

**Embodied Histories, Danced Religions, Performed Politics:
Kongo Cultural Performance and the Production of History and Authority**

by

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To my grandmother NeNe

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Glossary

Note: The terms in this list are in Kikongo unless otherwise indicated

Bakulu: ancestors

Bascule: (French) the ceremony during which the spirits of the members of the DMNA church are publicly weighed

Bikualakuala: long lengths of bamboo that are laid out on or across tables and played with sticks

Bimpampa: body gestures

BisiKongo: BisiKongo is the term that I am using to describe are the ethnic group one finds throughout the Lower Congo, who speak varying dialects of the same language, KiKongo. This group is also known as BaKongo, a term that was frequently used by colonial administrators to describe this group during the colonial period. The term “Kongo” describes the cultural area of this group, which was the basis of the Kongo Kingdom, and covers parts of present day Congo-Brazzaville, Congo-Kinshasa, and Angola. MwissiKongo is a singular term used to describe an inhabitant of the Kongo Kingdom, while BisiKongo is the plural form of this term. I have found that BisiKongo or Kongo people are phrases more often used by informants in describing themselves as members of a larger group. So I am respecting the political choice that some people have made to use BisiKongo rather than BaKongo to describe themselves, although most of the scholarly literature still uses BaKongo.

Bula makonko: cupped handclapping that is and was used in the past as a gesture of respect, to open and close meetings and prayers, to ask for pardon, forgiveness, and blessings, and also as a form of greeting other people.

Bundu dia Kongo: a politico-religious-nationalist movement of Kongo people that seeks to reestablish the Kongo Kingdom and advocates a return to certain elements of “tradition” in the face of a growing lack of political and economic power in the country

Dekama: genuflection

Dibundu dia Mpeve ya Nlongo mu Afelika: Church of the Holy Spirit in Africa. See chapter four.

Dikisa: (from verb kudikisa) - to give to someone to ingest. Often used to refer to passing on the Holy Spirit and the ability to heal to someone else, called *dikisa mpeve*. Also used to describe giving the *nkasa* poison to someone to ingest as a test of their innocence.

Dumuka: jumping

Dumuna: ritual jumping for a blessing or other purposes

Fukama: kneeling

Kibandi: (pl. bibandi) - double skinned drums that are beaten with batons. See the photo on page 220.

Kindoki: witchcraft or the use of spiritual powers to harm others

Kingunza: word used to describe the prophetic movements throughout the Lower Congo during the colonial period, sparked by the healing of the Prophet Simon Kimbangu

Koko: (pl. moko) - hands

Luketo: hips

Madeso: beans

Makinu: general term for dances, of which there are many types. These include dances for the ancestors, dances of the nobility, dances for the king, ecstatic dances, dances in honor of healing spirits, and dances of the hips (see page 28 in dissertation, and Fu-Kiau in Thompson 2005:63).

Malembe: peace

Malu: legs

Mani: ruler, governor

Mfumu: king

Mpeve: vital principle of every individual; spirit or Holy Spirit; breeze.

Nganga: (pl. banganga) - healers, priests and diviners in the system of Kongo traditional religious beliefs

Ngoma: a tall (waist high) thick, wooden drum with one side covered by an animal skin that is often tightened by heating it with fire. In many secular makinu, this is the lead drum. The term ngoma is also used to describe the dance event at which ngomas and other drums are being played.

Ngunza: (pl. bangunza) - prophet

Nitu: body

Nkasa: a poisonous drink given to accused parties during the pre-colonial period to test their innocence. If they vomited the drink, they were considered innocent, but if they died, they were considered guilty.

Nkisi: (pl. minkisi): material object in Kongo traditional religion that has been given spiritual power by traditional priests. Wyatt MacGaffey has referred to them as “charms.” (1986: 137-145), while John Janzen refers to them as consecrated medicines (1982:4).

Nsakala: shakers or rattles that are often made from small calabashes mounted on sticks. They also can be tied to strings and worn on the wrists of drummers to accentuate the playing.

Ntwadisi: person in the DMNA church who weighs the spirits of members during the bascule

Sanga: war dance

Sangamento: large military reviews that were stages in the Kingdom of Kongo

Soyo: one of the provinces of the Kongo Kingdom that became increasingly independent in the seventeenth century.

Yinama: bowing

Abstract

Embodied Histories, Danced Religions, and Performed Politics: Kongo Cultural Performance and the Production of History and Authority

by

Yolanda Denise Covington

Chair: Elisha P. Renne

This dissertation examines two types of embodied cultural performances, *makinu*—Kongo dances—and *bimpampa*—Kongo body gestures, to investigate changes and continuities from the late fifteenth century to the present in the ways that the Kongo people both represent cultural memories and social values through cultural performances, and use these same performances to create, confirm, and contest political and religious authority.

By focusing on the multivalent meanings and uses of *makinu* and *bimpampa* over time, I illuminate processes of social transformation that both have been affected by, and have affected, the BisiKongo ethnic group. Based on ethnographic and archival research in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Belgium, I consider everyday interactions in the Kongo Kingdom, conflicts over embodied practices associated with colonial era prophetic movements, enacted theologies in the DMNA church, political animation

during Mobutu's reign, and traditionally-referenced gestures of the Bundu dia Kongo nationalist movement.

This study shows that embodied cultural performances not only are an important means of chronicling Kongo social history, but also play a crucial role in actively making and unmaking authority on a daily basis through social interactions. This dissertation contributes to literature on the anthropology of the body, adds to studies of the relationship between performance and power by focusing specifically on authority and examining the role of coercion and prohibition, challenges notions of a strict separation between ritual and everyday life, and provides comparative information for scholars interested in Kongo history, and its relationship to the development of New World cultures.

Chapter 1

Bodies, Performance, and Authority

Kongo in the Body

It was November of 2005, and after an extended stay in the town of Luozi in the Lower Congo, I came back to Kinshasa briefly before heading back to the United States for Thanksgiving. However, Luozi remained with me, not only in the red dirt hiding in the creases of my suitcases and in the soles of the my sneakers, or the *madeso* (beans) that I brought back to my host family to cook and eat, but also in the genuflection of my knees that happened almost involuntarily when I greeted someone, or the cupped clapping of the hands that accompanied the greeting, along with a slight bow of the head, or the feedback sound that came from my throat to indicate that I was listening to what someone was telling me. My host family and neighborhood friends in Gombe remarked that I had become a girl of Luozi in my mannerisms. When I later returned to the United States, I had to retrain my body as I often unwittingly found myself continuing to exhibit these same embodied practices, ways of moving that had not been a part of my body language before my time in Luozi. It was then that the import of my research became even clearer to me. Comportment, movement, gestures; they can be seen as forms of embodied history and knowledge and more specifically, as cultural performances. What

stories and histories can be told through an analysis of cultural performances such as these? What purposes do such embodied cultural performances serve in a society?

Overview and Significance

This dissertation utilizes the study of two types of embodied cultural performances, *makinu*—a general term for Kongo¹ dances—and *bimpampa*, Kongo body gestures, as a way to investigate the following questions: What types of cultural memories and social values are being activated for Kongo people through embodied cultural performances, and how do these change or persist in the context of major social transformations? How are these same cultural performances used in the active construction of social life, in particular to establish, confirm, and contest political and religious authority?

With this project, I make several contributions to the field of anthropology. First, this study adds depth to anthropological studies of performance in Africa by emphasizing the body as a source of information about the past, which is significant because most other analyses of performance in Africa have not used the approach of privileging the body. Moreover, the vast majority of other non-performance ethnographies of embodied practices as sites of embodied memory and history privilege spirit possession as their primary medium of analysis. Although my work does incorporate significant attention to spirit possession, it also considers embodied histories in a variety of contexts, from war

¹ The BisiKongo, also known as BaKongo, are the ethnic group one finds throughout the Lower Congo, of which the people speak varying dialects of the same language, KiKongo. The term “Kongo” describes the cultural area of this group, which was the basis of the Kongo Kingdom, and covers parts of present day Congo-Brazzaville, Congo-Kinshasa, and Angola. I have found that BisiKongo or Kongo people are phrases more often used by informants in describing themselves as members of a larger group, and thus have chosen to use that terminology in my dissertation.

dances and gestures of respect in the pre-colonial Kongo Kingdom, to festivals for Mobutu in the eighties and religious worship services in the present.

Second, the focus on embodied cultural performances, especially gestures, allows us to see that there are no strictly defined boundaries between ritual and everyday life, between performance and everyday experience. The study of gesture in anthropology, while vigorously explored by a few scholars such as Adam Kendon (1997, 2004), remains marginalized and continues to focus mainly on sign language (Farnell 1995) or the relationship of gesture to verbal expressions and language (McNeil 2000; Haviland 1998, 1999). Thus, gesture remains an area of study in anthropology that has not received much attention, much like the study of dance in socio-cultural context, which although less marginalized than gesture, remains on the fringes of anthropological inquiry. I believe that this is the case because, like many other disciplines that have grown out of Western thought, anthropology remains haunted by the Cartesian dualism that privileges the mind over the body and often posits the body as the site of irrationality and emotion. It is for all of these reasons that this study aims to demonstrate the usefulness of a focus on gesture and dance to the discipline of anthropology and the unique perspective that such an approach provides to studies of society and history.

Third, through an explicit focus on the relationship between performance and authority, this study also suggests a different approach to the study of the interrelatedness of performance and power. Instead of focusing on power as a general concept, I look at how these embodied cultural performances were used to contest and confirm *authority* in particular. I understand authority as the ability to influence or determine the conduct of others within a hierarchy of statuses in a group. This distinctive analytic lens illuminates

another aspect of the role of performance in the active construction of social life in the changing socio-historical landscape of the Lower Congo from the pre-colonial era to the present.

Fourth, the focus on Kongo embodied cultural performances is significant because other studies of the BisiKongo have generally overlooked performance practices for investigations of cosmology, political structures, and art (MacGaffey 1970, 1983, 1986; Fu-Kiau 1969; Thornton 1998; Thompson 1983; 2005). In the larger field of literature on performance in Africa, this study will prove valuable because not only have most other studies focused on other regions of Africa (Ranger 1975; Mitchell 1956; Waterman 1990), but also, unlike many anthropological studies of performance in Africa, this project begins with the pre-colonial, rather than the colonial era, which is useful for identifying and evaluating recurring trends over time. Thus, a focus on changes over time in the uses and meanings of *makinu* and *bimpampa* illuminates historical conditions and processes of socio-cultural, religious, political, and economic transformations that both have been affected by, and have affected, the BisiKongo of present day Democratic Republic of Congo from the pre-colonial era to the present.

Last, this project will also provide information that can be used for comparative purposes for scholars interested in the development of New World embodied cultural forms. This is important because West Central Africans such as the BisiKongo made up a significant portion of those enslaved in the Americas, and it is only more recently that scholars have begun to really explore the often ignored contributions of West Central Africans to the cultures of the African Diaspora (Heywood, 2002; Heywood and Thornton, 2007; Thompson 2005). In the growing literature on the influence of Kongo

culture on the New World, scholars often have assumptions about a Kongo culture that remained static and unchanging in Africa. My study highlights the role of performances in the dynamic processes that affected social life by revealing both change and continuity over time in Africa, which allows scholars interested New World cultures to compare performances both within and across different periods of time.

The rest of this chapter is divided into two main sections. The first provides a theoretical outline of the areas of study, situates my own research within the work of others, and explains in further detail how I am expanding upon past studies and the contributions that I seek to make. The second section examines my research site, methodology, and my experiences as an African American woman ethnographer in the Congo, and also sketches out the remaining chapters of the dissertation.

Part I: Theoretical Overview

Memory and Embodied Histories

Although most historical studies continue to privilege written texts, many scholars now recognize that history also exists in the body through embodied practices (Stoller 1995; Shaw 2002). Anthropologists have not only been interested in the body as a way of knowing, but also the body as a way of remembering. The seminal work *How Societies Remember* (1989) by Paul Connerton has been very influential on anthropological studies of the body as a way of remembering. Connerton outlines personal, cognitive, and habit memory as the three classes of memory (1989:21), but emphasizes the role of the body in habit memory especially: “In habitual memory the past is, as it were, sedimented in the body.” (1989:72). First, incorporating practices are transmitted through the body and “all

habits are affective dispositions; that a predisposition formed through the frequent repetition of a number of specific acts is an intimate and fundamental part of ourselves” (1989:94). Thus, through the repetition of certain acts that are laden with culturally significance, these acts become a part of one’s daily routine and the values and meanings associated with these acts unconsciously become a part of one’s cultural ethos. “Incorporating practices therefore provide a particularly effective system of mnemonics” (1989:102), meaning that bodily practices can activate and create cultural memories.

Pierre Bourdieu is another important theorist whose work addresses issues surrounding embodied practice. His work hinges on the concept of habitus—the mode of the generation of practices—which he defines as “...systems of durable, transposable dispositions...that is...principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations...” (1977:72). The habitus is the internalization of the “objective structure,” a term that Bourdieu uses to describe both the internal generating principles that are based on past conditions and become incorporated into the habitus (1977: 78), and also, the established order or present social/economic/political conditions in which one is situated, (which are located outside the individual) that will then inform the principles of the habitus (1977: 166). Bourdieu gives as examples of objective structures “chances of access to higher education, laws of the matrimonial market,” among others (1977: 21). Thus, the habitus is a set of generating principles that produce practice based on the structures within itself, which were passed on from previous generations. Moreover, these generating principles based on past experiences act in concert with the objective conditions of the present to guide practice, and it is the habitus that relates these two things.

Bourdieu connects the habitus to the body with his concept of the body hexis. The body hexis is one of the many ways that the habitus is passed on and reproduced, most often by children imitating the actions of adults. “Body hexis speaks directly to the motor function, in the form of a pattern of postures that is both individual and systematic, because linked to a whole system of techniques involving the body and tools, and charged with a host of social meaning and values”(1977: 87).²

In his discussion of habitus and body hexis, Bourdieu points out that practice is a form of mnemonics as well, particularly practice that invokes social and cultural values. Bourdieu demonstrates this point in his discussion of male and female embodiment in Kabyle society:

Body *hexis* is political mythology realized, *em-bodied*, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable manner of standing speaking, and thereby of *feeling* and *thinking*. The oppositions which mythico-ritual logic makes between the male and the female and which organize the whole system reappear, for example, in the gestures and movements of the body...The manly man stands up straight and honours the person he approaches or wishes to welcome by looking him right in the eyes...Conversely, a woman is expected to walk with a slight stoop, looking down, keeping her eyes on the spot where she will next put her foot...In short, the specifically feminine virtue, *lahia*, modesty, restraint, reserve, orients the whole female body downwards, towards the ground, the inside, the house, whereas male excellence, *nif*, is asserted in movement upwards, outwards, towards other men. (Bourdieu 1977: 94)

Bourdieu emphasizes the importance placed on these values being embodied, because in this Kabyle example, the very principle of feminine virtue seen as appropriate for women, is most aptly demonstrated by the way in which a woman uses, orients, and moves her body (downward and inward in this instance). In this way, the gendered

² Mauss's study of “body techniques” was one of the first to outline the ways in which cultural norms of movement that differ from society to society are unconsciously learned (Mauss 1973).

values of Kabyle society are actually embodied by women and men in everyday posture, movement, and life. The significance of values embodied in such a way explains why embodied practices are targeted when people, organizations, and institutions seek to transform the values, belief systems, and behavior of groups of people and individuals alike. This becomes especially clear in situations in which institutions (e.g. prisons, churches, moral reform associations, etc.) want to “produce” new subjects. This occurs precisely because, “treating the body as a memory, they entrust to it in abbreviated and practical, i.e. mnemonic, form the fundamental principles of the arbitrary content of the culture. The principles embodied in this way are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness” (1977: 94). Thus, correctives and etiquette reinforce social values and become forms of “an implicit pedagogy, capable of instilling a whole cosmology, an ethic, a metaphysic, a political philosophy, through injunctions as insignificant as ‘stand up straight’ or ‘don’t hold your knife in your left hand’” (1977:94).

According to Bourdieu, the embodiment of social values and principles is often most important in societies where written texts historically have not been at the center of preserving history and transmitting moral values and ideologies, so that “in societies which lack any other recording and objectifying instrument, inherited knowledge can survive only in its embodied state” (1977:218, footnote 44). However, for all societies, whether literate or not, emphasis is placed on embodying its core values and ideologies because of the subtle persuasiveness of ideologies embodied in this way, such that they become so embedded in one’s body that they seem natural. As a result, “every group entrusts to bodily automatisms those principles most basic to it and most indispensable to its conservation” (1977:218, footnote 44). It is clear that embodied practices are

immensely critical to transmitting and activating social values, ideals, and cultural history, and as such, a study of the embodied practices of the BisiKongo will illuminate meanings and values that have particular salience for the Kongo people.

However, what happens to embodied practices and the ideas associated with them in situations of major social transformation?

Embodied Practices and Social Transformation

So far, we have explored the importance of embodied practices for transmitting social values, ideals, and cultural history. A major tenet of these embodied principles is that they seek to reproduce the structure of power and hierarchy that produced them. A key question that remains to be answered is what happens in situations of major social transformation, especially culture contact, in which there are competing value systems and systems of power? What happens to embodied practices beholden to a past system? Do the practices remain the same, but the values associated with them change, or vice versa? Or do completely new practices and values come into play?

This topic is one that has not been adequately explored by either of the two authors (Bourdieu, Connerton) that have been previously discussed. One way that Bourdieu discusses changes in the objective structures is by emphasizing the importance of culture contact and/or political or economic crises, for rupturing the fit between subjective structures (habitus) and objective structures, destroying the unquestionable, self-evident nature of the world and revealing doxa for what it is (1977:168-9). He briefly addresses the mismatch of habitus and objective structures more specifically in *The Logic of Practice*:

The presence of the past in this kind of false anticipation of the future performed by the habitus is, paradoxically, most clearly seen when the sense of the probable future is belied and when dispositions ill-adjusted to the objective chances...are negatively sanctioned because the environment they actually encounter is too different from the one to which they are objectively adjusted...The tendency of groups to persist in their ways, due *inter alia* to the fact that they are composed of individuals with durable dispositions that can outlive the economic and social conditions in which they were produced, can be the source of misadaptation as well as adaptation, revolt as well as resignation. (1990:62)

Thus, when there is discord between one's habitus and the prevailing objective structures, it can have both positive and negative consequences for the person, and, I would add, the objective structures. However, Bourdieu did not go into detail about such instances of discord. How have other authors looked at embodied practices in the throes of social transformations?

A common thread that runs through ethnographies dealing with questions of the body, practice, and social transformation is that of religion and spirit possession. In *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance* (1985) Jean Comaroff makes a comparison of ritual practice in societal transformation, investigating pre-colonial initiation rites and the Zionist church movement among the Tshidi of the South Africa-Botswana borderland, and the response of ritual practice to major changes such as racial oppression and migrant wage labor. The Zionist churches use bodily reform to make "new" men and women, through dietary restrictions, special uniforms, healing illness only through a prophet in the church, and even desisting from using money and engaging in the economy. Thus, ritual practices that surround the healing of physical bodies suffering from the manifestation of larger social ailments may also be seen as a form of resistance to an oppressive society. Stoller's *Embodying Colonial Memories* (1995) is based in a

Songhay town in the Republic of Niger and examines the Hauka Movement, in which devotees are possessed by the spirits of Europeans (called Hauka). These devotees mimic various colonial personages, particularly the military. Through gestures and other movements, language, improvised uniforms, wooden guns, etc. the Hauka mediums utilize embodied practices to express cultural memories of European colonization. Similarly, *Prayer Has Spoiled Everything* (2001) explores *bori* possession ceremonies in the Hausaphone Mawri community of Dogondoutchi in south central Niger. *Bori* are “invisible beings that populate the bush” (Masquelier 2001:3), and possess devotees (*yan bori*) both inside and outside of ritual contexts. In contrast to the lack of change in the tradition of *bori* that is emphasized by *yan bori* themselves, Masquelier notes that *bori* is altered to reflect novel social transformations: “*Bori* possession has been constantly changing to accommodate new spirits that are chronicling the unfolding and complex engagement between Mawri society and the outside world” (2001:291). Thus, the *bori* pantheon expands to include a diverse cast of “female warriors, French soldiers, noble Taureg, seductive prostitutes, Zarma blacksmiths, doctors and lorry drivers, Muslim clerks and bank thieves” (2001:292). In this regard, *bori* is used both as “a form of anchorage into the past and as a locus for the mediation of historical transformations” (2001:6).

These studies provide excellent analyses of embodied practices in the context of major socio-historical changes. One drawback, however, is that they focus overwhelmingly on spirit possession. One can understand the attraction of anthropologists to spirit possession as a condition that stands out starkly from everyday life and seems amenable to ethnographic study because of how vividly it contrasts with

mainstream Western religious traditions and worship. However, the emphasis on spirit possession once again tends to reinforce the divide between ritual and everyday life by focusing on events that most often take place in the contexts of ritual settings that are framed and marked as separate from everyday practice.³

There are several other studies that look at practices in the context of major social change. Drewal's study of Yoruba ritual in Nigeria provides an innovative approach by focusing on the incorporation of change into "traditional" rituals that have to be adapted to new social conditions in order to persist (Drewal 1992). Rosalind Shaw's *Memories of the Slave Trade* explores Temne divination in Sierra Leone, in which memories of the violence and experience of the slave trade are embodied in current ritual practices such as witch-finding and techniques of divination (Shaw 2002).⁴ Deborah Kaspin (1993) examines *nyau*, a traditional dance and ritual organization in Malawi that went from being essential to pre-colonial chiefship and ritual events to being emblematic of resistance to white rule during the colonial period. Moreover, McCall investigates Ohafia Igbo dances that reference a past of headhunting (2000) while Terence Ranger's (1975) study of the Beni Ngoma is probably the best known in historical circles, examining beni performance as a reaction to European colonial occupation, the first World War, the Great Depression, and other major changes affecting East Africa from 1890-1970.

³ Although this is not the main point of the book, an exception to this is Masquelier's attention to embodiment both inside and outside of *bori* ritual contexts. Examples ranging from everyday interactions between people affected by alternate spirit identities, to spirit possessions occurring unexpectedly outside of ritual contexts, reveal that there is no strict division between the "sacred" and "profane" worlds for *bori* practitioners in Dogondoutchi. According to Masquelier, "Mawri understanding is often embedded in praxis—that is, enveloped in bodily attitudes—rather than enunciated through words, concepts and formulas" (2001:185). The body is thus the most accessible way for the Mawri to articulate their understanding of changes in their society.

⁴ Nicolas Argenti's *Intestines of the State* (2007) also deals with memories of the slave trade as evidenced in masquerades and other practices. This book will be discussed in further detail later in the chapter.

An overview of these studies has shown that the study of the body and embodied practices can reveal a lot about a particular society and its history. Because embodied practices often become second nature and in daily life are placed beyond the realm of conscious thought, they constitute a valuable site for the “storage” of significant values and historical narratives of a society. With this dissertation, I broaden the discussion of embodied practices in the context of socio-cultural transformations considerably through an in-depth examination of embodied practices in cultural performances not only in religious contexts, but in many areas of everyday life, expanding the more narrow focus on spirit possession that has dominated the literature until now.

Embodied Cultural Performances

Bourdieu and Connerton have focused on embodied practices as a form of mnemonics for social and cultural values, norms, and principles. Embodied practices, however, is a very broad category that could encompass everything from planting rice to drumming to spirit possession. For my own research, I concentrate on embodied practices (gesture and dance) as expressed in the context of cultural performances.

Performance is a contested concept, and many related definitions have been offered. Some key concepts relevant to defining performance are: restored behavior and awareness of being in the presence of others—which may be a formal audience, simply being in public, or a spiritual presence. Richard Schechner defined performance as “never for the first time. It means: for the second to the nth time. Performance is “twice-behaved” behavior.” (1985:36). This twice-behaved behavior is also called “restored behavior”:

All performances...share at least one underlying quality. Performance behavior isn't free and easy. Performance behavior is known and/or practiced behavior—or “twice-behaved behavior,” “restored behavior,”—either rehearsed, previously known, learned by osmosis since early childhood, revealed during the performance by masters, gurus, guides, or elders, or generated by rules that govern the outcomes. (1985:118)

Here, the connection between the body hexis/habitus of Bourdieu, the incorporating practices of Connerton, and “restored behavior” of Schechner become clear, as ways of moving and using one's body become the basis for performance. Thus, Schechner more simply defines restored behavior as “me behaving as if I were someone else,” or “as I am told to do,” or “as I have learned” (2002:28). Moreover, Schieffelin connects the concepts of performance and practice as the following: performance embodies the *expressive dimension of the strategic articulation of practice* (1998:199).

Another key part of defining performance is awareness of being in the presence of others. Linguist Dell Hymes sought to define performance by contrasting it to behavior and conduct. Behavior he saw as “anything and everything that happens,” while conduct was behavior “under the aegis of social norms, cultural rules, and shared principles of interpretability.” Hymes defines performance as a subset within conduct in which “one or more persons ‘assume responsibility to an audience and to tradition as they understand it’” (1975). Erving Goffman, in his classic study and analysis of interactions in everyday life, in which people perform certain roles to make impressions on others, defines performance as, “all activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers” (1959:22). In both Hymes' and Goffman's definitions, the key component seems to be the interaction between an individual and others.

Combining all of the preceding elements, I use John MacAloon's very useful definition of performance as: "a particular class or subset of restored behavior in which one or more persons assume responsibility to an audience⁵ and to tradition as they understand it" (1984: preface). Moreover, I consider performances to incorporate everyday interactions as well as performances that are more clearly bounded or set apart from everyday life, that in the words of Schechner are "marked, framed, or heightened behavior separated from just 'living life'" (2002:28). This follows Goffman as well as Palmer and Jankowiak, who assert that "performances run the gamut of complexity from mass rituals, such as the Great Sacrifice and Prophet's Birthdays of Morocco...and the spectacular floor shows of Las Vegas, to small, self-deprecating jokes and mundane comments on the weather" (1996:226). I have also narrowed my subject of study from not only performances, but specifically embodied cultural performances. *Embodied*, because of the trove of information and history that are associated with gestures and ways of moving, and *cultural*, to emphasize the focus of the cultural matrix of the Kongo people. Thus, in this project I will examine a wide range of embodied cultural performances, from interactions in greetings, to movements in traditional dances, to gestures in independent churches.

Scholars in performance studies have already begun to apply some of the theories of the body as a form of history to their analyses of performances. Diana Taylor, a

⁵ I take audience in its most general sense to mean anyone who views or experiences the cultural performance, or following Schieffelin, "others in the situation to whom the performance is directed," (1998:200) recognizing that these others may be mere observers, active co-participants, the performer herself, or even not visibly present, such as in the case of cultural performances for God, deities, ancestors, or other spiritual beings (although these spiritual entities may be present in other ways, e.g. possession).

performance theorist and Latin Americanist, extends Bourdieu's assertion about the mnemonic capacity of embodied practices to performances:

By taking performance seriously as a system of learning, storing, and transmitting knowledge, performance studies allows us to expand what we understand as 'knowledge'...Embodied expression...will probably continue to participate in the transmission of social knowledge, memory, and identity pre- and post writing." (2003:16)

In *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Taylor juxtaposes archival memory (documents, letters, texts, etc.) based on writing and material objects seen as more resistant to change, with the sites of embodied memory, which she calls the repertoire: "performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing—in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge" (2003:19-20). These embodied performances, while on the one hand ephemeral as performances, replicate themselves over and over again. "Multiple forms of embodied acts are always present, though in a constant state of againness. They reconstitute themselves, transmitting communal memories, histories, and values from one group/generation to the next. Embodied and performed acts generate, record, and transmit knowledge" (2003:21). Thus, the repertoire "allows for an alternative perspective on historical processes...by following traditions of embodied practice" (2003:20). In order to explore these ideas further in the context of the Americas, Taylor looks at recurring scenarios, which are "a sketch or outline of the plot of a play" (2003:28). Some examples that she uses include the scenario of discovery, or that of the battle between the Christians and Moors, as plots that are continually acted out in rituals, churches, masquerades, etc. over the history of the Americas in different contexts.

Taylor's work is enlightening and groundbreaking in its focus on performances as sites of history, and is very relevant and useful for my own work. However, where I

depart from her work is in regard to idea of the scenario, and the stability and analysis of the actions in the repertoire. Although useful as a methodological tool of analysis, the scenario as a recurring plot still focuses on the larger structure of a performance and not as much on the embodied details of how people move and interact with each other. Moreover, Taylor sees the actions and embodiment of the repertoire as always changing. While I agree that some transformations in both meaning and form may take place, there are also continuities that recur as well in the embodied movements. Taylor sees performances as “the many practices and events—dance, theatre, ritual, political rallies, funerals—that involve theatrical, rehearsed, or conventional/event appropriate behaviors... [and] are usually bracketed off from those around them to constitute discrete foci of analysis” (2003: 3). Her idea of performances as scenarios that are separate from other practices reinforces the idea of a boundary between performance and everyday life. This position counters Beidelman’s argument, for example, about Kaguru ritual in Tanzania, in which everyday actions such as sweeping and cooking are in fact the source of ritual performances (1997). Through an analysis that not only considers gesture and embodiment, but also examines them in great detail in multiple contexts, (e.g. the use of cupped hand clapping (*bula makonko*) not only in church services but also everyday greetings and acts of gratitude and supplication before the King of Kongo), I hope to demonstrate that such boundaries between performance and everyday practice, while useful for analysis, do not necessarily exist in social life.

The theoretical discussion thus far has focused on embodied cultural performances based on restored behavior (Schechner 1985) that is often involuntary, as the gestures and actions that are drawn upon have been learned (whether consciously or

unconsciously). However, another aspect of performance theory is the recognition of performances as sites for transformation and resistance, where people consciously and voluntarily do particular things to achieve certain goals, even while drawing upon restored behavior. I will now consider this element of cultural performance in the following discussion of performance and power.

Performance and Power

The study of the connections between performance and power is a growing area of interest in anthropological writing of the last two decades. Ethnographies such as *Power and Performance: Ethnographic Explorations through Proverbial Wisdom and Theater in Shaba, Zaire* (1990) and *Nightsong: Performance, Power, and Practice in South Africa* (1996) emphasize power struggles, resistance, and challenges to hegemony in terms of macro-politics at a national level and/or micro-politics at the local or regional level, whether in a theater performance in Congo during Mobutu's reign, or through *isicathamiya*⁶ performance amongst South African migrant workers, respectively. The study of the politics of dance is one area within the discipline of anthropology where analyses of power and performance have begun to flourish since the 1980's, as Susan Reed points out (1998:505). For example, Gilman (2001, 2004) examines questions of agency, coercion, and the discourse of traditionalization in women's praise singing and dancing at rallies of national political parties in Malawi while Heath (1994) looks at the importance of context in defining appropriate and inappropriate dancing by women in

⁶ *Isicathamiya* is a performance tradition of male a capella choirs in the mining labor community of black South Africans.

urban Senegal, and the power struggle between men and women over its regulation.

Kapchan (1994) focuses on the transgressive actions and performances of female *sikhat* dancers in Morocco, who challenge societal ideals of the respectable woman and deference to males, while remaining central to most festivities throughout their society.

Two ethnographies that examine the interrelatedness of power and performance and are clearly relevant for the present study are Kelly Askew's *Performing the Nation: Swahili Music and Cultural Politics in Tanzania* (2002) and Nicholas Argenti's *Intestines of the State: Youth, Violence, and Belated Histories in the Cameroon Grassfields* (2007).

