

Film-maker ventriloquism in ethnographic film: Where subtitles *don't* let subjects “speak for themselves”

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The question of whose voices address us most audibly in an ethnographic film is ... influenced by the general and highly personal politics of production.

– Loizos (1993: 13)

1. Introduction

The purpose of the present paper¹ is to make and illustrate a point concerning the use of subtitles in ethnographic film. The point concerns the received notion that ethnographic film-makers use subtitles to enable film subjects to “speak for themselves” – to speak their own words in their own exotic languages, which film-makers render via subtitles into the language of the intended audience. The point is that film-makers might sometimes instead use subtitles *ventriloquially*, as a kind of “voice of Oz”² (cf. traditional film narrative’s “voice of God”), putting *their* message into subjects’ mouths more than faithfully translating subjects’ speech.

The film speech and subtitles by which the point is illustrated are those of the 1989 ethnographic television film *Spirits of defiance: The Mangbetu people of Zaire* (British Broadcasting Corporation [BBC] 1989).³ (Since the May 1997 overthrow of the Mobutu government, Zaire is again called the Democratic Republic of the Congo.) There are four film languages concerned: French, which was Zaire’s one official language; Lingala, which remains the most widely spoken of its four major national languages; the local Mangbetu language, in its predominant Meegye dialect;⁴ and English, the language of the film’s primary intended audience and thus also of its narration and subtitles.

¹ I finished the present paper in close to its present form in 2002 but have put off publishing it until now. I have retained the ethnographic present with which I began it in the early 1990s; I have retained as well all Zaire-era names for political-administrative districts – e.g., *collectivités*. I have done little to update or try to improve the paper in any other regard – e.g., I haven’t added references recommended to me by colleagues with whom I shared the paper in 2002; I think the 2002 form made clearly enough the paper’s intended main point. I have deleted an appendix intended to demonstrate that the paper’s free translations of Mangbetu and other film speech are indeed at least adequately done. I hereby acknowledge encouragement (not endorsement) concerning the paper’s 2002 form from Thomas Headland, Stacy Lathrop, and Ivan Karp (personal communications, 22 May, 9 August, and 20 August 2002, respectively). Also, I thank Karl Franklin and Jack Shoemaker for reading forms close to the current one, and Robert McAnally Adams and Pat Feinberg for help with copy-editing and suggestions relative to clarity and style. The paper’s faults, needless to say, are my own.

² In the 1939 movie *The Wizard of Oz* (MGM), which I remember watching on TV as a child, a small elderly man behind a curtain speaks into a kind of loudspeaker and produces special effects to create for Dorothy and her companions the *appearance* of the all-powerful Wizard of Oz. Another well-known image of what goes on, more or less, with film-maker ventriloquism, is that of ventriloquist Edgar Bergen (d. 1978) and his dummy, Charlie McCarthy.

³ The choice of films to illustrate the point was dictated by my own work with Mangbetu. From November 1980 to the mid-2000s (with interruptions), this was first as a linguist-translator in an SIL-assisted language project that included Christian bible translation, then as both this and a graduate student in Anthropology (MA 1985, PhD 1995, University of Rochester), and finally as one of SIL’s technical consultants to the project. Helpfully for readers who would evaluate the present paper, the film was posted on YouTube on October 30, 2016 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KCT1aY-6pw> (accessed 20 January 2017).

⁴ According to Lewis, Simons & Fennig (2016), Mangbetu is classified as Nilo-Saharan, Central Sudanic, East, Mangbetu (<https://www.ethnologue.com/language/mdj>, accessed 25 April 2017). While the name of the lan-

I have organized the paper in three major sections, followed by a brief summary and conclusion. In the first major section, I present relevant background about (1) the “Mangbetu” who are the film’s main subject, (2) the film itself, and (3) the conventionally-understood use of subtitles in ethnographic film. In the second major section, I continue, in relation to the actual speech of five film segments, with (1) film speech *context*, (2) a juxtaposition of film speech *subtitles*, *transcriptions*, and *free translations*, and (3) *observations* followed by some *analysis*. A comparison of transcriptions and translations, on the one hand, with subtitles, on the other, demonstrates that the film’s subtitles do *not* in fact translate or even condense consistently well the film speech that they accompany. From this fact, and from the ways in which the subtitles *do* render this speech, the observations and analysis show how film-makers *might* use the sum of a segment’s subtitles to support or help construct a film’s message as much as, if not more than, to permit film subjects to speak for themselves. In the third section, I consider aspects of the anthropological ethics of this type of film-maker ventriloquism that I see present in *Spirits of defiance*.

2. Relevant background

2.1. Concerning the film’s “Mangbetu”

In the literature, the term “Mangbetu” is an ethnic, linguistic, and even artistic label, and one that can have application at two or more levels. Ethnically, the term is used to denote not just the relatively small group most properly called “Mangbetu,” but also an amalgam of peoples that outsiders especially have come to call by that name. Besides Mangbetu proper, the amalgam includes, among other peoples, Meegye, Magyoo, Mapume, and Ambwuma. All these are from around Isiro in northeastern Congo, and most reside in political-administrative *collectivités* ruled by hereditary Mangbetu chiefs. By the early nineteenth century, the Mangbetu proper had achieved political prominence vis-à-vis the others by a combination of military victories, strategic alliances, and the forging of a multi-ethnic kingdom under their renowned kingdom builder Nbiangbale.⁵ Prior to this kingdom, the various peoples concerned had apparently approximated “tribes without rulers”⁶ more closely than even weak chiefdoms, with *strong* chieftainship a foreign institution to all. When, following Nbiangbale’s death, the kingdom began to weaken and fragment, neither the nature nor length of Mangbetu rule had been such as to make more than some (few, if in fact any?) of their subject-allies regard themselves as traditional, continuing subjects of the Mangbetu. Nevertheless, at the time of Belgian penetration into the area in the 1890s, the Mangbetu were still prominent enough that the Belgians, in establishing indirect foreign-colonial rule in the Congo, established hereditary Mangbetu chieftainships over a number of the region’s newly-created multi-ethnic administrative districts. From that point, and despite a certain cultural resentment (even hatred) of outsider chiefs,⁷ such chieftainships have been maintained through Congolese indepen-

guage’s principal dialect, Meegye, appears more commonly in the literature as either “Meje” or “Medje,” I have come to follow Van Bulck (1954: 59-60) in preferring “Meegye” as the closest transliteration of the noun stem of *némēgye*, which is what Meegye speakers themselves call their dialect.

⁵ See especially Keim (1979) concerning the history of the Mangbetu peoples in the nineteenth century.

⁶ The term is from Middleton & Tait (1958). My point in using it is only that, prior to Nbiangbale’s kingdom, all the peoples concerned were acephalous – without heads in the sense of rulers, of centralized political authority – more than they were anything approximating chiefdoms.

⁷ With regard to chiefs being regarded and resented as outsider authorities, see McKee (1995: 58-59, 104-105; 329, note 77, second sentence); with regard to the possible depth of the resentment, see below, in section 3.2., concerning the contents and theme of at least some Mangbetu tales that involve both Azapane (the Mangbetu

dence to the present, including in the Meegye-Mangbetu area⁸ *collectivités* of Mongomasi, Ndei, and Azanga. Since *Spirits of defiance* was filmed entirely in just part of Azanga, in and around the town of Nangazizi, about forty kilometers north of Isiro, the film's "Mangbetu" include some of the ruling Mangbetu proper of Azanga, some local Meegye Mambwugi subject-commoners (from the Mambwugi road leading west out of Nangazizi), and surely fewer from other such groups.⁹

2.2. Concerning the film

Spirits of defiance was one of two films produced for a 1989 exhibition of the American Museum of Natural History. Called *African Reflections*, the exhibition showcased a wide variety of material culture items from northeastern Congo, most of them collected over a half-century earlier by the museum's Lang-Chapin expedition of 1909-1915. One of the films, called *Mangbetu in the modern world*, was included in the exhibition itself; the other film was *Spirits of defiance*. There was no study-guide accompaniment to the film to explain its making or support the ethnography it presented. The film first aired on television on 6 June 1989, to an audience estimated by one source at over four million.

The exhibition was developed by two co-principal investigators – viz., anthropologist-curator Enid Schildkrout of the American Museum and historian Curtis Keim of Moravian College. Of primary interest to the investigators were artistic aspects of the exhibition's various items, as viewed within their cultural and historical contexts. Thus, as stated in the exhibition catalog, the exhibition and catalog's overall thesis was that "the art of the Mangbetu – the nonrepresentational art embodied in household furnishings, personal adornment, and the art of the court, as well as the genre of anthropomorphic art – should be interpreted in the larger ethnographic and historical context of the region" (Schildkrout & Keim 1990: 27).

Spirits of defiance was a co-production of the American Museum and England's Harcourt Films; it was made for BBC Television in association with America's Arts and Entertainment cable network; it was the first film of the *Under the Sun* ethnographic television documentary series, edited by Chris Curling; and funding came in large part from a grant from America's National Endowment for the Humanities. The film's producer-director was Harcourt Films' Jeremy Marre; its anthropology consultant from New York was the already-mentioned Enid Schildkrout; and it had a Belgian graduate student in linguistics, Didier

culture hero and "trickster") and Leopard. (With regard to both of these, see McKee 2010, which I presented at a conference and eventually published after the present paper's 2002 version.)

⁸ See in chapter 2 of McKee (1995), especially 2.1., a definition of this Meegye-Mangbetu area. As summarized in note 13 on page 301, this is "a multiethnic area within which a) people(s) calling themselves most properly 'Meje' constitute most of the population; b) a speech form most properly called 'Meje' is the dominant form; c) a minority of people(s) more properly called 'Mangbetu' enjoy a disproportionate political prominence; and d) there is a relative sociocultural unity."

⁹ There is an apt statement in Hutereau (1922[?]) concerning parts of this introductory section's background material:

Deux clans jouèrent un rôle important dans l'histoire de la tribu Medje Les Medje, séparés en groupements familiaux, indépendants les uns des autres, se voient réunis sous le pouvoir des Mangbetu, qui se partagent le territoire et qui appliquent avec une volonté sauvage les droits absolus qu'ils s'arrogent sur les familles (1922[?]: 268).

The Italian anthropologist Stefano Allovio is an important further source on the Mangbetu. Although he didn't do his fieldwork until after the film was made, I mention him in a note below for the relevance of his study of Meegye-Mangbetu area blood pacts to the choice, for a Mangbetu ethos, between "defiance" and "understanding."

Demolin, as a field consultant. The last mentioned, Demolin, had done substantial Mangbetu-related field research by the time of the film's production (in ethnomusicology, on the one hand, and phonetics and phonology, on the other); Schildkrout had had no such Mangbetu experience. Actual filming was done over a period of between two and three weeks in January-February 1989.

