

AGNIESZKA PODOLECKA

(University of South Africa, University of Warsaw, Poland)

ORCID: 0000-0003-1146-3433 

History of the Bantu¹ Peoples by Credo Mutwa – Zulu Tradition or Mutwa’s Invention?

Abstract

Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa (1921–2020) was one the most famous and controversial sangomas² – sages, clairvoyants, healers and diviners – in South Africa. He was also the first sangoma who published books revealing sangomas’ esoteric calling, vocation and cooperation with spirits. He wrote extensively about Zulu mythology. A part of his version of mythology is the ‘history’ of the Bantu languages speaking peoples, their divine origins and the conquest of the lands in the South of Africa. Mutwa also wrote about relationships between Zulus and other ethnic groups, focusing on their mythological beginnings. The aim of this article is to analyse Mutwa’s myths and stories about the history of Bantu languages speaking peoples, relationships between Zulus and other peoples, and place it all within historical facts and religious beliefs known to academics. The article is part of the project ‘Esoteric landscape of Southern Africa’ financed by the Polish National Science Centre (Narodowe Centrum Nauki), Poland, project no. 2017/25/N/HS1/02500.

Keywords: Credo Mutwa, sangoma, history of Bantu-speaking peoples, Zulu mythology, Zulu religion

¹ Bantu is the word used by Mutwa. It may be seen as derogatory, which will be explained in the article.

² *Isangoma* (sg.) and *izangoma* (pl.) are words present in Nguni languages, among them isiZulu. Mutwa was a Zulu (pl. amaZulu). Because the article is written in English, I use anglicised forms, which are widely used by sangomas themselves.



Introduction

The term 'Bantu' causes problems. 'Bantu' is a plural form of 'muntu' meaning 'a man' (in Kongo), mtu (pl. watu in Suahili), moto (pl. bato in Duala), bonto (pl. banto in Mongo), munhu (pl. vanhu; in Shona), umntu (pl. abantu in Khosa); all these words have the same or a similar root: ntu.³ In 1856 the German linguist W.H.I. Bleek used the name Bantu for the group of the languages for the first time. The term was repeated then by Theal in 1856 and Doke in 1862 and had become the official name of the language group.⁴ Mutwa's native isiZulu belongs to a Southern Bantu language group that belongs to the Nguni group (Mutwa uses the term 'Bantu' in a neutral way).⁵ The beginning of the term 'Bantu' was scientific and meant nothing offensive. However, during the apartheid racial segregation it was used by whites in a derogatory ways, often in the meaning the same as 'nigger' in USA. As a result, it became offensive for black Southern Africans. At the same time, the term 'black' is considered offensive in Europe, while it is us widely used by native Africans, not only in an everyday conversations but also in legal documents.⁶ Hence, in this paper I will use the terms 'black' and 'white' with full respect. There has been no scientific term offered as a replacement for 'Bantu' peoples and the term is still used for the language group. Hence I will use 'Bantu-speakers' or 'Bantu-speaking peoples' in persue of not offending anyone. Fragments of Mutwa's books and interviews will be quoted the way he wrote and spoke them.

The article was inspired by accounts of Zulu religious beliefs that turned out to be very different from Mutwa's version. I decided to check if there is any confirmation that Mutwa's myths and opinions about other peoples have roots in Zulu beliefs, and if there is any possibility that two different versions of Zulu religion exists. Both Zulu mythology and Bantu-speaking peoples' history are well documented, though the knowledge was not described in books like in Europe. They were passed down the generations orally by clans' chiefs and sangomas – sages, clairvoyants, healers, diviners and psychopomps who also perform priestly duties. One of their duties is learning the history from older sangomas, other sages and chiefs, and add events that occurred during their lifetime. In pre-colonial Africa religious beliefs and reality mingled, creating a unique form of the 'historical' truth. Ancestral spirits till today are real for millions Southern Africans. Hence it is not surprising that people believed in the divine origins of humankind, and such 'history' was conveyed to each new generation. The stories forming the belief canon in which

³ Philip Curtin, Steven Feierman, Leonard Thomson, Jan Vansina, *African History. From Earliest Times to independence* 1978. Polish edition: *Historia Afryki. Narody i cywilizacje*, Gdańsk 2003, p. 34.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 34.

⁵ Nguni peoples are part of the Bantu language group. Nguni languages are a subgroup of Bantu languages and include Xhosa, Zulu, Swazi, Hlubi, Phuthi and Ndebele (Eric P. Leuw, 'Language and National Unity in Post-Apartheid South Africa', Michigan State University 1992, Viewed 1 August 2022, <<http://archive.lib.msu.edu/DMC/African%20Journals/pdfs/Critical%20Arts/cajv6n1/caj006001004.pdf>>).

⁶ See: Black Economy Empowerment Act No 53 of 2003, Viewed 14 October 2023, <https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/a53-030.pdf>.

historical events mingle with mythical were also reported to the first missionaries and researchers who wrote them down in the 19th century. Among these mixed stories there was information about relationships between tribes and clans (Bantu-speaking and other ethnic groups like San and Khoikhoi), about their trade dealings, fights and cooperation. And from these information scientists extracted the vision of peoples' movements, activities, and style of life. Also, archaeological discoveries helped recreate the history of the first inhabitants of contemporary South Africa: San (called by European colonisers Bushmen⁷) and Khoikhoi (called also Hotentots).⁸ San rock paintings and engravings allow recollection of their wanderings. Some of them were caused by Bantu-speakers immigration to the South hundreds of years ago.

