

Article

## Mind, Body and Spirit in Basket Divination: An Integrative Way of Knowing

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**Abstract:** The statements of researchers on the topic of basket divination and the statements of basket diviners in northwest Zambia, Africa, do not fully agree. While researchers rightly stress the importance of observation, analysis and interpretation in basket divination, going so far as to describe diviners as scientists, they fail to recognize that divination is not an abstract, disembodied undertaking. Truthful knowledge is not flushed out of the diviner’s mind as a set of theoretical propositions; it is instead delivered by an ancestral spirit that becomes objectified in three symbiotic forms: physical pain, configurations of material objects laid out inside a basket, and the diviner’s translation of those meaningful configurations into words. In basket divination, human bodies, artifacts, words, and spirits work together in symbiosis. Knowing is a spiritual, intellectual, and embodied undertaking. The challenge then is to conceptualize basket divination as an integrative way of knowing in such a way that one does not fail to recognize either the neurobiological substrate that we all share as humans or those others facets—such as the numen—without which basket divination as a cultural practice would cease to exist.

**Keywords:** divination; knowledge; epistemology; cognition; mind and body; senses; material objects; spirit possession; religion; Africa

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### 1. Introduction

In basket divination, a highly respected technique practiced in Zambia, Angola, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the diviner tosses symbolic objects of different sizes, shapes and materials in a

woven basket. Those who have had the good fortune of observing a basket diviner at work have oftentimes described basket divination as a rational, analytical and detached way of knowing. Having studied basket divination in northwest Zambia for over two years, I testify to the accuracy of this depiction. This said, I testify as well, and as accurately, to the important fact that truthful knowledge in basket divination is not delivered as a set of abstract propositions flushed out of the diviner's mind. Instead, divinatory knowledge is delivered by an ancestral spirit that becomes objectified in three forms: the bodily pain felt by the diviner in his heart, the material configurations of small symbolic articles contained in the diviner's basket, and the diviner's translation of those meaningful configurations into words. In this liminal universe defined by spirit possession, knowledge is imputed to an ancestral spirit; this spirit, however, manifests itself through a human body that feels pain and operates the oracle by shaking it. The contrast between the statements of researchers on the topic of basket divination and the statements of basket diviners in northwest Zambia is revealing of a broader, telling story that has defined the scholarship on divination systems in particular, and the study of knowledge in general. This is the story of birthing knowledge to the world, and the part played in this delivery by the mind, the body, and the spirit.

## 2. Knowing

In comparison with shamanic séances and other types of mediumistic divination, basket divination seems awkwardly secular and deprived of emotion and spectacle. The picture of a diviner, always a man, shaking his basket with brisk, up and down motions and interpreting successive configurations of divinatory articles as these articles land inside the basket is more remindful of an act of reading and interpretation than of a ritual. The expert diviner observes the patterns of articles and interprets their meaning for his clients, who do their best to follow. His clients sit across from him with deadpan faces and observant eyes, hiding their feelings of worry and apprehension. The ambience evokes seriousness, reflection, and resolve.

In the light of this brief sketch of a typical séance, it is hardly surprising that basket divination has appeared to the eyes of foreign observers as a highly rational undertaking. Authors as different in training and worldview as the Swiss missionary and ethnographer Alfred Hauenstein, the Swiss museum curator Théodore Delachaux, the British colonial officer and anthropologist Charles M. N. White, the Portuguese, Sorbonne-trained anthropologist Manuel Rodrigues de Areia, and the Scottish, Manchester University-trained anthropologist Victor Turner, soon-to-become a leading light in ritual studies, have all been equally impressed with the seriousness of the event and the intellectual agility of the diviners. Because each article has different meanings, diviners have to determine what meaning of an article relates to what meanings of selected contiguous articles, both in one configuration and across configurations. This difficult work is particularly impressive because the diviner must deliver his pronouncements without delay in between basket shakings.