Regarding the film's message, it portrays the Mangbetu as a traditional people who, from first contact, have resisted the Western outsiders who would stereotype and attempt to change them. The film accomplishes this by a combination of visual images, English-language narration, and English-subtitled film speech. It features three persons especially: (1) the previous Mangbetu chief of Azanga, Danga Poli; (2) a Meegyie Mambwugi subject-commoner named Mabondane; and (3) the head of the local Roman Catholic mission, an Italian priest named Elio. The film portrays Danga Poli as a traditional Mangbetu chief; it portrays Mabondane as a traditional Mangbetu; it portrays Father Elio as the quintessential (bad-guy) white outsider, representative of a foreign church that devalues the Mangbetu language, misunderstands Mangbetu culture, and seeks through its missionary work to destroy and replace foundational parts of the culture.

One of the film's reviews, by anthropologist Ivan Karp, appeared in the June 1991 issue of *American Anthropologist*; it appeared alongside another review by Karp, of the American Museum's *African Reflections* exhibition. Karp categorized the film as a "made-for-television ethnographic documentary." He said it took a different tack from the exhibition, in that "[i]t displays Mangbetu culture and society as largely intact from the precolonial period, and the Mangbetu people as having a self-conscious interest in retaining their cultural forms and identity." In praise of the film, he wrote, "If we had a readily available ethnography of the Mangbetu, this film would make a wonderful accompaniment to the text"; in criticism, "The least successful aspect of the film is the story of cultural 'defiance.'" Alongside visual-image evidence of "Mangbetu economic innovation and changes in social life," he saw this "defiance" reiterated constantly by "the conclusion that the Mangbetu have resisted incursions into their cultural world." Concerning this conclusion, he noted that, "The evidence provided consists primarily of *filmed Mangbetu conversation* and scenes of 'traditional' ritual. Resistance is defined as though some sectors of Mangbetu life are kept unchanged while the people move in other directions. This is rather misleading" (my italics). On the same subject of filmed conversation, he stated earlier that the film "presents rather striking interviews with Italian missionaries attempting to root out what they see as unacceptable pagan practices among the Mangbetu." Without attention to the film's subtitling, Karp concluded his review by saying, "This film is fine if it accompanies the exhibition with which it is associated. By itself it can be misleading" (1991: 521).

In a review article that touched on the *Under the Sun* series generally, Hughes-Freeland (1991), concerning how she wrote her review, noted that she had asked herself "whether [the series' summer 1991 films] would help students in anthropology to overcome *stereotypes* or not" (1991: 15, my italics); her answer was that "many of the current and past *Under the Sun* films have lacked [a certain necessary] quality of sympathetic yet serious and informed inquiry."¹⁰ She concluded her review by saying that,

¹⁰ To try to boil it down, the quality of inquiry in view here is described as one "which comes from thinking and experiencing [anthropology's recent] problematics" (Hughes-Freeland 1991: 16), in which the discipline had been "asking itself about how it is constituted as a form of knowledge and what are the political implications of that form" (ibid.: 15).

Many of the ... *Under the Sun* films I would put aside [and not use in an anthropology course] for fear that anthropology's concerns and debates are misrepresented. Too many of the films are anthropological simulacra and would be better off unburdened by the anthropological tag they have been given (ibid.: 16).

About the film's subtitling, I have but three sources containing any explanatory or evaluative information, and two of these are personal correspondence. First, there is a pair of letters to me from producer-director Marre, which explained (1) that it was consultant-in-the-field Demolin who stayed behind others of the film crew "working on detailed translations with the Mangbetu interviewees";¹¹ (2) that "[Demolin] then came and stayed at my home and helped in the post-production over many weeks";¹² and (3) that "[t]he subtitles and edited version [of the film] were shown to Mangbetu for correction and approval."¹³ Second, there is a pair of letters from consultant Schildkrout, one to me and the other to the Mangbetu chief Danga Dambo, both of which, by the following quotes, appeared to imply that she believed the film's subtitles had enabled the subjects to speak for themselves: (1) "There are, no doubt, many ways [for a film like *Spirits of defiance*] to approach a complex subject, not only from the point of view of outsiders ..., but also from the viewpoints of the actors themselves";¹⁴ and (2) "I was sorry not to visit Zaire myself for the filming, but I have had the pleasure of getting to know you and your people through the film."¹⁵ And third, Schildkrout & Keim (1990) includes a note that refers to film statements of Mangbetu on a certain subject – viz., the consecration of a double bell – as a source of information concerning it (1990: 258, note 8 to chapter 2).

As a final note of background concerning the film, the exhibition catalog's acknowledgments mention the existence of twenty hours of unedited film footage that "provide a new resource with which to continue the study of the Mangbetu people" (ibid.: 10).

2.3. Concerning the conventional use of subtitles in ethnographic film

Subtitles were introduced into ethnographic film from about the early 1960s,¹⁶ as a means of allowing film subjects who spoke languages foreign to a film's main intended audience(s) to "speak for themselves."¹⁷ Together with voice-overs, they were a response to the idea that "the expert, authoritative commentary voice" – i.e., the film's narrative commentary,

¹¹ Jeremy Marre, personal communication, 19 July 1990.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Jeremy Marre, personal communication, 15 June 1990.

¹⁴ Enid Schildkrout, personal communication, 14 February 1990.

¹⁵ Enid Schildkrout, personal communication to Chief Danga Dambo, 27 September 1990.

¹⁶ Loizos (1993) says of David & Judith MacDougall's *To live with herds* (1971) that it "is remembered [above all] for being one of the first films to use English subtitles to render indigenous speech, and for its avoidance of orthodox voice-over commentary with its suggestion of authority" (1993: 93), while he mentions Timothy Asch's *The feast* (1970) as having formal priority as to the use of English subtitles (ibid.: 112, note 2).

¹⁷ Loizos (1993), again, says that, at a certain point after the development of "synch-sound" filmmaking technology, when film subjects' speech "could be translated into another language via the medium of subtitles, any people, no matter how obscure their language, could 'speak to' people they had never seen, and who would never learn their tongue" (1993: 11). As just one example of how a well-known anthropologist saw this able to work out in practice, Terence Turner expressed satisfaction in his experience of working on two Kayapo films with a film director and a BBC director who "were willing to pack the films tightly with ethnography and cultural interpretation, while allowing the Kayapo to speak for themselves in extended passages of subtitled speech" (1992: 111, my italics).

or narration – with which ethnographic documentaries addressed their audience(s), was impersonal, remote, colonial, even the all-seeing, all-knowing “voice of God” (Loizos 1993: 12); and that, as such, narrative commentaries could not be presumed to speak the message of film subjects themselves. Subtitles were acknowledged to have their own difficulties – e.g., the “relative scarcity of subtitling skills” (ibid.: 13) and their negative effect on the visual image;¹⁸ and it was the view of some that, because of the time required to read them, “the subtitle can be no more than a condensation of what is said” (Rouch 1995: 93). But despite such difficulties, subtitles still appeared, at least to many, “the most effective means of escaping from the trap of commentary” (ibid.: 92). Clearly enough, the assumption appears to have been that subtitles, given that they were translations, whether or not condensed, of what film subjects were saying on film, were the voice of the film subjects themselves, and thus that they made a film “multi-vocal” when they were used together with a narrative commentary. Supporting this view is the fact that subtitling is *not* treated as a controversial subject (if it appears as an index entry at all) in works such as Heider (1990 [1976]),¹⁹ Crawford & Turton (1992), Loizos (1993), or Hockings (1995).

3. Context, data, and analysis concerning the speech of five film segments

In this section, I present relative to the speech of five film segments (1) the film *context*, (2) a juxtaposition of speech *subtitles*, *transcriptions*, and *free translations*, and (3) *observations* and *analysis*. All subtitles are as copied verbatim from the film;²⁰ all Mangbetu transcriptions were done by myself together with either two or three native Mangbetu speakers;²¹ all English translations of Mangbetu and Lingala were done by myself with the help of French free translations by the same Mangbetu just mentioned;²² and the English translation of the French interview segment was done by myself and then checked against the translation of a U.S. college professor who has long taught French.²³ Final responsibility for all transcription and free translation I assume as mine alone.²⁴

3.1. An interview in which the Mangbetu are made fighters more than chiefs

Not quite eight minutes into the film, there is a segment featuring an interview with the previous Mangbetu *chef de collectivité*, Danga Poli. The film’s narration introduces him

¹⁸ Rouch (1995) speaks of titles and subtitles as “mutilating the picture” (1995: 92).

¹⁹ I consulted the revised edition, Heider (2006), when it appeared, but I saw nothing added or changed that concerned subtitles.

²⁰ I hereby thank the BBC for permission to reproduce verbatim sixty subtitles from *Spirits of defiance* (Neil McFarlane, BBC Information; personal communication, 18 April 2002).

²¹ The transcriptions are according to a provisional Mangbetu orthography that is in the process of being formalized and tested throughout the Mangbetu language community. My thanks for help with transcription to Mr. Mbiri Kogibo, Rev. Motinda Ogili (deceased), and Rev. Abule Abuotubodio, all of them native Meegye-dialect speakers of the Mangbetu area’s CECCA Protestant church *communauté*.

²² Again, my thanks to these men for this assistance.

²³ My thanks to Professor Jean-Louis Roederer of Houghton College (Houghton, NY) for help with and confirmation of my own French translations.

²⁴ While various points of transcription and translation may undoubtedly be improved, they are both serious efforts that more than serve the purposes of this paper. In this regard, I agree with Agar (1990: 187-189) concerning both the difficulty and professional value of transcriptions, etc., and I recognize from personal job experience some of the difficulties involved in translation.

as having “ruled the Mangbetu for 36 years, longer than any previous chief,”²⁵ and it goes on to say that, even though he has “recently retired due to ill health,” he is “still regarded as head of the family.” The segment immediately preceding this interview segment shows Danga Poli’s son, Danga Dambo, who has recently succeeded him as chief.

The interview’s subtitles, transcriptions of actual film speech, and free translations of that speech appear below in Figure 1.²⁶ From a comparison of the three, I offer the following observations and analysis:

Figure 1: An interview in which the Mangbetu are made fighters more than rulers

Film subtitle	Transcription of the related Mangbetu film speech	Free translation of the related Mangbetu film speech
1.1. I am Mangbetu.	<i>Ma ámángbétú.</i>	We are Mangbetu.
1.2. Our great ancestor founded Mbunza and Azanga ...	<i>Aékóko ín 'abwú gye né, chíbwú Mbúnza, Azángáhe, sí bha dri ma i dri né, ...</i>	Our distant ancestor, he begat Mbunza, Azanga and his people, down to where we are, ...
1.3. ... and the lineage of Danga.	<i>... Azángá chíbwú Dangá.</i>	... (where/when) Azanga begat Danga.
1.4. Danga the First founded Niapu.	<i>Dangá aavhíngílía ndre – Dangá námékáná – ...</i>	Danga turned – the first Danga – ...
1.5. Niapu had a child called Poli.	<i>... bh 'chía Nyakpú, bh 'chía Mamúru, bh 'chía Polí, ...</i>	... and he begat Nyakpu, he begat Mamuru, he begat Poli, ...
1.6. Poli fathered me.	<i>... Polí i chíma ma né.</i>	... the Poli who begat me.
1.7. It is said that the Mangbetu were always fighting.	<i>Íséélé, todri i bháéné mómúbwú náapwú míngi.</i>	In our former way of life, we loved war greatly.
1.8. That is not a lie.	<i>Néné, ka bha eitɔ.</i>	That, it is not a lie.
1.9. I have the evidence of old photos.	<i>Mabwú áapwú sí mágwá áméfo-, ámé-, ámó-, ámélilimbi te-, tedhu hé kékúbá nó né né.</i>	We were warriors, because I have seen those pho-, those, those, those images in, in those things they came with.
1.10. We were always making war.	<i>Aama Mángbétú mabwú sɔ.</i>	We Mangbetu were thus.
1.11. We are a family of Chiefs.	<i>Nódri i bháéné, mabwú ékinyi. Sí bha otúne sí kóhibwú aama, ma náá ékinyi [?].</i>	Our way of life, we were chiefs. Down through to the present day when they fathered us, we are simply chiefs.