The first Bantu-speaking people arrived in the South of Africa probably between the 2nd and 4th century AD.⁹ They brought with them culture organised in clans which depended on cattle and farming. Bantu speakers left Central Africa for Southern Africa in search of more fertile soil and higher rainfall. First, they lived in river valleys, then they broadened their territories pushing away San and Khoikhoi. Bantu languages formed a different language group than click-sound Khoi-San languages. Bantu-speakers also had different religious beliefs. With time however, Bantu-speakers developed trade with Khoikhoi who had sheep and cow herds, while San became more and more distant – their hunter-gathering style of life was too alien and presented no trading opportunities to make a bond.¹⁰

Methodology

Mutwa derives Zulu origins from divine sources. This is not surprising because all religions assume that some divine intervention was needed to create a humankind. That is the case of Zulus and other Bantu languages speakers as well, just not cohesive with what Mutwa writes in his books. In this paper Mutwa's version of the emergence of Bantu-speaking peoples in Southern Africa and their relationships with neighbouring ethnic groups will be compared with the more widely accepted version of Zulu mythology to determine the areas in which Mutwa's version is not congruent with Zulu or other peoples' traditions. This will be done from the historical and comparative religious studies perspective. The comparison is based on juxtaposing Mutwa's myths with Zulu myths and

⁷ The word 'Bushman' was created for San people by white colonisers and was offensive. However, today it is consciously used by San themselves because it is well recognised and helps their cause of fighting for lands. Bushmen are often evicted from their properties in SA, Botswana and other countries. To gain more international recognition and support, they use the term Bushmen. Hence, I use it in the paper with full respect.

⁸ Johannes Du Plessis, *Report of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science*, Cape Town 1918, p. 189.

⁹ Curtin et al., *African History*, p. 335 and Faye Lander, Thembi Russell, 'The archaeological evidence for the appearance of pastoralism and farming in southern Africa', *PLoS One*, Jun 14; 13,6 (2018), Viewed 14 October 2023, <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6002040/>>.

¹⁰ Curtin et al., *African History*, pp. 334–336.

histories collected by researchers and information gathered from twenty-six contemporary sangomas.

Because Mutwa's version of Zulu history differs from the versions presented by academics, I decided to do field research among Zulu sangomas. One of sangomas' duties is preserving history, hence they should know myths and histories about the origins of their ethnic group. The research among Zulu sangomas, who could verify the authenticity of Mutwa's version of myths, was conducted during three field studies in 2013, 2018 and 2019 in the following SA provinces: Gauteng, KwaZulu Natal and Western Cape. All those sangomas were firmly set in the Zulu culture, learnt Zulu beliefs and histories during their upbringing and their *ukutwasa* (the apprenticeship).¹¹ None of them knew Mutwa personally, though they were well aware of his ideology.¹² Those who did not read his books, were told Mutwa's version of Bantu-speakers' history and asked to verify it. They offered their opinion. Apart from these twenty-six sangomas, I interviewed two who were trained by Mutwa himself. These were his twasas (apprentices): his wife Virginia and his white apprentice B.F.¹³ Both grew up as Christians and learnt Zulu religious beliefs from Mutwa, the same applies to his version of Zulu history. Hence, they are not included in this study.

In March 2013 I interviewed Mutwa in his home in Kuruman because I believe that – as the author – he should have been given a chance to explain his own myths and ideas and give his comments.

Who is Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa?

Credo Mutwa was probably born in 1921 and died in 2020.¹⁴ The name Vusamazulu (meaning: the awakener of the Zulus) was – as he believed and claimed – given to him by a goddess Amarava, 'the inspiration of his life'¹⁵, his supposed mentor, teacher and a deity that is not confirmed by any of my and other researchers' informants, neither sangomas nor secular people.¹⁶ When asked about this discrepancy in his and other

¹¹ Twasas, in isiZulu *itwasa* or *ithwasa*, are people who accepted the calling to the sangomahood (in isiZulu: *ubungoma*) from ancestral spirits and are in the process of learning (*ukutwasa* or *ukuthwasa*) which finishes with the graduation-initiation. However, all sangomas emphasise the need of learning all their lives.

¹² Mutwa was a controversial person for many reasons: he did not oppose apartheid, he even sanctified it in his book *Let not my Country Die* and several speeches. He claimed to be abducted by aliens. His version of Zulu mythology is very different from the one known in last 200 years. He was a public figure and his books and messages gained him many opponents.

¹³ When I am allowed to disclose informants' name, I do so. Otherwise I give their initials or call them 'informants'.

¹⁴ The year 1921 was told Mutwa by his father, there was no obligation to register every new born child those days in South Africa.

¹⁵ Linda Tucker, *Mystery of the White Lions: Children of the Sun God*, New York 2010, p. 44.

¹⁶ Mutwa wrote about Amarava in his books and talked in interviews, and confirmed to me during our meeting in his house in Kuruman, South Africa, in March 2013.

Zulus' version of mythology, he claimed that his knowledge was unique because it was given to him by Amarava in special visions.¹⁷ Mutwa describes Amarava as 'one of the manifestations of the goddess, and an important, world-saving figure in Zulu mythology'.¹⁸

Mutwa was a sangoma and a sanusi (sage), he was also an artist who painted pictures and made sculptures, and he was a writer.¹⁹ At the beginning of his writing career Mutwa called himself a 'sangoma', a 'witchdoctor'²⁰ and a 'traditional healer', in the 1990's – as the result of his cooperation with New Age publishers – he started calling himself a 'shaman'. Sangomas can be considered part of the shamanic phenomenon because their esoteric calling by ancestral spirits, training, initiation, abilities, duties, and prerogatives are in-line with those of Siberian or native American shamans.²¹

Sangomas are believed to be chosen and called by ancestral spirits to renounce the profane life and start sacred lives in which they balance between the physical and spiritual realms, to mediate between ancestral spirits and living descendants, between history and modernity, prophetic dreams and everyday reality.²² Sangomas report that the calling to *ubungoma* (sangomahood) is not a matter of the personal choice but a vocation sent by spirits. It is a sickness of body and mind, manifesting in the overwhelming weakness of the body, hallucinations and meaningful dreams. It is widely reported that the healing can be achieved only by accepting the calling and going through the apprenticeship process. Once 'the teacher is discovered, once the call is accepted, the initiate starts out on a usually prolonged and frequently challenging period of training, a round of rituals, ceremonies and events which will culminate in the *goduswa* or graduation'.²³ Chidester confirms the tradition of the difficult training and initiation: twasas have to learn how to interpret illness symptoms, cast and interpret bones, how to have a psychological approach to patient, how to heal, dance and fall into trance. They also need to learn to cooperate with other sangomas.²⁴

¹⁷ Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa, *Zulu shaman. Dreams, Prophecies and Mysteries*, Rochester 2003, p. 10.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

¹⁹ Mutwa's books: *Indaba, my children* (1964, quotations in this paper come from 1999 edition), *Africa is my witness* (1966), *My people. The Incredible writings of Credo Vusa Mazulu Mutwa* (1969), *UNosilimela* (1973), *Let no my country die* (1986), *Zulu shaman: dreams, prophecies and mysiteries* (1996), *Isilwane, the Animal* (1996), *Kingdom of forever* (graphic novel, 2008).