In the former, Askew discusses the connection between power and performance, from local micro-politics between individuals, to larger negotiations inherent in state-citizen interactions in the production of Tanzanian national culture and nation building overall. She investigates three performance genres, *ngoma* (musical events encompassing music, dance, song and characteristic rhythms that are seen as more traditional), *dansi* (urban popular dance music) and *taarab* (sung Swahili poetry), and their respective acceptance or rejection as performances of national culture. Noting the overemphasis on print media and assumed homogeneity in other scholarship on nationalism, Askew's study focuses on the role of performance in actually constructing the heterogeneous nation of Tanzania in the sense of J.L. Austin's performatives. In J.L. Austin's (1962) conception of performative statements, saying something effectively brings it into being. Askew successfully applies Austin's concept to show that the production of a "nation" and national imaginaries through performance is crucial in Tanzania, especially since the nation is composed of two formerly separate countries with different identities; the Republic of Tanganyika and the People's Republic of Zanzibar, joined together under

President Julius Nyerere in 1964 (2002:6). Thus, Askew emphasizes the need for governments and states to continuously perform. Attention to performance then “can expose the continual performance not only required *by* states but required *of* states that, just like individuals, must continuously reinvent themselves...Saying and, notably, *performing* the nation brings it into being. Words alone are insufficient.” (2002:292)

This demonstrates Askew’s concept of the performativity of power in states, which is further elaborated upon when she writes:

Power admittedly comes in many guises...Where states are concerned, however, emphasis tends toward the visible (even flamboyant) and the performative. Why? Because state officials can perform their allegiance and loyalty to their constituents and citizens can perform their allegiance and loyalty to their rulers when other forms of communication prove inconvenient or ineffective. Singing a national anthem, standing at attention during a state procession, rising to one’s feet to acknowledge the arrival of a dignitary, chanting “CCM Number One !” at a political rally, and wearing identical dresses with political portraits emblazoned on the fabric constitute condensed, symbolically laden, and highly demonstrative strategies for engaging and asserting membership in the nation...Through their shared performances, the citizens of a state congeal and bring the nation—however variegated—into being (2002: 290-291).

By emphasizing the constant need of states to perform their power and citizens their allegiance, Askew reveals the importance of performances in constituting the “imagined communities” that are nations.

After an analysis of numerous theories and definitions of performance, Askew puts forth three conclusions relevant to developing a general theory of the politics of performance.

The first is a recognition of performance as a process actively engaged in by everyone in attendance as opposed to a product somehow owned by performers and transmitted for audience reception. The second is that performative necessarily means emergent and contingent...the final

conclusion relates performance unambiguously to the active construction of social life. (2002:23)

It is this third conclusion about the politics of performance and the interrelatedness of performance and power that we will focus on for the remainder of this section. Among other examples, Askew's discussion of the use of tipping and subtle gestures at *taarab* music events as forms of dispute negotiation clearly demonstrates that performances actively "reconfigure social relations" (2002:23) rather than only simply represent or reflect social realities.

Nicholas Argenti's *Intestines of the State* (2007) examines performance and nondiscursive practices such as masquerades as forms of embodied history in the Oku chiefdom of the Grassfields of Cameroon and the relationship they have to elites, state power, and marginalized youth populations. Like Rosalind Shaw's *Memories of the Slave Trade* (2002), in this historical ethnography, Argenti focuses on embodied practices as a means by which the past is continually remembered and reenacted, especially that of slavery:

However silent the people of Oku might be on the subject of slavery, centuries of trading in human beings remains palpable today in other ways: the myths and nondiscursive bodily practices of the chiefdom are impregnated with veiled references to the institutions of slavery and to their effects on the young people who were once imperiled by them. The mythic memories and the bodily practices of the Grassfields together form a body of social memory. (Argenti 2007:4)

Argenti examines myths of origin, witch-finding discourses, palace and village masking, and mimetic military style embodiment as hegemonic practices deployed by elites to legitimize and spread their authority. Yet, these practices have also been incorporated and transformed by youth, particularly during the youth uprisings of the colonial period

(2007:34;183). So while, according to Argenti, these practices recall a history of structural violence (as the youth were most often the victims of the slave trade and the elite the beneficiaries), at the same time, these practices also can be used to challenges these relationships (2007:20). Likewise, in my own study, an examination of gestures of respect such as *bula makonko* and *fukama*, culturally significant forms of embodiment such as trembling and jumping, and secular dancing such as *makinu ma luketo* will reveal the importance of embodied cultural performances for both legitimizing and challenging political and religious authority for Kongo people from the pre-colonial period to the present.

One of the unique contributions that Argenti makes with this study is his discussion of the continuity of structures of inequality from the pre-colonial era to the present, in which youth (in particular unmarried men) are made subordinate to other men who are higher in rank and social status due to age, descent, or chiefly title, who also seek to exploit the labor of the youth. In this way, Argenti shows the continued salience of the past in the present:

The dances of the Grassfields are therefore not commemorative of a past that is dead and gone... The past is not “another country” in Cameroon—it is everywhere present in the relations of structural violence that continue to divide and polarize communities on the basis of social judgments of age and seniority. In the ambiguity and the polyvalence of their unspoken embodiment, the dances address the inequalities that persist in the contemporary social relations between youth and elites in the Grassfields today. (Argenti 2007:4-5)

Argenti presents an inspiring model for my own work that starts with the pre-colonial era, focuses on the histories ever present in embodied practices, and exposes the use of these practices by elites and their transformation and appropriation by the youth.

Building upon Argenti's study, I will explore Kongo embodied cultural performances as forms of embodied history and as key sites of both confirming and challenging political and religious authority. There are, nonetheless, significant differences in my own study.

First, rather than focusing on unchanging structures of inequality, I examine both changes and continuities in the meanings, forms, and uses of these cultural performances throughout a number of major social and political transformations for the Kongo people. Thus, for example, while the rest of the hierarchical organization of the Kongo Kingdom remained intact, the separation of the province of Soyo from the kingdom by the seventeenth century, (hastened by the accumulation of European firearms through the slave trade), came to be publicly signaled on an annual basis by a huge *sanga* or war dance in the capital of Soyo. This war dance was held on the same national holiday that in the past was when all of the governors of the provinces would go to the capital of the kingdom (Mbanza Kongo), to perform war dances of loyalty to the Kongo king. Using a practice that had been used to confirm and legitimize the authority of the Kongo king, the war dance in this instance effectually re-proclaimed Soyo's independence annually while also establishing its willingness to fight to keep its newly gained sovereignty. This transformed the relationship between Soyo and the rest of the kingdom and surrounding area for a number of decades. By focusing on embodied cultural performances, periods such as the pre-colonial era in West central Africa that have often been imagined as one of static, unchanging "traditions" and patterns of social and political relationships, can be revealed as eras full of both change and continuity that should be more fully explored.

Second, in my own study, I spend more time discussing the actual movements themselves, trying to move from discussions of embodied practices as larger performance

events (e.g. the masquerade) to also include smaller, more everyday examples of embodied practice (e.g. greetings). Such a focus reveals the ways in which seemingly quotidian practices contribute to the making and unmaking of authority. If gestures themselves are contested by different groups, how might this affect larger performance events in which such gestures are enacted? When scholars such as Argenti continue to emphasize the study of performance events, they miss out on the role of gesture and other embodied practices as the smaller building blocks of these larger performance events.

Third, while Argenti's ethnography focuses on political struggles and concerns, I hope to expand the field of analysis to incorporate contestations for authority in the religious arena as well, which was often integral to political success and hegemony. Moreover, religion could also be a site from which to challenge political authority, as demonstrated by the Kimbanguist and Bundu dia Kongo movements in chapters three and six respectively. So, with this project, I build upon the work that Argenti has done while illuminating both change and continuity throughout significant social transformations, the usefulness of examining gesture and movement as performances within themselves that in fact constitute larger performance events, and the importance of struggles for religious authority in considerations of performance and power.

Other scholars have also recognized the potential for performance to transform social positions and realities. In some of his earlier work linguistic anthropologist Richard Bauman uses the example of former comedian Dick Gregory. Gregory was teased a lot as a child and began to use jokes about himself to ward off attacks, becoming so good at it that he eventually began to turn his jokes on his former attackers, hence changing his own social position:

Through performance Gregory...has transformed the situation...into one in which he gains admiration for his performance skills...[he] emerges from the performance encounters in a different social position vis-à-vis the other boys from the one he occupied before he began to perform. (1977: 44-45)

With this example, Bauman calls attention to the transformative potential of performances in everyday life. Edward Schieffelin also points out the active, constitutive nature of performance when he writes: “‘Performance’ deals with actions more than text: with habits of the body more than structures of symbols, with illocutionary rather than propositional force, with the social construction of reality rather than its representation” (1998:194).

Yet another instance of the transformative potential of performance can be found in Zoila Mendoza’s ethnography of ritual dance associations in Andean Peru, exploring how performances are used to transform the social position of the association members in relation to the local community, as well as to shape novel regional identities (2000). Mendoza’s study shows “how *comparsa* members constantly redefine and give form to disputed ethnic/racial, gender, class, and generational distinctions and identities through ritual performance and their associations,” based on embodying significant social distinctions such as “decency, elegance, genuineness, modernity and folklore” (2000:4). For some residents of San Jerónimo, the site of Mendoza’s study, participation in *comparsa* performances has become a large part of being recognized, by others both within and outside their town, as *mestizos* (mixed), a more desirable social category that is structurally opposed to *cholo*, a category of lower status more associated with being Indian.

Moreover, Margaret Thompson Drewal captures both the reproductive and transformative aspects of performance when she writes: "...performance is a means by which people reflect on their current conditions, define and/or reinvent themselves and their social world, and either reinforce, resist, or subvert prevailing social orders. Indeed both subversion and legitimation can emerge in the same utterance or act" (1991: 2). My work focuses on the role that embodied cultural performances play in both chronicling history and making history; more specifically, in shaping social interactions and both constituting and challenging political and religious authority in Kongo society over time.

Performance and Authority

Although the literature continues to grow in anthropological research on performance and power, scholars for the most part have considered "power" in general terms. That is to say, there has not been as much attention to specific forms of power. In my particular case, I examine the interrelatedness of not simply performance and power, but more specifically, performance and *authority*. By focusing on the role of cultural performances in the construction, confirmation, and contestation of authority, I further the burgeoning dialogue on performance in anthropology.

What exactly is authority? Authority, like power and performance, evades any set, agreed-upon definition, as there have been many, often competing meanings over time in the social sciences. I choose rather, to emphasize the most relevant articulations of authority in cultural anthropology, most of which developed out of the sub-discipline of political anthropology from the mid-twentieth century onwards.

Following the publication of the foundational political anthropology text, *African Political Systems* (1940), anthropologists have explored the mechanisms and nuances of governance, influence, and control in many societies. A central concept in such studies, and many others in the social sciences, is that of power. In *Economy and Society* (1968), based on the work of Max Weber, power is defined as “the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability exists” (53). Others, however, have contested this definition. Foucault, emphasizing force relations and challenging notions of power as being possessed by anyone, asserts rather that power is “not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength that we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (1990:93).

Similarly, authority has also been defined in numerous ways. Weber, for example discussed it as “legitimate domination”⁷ (1968:215), Bierstedt as “institutionalized power,” (1950:733), Easton as “assertion of the right to undertake an activity and presumably the acknowledgement of this right by others...” (1959: 223), while Parsons viewed it as “the right to use power, or negative sanctions...or even compulsion to assert priority of a decision over others” (1963: 243). In *Political Anthropology*, an edited

⁷ Weber outlines the basis for validity of three major claims to legitimacy:

1. Rational grounds—resting on a belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands (legal authority). 2. Traditional grounds—resting on an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them (traditional authority); or finally. 3. Charismatic grounds—resting on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him (charismatic authority) (1968: 215)

volume seeking to shape political anthropology as a sub-discipline, authority, following Parsons, Swartz, Turner, and Tuden basically defined authority as “rights to use and acquire power” in a hierarchy of statuses in a group (1966:17). Moreover, Begler defined authority as “the legitimate utilization of power exercised within an institutionalized hierarchy of statuses” (1978: 575), while Rushforth considered it in two senses: “the power to inspire justified belief in others (being an authority, having legitimate knowledge) and the power to influence or determine others’ conduct (having control over the action of others” (Rushforth 1994: 336). Due to debates such as whether the decisions of authorities are necessarily binding (Rushforth 1994) or if legitimacy is always a pre-requisite of authority (Swartz, Turner, and Tuden 1966:14-18), more recent articulations of “authority” are notably more cautious, such as that of Kurtz:

Authority connotes the condition of an incumbent, agent, or structure of statuses recognized by a political community to make decisions on its behalf. A person with strong authority may be able to make decisions that are binding on the community and also delegate authority to others. A weak authority may only be a symbol...authority figures or structures may be more or less legitimate. (2001:41)

For the purposes of this project, I define authority as: the ability to influence or determine the conduct of others within a hierarchy of statuses in a group, in which said authority may be more or less legitimate, and the members of the group may or may not recognize the rights of this authority to exercise power. This definition leads us to one of the major questions driving this study: how do some people come to have a large influence on the conduct of others in a group, exercising some sort of authority that supersedes that of other people? What role do embodied cultural performances have in constituting and contesting that authority?

Several anthropological studies have explored the particular relationship between performance and authority. Most of these have focused on textual authority, the authority that comes from reading, interpreting, and reciting often sacred texts (Kuipers 1990; Lambek 1990; Shryock 1997; Messick 1992). Lambek's study of Islamic *fundis* (scholars) in Mayotte however, extended beyond textual authority to also consider the authority that comes from social performances: "The ability to read texts is not an automatic source of power; personal authority is constrained by ritual performance and must be continually confirmed in social performance" (1990:35). Similarly, in another study, Peabody (1997) examines the role of a pageant-play in legitimizing the authority of different political regimes in North India.

The study of cultural performances can provide a different perspective on authority in Kongo society. In some instances, embodied cultural performances are one of several sources for authority. In others, they may be, on the one hand, the main source of legitimacy for that authority; while on the other hand, they may be the primary source of challenge to authority. Attention to performances can reveal the countless ways that authority is configured, and show that authority is not just about social hierarchy, but also how social positions are made and unmade through everyday interactions with others. Authority depends not only on who you are, what position you occupy, or what you have, but it also is based on your own cultural performances and the responses of others to you, including their own performances.

Defining Terms and Previous Scholarship

The cultural performances that I will be examining in this dissertation are *bimpampa* and *makinu*. *Bimpampa* can be defined as gestures of the body (Falgayrettes-Leveau 2002:25), where gesture can be understood as “a movement usually of the body or limbs that expresses or emphasizes an idea, sentiment, or attitude.”⁸ However *bimpampa* is not a general, abstract term in KiKongo. *Bimpampa* as gestures are always understood to be in the context of communicating something to someone. Moreover, *bimpampa* as a term doesn’t usually stand alone, as the part of the body being used is often indicated.⁹ Thus, *bimpampa bia moko* would be gestures of the hands, and *bimpampa bia malu* would be gestures of the legs, and so on. The term *makinu* means dances, from the verb *kukina*, to dance, although these dances are accompanied by music and singing. Like the complexity of *bimpampa*, the term *makinu* is usually used with another term describing the context. Thus, Fu-Kiau kia Bunseki describes elders talking about the dances of the Kongo Kingdom in the following way:

They mentioned *makinu ma bakulu* (dances for the ancestors), *makinu ma mfumu* (dances for the king), the related *makinu ma nsi* (dances of the nobility), *makinu ma nkisi* (dances in honor of healing spirits) and *makinu ma soonga* (ecstatic dances, climaxed by the descent of the spirit, from the realm of the ancestors) (Thompson, 2005:63)

Another type of *makinu* not mentioned here by Thompson, but very important in Kongo cultural performance, is *makinu mu luketo* (dances of the hips). Thus, in my

⁸ Merriam-Webster Dictionary in the Encyclopedia-Britannica Online (Academic Edition), <http://search.eb.com/dictionary?va=gesture&query=gesture> [Accessed August 19, 2008]

⁹ Personal communication, Professor Mbala Nkanga, July 19, 2007, Ann Arbor, MI.

dissertation, I explore many forms of *makinu*, with an emphasis on *makinu mu luketo* that tend to be used in community social events such as weddings and other celebrations.

The primary scholar who has paved the way for this type of research is Robert Farris Thompson, with his seminal work on both *bimpampa* and *makinu* in relation to material art and aesthetics. With his contributions to *Le Geste Kongo* (2002), he examined different gestures portrayed in a collection of Kongo art and artifacts at the Dapper Museum in Paris as a form of embodied knowledge of the Kongo people. In a more recent monograph, *Tango: The Art History of Love* (2005), Thompson concisely describes *makinu* in the Kongo Kingdom and contemporary Congo Brazzaville and Congo Kinshasa in order to examine the Kongo cultural influence on the development of tango in Argentina. Thompson remains the trailblazer in this type of work; however, as an art historian, when his focus does turn to gestures and movements, it is most often in reference to how they are captured in static, unmoving artistic objects and paintings.¹⁰ For this project, I am looking at cultural performances in motion, and by focusing on the performances themselves and how their meanings, uses, and relationship to authority change over time, I hope to provide a deep and thorough analysis of Kongo performance practice in the Lower Congo. Pastor Esther Luhunu Mahema (2005) is another scholar who has written on *bimpampa*, specifically in relation to the expected conduct of Kongo women. Her work, while focusing overall on the place, roles, and issues of morality of women in Christianity, has proven useful for identifying some of the most important recurring gestures in traditional Kongo society.

¹⁰ A notable exception to this is *African Art in Motion*, in which he does examine aesthetics in relation to dance in the Democratic Republic of Congo. But again, the main goal is to illuminate aesthetic preferences that can also be seen in the figurines and objects that he is studying.

While I learned a great deal from the writings of scholars like Thompson (2002, 2005) and Mahema (2005) about gestures and the conduct of women in Kongo society, my knowledge was expanded the most by my everyday experiences while conducting field research. The next part of the chapter explores the methods utilized to conduct research both in and outside of the Congo, describes the research sites of Kinshasa and Luozi, and examines the affect of my own identity on my research and some of the cultural performances that defined the interactions that I had with others during my stay there.

Part II: Methods, Sites, Positionality and Embodied Prophecies

Description of the Methodology

The research questions that I have come to explore evolved from a long and circuitous intellectual journey. It began with an exploration of “Congo” dances in Portobelo, Panama as the subject of my undergraduate honors thesis in Afro-American Studies at Brown University. As I found more and more examples of similar Kongo or Congo dances forms throughout the Caribbean, South America, and the historical United States, I became interested in cultural continuities and transformations, and curious about the existence of similar dances across the Atlantic in the Kongo region. Initially planning a multi-sited project in both Panama and Congo and completing several preliminary visits to Panama during the first years of graduate school, I eventually decided to focus exclusively on the Congo. However, my plans for preliminary field visits to the Congo were frustrated several times by outbreaks of political violence in the country. Finally, with the help of a Fulbright-IIE fellowship and armed with a number of contacts provided

mainly by Mbala Nkanga and some others by Fu-Kiau kia Bunseki, I traveled in 2005 to the Democratic Republic of Congo for the first time to commence my field research on Kongo traditional dances as embodied histories and the social and political implications of dance in general. By the time I left in 2006, based on my experiences and the recognition of the salience of religion, my project had evolved considerably, to look at gesture as well as dances, and to focus specifically on religious and political authority in these embodied cultural performances.

My data is based on 12 months of ethnographic field research in the Democratic Republic of Congo, from March 2005-March 2006. I divided my time between two main research sites, including Kongo communities and interactions with Kongo people in the urban metropolis of Kinshasa, and the rural town of Luozi in the western province of Bas-Congo (soon to renamed Kongo-Central).



Map of the Democratic Republic of Congo

After leaving the Congo in 2006, I also conducted archival research in Belgium for six weeks (June 30 – August 15, 2006), primarily on Kongo dances and the Kimbanguist movement during the colonial period. Before leaving for field research, I completed six semesters of French language study both as an undergraduate student at Brown

University and as a graduate student at the University of Michigan. Through an intensive summer African language program funded by a FLAS fellowship, I also completed the equivalent of one year of language study in KiKongo under Tata Fu-Kiau kia Bunseki.

One unique aspect of my preparation for my research in Congo is based on the special perspective that I gained through training as a performer of Congolese dance. After taking a Congolese dance class at the University of Michigan, I was invited by the instructor to join his company.¹¹ I danced professionally with Bichini bia Congo, a small Ann Arbor based company with a MuKongo company choreographer (Biza Sompa) for two years. I performed not only through Michigan, but in places like Atlanta and Kansas City as well. This background aided me in many performance events in the Congo, in that I was able to participate along with others, rather than remaining a distant observer.

There were three main methodologies that I employed in my research. The first was based on examining archival materials such as missionary diaries, state reports, travel narratives, accounts of literate Congolese, and performance programs, among others, to illuminate the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial history of *makinu* and *bimpampa*. I consulted multiple archives and libraries in the Democratic Republic of Congo including: the National Museum, National Archives, Main Library of the l'Université Pédagogique National (UPN), the National Library, the National Institute of Arts, CEPAS (Centre d'Etudes pour l'Action Sociale), Pere Bontinck's personal library at Scolasticat, Facultés Catholiques de Kinshasa (FCK), the library of College Boboto in Kinshasa, the Jesuit Canisius Library at Kimuenza, the Mayidi Grand Seminary in

¹¹ The fact that there was a Congolese dance company based in Ann Arbor offering classes at the University of Michigan was one of the deciding factors that led to my choice of the University of Michigan when deciding between graduate schools.

Mayidi, Bas-Congo, the Library of Luozi, and the museum of the C.E.C. Protestant church in Luozi. In Belgium, I consulted the African Archives of the Minister of Foreign Affairs (which houses the majority of documents from the colonial period in the Congo) in Brussels and the ethnographic images and documents of the Royal Museum for Central Africa, in Tervuren.

The second methodology was participant observation of performance events. These included marriages, funerals, the construction of tombs, the cleaning of cemeteries, worship services in churches every Sunday and throughout the week, cultural festivals, performance group rehearsals and presentations, rallies and parades, community theater, and other events--where *bimpampa* and *makinu* cultural performances were presented in Congo. For the most part, I depended on friends and others associated with my work to let me know when events were happening, although I did find some events of my own accord. I attended and videotaped many events during my ethnographic field research, in order to retain records for further analysis. I always asked permission before recording, and was usually granted permission, especially after I began to burn VCDs for the performing groups or participants in the performances as a token of appreciation for their participation.¹² If the events were funerals or marriages, I always brought a small donation in an envelope as well to give to the family. Much of my observation and participation in *bimpampa* also occurred on a daily basis, as I walked the roads and encountered other people, embodying the proper greetings as I had learned.

¹² This was preferred over DVDs because most people did not have the financial means to own a DVD player, but at least might own or know someone with a VCD player or a radio that played VCDs, since these were considerably cheaper and more common.

The third methodology was based on conducting interviews in order to investigate the significance and function of *makinu* and *bimpampa* in both past and contemporary life, the beliefs and worship practices of the DMNA church, personal experiences of political animation, and the mission and practice of Bundu dia Kongo. I conducted and recorded 67 interviews of dancers, musicians, professors, audience members and participants, pastors, church members, and other people, in both Luozi and Kinshasa in the Congo, and one interview in Mayidi. I found participants most often through suggestions from my contacts; in this way, I was able to avoid, for the most part, people who did not have the knowledge to answer my questions. I also arranged many interviews myself based on seeing people perform or hearing about their knowledge and skill in particular areas of *makinu* performance. I compensated all of my interviewees for their time and their travel as well, if they came far to do the interview. I conducted my interviews in French, which many people did seem at least moderately comfortable with, especially in Kinshasa. In Luozi, although I used French there as well, I occasionally had to ask a friend to interpret KiKongo for me, especially with many of the older interviewees. My KiKongo was still not advanced enough to do interviews in, and although I did try to learn as much as I could in everyday interactions, people would sense my weakness in the language and switch to French, which helped me to communicate, but frustrated my developing KiKongo. The next section of this chapter describes my two research sites: Kinshasa and Luozi.

The Ethnographic Present of Political and Economic Disarray: Introducing Kinshasa

May 11, 2005. This morning, the electricity went out around 10:00 am. My friend Christian and I go to the National Library and the monument to former president Laurent Kabila. We take the taxi around 1:30 pm over to the library, a small building located right behind the national bank and near the presidential residence (the white house of the Congo) which has in front of it the mausoleum of Laurent Kabila. Christian wants to take me to see the mausoleum, and after he eats at a small restaurant in the back of a truck, we walk over there. There are four soldiers sitting there guarding the wide walkway. Three are sitting elevated on sandbags and one on a chair. They are wearing navy blue uniforms with matching tam-like hats, black boots, and serious faces. One has dark shades on. They talk to Christian in Lingala and I hardly say anything, letting him to do the talking. One hefty guy on the sandbags asks me for my identity card. I dig in my bag and hand him the STA travel student identification card I have, which is printed in English. He peers at me, and asks Christian if I am “Rwandaise (Rwandan) then “Ougandaise” (Ugandan), immediately taking on a hostile tone and posture. Christian quickly replies, “No, she is American.” They say collectively, “oh.” Then another soldier asks me to approach so that he could look in my bag. I come close to him and open the bag and he looks briefly inside. He gestures that it was ok, and I step back. “Careful!” Christian says, pointing downwards, and when I follow his gaze I see that I had almost kicked over an AK-47 that was sitting on the ground. I step cautiously away. After some more conversation, Christian gives one of them (the hefty one) 100 Congolese francs, and they allow us to be on our way, and give us back our identification cards. As we are leaving,

they ask if I have a camera, and I say no, and Christian tells me that they are permitting me to take a photo. I ask him about the Rwanda/Uganda question as we walk, and he explains that they are not welcome here because of all the trouble in the east of the country. The grounds are beautiful and well kept over all, and we walk towards the mausoleum, which consists of four bronze colored hands holding up a white roof with a star at the top, and a recurring lion motif. As we walk around the decorated coffin under glass, and read the inscriptions, I notice four soldiers there as well, sitting in chairs and yet another slumped against a wall sleeping. Then, I see a line of soldiers march by single file in front of the presidential palace, across from the mausoleum. When we leave the grounds, I immediately notice the contrast between the well-manicured lawns and immaculate mausoleum on the inside, and the overgrown shrubbery and side walks, cracked and potholed roads, and trash lining the gutters on the outside, punctuated by an overcrowded, rusty taxi squealing by.

This ethnographic excerpt poignantly captures the political, economic, and overall social conditions of the Democratic Republic of Congo as I experienced them during my field research there from March of 2005 to March of 2006. The crumbling social infrastructure and struggling economy were not only the result of years of mismanagement and corruption under the thirty-two year dictatorship of Mobutu Sese Seko but were exacerbated by the five year civil war from 1998-2003 that came to involve at least five of the countries surrounding the Congo.

After taking over the country in 1965 through a military coup, Joseph Desire Mobutu (later known as Mobutu Sese Seko) ruled the Congo until 1997, when he was overthrown by Laurent Kabila, who led a rebel army from the eastern Congo backed by

Rwanda and Uganda (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002). After he took power, Kabila fell out with his former allies, which resulted in fighting in the eastern Congo against troops from these two countries, with Kabila backed by Angola, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and even Chad (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002:238-240). The lingering legacy of hostilities towards Uganda and Rwanda was evidenced by my own “misidentification” by government soldiers as told in the previous ethnographic account. After Laurent Kabila was assassinated by his own body guard in 2001 (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002:246), his son Joseph Kabila took over. He continued as the president of a transitional government (one president and four vice presidents, or *une plus quatre*) established after the cease-fire of 2003, and garnered the majority vote in 2006 in the first democratic elections since the country gained independence from Belgium on June 30, 1960.

Although the fighting that continues to this day in the eastern part of the country is what people outside of the country hear about most often in the news media, it was not the main focus or even most relevant force shaping the everyday lives of people as I saw it in Kinshasa and Luozi. People seemed rather desensitized by it in fact. Rather, the economic depression and dysfunctional infrastructure were the most pressing, especially in Kinshasa. Kinshasa is a bustling city with an estimated six to seven million inhabitants. One phrase that people often used to capture the dramatic transformation that has taken place in the country over time in this regards is to say that Kinshasa has gone from “Kinshasa la belle” to “Kinshasa la poubelle” (from Kinshasa the beautiful to Kinshasa the garbage can) (De Boeck and Plissart 2004:35). This references the pristine, well-kept, and modern city Kinshasa was in decades past in comparison what it looks like today, which is almost at the complete opposite end of the spectrum. The physical state

of Kinshasa is like the material embodiment of the nation at the time I did my field research; scarred, unkempt, falling part, a vestige of its former self. In Kinshasa at the time, 500 Congolese francs were equal to one \$1 US, civil employees were often unpaid, there was a military presence in the streets, markets, buildings, there were large numbers of homeless street kids (shegues), prostitution was rife, state sponsored public transportation was nearly non-existent, and urban communities were often criss-crossed with open sewers and dotted with piles of garbage. These were the conditions that I encountered on an everyday basis while living in Kinshasa. However, what was and remains the most amazing, is the resiliency that people showed in dealing with these issues everyday. People would get dressed in their business attire in the darkness because of the frequent loss of electricity, spend several hours waiting for transportation, and go to a civil service or teaching job where they may not have been paid for months.¹³ Overall, people were very welcoming and gracious to me, extending all efforts to help me to further my research.

Crocodiles and Rolling Hills: Introducing Luozi

“You’re going to Luozi? There are crocodiles there.” “Have you heard about the big crocodile in Luozi?” Each time I mentioned to friends or inquisitive strangers in Kinshasa the fact that I was going to Luozi to possibly pursue ethnographic research, the first word that they associated with “Luozi” was crocodile. Popularized by *Un croco à Luozi*, a short novel dealing with *kindoki* (witchcraft) and the ability of some people with

¹³ See De Boeck and Plissart (2004) *Kinshasa: Tales of the Invisible City* for a more extensive discussion of the deteriorating economic and social conditions in Kinshasa and the reactions of individuals and groups, especially youth, to these conditions.

supernatural powers to take on animal forms and harm others (Zamenga 1979), the image of the crocodile in the national imagination is probably the claim to fame of both the town and territory of Luozi.

My first trip to Luozi was an exploratory trip in May, as a guest of Dr. Kimpianga Mahaniah, a MuKongo historian who was returning to the town for the first time in several years. He arrived to collect me a little after eight in the morning on May 21, and we, including his driver Paul and his friend Papa Leon, set off in his late model white land cruiser toward Bas-Congo. To reach Luozi by car from Kinshasa, you have to drive south west on the only main road that connects Kinshasa with the port city of Matadi. This road is paved for the most part, and although we had to stop several times when we encountered groups of men repairing the road, the trip from Kinshasa to Kimpese (the city at which we take another road to Luozi) took about four hours. We passed through Kasangulu, Kisantu, and Mbanza-Ngungu along the way, with the monotony of the drive being punctuated with huge trucks and lorries speeding by with supplemental passengers perched precariously atop the vehicle's cargo. After passing through Kimpese, we turned right onto a dirt road that ran alongside a range of hills made of red dirt and stone. Here, the going was more treacherous, as the road was often uneven, and we passed over several rivers and ravines using small bridges that lacked any kind of guard rail to prevent the vehicle from falling.

I was struck by the beautiful scenery—clear blue skies with drifting white clouds that seemed to brush the tops of the mountain range in the distance, and open lands of tall grasses and brush that, although broken up by some farms, plots, and intermittent villages, seemed to go on and on for as far as the eye could see. We often encountered

small groups of people walking along the road that would move quickly to the side into the brush as we passed, murmuring greeting of “mbote”¹⁴ and covering their mouths and noses against the dust cloud that followed in our wake.