²⁵ In fact, I believe Danga Poli had been the long-time chief of just one of the region’s Mangbetu-speaking *collectivités*, not that of “the Mangbetu” generally, or perhaps even of all the Mangbetu proper.

²⁶ In each of the paper’s five figures, there are subtitle numbers such as 1.1., which go for the whole of a row of data, and in which the first number is that of the figure and the second that of the subtitle’s place in the figure’s speech segment.

Figure 1, cont.

Film subtitle	Transcription of the related Mangbetu film speech	Free translation of the related Mangbetu film speech
1.12. We are ruling people.	<i>Némolo i bháéné, a náá bhó nékínyí.</i>	Our work, it is simply [that of/to be] the chief.
1.13. Recently my eldest son succeeded me.	<i>Néné in'a nékutíme i bháéné ; ...</i>	That is our custom; ...
1.14. That is Mangbetu law.	<i>... nékutíme i éMángbétú ányé.</i>	... the custom of the Mangbetu.
1.15. From the time of our ancestors.	<i>Ígye kókohe kéngábwu i sí bha téikó i otúne i né.</i>	From when our ancestors arose until this present day.
1.16. We have always wanted to fight.	<i>Nó-, né-, némolo i bháéné, bhó nónyé ! Gaadrí drí, ...</i>	Our work is to rule! Right now, ...
1.17. Until the arrival of the white man.	<i>... ádhya míó bhó, télélé –, in'abwu ísélélé náapwu abwu míngi, meéhé kábondre áápwu.</i>	... I say to you, at that time, there was formerly much war, those people habitually fought wars.
1.18. We even fought the first whitemen [sic] we met.	<i>Atúká, bha átólélé i ébai kékúá i né, bha káápékísá náapwu.</i>	In any case, when the (white/European) foreigners came, they forbade war.
1.19. Things really changed after Independence.	<i>Ágwá, atúngá ndre náásáasanze drí magbá i né-, nébha i bháéné ; ha, zambí, ...</i>	From what I see, it began to change when we received our independence; because, ...
1.20. Then people began to shout:	<i>... nómbí né abódhya bhó « Mabési ka bhó éinyi kála dhu ! » ; ...</i>	... one person was saying repeatedly, “We will no longer do anything for the chiefs!”; ...
1.21. “Nobody needs to work for the Chief anymore.”	<i>... nómbí né « Aaá! Mabési ka bhó sá ! » ; nómbí né sá ! É-, é-, é-, épolitisié, kótúá he áábúlú bháéné ányedru ányekpákpára !</i>	... another person, “We will no longer do anything for them!”; another person the same! Politicians, it is they who began our people’s stubbornness.
1.22. Since Independence, nobody wants to work for us.	<i>Sí kabwu kóómú bhó bhó kési bhó mala dhu. Sí mangágba nééndepandási té ?</i>	Because they no longer wanted to do anymore for us. Because we have received independence, no?

First, the subtitles don’t by any means always translate or even paraphrase the film speech they accompany. This is most clear regarding subtitle 1.13. (about Danga Poli’s eldest son having recently succeeded him), since there is nothing in actual film speech that can be translated by anything close to this.

Second, several of the subtitles appear inaccurate in a direction that helps construct the film’s overall message of Mangbetu “defiance.” The ones in question have the Mangbetu “always making war” (1.10.), having “always wanted to fight” (1.16.), having “even fought the first whitemen we met” (1.18.). In fact, the “always” of 1.10. appears to be a contextually-unwarranted repetition of a previous and similarly phantom “always” (viz., that of 1.7.); in

1.16., Danga’s actual summary statement concerning the Mangbetu as *rulers* – viz., “Our work is to rule!” – is subtitled without any interview warrant to have the Mangbetu still wanting to fight in the present as they always wanted to fight in the past; and in 1.18., where the subtitle has the Mangbetu having even fought the first whites they met, the actual film speech instead has the white men, after their arrival, forbidding fighting. The sum of these three inaccuracies is both (1) to lessen an emphasis that Danga evidently intended to place on the Mangbetu as rulers, and (2) to distort and exaggerate what he said about the Mangbetu as fighters. Regarding the actual emphasis on *ruling*, the interview begins, after the statement “We are Mangbetu” (1.1.), with the ruling genealogy that made Danga chief; there is later the clear statement that the work of the Mangbetu *is* (not was) to rule; there is the statement, made and then repeated (in 1.11. and 1.15.), that the Mangbetu have been chiefs from the time of their ancestors down to the present; and finally, Danga expresses a certain regret concerning Independence (in 1.19.-1.22.), given his perception that Mangbetu chiefly authority had been attacked and weakened.²⁷ By contrast, with regard to Mangbetu *fighting*, there is Danga’s consistent use of his language’s distal past tense²⁸ to talk about the Mangbetu as warriors; there is his use of the word *mééhé* “those people,” not of any first-person plural, to refer to the Mangbetu of the past who would habitually fight wars; and there is his appeal (in 1.9.) to the evidence of some “images” that the film people had evidently come with, rather than to anything from the present day. In view of all of this, the segment’s subtitles, as they are, are definitely misleading. A more faithful rendering of Danga’s speech would let the viewer see him distancing the modern Mangbetu from their warlike past, while expressing more clearly his pride in Mangbetu chieftainship.

3.2. A tale whose Azapane is of the film’s subtitles, not of any actual film speech

A little over fifteen minutes into the film, there is a several-part segment of which one part is a section of a tale, recounted by an elder to a group gathered around a fire at night. The segment has to do primarily with two things: (1) some of the local Roman Catholic missionary work, and (2) what the film portrays as Mangbetu rejection of genuine Christian conversion. The film asserts that, instead of converting, the Mangbetu adapt what they hear in church to their own traditional ways, “[e]ven though the Missionaries don’t like it.”²⁹ Offered as illustrative of this Mangbetu attitude is the people’s continuing to tell what the film calls “Azapane stories.” These stories, per the film’s narration, are “fables, morality tales about animals,” in which the Mangbetu culture hero Azapane “appears in various disguises, and always wins by trickery.”³⁰ The narration presents the missionaries as taking the tales at face

²⁷ Danga’s regret is understandable as that of a Mangbetu chief who has long seen himself and his chiefly family as born rulers of the Meegye and others; and, in view of what I wrote in 2.1. about a Mangbetu cultural resentment of outsider chiefs, the people’s “stubbornness” and refusal to work for the chief any longer is understandable as that of non-Mangbetu subject-commoners who believe they are being liberated from the outsider authority of the Mangbetu. See below in the observations and analysis of section 3.2. for the relevance of this point to the interpretation of tales involving Azapane, the culture hero, and Leopard, symbolically an outsider chief.

²⁸ The distal is the most distant of Mangbetu’s three past tenses. See *mɔ́múbwú* “we loved” in 1.7., *mabwú* “we were” in both 1.9. and 1.10., and both *abwú* “it was” (twice) and *kábondre* “they used to fight” in 1.17., all of them distal past forms.

²⁹ The assertion is made by the subtitled speech of a relatively youthful Mangbetu man; the quotation, from the same context, is one of the film’s subtitles. An evaluation of the subtitles, etc., of this young man’s speech, not presented here for its additional length, is further illustrative of the present paper’s main point.

³⁰ The Mangbetu word for tale is *nátámbá*. In my own researches, I have never encountered any word or phrase that could be translated well as anything close to “Azapane stories”; cp. Evans-Pritchard’s (1967) saying that, “In a very broad way of speaking all [the Azande’s] folk-tales can be spoken of as *sangba ture*, Ture tales,” with

value, and as considering them immoral and subversive. In a short interview that concludes the segment, a Mangbetu elder's subtitled speech explains that his people have taught these stories to their young for generations, not to teach trickery, as the missionaries think, but rather so that their young will not grow up to behave like Azapane.

The tale section's subtitles, transcriptions of actual film speech, and free translations of that speech appear below in Figure 2. From a comparison of the three, I offer five film-related observations, four more general ones, and my analysis.

Figure 2: A tale whose Azapane is of the film's subtitles, not of any actual film speech³¹

Film subtitle	Transcription of the Mangbetu film speech	Free translation of the Mangbetu film speech
2.1. One day a rat tricked a leopard ...	<i>Ookondó abeéó náá ándreté nyáandi ánekí nándrɔ né ko bhó « Kanya ká mú anákí si ɔsúmba ɔgá i né ! »</i>	Leopard just stretched out his paw and flashed his teeth at each wife in turn saying, "Just look at these teeth of mine that Giant Rat has carved!"
2.2. ... by offering to carve its teeth.		
2.3. Instead, he smashed the leopard's teeth.	<i>Nándrɔ né bhó « Si ! si ! si ! si ! Adhi i ɔgá, adhi i ɔpwúa némasí i ánekí nópwu i né ? Adhi i ɔpwúa némasí i ánekí nópwu i né ? »</i>	Each wife in turn said, "My! my! my! my! Who has carved, who has destroyed this man's teeth in this way? Who has destroyed this man's teeth in this way?"
2.4. So that he wouldn't be eaten.		
2.5. Azapane, in his turn, tricked the rat.	<i>Nyáátu, nyóópu, tóme né dru, nyáandi ánekí nándrɔ né ko.</i>	Leopard up and arrived in turn there at each wife's place and flashed his teeth at each wife.
2.6. He tied it in a bag.	<i>Nándrɔ né bhó « Mádrí ka bhó má drí ! Ágí ka bhó má mi ! Má ú mákúá mókú ! Ékí balí si kábwu míro né, ká he hé, mágwá bhó to nódhya né né né ! »</i>	Each wife in turn said, "I will no longer reside here! I will no longer be married to you! I am going back home in divorce for sure! The beautiful teeth that you had, they are those there, among which I see that destruction!"
2.7. He took it to the leopard's house.		
2.8. Yes, Azapane tricked him.	<i>Ee bha drí, Ookondó angáátu i, Ookondó ɔdhya bhó « Nódhya i, bhó néi ándrɔ kókúókú kókú ndrát i né, bhó méike ká pá néó ! » Ee bha drí Ookondó aátúá i, bh' eiká dru i ndó néó. Néíkéike i Ookondó eíká i néó né, ɔdhya bhó « Érígyándré náá ésé ! ... » [end of the tale segment's filmed speech].</i>	Well, so Leopard went and said, "Regarding this matter of my wives being on the verge of going back home on me in divorce, I must organize a dance!" Well, so Leopard went and organized a dance. When Leopard had organized the dance, he said, "All the animals! ..."