A handful of quotes will suffice to evoke the extolling tone that pervades these authors' accounts: Delachaux, who participated in the second Swiss scientific expedition to Angola in 1932–1933, praises the diviner's "discernment and his power of interpretation" ([1], p. 58; author's translation from French). Based on work in Angola, Manuel Rodrigues de Areia tells his readers that the material symbols in basket divination consist of "a kind of analytical grid" ([2], p. 470), noting that the

diviner's "science lies in his organized reading of sequences of objects" ([3], p. 43; author's translation from French). Victor Turner was equally impressed with the diviners he met in the Zambian district of Mwinilunga in the mid-1950s, whom he praises as "astute", "shrewd", "logical", and "rational" [4,5]. For Turner, as for the other authors, basket diviners are master interpreters of complex configurations of material symbols, which they read as texts. They are also insightful men who are deeply familiar with both the pulsing and patterns of social life in south Central Africa; for Turner, "the way [diviners] interpret their divinatory symbols reveals deep insight both into the structure of their own society and into human nature" ([5], p. 209). Hauenstein would concur; referring to the basket diviners he met in northeast Angola, where he lived and worked as a missionary for over twenty years, he states: "It is obvious that the diviner has the great gift of understanding the human mind and psyche" ([6], p. 128; author's translation from French).

More sophisticated and insightful in his analytical work than the remaining authors, Turner also elucidates basket divination by contrasting it with what he calls "rituals proper", a broader category that includes life-crisis rituals and rituals of affliction. Taking the symbol as the basic unit of ritual, Turner argues: "Divinatory symbols are multireferential, and their referents are highly autonomous and readily detachable from one another. Ritual symbols proper are much more highly condensed; their meanings interpenetrate and fuse, giving them greater emotional resonance" ([5], p. 221). On this account, Turner claims that ritual symbols proper are "synthetical" whereas divination symbols are "analytical"; ritual symbols proper are objects of emotion whereas divination symbols, because they approximate to the status of signs, are objects of cognition.

Needless to say, these researchers of basket divination are not alone in their emphasis on cognition. Many other authors describe divination as a way of knowing, an important reason being the fact that this approach runs against the widespread tendency, within and beyond academe, to either dismiss divination as a minor ritual lacking in density and spirituality, or, worse, as Evan Zuesse notes disapprovingly, as "a form of magic and therefore irrational, utilitarian, egoistic, and insufficiently 'religious'" ([7], p. 158). From these negative remarks to brazenly ridiculing the diviners as deluded charlatans, and their performances as pagan gibberish, is a short step. More fundamentally, though, to describe divination as a way of knowing is in accordance with its purpose (and its telic structure) from the standpoint of diviners and their clients. No one goes to a diviner to initiate a child into adulthood or coronate the new chief. Divination is a means to gain access to truthful information otherwise unavailable. Some of the terms associated with basket divination reflect this understanding. In the Luvale language, the term used for a divinatory article is *katakachikijilo*; it derives from *kutachikiza*, meaning to know. The diviner's erudition is sometimes referred to as *chinyingi*, from the verb *kunyingika*, meaning to know.

This same redeeming combination of epistemological and ideological factors has led, more recently, to the famed analogy in African studies between divination systems and Positivist social science. After Robin Horton [8], in the footsteps of E. E. Evans-Pritchard [9], advanced the controversial proposition that African religion and Western science both seek to explain the world in their different idioms, one speaking of ancestors, spirits and Gods and the other of atoms, molecules and waves, other scholars carried the intellectualist analogy to new heights. For these scholars, religious practitioners in Africa—in particular diviners—may be fruitfully described as scientists. For Igor Kopytoff [10], the Suku of the Democratic Republic of the Congo *know* (they do not simply *believe*) that ancestors exist,

their system of thought being comparable to science, but their science corresponding to the nineteenth century ideal of Positivism. For Michael Jackson, the Kuranko pebble divinatory technique used in Sierra Leone is akin to social science, but its outlook is similarly Positivist; like the Positivist scientist, the Kuranko diviner is “allegedly passive and receptive, the technique allegedly objective, the procedure allegedly impersonal” ([11], p. 56).