After about two hours, we arrived at the edge of the mighty Congo River (*Nzadi* in KiKongo), the second largest river in Africa (after the Nile), whose mispronunciation by the Portuguese led to the misnomer by which the country was known under Mobutu’s regime: Zaire. We had to wait for the ferry to return from the other side. An old, dilapidated looking vessel, it slowly crept back across the waters to finally arrive, its bottom scraping the shore on our side. Throngs of people waited anxiously to board, but priority went to the paying passengers—the vehicles. Each vehicle was charged \$15 to cross, and after they were loaded onto the ferry, the people could then board for free. The driver of our SUV lined up the vehicle’s tires with the rusted planks, and we began to move forward, on an upward angle over the water. Suddenly, the vehicle stalled, and several of the workers from the ferry began to fuss around the car. I glanced down anxiously at the water: were there crocodiles? I heard, “American! American!” Bewildered, I began to look around outside the car. How could they tell I was American? Then, I realized that one of the ferry workers was responding to the call. His name or nickname rather, was American! I laughed at this coincidence, and the car finally lurched forward onto the ferry. We parked, with both ropes and rocks being used to secure the vehicle. One of the hands gave the signal, and the people waiting on the shore rushed to get on, holding shoes and sandals in their hands as they walked through the water, up the

¹⁴ Mbote in Kikongo is the adjective “good” which is also used as a shortened greeting to say hello.

planks, and onto the ferry, filling all of the available space in the seats upstairs and on the floors on the main level.

After the final preparations, the ferry began to move. I carefully opened the car door and stood outside on the deck to stretch my legs, now cramped from hours of travel. I looked up at the upper deck of the ferry and spotted several life preservers, which made me feel better about my trip across the river as I cannot swim. However, I then looked at the large number of people around me, some standing, some sitting, mothers removing babies from their backs, one man selling oranges, and many people relaxing and talking, and realized that those few life preservers wouldn't do anything in the event of an accident. I silently prayed that we would make it to the other side, and tried not to focus on the churning waters that had transitioned from a reddish brown near the shore to a dark grayish blue in the deeper part of the river that we traversed.

After about twenty minutes we finally reached the other side. When all of the people had debarked, we descended down the planks into the shallow water and then up onto the river bank. We continued onto the main road into town, creating dust clouds in the red dirt as we sped up. I took in the sights as they were pointed out to me by the professor: small homemade stands where people sell miscellaneous items, a monument to those who died on a ferry a number of years ago, a bridge built during the colonial period that crossed over yet another small river, some buildings belonging to the Protestant mission, a small market, the Catholic church and mission, a number of crumbling whitewashed buildings that had housed European merchants during the colonial period, a

small bar with “Skol”¹⁵ emblazoned in yellow and red on its wall, and many homes and shops lining the main road into town. Finally, the professor pointed out the dusty soccer field to our right that sits next to another wide road that doubles as Luozi’s “airport.” We then passed a statue of a crocodile holding a hoe, a monument erected in Zamenga’s honor at the first festival of culture and arts in Luozi (FESCAL), held in 2002. As we turned left to get into the professor’s compound, I breathed a sigh of relief. Finally, we’d arrived. Welcome to Luozi.

The town of Luozi is located in Luozi Territory, which itself lies in the westernmost province of Bas-Congo, known in the past as Bas-Zaire and in English as the Lower Congo, and soon to be renamed Kongo Central. The province has been further subdivided into two cities (Matadi, Boma) and three districts (Cataractes, Lukaya, and Bas-Flueve). Luozi is one of three territories in the district of Cataractes (Mahaniah 1989:18), lying in between the Congo River to the south and part of the southern border of the Republic of Congo to the north (see map). During the colonial period, this area was referred to as Manianga, based on the name of a major marketplace that existed there during the pre-colonial era (Janzen 1978:12). In regards to demographics, the territory of Luozi is sparsely populated in comparison to the rest of the province of Lower Congo. While the entire province had an estimated 1,971,520 inhabitants in 1984 (54,804 km² in area) or 35 inhabitants per square kilometer, the territory of Luozi had a total population of 143,998 inhabitants (7,502 km² in area), or 19.19 inhabitants per square kilometer (Mahaniah 1989:20-22). Henri Nicholai’s assertion that, based on his study published in

¹⁵ Skol and Primus are the two most popular beers in Congo. Primus is brewed by Bralima Brewery (owned by Heineken International) and Skol is brewed by Unibra, a Belgian corporation.

1960, Luozi was one of the least favored territories in the Lower Congo, primarily due to its isolated location on the other side of the Congo River, seems to ring true even today, when one looks at the higher population densities in other parts of the province (1960:53).

Luozi territory is further subdivided into ten collectivities. The town of Luozi is located in the collectivity of Mbanza-Ngoyo and is the political and administrative capital of the territory (Mahaniah 1989:37). A small town that in the most recent census had about 6,927 people (Institut National de la Statistique 1984:51), Luozi consists of five neighborhoods, a number of churches (the three largest of which include the Kimbanguist church, the Catholic church founded by the Belgian Redemptorists, and the Protestant church founded by the Swedish Covenant Mission), one major hospital and several small clinics that are often affiliated with religious institutions, several small open air markets where people from the surrounding area often come to sell their produce, and a number of schools (both religious affiliated and secular).

Life in Luozi revolves around crops as the town and the surrounding region are heavily agricultural, with people planting crops both for their own use and for profit. Even those inhabitants with jobs in other sectors (teachers, pastors, etc.) still have their plots of land that they farm, which can be a distance of even a number of hours away by foot. Many of the homes have been constructed with red or brown bricks that are locally produced in open ovens that dot the landscape of the town. Most of the roofs of homes are covered by metal, but some are covered by thatch. Goats and chickens openly roam the town, and most people get around by foot, as only a minority own cars. One of the defining characteristics of the town at the time was that it lacked electricity. So, this

often affected my research as I would have to find a place with a generator running in order to charge my laptop and other equipment during the day, especially if I knew that there was to be an event at night. Overall, the feel in the town was much more relaxed and slower paced than the bustling city of Kinshasa, and the people there were very hospitable and gracious. Also, because of the small size of the town and the fact that everyone seemed to know one another, I felt much safer (as a woman) attending events day and night and carrying out my research than I did in Kinshasa.

The experiences that I had in not only Kinshasa and Luozi but also in other places to which I traveled during my time there were not only defined by infrastructural problems or economic and political crises; they were also defined by who, in fact, I was, as a researcher. The next part of the chapter examines the role that my own identity played in everyday interactions, cultural performances in many instances, which impacted my research in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Neither Native Nor Stranger: On Positionality and Being an African-American Woman Conducting Ethnographic Research in the Congo

In much of what has been written on conducting anthropological field research, the main categories that have been used are those of “outsider” and “insider.” Outsider often denotes people foreign to the culture of study who are usually easily visually distinguished from the community of study. The other is “insider” or “native” anthropology, where the anthropologist is from the community of study. Although the writings of scholars such as Narayan (1993) have problematized these designations, I’d like to turn our attention to yet another positioning that warrants analysis. This

positioning is that of a person who was not born in the community of study, yet looks like the relatives of his/her informants; one who isn't fluent in the indigenous language, yet intuitively understands many elements of the cultural body language. In particular, I am referring to the situation of being a brown-skinned African-American woman doing research in Kinshasa and Bas-Congo in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The position that I occupied, not by any choice of my own, seemed to be one that hovered in between "native" and "stranger." Because of my skin color and features, I was often seen as one of the "skin folk," to use a term coined by Zora Neale Hurston. This experience contrasted vividly with a semester abroad that I spent in Ghana as an undergraduate, during which people would quickly pick me out as a foreigner, possibly because I was lighter than most Ghanaians, and I was once even called a half-caste. In the Congo, I was definitely able to blend in more readily. Often, before people spoke to me, they assumed that I was Congolese, and when I explained that I wasn't, they continued to assume that my parents were Congolese. If I explained that my ancestors had been taken from Africa and enslaved in the United States, and that I wasn't sure of where I was from, people would smile, and say assuredly, "oh, they must be from Congo." If I wasn't specific about telling them that I was African-American, people would make a number of guesses and try and make sense of who I was and what I was doing in the Congo. My "mis-identifications" were specific to the region and francophone nature of the Congo, as I was often asked if I was Ivorian, Togolese, South African, and then, Jamaican (because of my locked hair) and finally American.¹⁶ Initially, the identity guessing game was

¹⁶ In fact, if my hair was uncovered, it was often the index that I wasn't a native Congolese, because locks

entertaining, but eventually, it became burdensome as I felt as though I had to explain myself to someone everyday, at least at first. But later, as I reflected on the value that these cases of misidentification have for indexing relationships, histories, and migrations to and from the Congo, I took it all in stride.

Shared Indignities

Manque de Transport

Throughout my research, and especially in Kinshasa, I experienced many of the same indignities and inconveniences that the average Kinois¹⁷ faced on an everyday basis. One of the major problems in Kinshasa was the lack of reliable public transportation. The fact that I did not own a car like the other Americans made it even more likely that people would confuse me for Congolese. Within a few days of my arrival, I was debriefed at embassy associated facilities and was advised to buy a car, but because I didn't plan on staying in Kinshasa for very long, I did not consider it since all I could afford was a small sedan, which would prove futile in navigating the treacherous roads of rural Bas-Congo, where SUVs, pick-up trucks, and big trucks reigned. I decided to make due with the public transportation. Now, public transportation in 2005-6 did not mean shiny, spacious buses with air-conditioning, or rapid subway lines. Rather, there are taxis, and taxi buses. Taxis are old, unmarked, barely running personal cars that have been transformed into taxis (3 people in the front, and 3, sometimes 4 people in the back).

are very rare amongst Congolese women; however because women also sometimes assumed that my hair was in hair extensions (mesh in French), this was not always as big an index of foreignness as it could have been. Women sometimes asked me where I bought my hair.

¹⁷ A colloquial term in French to describe an inhabitant of Kinshasa.

The other option is the taxi buses, which are decidedly less comfortable, with the worse (and more common) ones being converted cargo vans, and the best ones old school buses from the United States. In addition, there are often groups of youth and men hanging onto the back of the moving taxi bus. As for the train, I'd initially considered taking the train down into Bas-Congo until I saw it passing one day and noticed that there seemed to be as many people on the roof of the moving train as there were inside of it! To demonstrate the intensity and competition of public transportation in Kinshasa, here is a description from my field notes of my very first taxi trip in Kinshasa:

April 4, 2005. Today I went to the National Museum with Mama Annie, my first taxi experience in Kinshasa. We caught the taxi at Batetela, and well, when we got to Magasin, people were pushing to get in the taxi. I am trying to reach for my purse to pay the driver, and this lady is like "Mama, quitte!" telling me to get out, and then I find myself squished between two people getting in. I tell the woman to my left that I am getting out, and she gets up, sucks her teeth, and then pushes me out of the way to get back in the taxi. All I could do was laugh at the absurdity of it all.

By the end of my time in the Congo, I'd learned to understand all of the hand signals indicating the direction of the approaching taxis, gotten accustomed to grabbing the door handle of an approaching moving taxi and running with it as it was slowing down to ensure that I was the first inside, and was prepared to stand for several hours waiting for transportation on crowded corners. I also became adjusted to the random flat tires, holes in car floors, and vendors and beggars approaching the windows. Once, as I was waiting with a friend for a taxi or taxi bus, a bus pulled up loaded with people, and just as we were running to board, people began shouting and jumping out of the doors and windows. The engine had caught fire, and the fire was coming through the floor! I watched in

horror, and backed away from the flames. Fortunately, no one was seriously injured. Unfortunately, we then had to compete with about fifty more people for a taxi!

Yet another passage from my field-notes details the everyday struggle that Kinois face when trying to get from one place to another. A friend and I were taking a trip to a library of the Jesuit mission located at Kimwenza. To get there, we took a taxi and two taxi buses. The trip there was uneventful and the buses were not too crowded because of the time of day that we departed. However, the trip home was another matter entirely:

May 6, 2005. After several hours at Kimwenza...we walked a bit down the road to wait for transportation back to Kinshasa. However, this is when things really began to get bad. A taxi bus (this one a converted cargo van) came, and we ran to get in, as other people were running trying to beat us to it. There was space for everyone though. As I tried to ascend, I cracked my right knee against the edge of the wooden bench. Then, I had to climb over two more benches to get to the seats (a wooden plank) in the last row. I had my back to the trunk door, and wasn't too reassured that it wouldn't fly open. However, things got really bad the next time we stopped. A bunch of people came to get in, and several of them got in from the back! One man kicked me in the side trying to get to his seat in front of me, and although there wasn't much space, he squeezed himself between me and another woman. Oh my God, it was terrible! I was squashed against the right side of the cargo van, with only a round circle to look out of that had been cut out by a hand tool. To make things worse, the wall was rattling, and bulging outwards, and every time we went over a big bump I swore the screws would give and I would tumble out the side of the van. I also thought that I was going to get a splinter right in my behind as I involuntarily slid along the wooden plank when we lurched forward. When I tried to

hold on to the holes in the ceiling, the metal was brown and rusted, and I hoped that I didn't cut myself and get tetanus. We finally arrived at the next round point.

You Can't Come In

Another set of experiences that I shared with most Kinois had to do with access. My lack of a car, skin color, and propensity for wearing tailored “African” clothes often made it difficult for me to enter certain foreign owned or affiliated compounds and buildings. Once I went to the house of an African-American friend for dinner, and the security guard on the ground floor of the apartment building refused to let me in, and had to call her to verify and physically come down to get me. Yet another time I was invited to join a small informal French conversation group of other foreign women. All of the other women in the group were white, or at least appeared to be white-looking. However, I couldn't get past the security gate because the guard didn't believe me when I told him that I was American and was there for the group. Yet another time, I went to a small grocery store in Gombe¹⁸ to shop. As I entered the store, the woman at the door asked to hold my bag, which was a large purse. As I looked around and noticed that all of the white and/or wealthy looking customers had bags, I refused, pointing out that they had kept their bags. Interestingly enough, at all of these occasions the guards (and woman) were Congolese working for foreign owned or operated establishments, whose jobs apparently included keeping out any errant Africans. These experiences and others (such as being served after white customers in restaurants although my Congolese friends and I

¹⁸ A more upscale neighborhood in Kinshasa that is inhabited by many foreigners who are often embassy affiliated.

had arrived and ordered at least twenty minutes before the white customers did) exposed me to the everyday indignities that Kinshasa suffer everyday in their own country.

On Being a Young Black Woman

Another experience that I shared, specifically with Congolese women, was that of being approached by white men. While Congolese men expressed their interest as well, the difference seemed to be that white, usually Lebanese men, seemed to think my interest (and body) were for sale. During the night, 30th June Boulevard (the main street going through downtown Kinshasa and Gombe) is decorated by many young Congolese women in their finest and most revealing attire, trying to attract the attention of male drivers so that there can be an exchange of cash for sexual services.¹⁹ Moreover, in the dance clubs most frequented by the foreign and wealthy, crowds of beautiful young Congolese women could be found, whom I later realized were prostitutes. Some of these white men approached me as they would a Congolese or other African woman who was a prostitute. Several times I had been walking along the boulevard during the day and white men pulled over their cars to “offer” me a ride. I always refused. Once, a man followed me out of an internet café and pulled his car up next to the taxi stop where I was waiting. I tried to ignore him but he kept calling and gesturing to me until I went up to the window and in no uncertain terms refused his company. When I came back to join

¹⁹ Wide-spread prostitution is one of the most simply heartbreaking symptoms of the bureaucratic and economic crisis in the Congo and the dire and desperate straits of most of the population there. I have seen prostitutes before but I have never seen the sheer numbers of girls and women who ply their trade along the Boulevard and other prominent streets in Kinshasa. For further discussion of this, see Janet MacGaffey (1988) *Evading Male Control: Women in the Second Economy in Zaire*, In Sharon B. Stichter and Jane L. Parpart (eds.), *Patriarchy and Class: African Women at Home and in the Workforce*, Pp. 161-176.

the crowd waiting at the taxi stop, one man said something to the effect of, “Good for you. They think all of our women are prostitutes.”

Advantages

Being mistaken for Congolese allowed me to experience the vagaries of daily life in the Congo on a much more intimate level, regardless of the number of inconveniences or slights to which I was subjected. First and foremost was my ability to be “unmarked” in the sense that because people did not automatically see me as a foreigner, they were less likely to change their behavior just because I was there. My ability to blend in also allowed me a bit more ease in getting around on foot, because, for example, when the street kids (shegues) came begging, I was not automatically targeted as a rich foreigner (although they did ask me for money often, as they did every other Congolese that passed). They were much more aggressive and persistent with white people and others driving fancy cars. My skin also provided a form of a pass in situations such as when I paid the Congolese rather than the twice as costly foreigner entrance fee to the bonobo sanctuary outside of Kinshasa. And had I been a white person walking the streets, I most likely would have had to endure being called “mundele” or even “mundele zoba” (stupid white person). Because of my skin color, when I flagged down a taxi, they didn’t automatically assume that I want an “express taxi” and up the price exponentially, which often happened when white people take the public transportation. Being a Black person was the key to my gaining access to a branch of Bundu dia Kongo²⁰ in Luozi, when

²⁰ A political and religious group that has the goal of rebuilding the former Kongo Kingdom. They are further discussed in chapter six of the dissertation.

leaders refused to allow a curious young white woman to participate or even see the ceremony, whereas I was allowed to attend and even videotape certain parts of it, as I was “their sister.” My African ancestry was also my saving grace when during an interview, a leader of Bundu dia Kongo asked me what field I was studying. When I replied, “anthropology,” he sucked his teeth and looked at me with disdain. “If I’d known you were an anthropologist, I wouldn’t have even talked to you.” A bit flabbergasted, I made my case by explaining that I knew the distasteful history of anthropology, and if we were to change how anthropology is done, more black people need to become anthropologists. As I continued on about being the only African-American in my cohort and in my classes, he began to loosen up and we had a frank conversation about the potential and need for transforming the discipline.

My positionality as an African-American doing research in the Congo, while important for my daily experiences as a researcher, also had even greater significance. What sorts of cultural memories and performances were invoked for Kongo people by my very body and physical presence?

Embodying Prophecies

January 30, 2006. Wearing baggy sweat pants, an old t-shirt and sneakers, and with my hair tied down under a scarf, I joined my friends outside, closing the door of the house behind me. “Let’s go, then.” Marie (big sister), Pierre (brother), Suzanne (little sister), Phillipe (Marie’s baby), and I were headed to one of the family’s many fields to plant soybeans. Up and down several winding red dirt paths, over rough troughs, past grazing goats, and through thigh-high grass, we walked until we arrived after about 10

minutes in a field next to the overgrown cement foundation and half finished walls of the future site of a bigger and better Kongo DMNA²¹ church. “This is it,” Pierre gestured. I gazed at the site, shading my eyes from the bright sunlight. We put down our water jugs, baskets, and hoes, and Marie placed Promise in the care of his little aunt under the shade of a colorful umbrella. Marie and Pierre began to test my knowledge of plants, which was not too developed, since I was a city girl, born and raised in the Bronx. “Saka-saka” (cassava-leaves), I pointed excitedly. “Nkovi,” (collard greens). “Nguba” (peanuts). Before planting the soybeans, I began to take photos of the plants and the field. Marie noticed an older woman at work clearing the overgrowth in one room of the church structure, and so we went over there to say hello. Marie introduced me as a black person from America (noire-americaine), and the woman smiled, and then spontaneously broke into song:

*Tata Kimbangu²² weti zieta kaka mu Afelika
Weti niku nanga nsi ye kamba vo lusiama.*

*Ah Ah Ah lusiama AhAhAh lusiama
weti niku nanga nsi ye kamba vo lusiama (2X)*

*Ah Ah Ah tata ye mama nge wabo kulua
simba sabala kia mpeve ye kota mu mvita*

*Papa Kimbangu walks always in Africa
He moves the world and says to be strong*

*Ahhh Be strong, be strong,
He moves the world and says to be strong (2X)*

Fathers and Mothers you who are called

²¹ DMNA is an acronym for Dibundu dia Mpeve ya Nlongo mu Afelika, or Church of the Holy Spirit in Africa, the church that is the focus of chapter four of my dissertation.

²² Simon Kimbangu was a great Kongo prophet and performer of miracles who was the impetus for a series of religious movements during the colonial period. He will be discussed in much greater detail in chapter 3.

Hold the weapon of the spirit and enter the war

Had I experienced this same situation when I first arrived in the Congo, I probably would not have understood the implications of her impromptu song and cultural performance. However, months before this, on September 22, as I walked through Luozi with Ne Nkamu, my chief cultural consultant, music/Kikongo language tutor, and friend, we passed through the yard of an older couple. When Ne Nkamu introduced us, the elderly gentleman took off his hat, smiled, and said something about the prophecy coming true. A few days later, on September 26, Ne Nkamu and I crossed the path of a group of men at work on constructing a building. As I introduced myself and tried my fledgling KiKongo by asking them their clans, some of the men responded, and then asked me the same question. As Ne Nkamu stepped in to explain that I don't know my clan as a result of slavery and the slave trade to the Americas, another man chimed in about the prophecy of Simon Kimbangu and some of the others nodded. Moreover, on my first meeting with representatives of Bundu dia Kongo in Luozi, the same comment was made, and it was explained to me that this particular prophecy of Kimbangu was recorded in their sacred book, and they have created a list of regulations to govern the impending return of African Americans to the Congo. Over and over again, especially during my time in Luozi, people associated my presence, my very body, with the fulfillment of the prophecy of Tata Simon Kimbangu. What exactly was this prophecy and what did it have to do with me?

The prophecy that Simon Kimbangu is claimed to have made during the colonial period, basically said that Black Americans would come back to the Congo to not only

help to liberate it, but also teach the Congolese all of the technical knowledge and skills they needed to be more successful than their colonial oppressors. Although there doesn't seem to be any text that Kimbangu actually wrote proclaiming this, the prophecy has been immortalized in eyewitness accounts, colonial government documents, song lyrics of the Kimbanguist church, the sacred book of Bundu dia Kongo, and in the memories of the Kongo people. Wyatt Macgaffey, a scholar of Kongo culture and religion, was told the following prophecy by an informant who said it dated to 1921: "Pray to your brethren who were sold in the ivory and rubber to the country of the Americans. The Lord will send them to this country to teach crafts and give skills surpassing those of the whites."²³ In the African Archives of the Belgian Congo colonial period in Brussels, I found a document in which one official reports to another the claims of two BisiKongo who went to Nkamba and heard Kimbangu say publicly that, "for so many years the Belgians are our rulers and haven't done anything for us till this day, but before long Americans will arrive here in order to make war with the Belgians and become our rulers."²⁴ Kimpianga Mahaniah, a MuKongo historian, cites Belgian author Maquet-Tombu, who reported a deported prophet as saying that, "the black Americans will soon come and conquer the Congo."²⁵ Joseph Van Wing, a Belgian Catholic missionary and long time inhabitant of the Congo, also mentions a variant of the prophecy when he wrote about Mpadism,

²³ Wyatt MacGaffey, "Kongo and the King of the Americans." *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1968):177.

²⁴ Luozi, 13 June 1921. Although there is another person's brief statement at the bottom of the document affirming that these were indeed the words of the witnesses, it is not clear whether it was written verbatim, or with some liberty that may have led to certain changes. In particular, I am referring to the idea that the Americans would become the new rulers of the Congo rather than partners, or guests of the Congolese.

²⁵ Kimpianga Mahaniah, "The Presence of Black Americans in the Lower Congo from 1878 to 1921," in *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora, Second Edition*, ed. Joseph Harris, 411; (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1993).

another Kongo based prophetic movement influenced by Simon Kimbangu, which occurred from 1939-1946. Clearly drawing on the implications and antagonisms of WWII, the prophecy foretold a war won by the Germans, who will give the Congolese access to arts and sciences, and then, “after 20 or 30 years...the German king would make Black Americans come to the Congo. He will kick out all the foreign missionaries and allow the Blacks to pray to God amongst themselves.”²⁶ MacGaffey also discusses the prophecy as shown in a hymn of the Kimbanguist church:

If the King of the Americans comes
To restore the King,
The chiefs of this world shall pass away.
If the King of the Americans comes
The troubles of this world shall pass away
If the King of the Americans comes
The King of the Blacks will return.²⁷

This prophecy is interesting not only because it is about Americans, but because it is about Black Americans in particular, coming (returning) to the Congo with technical know-how and skills, to teach and aid the Congolese in gaining their independence from the Belgians. Several authors have linked this reference to the spread throughout Central Africa of the ideas, publications, and movement of Marcus Garvey. This is particularly poignant because at least one Congolese intellectual, Paul Panda Farnana, had been identified as a Garveyist agitator, while other Congolese had been found to have Garveyist publications in their possession, and Kimbangu himself worked for a time at a British owned oil refinery alongside Black Americans and Anglophone Africans who

²⁶ J. Van Wing, “Le Kibanguisme vu par un Témoin.” *Zaire: Revue Congolaise*, Vol. XII, No. 6 (1958): 600.

²⁷ Wyatt MacGaffey, “Kongo and the King of the Americans.” *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1968):176.

discussed ideas of Pan-Africanism.²⁸ Thus, Kodi posits Marcus Garvey as the “King of the Americans” who is mentioned in the prophecies (1993: 278). Moreover, both Mahaniah and Kodi link circulating rumors of the arrival of a ship on the Congo River signifying the end of Belgian rule, with the Black Star Lines of Marcus Garvey (Mahaniah 1993: 415; Kodi 1993: 279).

All of this brings us back to the intersection of embodied cultural performances, embodied histories, and religious and political authority. The fact that I was a brown-skinned African-American conducting research in a West Central African country affected the reception that I received and the development of my research on Kongo embodied practices in cultural performances.²⁹ My very physical presence evoked cultural memories of a religious movement that challenged the authority of the Belgians during the colonial period and offered hope for a future free from European colonialism. As the rest of the dissertation shows through an examination of *bimpampa* and *makinu* over time, embodied cultural performances have played and continue to play a major role in the confirmation of religious and political authority, while at the same time acting as possible sites for resisting and even establishing other competing structures of authority.

²⁸ Kimpianga Mahaniah, “The Presence of Black Americans in the Lower Congo from 1878 to 1921,” in *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora, Second Edition*, ed. Joseph Harris, 414-416; (Washington, D.C: Howard University Press, 1993); M.W. Kodi, “The 1921 Pan-African Congress at Brussels: A Background to Belgian Pressures,” in *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*, ed. Joseph Harris, 263-288 (Washington, D.C: Howard University Press, 1993).

²⁹ For several other discussions by women of African descent on doing ethnographic research in black countries, whether in Africa or the Caribbean, see the contributions to *Black Feminist Anthropology: Theory, Politics, Practice and Poetics* (2001) and Gina Ulysse, (1999) “Uptown Ladies and Downtown Women: Female Representations of Class and Color in Jamaica. In *Representations of Blackness and the Performance of Identities*, ed. Jean Muteba Rahier, 147-172. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

Outline of Chapters

In chapter two, I explore the multiple roles of embodied cultural performances in challenging and confirming religious and political authority in the pre-colonial era of the Lower Congo from 1491 to approximately 1876. This chapter is based primarily on travel accounts and diaries of European explorers, traders, and missionaries in the Kongo cultural area in the pre-colonial period. During this period, performance is most often discussed in the context of ceremonial and ritual events for the kings and other higher level authority figures in the Kongo Kingdom, beginning in 1491 with the pomp and circumstance surrounding the baptism of the Kongo King who took the name of Joao I. There are also other significant cultural performances such as the *sanga* military reviews conducted by Kongo kings in front of various European visitors, *bimpampa* gestures of respect, *makinu* which occurred both inside the royal court and outside amongst the common people, and music and dance as used in the healing practices of *banganga*, traditional healers and priests. These cultural performances were used by Kongo people in many different ways. In some cases they were used to reaffirm the current political authority of the ruling elite, such as in the case of *bimpampa* used in everyday life and incorporated into Catholic masses and processions and other spectacles of the Kongo court. However, they were also used to undermine the prevailing hierarchy of political and religious authority, such as in the *sanga* performance of the provincial ruler of Soyo that performatively announced its succession from the Kongo Kingdom, or the embodied gestures of Dona Beatrice Kimpa Vita that challenged European missionary notions of Catholicism in the context of her movement to restore a fragmented Kongo Kingdom.

These and many other examples show the important relationship of embodied cultural performances to political and religious authority throughout a number of larger socio-historical transformations in Kongo society from initial cultural contact with the Portuguese, the rise of the slave trade, and the decline of the Kingdom.

In chapter three, I use archival documents and personal interviews to examine Kongo performances as sites of moral and political contestation between the church, colonial state, and the indigenous population in the Lower Congo. In the colonial period, the Kongo population became officially subjugated to European, and specifically Belgian, rule and authority. Kongo secular *makinu* were seen as “indecent” threats to public morality, persecuted and prohibited by both Protestant and Catholic missionaries, and were the subject of fervent debate amongst colonial administrators. Kongo non-secular performances in the context of independent *ngunza* churches—including practices such as trembling, jumping, and using traditional instruments—were seen as subversive movements that menaced the smooth running of the colony and the hegemony of the European-led missions. As the *ngunza* movement gained strength and Kongo people continued to participate irrespective of the harsh punishments of the colonial administration, their actions forced the colonial agents to change their own opinions of *makinu* in reaction. Colonial agents visualized the potential of using one form of Kongo embodied practice, *makinu*, to combat another, *ngunza*. This chapter investigates the shifting relationship of *makinu* and embodied practices in *ngunza* churches to political, religious, and moral authority in the Belgian Congo, and the manipulation of Kongo cultural performance by both European missionaries and colonial agents, and the varying

reactions of resistance, accommodation, and even collaboration of the BisiKongo population by and through their embodied practices.

Chapter four is based on present day experiences in the *Dibundu dia Mpeve Nlongo mu Afelika* (DMNA) church in the town of Luozi in the Lower Congo. This church arose after independence, seeking autonomy from European missionary led Protestant and Catholic churches, and it incorporates Kongo music, dance, and gestures in different ways. The DMNA church is one of many churches that emerged from the *kingunza* movement of the colonial period. Thus, many of the same embodied practices of trembling, jumping, playing traditional instruments are present, but have been creatively re-imagined under the guidance of the Prophet responsible for the church's creation: Masamba Esaie. The DMNA church considers itself to be Protestant, and thus also uses the Bible and ideas of the Protestant church. However, the more embodied Christian identity that it embraces differs considerably from other more mainstream Christian churches in the area that also have their origin in mission-led churches. This chapter explores cultural performances including trembling and jumping, and certain *bimpampa* such as *bula makonko* as "enacted theologies" that have been incorporated into the worship, that function as challenges to the religious authority of a Swedish missionary led Protestant church in particular, and as a genuine attempt by the DMNA church to define and embody Christianity on their own, Kongo, terms.

Chapter five considers the post-colonial period under the dictatorial regime of Mobutu. During his rule, he advocated an ideology of "authenticity," based on celebrating and upholding the country's diverse cultural heritage that had been mostly suppressed during the colonial period. Although ideologically positive, the actual practice

entailed many negative policies, one of which included political and cultural animation, which used Mobutu's power as a dictator to force people all over the country to dance, sing, and execute "traditional" performances for him, in order to spread and popularize the message and ideology of his regime. Thus, in the case of the BaKongo, *makinu* performances and certain *bimpampa* were altered by party "animators" to glorify his government. In this chapter I will examine yet another shift in the relationship of these embodied cultural performances to political authority in particular from the early seventies to the nineties. Using interviews in Kinshasa and Luozi, archival documents retrieved in Kinshasa, and archival video footage, I will examine the connection between Mobutu's policies and ideologies, ordinary Kongo citizens, dancers and musicians, and their embodied practices.