Ture the central figure and hero in a body of Zande tales (1967: v, 20), and the Azande being northern neighbors to the Mangbetu. The Meegye-dialect name *Azapane* has low tone on each of its vowels. Concerning other roles or senses of Azapane, see both Schildkrout & Keim (1990: 174, 178, 193) and McKee (1995: 469-470).

³¹ Because of the great lack of correspondence between the tale section's film speech and the accompanying subtitles, I have not used the same format for Figure 2 as for the paper's other figures.

Of the five film-related observations: First, the tale section's subtitles don't come close to either translating or condensing it; rather, they are something like the summary of a complete tale, the contents of which have but a measure of correspondence (from 2.1. to 2.3.) to only some of the tale section's actual speech.³² In this regard, by comparison with many dozens of Mangbetu tales I have examined,³³ I know of none so brief or summary-like as the subtitles' tale.³⁴

Second, the subtitles' tale is pale and uninteresting beside the actual film speech's free translation. The latter includes something that even an outsider can understand as humorous – viz., the several sentences that have Leopard displaying his broken teeth to each of his wives in turn, thinking they're beautiful, but then having each wife in turn exclaim at their destruction and say she will not stay married to him. By contrast, the former is so all-around bland that it is hard to imagine youth of any culture being entertained or effectively instructed by it. In this regard, I know of no Mangbetu tale that begins to compare for blandness with the subtitles' tale.

Third, although the tale section's speech includes neither mention of Azapane's name nor any other allusion to him, he is yet the third-mentioned of three characters in the subtitles' tale, after a rat and a leopard. Also, where the tale section's actual speech includes reference to both Leopard's wives and all the animals together, there is no mention of either party in the subtitles' tale.³⁵

Fourth, the subtitles' tale has Azapane's relationship with a leopard limited to a single act of assistance – viz., that of his delivering to the leopard the rat that has smashed the leopard's teeth. This contrasts, however, with their relationship in four other tale tokens I know that include the two as characters.³⁶ In each of these others, they feature as the two main characters, and Azapane betrays the “false friendship” they are in at the tales' start,³⁷ in *none* of

³² Interestingly, what the subtitles' summary tale does largely outline is one of the Zande tales of Evans-Pritchard (1967) – viz., tale 55. *Ture, Leopard, and Cricetus* (1967: 152-153). In this tale, Leopard's enmity is with Cricetus (or Hamster), not Ture, and the enmity stems from Cricetus tricking Leopard about sharpening Leopard's teeth. When Leopard gives a feast-cum-dance, Ture, on his way to attend, sees Cricetus and agrees to hide him in his (Ture's) bag. While dancing at the feast, Ture betrays (or helps betray) Cricetus's presence in his bag. Although “they” then say they will kill Cricetus, Cricetus eats his way through the bottom of the bag and escapes. A further effort to catch Cricetus fails, the end of which is that “they all” die. (See also note 35 below.)

³³ In addition to the more than five dozen Mangbetu tales I have recorded myself, see McKee (1995: 357, note 17, first paragraph) for a list of Mangbetu tale sources I have examined and a bit of information concerning each.

³⁴ Finnegan (1970) associates, with *early* tale collections and recording techniques, texts that are “little more than abstracts or summaries of the plots” (1970: 335-336); Lelong (1946), writing about a similarly skeletal version of another Mangbetu tale, says that a Black (African) would not content himself with so few words except to get rid of an importunate White who wanted to know, for who knows why, the tale in question (1946: 236).

³⁵ See Evans-Pritchard (1967: 130-133, 152-153, 156-160) for three Zande tales, in English translation, that have Ture and Leopard together as (or among) the title characters. These are, respectively, 44. *How Leopard burnt Ture all over*, 55. *Ture, Leopard, and Cricetus*, and 58. *Ture and Leopard's fruit*. (Cricetus is a species of hamster.) Interestingly, these tales have plot elements that overlap with those of the film's tale(s) – e.g., in 55. and 58., Leopard either tells or asks another character to sharpen his teeth (this is Cricetus in 55., Little Bushbuck in 58.); in 44. and 55., Leopard gives a feast-cum-dance that everyone attends; in 55., Ture, with Leopard somehow concerned, puts Cricetus in his (Ture's) bag. (Leopard also appears prominently in tale 67. *Ture and the hypocritical mother-in-law* (ibid.: 177-180), and in variant version K. of 15. *Ture and the woman's dogs* (ibid.: 213-215). Differences about Leopard as a character in Zande versus Mangbetu tales, while beyond the scope of the present paper, are surely in relation to differences in more traditional Zande and Mangbetu political organization, with centralized authority much longer established and accepted among the Azande.)

³⁶ Three of these tales are presented in French translation toward the end of Denis (1952); the fourth I recorded at Egbita in 1986, included parts of in McKee (2010), and hope to publish in its entirety at some point.

³⁷ See Haring (1972), among many others, concerning “false friendship” as frequently characteristic of the initial situation of African tales.

these others does Azapane do anything nice or as a favor to Leopard, except as prelude to betrayal.

Fifth, the nature of Azapane's "trickery" in the subtitles' tale strikes me as highly innocuous, especially compared with its nature in the other four tales mentioned in the previous paragraph. In the subtitles' tale, Azapane simply tricks the rat, ties it in a bag, and takes it to the leopard's house, with no mention made of what the leopard does to the rat after receiving it; in each of the other tales, in stark contrast, there is betrayal of friendship on Azapane's part leading to one or another of the following: (1) to Azapane first killing and eating Leopard's brother, then killing Leopard; (2) to Leopard's eyes being badly burned; (3) to Azapane killing and eating Leopard's firstborn son; (4) to Azapane killing, butchering, and eating first Leopard's children, one by one, then Leopard's wife, then Leopard.³⁸ Thus, the subtitles' tale portrays Azapane's general tale "trickery" as *much* tamer and less objectionable as story matter for children than that of this set of four other Leopard-and-Azapane tales.

Passing now to the more general observations: First, while tales can indeed be moral-educational in the way that the Mangbetu elder says "Azapane stories" are, they can also serve other purposes, or even a number at the same time. Tales can entertain, they can presume to explain origins, they can express political or other sentiments that cannot safely be given more transparent voice.³⁹ Thus, any given tale must be analyzed carefully before the purposes for which it is told can be understood.

Second, while Azapane might be a negative moral example in some tales, I have never suspected him to be such when he appears opposite Leopard, whom it is deemed admirable and even heroic for him to deceive and then mistreat as he pleases.⁴⁰

Third, the leopard in Central Africa has strong associations with chiefs, including that it can represent chiefs in tales.⁴¹ In at least one Mangbetu tale I have recorded, Leopard is explicitly stated to be chief of the animals.⁴² Thus, it is by no means unreasonable to think that Leopard might represent a chief or chiefs in other tales as well.

Fourth and finally, Leopard, in Mangbetu tales, has a character that Denis (1952: 163ff) has described as hateful, murderous, deceitful – in sum, as that of a terrorist.⁴³ If the

³⁸ In my own acquaintance with Mangbetu tales, Azapane's character, whenever he and Leopard are the two principals, is similar to that of Tortoise as described by Denis (1952): « D'une tournure inhabituelle, on déduit la présence d'un esprit rusé, hors de la norme, l'esprit des désavantagés, experts en vengeance » (1952: 155).

³⁹ Thiel (1968) provides a Central African example of this regarding a sociopolitical system that resembles that of the Mangbetu case:

Il existe d'ailleurs une tension permanente entre les *bamvil* [those of the ruling clan] et les *bansan* [those of the subject clans]. Les derniers dénoncent la dureté du régime, l'avidité des *bamvil*, les amendes élevées pour les moindres délits etc. D'où aussi la joie, souvent peu cachée, des *bansan* lorsque un chef meurt. On entend combien de fois les gens dire: « Les *bamvil* nous traitent comme des esclaves! » Ils se gardent évidemment de critiquer trop ouvertement le régime d'un chef par peur de ses moyens de répression. Dans la littérature populaire cependant, où les relations entre chef et sujet sont transposées sur le niveau animal, l'image du chef est très différente de l'image officielle. Dans les fables le chef apparaît comme rapace, glouton, menteur, fort mais nanti d'intelligence, brutal etc. Il va sans dire que les *bansan* s'adjugent les qualités qui s'opposent à ces vices (1968: 67).

⁴⁰ See McKee (1995: 470, note 9, third paragraph) for an early statement of my understanding of Azapane as a resistance hero.

⁴¹ This is my own analysis for Mangbetu; see Thiel (1968) concerning Mbim chiefs being represented in tales by a leopard-like animal – viz., a panther.

⁴² This is a tale in which Leopard feigns death to kill and eat from among the animals come to mourn him.

⁴³ This term "terrorist" is Denis's, not mine: « [D]ès les premières légendes, [le léopard] a joué un rôle de terroriste » (1952: 163).

other animals fear and suspect him, it is with good reason, and his terrorist character goes a long way toward explaining why Azapane can be admired for mistreating him as he does.

Analytically now, in view of all the above: The subtitles' summary-like tale appears to have been constructed to support the film's criticism of the missionaries. Because there are subtitles and narration concerning "Azapane stories" immediately before the tale section, the subtitles' tale has Azapane as a main character, even though it appears possible that he does not appear at all in the actual tale of which the film's tale section is a part. Again, because the film has portrayed missionary objections to "Azapane stories" as mistaken, Azapane's "trickery" in the subtitles' tale is made so relatively harmless that the missionaries are made to look silly for viewing it as immoral and subversive. For the sake of coherence and appearance, the plot of the subtitles' tale is made complete, but at the expense of adding material that cannot be verified as present in the actual tale without access to the American Museum's Mangbetu collection (who knows, the material may be there, plausibly; see again note 32). Overall, the result of the construction is the great lack of correspondence between the subtitles of the tale section's speech, on the one hand, and of its free translation, on the other. Thus, unfortunately, the audience is prevented from appreciating anything of a Mangbetu elder's verbal artistry in recounting part of a tale; and thus also, they are encouraged to think how stupid the missionaries must be for wanting to keep the Mangbetu from telling "Azapane stories."

As a final note concerning the tale segment: The film-makers, by doing the segment as they did, may have missed a golden opportunity to advance a reasonable argument for Mangbetu cultural "defiance." For I see defiance evident indeed in tales that involve Azapane and Leopard as the two main characters, and in which, by analysis, Azapane-as-culture-hero betrays and then brutalizes Leopard-as-outsider-chief. Had the film-makers recognized this and filmed appropriately, they could, with reason, have cast the missionaries as outsider *religious* chiefs. This is because they were in fact outsiders, they did in fact exercise authority within Congo/Zaire's Roman Catholic church, they were in fact opposed to the telling of some Mangbetu tales,⁴⁴ and they were, evidently, resented by some Mangbetu.