These are well-intentioned and thought-provoking approaches that successfully highlight the intellectual and analytical aspects of divination systems. They also lead to the same blind alley. Scholars say that diviners are scientists, placing divination and science on the same footing, but they also say that diviners are Positivist social scientists because they value objectivity and detachment. Purportedly, diviners also lack a developed unawareness of alternatives in comparison with (true) science, as Horton said of African religion in general. Whereas Western science is open, African religions are closed. Scientists promote and demote African diviners with one and the same stroke.

Many scholars of basket divination are caught in the same blind alley. Writing in the late 1940s, the colonial officer and anthropologist Charles M. N. White remarks that divination in northwest Zambia is “a belief in a chain of logical causation, however illogical it may seem” ([12], p. 94). As he sees it, divination defines a chain of causation, but that chain rests on the shaky grounds of belief rather than knowledge. Turner walks down the same path. In a passage concerning the complex analytical work of the basket diviner, Turner comments, “In all this, he is as logical as Linnaeus himself” ([5], p. 218). Soon enough, though, having promoted the basket diviner to a master logician on a par with Linnaeus, Turner feels the need to explain the differences between scientists and diviners, saying, “The diviner is a ratiocinating individual, but the premises from which he deduces consequences may be nonrational. He does not try to ‘go behind’ his beliefs in supernatural beings and forces. That is why divinatory objects are better classed with symbols than with signs, although they have some of the attributes of signs. He treats as self-evident truths what social anthropologists and depth psychologists would try to reduce to rational terms” ([5], p. 231). In the end, “The logician is felt to be a magician” ([5], p. 241).

Portraying diviners as Positivist scientists does little justice to divination as a way of knowing. It is a generous, and bold, interpretive gesture, but it is also a glaring misrepresentation. Cognizant of this problem, some of the same authors who promote diviners to Positivist social scientists also show that divination knowledge, far from being an abstract intellectual exercise exclusively concerned with questions of veracity, is part and parcel of the clients’ coping strategies and desperate attempts to assuage suffering (e.g., [11,13,14]). Positivist social scientists may believe that their work as scientists is disconnected from their daily struggles and concerns, but basket diviners know better. For them and their clients, divination is not simply a way of knowing, Positivist or not; divination is also a way of coping with suffering and misfortune by seeking help and taking action in a culturally accepted and spiritually sanctioned way. Further contributing to this larger effort to curb some of the excesses of intellectualism, I propose that we now return to the liminal space of the séances where the divinatory knowledge is produced and shared with the consultants. There is more to basket divination than reading and interpreting configurations of material signs in a detached, objective mode. Knowledge and objectivity are valid concepts outside a Positivist paradigm; intellectual work and the sense of sight are not the handmaids of intellectualism; and neither are they at perpetual war with the body and spirit.

### 3. Embodying

Firstly, a word on vision and the seeing eyes. In the current age of Post-Positivism, the sense of sight has been denigrated and repeatedly bashed on account of its close kinship with the intellect, a kinship carefully nurtured over the centuries by a long line of Western thinkers, from Plato through Descartes to Comte. We have known since Positivism that the intellect is largely dependent on vision in its abstract pursuits. Seeing, like thinking, is directed toward the object, implying what Erwin Straus describes as a “standing over-against” it, rather than a being-beside it ([15], pp. 370–75). In seeing, one grasps the skeleton of things, identifying and stabilizing them. This said, although this partnership between knowing and seeing may lead to the excesses of visualism [16,17], the sense organ of sight is not to be hastily discarded as Positivist nonsense. Caught up in the midst of the anti-Positivism warfare, let us not forget that western scientists and thinkers are not the only ones whose epistemological vocabulary conveys a close kinship between knowing and seeing [18]. In northwest Zambia, the link between divination and vision is explicitly acknowledged in the Luvale word for divining—*kutaha*. Like the English “diviner,” the Luvale *mukakutaha* is synonymous with “seer”. To divine is to see, and to see is to know ([14], pp. 124–25). The eyes of diviners are said to be sharp like the eyes of an eagle owl. Diviners receive the gift of clairvoyance during the affliction ritual that both cures and initiates them into basket divination, when the officiating diviners apply *misozo* medicine to their eyes to clear their vision. Yet diviners do not exclude the other senses from the process of knowing on account of the supposedly unreliable and untrustworthy nature of those senses. Diviners report that they feel the truth before they see and speak it; and that they think in the head and heart.