²⁰ I encountered several kinds of spelling the term: witchdoctor, witch-doctor and witch doctor. None is dominant. I use the joint spelling 'witchdoctor'. In his first books Mutwa uses the term 'witch doctor', which was created by colonisers, for sangomas, inyanga (herbalist) and other healers but later he changed it into Zulu term 'sangoma' and in the 1990s to 'shaman' (Mutwa, *Zulu shaman*, p. 10).

²¹ For more see: Agnieszka Podolecka, 'Sangomas, shamans and New Age: the hybridity of some modern healing and esoteric practices and beliefs in South Africa', *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 69,1 (2016), pp. 142–157.

²² Most *sangomas* tell me that about 90% of them are female though there is no way to prove it because there is no obligation to register oneself as a sangoma and no statistical research has been done so far – hence we also do not know how many white sangomas exist.

²³ Joanne Thobeka Wreford, 'Studies 'Long-Nosed' Hybrids? Sharing the Experiences of White Izangoma in Contemporary South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 33,4 (2007), p. 9.

²⁴ David Chidester, *Religions of South Africa*, London 1992, p. 18.

Mutwa describes his calling as an ordeal in which he almost died. When Western doctors failed to cure him, his uncle took him to the sangoma who recognised the sangoma calling in 1937.²⁵ The calling is called *ubizo*, the process of healing and learning to become a sangoma is called *ukutwasa*. It is a journey of becoming a healer, and it is also a sickness because the process causes the failure of physical and mental health. *Twasas* suffer the failure of kidneys, heart, lungs, miscarriages etc., and it is reported by all sangoma informants that the only way to get well is to accept the calling and go through the process of apprenticeship.

The process of *ukutwasa* means rejecting the world of *profanum* and entering the world of *sacrum*, in which people can cooperate with spirits for the benefit of the living. It is a process of learning that includes meditation, purifying rituals, contacting spirits and knowledge about herbs and their use for healing purposes; also history of the clan and the ethnic group is learnt. *Ukutwasa* is finished by an examination-initiation. It is also the process of healing the *twasas*'s body and mind. Mutwa went through this process and became a sangoma in his twenties. He was a practicing sangoma all his life, even when he was sick and frail in his nineties. He told me that no matter how bad he felt, there were people who felt worse, and he wanted to help them, and a sangoma's duty was to help.²⁶

Researchers agree with Mutwa's claim: sangomas' main duty is holistic healing which means that they are supposed to diagnose physical, emotional, mental and spiritual reasons of illnesses, and address them accordingly. Sangomas are believed to be instructed by spirits, hence patients expect them to check if their predicament is caused by some esoteric reason. For example, influenza may not be seen as just a result of contracting the virus, but a result of ancestors' disapproval or a curse, and it is a sangoma's duty to find the reason and then apply the proper way of healing. This may include taking herbal medicines (*muti*), food offerings or even animal sacrifices for spirits. Wreford who is a sangoma and a scientist states that 'a strong emphasis [is put] on their [sangomas'] counselling role and *ukuthwasa* in particular was often spoken of in terms familiar to a psychotherapeutic process'.²⁷ Sangoma healing 'is not necessarily dealing with an illness or disease as defined in Western medical science' but rather a psychological, spiritual and social disorder that can be healed in specific conditions: holistically, addressing all aspects of human life and health.²⁸

Sangomas' duty is also passing down the history of their people in both local, clan meaning and the history of the whole ethnic group. Even in Christianised South Africa, where most sangomas are Christians, part of their training is learning pre-Christian beliefs and the history of their people. Teachers should pass their knowledge to their apprentices

²⁵ Mutwa, *Zulu Shaman*, pp. 10–11.

²⁶ Private conversation, March 2013.

²⁷ Joanne Thobeka Wreford, 'Talking with the White: Sharing the Experience of White Sangoma in Contemporary South Africa', CSSR Working Paper No. 150, Cape Town 2006, p. 12.

²⁸ Manton Myatt Hirst, 'The Healer's Art: Cape Nguni Diviners in the Townships of Grahamstown', PhD thesis, Rhodes University 1990, p. 89.

and add information about important events from their own lifetime. Mutwa claims that his historical knowledge came not only from his teachers but also from the goddess Amarava. This is why his knowledge is much wider than other sangomas' and his version of Bantu-speakers' origins and Zulu mythology differs from the history one may learn from historical books or other sangomas.

The notion of myth. Should Mutwa's stories be called myths?

Mutwa uses the terms 'myth' and 'mythology' for his stories to give them a greater meaning, and uses them with full respect.²⁹ There is no binding definition of a myth but there are certain aspects that qualify a story to be a myth. Des Bouvrie describes myths as 'a group of identifiable tales, which by corollary we consider as historically and otherwise "untrue"'.³⁰ However, for many believers, myths are considered to be facts, the most common concepts: the world and humanity were created by God or gods like in the myth of Adam and Eve.

Creation myths lie at the foundation of numerous religious beliefs. They present both 'news', which are the events or rules the society yet to understand, and the interpretation of long-existing situations and principles.³¹ They describe the roots of culture and validate the existing social system and powers that rule it. Myths explain calamities like great deluges, overwhelming fires, great wars, and other events which influence the course of history. Myths also sacralise taboos and incorporate rituals into people's lives. Thanks to rituals, myths are re-lived and become part of everyday life.³² Myths are important part of oral narrative traditions, and each literary culture has its own stock-figures easily recognised by the community: God or gods, saints, martyrs, demons, tricksters, animals, spirits etc. Their stories reflect human beliefs and dilemmas, hopes and worries, which are then explained and given meaning by myths. They explain human behaviour in metaphorical ways and help the believers handle their own lives.³³ Myths can be understood literally or as metaphors of esoteric powers that influence the world. They are 'symbolic tales' which explain 'symbolic workings' and help the believers to recognise their 'symbolic quality'.³⁴

Mutwa's stories about the beginning of the Zulus and the rest of humanity fulfil the requirements of being myths: they show divine beginnings of the world and people, they engage gods in the creation process sanctifying humanity (life is gods' gift), they sanction social rules (e.g. the place of women in African societies), they show that traditional law was created with the divine intervention. They also guide people and

²⁹ Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa, *Indaba my children*, New York 1999, p. 535.