3.3. A "rather striking" interview in which a Congolese *abbé* is made a Western "priest"

Spirits of defiance has just one French-language segment for which there are subtitles. This is an interview segment that occurs just over twenty minutes into the film; those who speak are two Italian missionary priests, Fathers Elio Farronato and Michel Dinoia, from the Roman Catholic mission at Nangazizi. It is Elio who speaks most; he has been introduced earlier, by the film's narration, as the senior priest of the area's Italian mission, and as one who "believes the Mangbetu are possessed by sorcery and witchcraft." The other priest,

⁴⁴ In a 5 June 1991 interview that I taped with Fathers Elio and Michel at Nangazizi, in the same mission-house sitting room where the film interview was done, Elio spoke as follows – his own French words – concerning the moral-educational value of tales, including some of the Mangbetu ones involving Azapane:

Il y a dans la tradition africaine ... plusieurs héros. Alors, comme dans toutes les traditions, un chrétien juge les choses à partir de l'Évangile. A partir de l'Évangile, certainement, plusieurs contes traditionnels mangbetu ne sont pas éducatifs. A ce moment-là, celui qui proclame l'Évangile dira, « Faites attention à ce conte-là ! Ne pensez pas qu'on peut raconter aux enfants tout conte qu'on pense ; parce que, pas tous les contes sont éducatifs. Choisissez les contes qui sont éducatifs, et cela vous pouvez bien les apprendre aux enfants. Mais, faites beaucoup d'attention, parce qu'il y a des contes qui, au contraire, gâchent la mentalité des enfants. »

Michel, speaks much less and is never identified by name.⁴⁵ The segment is sandwiched between two others that criticize the missionaries at least implicitly. In the first of these, the narration has “Azapane stories” as “strictly banned in the mission school,” where “[n]ot even the Mangbetu language may be taught”,⁴⁶ and the second segment begins with both (1) birds taking flight from a tree as “loudspeakers in the mission church bombard the neighborhood with songs of praise,” and then (2) the priests presented as seeking to destroy something they regard as “a touchstone of Mangbetu culture.”

The interview’s subtitles, etc., appear below in Figure 3. From a comparison of the subtitles, transcriptions, and free translations, I have three observations and analysis as follows:

Figure 3: A “rather striking” interview with two of the local mission’s Italian priests⁴⁷

Film subtitle	Transcription of the priests’ French film speech	Free translation of the priests’ French film speech
3.1. They are the slaves of evil, the devil will destroy them!	C’est à dire, ils sont vraiment esclaves de ce mal. C’est un mal qui veut les détruire.	That is to say, they are really slaves of this evil. It is an evil that wants to destroy them.
3.2. Evil exists here.	Le mal existe ;	Evil exists;
3.3. The devil traps people and ultimately destroys them.	et ce mal [est ce] qui entraine toutes les personnes, qui les ronge et qui les détruit.	and it is this evil that drags everyone along, which gnaws at them and which destroys them.
3.4. There was a priest ...	Les –, un certain abbé, dont je ne [me] rappelle plus le nom, ...	A certain indigenous priest, whose name I no longer remember, ...
3.5. ... who wrote about the “African mentality” saying qui a écrit un article sur la mentalité africaine, disait who wrote an article on the African mentality, was saying ...
3.6. ... that the African is afraid of everything.	... que l’Africain a peur de <i>tout</i> !	... that the African is afraid of <i>everything</i> !
3.7. He’s afraid of his father, mother, brother ...	Il a peur de son frère, il a peur de son papa, de sa maman, ...	He is afraid of his brother, he is afraid of his dad, of his mum, ...

⁴⁵ Data from and information concerning Fathers Elio and Michel I gathered at the time of the interview I did with them at Nangazizi in June 1991. Present with me during the interview was Abule Abuotubodio (not yet a pastor at the time), with whom I had worked closely in the Mangbetu language project and who later became president of the CECCA Protestant church *communauté*. There is a third priest sitting with Elio and Michel during the film interview, but he neither speaks nor is identified.

⁴⁶ McKee (1995: 331-332, note 86) contains the basis for a contrary evaluation of each of these film narration assertions.

⁴⁷ Father Michel speaks 3.1.-3.3.; Father Elio speaks the rest. There are, for me, a few inconsequential uncertainties in the transcription, most notably the following: (1) there is a small bit of 3.3. that I do not hear at all clearly, but which I have transcribed [*est ce*]; (2) in 3.4., I have corrected what I hear as *peux* to the grammatically correct *me*; (3) what I have transcribed *outils* in 3.12., Elio pronounces with a final ‘l’, where the ‘l’ of normal French *outil(s)* is silent; and (4) it is not clear where the direct quote that begins in 3.11. ends, whether at the end of 3.13. or of 3.14.

Figure 3, cont.

Film subtitle	Transcription of the priests' French film speech	Free translation of the priests' French film speech
3.8. ... he's afraid of everyone.	... il a peur de <i>tout homme</i> !	... he is afraid of <i>everyone</i> !
3.9. So more than anyone else he needs ...	Et donc, il a besoin, plus que n-, toute autre personne, ...	And so, he has need, more than anyone else, ...
3.10. ... the message of Jesus Christ.	... du message de, de Jésus-Christ.	... of the message of Jesus Christ.
3.11. Because, he said, we Europeans have art ...	Parce qu'il disait, « Les européennes[ns], les occidentaux, quand même ont le, l-, l'art, ...	Because he was saying, "Europeans, Westerners, at least have art, ...
3.12. ... and we have beautiful possessions ...	« ... ont les, les beaux outils[?], les choses; ...	"... have beautiful tools, things; ...
3.13. ... but here we have only a community that is sick.	« ... mais nous, nous avons tout simplement la communauté, et cette communauté est malade, s[ub]stantiellement.	"... but we, we have very simply the community, and that community is sick, substantially.
3.14. Here there is a fear that destroys everything.	« Parce que, elle est euh, malade, il y a cette peur qui détruit tout. »	"Because it is sick, there is this fear which destroys everything."

First, the subtitles are, on the whole, among the film's best with regard to the accuracy of their translations. They illustrate the fact that subtitles can indeed, at least in some cases (see, e.g., 3.6.-3.10.), be reasonably accurate translations of the film speech they accompany.

Second, there are yet at least three places where the subtitles are, in their film context, both inaccurate and misleading. The first concerns their translating *abbé* as "priest" (in 3.4.); the second, their translating *les européens, les occidentaux* as "we Europeans" (in 3.11.); the third, their translating the contrastive clause-initial *mais nous, nous ...* as "but here we ..." (in 3.13.). With regard to the first, the *abbé* whose name Elio could not remember was a Congolese Muntu priest named Augustin Kalenga, with the article Kalenga had written having appeared in a French missiology journal under the title 'La mentalité bantoue et l'esprit de Jésus.' That Kalenga was a Congolese priest should have been suspected, if not known for sure, by the film-makers from Elio's use of *abbé*, rather than of *prêtre* or even *père*, to refer to him, given that *abbé* is seldom if ever used in Congo to refer to a Western priest. A more faithful and transparent translation, in context, would be "Congolese priest." With regard to the second, the conjoined phrases *les européens, les occidentaux* are best translated "Europeans, Westerners" rather than "we Europeans," especially in a context where a *non-Westerner*, Kalenga, is using them to contrast (1) Westerners with (2) non-Westerners that include himself. With regard to the third, the contrastive clause-initial *mais nous, nous ...* is best translated "but we, we ...," especially in the context, again, of a *non-Westerner* using it contrastively as explained in the previous sentence.

Third, I am not sure that a(n alleged) Bantu mentality of fear of others is any more a stereotype than a(n alleged) Mangbetu spirit of defiance of certain outsiders. Do we, as anthropologists, brand the first a stereotype because we are convinced that it stems from igno-

rance, while we accept the other as an “ethos” to the extent we are convinced it stems from insightful interpretive study? The fact that Karp (1991) found the film misleading in isolation from its parent museum exhibition – and this without any evaluation of its subtitles – gives me as an anthropologist pause to think; and I have in fact suggested, in view of the intergroup *náágáágá* “understanding” that is(/was) the normal goal of Meegye-Mangbetu death compensations, that a more appropriate Mangbetu ethos than defiance of outsiders would have rather to do with establishing and maintaining “understanding” with them.⁴⁸

Analytically, now: Where this interview segment is concerned, one must remember that the overall film message has outsiders stereotyping the Mangbetu. Thus, it clearly serves the film’s interest to be able to present Elio, the film’s quintessential outsider, as openly guilty of such stereotyping. This is accomplished in the segment – whether or not intentionally⁴⁹ – by making Elio appear to be endorsing a fellow European priest’s stereotype that would have Africans afraid of everyone, even of their closest kin.⁵⁰ The appearance is achieved by slightly inaccurate subtitling at the three points mentioned above, which cohere in their inaccuracy such that the audience is unlikely to recognize that Elio might in fact be doing something very different from stereotyping – viz., talking about an intelligent Congolese colleague’s understanding of his own (the colleague’s) Bantu mentality, which understanding Elio, the missionary, has been humble enough to try to learn from.⁵¹

To conclude concerning the French interview segment: I would find it interesting to know why Karp (1991) found this interview “rather striking.” Was it in part because of the openness with which Elio shared what Karp misunderstood, given the film’s subtitles, to be a(nother) Western priest’s open stereotyping of Africans? If not, why then did Karp find the interview “rather striking”? To the extent that inaccurate subtitles were in fact responsible for Karp’s reaction, the film clearly misleads in more than the ways that Karp, perceptively, noted in his review.

⁴⁸ See McKee (1995) for my description and analysis of these compensations; see especially pages 285-289 regarding a Mangbetu ethos concerned with “understanding” more than defiance; Allovio (1999), interestingly in this regard, is entitled *La foresta di alleanze*. The film has a death compensation segment, which Karp (1991) found its “most ethnographically illuminating” segment (1991: 521); interestingly again, my own data and analysis concerning these compensations differ significantly from those of the film at a good number of points.

⁴⁹ It may be that the film-makers did not consider the possibility that Father Elio was quoting a Congolese priest, and that they tweaked two of the segment’s subtitles where they did (in 3.11. and 3.13.) for the whole to cohere in view of their sincere misunderstanding of Elio’s speech. In any case, in my 5 June 1991 interview with Elio, he told me (1) that an *abbé* in that context had to be Congolese (or, at the time, Zairean), and (2) that he was sure he told the film-makers that the *abbé* of whom he spoke was Congolese.