Sangombe, Sakutemba, Mutondo and other basket diviners I met in northwest Zambia showed me that objectivity is a real concern outside a Positivist paradigm. As mentioned, diviners claim to be objective, and their clients ensure objectivity by consulting diviners who live faraway. In northwest Zambia, people walk or cycle long distances on dirt roads and sandy terrain in search of objective, spiritual knowledge. Sometimes they cross the international border on their way to renowned diviners who reside in the neighboring country of Angola. Equally important, both diviners and their clients assert that the diviners do not speak for themselves during divination. Diviners are mere conduits through which Kayongo, an ancestral spirit, communicates with the living. As diviner Sakutemba once told me, diviners are mere megaphones.

Let us now revisit the typical image of basket divination in the new light of spirit possession. The diviner is sitting on a goatskin in the shade of a tree. His clients are sitting in front of him, anxiously waiting for the séance to start. The diviner opens his large carrying basket, takes out his *lipele* (as the divination basket is called in the Luvale language) and places his *lipele* on the goatskin. He also brings out other divinatory paraphernalia—including a thick bundle of broken arrows, animal horns, and a large, bell-shaped rattle known as *musambo*—which he carefully places on the ground within arm’s reach. At this point he grabs his *musambo* rattle and proceeds to shake it with his right hand in regular movements while he utters the invocation (*kukombela*). He invokes prestigious basket diviners as well as public political figures such as traditional chiefs and heads of state. Most important among these invoked personalities are the diviner’s late relatives who passed down his oracle to him, beginning with Nyakweleka, the first basket diviner according to legend. This long line of basket diviners embodies Kayongo, the spiritual manifestation of male ancestors who practiced as basket diviners

during their lifetime. The diviner hopes that his late relatives will respond to his invocation and help him reveal the truth for his clients.

At this point, it is said that Kayongo “comes out” (*kulovoka*) taking hold of the diviner and his oracle. Uninformed onlookers may see a man shaking his oracle and diligently delivering knowledge to his clients according to rules and procedure; those in the knowing, however, are fully aware that the diviner is no ordinary man. The diviner is a man whose speech is not his own, a man who delivers spiritual messages untainted by his personal views and prejudices.

Those in the knowing also know that the basket being shaken with brisk, up and down motions, *seku seku seku*, is no mere winnowing basket of the type used by women to winnow grains and dried small fish (even though the same movement, *kusekula*, occurs in both contexts of use). In place of foodstuff, the divination basket contains thirty or so small objects known as *jipelo*, a kind of microcosm of human life in south Central Africa. Kayongo depends on the skilled body of diviners who shake their baskets in the right way and reveal the truth as material configurations. Intellectual knowledge and practical knowledge go hand in hand; to borrow from Gilbert Ryle [19], there is no *knowing that* without *knowing how* in basket divination. Each time a truthful configuration emerges inside the basket, Kayongo causes the diviner to feel a sharp pain in his heart. This sudden pain is a sign that a truthful statement has been delivered in material form and may now be spelled out. As soon as the diviner translates that statement into words, the heart stops aching.

Diviners also say that Kayongo causes their heart and head to “change” (*kwalumuka*). They describe the experience of being possessed by Kayongo as an upward movement (*kukatuka*) from heart to head, a growing pressure in the chest, and an increasingly faster and heavier heart beat which they describe by means of ideophones: *luku luku luku luku* (a pounding sound) and *palakanyi* (pressure), for example. Conversely, they describe the experience of being released from Kayongo’s grasp as a downward movement: *heeeee* (sighing); *nyeka nyeka nyeka nyeka nyeka* (lowering or sagging). When Kayongo gets hold of the diviner and occupies his heart and head, the diviner’s sense of self contracts; when Kayongo departs, the diviner’s “I” expands and returns.