Chapter six focuses on the current post-Mobutu era by exploring uses of embodied cultural performances such as *bimpampa*, traditional music, and attitudes towards *makinu* in the politico-religious movement of Bundu dia Kongo, as ways to both challenge and establish religious and political authority in Luozi and the rest of the Lower Congo region. Since Bundu dia Kongo is a movement that remains rarely studied in English language publications, the first half of the chapter examines their ideological beliefs, political goals, and predecessors, and the place of the movement in a larger diasporic context. The second half of the chapter focuses on the ways in which Bundu dia Kongo uses the body and the reformation of bodily habits, both in everyday interactions and spiritual worship, as a means of unifying Kongo people and re-forming the former Kongo Kingdom here on earth in a newly democratic state. This chapter also considers attempts by the leadership of Bundu dia Kongo to control forms of embodiment

that may act as sites from which to challenge the growing but tenuous authority of the movement.

Chapter seven summarizes the major findings of the dissertation. In it, I discuss the role of the body in chronicling histories that also include recent events, emphasize the multivalent meanings and uses of *bimpampa* and *makinu* over time and in different contexts, note the importance of embodied performances in everyday social interactions for both constituting and challenging authority, underscore the role of coercion and prohibition in any discussion of performance and authority, and observe the relationship between religious and political authority. I also provide suggestions for future research and lines of inquiry by focusing on the significance of this study for research on embodied practices across the Atlantic in the New World. It was during the pre-colonial period that millions of enslaved Africans were taken to the Americas, and it is this era that I shall consider in the next chapter of this study.

Chapter 2

Performing the Kingdom: Kongo Performance in the Pre-colonial Period

Mkinu mamfumu ka mazingilanga ko.
(The dance of the chief doesn't last long)
-Kongo proverb

Introduction

September 17, 2005. Today there is a celebration in Professor Mahaniah's³⁰ maternal village of Kindezi, located about forty minutes away over long, dusty roads in the hills above the town of Luozi. We leave the house in the pick up truck around 9:30 am. The ceremony was supposed to commence at 10:00 am but didn't actually begin until around 12:30. The point of the festivities is to celebrate the work that had been done on the graves in the family cemetery, as the professor and some other members of the family had the graves cleaned, painted, and the brush and undergrowth cleared away. We reach Kindezi, and the small village is literally full of people, sitting in groups on the ground on mats or in chairs talking, some women are cooking, and a group of children are playing.

The event basically consists of a sermon given by a Protestant pastor and several prayers (which took place in a small clearing under the shade of one or two big trees at

³⁰ Professor Kimpianga Mahaniah is a MuKongo scholar and historian who generously offered me a room in his own home during the duration of my research in Luozi. See chapter six for more.

the edge of the village and last for almost an hour), after which we all set off to the cemetery to see the work that had been done. When we arrive, there is a group of women and men singing at the entrance of the cemetery, who were the bana mbuta or paternal children of the clan in the village. As we are waiting to enter the cemetery, (a time during which I find out that the Eveready batteries I had purchased were too weak to even turn on my digital camera), a large ndosa³¹ group that had been hired for the occasion began to play, coming down the path, and ending in front of the entrance to the cemetery. Then, the family enters the cemetery. I follow behind Tata Mahaniah, and one of the older men in the family is leading the other family members from grave to grave and saying the name of each person interred, and letting everyone see the work that had been done. The difference is tremendous in comparison to how the cemetery looked months before. Most of the grave stones are gleaming white, and several of them even had the pictures of the dead in the grave stone behind what looked like plastic or glass.

Meanwhile, the ndosa group found an empty spot big enough to form a circle, and began to play and dance. They form two lines, one of women and one of men, and the dancing and drumming begin. I am shocked at first, because we are in a cemetery and I ask Professor Mahaniah whether or not it is disrespectful. He responds by saying, “We are letting the ancestors know that we are here and celebrating them, so no, it’s not disrespectful. They might come to dance.”

³¹ *Ndosa* is the name used to describe a form of traditional Kongo dance performed to a repertoire of *ngomas* (large, waist high drums made from a carved out tree trunk and covered at one end with an animal skin) and *ndembos* (smaller drums fabricated in a similar way that accompany the *ngoma ngudi*, or lead drum) that consists of two facing, interacting lines of men and women. The dance is based on continuous circular hip movement, mixed sex partnering, and a kicking out of the leg by the men. *Ndosa* is often heralded as the most ancient and traditional of existing Kongo dance forms. The name of this particular *ndosa* group was *Lua kia Nzulu*.

Once the family is finished viewing all the graves in the cemetery, we make our way back to Kindezi. There, the dancing and drumming continue, and the ambiance really heats up. I dance, stop to film, hand off my camera, dance some more, watch in amazement at some of the moves, and enjoy myself tremendously. I happen to be standing, singing and clapping with the women's line when I notice the professor's nephew entering the mbazila makinu³² to dance once, and then twice. He finally leaves the space and walks back to where the professor and some of the other village elders are standing nearby. As I am walking toward him to make a few jokes about his dancing, I hear Tata Mahaniah brusquely tell him "Makinu mamfumu ka mazingilanga ko" (the dance of the chief doesn't last long). His nephew, chastised, reservedly watches others dancing for the rest of the celebration, which went into the night. I ask Tata Mahaniah why his nephew couldn't dance more, and he explains that as his nephew represents the more distinguished side of the family, he expected him to carry himself better than if he was a common person.

The above proverb is used to police comportment, to remind people of (whether actual or perceived) higher status that they shouldn't behave like everyone else, and should show some reserve in the way that they carry themselves, such as dancing only briefly at an event. The use of the proverb in this particular situation demonstrates the importance that is placed on one's body in that comportment not only symbolizes but also enacts one's place in a social hierarchy of statuses. This is evident, not only in the present, but also in the pre-colonial past of the Kongo Kingdom as demonstrated by the

³² *Mbazila makinu* is literally space of dance, or dance space, which in this case consisted of the open space between the two facing lines of men and women.

numerous cultural performances done by and for kings, governors, and other figures of political authority, and the traditional priests and European missionaries who embodied religious authority during that era. It can also be argued that the proverb indirectly references the loss of organized political authority in the Kongo Kingdom by the mid to late 19th century, since the power of the Kongo King had basically dissipated by then.

The title of this chapter, *Performing the Kingdom*, is in fact referencing Kelly Askew's *Performing the Nation*,³³ where performances are critical to imagining and constantly creating the nation of Tanzania. Similarly, many kingdoms relied heavily on ritual and embodied practice to enact authority and publicly demonstrate power. For instance, in seventeenth century France under King Louis XIV, dance and court etiquette were ways in which the kingdom was enacted and performed, and made concrete in everyday life.

By disciplining the body, the monarchy mastered the mind—and nowhere did it do this more effectively than at Versailles...The aristocrat who learned to bow, speak, and dance in accordance with court (that is, royal) protocol had learned to obey. Courtiers' bodies became symbolic surfaces upon which Bourbon rule was inscribed. Their flesh bore the marks—the elaborate wigs, the high heels, the restrained demeanor—of royal will. Their movements—patterned and precise—recreated the disciplined designs of Versailles's music, dance, and architecture. (Melzer and Norberg 1998:3-4)

Likewise, in pre-colonial Kongo, embodied cultural performances such as gestures of respect, war dances, and dances of the royal court, all played an integral role in performing the Kongo Kingdom and the power of the king over his subjects. To take it a step further, while embodied cultural performances were a crucial aspect of maintaining

³³ Kelly M. Askew, (2002), *Performing the Nation: Swahili Music and Cultural Politics in Tanzania*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

hierarchical authority and defining the Kongo Kingdom, they also presented viable ways of challenging political and religious authority throughout many larger social transformations.

This chapter examines the shifting roles, uses, and meanings of embodied cultural performances in relation to political and religious authority in the pre-colonial Kongo cultural area from approximately 1491-1876. The focus will be on KiKongo speaking populations within and around the former Kingdom of Kongo over an extended time period that saw a number of large social transformations: African-European contact, the adoption of Christianity, the expansion of the slave trade, struggles for control of the throne, religious movements, wars, conflicts, and the gradual decline of the Kingdom. A long view of the examination of embodied practices in cultural performances is very important in this project because most published research on African societies tends to begin with the colonial period and does not really consider the era before European settlement and colonialism. As a result, the pre-colonial era is often mistakenly looked at as a static and unchanging time period. Through the examination of Kongo cultural performances during crucial time periods of major social transformations before European colonization and as tools to both confirm and challenge political and religious authority, I hope to show that these performances were part of a dynamic cultural process that began long before the area was colonized in the late nineteenth century and continues into the present and future.

Sources and their Limitations

The methodology that I employed for this chapter basically consisted of consulting written documents (missionary reports, travel diaries, tales of exploration, letters between parties, etc) that discuss the Kingdom of Kongo and its environs during the pre-colonial era. The vast majority of the sources that I am using were written by Europeans, especially Catholic missionaries, although there were some travel descriptions that were also penned by European traders, travelers, and explorers. There are multiple challenges in using these sources.

First, many of the primary sources dealing with pre-colonial West Central Africa are in a wide variety of languages. As historian Beatrix Heintze notes, these sources are written in Latin, Portuguese, Italian, Spanish, Flemish, German, French, and English (1984:131). For example, quite a few of the missionary reports on the Kongo Kingdom were written by Italian Capuchins in the seventeenth century, while certain travelers' accounts, letters written by the Kings of Kongo, and other assorted missionary documents are often in Portuguese. Many documents can also be found in the other above aforementioned languages. Because of the wide variety of languages of these primary sources, and the fact that I cannot accurately translate them, I have relied on a number of compilations of translations into French of these letters and reports.³⁴ Several Belgian Catholic priests of different orders who lived for decades in the Lower Congo (Jean Cuvelier, François Bontinck, and Louis Jadin in particular) dedicated much of their time

³⁴ All French passages in this dissertation have been translated by the author, who alone claims responsibility for any significant errors.

to translating thousands of pages of primary sources into French. These translations prove quite useful to my work because they are often of documents that are not readily accessible (located in Papal and other Catholic archives in Rome, for example) and also because they have been edited to include relevant background historical information and even some cultural references (as these priests were also fluent in KiKongo). While noting that historians of Africa who use translations as source material must be content to work with what is available, Heintze also observes that due to the inability of historians to accurately test the reliability of translations, “translations should be used only with the greatest caution” (Heintze 1984:158). While using these sources, I am keeping in mind the many pitfalls of using “translations of translations.” Moreover, after a long, extensive search through interlibrary loan, I was able to consult, copy, and secure a direct translation of a number of pages of Cavazzi’s text in the original Italian from a well qualified translator.

Second, my focus on embodied cultural performances sometimes poses a problem in using these sources, because frequently performances in the context of everyday interactions were not recorded, perhaps because they were not deemed important. Specifically, interactions amongst the common population were most often ignored, although interactions that took place within the royal court were described more frequently. Moreover, the details of the bodily gestures and movements that took place in cultural performances that were marked as special events by the Kongolese, were sometimes deemed too “evil” or “dirty” to even be described on paper by the missionaries. This did not seem to be as much the case with other Europeans who were visiting the Kongo area on other business besides religious proselytization. However,

both European missionaries and traders/explorers shared ethnocentric views of BisiKongo people that often impacted what they wrote and left behind in the written historical record. As a researcher, I must be cautious and vigilant of biases and prejudices against BisiKongo people that can appear in phrases ranging from calling them idolaters to “indolent and lazy” (Cuvelier 1953a:52), and also be vigilant of the effects of these views on the interpretations of events and cultural performances that these missionaries and other Europeans wrote about.

Third, some periods of time are very well documented (the 1600’s for example, particularly through Capuchin missionaries) while others have scant eyewitness accounts (the 1500’s). Yet another larger problem, one that is often encountered in research on pre-colonial African settings, is the lack of African voices in documents from this period. Kongo is unique in that there is some correspondence between Kongo kings and Portugal and Rome. Although these letters do not seem as if they will provide much information in regards to Kongo cultural performance, they can be used to illuminate the position of power and political opinions and strategies of the Kongo elite during different historical transformations. Missing also, are accounts by women. As the missionaries during this period were all male (I am unaware of any female missionaries until the colonial period) these reports were written by men, most often about men. While the customs and lives of women are visible at times (documents about Dona Beatrice Vita Kimpa or Queen Nzinga, for example), the vast majority of the texts are about men, their activities and beliefs.

Overall, although there are many blind spots, there is still enough information to begin to piece together a history of Kongo cultural performance before colonization sponsored by King Leopold of Belgium in the late nineteenth century.

The Kongo Culture Area

Peopling of the Area

What I am calling the Kongo culture area is basically defined linguistically, encompassing the geographical areas where speakers of the KiKongo language have traditionally resided.³⁵ The people inhabiting the Kongo culture area are speakers of Bantu languages. It is estimated that Bantu speakers originated in an area between the Cross River and the Middle Benue in what is modern day Cameroon and Nigeria, and about 4,000 years ago migrated southward in what has been called the Bantu migration to occupy a savanna area of West Central Africa, that was most likely already populated by Pygmy hunter-gatherers. By 800 A.D. most of Central Africa was populated by this group.³⁶ The population grew, centralized governments were formed and many kingdoms emerged. The most important one for our area of research is the Kingdom of Kongo.

³⁵ This focus on linguistically defining the group of study does not ignore the fact that KiKongo speakers shared many cultural practices, beliefs, and even vocabulary with other West Central African groups, such as Ovimbundu speakers to the south in modern day Angola. Some of these similarities are referenced at different points in this chapter. However, for the purpose of this study, in order to limit the amount of source material that can be used to a manageable amount, language shall be the major factor used in distinguishing the society of study.

³⁶ Vansina, Jan. 1966. *Kingdoms of the Savanna*. Madison: University of Wisconsin press, page 34; David Birmingham and Phyllis Martin. 1983. *History of Central Africa*. London: Longman, page 13.

Although KiKongo was the main language of the Kongo Kingdom, there were also Kongo people outside its boundaries who spoke KiKongo and maintained similar cultural practices, such as in the Kingdom of Loango to the north, so that the political boundaries of the Kongo Kingdom did not necessarily map onto the limits of the cultural and linguistic grouping of Kikongo speaking peoples. Geographically, the KiKongo speaking population “is roughly bounded by the Rivers Kwilu and Niari to the North, Malebo Pool and the River Kwango to the east, the Dande to the south, and the Atlantic Ocean to the West” (Hilton 1985:1). Anthropologists have also come up with similar geographical boundaries and socio-cultural connectedness for the Kongo population:

A comparison of modern ethnographies shows that, from the BaKunyi in the north to the Mbanza Kongo and from the coast to Malebo Pool, we are dealing with the same society, that is, with the replication in space of the same set of institutions. Local variations correspond in degree to dialectical variations in the KiKongo language. (MacGaffey 1986:22-23)

In regards to ecology, Hilton notes that south of the Congo River during the pre-colonial period, one could find three main ecological zones running parallel to the coast: a coastal zone, sparsely populated with mainly infertile or sandy soil and irregular rainfall, a densely populated middle zone, covered with rolling hills, fertile soil, and some woodlands, and an inhospitable eastern zone with infertile soils and a sparse population (Hilton 1985: 1-2). The vast majority of what became the Kingdom of Kongo could be found in the middle ecological zone.

Origins and Organization of the Kingdom of Kongo

Due to a lack of written documents before European contact with the Kingdom, the history of the origins of the Kingdom can only be pieced together based on current

oral traditions amongst the Kongo people, and genealogies and histories collected by Europeans in the area from the 15th century to the colonial period. Although there are many variations, according to John Thornton, a historian of West Central Africa, the consensus seems to be that the kingdom was founded by Nimi a Nzima (or Nimi a Lukeni) during the 14th century, sometime between 1350-1375 (Thornton 2001:119). Coming from the northern shore of what is today called the Congo River, he crossed the river with a number of companions to begin the conquest of the lands on the other side. Thornton quotes a missionary who wrote in 1669: “the first kings who dominated Congo left from Coimba...and crossed the Zaire³⁷ and began to dominate the lands of Congo” (Thornton 2001:107). One tactic these first kings used was making alliances through marriage with other polities in the area (Vansina 1966: 38; Thornton 2001: 110-1; 119).

The political and administrative organization of the Kongo Kingdom consisted of King of Kongo (*mani*³⁸ Kongo) residing in Mbanza Kongo (renamed San Salvador by the Portuguese) in modern day Angola, with a number of surrounding provinces, each governed by a *mani* who was appointed by and paid tribute to the King. Historically, the kingdom had been formed by “voluntary and compulsory agglomeration of neighboring states around a central core,” (Thornton 2001:104), such that these neighboring states became provinces of the Kingdom either through alliance or conquest. Although the number and names of some of the provinces changed over time and in different historical documents, Nsundi, Soyo, Mbamba, Mpangu, and Mbata are some of the provinces that

³⁷ Zaire was another term for the Congo River, (*Nzadi* in KiKongo), which the Portuguese mispronounced and wrote as Zaire.

³⁸ *Mani* is a KiKongo term used for ruler, king, governor, etc. and it is usually followed by the name of the geographical area that the person rules over. Thus, the *Mani Kongo* is the ruler of all of the Kongo Kingdom, while the *Mani Soyo* governs the province of Soyo.

appeared over and over again in the written documentation from the pre-colonial period.³⁹ Towns, including the capital, were called *mbanza*, and smaller groupings such as villages were referred to as *libata*⁴⁰ (Hilton 1985:7-8).

³⁹ Thornton (2001) discusses variation in the number of provinces, ranging from six provinces to one document that even listed thirty five territories of the Kongo Kingdom. Duarte Lopes's account (1591) gives six provinces (Pamba, Songo, Sundi, Pango, Batta, Pemba) each of which he discusses briefly. He also asserts that the northern border of the kingdom extended beyond the Congo River (56), which is important because many scholars of the Kongo kingdom have often delimited its northern boundaries to stop at the Congo River.

⁴⁰ The correct spelling is *vata* (Laman 1964:1052).

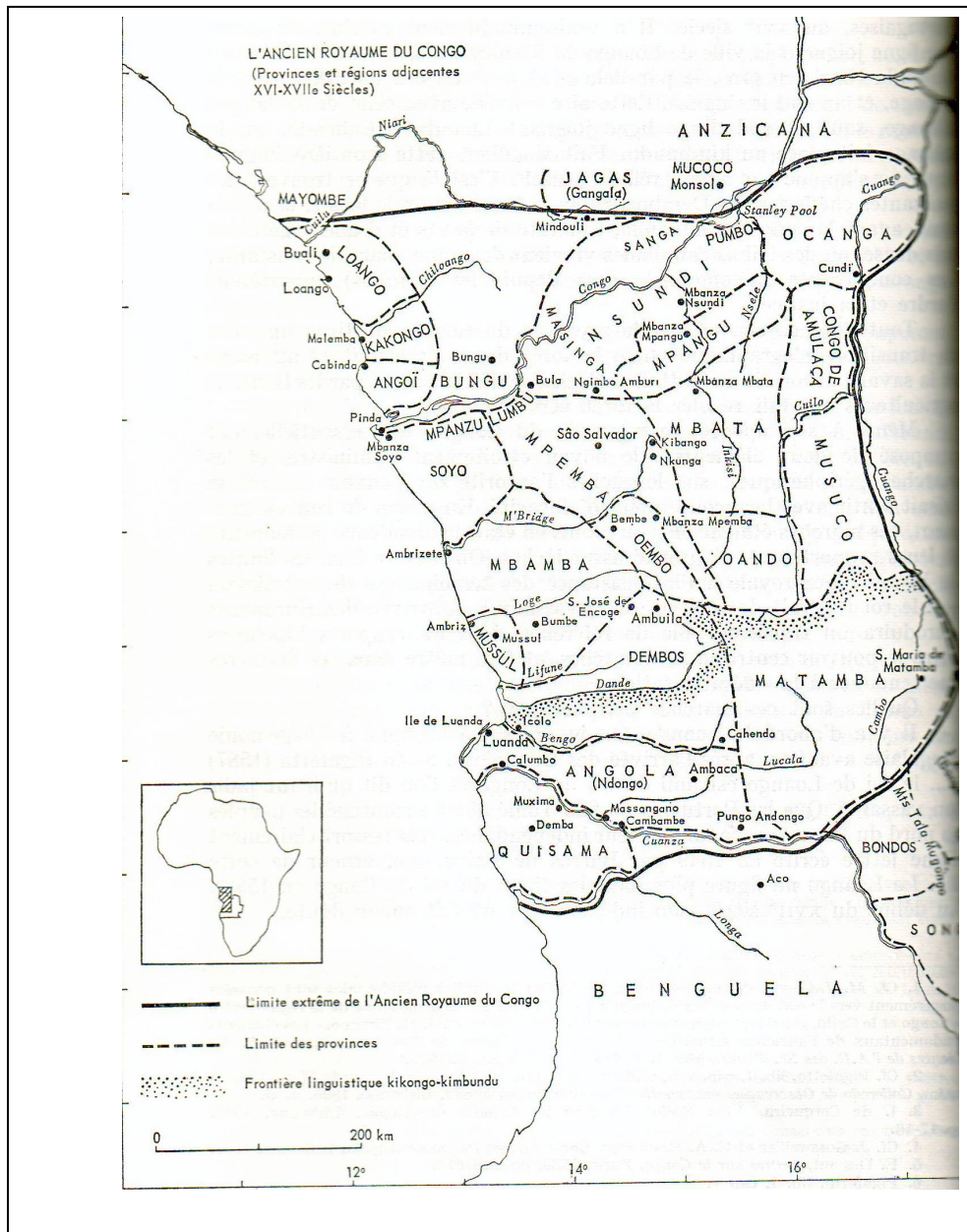


Figure 1: Map of the Kongo Kingdom and Adjacent Areas from the Sixteenth to the Seventeenth Centuries (Source: W.G.L. Randles, 1968, *L'ancien royaume du Congo des origines à la fin du XIXe siècle*, page 22)

Kongo-European Contact

In either 1482 or 1483,⁴¹ a Portuguese navigator Diogo Cão landed at Mpinda, near the mouth of the Congo River. This would be the first contact between the people of this region and Europeans. Cão took some BisiKongo to Portugal as hostages (Hilton 1985: 50). In 1485, he returned with these hostages who spoke to others of their experiences. He left again to Portugal, this time taking some Kongo nobles with him, and leaving some of his own people behind (Vansina 1966: 45). In 1487, he came back a third time, returning the Kongoleses and receiving his own people. Over this time, both the Kings of Kongo and Portugal had been collecting information about each other's countries and ways of life. So, in 1487 the Mani Kongo (King of Kongo) sent an ambassador, his own spiritual leader, the Mani Vunda, along with some other men and assorted gifts for the King of Portugal, to Portugal (Vansina 1966:45).

What is important to note in these exchanges is that the kingdoms were relating to each other as equals. It was in this spirit that Christianity first came to the Kongo Kingdom. What we shall examine next is the earliest written description of performance and embodied practices in the Kongo Kingdom. That these performances are staged to welcome missionaries, display the power of the mani,⁴² and accompany the baptism of first the Mani Soyo, and then the Mani Kongo, is not a coincidence. It shows that from

⁴¹ Thornton (2001:89), MacGaffey (1986:193), Hilton (1985:50) among other scholars place the date of Diego Cao's arrival at 1483, while Brasio's Portuguese documents collected in *Momumenta Missionária Africana* place the date at 1482 (Brasio 1951 Volume I: 30, 32).

⁴² Mani is a KiKongo term used for ruler, king, governor, etc. and it is usually followed by the name of the geographical area that the person rules over. Thus, the Mani Kongo is the ruler of all of the Kongo Kingdom, while the Mani Soyo governs the province of Soyo.

the beginning, political authority, Christian identity, and cultural performance all met at a critical intersection of African-European contact in West-Central Africa.

In 1491, another Portuguese expedition, and the first official Portuguese embassy, returned to Kongo with gifts and missionaries,⁴³ led by Ruy de Sousa. They landed in the province of Soyo, where an uncle of the king was in charge. The Mani Soyo came to meet them, accompanied by “a great number of vassals and, with a great din of horns, kettledrums (drums), and other instruments of festival in the style of the country, he came to receive Ruy de Sousa” (Bal 1963:47). Through the translation of the young Kongolese men who had studied in Portugal and converted to Christianity, the Mani Soyo demanded to be baptized as well. So, on Easter, April 3, 1491, the Mani Soyo was given the Christian name of Dom Manuel and baptized “in the presence of more than 25,000 people, vassals of the Prince of Soyo,” (Bal 1963:49). When the Kongo King received word of the baptism, he sent word that he was giving his uncle a tract of land “to increase his domain” (Bal 1963: 49). It was on this occasion that Dom Manuel ordered the burning of all of the idols in the region that pertained to the traditional religion.

The King sent a message that the Portuguese could come to Mbanza Kongo. When Ruy de Sousa was on his way to Mbanza Kongo, several of the king’s captains came to meet him, accompanied by a lot of people, and when he was two leagues from the city, three more captains came with a big troop.

They arrived in three detachments equipped in their manner, to a great din of drums, horns, and other barbaric instruments, arranged in lines and singing in such way that they seemed to walk in the nature of the processions made to invoke and pray to the saints. Three or four men sang

⁴³ The Mani Vunda died of the plague on the journey back to Kongo (Hilton 1985: 50).

a verse and the mass of others responded to them, so harmoniously that our own people took pleasure to hear them. From time to time, they made a cry which seemed to pierce the air. The words of this song were praises addressed to the king of Portugal, for the things which he sent to their sovereign. (Bal 1963: 51)⁴⁴

This shared cultural performance of the citizens of the Kingdom seemed to serve several purposes. First, it welcomed the visitors to Mbanza Kongo, the capital of the Kongo Kingdom. Second, although the traveler did not note this, the music likely widely announced the arrival of these foreigners to the land to all that were within earshot of the instruments and singing. Third, it displayed the musical attributes and talent of the area to the Portuguese, who according to the above account, quite enjoyed the singing. Fourth, the troop of captains and musicians that accompanied the Portuguese visitors allowed them to enter the city with a similar type of pomp and circumstance that accompanied the movements of the King of Kongo as he traveled through the region. Thus, through the cultural performance of the troop, the visitors were being placed higher in the social hierarchy than the common people who watched the troop and the visitors as they passed by.

It is this last component of cultural performances that will be examined in greater detail throughout this chapter. What role did cultural performances, ranging from gestures of respect, to war dances, to healing by traditional priests, to secular dances, play in constructing, confirming, and challenging both religious and political authority in the pre-colonial Kongo Kingdom and its immediate environs? How did the meanings and

⁴⁴ More of this account can be found in Portuguese in MMA volume I, pages 112-129, including the accounts of both Rui de Pina and Garcia de Resende.

uses of these cultural performances change throughout the social transformations that impacted this west central African region? And what aspects of these cultural performances persisted over time even as the external structures from which they originated ceased to exist?

First Documented Arrival in Kongo Area	Short Name	Official Name	Nationality	Documentary Source
1491	Franciscans	Order of Friars Minor/Order of St. Francis (O.F.M)	Portuguese	Rui de Pina
1491	Dominicans	Order of Friars Preachers/Order of St. Domingo (O.P)	Portuguese	de Barros
1491		Uniform Canon of St. Eloi/Order of St. John the Evangelist		
1548	Jesuits	(Society of Jesus)	Portuguese	
1558	Augustinians	Order of St. Augustine (O.S.A)		
1584	Carmelites	Order of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel (O. Carm)	Spanish	unknown, probably Confalonieri
1645	Capuchins	Order of Friars Minor Capuchin (O.F.M. Cap)	Spanish, Italian, Flemish	Caltanissetta; Cavazzi; da Roma, etc.
1766	Foreign Mission of Paris	Foreign Mission of Paris	French	Proyart; anonymous

Table 1: Chart of European Missionaries in the Lower Congo (1491-1766)

Cultural Performances, Social Transformations, and Authority

Bimpampa as Gestures of Respect

One of the embodied phenomena most frequently mentioned in European accounts of the Kongo Kingdom is gestures of the body that were considered to be signs of respect. In modern day KiKongo, these can be called a number of terms, however the term that I have decided to use throughout the dissertation is *bimpampa bia nitu* (gestures of the body), *bimpampa* for short. Some of these gestures are *dekama* (genuflection), *fukama* (kneeling), *bula makonko* (cupped hand clapping) and throwing dirt on one's face and body. These gestures of respect are signs of humility that inhabitants of the Kongo Kingdom and of surrounding areas used to express their respect and gratitude, usually to people of much higher social status such as kings and nobility, although these gestures were also used in other everyday contexts as well. Through these particular cultural performances, citizens of the kingdom enacted their consciousness of an organized social hierarchy, and these performances were crucial ways in which status differences could be publicly demonstrated in a society in which high status didn't always correlate with material wealth. An analysis of the use of such gestures over time reveals the highly significant role that gestures had in not only confirming social hierarchies and political and religious authority, but also as potential ways of challenging structures of power.

The first account of *bimpampa* can be found in the travel accounts of Rui de Pina and João de Barros, based on the arrival of the aforementioned Portuguese envoy in Mbanza Kongo to baptize the Kongo king in 1491. On coming close to the king, Ruy de

Sousa salutes him in the manner of Portugal, and the king responds with his own salute, in the following way:

He put the right hand on the ground, as if it collected dust, next he passed it lightly on the chest of Ruy de Sousa, and then on his own, this which was the most great mark of courtesy that could be done among them. (Bal 1963: 51)

In this description of a greeting, the king symbolically put dust on the chest of Ruy de Sousa, and then on his own. As numerous accounts to follow will demonstrate, the act of putting dust on one's head and body, often while kneeling (*fukama*) was a sign of respect and humility that people of lower status used in interaction with the king and other nobility. In this instance, not only is the king standing, but he places the dust on both his own body, and that of his Portuguese visitor. In this regard, the King of Kongo used gesture not only to greet Ruy de Sousa, but also to place himself on equal footing with his visitor. The king did not use the gesture to indicate that he was lower in status to de Sousa, but rather to say that they were meeting as equals. This public display established de Sousa's position for all of those Kongo citizens watching as that of a person of high status, while at the same time confirming the political position and authority of the Kongo King. In all, this first exchange between the two men demonstrates the complicated social meanings and uses that gesture enabled even in inter-cultural exchanges between the people of the Kongo and the Portuguese.

Between the late 15th and the late 16th centuries, there were not as many published accounts to be found about Kongo in comparison to the next three centuries. However, in the documents that are available, one finds mention of gestures of respect in the region. For example, another account was published in 1591 by Philippe Pigafetta, based on

Duarte Lopes's travels in the area in 1578, in which gestures of humility and respect are discussed, this time in reference to *minkisi*,⁴⁵ which this Portuguese traveler called idols:

The act of adoration was performed in various ways, but always in the direction of humility, sometimes throwing themselves on their knees and taking up mouthfuls of earth, covering the face with dust, and making prayer to the idols both in words and gestures (Pigafetta 1881: 87).

Likewise, using such gestures of respect in relation to sacred *minkisi* was also evident in Dapper's description of the Kingdom of Kongo, in which "their religious ceremonies consisted of genuflections, to prostrate yourself face on the ground, to cover your head in dust, to offer that which was the most precious that they had to their idols" (Dapper 1686:357).