⁵⁰ Kalenga (1971) wrote of “the Bantu mentality,” which Elio remembered as “African.” I believe that a fair summary of Kalenga’s article would include the following points: (1) he shares concerning it from lengthy first-hand knowledge of daily life among Bantu; (2) Bantu, by comparison with Europeans, are very community-oriented; (3) living in close community as they do, *and* with certain ideas about mystical anger, witchcraft, etc., Bantu are very concerned that others around them have good intentions toward them; (4) while Bantu are not transparent as to their intentions toward others, they yet hate and curse them easily, with even one’s own parents more than once having shown ill will toward oneself or one of one’s brothers (1971: 256); and (5) because Jesus was very community-oriented, *and* because he required that his followers be well-intentioned even toward their enemies, Bantu should find a special fulfillment in a Christianity that gives these aspects of the gospel due practical emphasis.

⁵¹ In this regard, I find it interesting that Kalenga, in the introduction to his article, wrote explicitly, « Que le missionnaire ait assez d’humilité pour se mettre à l’étude de la mentalité des Bantu et assez de courage pour distinguer nettement le message des coutumes que celui-ci a revêtues chez lui! » (1971: 248).

3.4. A traditional ritual prayer – from which the name of the Christian God gets omitted

Just over thirty-five minutes into the film there is a segment concerned with a traditional ritual prayer that the film calls “Atolo.”⁵² The segment is one of a series that, for the most part, in follow-up to the priests’ French interview segment, shows Mangbetu engaging in a variety of traditional ritual practices. These practices include, in order, divination by the “mapingo” oracle;⁵³ an impromptu hunting-related ceremony that “summons the forest spirits for good luck”;⁵⁴ the “Atolo” ritual, which the narration describes as “a code of respect, both for the family and their ancestors”; the smelting of iron, which the narration describes as “a magically-protected metal that once symbolized the power of the Mangbetu people”; and finally, a number of death rituals, which the narration describes as “a microcosm of Mangbetu life.”⁵⁵ To all such traditional ritual practices the film presents the missionaries as opposed.

The segment’s “Atolo” ritual is led by a man named Mabondane (see in Photo 1, after Figure 4 in the present section).⁵⁶ He is Meegye Mambwugi rather than Mangbetu proper, from along the Mambwugi road that leads west out of Nangazizi. In large part, then, the film presents him as an example of Mangbetu defiance of the missionaries.

The interview’s subtitles, etc., appear in Figure 4 below. From a comparison of the subtitles, transcriptions, and free translations, I offer four observations and brief analysis as follows:

First, although the subtitles cannot be said to translate the segment’s speech well, I think they yet adequately condense some of it; and I readily grant that condensation might be necessary with some subtitles, for speech that can be adequately explained only by reference to some level of “thick description” ethnography.⁵⁷

Second, one of the things *not* subtitled from the segment’s speech is the proper name *Angéle*. Thus, where one of the subtitles (4.8.) says “may that person die,” one of the things it leaves out is *Angéle*, present in the actual film speech, as the agent who would cause the person’s death.

Third, although the literature contains more than one view of the identity and origin of *Angéle*, I believe it uniformly agrees both (1) that Mangbetu have known *Angéle* for some time as the creator god of Christianity, and (2) that modern Mangbetu commonly pray to *Angéle*. The various things that Schildkrout & Keim (1990) say about *Angéle*, without necessarily being entirely accurate, illustrate well the complexity of the subject: (1) that *Angéle* is “the creator god ... introduced by Muslims and Christians” (1990: 178); (2) that “the strongest evidence for the Mangbetu not having had a creator god comes from northern Meje informants” (ibid.: 261, note 25 to chapter 9); (3) that “[t]oday Mangbetu commonly pray to Angele rather than to Azapane”; (4) that the origin of the name *Angéle* is uncertain; and (5) that a certain Noubobofofu (“It grew by itself”), whom southern Meegye identify as having created the first ancestor Azapane, may have “metamorphized into Angele during the missionary period” (ibid.: 193).⁵⁸

⁵² The noun stem of the word in Meegye is *atóló*.

⁵³ The noun stem of the word in Meegye is *mápińǒ* (var. *mápińǒ*).

⁵⁴ The quote is from the film narration of *Spirits of defiance*.

⁵⁵ The narration may be referring at this point to the death compensation dialogue alone, rather than to the sum of the death rituals the film presents.

⁵⁶ *Mabonda ne* (“We were searching for him”) in the Meegye dialect, with low tone on each of its vowels.

⁵⁷ Concerning “thick description” as what is involved in doing ethnography, see Geertz (1973: 5-10), with Geertz saying he borrowed the term from Gilbert Ryle. Concerning the difficulty of even *free*-translating *well* the ritual speech of Figure 4, see also note 59.

⁵⁸ For more concerning *Angéle*, see also Lelong (1946: 244-251) and McKee (1995: 470-471).

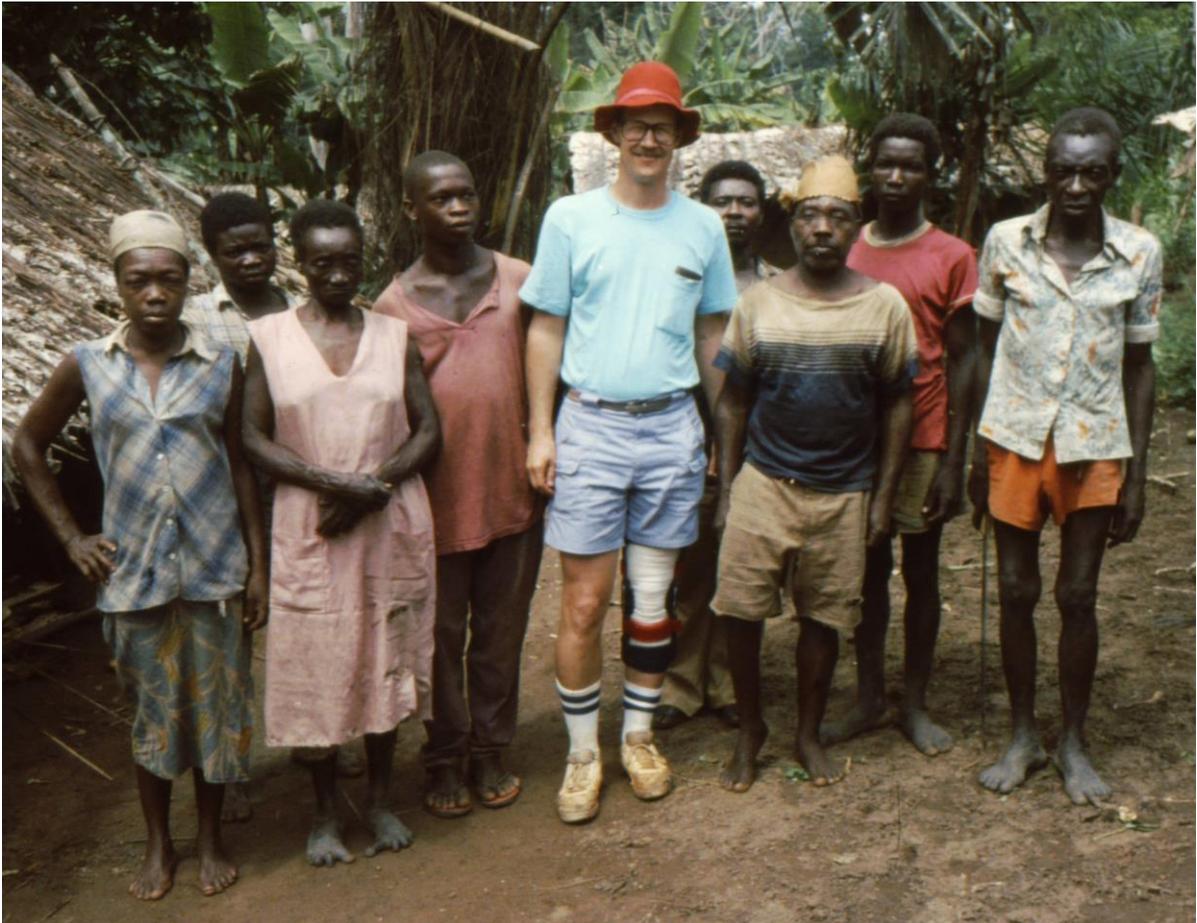
Figure 4: A traditional ritual prayer – with the name of the Christian God omitted

Film subtitle	Transcription of the related Mangbetu film speech	Free translation of the related Mangbetu film speech ⁵⁹
4.1. Gather round everybody.	<i>Anyéi ! Anyéi aami pété ! Anyábhuta ...</i>	Come! Come, all of you! Come around and take hold ...
4.2. I am planting this “Atolo” tree tókíre ndri, bhe mudria táo.	... of this [“Atolo”] stick, and then sit down!
4.3. ... to bring the family good fortune.	Anyágba aami pété !	Take hold all of you!
4.4. Like the tree, may our family grow strong.	Amúdrí mómómbe ; amúdrí nyáá síísó mudria ! Haa ! Nátóló, ín’a i máángéó ne i né. Éá mi drí tatamba bali. Áángóósé he bha drí i né.	Sit well; go ahead and sit just as you normally do. In faith! “Atolo,” it is this leaf packet here that I have placed as if on the fire to cook. I have placed you (sg.) as if on the fire for much good fortune. I have gathered a mixture of food contents right here in the packet.
4.5. May your hearts be strong.	Nómbí i ɔpwua ndre. Ábúa aanyóótó nátóló i drí ! Ábúa aanyóótó nátóló i drí !	The person who would deflect this “Atolo” blessing risks death. I have fanned this “Atolo” over you people here! I have fanned this “Atolo” over you!
4.6. And may you be calm and gentle.	Ábúa aanyóótó nátóló i drí ! Ndó akíeisu, ndó kóbhú mómómbe ; ndó akíeisu kékú ébiiii ! Ndó akíeisu kóbhú drí mómómbe ! Nómbí i ɔdhya táo bhó, bhó ndreevHINGÍlí bhó, ...	I have fanned this “Atolo” over you (pl.)! May your hearts be good; may your hearts come back in peace! May your hearts be good here! The person who would later turn this blessing, ...
4.7. If anyone wishes to harm us bhó nómbí nónzí máto né, to the end that a person in my care would die, ...
4.8. ... may that person die bhe nómbí nódrwa sí ne nésavó ngandá, néi, Angéle bha[né i] nyááa to nómbí né ko, may that person himself be cursed by God for it [lit., “may that person gather himself the bad soap of God that you [God] will give to that person for it”], ...
4.9. ... and may my children stop arguing.	... akíeepi bha kóbhúa mékpá-kpára. Ín’a ne i máángobú to aami drí i né. Ábúa aami drí, akíeisu kékú ébiiii !	... and may your bodies be strong! This [“Atolo”] stick is the one on which I have fanned you here. I have fanned you here, may your hearts come back in peace!

⁵⁹ The nature of some of the (ritual) speech of Figure 4 is such that even its *free* translation is a challenge to do *well*. I acknowledge I might have done better with parts of it, especially with help from Mabondane, who prayed it in the film, but this was not something I could manage during my June 1991 visit to the Nangazizi area.

Figure 4, cont.

Film subtitle	Transcription of the related Mangbetu film speech	Free translation of the related Mangbetu film speech
4.10. I spat this saliva for all our good health.	Ábúa aami drí, nómbɛ ! Sí aéisu pété kóbhú mómómbe !	I have fanned you (pl.) here, may the “Atolo” blessing be efficacious! So that all our hearts might be good!