I asked several diviners if, during divining, they ever experience jerking, or *kutunguta*, the term for possession trance in the Luvale language. They all assured me that divining is different from jerking (although one diviner informed me that possession trance may occur during sessions dealing with death). During affliction rituals, for example, diviners lose self-awareness and may behave in dangerous ways, jumping over campfires and dashing into the forest. During divination, though, diviners do not jerk. The chest hurts, the heart beats faster and louder, and the body trembles a little, yet jerking proper (the total dispossession of the self) does not occur. In Sangombe’s words, recorded in 2002, “You do not jerk while divining, no, no. You divine for your clients with calm eyes (*meso akuunda*).”

Interestingly, in addition to somatizing knowledge in the form of physical pain, diviners also objectify knowledge in the form of a material object, a tiny piece of a needle. Diviners ascribe the sharp pain they feel in the heart to a needle tip lodged inside, a fact typically explained by referring back in time to the healing and affliction ritual through which basket diviners become initiated into their profession. I was told that the senior diviner officiating in that most important of Kayongo rituals instructs the diviner-to-be to ingest the heart of a sacrificed rooster into which the tip of a needle has been inserted. In Kayongo rituals, needle tips and other sharp objects stand for the sharpness and

clear-mindedness needed to divine. Here, however, I am less interested in symbolism than in the notorious fact that Kayongo becomes real to the living in material forms and somatosensory experiences [20].

The externalization of Kayongo across bodily and material domains becomes clearer if we briefly consider the presence of this ancestral spirit in the life of a diviner over time. When Kayongo determines that one of his living kin shall become a basket diviner, he does not communicate his decision with words; he causes his living descendant to feel chest pain, difficulty breathing, and strong headaches. Some men report episodes of lunacy and the fear of going insane. Later, in the context of the affliction ritual performed to cure the sick man and initiate him to basket divination, the same Kayongo who makes his descendant sick also returns in the form of possession trance. When, later, the newly initiated diviner shakes his basket for his clients, Kayongo comes back once again to help him out with divining. Kayongo becomes real to basket diviners through physical illness, possession trance and physical pain. Disease, healing-initiation, and divination have more in common than you may think. The ritual universe of the time-honored profession of basket divination reveals the ontological imprint of Kayongo, an ancestral manifestation that rejoins the world of the living on occasion by taking hold of human bodies and material objects. In basket divination séances, truthful words are of key importance, no doubt, but they are one among several Kayongo manifestations, next to material objects and human bodies.

At this point, we must return to the well-known distinction between divination and affliction rituals (all “rituals proper”), first introduced by Victor Turner. Although this distinction highlights differences over similarities in order to capture what is most distinct in each type of ritual (the revelation of spiritually sanctioned truth, in one case, and healing, in the other) it also obfuscates the central role of spirit possession in both rituals [21]. The risk of reification in matters of ritual classification never looms far. Is not the line between divination and other rituals more porous than ritual typologies suggest? And are those similarities across divides not critical to the understanding of divination as a way of knowing?

I should mention here that other authors have acknowledged the role of Kayongo in basket divination, describing the embodiment of knowledge as spirit possession. Turner is no exception in this regard. Not only does Turner note the place of Kayongo in basket divination, often through the poetic words of his main Ndembu informant, Mr. Muchona, but he also reports that diviners are possessed by Kayongo, thus acknowledging, sometimes explicitly, an important similarity between divination rituals and affliction rituals. In his work on symbolism, Turner states, “the symbols that [the diviner] uses are not mere economical devices for purposes of reference, “signs”, but have something of the subliminal quality of ritual symbols proper” ([5], p. 233). It is true that Turner, writing as he did before the “body turn” in the human sciences and humanities (see, among others, [11]; [22–24]), never conceptualized knowing as an embodied process. Turner alternated between two interpretations: a structural functionalist portrayal of the basket diviner as a judge who acts on behalf of Ndembu society and a study of ritual symbolism predicated on the distinction between signs and symbols, a distinction borrowed from the psychologist Carl Jung [25]. But Turner was pointing in a novel direction, opening up his focus on social relationships to the role of emotions and material symbolism in ritual life.