³⁰ Synnøve Des Bouvrie, 'The Definition of Myth. Symbolical Phenomena in Ancient Culture', Papers from The Norwegian Institute at Athens 1998, p. 19.

³¹ Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, Madison 1985, p. 7.

³² Lauri Honko, 'The Problem with Defining Myth', Åbo 1972, pp. 10–12.

³³ Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa*, Oxford 1978, p. 351.

³⁴ Des Bouvrie, 'Myth and Symbol', p. 22.

teach what kind of behaviour is right and what is wrong. Like all myths, they present religious versions of history and human fate. Sometimes Mutwa uses cross-cultural motifs like the Tree of Life or the great deluge. For all the reasons stated above I believe that his stories can be called myths, even though they are difficult to be found within Zulu known mythological records.

The beginning of the world and humans according to Mutwa

Mutwa's stories about the history of Bantu-speaking peoples are the continuation of his version of Zulu creation myths presented in his book *Indaba, my children* (1968), then repeated and broadened in his sequential books.³⁵ According to Mutwa, the world was created by a god uNkulunkulu whom he calls 'Great Spirit' and 'the Spirit of Life'.³⁶ He does not reveal the origins of uNkulunkulu but describes him as the highest divinity who decided to organise the primal chaos, divide darkness from light and created the universe. According to Mutwa, uNkulunkulu was also responsible to oversee the never-ending battle between oppositions like cold and heat, darkness and light, goodness and evil. He was also the one who created the goddess Ma and asked her to put the chaotic Universe in order and to create the Earth.³⁷ In his myth, Ma became later the mother of the first people who sinned and were destroyed by a great deluge. After it, one of Ma's daughters Amarava (the goddess whom Mutwa believed to be his teacher) became the mother of the second people, and from them contemporary humankind, including Bantu-speaking people, were born.

Mutwa's idea of uNkulunkulu and first and second race of people have never been confirmed by first 19th century researcher's informants, described by first missionaries and later scholars. Also, none of my twenty-six sangoma informants heard such version of Zulu mythology. However, they report that uNkulunkulu is the Zulu deity and is still remembered among sangomas and some people. He is believed to be a complex male deity. There is no consent among the Zulus, both today and those who recalled their religious beliefs to first researchers. According to Zulu mythology recorded in the last 200 years, uNkulunkulu was born from the reeds which covered the Earth. From other reeds he broke out people and animals. The first researchers' informants and those in the 20th century are not in unison in deciding who created the reeds. Some say they were created by uNkulunkulu, others that uHlanga, the Lord-of-the-Sky, brought all the people from the reeds, and the very first one was uNkulunkulu, hence he was the first ancestor.³⁸ Zulu faith believers report that there are rare situations when the name of uNkulunkulu

³⁵ For in-depth analysis of Mutwa's creation myths see: Agnieszka Podolecka, 2022. 'Zulu creation myths by Credo Mutwa – ancient tradition or Mutwa's invention?', *Journal of Religion in Africa* 51 (2022), pp. 1–22.

³⁶ Mutwa, *Indaba*, p. 8

³⁷ Ibidem, p. 8 and Mutwa, *Zulu Shaman*, p. 35.

³⁸ Eileen Jensen Krige, *The Social System of the Zulus*, Pietermaritzburg 1962, p. 281 and Axel-Ivar Berglund, *Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism*, Uppsala 1976, p. 35, 280.

can be called, and it is accepted only in highly stressful situations like grave illness or flood.³⁹ Twelve of my sangoma informants support this view and say that even though Zulus are Christianised, still some can be found who believe in uNkulunkulu as a great ancestor and ask him for help. This, however, hardly happens because ancestral spirits are those who are asked for help or carrying pleas to God.⁴⁰

There is also no consent in the 21st century who uNkulunkulu is but it is not the powerful highest god Mutwa describes. Some sangomas perceive him as a god, others as the first ancestor, yet others as both. Before colonisation, Zulus did not wonder about this topic. They were forced to do it by missionaries who tried to find the main god, someone comparable to Jesus Christ, Yahweh or at least to Zeus. Matching Zulu god with one known to missionaries would have allowed to find similarities and opposites, draw comparisons and hence, would have made the conversion process easier. Only confronted by missionaries, Zulus tried to describe uNkulunkulu and place him within their divinities' pantheon. After almost 200 years uNkulunkulu Zulus still have not reached consent and truthfully, they have no interest in analysing this divinity or its divine ancestry. None of researchers or my sangoma informants have reported myths that would prove Mutwa's claim that uNkulunkulu was the one who created the world, influenced the order in the universe and was the highest deity. Mutwa's image of 'the Great Spirit' is heavily influenced by the Christian Almighty God, and it is not a phrase that any of my informants would use.⁴¹

Though Ma gave birth to first people with the blessing of uNkulunkulu, people turned to be cruel, evil and mindless. Ma and her husband, the Tree of Life, did not interfere in worldly matters but finally they decided to stop people's 'selfish and useless lives'.⁴² As a result, a great flood destroyed the Earth and all people died but one: a good young woman called Amarava. When Goddess Ma spared her life, Amarava begged the goddess for forgiveness for all people and for saving them, but the goddess refused. Ma told her to marry Odu, an ugly giant, and become the mother of the second people, a new race that will live on Earth after the great deluge.⁴³

Water is worldwide recognised as a purification agent. It also plays important part in Nguni peoples' beliefs. In spite of vast Christianisation, people who seek sangomas' help often undergo water purifying rituals. Also sangomas and other healers-diviner in the South of Africa use water during their training and as frequent cleansing practices. They claim that water is inhabited by good spirits and divinities, like e.g. water snakes.⁴⁴ Snake worship (ophiolatrea) is a popular worship connected not only to water cleansing

³⁹ Krige, *Social System*, p. 281 and Berglund, *Zulu Thought-Patterns*, p. 36.

⁴⁰ Private conversations in 2013 and 2018.

