group had become incorrigible—*aro*gi, in fact, whose persistent and malicious cursing was undermining the very fabric of society. Later one of the survivors of this attack, Firipo M. Inoti, became the first Methodist minister. He also became an important agent in the government’s attempts to bolster up the traditional structures of society through the revival of *Njuri Nceke* (the council of elders).

This attempt, like so many colonial experiments in ‘indirect rule’ and the missionary equivalent of ‘adaptation’, was essentially a cul-de-sac—but this was only just beginning to be apparent in 1940. The cut-off date of the book leaves some of the basic questions about the place of the cursing movements in Meru society unresolved. One can project the outline of future developments. For example, the mainstream institutions of the kiamas have continued to be eroded despite the attempts of colonial administrators and missionaries. To an extent the Churches have replaced some of the functions of the kiamas, thus becoming integrated into mainstream society in a way which would have been inconceivable in 1910 or even 1940. On the other hand one can be sure that the ‘deviant’, non-conformist, *uro*gi traditions have continued—in the protest movement of Mau Mau, in the Christian *roho* (spirit) movements, as well as in developing indigenous forms. Fadiman does not deal with these more recent developments, though he has provided a solid background and hermeneutic with which to assess such change.

The field work for the book was undertaken in 1969 & 70. If it had been done more recently it would surely have taken much greater account of the rôle of women.

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There has been a gap in our knowledge with regard to the traditional religion of the Ovambo, the northernmost people of the
Southern Bantu with an estimated population of 500,000, living in the far north of Namibia; the writings of Father Carlos Estermann refer merely to the Ovambo living in Angola. Nevertheless, the early Finnish missionaries, who started to work among these people in 1870, have enriched the study of religions with a unique collection of material on Ovambo traditions. But their accounts have been buried in letters and diaries, and only a few of them have been published in Finnish. However, who among us knows that beautiful language? It is the achievement of Dr Hiltunen, who worked for long years in Namibia and South Africa, to dig out this treasure and to make it accessible to a broader public by an English edition.

In doing so, she has refrained from pressing the reports into the straitjacket of Western theories. She rather classifies the phenomena under objective aspects, which arise from the field material and its terminology. In this way we learn that the old Ovambo did not distinguish between magic and religion. In their holistic outlook, they rather believed in the working of the vital power of God, which was mediated to them through their ancestral spirits, and which set all human activities in motion. It was the intention that determined whether an individual used it for injuring other persons or for the benefit of other people or himself.

Harmful activities are discussed in the first volume. In their own statements the Ovambo distinguished between witchcraft and sorcery. Witches were believed to act involuntarily, without being aware of their ability; they did not use rites, spells, or charms. Sorcerers worked consciously, using rites and means, which they had learned from other agents of evil, in order to achieve their gloomy aims. In times of famine and epidemics especially, this belief offered an answer to the question ‘who sent it?’

The second volume describes the beneficial use of this vital power. Again, there is a differentiation between various kinds of diviners, who reveal the messages from the ancestral spirits, and healers, who are experts in the use of traditional medical treatments and herbal medicines. This ‘good magic’ was applied to ensure success in work and war, to protect the families from all kinds of danger, to prevent spirits of misfortune from harming individuals, and to establish peace in the community. To achieve these purposes, the diviners used amulets and performed rites of purification and reconciliation.