Basket divination is a ritual practice that requires both the service of the mind and the service of the sensorimotor and sensing body. As a way of knowing, it is an activity analogous to science and other

intellectual endeavors such as hermeneutics; but it is also an activity that shares a lot in common with other religious rituals throughout the world, beginning, of course, with the affliction rituals of south Central Africa, made famous through the pen of Victor Turner. Mind and vision are at the front stage of basket divination, but the diviner cannot think or even see unless Kayongo, an ancestral spirit, has taken possession of him and his oracle. Neither can Kayongo communicate with the living without the diviner and his *lipele*. In basket divination, humans, artifacts and spirits depend on one another.

Thus far we have approached basket divination from the perspective of the diviner, a man who is possessed by Kayongo and experiences spirit possession as physical discomfort and pain: pressure and pounding in his chest, difficulty breathing, and pain in his heart. For diviners, the ancestral truth is felt before it is spoken. But what of the clients (the *vatewa*), do they see divination as an intellectual way of knowing? Are they more intellectualist than the diviners?

The consultants do not feel Kayongo in any way or form, and neither do they shake the *lipele* or even dare to touch it. Their attention is entirely focused on the emerging configurations of divinatory articles, which the diviner presents to them as the visual confirmation of his verbal statements. “See, look, there you have the woman walking down the road to her husband’s village”, the diviner might say as he points his index finger at two adjacent articles, Woman and Path. More so than the diviners, the consultants appear to be engaged in a detached exercise of observation and analysis. There are, however, critical differences between the consultants and the conventional picture of the detached observer and interpreter, an individual reduced to his mind and vision. Firstly, the consultants’ knowledge of *jipelo* symbolism is notoriously shallow and incomplete in comparison to that of the diviners; secondly, as mentioned earlier, the consultants, like the diviners, never think of divinatory knowledge in theoretical terms disconnected from the existential struggles and pressing needs of daily life, these needs and struggles being the reason why they reach out to diviners in the first place. Theirs is not an epistemological quest in search of pure knowledge but a search for situated knowledge conducive to healing and resolution. They may not feel the pain of a needle pricking them in the heart, but they are sufferers, too. Thirdly, and lastly, the consultants are fully aware that the act of divining is dependent on the services of the human body. Not only do the consultants depend on their bodies in order to consult an oracle—they must travel to the oracle, sit in front the diviner, clap in response to the diviner’s clapping and so forth—but they fully recognize that basket diviners divine with their bodies much as do with their minds. Consultants also know that diviners open each session by invoking late diviners, among other renowned figures, and that divining proper follows. And that diviners bring their clients into Kayongo’s universe by shaking hands with them, and let them part at the consultation’s end with either a red mark on their forehead, accusing them of witchcraft, or a white mark on their chest, protecting them from false accusations. No consultant would ever pay the heavy sum charged per consultation were the basket diviners to observe and analyze their symbolic objects in the way that scientists may study bacteria placed on a slide under a microscope.

To the naked eye, divining may appear to be an act of reading and interpreting a text composed of material symbols; in its cultural context, though, divining is best described as a complex process of objectifying ancestral truths in three symbiotic forms: physical pain, material configurations laid out inside a basket, and the diviner’s translation of those meaningful configurations into words. In order to approximate the phenomenology of basket divination, we must therefore return the intellect to the embodied and material world where it gains form and is shared among the living.