Bula makonko or the cupped clapping of the hands that makes a sound like Bo! Bo! Bo!, is a gesture of respect that could often be seen in the interactions between the Kongo King and his court, and between members of the nobility and people of lower social classes. There is another document entitled "History of the Congo, Description of a Country" which is thought to have been compiled by Monseigneur Confalonieri and to be based on the accounts of two Carmelite missionaries (Diego of Saint Sacrament and Diego of the Incarnation) who were sent to the Congo in the late 1500's, along with Lopes (1584-87).⁴⁶ This compilation revealed some other gestures in the court setting in Kongo. According to the document, the king eats boiled or roasted meat with his fingers

⁴⁵ *Minkisi* are material objects in Kongo traditional religion that have been given spiritual power by traditional priests. Wyatt MacGaffey, an anthropologist of Kongo society, has referred to them as "charms." (Religion and Society in Central Africa 1986: 137-145, while John Janzen, another anthropologist, refers to them as consecrated medicines (1982:4).

⁴⁶ This document is found in J. Cuvelier and Louis Jadin, 1954, L'ancien Congo d'après les archives romaines (1518-1640), Académie royale des sciences coloniales, section des sciences morales et politiques, 36:2.

from a large pot in front of him, and he “distributes it to his servants, giving to each their ration, which they receive with big claps of the two hands in a sign of thanks” (Cuvelier and Jadin:132-33). Moreover, twice a year the governors and local leaders throughout the kingdom come to the capital to pay their tribute to the king. When the king expresses his approval to a governor, the governor claps his hands many times. “In a sign of contentment, he throws himself to the ground, covering his body in dust. His servants (*baleke*) do the same thing...” (Cuvelier and Jadin:133). Similar behavior is expressed by the winner of a civil dispute who “claps his hands, covers himself in dust, and was conducted throughout the town in triumph” (Cuvelier and Jadin:135; also see the relation of Father Laurent de Lucques, Cuvelier 1953: 82).

Bula makonko, fukama, and throwing dust on oneself also play roles in trials and other courtly matters. For example, the process of a trial in the province of Soyo is described by F. Cappelle in 1642, a clerk working for the Dutch West Indies Company who had arrived in Soyo in October of 1637 (Jadin 1966:148). In his report to his employers, he recounts the trial in which each person acted as their own lawyer, and he also details the procedure for speaking. “No one can speak without having first asked the consent of the judges and of everyone present. The consent, they give in a curious way by together clapping all of their hands. This action is called *imsoollo*”(Jadin 1966:234). Cappelle further describes matters that are taken before the king such as war, the opening and closing of roads, or the promotion of a nobleman, and describes the actions of the nobles and their companions in front of the king, who is seated high in a throne. “They execute particularly curious jumps called kylombas. They throw themselves to their knees, rubbing the flat part of the hand on the ground, and throwing the dust on their

chest and their face as a sign of respect” (Jadin 1966:235). Further, when the king leaves his home, those around him must demonstrate their respect and ask for his blessing, as illustrated in the report of Giovanni Francesco da Roma, an Italian Capuchin missionary who was stationed in Mbanza Kongo from 1645-1646, and in Loanda for several months during 1647:

The courtiers and soldiers who are held in the interior court, get on their knees and, in quickly making two or three claps of the hands, each asks his blessing; the king holds the right hand, lightly moving the fingers as if he is playing the lute. The one to which the king would not stretch the hand in this way, would think himself unfortunate because this would be an evident index that he fell in disgrace. The king takes around half an hour to give everyone his blessing in this way.” (da Roma 1964:125)

This passage suggests that there is a belief on the part of the courtiers in the blessing of the king, demonstrating that both political and spiritual authority were intertwined, and that the position of the Kongo King could be considered to embody divine kingship.⁴⁷

MacGaffey discusses the importance of spiritual legitimation for *kimfumu* (kings, chiefs, rulers) in Kongo society in general, when he writes:

According to the Kongo conception, a chief was chosen by a committee of his relatives from among the elders of his descent group. Thereafter he submitted to a rite of passage which included seclusion in a temporary camp or enclosure and some sort of ordeal which indicated that supernatural forces approved of his candidacy... Those who obtained a sign of approval were invested with the insignia of office, through which the same supernatural forces conferred upon the holder the characteristic powers of the chief, their delegate. (1970:230)

Thus, the political authority of new kings and other rulers was legitimized by the spiritual realm. In this way, the subjects would see the kings as having received the blessing of the spiritual world, and accord them the proper respect and obedience. Additional

⁴⁷ For an extensive overall review of anthropological literature on divine kingship, see Gillian Feeley-Harnik, 1985, Issues in Divine Kingship, *Annual Review of Anthropology* (14):273-313.

evidence of associations of Kongo kings with the spiritual world can also be seen in the roles of spiritual specialists in rituals of investiture for new kings and governors (Hilton 1985:45-47). These spiritual specialists were both proponents of Kongo traditional religion (e.g. Mani Vunda)⁴⁸ and later, European missionaries, and in some cases both types of spiritual specialists were present (Jadin 1963:405-407).⁴⁹ Moreover, Kongo kings also performed fertility rites to bring rain and ensure good harvests for the society (Cuvelier 1953b:109-111).⁵⁰

Another time at which people in the Kongo Kingdom demonstrate their respect and gratitude to the king is when he grants a favor, after which the following protocol is observed:

In the presence of all the others, the one who receives the favor gets on his knees in front of the king, he makes a number of claps of the hand, he covers his hands in dust by rubbing them on the ground, then he dirties his face and head... While the favored person of the king returns his grace to him, the hands, face, and head smeared with earth, this one [the king] gives his blessing three⁵¹ times by stretching out to him the hand in the

⁴⁸ The Mani Vunda was the person with the most spiritual power in pre-colonial Kongo society. He was believed to have the ability to ensure the fertility of the land, acted as an elector of kings, and was even an emissary, as shown by the voyage of the Mani Vunda to Rome in the early 17th century. It is believed that the position of Mani Vunda described a sort of priest-chief (*kitome*) who ruled small chiefdoms in the area before the Kongo Kingdom was established (Hilton 1985:33; Hastings 2003:30). These chiefdoms were eventually incorporated into the Kongo Kingdom.

⁴⁹ In the ceremony of election and investiture described by Father Cherubino da Savona, who was based in the Kongo Kingdom between 1759-1774, the Mani Vunda led the ceremony while the missionaries blessed the insignia of office (Jadin 1963:405-407).

⁵⁰ Associations of rulers with divinity occurred outside of the Kongo Kingdom as well. Similar behavior could be seen to the north where, when the king of Kakongo (to the immediate north of the Kongo Kingdom) leaves his house, all of the people who are in his path get on their knees (Cuvelier 1953a: 48).

⁵¹ Throughout this dissertation, the number three, whether in grouping of gestures in the Kongo Kingdom or listing primordial ancestors in modern day Bundu dia Kongo, reappears over and over again. The number three clearly has symbolic value for Kongo people. Why did subjects in the Kongo Kingdom clap three times as a sign of gratitude? Why do healers in the DMNA church circle their patients three times? Why are trinities (of God's attributes, ancestors, colors, etc) privileged in so many different facets of Bundu dia Kongo ideology? Although I was unable to delve deeper in this study, for further information on the cultural significance of the number three, see Raphaël Batsíkama ba Mampuya ma Ndáwla (1999) *L'Ancien Royaume du Congo (Ndona Béatrice & Voici les Jagas): Séquences d'histoire populaire*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

manner described above. *It is therefore solely by gestures and acts of humiliation, without uttering words that the people express to the king their recognition.* (da Roma 1964:127-8; my emphasis)

This passage emphasizes the importance of gesture in shaping and signifying social status in the Kongo Kingdom. The author goes on to say that if a noble person grants them a favor, the common people follow the same embodied protocol described above, and receive their blessing in the same manner. The author called this action “benediction” because it was the term that the BisiKongo themselves used to describe it. The above quote demonstrates the importance of gesture in the relationship between a king and his subjects in the former Kongo Kingdom. A similar observation was made by Dapper in describing the Kongo Kingdom: “all of those convened come and throw themselves at the feet of the king, testifying by their lowering of the head, clapping of the hands, and their genuflections the love and recognition that they have for a prince who is so liberal” (1686:352).

Gestures of respect were also accorded to other members of the nobility by the rest of the population in quotidian situations. For example, da Roma notes that,

The lords want their servants and slaves to speak to them always on their knees. If they are of royal blood, not only the servants and slaves but also all other persons, inferior to them, must speak to them on their knees. That which is observed with the lords, is also observed with their wives...they equally want that one speaks to them with the knees on the ground. (da Roma 1964:120)

The same manner of showing deference was expected by Portuguese in Loanda, who had their slaves kneel when speaking to their owners (Churchill 1704:620). By demanding

these embodied cultural performances of respect from their slaves and servants, both the Kongolese nobility and Portuguese essentially confirm and reestablish their own positions as superior to their servants and slaves, while the latter are reminded on a daily basis of their inferior social status in relation to their owners and employers. This shows how social status was continually shaped over and over again through the embodied cultural performances that defined interactions between people.

Others examples of *bimpampa* in everyday interactions outside of the court reveal that *bula makonko* seems to have been an embodied form of greeting. Respect must be shown by anyone who encounters someone of higher rank on the road for example: “Meeting on the road any person of quality, they get on their knees, greet them with a clapping of the hands and continue on their journey. If they are equals, they simply continue on their way” (Cuvelier 1953b:81). Capuchin missionary Luc da Caltanissetta’s observations, however, suggest that *bula makonko* played a role even in greetings between equals in the town of Ngobila in 1698:

In this mbanza, we could also observe how these people greet each other: they touch each other’s right hand, by lightly hitting it, and then having withdrawn the hand, each hits his own hands three times one against the other; finally the person inferior in rank continues to clap his hands in order to ask the blessing of he that is superior, who during this time remains motionless. (Bontinck 1970:130)

There is also evidence that these gestures of respect may also have been gender differentiated in Loango and Kakongo. Wives of the king and princes serve them on their knees (Cuvelier 1953a:51) in KaKongo, and in Loango, Dutch traders noted that,

“women have to kneel and clap their hands before their husbands when they see them”
(Dapper 1686:326).

Gestures of respect were also a part of the ritual of confirmation for positions of leadership and elections. For example, da Roma writes that when the king is confirming someone to a new position, the chosen person kneels in front of the king’s throne, clapping endlessly, and smearing his face and head with dirt. The king makes a speech explaining his choice, and tells the chosen person their duties. The king declares him elected, and the newly elected suddenly gets under the king’s rug. His parents come and lift the rug, and throw a huge quantity of dirt on him. He then comes out from under the rug, continuing to cover his face with dirt and clapping his hands. “After this humiliation, the king gives him a stick as a scepter, leaving him to kiss his hand.” (da Roma 1964:128-9). Drums and all the other instruments present are played and everyone claps and shouts with happiness.⁵²

Similar ritual was followed when the prince of Soyo confirmed someone to a leadership position, as the writings of Father Laurent de Lucques demonstrate:

When the count wants to confer some dignity or function to a person, the drums and other instruments announce it the previous evening...at the habitual hour, they make enter the one who must be elected. He goes next to the prince and begins by doing three genuflections and clapping the hands. At this moment the count says to him: You will be *mani* of such and such village, that is to say, governor of such and such city or territory...After the election of a *mani*, they applaud and thank the prince, by shouts and while playing instruments. During this time this *mani*, kneeling in front of the prince, claps the hands many times, throws himself to the ground, smears himself with dirt and dust and the assistants also

⁵² For further description of the coronation and election of kings, see the account of Raimondo da Dicomano, Academie Royale des Sciences Coloniales, 1957 page 327,330.

throw dirt on his back. Thus well covered he goes again to his knees, clapping the hands many times repeatedly. (Cuvelier 1953b:112-113)

The above descriptions demonstrate that *fukama* (kneeling) was a gesture that signifies submission, humility, and obedience. It clearly marks a spatial hierarchy that corresponds with the social status of the people involved in the exchange of gestures; slaves, servants, non-nobility, and wives kneeling in front of those who have higher rank, social status, and more power than they do.

Moreover, it is clear that once acclimated to the culture of the Kongo court, these gestures of respect were also expected of European visitors in their interactions with the nobility, especially the King. As Thornton shows, conforming to these embodied norms became a point of contention in one case of Marcellino D’Atri, a Capuchin priest living in the Kongo Kingdom in the early eighteenth century, who tried to exclude, on the basis of race, a visiting European layperson (Juan de Rosa) from having to interact with the King in the customary way:

But the priest considered court etiquette degrading not just for priests but for Europeans, and told de Rosa as they entered the royal audience chamber that “in no way should you follow, as is their usual custom, the practice of covering your face and eyes with dust, as you are white and not black, and moreover are in my company.” Then, when the two entered King Pedro’s throne room, he told the king that de Rosa would enter doing the “ceremonies that are customary among the whites of similar ranks”...Pedro would have none of it. “This cannot be,” he fired back, “if he is to remain in my kingdom, he must follow its customs”...a two-day standoff ensued. (Thornton 1998:88)

This passage shows the importance of gestures of respect as cultural performances that publicly enact a social hierarchy. The conflict between the Kongo King and the Europeans, in this instance, also demonstrates how the refusal to participate in the gestures of respect could be seen as a way of contesting the king’s authority. Thus, even

Europeans visiting the King were located in a particular place in the hierarchy and were expected to comply and participate in the cultural performances that defined social interaction in the Kongo Kingdom.

The social significance of gestures of respect such as *bula makonko*, *fukama*, and throwing dust on the face and head outlasted even the decline of the Kingdom and its influence by the nineteenth century. These gestures were also used as a way of asking for an audience with the king⁵³ as demonstrated in 1878 by Baptist missionaries being introduced to the Kongo king in San Salvador by Pedro Finga, the head of their caravan:

Dropping on his knees three times in approaching him, the third time he put his hands together, touched the dust with the tips of the third finger of each hand, and made a little spot of dust therewith on each temple. This was done three times, the king accepting the homage by placing his hands together before him and slightly moving his fingers; then Finga clapped three times, and all present joined in clapping. (Bentley 1900:77)

So, while the slave trade and its demise, internal and external violent conflicts, and European exploration and colonial encroachment had impacted the Kingdom such that by the time of the visit of these missionaries, the King functioned in name only, sitting on a chair “on an old piece of carpet” (Bentley 1900:76), *bimpampa* were one of the primary ways of continuing to perpetuate, enact, and even imagine a still existing kingdom. Thus, while the Kongo King may have lost economic, military, and even political power, the maintenance of ritualized gestures of respect and embodied protocol guiding social interaction continue to demarcate a social hierarchy based in the past of a more glorious kingdom.

⁵³ A reference to handclapping being used to ask for an audience with the king can also be found several centuries earlier in Dapper (1686:332).

Bimpampa and Religious Authority

Bula makonko and *fukama* were gestures of respect that were not only reserved for Kongolesse nobility, but came to be extended to European Christian missionaries who evangelized and lived in the kingdom. In this context, the gestures were used as a way of asking for a blessing or benediction. This is demonstrated by another Capuchin missionary, Andrea de Pavia, who was present during a huge feast and celebration held in Soyo province for Saint James and describes his reception by the people of the area: “As I passed by this great multitude, they all got on their knees, smiling and clapping their hands, in receiving their blessings (Jadin 1970:450). Father Laurent de Lucques describes the mani of Masongo asking for a blessing in this way: “He descended from his hamac[sic] and, on his knees, asked me for a blessing. When he received it, in a sign of thanks, he placed his hands on the ground (according to their custom) rubbed them in dust, rubbed his eyebrows and clapped his hands” (Cuvelier 1953:101). Andrea de Pavia also notes that people ask for his blessing in this way as well. While on their knees “they clap their hands three times, receiving or demanding with this gesture the blessing of the Father, then they salute the prince with the same ceremonial” (Jadin 1970:437). During the celebration of St. James in Soyo, de Pavia also writes about the Prince of Soyo asking for a blessing in a similar manner. “Arriving outside the church, the prince kneels at the feet of the Father, in a sign of humility and obedience, he places then a hand on the ground and carries it to his head. Then, he claps his hands three times and we give him at this moment the benediction” (Jadin 1970:444).

The extension of these gestures of respect, previously reserved for the nobility and sacred *minkisi*, to European Catholic missionaries signaled a social transformation

already underway: the spread of Christianity throughout the Kongo Kingdom. These missionaries, who were usually closely tied to the royal court, occupied a particular social location high in the social hierarchy that defined everyday interactions and social relations in pre-colonial Kongo. As emissaries of the Pope in Rome and the very embodiment of Catholicism in Kongo, these missionaries derived their religious authority and social status both from where they were from and whom they represented (Europe, the Pope, and access to Jesus Christ), as well as who they associated with in the Kongo Kingdom (the Kongo royal court and nobility).

However, as the next case demonstrates, gestures of respect were also extended to other representatives of Christian spiritual authority, unassociated with either Europe or the Pope, and unsanctioned by the Kongo nobility. Kneeling and clapping were gestures of respect exhibited by people upon encountering Dona Beatrice Vita Kimpa or one of her disciples during the Antonian movement to restore the Kongo Kingdom in the early 1700's. Dona Beatrice was a young woman who fell gravely ill and became possessed by the spirit of Saint Anthony, and told others that she had been charged with the mission of restoring the Kongo Kingdom. As people began to follow her and her movement grew, the way in which people interacted with her and her representatives (disciples called little Antonys) changed. Father Laurent de Lucques wrote of one Mwissikongo disciple to whom, "many people gave honors, kneeling before him and kissing his feet." (Cuvelier 1953b:171). He reports the same behavior displayed by people who encountered Dona Beatrice Kimpa Vita herself (Cuvelier 1953b:227). Followers of this major movement to unify and reinvigorate the Kingdom displayed gestures of respect, that were formally reserved for nobility and European priests, to Vita Kimpa and her disciples. Deriving

authority from her recovery from a debilitating sickness, being possessed by a Catholic saint, and having continuous spiritual revelations and dreams, Dona Beatrice's growing power threatened not only the Catholic missionaries stationed in the area, but also the claimants to the throne of King. She was burned alive at the stake as a heretic on July 2, 1706.⁵⁴

War Dances and Military Reviews

Another genre of cultural performances that I shall examine is that of war dances and military reviews. Throughout the Kongo-Angolan culture area during the pre-colonial period and before the introduction of European muskets, similar patterns of engagement in war could be found (usually arrow strikes followed by hand to hand combat) (Thornton 1988:363). Thus, similar ways of using the body in war situations also emerged such that "the most important skill was, above all, the ability to twist, leap, and dodge to avoid arrows or the blows of opponents." (Thornton 1988:363-4). The earliest detailed reference to the embodied practices associated with demonstrating these skills seems to be that of Pero Rodrigues, a Jesuit priest who witnessed the armies of the Kingdom of Ndongo (Angola) and its neighbors during the 1570's. "All their defense consists of *sanguar*, which is to leap from one side to another with a thousand twists and such agility that they can dodge arrows and spears." (Thornton 1988:364; Thornton 1999:105). A similar description was also given by a Portuguese trader Duarte Lopes in reference to soldiers in the southern part of the Kingdom of Kongo in the sixteenth

⁵⁴ Further discussion of Dona Beatrice Vita Kimpa's embodied practices follows later in the chapter.

century. “The common soldiers...first begin the skirmish attack, advancing in scattered groups, and provoke the enemy to fight, leaping quickly round from one side to another to avoid the enemies’ blows.” (Pigafetta 1881:36). The public demonstrations of one’s fighting ability often occurred in a war dance called *sanga*.

Collective *nsanga*,⁵⁵ called *sangamento*, involved dancing out large-scale encounters during ritual contexts such as...the feast day of Saint James—patron saint of the Kongo Kingdom, or prior to war. These large gatherings, which Cavazzi describes as military reviews, allowed rulers to evaluate and reward their troops... While participation was a demonstration of group loyalty to the officiating ruler, individuals also exhibited their dexterity in their own *nsanga* solos against imaginary foes in attempts to outshine their rivals for the praise of the ruler. (Desch-Obi 2002: 359)

Sanga could be performed collectively, but also as an individual performance by a ruler, usually combined with displaying his dexterity with a sword. Dancing the *sanga* could also be seen as essentially an embodied declaration of war. Thornton supports this when he writes:

In African war, dancing was as much a part of military preparation as drill was in Europe. Before 1680, when soldiers fought hand to hand, dancing was a form of training to quicken reflexes and develop parrying skills. Dancing in preparation for war was so common in Kongo that “dancing a war dance” (*sangamento*) was often used as a synonym for “to declare war” in seventeenth century sources. Dancing was less useful in the period after 1680, since hand-to-hand combat was largely replaced by missile tactics with muskets. However, Africans did not use bayonets on their muskets; they needed swords and other hand-to-hand weapons for those times when close fighting was required... Thus dancing may have been important even after guns became the principal weapons to ensure

⁵⁵ In this dissertation, I use the word *sanga* rather than *nsanga* because in the KiKongo-French dictionary compiled by K. Laman, most of the definitions for *nsanga* (new generation, reason, excommunication, cutting of cultivated bananas, pearls, etc) are not related to dance at all; only one definition does (dance like *mayinda*, which is defined as a dance accompanied by a huge drum) (756-757). *Sanga*, on the other hand, is more clearly associated with dance and war; (to mingle; to dance, to jump, to make shouts of war, of combat, to dance the sword dance that only the chief executes...) (874)

that soldiers still honed their skill in hand-to-hand fighting, or it may have survived...as a distinctive element of military life. (Thornton 1991:1112)

The performative power of dancing a war dance is demonstrated by the earliest reference of such a performance that I located specific to the Kongo Kingdom. In 1621, a conflict brewed between the King of Kongo Dom Alvaro III and his brother Dom Afonso. Dom Afonso had killed the mani of the Mpangu province, and in order to declare war on him, the King “executed a war dance” and mobilized many people, declaring that he himself wanted to go search for his brother” (Jadin 1968:363).⁵⁶ The king sent a Portuguese Cordeiro to find Dom Afonso and get him to reconcile and accept the pardon of the king. When Cordeiro reached Dom Afonso’s encampment, “Dom Afonso’s[sic] people and those of Pango didn’t stop one moment from doing war dances.” (Jadin 1968:368). Brief mention of war dances on both sides of the conflict can be found throughout the remainder of the document (Jadin 1968:371-372). In all, war dances were not just exercises to get ready for war, but also actual embodied declarations of war.

Another, even more detailed description of the war dances of the Kongo Kingdom is provided by da Roma. He describes the military reviews of the city as taking place during certain celebrations such as Christmas, Easter, the Pentecost, etc, and as being attended by the king himself, who is dressed in fine clothing, and in his right hand holds an unsheathed sword. (Bontinck 1964:129-130). An elaborate performance of strength, agility, and skill follows:

⁵⁶ Although the original document is unsigned, Louis Jadin thinks it likely to have either been written by André Cordeiro, a Jesuit priest who evangelized in the Kingdom of Kongo during the early 1600’s, or recomposed by Jesuit priest in Loanda, based on Cordeiro’s mission.

In a group, the king in the middle, they [the soldiers] begin to run, the unsheathed sword in the hands, making clamors and shouts as if they are going to sack a village. On the spot, they stop themselves, some on one side, some on the other, and from the two camps some men dash onto the field...they confront each other, handling the sword and the shield, the arrows and the spears with such dexterity and agility, that it is a captivating spectacle. They jump here and there, lower themselves, stand up, making terrifying expressions...When the first ones have shown their valor, they withdraw to their side and there are others...advancing and then successively each demonstrates his bravery in the presence of the king. (Bontinck 1964:130)

After the soldiers have finished, some of the nobles, sword and shield in hand, place themselves in a circle around the king, and turning around him, “they begin to jump around him...when they pass in front of the king, each tries hard to also show themselves valorous...This done, with a jump the king hurls himself amongst the crowd of soldiers, and all together...they begin to run as if giving chase.” (Bontinck 1964:130)

Sanga would continue to exist for centuries, and in 1879, as the Reverend William Holman Bentley aided in the establishment of a Baptist Missionary Society station at San Salvador (Mbanza Kongo), he encountered vestiges of this cultural performance in Kinsende, when an elderly chief came to pay his respects to the Kongo King:

As he came in sight of the king, he stopped; commencing to sing, he drew a long cavalry sword from the sheath, which he held in his left hand. He began to caper and dance about as briskly as his stiff joints would let him. The weapon and its sheath were alternately flourished over his head. Warming up with the excitement, he danced round and over his sword, twisting it in and about...as a ‘ceremonial’ this *Sanga* was the most impressive. (Bentley 1900: 201-2)

After dancing the chief sat on the ground before the king, and performed several gestures of respect, including clapping and putting dust on his face. Then, taking his seat near the king, he had his tribute gifts brought before them (Bentley 1900:201-2). Even in the late

nineteenth century, when the power and authority of the King of Kongo had waned to only a shadow of its former glory, *sanga* was used to show allegiance and pay tribute to the king.

One of the historical transformations that is better illuminated by an examination of embodied practices such as *sanga* is the decentralization of the political authority and economic power of the King of Kongo, and the rise of provincial rulers (*manis*) who threatened the king's authority, during the early to mid seventeenth century. Probably the most important province that rebelled against the power of the king was that of Soyo.⁵⁷

Soyo (Sogno, Sohio) was distinguished from the rest of the kingdom of Kongo by its natural resources, its geographical location and its historical development in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries...The port of Mpinda, a few miles within the Zaire estuary, provided the natural gateway for trade and contacts with the Portuguese, and the capital of Soyo, Mbanza Soyo, was established some three miles in the interior behind Mpinda. By the seventeenth century the ruler of Soyo was asserting a degree of independence which at times culminated in active revolt against the king of Kongo. This subordination was assisted by the existence of the Nfinda Ngula, a large forested wilderness which separated Soyo from Kongo (Thornton, 1979:41), but of even greater importance was the growth of trade with the Dutch. (Gray 1983:39-40)

The province of Soyo traded in goods such as ivory, indigenous cloth, copper, and slaves (Hilton 1985:112-127). With the expansion of trade with the Dutch, the *mani* Soyo and other nobles there were able to procure a valuable commodity that they didn't usually get from the Portuguese; namely, guns (Gray 1983:41; Hilton 1985:119). The possession of firepower no doubt further enabled the rulers of the province to seek independence and autonomy from the Kongo King. In 1641 the *mani* Soyo died and an ambitious patrilineal clan by the name of Silva seized power and declared Soyo independent (Hilton

⁵⁷ Soyo is also spelled Sohio, Sogno, Sonyo, and several other variations in the pre-colonial documents that document the Kingdom of Kongo. I choose to use the spelling of Soyo throughout the dissertation.

1985:127). This independence was maintained over decades as they defeated Kongo armies that tried to crush the rebellion, and later, Portuguese armies as well that invaded Soyo in 1670. The decisive defeat of the Portuguese by the armies of Soyo at Kitombo on October 18, 1670 came to be celebrated in that province as a holiday (Gray 1983:41; Thornton 1977:520; Hilton 1985:127).

Soyo's rise as a political, commercial, and military power was also augmented by a continuous presence of Catholic (Capuchin) missionaries starting in 1645. The openness that the rulers had to receiving missionaries was no doubt based on the legitimacy that the presence of the missionaries gave to the rulers of the newly established polity, since Christianity was the recognized state religion. Thus, there are quite a few descriptive reports written by Capuchin missionaries in Soyo during this period, and many of them reveal an important public ceremonial, *sanga*, that was performed to show allegiance to the Mani Soyo by his lesser rulers and to display the might of the Soyo armies. Moreover, the missionaries took an active role in these cultural performances. A good example of this entire ceremony can be found in the writings of Girolamo Merolla da Sorrento, who was stationed in Soyo in 1682.

Every Governor or Mani on the Feast-Day of St. James is oblig'd [sic] to appear with all his People at the *Banza* of *Sogno*, to assist at the first Mass said there...On the same day every one is to pay Allegiance to the Prince after the following manner. In the great Market-place near our Convent a Throne is erected for the Count, who in the presence of all the People comes to receive the Benediction from the Missioner [sic], who attends for that purpose in the Church-porch: He afterwards exercise two feats of Arms. In the first...he makes use of a Bow and Arrows: in the other...he exercises with the *Fuzee*.⁵⁸ In both these he is at the same time imitated by the People, who herein use the same Gestures and Motions they would

⁵⁸ *Fuzee* is most likely *fuscile* in Italian, meaning rifle.

do in case they were either to attack or defend themselves against their enemy. As soon as the Count has ended his Exercise he goes to sit upon his Throne...After him the Captain-General having receiv'd [sic] the like Benediction with his Master, performs the same thing that he had done before him, and wherein he is also followed by all the People, with divers [sic] ways of Attacking, Retreating, and other Stratagems of War, call'd [sic] by the Nations *Sasch*lari*.⁵⁹ (Churchill 1704: 691-2)

One notable detail in the above description is the performance of *sanga* by the Mani Soyo with a gun rather than a sword, a change that reflects the growing use and importance of firearms in warfare in the Soyo province. Another fact that is also emphasized by other missionary accounts is that these massive public *sanga* took place on the feast day of Saint James, July 25, usually in front of or near the church and with the participation of the missionaries (de Pavia, 448; Caltanissetta 5-6, 171, 174; de Lucques, 51). Saint James was the patron saint of the Kingdom of Kongo, based on the belief that he miraculously appeared in the sky during a battle between Alfonso I and his pagan brother Mpanzu a Kitima, frightening the armies of the latter and leading to Afonso's victory, all of this after the death of their father the king (Churchill 1704: 692). Their father was Joao I, baptized as a Christian in 1491. After winning this decisive battle, Afonso I came to be known as the Christian king, based on his efforts to spread Christianity throughout the kingdom.

The feast day of Saint James came to be celebrated as a type of national holiday throughout the Kingdom of Kongo, and was also the day that all of the provincial rulers would come to Mbanza Kongo to pay tribute to the King. However, by the late seventeenth century, the Mani Soyo had co-opted this feast-day celebration for his own

⁵⁹ Although not all of the letters are visible in this word in the document, it seems phonetically close to *sangare*.

province, using it not only as an occasion for lesser governors and their subjects to show their allegiance and to pay tribute to him rather than to the King of Kongo (with the tribute symbolically shown by armies carrying specimens (fish, etc.) during the military review, (Churchill 1704:692), but also to demonstrate that he had the power of a Christian God behind him, through the blessings that the missionaries gave during the ceremony.

Besides the St. James feast-day, De Lucques also writes that *sanga* in Soyo was used to declare war on rivals and also to demonstrate the might and prowess of Soyo's armies to a visiting French ambassador (Cuvelier 1953a:69, 83). Overall, the performance of *sanga* was a key element in the public display of the power of Soyo and became crucial in signaling its break from the Kingdom of Kongo and its status as an independent state.

Healing

Banganga (singular *nganga*) is a term in KiKongo that is used to describe traditional healers, priests, diviners, ritual specialists, etc. There are many different types of *banganga*, each with different specialties. For example, there is the *nganga mbuki*, who heals with herbs, the *nganga ngombo* who divines, the *nganga Lemba*, who is a priest in the Lemba cult of affliction that was also a trading association, among many others (Janzen 1982:14; Laman 1936:683-684). *Banganga* were mentioned and/or discussed in detail in many pre-colonial accounts of the Kongo Kingdom and its environs. The fact that these traditional priests and healers were the primary competition (in the religious realm) of European missionaries led to many accounts in missionary

writings of their practices and missionary efforts to suppress their activities and influence (Axelson 1970). Some Kongo people became *banganga* through initiation and training, from being associated with an event of extraordinary significance (e.g. mother of twins, etc), or from recovering from an illness or other affliction that then enables one to be able to assist others suffering from the same illness. As initiated specialists with access to the spiritual realm that others didn't have, *banganga* had an authority that derived directly from the supernatural realm, which allowed them to diagnose and cure illnesses, seek out those who used supernatural powers to harm others, and overall to know things that others couldn't or didn't know. *Banganga* often demonstrated, through their gestures and bodies, the contact and connection that they had with the spiritual realm, which gave them authority in earthly matters. This section of the chapter will analyze descriptions of the embodied practices of *banganga* in pre-colonial Kongo, especially trembling⁶⁰ and jumping as a form of blessing (*dumuna*).