⁴¹ For in-depth analysis of uNkulunkulu in the Zulu traditions see above and: Agnieszka Podolecka, 2020. 'UNkulunkulu: "God, a God or the First Ancestor? The Quest for a Supreme Deity in Zulu Religious Beliefs"', *Rocznik Orientalistyczny / The Yearbook of Oriental Studies*, 73,1, pp. 160–170.

⁴² Mutwa, *Zulu Shaman*, pp. 45–46.

⁴³ Mutwa, *Indaba*, p. 47.

⁴⁴ Bernard Penelope, ' "Living Water" in Nguni Healing Traditions, South Africa', *Worldviews* 17 (2013), p. 139.

rituals but also prayers for rain and ancestors' reverence.⁴⁵ Places with 'living water' like waterfalls, rivers, natural lakes and sea are often considered sacred and are hedged with many taboos.⁴⁶

Mutwa emphasises the importance of water rituals during his apprenticeship to become a sangoma. During his *ukutwasa*, Mutwa would wake up before dawn, meditate, drink a herbal mixture, and then tickle his uvula to regurgitate it. Then, he would bathe in the coldest water available. Afterwards he would hurry home to take a steam bath to steam-clean his body. Afterwards he would bathe a second time and then greet his tutor.⁴⁷ Mutwa told me that all his life he used water as a main purifying means while working with patients and to cleanse himself.⁴⁸ Hence, it is not surprising that in his myths he uses water as means of destruction of evil and to bring the second people.

A great deluge which symbolises the purification of sins is a popular mythological motive present in the Bible and many mythologies but not in the Zulu one. The separation of light and darkness is also a popular mythological motive, and like the great deluge it is described in Genesis chapter one. Also in the Bible, chaos is presented as a state of confusion in several meanings: a personal disorientation, the disregard of proper social rules and disobedience to God (Isaiah 45), the first stage of creation where God created the world from nothingness (Genesis 1). Chaos is also perceived as the opposition of God who 'is not a God of confusion but of peace' (Corinthians 14) and so should be the Earth and people. Mutwa grew up with a father who was a strict Christian, so strict in fact that he preferred to read the Bible to his dying son than allow his medical treatment.⁴⁹ Mutwa was also an avid reader very well acquainted with the Bible. This probably was the reason of creating stories so heavily influenced by Christian motives. Using chaos, darkness and nothingness as the opposition of divine order, light and well-organized world helped Mutwa write creation stories with motives that will be easily recognised and understood. However, they are not myths from the known Zulu canon.

The divine beginning of Bantu-speakers according to Mutwa

The mythical birth of Bantu-speaking peoples is a continuation of Mutwa's creation myths in which uNkulunkulu is the great god, while Ma and Amarava are goddesses and mothers of humankind. Ma was unwillingly married to the Tree of Life, then she forced

⁴⁵ Rakotsoane F.L.C., 'Religion of the Ancient Basotho with Special Reference to "Water Snake"' (PhD. diss. University of Cape Town 1996), pp. 1, 51.

⁴⁶ Bernard, "Living Water", p. 139. The usage of water and learning from water spirits is reported by researchers, e.g. Berglund 1976, Bernard 2010, 2013, Rakotsowane 1996.

⁴⁷ Mutwa, *Zulu Shaman*, pp. 16–17.

⁴⁸ Private conversation, March 2013. Many sangomas has experience similar to Mutwa's: they bathe and use steam huts to purify themselves and their patients, they drink *muti* and prepare it for it for sick and troubled (Bernard, "Living Water", p. 140 and all my sangoma informants).

⁴⁹ Mutwa, *Indaba*, p. 691.

the fate of an unwilling marriage onto the only good person who survived the great deluge, Amarava. Amarava was in despair, but Ma was adamant: she had to marry Odu. None of the goddesses chose their husbands, in fact both fought against such unions with all their power, but Mutwa presents their stories in a way that sanctifies the social order: women should not protest, marriage should serve the greater good, not be a caprice. Ma was forced by the god, and – in spite of her initial unhappiness – she forced the same fate onto Amarava believing that it would serve the highest good. Both women finally learnt to love their husbands. They all helped create the world we know, and thanks to Amarava Zulus and other Bantu-speaking peoples live in contemporary Africa. The rest of the humankind comes from Africa – this belief Mutwa hold to the end of his life.⁵⁰

The concept of arranged marriage is both African and worldwide. Women in Africa were and still are currency, the means of getting money. Zulu tradition of *lobolo*, the dowry that is paid for a bride, helps many families financially. Also, arranging marriages within a village or a social group assures more stability for all. Mutwa emphasizes the need for obedience, and does it in both meanings: obeying social rules for the benefit of the family/clan/village/ethnic group and obeying gods' orders.

The idea of the deity in the form of the Tree of Life must have been influenced by an intercultural symbol known from Norse, Egyptian, Assyrian, Indian, South American and other mythologies. The Tree of Life appears also in the Bible in books of Genesis, Proverbs, Psalms and Revelation. It grows in the middle of the garden of Eden, where also the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and other trees grow. It may represent God's life-giving presence and the promise of eternal life. Its central position in the garden may symbolise the importance of the bond between humans and God. Mutwa also emphasises such importance giving humans their divine origins: the first people were born from the goddess Ma and the second people from Amarava who later became a powerful goddess. Even though Mutwa claims that the Tree of Life 'is the most revered deity throughout Bantu Africa, even today'⁵¹ and his knowledge about it comes from Amarava herself, such a myth does not occur in Zulu mythology, it is his own creation.

After Amarava helped creating the second people and became a widow, she changed. At the end of her life, she became a monster. Mutwa blames her split personality for the dualism and duplicity in human souls.⁵² He believes that Amarava is the reason for which people are prone to sin and evil, though in *Indaba* Mutwa also blames Ma, the mother of the first people, for human imperfections: it is Ma's desire and lust that tainted human souls with jealousy, anger, misery and evil.⁵³ Whichever goddess Mutwa wants to blame, he shows that people's aptitude to war, fighting, cheating and other forms of violence are deeply engraved in human psyche. Hence it is no surprise that Bantu-speaking people also succumbed to violence when conquering new lands and pushing away previous inhabitants like San and Khoikhoi. As will be shown later, Mutwa believes

⁵⁰ Private conversation, March 2013.

⁵¹ Mutwa, *Indaba*, p. 41.

⁵² Mutwa, *Indaba*, p. 69 and Mutwa, *Zulu Shaman*, p. 59.