#### 4. Thinking-Feeling

We exited one paradigm and entered another. We started with the idea that the role of vision and the intellect is paramount in divining, and we arrived at the realization that the mind, the body, and the spirit work together in symbiosis. In the process of moving from one paradigm to the other, however, we did not discard the role of knowledge and the intellect in divining, a senseless idea. Based on my experience, I can tell you that basket diviners are wise and intelligent men, even though they serve as mere conduits for Kayongo during divination. But now the concept of the mind has been replaced with the brain and heart as the seats of thought and spiritual manifestation; the senses are no longer weak and untrustworthy; and the role of motor skills has been acknowledged. Knowing is now perceived as a spiritual, intellectual and embodied process in which the knower is fully involved as a rational and sensorial being. In knowing, the embodied mind and the thinking body work in tandem.

Other researchers describe basket divination as an integrative way of knowing. Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted among the Yaka and Luunda in the southwest corner of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, anthropologists Filip de Boeck and René Devisch, in critique of Turner, claim that basket divination, an “interactional and highly sensory performance, constitutes a space in which cognitive structures are transformed and new relations are generated in and between the fields of the human body (senses, emotions), the social body and the cosmos” ([26], p. 100). Based on fieldwork in the same region, anthropologist Manuela Palmeirim brings out the role of the senses in divination, healing, and sorcery, showing that the Aruwund “fine-tune and unblock the senses” in order to think clearly ([27], p. 520). Other researchers with different training and expertise similarly portray basket divination as an integrative way of knowing. Evan Zuesse [7] argues against the classification of divination systems as either “possession” or “wisdom” types; in matters of divination, he states, “we can only talk of tendencies.” More recently, Barbara Tedlock similarly distills the diversity of divination techniques into two main classes, the “mediumistic (nonrational, inspirational or natural) and the inductive (rational, mechanical, or artificial)”, only to conclude that “many peoples worldwide actually perform mixtures of these two forms of divination” ([28], pp. 65–66; see also [29,30]).

A new line of research has developed since the 1990s. Philip Peek, for example, argues that divination is an alternate way of knowing in which opposing cognitive modes converge and synthesize, mirroring the brain’s physiology and functioning. In his words, “both divination and the brain are two-sided systems that function through differentiation and synthesis of both sides, often in fixed oscillation, for truly comprehensive and effective responses” ([31], p. 205). Michael Winkelman and Philip Peek ([32], p. 10) maintain that divination procedures, rational and logical though they are, provide access to nonverbal information channels located in the limbic brain and lower brain center. Barbara Tedlock, too, does not simply speak of a “cognitive continuum consisting of ‘propositional’ and ‘compositional’ modes of thought with a third integrative mode lying in between” ([28], p. 68); she links this continuum to “inter-hemispheric coherence”. Tedlock also draws on the recent work of biophysicists in the area of integral mind-body research. “The implications [of this research] for the study of divination are enormous”, she claims. “The jump conduction of streams of information within the protein matrix of our bodies appears to be connected to the sudden burst of intuition in the midst of otherwise inductive procedures—like the casting of lots—that have been so often described in the literature on divination” ([28], p. 71). Whereas other authors depict divination as a disembodied

epistemological exercise, Peek, Winkelman and Tedlock anchor divination in the neurobiological substrate that we all share as humans.

The significance of these contributions cannot be overstated. Not only do they deepen our understanding of divination as a way of knowing but they also challenge us to think differently about knowledge production in general, including scientific knowledge. If scientists and diviners are equally equipped biologically and neurologically, it should come as no surprise that scientific work is never a purely rational, disembodied undertaking. We know this from practice. Think of the role of free-writing, the embodied act of writing freely in order to get ideas; the incentive of adrenaline to bring intellectual work to completion; and, the dependence on the human body or its technological extensions to materialize thoughts in the form of talks and publications. Think also of the different ways in which feelings of pleasure and anxiety affect the quality of thinking (not to mention the quality of writing). Intellectualism may capture the scientific spirit and ideal, but it does little justice to scientific practice. In matters of knowledge in general, including science and divination, we can only speak of tendencies.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