In pre-colonial accounts and reports about the Kongo Kingdom, one can often find mention of *banganga*. In "History of the Congo: Description of the Country," dated to the 1580's, the people of the area were described by the author as having "great veneration for their fetishers and priests that they call Ganga[sic], and they obey them in

⁶⁰ In my discussions of trembling in this dissertation, I have not used a Kikongo word to describe it. This is because there are many words that can be used, and I am not yet sure which term is most relevant not only in discussions of the trembling of *banganga*, but also trembling that occurred in the context of the prophetic movements addressed in chapter three, and in the DMNA church in chapter four. While Simbandumwe suggests that for Kimbanguists, for example, *zakama* is the term used to describe shaking, while *tuntuka* is a term for wild shaking that applies more to *banganga* (1992:167), I have not confirmed that distinction, nor have I ruled out use of the term *mayembo* to describe shaking and trembling in different settings. This is an aspect of my research that definitely needs to be further explored and clarified, especially possible distinctions between types of trembling.

everything, as if God himself commands them.” (Cuvelier and Jadin 1954:122). Pieter Van den Broecke, a Flemish merchant who traded in the Kongo and Loango kingdoms between 1607 and 1613 wrote the following about *banganga* and traditional healing practices in Loango:

Their manner of treating the sick is the following: they lead the patient to a public place and they place him in the middle of five or six drums that they make resound. They suspend all types of moquisis [sic] to his body and to his neck...Then one of the fetishers puts a blazing coal in his mouth, chewing some yellow ingredient of which he sprays the patient through spitting on him...During this time, the other fetishers get up strangely, dancing and singing to the sound of the drums. The people and the friends of the sick person imitate them and this last five to six days and as many nights with a great din, yelling and accompaniment of pleas too long to recount. It arrives that the sick person heals. (Jadin 1966:233-234)

More elaborate detail about the healing practices of *banganga* can be found in other accounts. One embodied practices that seems to have particular salience is that of trembling. In his analysis of trends in Kongo religious thought before, during, and after European colonialism, John Janzen associates trembling with the concept of *mpeve* and its relevance for spiritual belief and action:

...*Mpeve* specified the vital principle or attribute of every individual. Its verbal root, *veeva*, meant to blow, to breathe, or implied the breeze responsible for the fluttering of a cloth or flag...But the interior manifestation of *mpeve* in Kongo thought is trembling, ecstatic manifestation accompanied usually by glossalalia and exorbited eyes. (Janzen 1977:107)

Trembling as the sign of possession and contact with the spiritual realm played a crucial role in healing, divination, and initiation. The manifestation of ecstatic trembling was described by Giovanni Antonia Cavazzi,⁶¹ who writes

⁶¹ Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi da Montecuccolo was a Capuchin missionary in west central Africa in the seventeenth century. His book *Istorica Descrizione de Tre Regni Congo, Matamba, et Angola*, was one of

about the bodily practices of an *nganga-ngombo* (or diviner) who both privately and publicly attempts to ascertain the person who is responsible for the death of another:

As for the other method in public, the Ngombo plays his drum and with this sound, all of the villagers come together in some open space, frequently in the forest; this one [Ngombo] enters into the woods surrounded by all in a circle, and without thinking he hums some songs precisely (says he) for this event, and immediately suggested to him by the spirit to find the source of the evil; all the others repeat his words with the same rhythm in their voices, dancing tirelessly until there is the whim of [him] pretending to be agitated and full of ghosts who reveal to him the one whom they are investigating; furiously then he jumps, goes out of and comes back into the circle, makes gestures, and throws ashes in the face of whichever one he chooses, and with pleasure points his finger at the one who is guilty of the death of the other; and because many others point at this guilty one (our enemy [Ngombo] is not satisfied with any limit to the blaming), each one of these wretched ones found guilty is dragged with force by ropes into a secure place and there each is violently forced to drink a beverage prepared by the same Ngombo; those who resist the violence by throwing it up are immediately absolved to be innocent; but those who cannot resist are subject to capital punishment... (Cavazzi 1687: 78)⁶²

The observation that the *nganga ngombo* was visibly “agitated” after much singing and dancing most likely refers to trembling, as it is during this part of the ceremony that the *nganga* receives information from the spiritual realm about the

the richest historical and ethnographic descriptions of the region at the time when it was edited from a manuscript and published posthumously by another capuchin Frere Fortunato Alamandini in 1687. It is now clear that Cavazzi, although he visited briefly, did not have much first hand knowledge of the Kingdom of Kongo (Thornton 1979:253). According to Thornton, he used a number of missionary sources written by others who'd spent much more time in the Kingdom of Kongo. While some of these sources are evident (reports of Giacinto Brugiotti da Vetralla, Juan de Santiago, Antonio de Teruel), others no longer exist or can only be guessed. For example, the section on religious practices that the above quote is drawn from has been ascribed with confidence by historian John Thornton to Girolamo da Montesarchio (1979:259). Moreover, although published in 1687, much of the descriptive material that he used dated from much earlier, “between 1620 and 1670, with a concentration in the 1650's” (Thornton 1979:260).

⁶² The translation of the original Italian of Cavazzi's text was provided by Donna Hart, PhD, of Promotec, Inc., Ann Arbor, MI.

perpetrators who caused the death of the person in question. Although a general term to describe the embodied gestures of the *nganga*, “agitated” also appeared quite often in documents of colonial administrators and missionaries describing the embodied gestures of Kongo prophets during the colonial period (see chapter three). Jumping, another important embodied gesture in Kongo religious thought, also appears in the above description. In a text describing the ceremony of an *nganga* in the Kingdom of Loango seeking to heal an illness, the embodiment of trembling of some sort seems to also have taken place:

The Ganga [sic] collects what falls from the cup, rubs it against the chest, brings it to the nose, and pronounces every time certain words. He paints the eyelids, the face and all the body in red and white figures, representing angles and crosses. He makes violent contortions of the body, raising and lowering the voice from one extreme to the other. The people from time to time mix their cries with his...after these cries and these grimaces have lasted some time, the Ganga [sic] begins to roll the eyes and to enter into a fury. They make him come back to himself, blowing in his face a sour juice that is contained in a species of cane. When he has returned to his good senses, he discovers that which the Boesi-Batta revealed to him during his ecstasy, the remedies that must be applied to the illness, the Gangas [sic] that they must consult, and the moquises [sic] that are the cause of the so called spell of the patient. (Dapper 1686:336-337)

In this passage, even more information is given about the embodied practices of the *nganga*. Painting the body in red and white references a Kongo color symbolism in which white is associated with the land of the dead, black with that of the living, and red with the transitory space at which these two worlds meet (Widding 1979). The movements of the *nganga* are described as “violent contortions” and “grimaces,” as well as a rolling of eyes as he makes contact with the spiritual realm, and in particular, a spirit called Boesi-Batta. It is this spiritual contact that bestows upon the *nganga* the authority

to tell the patient with certainty what should be used to cure the illness and other important information.

Trembling was present not only in instances of divining and healing, but also in situations such as Christian baptisms of *banganga*. Luca da Caltanissetta, a Capuchin missionary, describes the “odd” behavior of an *nganga* that he witnessed when he baptized the man in 1698 in Nsundi province:

The first one that I baptized was a man of about forty years old; I carried out the usual ceremonies of the church, I made to instruct him briefly but at the moment when I was pronouncing the ritual words, giving to him the name of Simon, and poured the water on the head, this man began to shake his head and emit groans “Aie! Aie! Aie!” his eyes grew dark and, in emitting these moans, he left half blind. I asked the assistants what was the cause of this trembling, this pain, this blindness. They told me that it was an *nganga-ngombo*, that is to say priest-soothsayer of the demon; I made this man come back and I asked him if he was really an *nganga-ngombo*; he responded yes and that in the past the demon had entered in his head; at the time of his baptism, at the moment when I poured the water on his head, this demon in running away from him, he had caused this pain in his head, and had left him temporarily blinded.” (Bontinck 1970:106)

Thus, in this instance of baptism, the trembling of the *nganga-ngombo* signifies, rather than the arrival of a spirit, the flight of a spirit from his body, out of his head.

Another important embodied cultural performance in the rituals of both *banganga* and non-*banganga* is that of jumping, especially jumping as a form of blessing (*dumuna*). The ritual use of jumping by people other than *banganga* was explored throughout the account of Father Laurent de Lucques, during his sojourn in Soyo during the early 1700’s. In Soyo, during the month of December, the count, countess, and other principle court members participated in a ceremony to ensure a bountiful harvest of plants that were being sowed at the time, such as millet. They “invoke the demon” as de Lucques

says, and after sharing a ritual meal with the count, the countess, two of the oldest women and two noblemen “begin to shout and to jump in front of the count.” (Cuvelier 1953b:110) Moreover, when a girl is to be married, she must receive a blessing from her father “who embraces her and makes her to sit on the knees and makes her jump a number of fixed times.” (Cuvelier 1953b:137) Jumping also plays a part in ritual following the death of a woman’s husband:

When the husband dies, the wife goes to a crossroads and there a close parent shaves her hair. Then she jumps and sings and does other gestures worthy of a lunatic. Then she returns to her home and makes a nephew to come, with whom a new ceremony takes place: She lies on the ground and makes the nephew jump over her from one side to the other three times. They say that this is done in order to quickly find a new husband. (Cuvelier 1953b:138)

This particular instance of *dumuna* (blessing through jumping) is all the more heightened in terms of its efficacy because of the cosmological significance of crossroads as places where the land of the living and the land of the dead intersect (MacGaffey 1986:116-120).

Father Laurent de Lucques also describes other ritual practices of banganga in Soyo. One is the use of flapping animal skins in healing by *banganga*:

The fetisher...makes the sick person lie on the ground totally naked. He touches him in order to examine him thoroughly. Then he takes the skins of certain animals, with which he touches all of the body and from time to time he starts to shake it and to hit it saying that these skins will draw out the illnesses that he suffers...the fetisher hits and shakes these skins in order to make fall to the floor the sickness that attached itself there. After this treatment and others of this type, the fetisher makes the sick person put on his loincloth and sends him to sleep. (Cuvelier 1953b:131)

This description of flapping animal skins in order to heal people is particularly striking because of its similarity to the flapping towels of healers in modern day DMNA

churches. Janzen connects this movement of the air to the channeling of *mpeve* to heal sick bodies (1977:107).

Furthermore, de Lucques describes the embodied practices of diviners. Sitting on the ground in front of his client, the diviner takes his client's two hands. "He pulls him, rubs him very hard; at the same time he spits, blows, shakes the head, bellows as if he was a demon. He does this three times and again carries out other ceremonies. Then he tells him that which will occur." (Cuvelier 1953b:132) De Lucques also describes the manner in which "demons" were invoked by apprentices who were learning to become *banganga*. After eating and drinking huge meals for several days, they "perform dances accompanied by rapid movements of the head. Then the demon came to them on the back (entered in the body) and talked to them" (Cuvelier 1953b:134). De Lucques also describes a ceremony during which the apprentices learn of their specializations.

The teacher...makes the drums to beat and assembles his disciples...the teacher of devils sits himself in the middle of them, surrounded by his instruments. Everyone seats themselves all around. He begins to invoke the demon, clapping the hands, turning, turning always the head, making a thousand unrestrained movements of the body, such as crazy people could do no worse. He does all of these gestures because, they say, for them the demon comes down who speaks not to the teacher but to those present. (Cuvelier 1953b:135)

Yet another description of embodied practices can be found in the account of Bernardo da Gallo, a priest in the Kongo Kingdom in the early 1700's, who describes Dona Beatrice Kimpa Vita, the leader of the aforementioned Antonian movement to restore the Kongo Kingdom. He describes her actions after she enters the church where he is to talk with her. "She went directly in front of the statue of the Holy Virgin, which was facing the door. She kneeled down and hit her forehead forcefully to the ground

three times, hesitated for a moment, as if to pray, she got up...and made three circles around, with me in the middle” (Jadin 1961:498). Based on her embodied practices, da Gallo assessed her as behaving like a crazy person who was in league with the devil:

I recognize in truth that in seeing this woman and considering that she walked on the points of the toes, without hardly touching the ground with the rest of the feet, considering that she made her flanks and all the body to move, like a grass snake, while she had a stiff neck as if she had lost her spirit and that she had bulging eyes, noting finally that she talked in a frantic manner with delirium, of the sort that I understood little of what she said... I didn't think that there was only shamming. I thought rather that her actions were equally diabolic. (Jadin 1961:499)⁶³

Before becoming possessed by the spirit of Saint Anthony, Dona Beatrice had been trained as an *nganga-marinda* “whose special tasks were to address social problems as much as individual ones” (Thornton 1998:54). She also had been initiated into the *Kimpasi* society (Thornton 1998:56). She was able to directly address both the king and the missionary and verbally chastise the king for not restoring the kingdom and occupying San Salvador. Her ability to do this was founded directly upon the spiritual authority that she received based on her possession (Thornton 1998:110-111), an authority that was clearly seen as a threat by the European missionaries and the king himself.

There is also evidence that European missionaries came to associate the beating of drums with the ritual activities of *banganga*. For example, de Montesarchio writes that

⁶³ In da Gallo's description, he notes that she speaks deliriously in a frantic manner and that he cannot understand what she is saying. Today, some might describe this as “speaking in tongues” or glossalia. The point of this observation is to show that while Pentacostal churches (where glossalia is common) have become more and more popular throughout Africa over the last several decades, this chapter of the dissertation also shows that embodied practices such as glossalia, spirit possession, and healing through spirits existed in the pre-colonial Kongo culture area long before the start of modern Pentacostalism in the early 1900's in the United States.

during his time in Nsundi province between December of 1649 and March of 1650, one night he heard the sound of a drum being beaten. He thought that it was for recreational dancing but the next day found out it was for the visit of an *nganga-ngombo*. He went to investigate and the *nganga* and the other participants fled upon his approach (Cuvelier and Bouveignes 1951:57). Therefore, on another occasion while still residing in Nsundi, when he heard the sound of the *ngoma* in the distance, “It was the index, I was convinced, of the presence of an *nganga ngombo* executing his diabolic craft.” (Cuvelier and Bouveignes 1951:86) He went again to investigate and when he arrived at the site, all was quiet. The people there said that they knew nothing about an *nganga ngombo* and that they were dancing “no more, no less.” He told them not to resume such evil spells, and warned them, a warning that he repeated again in church (Cuvelier and Bouveignes 1951:87). A month later he heard drumming at night once again and took two guys with him to investigate. There, they seized the drum irrespective of the protests and threats that they received. The next day he described the incident to the audience in the church and asked some people to return with him to the village where the confrontation took place. Back at Mbanza-Nsundi, he broke the drum into pieces and suspended it on a post near the big cross erected in front of the church (Cuvelier and Bouveignes 1951:89).

Girolamo Merolla da Sorrento, a Capuchin missionary stationed in Mbanza Soyo in 1682 describes the reactions of the missionaries when they hear drums commonly used at “unlawful feasts and merry-makings.”

When the missioners [sic] hear any of these at night, they immediately run to the place in order to disturb the wicked pastime. It fell often to my lot to interrupt these Hellish Practices, but the people always ran away as soon as ever I came up to them, so that I could never lay hold to any to make an example of them. (Churchill 1704:695)

This example shows, in the eyes of the missionaries, the conflation of drumming with the activity of banganga, thus leading to efforts by the missionaries to suppress such activities in the Kongo Kingdom. However, drumming was also associated with dancing in general, which many of the Catholic missionaries also viewed negatively.

Makinu

In the pre-colonial Kongo Kingdom and its environs, there were a number of embodied cultural performances that played a role in religious and political authority. Besides gestures of respect, war dances, trembling, and jumping, uses of and attitudes toward *makinu* (dances) in secular contexts were also aspects of the configuring and unmaking of political authority, and the struggle for control and the establishment of religious authority, separate from the king. First, however, I shall briefly explore the history of attitudes towards dance and issues of morality in general in Christianity.

Dance and Christianity: The Moral Debates

The moral debates concerning dance have a very long history in Christianity. From opposition to dancing in medieval summas⁶⁴ to the use of liturgical dances in some modern day churches, there has not been a fixed consensus of opinion over time in the Christian church in regards to dance. Many of the arguments that European missionaries and some colonial administrators in the Congo used against dancing have their antecedents in discussions and debates that took place in Europe, especially during the

⁶⁴ Ann Wagner (1997). *Adversaries of Dance*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press; 6. Summas were books popular in Europe during the medieval period that explained sins, punishments, and restitution for followers of the Christian faith.

16th century in the age of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, when the culture of the post-middle ages Renaissance period emphasized dance in court culture and comportment.⁶⁵ There were both Catholic and Protestant sources, such as sermons, courtesy manuals, and anti-dance pamphlets, that were opposed to dancing, as well as several who saw no harm in dance. For those that opposed it, the reasons didn't seem to have anything to do with an essential evaluation of dance as immoral in itself, but rather focused on the conditions in which dances took place. "It [dance] was regarded, at least by some authors, as unlawful if performed too often; at times of penance (or by night, some added); in or near a church or cemetery; by clergymen (and by the faithful with them); with lascivious clothes, touches, and songs; and with immoral purposes" (Arcangeli 1994:130).

The different branches of Christianity were varied in their conceptions of the value or danger of dance.⁶⁶ Within Protestantism, Calvinists prohibited dance while the Lutherans were more tolerant. Similarly, some Catholic churches were more open to dance (e.g. Society of Jesus) while others were more proscriptive.⁶⁷ However, in the debates that occurred about dance, some common themes emerged for both sides, revealing the frame of assessment that many Western Christians had towards dance.

These included seeing dance as an amusement, an expression of joy, a physical exercise,

⁶⁵ Alessandro Arcangeli. 1994. "Dance under Trial: The Moral Debate 1200-1600." *Dance Research Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 2: 127.

⁶⁶ For example, John Calvin's attitude towards dance is clear when he compares dancers to "mad folk" and writes that, "nowadays we see many men seek nothing...in so much as they have none other countenance but in seeking to hop and dance like stray beasts...let us understand that it is not of late beginning, but that the Devil hath reigned at all times" (Wagner 1997:27).

⁶⁷ An example might be churches that adhered to the concept of dance as an invitation to lust, an idea advanced by Catholic priest Juan Vives in 1523 in a manual on proper Christian behavior (Wagner 1997:13).

an occasion for encounters (often with the opposite sex), as a traditional habit or custom, as a pagan rite in worship of the devil, and as associated with madness and/or drunkenness (Arcangeli 1994:138-147). Throughout the pre-colonial and colonial periods, many of the same ideas were applied to Kongo dances when they were being evaluated by European missionaries and colonial administrators.

Overall, the European missionaries living in the Kingdom of Kongo tended to disapprove of many of the secular dances that people partook in, often seeing them as a waste of time and an invitation to licentiousness.

Dances, comprised of all of those under the generic name of Maquina[sic], are practiced by the Blacks with excessive immoderation, consuming entire days and nights; they are tired but not sated by this sort of exultation in which, besides wasting time, they wear out the sanity of their bodies and squander the Christian spirit, if they have even understood it. The formality of these dances consists in a laborious and constant turning of men and women together without refining themselves to assume an air of decency, and not honorably, with the intertwining of obscene songs, the tone of which harmonizes with whomever is the leader of the dance, and is picked up alternatively by the other dancers without them missing one iota of a beat; in this manner, they apply themselves completely to learn [the dances] and everyone considers it a great shame if one should slow down or upset the dance. (Cavazzi 1687:168)

In this passage, one clearly sees the disdain that Cavazzi had for the dances in question, as he generally calls them indecent and associates them with obscenity. Other accounts confirm dances of mixed sex of men and women dancing in a circle around a fire late into the night (Bontinck 1971:123).

The immorality that many missionaries associated with Kongo secular dances is more clearly evident in Cavazzi's judgment of a particular dance:

The Mampombo...is completely impure and diabolical... This dance is so continually performed...I judge it as one of the most scandalous damnations that the Devil has put into these souls; and I am constrained to

leave out a description in order not to mark the page with so much impurity. (Cavazzi 1687:168)

Many of the European missionaries who came to evangelize in the Kongo Kingdom shared his sentiments about secular dances in the area. In particular, a major problem that they seemed to have with the dances was with the mixing of the sexes in dance. In these contexts they saw the potential for immoral behavior.

As such, the suppression of many secular dances, especially those mixed in sex, became one of many ways that European missionaries established their own religious authority in the Kongo Kingdom and its environs. This is demonstrated by the account of Luca da Caltanissetta, a Capuchin missionary who traveled and evangelized throughout the Kongo and Angola between 1690 and 1701. After describing a children's game, an "honest" dance of only men, and another of only women that he saw in Congo, he describes yet another dance that he saw in Luanda:

Another dance, this one dishonest, is called makwanda, it is so obscene that I must believe that it is the devil personally who invented it; this dance is done by men and women together...I happened to see it by accident in passing by. I saw a black male dancing so dishonestly in the middle of a crowd of men and women, I entered with our collector Fr. Giulio d'Orta...in order to take a stick to go and beat this dancer; as I couldn't find the stick, I wanted to hit him with the cord of my habit, but I could give him only two hits because everyone ran. (Bontinck 1970:131-132)

Here, Caltanissetta, in seeing a dance of mixed sex just in passing, takes it upon himself to break up merrymaking with brute force, attacking the black male dancer in the center of the circle. This account reveals the extent to which Catholic missionaries, through seeking to regulate (even through physical force and violence) comportment and what West Central Africans did with their own bodies, reinforced their own authority in

matters of religion and morality. This is remarkable because in times past, the regulation of secular dances was not in the domain of the religious authority of the *banganga*. As such, attitudes toward embodied cultural performances such as secular dances are also part and parcel of the reconfiguration of religious authority in the pre-colonial Kongo Kingdom.

However, not all mixed sex dances were uniformly condemned as immoral by European missionaries in pre-colonial Kongo. In particular, dances associated with the court and nobility were generally left alone. Whether this was because the nature of the dances were so different, or because there were limits to the influence and ability of the missionaries to force the king and the nobility to change their behavior, dances of the courtiers, combined with songs, served the purpose of confirming the king's political authority:

there is a custom of a simple but joyous diversion, a dance that the Congolese call in their language Maquina Masuete[sic] and it sounds the same as the regal dance inasmuch as only the noble persons and the matrons are present, and around the king (that is to say, following him) either in the principal courts with great self-restraint rather than with abandon, and with seriousness they emulate and copy him like the Castilians; and in imitating these, they hold in the left hand some empty gourds⁶⁸ in which there are some stones inside, and they shake these from time to time much like castanets; and similar to the beat of the sound, they regulate the movements of their feet and of their voice, singing honest things which are without offense to the audience who would listen to them if only these actions weren't corrupted by the excessive adulation toward the main character who is in attendance and indulged. (Cavazzi 1687:168)

This passage talks about a royal dance in which the courtiers and nobility dance reservedly around the king, following him and singing his praises. While there is not as

⁶⁸ These small gourds with small stones or seeds inside of them that are used for musical purposes can still be seen the Lower Congo. Called *nsakala*, these can be made into rattles to be shaken, or can even be worn on the wrists of drummers to provide additional sound, amongst other uses.

much detail about the actual movements and gestures that the dance consists of, what is clear is that the purpose of such royal dances is to glorify the king. Like the etiquette and gestures that demonstrated the sovereignty of King Louis XVI in the royal court in France (Merrick 1998:15), both gesture and dance in the pre-colonial Kongo Kingdom effectively performed the kingdom on a daily basis by physically enacting and embodying a social structure in which the Kongo King reigned supreme.

Conclusion

Embodied cultural performances in the pre-colonial Kongo culture area, both inside and outside of ritually marked contexts, served to inculcate the symbolism of a number of important ideologies, including those of a stratified society and belief in two interacting worlds of the living and the dead. Gestures of respect, war dances, trembling, jumping, and secular dances were ways, through the body, of creating, confirming, and undermining political and religious authority in Kongo society throughout a number of major social transformations; from the arrival of European missionaries, to the rise of an independent Soyo province, to the Antonian movement led by Doña Beatrice Vita Kimpa.

Another aspect of the struggles for authority highlighted in this chapter is the role of prohibition and coercion in performance, namely the repression of certain performances and the compulsion to perform others. In the case of the conflict between the King of Kongo and a European layperson that refused to enact *bimpampa*, along with examples of Catholic priests breaking drums, beating dancers, and announcing rules of

comportment, the contests associated with embodied cultural performances show the role of both prohibition and coercion in struggles to maintain or assert authority.

The examples in this chapter have shown that everyday embodied performances had multiple meanings in different contexts during the pre-colonial period. For example, *bula makonko* and *fukama* were gestures of respect, gratitude, and ways of asking for blessings, that were used in front of sacred *minkisi* and divine kings, which were then extended to Catholic missionaries, and finally enacted before Dona Beatrice Vita Kimpa, who was possessed by the spirit of Saint Anthony. A focus on the embodied practices of people living in and near the Kongo Kingdom over time thus reveals the ways in which larger processes had an effect and were often impacted by everyday interactions. By the mid to late eighteenth century, yet another major transformation—a shift in the authority from the King of Kongo to King Leopold of Belgium—was underway. What meanings and uses did gestures and dances take in the context of European colonialism?

Chapter 3
**Threatening Gestures, Immoral Bodies: The Intersection of Church, State, and
Kongo Performance in the Belgian Congo**

Nsinsa wa ngoma wusobele, soba makinu maku.
(When the rhythm of the ngoma changes, change your dance)
—Kongo proverb

Introduction

The above proverb in Kongo culture is often used to remind people that when they find themselves in a different situation or place, they should also change their comportment to match their circumstances. This proverb captures the shifting nature of the uses and meanings of Kongo embodied practices in the context of the many socio-cultural transformations that defined the colonial period. In colonial contexts, embodied practices such as dance were likely to be altered by the dominating power in much the same way that the economy, social and political structures, language, and ways of dress of indigenous populations were subject to change. As Susan Reed notes:

The suppression, prohibition and regulation of indigenous dances under colonial rule is an index of the significance of dance as a site of considerable political and moral anxiety. Colonial administrations often perceived indigenous dance practices as both a political and moral threat to colonial regimes. Local dances were often viewed as excessively erotic, and colonial agents and missionaries encouraged and sometimes enforced the ban or reform of dance practices... (Reed 1998:506)

In addition to dance, this chapter will show that other embodied practices, such as trembling associated with spirit possession, were often seen as a threat as well because of their reference to a different and competing form of authority.

This chapter examines embodied cultural performances of the BisiKongo⁶⁹ as sources for confirming and challenging political and religious authority, and also as sites of moral and political contestation, between the church, colonial state, and the indigenous population in the Lower Congo of the former Belgian colony from 1885 to 1960. This chapter focuses on two types of Kongo cultural performances. The first are Kongo religious performances in the context of independent *ngunza* churches—including practices such as trembling, jumping, and using traditional instruments—that were seen as subversive movements that threatened the running of the colony and the hegemony of the European-led missions. The second type of embodied cultural performances to be analyzed is *makinu*. During the colonial period, Kongo *makinu* secular performances, at occasions such as weekend parties, weddings and other festive events, were seen as “indecent” threats to public morality that exuded sexuality, and thus, were persecuted and prohibited by both Protestant and Catholic missionaries, and were also the subject of fervent debate amongst colonial administrators. However, attitudes towards both of these types of practices and the manner in which they were used for different purposes changed over time and in varying contexts.

Using colonial archival documents, missionary conference proceedings and journal articles, and personal interviews of Kongo people remembering the colonial

⁶⁹ Although I use the term BisiKongo to describe the ethnic group one finds throughout the Lower Congo, speaking various dialects of KiKongo, the reader should be aware of the common occurrence of the term “BaKongo” in colonial documents, which I will not change in translating the material in this chapter.

period and *bangunza* movement, this chapter investigates shifting uses of Kongo cultural performances as ways to establish, confirm, and even challenge political and religious authority during the colonial period. Moreover, this chapter also examines differing interpretations of the moral significances of Kongo performances by both European missionaries and colonial agents, and the Kongo population's varying actions of resistance, accommodation, and even collaboration.

The first half of this chapter seeks to describe the impact of colonialism and European missionary societies in the Lower Congo during the late nineteenth century, the rise of the *kingunza* prophetic movement led by Simon Kimbangu, and shifts in the uses and interpretations of the embodied practices that characterized this movement. The second half of the chapter will examine the interpretations of the meaning and uses of secular *makinu* by colonial agents, missionaries, and Kongo people themselves, and how all of these have changed over time and in different circumstances, particularly in relation to the *ngunza* movements.

In all, in this chapter I hope to show that embodied cultural performances played a crucial role in the making and unmaking of political and religious authority in Belgian Congo, and this was particularly evident when missionaries and colonial agents were placed in positions of having to fight off challenges to their authority. These challenges, in fact, were often mustered through embodied cultural performances on the part of the Kongo people, as shown by the trembling, jumping, singing, dancing, and revelatory visions that characterized the Kongo prophetic movements, which established a powerful, competing religious authority through its prophets. Thus, the desire of European missionaries and colonial agents to maintain their religious and political authority then

necessitated numerous efforts to control the embodied cultural performances of colonial subjects, efforts that often failed.

Part I: Kingunza

Brief History of Christian Missions in the Lower Congo

The history of Christian evangelization on the Lower Congo began with the first wave of missionary activity, which dates back to the baptism of Nzinga-Nkuwu (Joao I), the sovereign of the Kongo Kingdom by Portuguese missionaries in May of 1491.

Contacts were established between the Kongo Kingdom, Portugal, and Rome, and the Kongo received European Catholic missionaries of different nationalities up until the late 1700's.⁷⁰ The BisiKongo were soon to see major transformations in their lives with the arrival of colonialism and the second wave of Christian evangelization, which actually began before the arrival of H.M. Stanley.⁷¹

⁷⁰ For more detailed information about this historical period, see John K. Thornton, "The Development of an African Catholic Church in the Kingdom of Kongo, 1491-1750," *Journal of African History*, Volume 25, No. 2 (1984).