⁵³ Mutwa, *Indaba*, p. 8.

in Bantu-speakers' superiority; his disdain for the San gave Bantu the right to claim their lands. Mutwa told me that even though he was a pacifist at heart, he knew that war was sometimes needed to gain land and the prosperity of Bantu-speaking peoples: 'this is history, tribes and nations move, some attack, others defend themselves, we cannot change it because wanting more is human nature'.⁵⁴

In the continuation of Mutwa's creation myths, the Great Spirit tested all living creatures on Earth and chose 'two-legged' as the most intelligent and skilled. As animals were less smart, the humans won all competitions over other races, and among them the ancestral tribe of whom all 'Negroid tribes of Africa sprang' were the Bantu-speakers. Mutwa believes the name 'Bantu' comes from 'muntu' which means 'a man', 'human being', 'he who walks erect', 'two-legged'.⁵⁵ As this is a linguistic alternation, nobody undermines this reasoning, as explained in the first paragraph of this paper.

Mutwa believes in the superiority of Bantu languages speaking peoples as those who were directly descended from the people created by Amarava. He calls them 'the Old Tribes' from the 'Old Land', also called 'Watu Wakale'.⁵⁶ He also believes that Bantu-speakers 'incorporate all the tribes of the land of the Bu-Kongo, right up to the southern parts of the land of the Ibo and Oyo (Nigeria)', those peoples being the 'offshoots of the Great Ba-Ntu nation that lived in the 'Old Land'.⁵⁷ According to Mutwa, Bantu-speakers started living as a properly organised tribe 4,500 years ago, 'reckoned according to the genealogies', though he does not provide any genealogy; he also claims that Bantu-speaking peoples were peaceful, ruled by a 'High council of the Mothers of the People, (...) Witches and Sybils over the age of forty' who ruled with magic and maintained peace until alien tribes came and raged wars.⁵⁸

There is no historical proof to a social organisation as a council of female elders and no proof that Bantu-speakers were peaceful. As an ethnic group who systematically broadened their territories from Central Africa to the South pushing first inhabitants (San and Khoikhoi) away to worse lands, it is rather highly probable that they were warlike people. Famous Zulu king Shaka was known for his ruthlessness and as a fearsome fighter.⁵⁹ Zulu chiefs are men and there is no written or rock painted account that they have ever been ruled by women.

For Mutwa, Bantu-speaking people are descendants of divinities, and they were 'ready-made' with their languages and cultures. He does not worry about the language-making process as a part of social evolution, for him the emergence of Bantu-speaking peoples

⁵⁴ Private conversation, March 2013.

⁵⁵ Mutwa, *Indaba*, p. 557.

⁵⁶ Watu Wakale is a Suahili term and means 'the people who used to live', 'the ancients' which can be understood as ancestors; 'watu' means 'people', Viewed 14 October 2023, <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/401106/Mzimu-wa-Watu-wa-Kale>; <http://www.swahili.it/>>.

⁵⁷ Mutwa, *Indaba*, p. 558.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 558.

⁵⁹ Mutwa does not praise Shaka, he considers him cruel and calls him 'a terrible chief', Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa, *Africa is my witness*, Johannesburg 1966, p. 159.

was a sacred moment in history. In his opinion, if historians do not know about these divine origins, it means they did not gain the information from those who are chosen to learn the 'true history'; he revealed 'the truth' and presented it in his books, and never changed his mind.⁶⁰ Divine origins of humankind are common in all religions, after all, they claim some higher superpower created the world and people. They maybe gods, God, ancestors, or other kinds of divine creatures, hence Mutwa's claim about divine roots of humankind – and hence Zulus – is neither original nor surprising. However, his version stands in contradiction to the creation myths collected by renown scholars.

Mutwa's attitude towards other Africans

In Mutwa's version of Bantu-speaking peoples' history, he mixes figures who are both known from the Zulu mythology like uNkulunkulu, and others which he invented like the first parents: Ma and The Tree of Life, Amarava and Odu. Because of his belief in these divine origins, in his books he was prejudiced towards other ethnic groups. Such motive is often used by religions to strengthen their power and conquer other peoples – religions have always given the authority to destroy those who do not subordinate, *vide* the idea of a chosen nation, nominating kings by religious authorities or religious wars. Mutwa uses the old belief in supremacy over the other. With time and thanks to the cooperation with New Age pacifist and inclusive circles, he changed his attitude, and in *Zulu Shaman* and multiple interviews he preached peace and respect to every human being. He even married Virginia, a woman who was partially San, a tribe he initially disdained.⁶¹ However, at the beginning in the 1960s, when he wrote *Indaba, Africa* and *My People* he felt superior over many African peoples. He called the Bushmen and the Pygmies (these names were quite commonly used in the 1950s and 1960s) an 'inferior and primitive aboriginal race' and 'cunning little rascals'.⁶² He wrote that they were descendants of Amarava and Frogmen and hatched from eggs like animals. The Frogmen were creatures who helped Amarava when she refused to marry Odu. She went into hiding and sought help from them. Frogmen hatched from eggs, so Mutwa decided that their descendants must have been inferior.⁶³ Zulu mythology does not offer any accounts of Zulu-Bushman interactions. Historically, the first contacts between Bantu-speakers and their Southern neighbours took place around 2nd century AD. Bantu-speakers were agro-pastoralists in the opposition to San people who were hunters-gatherers. In the 16th century when the Zulu kingdom was created, San and Khoikhoi still used tools made of rocks, wood, and bones, while Bantu-speaking ethnic groups used metal tools and weapons. Zulus like many other Bantu-speaking peoples were also better organised and they were

⁶⁰ Private conversation, March 2013.

⁶¹ Private conversation, March 2013.

⁶² Mutwa, *Indaba*, p. 57.

⁶³ Mutwa, *My people*, p. 57, and Mutwa, *Indaba*, p. 242.

trained in combat, so taking over San's lands was not difficult.⁶⁴ As conquerors, Zulus felt superior over the conquered but if it came from the divine roots they believed in or just from their power is not determined.