Photo 1: The author with Mabondane and others, 6 June 1991, at Mabondane’s village⁶⁰

Fourth, the literature on “Atolo” includes Lelong’s (1946) mention of a Roman Catholic missionary recounting something about the ritual to an audience of Meegye Mambwugi – viz., that a village head had explained to him that, as part of the ritual, he asked God to protect him, his wife, and his children (1946: 412).⁶¹ Thus, given Mabondane’s use of the name

⁶⁰ Mabondane, wearing a hat, is to the author’s right in the photo. The photo was by Abule Abuotubodio, who accompanied me on my 5-7 June 1991 trip to Nangazizi and the more rural of Mabondane’s two residences. The latter was about ten kilometers west of Nangazizi, at a location I heard called Bandundu.

⁶¹ Lelong (1946) reports the relevant paragraph from the missionary’s discourse as follows:

Hier, j’ai vu dans un village un *atolo*. Le maître du village m’a expliqué qu’à certains jours il allait, avec sa femme et ses enfants, auprès de cet *atolo* et, en tenant le bois, il demandait

Angéle in the film's prayer, there appears at least the possibility of continuity with regard to *Angéle*'s involvement in "Atolo," at least in the northern Meegye-Mangbetu area where the film was done, from sometime before 1946 through at least 1989 (the time of the filming).⁶²

Analytically now, the only reasonable translation of the name *Angéle* into English is "God." However, the film-makers would have found it a problem to explain an invocation of the Christian God in a traditional ritual prayer that the film portrays (1) as having to do with the family and ancestors, and (2) as continuing to be conducted in cultural defiance of Christianity and Christian missionaries. The simplest way around the problem would be to keep "God" out of the subtitles, which allows both (1) the prayer to be presented as apparently free from Christian influence, and thus also (2) the film's image of Mangbetu defiance to be preserved. Obviously, though, whether this was indeed the reason the film-makers neglected to translate *Angéle* as "God" in the prayer's subtitles must remain open to question.

3.5. A homily segment in which trust and faith in Jesus are made to divide

About thirty-eight minutes, fifteen seconds into the film, there is a transition between two segments that is marked by use of the words "trust" and "faith," which occur in both the last subtitle of the first segment and the first subtitle of the second. The first segment comes right after the "Atolo" ritual-prayer segment (see above in section 3.4.), and it shows Mabondane and some others finishing a celebratory meal together around a fire in Mabondane's "sitting house."⁶³ Per the narration, a small part of the meal's meat has come from a net-hunt whose catch had been predicted to Mabondane by the oracle, with the "Atolo" blessing of the ritual-prayer segment said responsible for the catch. The second segment, into which the first leads by the "trust"-and-"faith" transition, shows Elio presenting part of a homily in Lingala to the Nangazizi Roman Catholic congregation.

The "trust"-and-"faith" segment's subtitles, etc., appear below in Figure 5. From a comparison of the subtitles, transcriptions, and free translations, I offer several observations and brief analysis as follows:

First, an important theme of the juxtaposed segments' subtitles is a comparison of the (more) traditional Mangbetu "Atolo" blessing with Christianity. This is evident from the transition already mentioned, in which Mabondane is presented, in the last take of the one scene, as saying, "What *trust* can you have in a *faith* like theirs?" (in 5.5., my italics) and in which Elio is presented, in the first take of the following scene, as saying, "You must put all your *trust* and *faith* in Jesus" (in 5.6., my italics again).

à Dieu de le protéger, lui, sa femme et ses enfants. Le désir de cet homme est bon car il tourne son coeur vers Dieu et je vous dis que Dieu a aimé ce qu'il faisait là (1946: 412).

Lelong (1946) is a Roman Catholic source that, although a missiological work, approaches at the same time a kind of popular ethnography of the Mangbetu.

⁶² An *atoló* narrative that I taped at Egbita in 1983 made no mention of *Angéle* and was not a general family blessing; rather, it was a ritual of affliction (see Turner 1953: 5-7, 1977: 10-43) that had two sisters addressing a deceased brother's shade and conducting the ritual to appease him with regard to their fish-traps, inexplicably to them from a natural standpoint, no longer catching fish. Other sources on the ritual are Schildkrout & Keim (1990: 169, 173-175) and McKee (1995: 465-466); both would appear to help establish the fact of significant differences in "Atolo" between the northern and southern parts of the Meegye-Mangbetu area. I abandoned a dissertation research proposal to study *atoló* when I became convinced, in late 1985, that it was no longer much practiced in the area where I would be doing my research.

⁶³ Most Mangbetu residence compounds have a *négbámú* "sitting house," which is a kind of roofed, at least somewhat open-sided structure, in which the men especially of a compound receive kin, friends, and visitors for sitting, conversation, and certain other activities.

Figure 5: A homily segment in which trust and faith in Jesus are made to divide

Film subtitle	Mabondane's Mangbetu film speech transcription	Free translation of Mabondane's speech
5.1. Compare our "Atolo" blessing ...	<i>Ámúpe akúé si kékúá bhó i né, ...</i>	Some of these priests who have come recently, ...
5.2. ... with the one the Missionaries give.	<i>... kóópua bhó náá égye, úbhúa nyá né múdhya bhó ndresí né, náákúné abhíkya ka mi !</i>	... they just arrive yonder at the mission, and when you are wanting to approach them, some will not greet you!
5.3. They just look at us with pity ...	<i>Bhó ndraagwó mi né, úbhúa nyá né múdhya bhó « Hee ! » bhó, bhó « Hee, bhó mékúnga bhó mbáé, bhó, ... »</i>	When one does accept to see you, and you are saying, "Well! Well, I came, friend, [earlier today, for a reason I'll now broach] ..."
5.4. ... shake our hands and go!	<i>... agba náá andrúété sóí né né né, bh'aánga ékyaaa !</i>	... he just takes your hand and shakes it like this, then he gets up to leave without further ado!
5.5. What trust can you have in a faith like theirs?	<i>Nélélé gyó angané i nyáátua bhó too to ndru ...</i>	When soon are you going to return to that kind of treatment ... ?

* change of scene, to the Nangazizi Roman Catholic church *

Film subtitle	Father Elio's Lingala film speech transcription	Free translation of Elio's Lingala speech
5.6. You must put all your trust and faith in Jesus.	<i>... lokola nalobi ee : Tozali na ekolo ya bana na Nzambe, krisma esantu ezali mafuta na Kristo.</i>	... as I am saying: We are of the family of the children of God; the holy chrism is the oil of Christ.
5.7. He is more powerful ...	<i>Ezalaki moto moko, balobi na ye, « Il faut yo ofuta ; ...</i>	There was a person, they said to him, "You must pay, ...
5.8. ... than any of your local Chiefs or gods.	<i>... zambi, likambo ekweli yo, bino na mwana na commissaire ! »</i>	"... because a problem has befallen you, a problem concerning you and the child of the commissioner!"

Second and very obviously, there is no warrant in the film's actual speech for the appearance of either word, "trust" or "faith," in either of the subtitles concerned. Thus, at least where the segment's actual speech is concerned, the transition between the two scenes is a creation, pure and simple, of the film-maker.

Third, the criticism that Mabondane's actual speech does make of the missionaries (see the free translations of 5.1.-5.5.) is not a criticism of all of them, but rather of some of the ones more recently arrived. Thus, where the segment's subtitles have Mabondane lumping all the missionaries together as to how they act toward the Mangbetu around them, his actual speech has him recognizing that there are differences among them.

Fourth, where one of the segment's subtitles (5.6.) has Elio dividing himself from his hearers by saying, "You must put all *your* trust and faith in Jesus," Elio's actual speech has

him united with them by, “*We* are of the family of the children of God” (my italics in each case). In this regard, the subtitles for Elio’s actual speech in this segment are among the film’s worst, for the extent to which they fail to let a film subject speak for himself by his film speech.⁶⁴

Analytically now, the “trust”-and-“faith” segment’s subtitles appear intended by the film-maker to let Mabondane, a traditional Mangbetu, express his disdain for the missionaries’ faith and compare it unfavorably with (what the film presents as) the Mangbetu’s own “Atolo” blessing. Thus, there cannot be accurate subtitling of any of the segment’s actual speech that would detract from the film’s image of either the defiant Mangbetu or the stereotyping, supercilious missionaries.

To summarize, then, briefly: First, in none of the five film segments considered were the subtitles consistently good translations, or even condensations, of the film speech they accompanied. In this way, they did *not* in fact enable subjects, whether Mangbetu or expatriate, to speak for themselves by their film speech.

Second, in each of the same segments, the subtitles were such that the film’s message was advanced, preserved, illustrated, etc., by the manner of their departure from good translation or condensation. In this way, overall, these subtitles may fairly be said to function ventriloquially, and thus at points, clearly enough, to speak for the film-makers rather than the actual speakers.

4. Aspects of the anthropological ethics of film-maker ventriloquism

Concerning the ethics of film-maker ventriloquism, let me say upfront both that I recognize “[t]he aims of professional anthropology and popular television are not always identical,”⁶⁵ and also that I don’t expect professional anthropological ethics of the television industry. At the same time, what I do expect of professional academics and major cultural-educational institutions is that they not be involved with television-industry productions that fail to respect professional academic ethics concerned.

As a point of reference for considering aspects of the ethics of film-maker ventriloquism, I have found useful one of the ethics-related chapters of Crawford & Turton (1992) – viz., the one by Timothy Asch entitled ‘The ethics of ethnographic film-making.’ In this chapter, Asch posits an eleven-step methodology for ethnographic film-making that he believes “responds to important ethical issues facing film-makers and anthropologists today” (Asch 1992: 197). Regarding nine of his eleven steps, which appear in quotes at the beginning of their respective paragraphs, I comment as follows concerning film-maker ventriloquism I see present in *Spirits of defiance*:

(1) “Know your subjects”: Since film-maker ventriloquism can be done without much if any knowledge of the language(s) or culture(s) of film subjects, it can conceivably serve as a cover for inadequate, faulty, or even no knowledge of these areas. In any case, resort to it

⁶⁴ It might be objected that one can see clearly enough where Father Elio was headed with the actual speech that begins his story about a man in a problem with the commissioner’s son – viz., toward an explanation of the Christian gospel in which the child of the commissioner represents Jesus, the commissioner represents God, and the person with the debt represents a sinner who needs to put all his faith and trust in Jesus, who is more powerful than any people’s chiefs or gods. This does not, however, answer the objection that the film’s subtitles are at least arguably presenting the film-makers’ view of this matter and not the film subject’s (here, Elio’s) own; and the audience would have to have the requisite subtitling skills and access to the American Museum’s twenty hours of unedited film footage to have a chance to verify whether Elio really said in sum what the subtitles present him as saying.

⁶⁵ Jeremy Marre, personal communication, 15 June 1990.

permits a film-maker to forego the assistance of linguists, anthropologists, and others with knowledge and skills needed to advise film-makers about quality of subtitling.