⁷¹ In 1865 the area of Lower Congo was transferred from the Capuchin missionaries of the 17th century to the Fathers of the Holy Spirit, French Catholic missionaries based in Gabon. They established posts at Landana, Boma, and Banana, but were told to leave when the area came under Leopold II's control. In 1878 Protestant missionaries of the L.I.M. (Livingstone Inland Mission) established a station at Mpalabala, near the coast. They continued to establish stations along the caravan route between Matadi and Stanley Pool. In 1881, the B.M.S. (Baptist Missionary Society of England) founded a post at San Salvador (the former capital of the Kongo Kingdom), and then Ndandanga. In the same year the first Swedish missionary of the S.M.F. (Svenska Missions Förbundet, or Swedish Mission Covenant Church) arrived. In 1884, after encountering financial difficulties, the L.I.M. divided its stations between the A.B.F.M.S. (American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society) and the S.M.F. The first Belgian Catholic missions were established in 1888 by the Scheutists, followed by Peres of Gand (1891), Sisters of the Gand Charity (1892), Jesuits (1893), Sisters of Notre Dame of Namur and the Trappistes (1894), Priests of the Sacred Heart (1897), and the Redemptorists (1899). See François Bontinck, "Le Conditionnement Historique de l'Implantation de l'église Catholique au Congo," *Revue de Clergé Africain*, Tome XXIV, 2 (March 1969) :139; Kimpianga Mahaniah, *L'Impact du Christianisme au Manianga* (Kinshasa, DRC: Editions Centre de Vulgarisation Agricole, 1988), 7-20; Hugo Gotink, *Mangembo 1921-1942: Un Regard sur l'Évangélisation Catholique dans le Territoire de Luozi* (Kinshasa, DRC: Editions Centre de Vulgarisation Agricole, 1995), 7-14;

The opening of the Lower Congo to colonial exploitation began with H. M. Stanley's travels there starting in 1877, which led to the establishment of the Congo Independent State as the personal fiefdom of King Leopold II of Belgium from 1885 to 1908 (Congo Independent State), and a colony of the Belgian government from 1908 – 1960. During the years of the Congo Independent State, King Leopold of Belgium, a Catholic himself, fervently lobbied Belgian Catholic missionaries to come to the Congo, and this commitment was first officially recognized in a concordat signed between the Congo Independent State and the Holy See in Rome in 1906.⁷² “They (Catholics) were freely given large concessions of land, while their personnel and goods were often

Name of Missionary Society	Date first Established in Lower Congo	Major Mission Stations	Religious and National Affiliation
Livingstone Inland Mission	1878	Mpalabala	Protestant (-) - Great Britain
Baptist Missionary Society of England (B.M.S.)	1881	San Salvador, Ndandanga, Ngombe-Lutete, Thysville	Protestant (Baptist)- Great Britain
Svenska Missions Förbundet (Swedish Mission Covenant- S.M.F)	1881	Mukimbungu, Kibunzi, Diadia, Nganda, Londe, Kingoyi, Sundi-Lutete, Matadi	Protestant (originally Lutheran; Reformed)- Sweden
American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society (A.B.F.M.S.)	1884	Mbanza Manteke, Nsona Mbata	Protestant (Baptist)- United States
Christian and Missionary Alliance (C.M.A.)	1884	Maduda, Kiobo, Lolo, Vungu	Protestant (Presbyterian? /Non-denominational)- United States
Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (C.I.C.M) or	1888	Boma	Catholic- Belgium

Ngemba Ntime Kavenadiambuko, *La Méthode d'évangélisation des Rédemptoristes Belges au Bas-Congo (1899-1919)* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1999), 33.

⁷²Marvin Markowitz, *Cross and Sword: The Political Role of Christian Missions in the Belgian Congo, 1908-1960* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1973), 7; hereafter cited in text.

Scheutists			
Fathers of Gand	1891		Catholic- Belgium
Sisters of the Gand Charity	1892	Kinkanda, Boma	Catholic- Belgium
Society of Jesus (Jesuits- S.J.)	1893	Kisantu	Catholic- Belgium
Sisters of Notre Dame of Namur	1894		Catholic- France
Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance (O.C.S.O.) or Trappists	1894		Catholic- Belgium
Priests of the Sacred Heart	1897		Catholic- Belgium
Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (C.Ss.R) or Redemptorists	1899	Matadi, Tumba	Catholic- Belgium

Table 2: List of Major European Missions in the Lower Congo during the Colonial Period (1877 – 1899)

transported in the state steamers. So much state favor was shown to the Catholic missions that the Protestants began to feel themselves at a considerable disadvantage...⁷³

However, the relationship between the missions and the colonial authorities wasn't unidirectional; missionaries were also engaging in activities that would aid the colonial government.

The Belgian colonial system operated on the basis of an interdependent triumvirate of missionary, administration, and commercial interests. The missions provided the government with a measure of social and territorial control, and they educated and trained Africans for work on the plantations and in the mines. In return they received subsidies, protection, and land. At their behest, the state would at times introduce laws that the missions felt they needed to further evangelization, for example, a law designed to discourage polygamous marriage by taxing surplus wives. The

⁷³ Ruth Slade Reardon, "Catholics and Protestants in the Congo," in *Christianity in Tropical Africa*, ed. C.G. Baeta, 86-87 (London: Oxford University Press, 1968). The British form of spelling has been changed to the American form in this and following quotations.

collaboration between the missions, especially the Catholic missions, and the administration was mutually satisfactory. (Markowitz 1973:17-18)

For much of the early period of the Congo Independent State, Protestant missionaries had a very good working relationship with colonial authorities as well. This situation perhaps explains why one of the first people to publicly condemn the numerous atrocities that were being committed against the native population in the Congo Independent State (especially as a result of the forced collection of rubber) was not associated with a mission at all. George Washington Williams, an African-American pastor, civil leader, historian, and journalist was the first to do this in 1890, in his public document “An Open Letter to his Serene Majesty Leopold II,”⁷⁴ based on his own travels in the Congo Free State. The first public expression of discontent with the policies and actions of the state by a missionary was by Augouard, a French priest based in French Equatorial Africa in 1894, in a Catholic newspaper printed in Paris.⁷⁵ This was followed by numerous public writings and speeches by Protestant missionaries condemning the atrocities from 1895 to the annexation of the Congo Independent State by Belgium in 1908. The ill treatment of the indigenous population overall was one among several key factors that spurred the emergence of the prophetic movement in the Lower Congo.

Conditions Leading to the Prophetic Movement

In the Kongo cosmological system, there is a belief in the continual influence of the dead, of ancestral spirits, on the world of the living. In numerous historic instances,

⁷⁴ John Hope Franklin, *George Washington Williams: A Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 264-279.

⁷⁵ David Lagergren, *Mission and State in the Congo: A Study of the Relations between Protestant Missions and the Congo Independent State Authorities with special reference to the Equator District, 1885-1903* (Uppsala, Sweden: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1970), 147.

paralleling these ideas, when there were disastrous situations and general social discord in Kongo communities, reconciliation had to be made with the ancestral and spiritual world through religious leaders in order for a sense of balance and harmony to prevail.⁷⁶ According to MuKongo historian Kimpianga Mahaniah, when the BisiKongo faced increasing stress and anxiety while dealing with the colonial situation that disrupted their communities, one end result was the emergence of healing movements led by prophets to address the conflicts (Mahaniah 1975). Like Tshidi ritual practices in South Africa (Comaroff 1985) in which the spiritual healing of individual bodies functioned as an attempt to heal the social body, the prophetic movements of the Lower Congo sought to right a world turned on its ear by European colonialism. What sorts of conditions were the Kongo people dealing with?

The nascent colonial state sought to control the indigenous population, and as a result of many of the brutal policies that were enacted, the Lower Congo suffered a period of depopulation. The devastating conditions that the BisiKongo faced were multifold.

As activities of the state's agents continuously increased in Lower Congo, the way of life of the Kongo came into more frequent conflict with European interests. The state government continuously sent expeditions into the villages to recruit labor for portage, railroad construction, the Force Publique, and for the collection of taxes and food, as well as for punitive expeditions. (Mahaniah 1975:185)

The Congo River wasn't navigable inland after a certain point; thus most goods and supplies were carried on the heads and backs of Congolese porters, as pack animals

⁷⁶Kimpianga Mahaniah, "The Background of Prophetic Movements in the Belgian Congo: A Study of the Congolese Reaction to the Policies and Methods of Belgian Colonization and to the Evangelization of the Lower Congo by Catholic and Protestant Missionaries, from 1877 to 1921," (Ph.D diss., Temple University, 1975),285; hereafter cited in text.

couldn't survive in the area and the railroad had yet to be constructed. In 1889, a decree was released regarding the portage system and later in 1891, another was issued establishing a labor tax system that compelled Africans to work for their colonizers. The reaction of many Kongo to these changing conditions was simply to move away from the caravan routes, and later, the rail road, leading to a depopulation of certain areas of the Lower Congo (Mahaniah 1975:185-190).⁷⁷

Famine was a disastrous plight that people in the Lower Congo frequently experienced between 1872 and 1921, often caused by military expeditions into villages, and further exacerbated by a growing "immigrant non-producing population" (Mahaniah 1975:187). Yet another factor that increased the general stress of the indigenous population was the large number of epidemics that devastated the area. Between 1890 and 1913, sleeping sickness ravished the Lower Congo, causing many deaths and migrations from plateaus to valleys. Spanish influenza was to add to the destruction in 1918, part of a world wide medical crisis that lasted until 1920 (Mahaniah 1975:189; MacGaffey 1986:271). As a result of all of these factors, there are estimates that the population declined by as much as 75 percent between 1885 and 1921 (MacGaffey 1986:271). All of these factors contributed to an enormous sense of crisis for the Kongo, and thus, by 1921, the ground was fertile for some sort of spiritual means of addressing the discord in Kongo society. This would come through what came to be known as the *kingunza* or prophetic movements in the Lower Congo.

⁷⁷ See also Axelson, Sigbert, *Culture Confrontation in the Lower Congo: From the Old Congo Kingdom to the Congo Independent State with special reference to the Swedish Missionaries in the 1880's and 1890's* (Sweden: Gummessons, 1970), 256; hereafter cited in text; MacGaffey, Wyatt, "Ethnography and the Closing of the frontier in Lower Congo, 1885-1921," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 56:3 (1986):266; hereafter cited in text.

Kingunza and the Movement of Simon Kimbangu

In order to comprehend the prophetic movements of the colonial period, one must first understand the difference between *banganga* and *bangunza*. In discussing this difference, Kimpianga Mahaniah writes:

The difference between the priest-healer *nganga* and the prophet-healer *ngunza*, is that the first works for a lucrative goal, while the prophet-healer works for a disinterested goal. The *nganga* employs the *nkisi*, the *ngunza* since 1921 heals only through the holy spirit, *Mpeve ya Nlongo*. (1982:95)

The most influential movement that arose in the Lower Congo during the colonial period condensed around the prophet-healer, or *ngunza*, Simon Kimbangu.

The Prophet Simon Kimbangu

Simon Kimbangu was born in 1889 in the village of Nkamba in the Lower Congo, to a mother named Lwezi, and his father Kuyela. While both of his parents died while he was young, first his mother, and then his father, apparently it was not before Kimbangu witnessed his father working as an *nganga-ngombo*, or diviner.⁷⁸ Kimbangu became a Christian and a member of the Baptist church (of the Baptist Missionary Society) as a young man. He worked as a catechist and a teacher in the mission for a short time. In 1918, during the devastating world wide flu epidemic, he heard a spiritual voice calling him, but refused to answer. He tried to escape the voice by going to Kinshasa, where he worked as a domestic servant and as a worker at a British owned oil refinery. It was there

⁷⁸Kimpianga Mahaniah, "The Presence of Black Americans in the Lower Congo from 1878 to 1921," in *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora, Second Edition*, ed. Joseph Harris, 411 (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1993); hereafter cited in text.

that he was exposed to Garveyist⁷⁹ ideas and readings by Black Americans and other Africans working there. The voice continued to call him, and eventually he returned to his village. On April 6, 1921, while walking through the neighboring village of Ngombe-Kinsuka, he heard the cry of a sick woman and was compelled to go and heal her. He laid his hands on her in the name of Jesus Christ and began to pray, and tremble.

Miraculously, she recovered (Mahaniah 1993: 412).⁸⁰ This monumental event was followed by other healings, and soon people came in droves to Nkamba to be healed by the prophet Simon Kimbangu.⁸¹

One of the most fascinating things about the prophet Simon Kimbangu is that, while praying and healing in the name of Jesus Christ, using the Bible faithfully, and upholding the doctrine and moral rules of the Protestant church, he also incorporated many ritual practices that came from his Kongo cultural background.

The most notable ritual practice is the embodiment of spiritual power through trembling. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, trembling was a practice used by the Kongo king to bless and show favor to members of his court during the pre-colonial era.

⁷⁹ Marcus Garvey was a highly influential yet controversial Jamaican nationalist leader who created a back to Africa movement and advocated Black pride and African independence during the early twentieth century. The influence of Garveyist ideas on the Kimbanguist movement has been explored by several authors, and although interesting, is not the topic of this dissertation. For information on this subject, see Mahaniah, 1993; M.W. Kodi, "The 1921 Pan-African Congress at Brussels: A Background to Belgian Pressures," in *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*, ed. Joseph Harris, 263-288 (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1993); Wyatt MacGaffey, "Kongo and the King of the Americans." *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1968):171-181; Jean-Luc Vellut, "Résistances et espaces de liberté dans l'histoire coloniale du Zaïre: avant la marche à L'Indépendance (ca. 1876-1945), In *Rébellions-Révolutions au Zaïre, 1963-1965 Tome I*, Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, Alain Forest, and Herbert Weiss, eds. Pp. 55-66 (1987); and Efraim Andersson, *Messianic Popular Movements in the Lower Congo* (Uppsala, Sweden: Almqvist & Wiksells Boktryckeri AB, 1958):250-257; here after cited in text.

⁸⁰ See also Marie-Louise Martin, *Kimbangu: An African Prophet and his Church* (Great Britain: Basil Blackwell, 1975),45; hereafter cited in text.

⁸¹ Martin, 46; AA portefeuille 1630/9184. II. Q.3.a.1. 1. Dossier: Documentation Générale sur le Kibanguisme. Document 84. Histoire de l'apparition du prophète Simon Kimbangu, found among the native population; anonymous.

It was also used by *banganga* in the healing of sick patients and for divination purposes, representing the physical possession of the body by spiritual beings and forces.

Kimbangu creatively incorporated this cultural tradition into his worship and healing practices as a professed adherent of the Protestant church. The exhibition of trembling by Kimbangu is most clearly shown in the eyewitness account of Leon Morel, a district administrator who went to Nkamba on May 11, 1921 to witness events for himself and described them in the manner cited below:

Morel's Report and the Significance of Trembling

Morel's five-page report describes the embodied practices of Kimbangu and his adepts. On the road into the town, Morel encountered Kimbangu, who

was shaken by a general trembling of the body, pushed to a fever pitch. Next to him, were two native men and two young girls, all shaken by the same trembling and all making bizarre shouts. They began to uncontrollably execute a crazy saraband around me [erratically whirling]. I tried vainly to speak with them. Understanding that these grotesque contortions and literally madness was obviously for the goal of trying to impress me, I took the part of calmly contemplating these exhibitions, which themselves slowed down after ten minutes, the dancers being visibly exhausted by fatigue.⁸²

After failing to communicate with the group, Morel enters Nkamba to set up his tent. Morel describes the home of the Prophet as being in a barricaded enclosure at the entrance to the village, facing the road, with a huge crowd of people gathered in the enclosure vigorously singing Protestant hymns. Although another area further away from the Prophet's home was suggested by some of the people, Morel stubbornly chose a spot

⁸²(AA portefeuille AIMO 1634/9191B, II.Q.3.c. 12. Dossier: Incidents en Territoire des Cataractes Sud (Thysville); unnumbered document; Rapport d'enquête Administrative sur les faits et incidents de Kamba (chefferie de Zundu); Thysville, 17 May 1921; to the district superintendent of Bas-Congo, Boma from the territorial administrator Morel, page 1).

20 meters from the Prophet's home to have a better view of the activities taking place.

“In the meantime, Kimbangu came closer with his associates and had resumed his contortions around me and my porters who erected the tent” (page 1).

According to Morel, Kimbangu then read in a loud voice the story from the Bible of David and Goliath, and one of the young girls came to show him a picture of Goliath killed by David. Then, some of the people told him that they wait to see fire fall on him from the sky like in the story of Sodom and Gomorra. He called the native chief of the local administrative chefferie of Zundu, who was there, and told him that he didn't come with hostile intentions, and that he didn't want another manifestation taking place that was “uncalled for in my regard.” (page 2) A little after the commotion had calmed down, Kimbangu came to shake his hand:

I notice that his hand is icy, a reaction following the period of nervous shaking. I took advantage of this period of calm to ask Kimbangu the reason for this not very suitable and grotesque manner of receiving me. He responded that: ‘It's God that ordered him to come to meet me in that way and that the bizarre shouts are nothing but his conversation with God. It's God that orders him and his apostles to tremble in this way. (page 2)

Later, when Morel asked to question Kimbangu in private, Kimbangu said that he needed to confer with God first. A catechist soon thereafter told Morel that God had ordered Kimbangu not to talk and that the spirit alone would talk and make the necessary responses.

At this juncture, the singers resumed their tunes stressed by the dances, while the five tremblers resumed their manifestations...I tried to interrogate Kimbangu, but in vain; the séance of epileptic craziness resumed. After a quarter of an hour of trembling the visionary began to read suggestive sentences taken from the Bible...It is certain that Kimbangu is not in possession of all of his faculties but he is not completely without them. The two native men that are his associates are

pretenders, and the two women seem to have a touch of hysteria (pages 2-3).

The above passages demonstrate the conflicting definitions of trembling in this colonial context. For the prophet Simon Kimbangu, while in the past similar actions were defined as symbolic of the political authority of the king or the ability of the *banganga* to communicate with a particular deity or nature spirit, Kimbangu provides a rationale for his embodied actions that is based on orders from God, a Christian God, and the trembling is an embodied manifestation of that spiritual relationship, and more specifically, the holy spirit. This indicates that Kimbangu is establishing his own authority to exhibit behavior that supersedes the wishes and commands of the colonial administrator. That authority is a religious authority, based on the voice of God. Since he is receiving his instructions and spiritual inspiration directly from God, it is God's wishes as relayed by Kimbangu that prevail in shaping this encounter with Morel, who is himself the physical representative of colonial power.

On the other hand, Leon Morel seems to be threatened by the trembling overall, describing it as crazy, uncontrolled, inappropriate, epileptic, and even hysterical. Trembling, then, was an embodied cultural performance that physically helped to establish the religious authority of Kimbangu and other Kongo prophets, an authority that they were not supposed to exercise as colonial subjects. Thus, Morel's derogatory attitude in regards to trembling would color the way in which colonial authorities overall would come to view and then suppress trembling in the Lower Congo.

Other European accounts of Kimbangu's practices and those of *ngunza* movements in general were similar to that described by Morel. For example, one person

described *bangunza* as “somewhat violent...He tossed his head, rolled his eyes, and jumped into the air, while his body often twitched all over” (Andersson 1958:58). In reporting to the procurer general in Boma the results of his investigation of the prophetic movement in August of 1921, Cornet reported witnessing “ at Matadi, especially in interrogating the blacks, all the trembling N’Gunza.”⁸³ Moreover, L. Cartiaux, in an encounter in June of 1921 with several leaders of the *ngunza* movement in the village of Mayombe in Luozi territory, recounted, “I ordered all my soldiers to tightly tie up the three n’Gunza...all three were making movements with the arms, the head, the body, the eyes rolling up to the sky....”⁸⁴ Missionaries at Kibunzi, in another part of Lower Congo, witnessed a man possessed by the spirit whose body shook continuously for three days, and saw other people who trembled, leapt, or danced when in a condition of ecstasy (Andersson 1958:58).

Not only did trembling come to be seen as a primary way of identifying troublesome *bangunza* for colonial authorities, but for BisiKongo people themselves, trembling was seen by some as a calling to become *bangunza*. In a set of interviews on August 19, 1921 in the administrative region of southern Cataracts in the Lower Congo, the following exchange took place between Cartiaux, the territorial administrator, and several suspected *bangunza* from the chefferie of Kinkenge:

⁸³ AA portefeuille AIMO1630/9183, II-Q-3-a-2. 4. Dossier: Enquete du Parquet et Rapport du Substitut N. Cornet. Document 1 (no. 139/966D), page 6.

⁸⁴ AA portefeuille AIMO 1634/9191B, II.Q.3.c. 12. Dossier: Incidents en Territoire des Cataractes Sud (Thysville) ; Unnumbered Document. Rapport sur mon voyage d’enquête vers Yanga du 13 au 16 juin 1921. Luozi, 17 June 1921. Letter to the district superintendent in Boma from L. Cartiaux, the territorial administrator, page 5.

D:⁸⁵ How many days have you been *ngunza*?

R: For only a day. Today I am cured.

D: How did you become *ngunza*?

R: I don't know anything, one morning I was trembling.

D: You haven't tried to heal people?

R: No, I trembled one day only.

He sent this first interviewee, a woman by the name of Sombe, back home, and told her to be wise. Then, he questioned a man named Mahambu:

D: Since when have you been *ngunza*?

R: For a day; I had a headache; I trembled several hours only. I did nothing but pray.

After his story was confirmed by the native head of the village, Mahumbu was sent back home with a warning. Then, Cartiaux interrogated another man by the name of Bombe Maloba.

D: How many days have you been *ngunza*?

R: I think that I had a fever, I trembled during a day; the people of Pembo took me by the hand [and] I was healed. Today I am healed, I haven't done anything.⁸⁶

The sentinels of the chief of Pembo said they hadn't seen the three *bangunza* in question trying to heal people. Thus, none of them were prosecuted for being *ngunza*.

⁸⁵ In the exchanges that follow, D stands for Cartiaux, while R stands for each respondent who is being interrogated.

⁸⁶ AA portefeuille AIMO 1633/9190, II.Q.3.c. 1. Dossier: Incidents en Territoire de Luozi (Manianga) et Cataractes Nord; L. Cartiaux, interviews sent to the district commissioner in Boma.

What is noteworthy is that they were arrested and accused of being *bangunza* precisely because they had trembled. However, according to these respondents, the trembling was not self-induced or even sought after, but was brought on by experiences of sickness.⁸⁷ This clearly relates to chapter two's discussion of cults of affliction and incidents that were seen as signs that people should be initiated as prophets or healers—whether *banganga* or prophets possessed by the spirit of Saint Anthony, such as Dona Beatrice Vita Kimpa. During the prophetic movements of the colonial period, falling sick and trembling could be taken as a sign from the spiritual world that you should become an *ngunza*, a prophet, and go and heal others.

In yet another earlier document addressed to the district commissioner, Cartiaux provided a short list summarizing the statements of six *bangunza* that had been arrested in the chefferies of Kibunzi and Bamba:

- 1) Inspired by the holy spirit in vision[s] and daydreams or dreams
- 2) Having wanted to heal sick people through prayers, songs, and the laying of hands on the head of people
- 3) Not having said nor did evil
- 4) Having trembled like the *ngunza* do⁸⁸

Although he doesn't specifically say what the list is for, it seems clear that this list of characteristics collected from the *bangunza* who were questioned most likely entails the experiences and qualities that lead one to become an *ngunza*. Again, trembling is an

⁸⁷ AA portefeuille AIMO 1633/9190, II.Q.3.c. 1. Dossier: Incidents en Territoire de Luozi (Manianga) et Cataractes Nord; L. Cartiaux, interviews sent to the district commissioner in Boma.

⁸⁸ AA portefeuille AIMO 1633/9190, II.Q.3.c. 1. Dossier: Incidents en Territoire de Luozi (Manianga) et Cataractes Nord; Bamba, July 30, 1921. Document Number 226.R, page 1)

important element of this list. Moreover, visions and dreams are also seen as important as evidence of having contact with the spiritual world.

Music and dancing also played an important role in the Kimbanguist movement in healing and evoking the spirit, which would possess one's body and lead to a condition of ecstasy.

Kimbangu had already said that the hymns must be sung loudly and enthusiastically, for then he would be given the power of healing. The louder the song, the stronger became the spirit. The prophets therefore tried to get men with good voices to be their assistants most of whom also experienced ecstasy, so that the singing was accompanied by dancing movements. Loud instrumental music was used in addition to the singing and dancing in order to produce the desired condition. (Andersson 1958:58)

All of these elements were mentioned in a letter to the procurer general in Boma from the vice-governor general in July of 1921: "The visionary and his disciples read the bible, sang protestant hymns, danced, and engaged in grotesque contortions."⁸⁹

Although dancing within the context of worship was allowed, dancing in secular contexts (outside of the church) was prohibited by Kimbangu, along with polygamy, the use of fetishes, and the drinking of alcoholic beverages, among other things.⁹⁰ Indeed, Kimbangu adopted many of the rules that already existed in the Protestant churches at the time.

Although Kimbangu was the impetus for the movement, many other prophets came to the forefront, both associated and unassociated with Kimbangu. The movements overall can be called *kingunza*, or prophetism, and the terms Kimbanguism and

⁸⁹ AA portefeuille AIMO 1630/9183, II-Q-3-a-2. 4. Enquete du Parquet et Rapport du Substitut Cornet. Document 1 (no. 4744). Boma, 12 July 1921. Objet: incidents dans les cataractes, pages 1-2. Unsigned.

⁹⁰ Asch, Susan, *L'église du prophète Simon Kimbangu : de ses origines à son rôle actuel au Zaïre, 1921-1981* (Paris : Editions Karthala, 1983), 112; 140 ; here after cited in text ; Martin, 132.

Ngunzism were often used interchangeably, and later variations such as Salutism (Salvation Army), Mpadism, and Dieudonne arose from the mid 1930's up until independence in 1960. Many of the same practices described above prevailed in all of these groups and movements, and some still exist today in churches of *bangunza*, such as the DMNA church that is the subject of chapter four.

Reactions of the Colonial Administration and Missionaries

At first, the Belgian administration regarded the movement of Kimbangu as a purely religious matter, and until the end of May in 1921, they saw it as an affair of churches and priests in which they had no reason to intervene. However, as more and more people left to visit Nkamba and witness the miracles of the Prophet Kimbangu, businesses began to be affected, as workers were absent.⁹¹ Thus, the business owners began to pressure the administration for action. Morel's report that he filed on May 17 is worth quoting at length to demonstrate his ideas about Kimbangu and his practices:

I learned after from the mouths of the Protestant missionaries of Gombe-Matadi, that these expressions...are the exact reproduction of the manner of behaving of native witch-doctors of the past... I have noticed that the current that reigns at Kamba [sic] isn't sympathetic to us: the natives know very well that we can never approve of these grotesque and insane manifestations that accompany the religion of Kimbangu...the goal of the latter is to create a religion that corresponds with the mentality of the natives, a religion that contains the elements of Protestantism, which adds to itself external practices bordering on fetishism...Everyone can readily see that our religions of Europe are all filled with abstractions, not responding to the mentality of the African, who longs for concrete facts and protection. The teachings of Kimbangu please the natives because they are allegedly accompanied by palpable facts: healings, protection

⁹¹ AA portefeuille 1630/9183; II.Q.3.a.2. 1. Dossier Kibangu Simon. Document 33; Letter to General Governor from Vice-Governor General, Subject: Kimbangu Movement; Leopoldville, 14 October 1921, page 2. Jules Chômé, *La Passion de Simon Kimbangu* (Les amis de la Présence Africaine: Brussels, 1959), 27; here after cited in text; Asch, 23.

against sickness...It is therefore necessary to oppose Kimbangu because the tendency of his movement is pan-African...The natives will say that they've found the God of the blacks... (AA portefeuille AIMO 1634/9191B, unnumbered document, 2-4)

Thus, we can see that the practices of Kimbangu (trembling, jumping, etc.) that Morel witnessed at Nkamba and saw as “fetishist” are what led him to distinguish the movement as different from Protestantism, and conclude that its goal of founding an African religion was in fact pan-Africanist and thus a threat to the colonial regime. Indeed, Morel assessed the movement of Kimbangu, enacted through its practices and representing an indigenous Kongo understanding of an alternative religious authority, as a direct challenge to the hegemony of European religious and political authority. This hostility that Morel showed in regards to Kongo traditional culture was repeated by the majority of both Protestant and Catholic missionaries, although not all. In the constant competition between various missionary societies for Congolese converts, Kimbangu's movement provided an advantage for the Protestants in comparison to the Catholics. For example, one Protestant missionary wrote,

Our village chapels filled whilst the Catholic chapels emptied. From everywhere requests came for teachers and school materials; in three months we sold about five hundred hymnbooks...So it seems to me that this is the most remarkable movement which the country has ever seen. The prophets only seem to have one goal—the proclamation of the Gospel. (Martin 1975:51)

However, there were many more missionaries who weren't as pleased with the movement, and who doubted Kimbangu's abilities. Jennings, the district head of the Baptist mission under which Nkamba fell, wrote to other missions that he and a colleague went to Nkamba and were “unable to observe a single miracle...keep your folks away from there!” (Martin 1975:51). In regards to the practices of the movement, many

Protestant missionaries saw them as a revival of traditional African religion. Palmaer, a Swedish medical missionary said Kimbangu's practices resembled those of "heathen banganga" (Andersson 1958:58). Similarly, Protestant missionaries in Ngombe-Lutete convinced the administrator Morel that Kimbangu's practices were an exact replication of that of "witch-doctors" (Martin 1975:56). John Geil, a missionary with the A.B.F.M.S. in Mbanza Manteke, wrote in a letter to headquarters dated June 20, 1921 that,

Like all mission work on the Lower Congo our work has been affected by the prophet movement. A prophet has arisen here who claims power from God to heal the sick and restore the dead to life...Others say that the 'movement' is a repetition of the witch doctor who was possessed with so much power. (Mahaniah 1975:249)

In a letter to the governor general in July of 1921, James H. Starte, the legal representative of the Baptist Missionary Society, reassured the colonial government that "our missionaries at Wathen, Thysville, and Kibentele have publicly and privately discouraged 'Les affaires des Prophets'" (the prophet affairs).⁹²

These reactions of different Protestant missionaries in the Lower Congo make sense because of the threat that the *bangunza* movement posed to the religious authority of the missionaries. If the Kongo people can receive visions and the holy spirit in their bodies, and hear the voice of God themselves, what need do they have for European missionaries to interpret for them? By focusing on condemning embodied practices such as trembling as pagan and evil mannerisms, these missionaries sought to discredit any associations that the prophet movement had with Christianity and a Christian God.

⁹² AA portefeuille 1630/9183; II.Q.3.a.2. 7 ; Dossier Attitude des Missionnaires Etrangers; Document 44.

The Catholic missionaries seem to have been more unified in their displeasure with the movement. For example, Morel received letters from the Tumba Catholic mission demanding that the “agitation of the prophets” be put to an end.⁹³ They were most likely letters from Van Cleemput, the vice-provincial of the Redemptorists, and the superior father at the Tumba Mission, who in a commentary on the movement wrote, “the immediate goal, if one can say: that of founding a religion of a prophet, a Negro religion, must lead to a goal...to get rid of the whites, to expel them, to become independent, in a word ‘Africa to the blacks.’”⁹⁴ In the August 1921 issue of *La Voix du Rédempteur*, the journal of the Catholic Redemptorist Fathers, Monsignor Van Rosle threatened excommunication of all Christians who affiliated themselves with the church of Simon Kimbangu. In the same issue, other missionaries noted that the movement was a political problem, as “these individuals could provoke an insurrection” (Chomé 1959:22-24). In all of these examples, the connection is made between the growing religious authority of the *bangunza* movement, and what that meant for possibly ending European religious and political authority in the Belgian colony.

Taking Action: Collaboration and Discord

As both the majority of the missionaries and the colonials saw the *kingunza* movement as a threat to European religious hegemony, business interests, and colonial authority, collaboration developed among them. On June 1, 1921, Morel, the

⁹³ AA portefeuille AIMO 1630/9184. II. Q.3.a.1. 1. Dossier: Documentation Generale sur le Kibanguisme. Document 84. Leopoldville, le 22 septembre 1921. Letter to the Vice Governor General from L. Morel, Territorial Administrator. Page 6.

⁹⁴ AA portefeuille AIMO 1630/9183, II.Q.3.a.2. 8. Dossier: Articles des journaux. Document 64 (No. 3863) Leopoldville, 14 (July or August) 1921. Objet: Mouvement Kimbangu. Included in a letter from Dupuis, the commissaire de district adjoint, to the governor general.

administrator of the territory, arranged a meeting with heads of both the Protestant and Catholic churches in the area. According to Morel, during this meeting, Father Van Cleemput, representing the Catholic missions “energetically demanded, and I support his view, that there must be an immediate end everywhere to the unrest of prophets,” while on the contrary Reverend Jennings, representing the Protestants, opted for a more “prudent” solution.⁹⁵ In the end, the Belgian administrators went along with the plan of the Catholics since “they were afraid that Kimbanguism could turn into a political movement” (Martin 1975:58). The district commissioner ordered Kimbangu arrested, and on June 6, Morel returned to Nkamba with soldiers to do just that. However, Kimbangu escaped and was hidden by his adepts for several months.