Another ethnic group whom Mutwa disregarded as not of proper divine origins in his early writings were Khoikhoi, then called Hottentot. Mutwa claims that 'Bantu hate [them] worse than the plague' and whom 'Bantu are proud to have wiped off from the face of the earth'.⁶⁵ According to Mutwa, the Hottentots were the offspring of Kanya, a cruel, yellow woman, disgusting god of fire and light.⁶⁶ Khoikhoi, like San, were the first inhabitants of the lands that are now South Africa. They were pushed to worse and worse lands, and then dispersed by Bantu-speakers during their conquering of southern Africa.

Researchers do not report hatred or severe conflict between Zulus, Hottentots and San peoples in modern times or even during the 19th century colonisation. Hottentot and Bantu-speakers relationships date back probably to the 2nd century AD. Hottentots were pastoralist group while San were hunters-gatherers. Agro-pastoralist Bantu-speaking groups entered the scene in the 2nd century, probably in small groups. They were more developed and militarily organised, so they claimed the best lands. They considered San worse than Khoikhoi because they did not respect non-pastoralist tribes but there is no evidence that Bantu-speakers hated other ethnic groups as much as Mutwa describes it. Before the arrival of the Europeans in 1652, Khoikhoi traded cattle and sheep for iron and copper with Bantu-speaking peoples; they co-existed and even allowed inter-marriages.⁶⁷ Today these ethnic groups are no longer pastoralist, they live both in towns and rural areas, work in various industries, and do not compete over land or political influence. None of my twenty-six sangoma informants have ever heard stories that would recall hatred or any myths that would support Mutwa's claims of divine superiority of Zulus over San or Khoikhoi.

Mutwa also denies the Swazis the privilege of belonging to the Bantu-speaking group, which is ethnically and linguistically false. IsiSwazi language is very similar to isiZulu and belongs to same Bantu languages and Nguni group. According to Mutwa, Swazi people migrated South from the original place of humanity, though Mutwa does not specified from where exactly, just somewhere in Central Africa. He states that when Nguni arrived South, 'they found the Swazi had degenerated to such an extent that they no longer built villages but lived in trees like monkeys'; the Nguni call them 'Tree Dwellers'.⁶⁸ The truth is that the Swazi have led very similar lives to Zulus, building rondavels (traditional round thatched huts) like Zulus, and still form clans with chiefs like Zulus, and are governed by kings. In the case of the Zulus, king is just a honorary title, as this ethnic group does not have its country, they are one of South Africa's ethnic

⁶⁴ Curtin et al., *African History*, p. 337

⁶⁵ Mutwa, *Indaba*, p. 208.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁷ Roger B. Beck, *The History of South Africa*, Westport 2000, pp. 11, 14 and Curtis et.al., *African History*, pp. 334–335.

⁶⁸ Mutwa, *Indaba*, p. 155.

groups. Swazis have managed to keep their country (Eswatini, former Swaziland). There is no proved evidence that Mutwa's disdain of the Swazis reflects Zulus' attitude. The Swazi-Zulu royal families are friendly enough to allow inter-ethnic marriages, e.g. Zulu king Goodwill Zwelethini married the Swazi Princess Mantfombi, daughter of King Sobhuza II in 1977.⁶⁹ In spite of small local conflicts, nothing supports Mutwa's claim. Denying the Swazis a place among the Bantu-speaking peoples (the chosen ones according to Mutwa) was Mutwa's personal attitude several decades ago, not a historical or an ethnographic fact. When confronted about his belief in Zulu superiority in 2013, Mutwa said that all people in the world are equally good and we should be one big family, stop wars and any forms of prejudice.⁷⁰

Another ethnic group disliked by Mutwa in his books are the Masai⁷¹: "Give a Masai a stone and he will hit something or somebody with it. Give him any piece of wood and he will turn it into a club with which to brain you. 'Peace' or 'peaceful' are words that do not occur in the vocabulary of the Masai".⁷² Why he disdained Masai is not clear, as Zulus live far away from them and have no political or cultural dealings. Mutwa bases his claim of 'wilderness' of Masai on another myth of his invention: the story of a lovely and good-hearted girl Marimba who saved Amarava. Even though Amarava did not want to be Odu's spouse, she learnt to love him, and when he died, she decided to commit suicide by jumping into Kilimanjaro. Marimba saved Amarava against her will, and it was then when she changed into a monster Watamaraka, 'the Spirit of Evil', with metal body, five udder breasts, claws and a lion tail which moved like a whip.⁷³ His dislike towards the Masai is based on another myth of his invention: Marimba became the chieftainess of the Wakambi tribe, part of the Bantu languages speaking group. The Masai invaded Marimba's people, and one of them seduced her. Then the Masai enslaved all indigenous people.⁷⁴ The story is set in the lands between the lakes Tanganyika and Malawi where the Masai live. Mutwa locates the Marimba's village in the region of Tanga-Nyika. Later in the story the Masai are described as the worshipers of Nangai, an evil god that was also one of the Night Howlers.⁷⁵ According to Mutwa, these evil creatures still linger among people and have their home in the 'Land-that-is-and-is-not' and it shows that the Masai cannot be trusted, and Zulus are better to stay away from them.⁷⁶

Mutwa draws the beginnings and migrations of Southern Bantu-speakers and other peoples from divine beginnings somewhere in the heart of Africa and mixes mythical past with events that he calls 'historical facts.' It is not historically proven that the Masai

⁶⁹ Viewed 14 October 2023, <<http://members.iinet.net.au/~royalty/states/southafrica/zulu.html>>.

⁷⁰ Private conversation, March 2013.

⁷¹ There are two forms of spelling: Masai and Maasai. I chose Masai because Mutwa uses this version and I want the spelling to be consistent.

⁷² Mutwa, *Indaba*, p. 112.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, p. 63.

⁷⁴ Mutwa, *Indaba*, pp. 62–67, Mutwa, *Zulu Shaman*, p. 58.

⁷⁵ Mutwa, *Indaba*, pp. 80–84.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 80.

had any close relationships with Zulus. Also, no such tribe as Wakambi has never been confirmed by scholars or travellers. There is a big Bantu language speaking group called Wakamba (or Kamba) in Kenya, so naturally they have contacts with the Masai; they are also related to Kikuyu, another big Bantu language speaking group living in Kenya. Wakamba probably originated in the 15th century at the region of Kilimanjaro, but some sources trace them back to the Congo region.⁷⁷ In pre-colonial times, their supreme god was called Ngai like Kikuyu and Masai deities.⁷⁸ It is not clear if the Wakamba of Kenya were Mutwa's inspiration; he might have only used their name. No other ethnic group with a name similar to Wakambi seems to exist in Africa.

