welcomed his own textual criticism on anthropological monographs related to Africa. Nevertheless, I would rather suggest that if the 'other' is ever going to be represented in anthropological 'translations' (i.e. monographs) in a more meaningful way, more of the actions and words of the 'other' should be present in our writings and, certainly, in Mudimbe's text.

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Based on intensive oral interviewing, Fadiman's book is an historical account of the migration from the coast of the Meru, their settlement on the slopes of Mount Kenya, and the evolution of their social and political institutions: an age-set system, and government through a series of councils (kiama). But, within this broad canvas, there is a much more definite focus: the religious beliefs and institutions which undergirded society, specifically, the rôle of urogi (cursing) and uga (curse removal or cleansing). It is this aspect of the book which many readers of this Journal will find so fascinating. The book attempts to show how religious concepts find institutional expression, and are part of a complex historical process.

Urogi (a word common to many Bantu languages) is often translated in English as witchcraft or sorcery, words which have overwhelmingly negative connotations. But Fadiman contends that Urogi should not simply be seen as malevolent and anti-social. The cursers ('witchmen') are more than agents of personal vengeance. 'Rather they serve as social catalysts, using verbal ritual to create the need for counterrituals, to undo what had been done. These, in turn, provided the basis for still other rituals, creating a ripple effect throughout society, until the conflict that had appeared among its members had been wholly reconciled.' In Meru conflict centres around the control of cattle and access to agricultural land. This was especially acute on the fringes of the forest, where there was a gradual incursion of mixed farmers into the domain of the hunting communities higher up the mountain, the people generally
known as Athi. In these frontier districts the preservation of the hunting grounds from interlopers necessitated a complex system of cursing. These feared and powerful rituals of cursing and curse removing spread down throughout Meru society in the 19th Century, and became institutionalised in secret societies—the Meru word is again kiama. Fadiman calls them 'deviant' or 'fringe' groups. These secret societies both articulated societal conflict and defused it; people could express their fear of evil and manipulate evil. Times of stress, such as the ecological disasters of the late 19th Century and the colonial conquest at the beginning of the 20th, served to increase the role of these deviant cursing societies. ‘Kagita [one such society specializing in dancing, in which men sometimes dressed as women] was the child of catastrophe, offering new ways of survival for impoverished and despairing men and women. As long as catastrophic continued within Meru, the society would continue to evolve.’ (p. 174).

Their very secrecy protected these deviant societies from colonial gaze at a time when the mainstream institutions were condemned as superstitious and were being undermined: the warrior age-grade was becoming otiose and the councils of elders redundant. Eventually, by the 1920s a series of anthropologically interested administrators tried to reverse the situation, bolstering up the mainstream institutions (like the highest council of elders, Njuri Nceke) and waging a campaign against deviant witchcraft movements.

The account ends in 1940. By this time the Christian Churches (Methodist, Presbyterian, Catholic) were still small and of marginal importance—much more fringe and deviant, in fact, than the cursing societies themselves. Ironically, the Methodist mission was established at a place called Kaaga: a grove used by the aaga—curse removers—and sacred to the ancestors. In 1913 a number of young catechumens was murdered when their dormitory was set on fire. Fadiman’s careful investigation of this incident shows that the attack on the converts was partly an expression of the traditional rivalry between the warrior age-set and the next generation, about to assume warrior status—the group to which the Methodist youth belonged. This antagonism involved a certain amount of ritualised violence and physical abuse. But the converts’ refusal to act out the conventions of this antagonism, in particular their refusal to brew beer for the warriors, eventually convinced the warriors that this