Because scientists share the results of their research in writing, we know what they think about divination; sometimes we also learn what diviners think of divination and the production of divinatory knowledge. Unfortunately, we know significantly less about the diviners' responses to the interpretations of scholars. Whenever I mentioned to basket diviners that researchers of different backgrounds and nationalities have written about their profession, they always showed delight. Whenever I mentioned to them that some researchers have described them as social scientists, they reacted with surprise. They immediately grasped the analogy between divination and science, probably because sometimes diviners describe themselves as medical "doctors" (they use the English word) and divination as their "job" (here they use the Luvale word *milimo*, meaning physical labor); but it had never occurred to them to see their profession as "science". I wonder what they would think of the concept of an extended mind as recently theorized in cognitive studies. People say that they think in the head and heart, but they do not place greater emphasis on the mind, which they see, in any case, as the head or brain. More importantly, though, the concept of an imperial mind that extends beyond brain and beyond skin, leaves no room for Kayongo, the source of truthful knowledge.

From the standpoint afforded by basket divination as a way of knowing, I notice a striking similarity between the intellectualist idea of the mind distanced from the body and the more recent cognitivist idea of an embodied mind. Intellectualists reduce the activity of basket divination to the act of thinking, symbol decoding and analysis. Divining becomes an exercise performed by a man who dwells in the depths of his mind. The diviner cogitates in a shadowy attic even though he acts in the open; he has a "ghost in the machine", to borrow from Ryle [19]. Cognitivists replace the language of metaphor with that of biology (they speak of the brain and the human body instead of a ghost in the machine, even though the brain has become the new metaphor for the mind in some cognition studies ([33], p. 3839), and they let the mind go free of the cranial chamber. Where intellectualists see a distanced mind, cognitivists discern a superlative mind that extends not only to all the organs and bodily senses but also to the world beyond the skin-encapsulated body. In spite of the important

differences between intellectualists and cognitivists (which cognitivists, for good reasons, do not fail to underline), they are both enthralled with the mind. Having long lost their muses and spiritual sources of knowledge and guidance, they deify “the mind’s own resources” ([34], p. 40).

Basket diviners are enthralled with Kayongo, a spiritual being. If asked to comment on the idea of an extended mind in the light of their profession, they would probably applaud cognition researchers for demonstrating what they always knew—that “bodily processes and stimuli, emotions and feelings, higher order cognition, *etc.* are connected” ([35], p. 307); but they would also ensure to clarify that Kayongo is not a metaphor for the mind; Kayongo is real. Without Kayongo, the brain cannot deliver truthful knowledge—only biased, ordinary knowledge of the type easily accessible back home and on the street for no charge. Without Kayongo, there is no divination.

On one side, we have scholars who include basket divination in a broader discussion of cognition and ways of knowing, either ignoring its specificity as a religious practice or acknowledging that specificity only to end up in a cul-de-sac where they find themselves promoting divination as science with one hand and demoting it as belief with the other. If only basket diviners stopped believing in their divination spirit, the scholars who take divination for an epistemology seem to be saying, the analogy between divination and science would be less slippery. On the other side, we have basket diviners who acknowledge the validity of scholarly interpretations without failing, nevertheless, to pinpoint their limitations. If only scholars realized that Kayongo is the source of divinatory knowledge, diviners seem to be saying, the specificity of basket divination as a way of knowing would not get lost in the meanders of scholarly interpretation. Scholars interpret the views of diviners, and diviners comment on the views of scholars. As long as these exchanges are mutual and symmetrical, there is nothing wrong with engaging and disagreeing with the views of others.

Symmetry, however, is easier said than done. Scholars and diviners know well that the long history of exploitation of the global south by the global north casts a shadow over their encounters and conversations. I bore this in mind each time a basket diviner insisted that basket divination is not simply a way of knowing that speaks to the larger issues of epistemology and cognition; that basket divination is a ritualized way of knowing in which the mind, body and spirit work together in symbiosis; that basket divination helps their clients find an answer to their problems, take action and assuage suffering; that it is preposterous to speak of divinatory knowledge in isolation from spirit possession. For as long as your definition of the universal does not silence and obscure their definition of the particular, basket diviners welcome your point of view.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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