The Masai are a semi-nomadic Nilo-Hamitic ethnic group whose social system is based on military ideals similar to Zulus: boys become warriors, then elders; women's life should be dedicated to keeping household and fulfilling maternal duties. Both Zulu and Masai are organised in clans led by chiefs and local kings. They used to be pastoralists but in time when Mutwa wrote his books many had already moved to towns. Mutwa travelled extensively even during Apartheid, and he met Masai people during these travels. He obviously disliked them as he wrote: 'they fight whom they please' and to them 'war and killing are the very breath of life'.⁷⁹ In fact, Masai live in the regions of contemporary Kenya and Tanzania and they used to be in conflict with neighbouring peoples; the reason was, among others, the stealth of cattle for which the Masai felt authorised by their god. Many Masai converted to Islam or Christianity, but others still believe in Eng-Ai 'who is prayed to and hears', and to whom sacrifices are made but who is not the creator of the world. The world was created by god Naiteru-Kop who takes little interest in the worldly matters.⁸⁰

Masai religion is monotheistic but the god's nature is dualistic: Engai Narok (Black God) is good-natured and benevolent, and Engai Na-nyokie (Red God) is vengeful. Piłaszewicz spells the god's name 'Ngai' (the same name as Wakamba people call their god), Last spells 'Engai'; Mutwa's 'Nangai' refers to the same deity who can be helpful or destructive, send health or sickness, cause rain or drought etc.⁸¹ Masai known mythology does not refer to any Masai-Zulu animosities.

Researchers' informants do not recall a story about Marimba, neither in Zulu nor related ethnic groups' mythologies. Nowadays, marimba is a name of a xylophone made of wood; the players use mallets to strike the keys and create a melody. Marimba is

⁷⁷ Kaplan Irving, *Kenya, a country study*, Washington 1982, pp. 15, 91 and Joseph Muya Mani, 'Cultural patterns of the Kamba culture' (PhD diss. United States National University, San Diego 2010), p. 4.

⁷⁸ James Karanja, *The Missionary Movement in Colonial Kenya: The Foundation of Africa Inland Church*, Göttingen 2009, p. 106 and Dorothy L. Hodgson, *The Church of Women: Gendered Encounters between Maasai and Missionaries*, Bloomington 2005, p. 63.

⁷⁹ Mutwa, *Indaba*, p. 86.

⁸⁰ Claud Hollis, 'The Masai', *Journal of the Royal African Society* 42 (1943), pp. 119–120 and Douglas Thomas, Temilola Alanamu (eds.), *African Religions: Beliefs and Practices through History*, Santa Barbara 2018, p. 179.

⁸¹ J.T. Last, 'A Visit to the Masai People Living beyond the Borders of the Nguru Country', in: *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, New Monthly Series 5,9 (1883), p. 531 and Stanisław Piłaszewicz, *Religie Afryki*, Warszawa 2000, p. 51.

popular not only in Africa but in South America as well.⁸² Marimba is yet another mythical figure created by Mutwa. Also, his view on relationships between Zulus and other ethnic groups are not supported by neither religious beliefs nor historical facts.

Conclusions

The convention of Mutwa's description of the origins of Bantu-speakers and other ethnic groups is mythical, not realistic. It is neither based on archaeological finds nor on well-researched Zulu mythology. Since his first book, *Indaba, my Children*, to the end of his life Mutwa claimed that his knowledge came not only from his sangoma teachers but also from a divine source – the goddess Amarava. As an avid reader and a traveller, Mutwa had a chance to meet various ethnic groups and he learnt some of their myths. He gained basic knowledge about other Bantu-speaking peoples and their traditions, and created his version of what he learnt. He incorporated that knowledge into his mythical stories, however, that are not consistent with Zulu or other Bantu-speaking peoples' mythologies.

The problem with analysing Mutwa's myths, his version of Bantu-speakers' history and relationships among neighbouring ethnic groups has never been supported by academics and their informants. Mutwa's mythical stock-figures are not the ones known to Zulus, neither contemporary nor during the beginning of the colonisation, when the first accounts of Zulu mythology were written. They are not confirmed by researchers' informants. Also, twenty-six sangomas I interviewed do not support his version of neither Zulu nor Nguni mythical origins. Sangomas are firmly set in their societal and clan cultures, they collect myths and are storytellers obliged to educate new generations. All my informants emphasise the importance of passing down history and tribal culture but none of them recognised Mutwa's stories of goddesses Ma, Amarava, Marimba and accompanying characters as Zulu stock-figures. Some believed that Mutwa had good will writing his stories, but all firmly stated that no goddess Amarava could have taught him – ancestral spirits are the ones who train sangomas alongside their mentors, sometimes nature spirits like water serpents help in the process. Hence Mutwa's stories – even though myths in their construction, narrative and aim – are not Zulu myths, and they do not convey Zulu beliefs about their origins. Also, his information about relationships between Zulus and other ethnic groups have no justification in historical or mythical records.

In his early writings Mutwa presented prejudice toward other ethnic groups and projected his fears of strangers in his opinions. This is a typical psychological fear of a stranger, someone who comes from outside, and even if he or she stays, they are still strangers. This can be seen in Mutwa's way of thinking about the Zulus – ours is known,

⁸² In South America the instrument is also called marimba. The name is believed to come from an African language, probably one of Bantu languages (cf. Kimbundu and Swahili *marimba*, *malimba*, name of a xylophone-like instrument) (on-line etymology dictionaries: Viewed 14 October 2023, <www.etymonline.com, www.dictionary.reference.com/etymology/marimba>).

hence good: our kraal, village, clan, tribe, while everything that is beyond the known realm is strange and causes anxiety. In his last years of life Mutwa changed his mind, he emphasised the importance of all African peoples and called for mutual respect between them and the rest of the world. He also stated that the Bantu-speakers were not different from other ethnic groups because all humans had divine origins: they looked different and formed various cultures and religions due to the evolution and divine interference. In spite of critics from fellow Zulus and academics, till the end of his life he never revoked his version of the beginning of Bantu-speaking peoples and his supposed teachings by Amarava.

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