(2) “Avoid misleading biases”: Judging from its apparent effect in *Spirits of defiance*, film-maker ventriloquism lends itself to misleading biases, rather than helps to avoid them. At its worst ethically, film-maker ventriloquism might be intentionally used to introduce or enhance misleading biases.

(3) “Shoot whole events”: The ethical concern here regards a film-maker’s control over how much of an event the audience sees, whether its entirety or just selected parts. For worse (not better), in Asch’s view, film-makers don’t always shoot whole events. Ethically, for Asch, an event’s participants should be able to recognize the event from whichever montage of selected parts the film-maker uses to depict it (ibid.: 199). As evidenced by the tale segment of *Spirits of defiance*, film-maker ventriloquism allows for the voice representation, via subtitles, of a whole event (the tale of the film’s subtitles is a whole) where there is only a partial visual representation (the film does not show nearly the whole tale concerned). Here, film-maker ventriloquism forces the audience to *trust* that the film-maker is not misrepresenting, by the voice-representation-via-subtitles of a whole event, the alleged whole event of which only part appears in the film.

(4) “Support your film with good written documentation”: The sort of documentation Asch has in mind is transcription and translation of the entirety of a film’s audio recordings. This is “[i]f at all possible,” “particularly all tapes related to synchronous recording for the film,” and before the film-maker leaves the field. Its importance, in Asch’s view, is that it “provides vital detail and context for present and future students of anthropology who are likely to use [ethnographic] films.” Without such detail and context, he asserts that “[a] film may unwittingly support common prejudices about primitive or isolated cultures, the very misunderstandings anthropologists are striving to dispel” (ibid.). Good written documentation of this sort should help to both document and evaluate cases of film-maker ventriloquism more quickly. It appears that certain instances of film-maker ventriloquism might be the result of a film-maker’s not having done adequate transcription and translation even of the footage eventually incorporated in a film.

(5) “Make and archive an uncut version of your work for scholarly research”: This step was evidently taken in the case of *Spirits of defiance*. However, *if* it is only after scholarly research on such a version that the nature, extent, and other aspects of a given case of film-maker ventriloquism are revealed, then some of the parties involved in the film’s production⁶⁶ may not become aware of any ethical problems involved until long after the film’s distribution.

(6) “Seek feedback from the subjects of your film”: According to Asch, “[This step] serves as an accuracy check and it solicits additional information from your subjects that might not come out in any other situation”; also, it permits “final revisions that often result in a better film” (ibid.: 200). With regard to *Spirits of defiance*, and as mentioned earlier in part, producer-director Marre stated in one letter that “[t]he subtitles and edited version were shown to Mangbetu for correction and approval,” while he stated in another both that “[t]he Mangbetu approved of [the film],” and also that “I believe [the film] is a fair and positive representation of Mangbetu life, and I know the Mangbetu feel the same.”⁶⁷ Begging the question of how many and which sort(s) of Mangbetu in fact helped serve as an accuracy check on

⁶⁶ E.g., a supporting educational-cultural institution or a funding source.

⁶⁷ Jeremy Marre, personal communication, 15 June 1990.

the film's subtitles and edited version,⁶⁸ and without addressing the more general problem of how one obtains meaningful feedback concerning a film made for literate anglophones from a not-so-literate, non-anglophone people like the Mangbetu, I see here at least two problems. The one has to do with the fact that the film's *missionary* subjects were never, according to Elio, shown the film for *their* feedback concerning the parts in which *they* featured, spoke, and had their speech subtitled.⁶⁹ In this regard, film-makers should certainly have ethical responsibilities toward *each of however many* ethnic, religious, or other kinds of groups of subjects they film, which responsibilities should include respect for each one's feedback on the manner in which its film speech has been subtitled. The other concerns the possibility of a film-maker granting subjects the right to approve subtitles that are "the voice of Oz" rather than their own actual film voices. Here, instances of film-maker ventriloquism that one subject group might applaud as a rich joke might be justly decried as dishonest by another.

(7) "Get feedback from sample audiences": Asch's concern here is that the film-maker have "an opportunity to see if the film is communicating with the audience as [he or she] intended" (ibid.: 201). Although this step may address this concern adequately for some films, it does not, where film-maker ventriloquism is concerned, allow for the fact that this is not likely to be detected by sample audiences, given that it may take a specialist professional weeks or more to research and document a given case. In any case, a film-maker should have an ethical responsibility to *all* audiences, both sample and otherwise, to inform them if, where, how, and why a film has employed film-maker ventriloquism; otherwise, it cannot help but mislead them, and it lays itself wide open, vis-à-vis its audiences and film subjects alike, to such charges as "communicative hegemony" or "audiovisual imperialism."⁷⁰

⁶⁸ In this regard, Chief Danga Dambo, on 30 April 2002 near Isiro, showed me a tattered letter, dated 27 September 1990, that the American Museum's Schildkrout had written him in English. In it, she said that they were, on Jeremy Marre's instructions, sending him a SECAM copy of the two films they had produced; that they were sending it, along with some other exhibition-related items, via the American Embassy in Kinshasa, to which he could send a messenger to get them; that, although she was sorry not to have visited Zaire for the filming, she had had the pleasure of getting to know him and his people through the film; that they were grateful for all of his assistance and hoped he enjoyed the film as much as they did. (On my request, the chief provided me with a photocopy of Schildkrout's letter, which I have retained among other film-related materials.) The chief, having shown me the letter, told me he never received more than the film *Mangbetu in the modern world*; previously, he had told me he had not seen *Spirits of defiance* until ca. June 1999 in Nairobi via one of my personal copies.

During my June 1991 visit to Nangazizi, (1) Father Elio told me that the priests had been promised at least a copy of the film, but then received nothing, and Mabondane told me the same where he was concerned; (2) Elio said he didn't know of anyone there at Nangazizi who had seen the film or had the means to do so; (3) I heard other such statements – in sum, that no one there had yet seen the film; (4) a boy came to us at one point with a message to the effect that a letter had been received with photos, that the video was apparently lost en route, that they had not seen the film there yet, not even the chief, and that they had sent asking for another copy.

⁶⁹ Elio Farronato, unpublished interview, 5 June 1991.

⁷⁰ The phrase "communicative hegemony" I found in Briggs (1986); it refers to an unequal power-and-control relationship in the conventional social scientific interview, whereby the interviewer is assured in advance of the ideological slant of his or her research results. The phrase "visual imperialism" I found in Kuehnast (1992): "Visual imperialism is the colonisation of the world mind through the use of selective imagery that acts as a representation of a dominant ideology or, as in many instances, a representation of the truth"; and Kuehnast notes that it concerns "the degree to which our interpretations reproduce hegemonic discourse and result in the perpetuation of myths, prejudices, or limited understandings about other peoples" (1992: 184). In an ethnographic film such as *Spirits of defiance*, I would suspect that the "dominant ideology" or "truth" represented via its film-maker ventriloquism is especially that of the film-makers' cultural-academic-media subculture. That they are not especially bothered by the possibly hegemonic nature of their film's "voice of Oz" is evidenced in part by the response of one person concerned to one of my criticisms of the film:

Finally, I note that in your letter of 26 June [1990] you state that "neither the Mangbetu nor the British (or American) viewing public, as groups, are in a position to judge the substan-

On the same subject, but now in relation to a concern expressed in (6) above, I don't believe that a film-maker's obligation to be honest with his or her audiences concerning film-maker ventriloquism ought ever to be neglected in favor of any commitment, however motivated, to one set of film subjects over another.

(8) "Publish a study guide or monograph to be distributed with the film": Asch credits Karl Heider with having expressed this concern more than thirty years previously, and it is in relation to the problem of films used in teaching being "incomplete without solid, written background material and deeper interpretation of the culture or events portrayed in the film" (ibid.: 203). The addressing of both this concern and that regarding good written documentation as support for a film, would of necessity, if responsibly done, reveal any film-maker ventriloquism that was part of a film. This would enable the sorting out of which of a film's subtitles could be counted on to have evidentiary value and which not; and it would also enable both professionals and students to assess for themselves the extent, nature, etc., of film biases introduced by film-maker ventriloquism. Unfortunately, but understandably, it is for the latter reason that film-makers who have employed film-maker ventriloquism may be reluctant to publish a responsible study guide or monograph that would acknowledge what they have done.

(9) "Ongoing commitments": Asch notes that "[e]thnographers gain a great deal from their interaction with indigenous populations," and thus that "[w]e owe it to our subjects to do what we can for them in return" (ibid.). Where film-maker ventriloquism is concerned, I believe that, once recognized by the whole of a subject community for what it is, the fact that it misleads concerning film subjects' speech may complicate greatly a film-maker's efforts at ongoing commitments.⁷¹

In sum, if one judges a case of film-maker ventriloquism of the sort one finds in *Spirits of defiance* by the ethics considerations of Asch (1991), then film-maker ventriloquism's possible ethical problems are both many and serious. Thus, I would suggest that if professional anthropology would not formally brand film-maker ventriloquism inherently, invariably unethical, the considerations I have mentioned should yet make ethically-concerned anthropologists eschew collaboration with film-makers who would practice it.

5. Summary and conclusion

My purpose in the present paper has been to make and illustrate the point that film-makers might use subtitles ventriloquially rather than to allow their film subjects to "speak for themselves." I have done so with reference to the subtitles and film speech of five segments from the made-for-television ethnographic film *Spirits of defiance: The Mangbetu people of Zaire*. Regarding these subtitles, I believe I have shown both (1) that they fall short in each segment of being consistently good translations or even condensations of the film

tive accuracy of the film's narration and subtitles." This leaves you as an audience of one, to ruminate forever on these issues (name withheld, personal correspondence, 24 September 1990).

⁷¹ Where the film's Mangbetu are concerned, Chief Danga Dambo told me on 30 April 2002 that they had received no visits from any of the film-makers after Demolin's departure as the last of the film crew; that there had been no assistance to them from any of those involved in the film's production, etc., in the approximately twelve years since the film's initial BBC television airing and the opening of the American Museum's *African Reflections* exhibition; and that, in the wake of the country's two civil wars since August 1996, substantial aid was in fact needed, including to help local students have scholarships they need to pursue secondary school and higher-level studies.

speech they accompany, and also (2) that they err in each case in a direction that helps construct or support the film's overall message of Mangbetu cultural "defiance." Thus, it should be clear that a film's subtitles don't necessarily make it multi-vocal by adding the voices of film subjects to whatever "voice of God" narration; rather, they can be little more, essentially, than "the voice of Oz" supporting "the voice of God," with "Oz" and "God" perhaps never revealed to be one and the same. Where this latter is indeed the case, a film *must* be judged misleading in this regard,⁷² it can hardly be judged "documentary" where its film speech is concerned, and aspects of the film-makers' ethics must come into question.

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⁷² In any case, given the critical review judgments of Karp (1991) and Hughes-Freeland (1991) that I quoted in section 2.2., my own judgment in the present paper – viz., that many subtitles of *Spirits of defiance* are more or less misleading – should not greatly surprise.

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