to church, lighting candles and praying. This depends on the individual's resources. Thus J. had been on a forty-one day pilgrimage; others may only go during twenty-one days. If one were to do all this exactly, it would certainly cost more than 100 gds (§20). If the individual is a member of the hunsan's family, he would have to pay him only 10 gds (§2) but for a stranger it would be 50 gds (§10).