During this time, railroad company officials and other European businessmen were threatened by worker strikes and thus insisted that the government show the native populations that it was “their master,”⁹⁶ while the movement continued to spread all throughout the Lower Congo. The sub-district of Zundu, where Nkamba was located, was placed under military occupation on June 14, and on June 20, Morel ordered that all native people owning guns turn them in to the local administration, prohibited “the usage of gongs, drums, or other means of communicating by signals of all kinds,” outlawed all gatherings, and restricted people’s movement.⁹⁷ On September 12, 1921, Simon

⁹⁵ (AA portefeuille AIMO 1630/9184, Document 84A, 6).

⁹⁶ AA portefeuille AIMO 1634/9191B, II.Q.3.c. 12. Dossier : Incidents en Territoire des Cataracts Sud (Thysville). Documents # 17 and unnumbered following; Thysville, 2 July 1921. Letter from Guasco to Geerts, Ingenieur Director, and 5 July 1921, Letter from Geerts to the governor-general of Boma.

⁹⁷ AA portefeuille AIMO 1634/9191B, II.Q.3.c. 12. Dossier : Incidents en Territoire des Cataracts Sud (Thysville). Unnumbered document. Kamba, 20 June 1921. Decision. L. Morel, Territorial Administrator.

Kimbangu willingly gave himself up to the administration, and was arrested, along with a number of his disciples.

Trembling and the Trial of Simon Kimbangu

During the trial, Kimbangu's embodied practices during a manifestation of possession brought into stark relief the anxiety and fear that such practices provoked for the colonial administration. Mandombe, a young female disciple of Kimbangu, was being questioned, when suddenly, Kimbangu went into a trance and began to tremble. M. de Rossi, the presiding judge over the case, threatened Kimbangu with a whipping and then when he didn't stop, called a recess. The doctor called to the scene to examine Kimbangu prescribed a cold shower and "12 blows of the whip." (Chomé 1959:63).

The day before Kimbangu was sentenced, it was noted in the newspaper *L'Avenir Colonial Belge*, that a meeting had been held between the territorial administrator Morel, Reverend Jennings of the B.M.S and Father Van Cleemput of the Redemptorists, from which nothing definitive emerged. This meeting was followed by another with only Morel and Van Cleemput, whose spokesperson told the paper that "the menace and influence of Kimbangu and his adepts are harmful for all of the country" and that Morel and Van Cleemput "estimate that an immediate and severe intervention is essential" (Chomé 1959:33). At the sentencing of October 3, 1921, Kimbangu was accused of a sedition and hostility towards the white population, along with other crimes. The actual text of the sentencing reveals some very compelling fears of the colonial administration:

Whereas Kibangu [sic] was recognized by the doctors as sound of body and spirit and by consequence responsible for all his acts, that his fits of nerves are nothing but shamming, that it might be that some cases of nervous sickness were healed by suggestion but that the accused profited

by deceiving the good faith of the masses destined to serve as an unconscious instrument to his ends, that the goal pursued was that of *destroying the authority of the state*. Whereas it remain established that by his acts, remarks, schemes, writings, songs, and his history dictated by himself, Simon Kibangu [sic] has set himself up as a redeemptor and savior of the black race in indicating the white [race] as the enemy...the sect of prophets must be considered organized in order to bear attacks on the security of the state, [a] *sect hidden under the veil of a new religion*...it is true that the hostility against the established powers was manifested up until the present by seditious songs, insults, outrages, and some isolated rebellions, yet it is true that the march of events could have fatally led to a big revolt.⁹⁸ (emphasis mine)

This selection from the sentencing text reveals that, by the conclusion of the trial, the colonial administration saw the prophetic movement as more of a political rather than a religious threat. In the words of the presiding judge, Kimbangu's movement, a "sect hidden under the veil of a new religion" sought to destroy "the authority of the state." In this regard, Kimbangu's religious movement and sudden status as a prophet imbued him with a particular religious authority that the colonial administration found menacing to their own political authority, and in fact construed as a political movement. Moreover, Kimbangu's bodily practices of trembling, unknown in the Belgian cultural context but understood in that of Kongo traditional religion, were seen as fake by the colonials and were stopped with force as demonstrated in the account of the trial. After Kimbangu was sentenced to 120 strokes of the whip and then death, several Baptist missionaries (including Ross Phillips of the B.M.S and Joseph Clark of the A.B.F.M.S),⁹⁹ as well as

⁹⁸ AA, portefeuille 1630/9183, II.Q.3.a.2. 1. Dossier Kibangu Simon; Unnumbered document; Jugement. Conseil de guerre de Thysville, 3 Octobre 1921, pronounced by Judge De Rossi, page 2.

⁹⁹ AA portefeuille 1630/9183, II.Q.3.a.2. 7. Dossier Attitude des Missionnaires Etrangers; Document 24. 5 October 1921, Letter to governor general.

the substitute public prosecutor¹⁰⁰ appealed to the governor-general in Boma, and King Albert in Belgium (Martin 1975:62), to change the sentence. On November 15, 1921, King Albert changed the sentence to life imprisonment.¹⁰¹

The Continued Persecution of the Prophetic Movements

After Kimbangu's imprisonment, the movement continued without him as other prophets continued to appear, and tragically, continued to be prosecuted. Membership dropped in both Catholic and Protestant missions, as many of Kimbangu's followers felt betrayed by these churches, and sought more independence. In the interrogation of a woman in Kunda-Tumba accused of participating in an *ngunza* meeting, the following exchange took place:

D: Since the missionaries are the agents of the God to whom you pray, why are you fleeing them?

R: We are not fleeing, we pray to the same God since there is only one. There was some time, when the affairs of *gunza* [sic] occurred, all of us, children of God, we went to visit them because they said that they teach the things of God. The missionaries and the state said that these *kunza* [sic] were crazy. They sent them to Upper Congo and now it's finished.

D: And it is for that that you flee the missionaries?

R: Listen white man. If your child has grown big, must you always serve him food? Can't he get it himself?...Now the missionaries want that we return to them to sing and pray...we don't want to go anymore, but we want to pray and sing [to] God without their intervention.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ AA portefeuille 1630/9183, II.Q.3.a.2. 1. Dossier Kibangu Simon ; Document 32; Affaire Kimbangu, 12 October 1921. Letter to Governor General in Boma from the substitute public prosecutor, V. van den Broeck.

¹⁰¹ AA, portefeuille 1630/9183, II.Q.3.a.2. 1. Dossier Kibangu Simon; Document 42; by Albert, King of the Belgians, Article 1, Bruxelles, 15 November 1921.

¹⁰² (AA portefeuille 1630/9184. II. Q.3.a.1. 1. Dossier: Documentation Generale sur le Kibanguisme. Unnumbered document. January 11, 1924. Procès-verbal no 1 (affaire Kunda-Tumba). Page 4-5. Identities withheld for reasons for privacy.)

This exchange reveals a burgeoning desire for independence in Christian worship, away from the guidance and eyes of European missionaries, who clearly saw the threat that the prophetic movements posed to their religious domination and hegemony. In this regard, the meetings and groups that were formed by Kongo people seeking to take control of their own Christian worship, defining it on their own terms, reflected a growing adherence to a religious authority that came not from European missionaries, but rather from a number of Kongo prophets who were inspired by God through visions, dreams, and possession. Seeing the disastrous effect of such mindsets on the declining memberships of their mission churches, at a missionary conference of Protestant churches in November 1921, missionaries decided to ask:

the native congregations to abstain from participation in a movement harmful to the progress of Christianity and the normal development of the native population...we believe that the authorities had to take severe and immediate measures to check the Prophet Movement which rapidly became favorable soil for propaganda hostile to all white men, endangering civilization itself. (Martin 1975:67)

A report released in 1924 by a Catholic priest, Father Dufonteny, claiming that the movement sought to unseat the white administration and was all inspired by Protestant missions, led to an investigation¹⁰³ and even more severe repression of the movement by the colonial administration. The Belgian colonial government forbade any involvement with the movement on February 6, 1925, all Kimbanguist institutions were closed, and all religious meetings outside of those directed by missionaries “of the white

¹⁰³ AA portefeuille 1630/9193, II.Q.3.a.2. 5. Dossier Relations avec le R.P. Dufonteny.

race” were prohibited.¹⁰⁴ The governor asked the Catholic and Protestant missions to help suppress the movement in a circular of the same year (Martin 1975:81).

The persecution of the prophet movements continued until independence. For example, in 1944 in Manianga¹⁰⁵ territory in Mbanza Mona sector, a sergeant in the Force Publique was imprisoned by the local chief for organizing a “kibanguist” [sic] cell.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, in Mayumbe territory, the annual report noted “a regain of prophetic activity...in the ‘Eastern’ region of the territory near the frontier of A.E.F...Two catechists...(had) the view of carrying out proselytizing in favor of the Mission of the Blacks. This movement was quickly put down.”¹⁰⁷ In Manianga territory in the same year a “cell” of ngunzists was discovered in Mbanza Ngoyo sector and its leader was imprisoned in Luozi. The annual report notes that, “This territory was repeatedly the theater of violent prophetic surges of a more or less subversive character.”¹⁰⁸ In 1950, a “cell” of the Salvation Army was discovered and 65 people imprisoned in Luozi territory.¹⁰⁹ The language that was used to describe these groups of *bangunza*, calling them cells, even implies a sense of political terrorism, as they were seen as such a threat to Belgian political authority and order. People arrested by the colonial administration were often deported to penal labor camps in other parts of the colony to serve long sentences. Kimbangu himself died in one of these camps in Katanga province, on

¹⁰⁴ AA portefeuille 1630/9183, Dossier Enquete et Rapport Procureur du Roi, Voisin; Unnumbered Document; 6 February 1925, Kibangisme, Mesures a prendre pour enrayer le mouvement; Letter to the District Commissioner from the Governor, F.Olsen, Province du Congo-Kasai, page 2.

¹⁰⁵ Manianga territory is known today as Luozi territory.

¹⁰⁶ National Archives, Kinshasa, DRC. AIMO. *Territoire de Manianga. Rapport Annuel, 1944.*

¹⁰⁷ AIMO. *Territoire de Mayumbe. Rapport Annuel, 1947.*

¹⁰⁸ AIMO. *Territoire de Manianga. Rapport Annuel, 1947.*

¹⁰⁹ AIMO. *Territory of Luozi. Rapport Annuel, 1950.*

October 12, 1951. Martin, who likens these places to colonial concentration camps, estimates that approximately 100,000 people were sent into exile, when heads of family and their family members who accompanied them are counted together (Martin 1975:69).

In the suppression of the prophetic movements, the reactions of Kongo people varied from person to person, like the reactions of European missionaries and colonial agents. Although the vast majority of Kongo people seemed to least sympathize with the movement, if not outright participating, there were people on both sides of the conflict. For example, looking at colonial native chiefs, some assisted in suppressing the prophetic movements. A 1955 annual report gives credit to the prudence and vigilance of “notables” in avoiding many prophetic manifestations in the area that year.¹¹⁰ Similarly, the authors of the 1957 report for Luozi territory seemed content to announce that “the attitude of all of the chiefs vis-à-vis the subversive movements was firm. The chief Makuala David of Kinkenge sector was particularly distinguished in this domain.”¹¹¹ On the other hand, some refused to participate in the movements’ suppression. Vuti, the chief of the sub-district of Zundu, was removed from his position on August 8, 1921 because he’d “observed an absolutely passive attitude, not cooperating in any of the efforts of the authorities taken to seize...the said Kimbangu.”¹¹² In short, BisiKongo reactions to the prophetic movements were varied, sometimes collaborating with the colonial administration and antagonistic missionaries, sometimes passively resisting, and at other times openly defying them, often resulting in arrest and imprisonment.

¹¹⁰ AIMO. *Territoire de Luozi. Rapport Annuel, 1955.*

¹¹¹ AIMO. *Territoire de Luozi. Rapport Annuel, 1957.*

¹¹² AA portefeuille AIMO 1634/9191B, II.Q.3.c. 12. Dossier : Incidents en Territoire des Cataracts Sud (Thysville); unnumbered document ; District du Bas-Congo: Decision. Thysville, le 8 aout 1921, Dupuis, assistant district superintendant.

The Prophetic Movement and Nsikumusu

During the explosion of prophetic movements in the Lower Congo, both Catholic and Protestant missions lost many members of their churches who were disappointed in what they saw as the collaboration of the European-led missions with the colonial administration in the persecution of the prophetic movements and their leaders. This reaction, ironically enough, led to a transformation of practices in the Protestant church. According to Tata Mukiese,¹¹³ an older, long-standing member of the *kilombo*,¹¹⁴ traditional instruments were allowed at one time, but starting in the late 1930's, all traditional instruments were prohibited in the Protestant church as a result of their association with worship in the prophetic movements.¹¹⁵ One could only sing in a classical manner, using European instruments. He recounted the story of a conflict in the town of Kingoyi in Luozi territory over this very issue. In a Protestant church there, a missionary named Mr. Alden banned the use of traditional instruments in his church in 1934. Kalebi Muzita, a Kongo leader in the church, disagreed with him and challenged his policy. Kongo catechists, teachers, and pastors split into two groups, some siding with Alden and others with Muzita. Kalebi and his group decided to leave the church and he reportedly told Alden, "Since you have prohibited playing these instruments, you will

¹¹³ This is a pseudonym. All of interviewee names are pseudonyms, unless otherwise indicated.

¹¹⁴ *Kilombo* in KiKongo means a large group (of people, insects, etc.) that is so numerous that they cannot be counted. In the past it also referred to the army in the Kongo Kingdom (Mahaniah 1989:87) and as shown in chapter two, was also used to describe the jumps and leaps of the soldiers. In the context of the Protestant church, and other churches as well, the name is most commonly used for a choir, often large, that incorporates traditional musical instruments.

¹¹⁵ Tata Mukiese was born in 1934. Interview conducted by author. January 30, 2006, Luozi, Democratic Republic of Congo.

see what will happen.” According to Tata Mukiese, Alden and his followers became sick after this proclamation, and were healed only when Kalebi returned and prayed for them.

This narrative demonstrates not only conflict and clashes over embodied practices in the use of traditional instruments, but also the importance of including such practices in worship for certain Kongo people, even to the point of revoking one’s membership in a particular church. In fact, Mr. Alden’s fervent attacks on *bangunza* in his own mission church have been chronicled in several *bangunza* songs from Kingoyi that disparage his actions and his negative attitude toward the prophetic movements (Andersson 1958:279-280; 283).¹¹⁶

As they lost more and more people to the various prophetic movements, the missionaries in the territory of Luozi finally decided on a plan of action. This plan was touched upon in the 1956 annual governmental report for the territory:

Since the month of June a new wave of mysticism colored by ngunzism has again swept a big part of the territory. This movement was provoked by a circular sent by the Protestant missionaries of Sundi-Lutete and Kinkenge, inviting their adepts to a moral and spiritual reawakening. Unfortunately, the text of this circular was ambiguous for the natives and was misinterpreted by them. The old ngunzist leaders took up again their subversive activity justifying it by the context of the circular. At a given moment the rumor spread that ngunzism was no longer prohibited by the government. Four big ngunzist manifestations took place in the territory.¹¹⁷

This spiritual reawakening was called *nsikumusu* by the Protestant S.M.F. (Svenska Missions Förbundet or Swedish Mission Covenant) churches in the Lower Congo. In this effort to bring people back to the Protestant church, many of the practices of the

¹¹⁶ For example, one verse of one song says, “Father Alden has accused me before the administrator. A prophet cannot fear anything” (Andersson 1958:280).

¹¹⁷ AIMO. *Territoire de Luozi. Rapport Annuel, 1956.*

prophetic movements were to be incorporated into the S.M.F. churches. For example, traditional instruments could now be played in the church again, and speaking in tongues and trembling were no longer strictly prohibited. This led to a disapproving report by the colonial administration the following year:

The movement “*nsikumusu*” or spiritual awakening, launched by the Svenska Missions Förbundet of Sundi-Lutete in 1956 didn’t have much success at the beginning. The propaganda of opposition made by the territory against trembling made the Reverend Missionaries think, who finished by admitting that in the Territory of Luozi these phenomena are a characteristic expression of *ngunzism*.¹¹⁸

Therefore, the spiritual awakening of *nsikumusu* was a case in which missionaries, this time Protestant S.M.F. missionaries in particular, and colonial administrators, disagreed on the meaning and usefulness of Kongo embodied practices. Once again both groups had the same interest of curbing the *ngunza* movement, however colonial administrators did not approve of the S.M.F. churches’ method of welcoming some of the same practices, such as trembling, which typified the prophetic movement, and were persecuted by the state. Although the S.M.F. churches did this in order to attract people back into their churches, the colonial administration saw it as encouraging the prophetic movements and thus increasing the threat to state security and their own authority.

Part II: Makinu in Secular Contexts

The second half of this chapter considers Kongo *makinu*, or dances, as embodied cultural performances that had varied meanings and uses by colonial agents, missionaries, and Kongo people themselves throughout the colonial period. Efforts by Europeans to

¹¹⁸ AIMO. *Territoire de Luozi. Rapport Annuel, 1957.*

control these dances as practiced by the indigenous population, often couched in terms of policing immorality, revealed the role that influence over the conduct of others played in the ongoing confirmation of European political and religious authority in the Belgian Congo. Moreover, in the context of the prophetic movements in the Lower Congo, some colonial administrators eventually saw a political use for *makinu*, using them in the service of combating *bangunza*. To understand what many of the secular *makinu* in question looked like, I present the following ethnographic memory from my own experiences in the field:

August 16, 2005. The light of the full moon clearly illuminated the way as we walked towards the large crowd of people haphazardly standing in a circle, laughing, singing, drinking, and dancing...People looked at me quizzically as I politely wiggled my way to the front of the circle of onlookers to get a closer look. There were three long, thick drums being played, and the one with a circle in the middle of its drum head had the deepest sound and led the other two. In the center of the circle of spectators, there seemed to be two lines, one of men, and another of women. Two men or boys left their line and, following the rhythm, walked across the center of the circle to the other line, and stopped in front of two women or girls, effectively choosing them. The women then followed them to the center of the circle, and danced with them, rotating and shaking their hips and posteriors, while the tops of their bodies barely moved...The men, however, shifted from one foot to the other, following another cross-rhythm, and their own hip movements were emphasized by long lengths of cloth hanging vertically from

their waists to the ground, making a type of skirt.¹¹⁹ The men jumped towards and danced around their partners, while the women remained in place, calm and collected, hips moving continuously, and feet shuffling slightly. At a particular drum signal, the couples stopped dancing, genuflected towards each other, and left the circle, to be replaced by another set of men coming in to begin the cycle again.¹²⁰

The following sections consider the question of morality, reactions of the colonial administration to indigenous secular dancing, and the opinions and efforts of both Catholic and Protestant missionaries to suppress dancing as an activity or pastime. In all of these instances, the political and religious authority of the government officials and missionaries respectively, is enhanced and confirmed by their ability to prohibit their Congolese subjects from dancing. However, the last example takes the opposite tactic in that a territorial administrator from Luozi sought to use *makinu* to combat *bangunza*, establishing a policy of forced dancing to distract people from participation in activities associated with the prophetic movements.

Moral Legislation and Ambivalent Action

The first official act of the colonial administration regarding traditional dances in general was on July 17, 1900, under the title of “indigenous dances.” It basically said that in places to be determined by the administrative authority of the district or zone, indigenous dances could not be held publicly except on certain days, in certain locations, at specific times, and under conditions determined by the administrative authority. If

¹¹⁹ This male type of dress is called *mbokula* in kikongo.

¹²⁰ Author’s ethnographic fieldnotes, 2005.

these rules were broken, the punishment would be arrest and seven days of penal servitude, and/or a fine of 200 francs. Over the next several decades, a debate over indigenous dances emerged that is visible in the *Recueil Mensuel*, a circular of laws, ordinances, and general concerns distributed for the “exclusive use of functionaries and agents of the colony.”¹²¹ It is in this publication that we can see some of the opinions concerning indigenous dances. Although these circulars were couched in general terms without discussing particular cultural or ethnic groups, the capital of the Congo Independent State and then the Belgian Congo was Boma (in the Lower Congo) from 1886 – 1929, and thus the majority of the indigenous people with whom authorities in Boma had contact were most likely BisiKongo. It is within this context that we can examine the assessments of indigenous dances made by colonial administrators.

On January 16, 1912, there was an interpretive circular commenting on the above law of indigenous dances of 1900, written by the vice-governor general Louis F. Ghislain. In this publication, he addresses his main issue of concern:

...it was brought to my knowledge, that in our posts, customary dances take place of a clearly lascivious or obscene character. On the part of the territorial authorities, charged with being the agents of civilization to the indigenous populations, to tolerate these practices and not to suppress them, could be with just cause considered by them as a sign of approval.¹²²

He reminds them of the decree of 1900, and offers a specific definition of the word locality in the decree as including all the posts of the colony. He continues: “It is superfluous to add, that the regulations ordered by the decree of 17 July 1900, can’t bear

¹²¹ Congo Belge, Gouvernement Local, *Recueil Mensuel des ordonnances, circulaires, instructions et ordres de service*. 6me annee, No. 10. Octobre 1913.

¹²² Congo Belge, Gouvernement Local, *Recueil Bi-Mensuel des ordonnances, circulaires, instructions et ordres de service*. 5me annee, No. 1. 15 Janvier 1912. Circulaire #14. ; hereafter cited in text.

upon the customary dances that don't offer any danger to order or public tranquility, or that don't take on any character neither lascivious nor obscene" (Ghislain 1912).

Thus, in this first circular, we find evidence of a concern for the morality of the public, in that Ghislain wanted to prohibit traditional dances that he saw as obscene. He also makes it clear that it is part of the civilizing mission of the colonial agents to suppress such dances. However, Ghislain did not want to forbid all traditional dances in that he left room for traditional dances that weren't a threat to the public morale, excluding them from being regulated by the decree of 1900.

The next year, another vice-governor general, E. Henry, wrote a circular pertaining to indigenous dances that showed that "obscene" dances were still a problem:

...in a number of posts of the colony and in proximity to them dances of a clearly obscene character take place. I remind territorial functionaries of circular no°14, of 16 January 1912, prescribing the prohibiting of dances of this type in all of the stations of the colony. The first of their duties is combating energetically the practices that constitute a permanent obstacle to all the civilizing efforts and that oppose themselves to the attainment of indigenous populations to an intellectual and moral level to which we have undertaken to raise them.¹²³

In this circular, a similar pattern is evident. Dances that the colonial administrators deem to be obscene are seen as a threat to the civilization that the Europeans believed they were bringing to their African colonial subjects. Such dances undermined the level of intellectual growth and moral turpitude to which the paternalizing colonizers, once again, sought to elevate the colonized. The morality of the public is again menaced by these indigenous dances. E. Henry continued by writing that if obscene dances were taking place, the functionaries must immediately put an end to them, and "...write a report to the

¹²³ Recueil Mensuel, October 1913, circular #139.

chief of violations of morals and to defer the guilty to court.” Thus, he insists on the persecution of transgressors of the 1900 decree regarding indigenous dances.

Two years later, in January of 1915, yet another circular appeared in the *Recueil Mensuel* regarding indigenous dances. Written by the governor general Félix Fuchs, it takes a more tentative approach to the control of indigenous dances, yet at the same time maintains ideas of European superiority and ethnocentrism that were part and parcel of the colonial endeavor.

I have the honor to attract the very serious attention of the territorial authorities on the precise interpretation that it is important to give to the circular of the 1st October 1913, relating to native dances and to warn them against a too severe application of the prescriptions that this circular contains. If it is urgently incumbent upon us to prohibit practices of a clearly obscene tendency, it is also our duty to respect the traditional dances of the populations, when these demonstrations aren't at all in opposition to our conceptions of morality. The usual dances constitute for the blacks a recreation, I will say almost the unique recreation that their primitive mentality and the environmental conditions that surround them, allow them to appreciate. They are to them also a beneficial exercise, the only effort of physical limbering up...It would not be a question of forbidding them excessively; one would thus risk provoking very legitimate discontent. I invite the authorities of the districts to communicate the present directives to their territorial administrators.¹²⁴

In this circular, Fuchs argues that native dances have a purpose in that they are often the only form of recreation and exercise for the indigenous population. He warns that being too strict in the rules regarding these dances will lead to legitimate complaints and discontent among the Congolese, and he echoes the sentiment expressed by Ghislain in the circular of 1912 in which non-obscene dances are excluded from being regulated. Moreover, the theme of morality emerges once again in this circular, in that Fuchs does

¹²⁴ Congo Belge, Gouvernement Local, *Recueil Mensuel des ordonnances, circulaires, instructions et ordres de service*. 8me annee, No. 1, Janvier 1915. Circulaire #2.

encourage the prohibition of dances that are against “our conceptions of morality,” in which “our” can be read as early 20th century Belgian Catholic colonials.

The hostility and general disdain towards indigenous dances that was noticeable in the colonial administration was even more pronounced in the European led missions. In the Protestant churches, dancing in general was discouraged. For example, since the early establishment of the missions of the SMF (Swedish Mission Covenant Church), dancing was strictly forbidden. At a missionary conference in 1894, a resolution was passed that “old customs, habits and conceptions, such as dance, all forms of idolater feasts, hair cutting feasts, funeral feasts, gun-salutes and wailing for the deceased, together with the drinking of palm-wine at such feasts, and at palavers, should be vigorously opposed and exterminated” (Axelson 1970:285). This policy persisted in later years as well:

The position of the Swedish Baptist Society on Kongo customs such as funeral rites was articulated by K.E. Laman in a speech made at a missionary conference in 1906. The Swedish missionary said that when an individual was in the process of conversion, he had to separate himself from all dealings with the unbelievers and from worship or curing by “idols.” He had to stop dancing, drinking palm wine and all other strong drink and to “cast off several bad customs of the Kongo” which were specified in the church rules. A man who had more than one wife had to separate from all but one...When a member of the church returned to drinking of palm wine, marrying other wives or dancing, the member was expelled. (Mahaniah 1975, 162-3)

Moreover, the constitution of SMF in 1907 forbade “dance...(and) drumming at palm wine feasts and dance...” (Axelson 1970:288).

Kongo Reactions to Dance Prohibitions

How did Kongo people react to these rules prohibiting dance? In some cases, people who were loyal members of the Protestant church upheld the rules and may have internalized the point of view of the missionaries, as exemplified by the following selections taken from *Au Pays des Palmiers*, a compilation of the recollections of Kongo instructors in the Protestant churches of SMF, originally published in 1928. Yoane Nlamba, a teacher at the Protestant mission at Mukimbungu, in describing some of the older traditions of the area, wrote that, “Dance was extremely appreciated by the ancestors. One would dance in all the villages, each village had their own drums. The dance took place during the evening and the night...and it was accompanied by immoral orgies.”¹²⁵ Similarly, Lebeka Kiniongono, a teacher at the Protestant mission in Kingoyi wrote, “The women of long ago really loved dancing. But certain dances were very much shameful” (1928:92). In both of these quotes, the moral interpretation of these embodied practices is very much a negative one.¹²⁶ In addition, in several interviews during my research, people stated that there were some Kongo dances that they considered to be immoral.¹²⁷ When pressed for specificity, one interviewee, Mama Nsafu, a prominent leader in the Protestant church, explained:

There is perhaps a dance of the man and the woman where they approach each other very, very, closely, or there is perhaps excitement... one can qualify that directly, that it is immoral, That, it is not for the church... if it

¹²⁵ *Au Pays de Palmiers: Récits du Congo écrits par des moniteurs indigènes* (1928), (Stockholm: Éditions Svenska Missionskyrkan, 2003), 59.

¹²⁶ These passages written by these instructors could have been influenced by the fact that the readership was a Swedish audience, rather than a Kongo one. However, I have also encountered other Kongo Protestants in the present who viewed dancing as inappropriate for members of the church.

¹²⁷ Interview with Tata Esaie, September 29, 2005, Luozi, DRC; Interview with Tata Mbuta, September 29, 2005, Luozi, DRC. Interview with Tata Yangalala, October 30, 2005, Luozi, DRC.

is a dance which shows an odd manner, one where the people can be described as bad, one must not continue, and...we don't permit that.¹²⁸

However, not all Kongo people agreed with this point of view. Ne Nkamu Luyindula,¹²⁹ recounting the story of his grandmother's position on dance and the Protestant church, explained that someone asked her,

Ma Batikita, were you baptized? She said, "Baptized? Why become baptized? To whom will I leave the dancing to? That's to say, me, I don't accept to be baptized at the Protestant mission. If I do, I will leave behind my dancing," and she was baptized really very late (in life), very late.¹³⁰

The point of the story, as he explained to me, was that there were many people who didn't accept the rules and policies of the different missions, and resisted them by continuing to dance. To stop dancing, for his grandmother, was a public sign of the embracing of a Protestant identity and the acceptance of the religious authority of the Protestant missions. The fact that his grandmother became baptized only when she was too old to dance testifies to the importance of *makinu* as embodied practice to some BisiKongo. Yet another interviewee supported this view when he said, "Dances of the BaKongo are a part of the process of education...dance is also for correcting behavior...I don't think that they [dances] were immoral...the adults, the people dance without a lot of negative ideas..."¹³¹

Catholicism and the Threat of Dancing Bodies

Protestant missions were not the only places where concerns and conflicts over traditional secular dances emerged. Catholic missionaries as well were generally against

¹²⁸ Interview with Mama Nsafu, September 20, 2005, in the town of Luozi.

¹²⁹ This is his real name, which I have been given permission to use.

¹³⁰ Interview with Ne Nkamu Luyindula, September 20, 2005, Luozi, DRC.

¹³¹ Interview with Tata Malanda, October 28, 2005, Luozi, DRC.

traditional dancing and music during the 1930's, in particular, although this came to change later. Dances of the BisiKongo became a major point of concern for the Catholic missions in the Lower Congo, as revealed by several detailed studies of "BaKongo dances" written in 1937, 1938, and 1939 by three Belgian Catholic priests. These studies provide the details of the dances that were alluded to in the administrative circulars, and demonstrate that certain dances were a concern for the clergy as well, who sought methods to actively combat them as immoral practices unfit for true Christians.

In "Les Danses BaKongo," published in *Congo*, an academic review of the Belgian colony, Jesuit Catholic priest J. Van Wing begins the article by providing a stereotypical assessment of the genetic ability of people of African descent in regards to dance: "If there is an art in which blacks excel, it is the dance. It is the only one (art) that they practice universally. It is innate to them..."¹³² Later in the article, the general form of BaKongo dances is described:

When the drums are ready they are put in the middle of the space, the dancers come to arrange themselves in front of them: one side of men, the chest bare...the other side of women, covered in a small cloth of dance. The main drum gives the first measures...the *mvudi-toko* (dance master) places himself at the head of the two lines and strikes up the song...the choir picks up the song and the dance begins. It consists of a shaking, to make wriggle in a certain way the *luketo* [hips], that is to say the lower stomach, in the same rhythmical movement, the speed and the intensity of movement is regulated by the rhythm of the drums...two male dancers move themselves forward in front of two female dancers...and the two couples dance watched by the crowd who mark the tempo of hands and feet. At the signal of the *mvudi-toko*, the two couples withdraw themselves and two others come forward and do the same, and so on for all the couples. Then...[the female dancers] move forward near the men, and each of them grabs hold of a partner, and the two embrace chest to

¹³² J. Van Wing, "Les Danses Bakongo," *Congo: Revue générale de la Colonie Belge, Tome II*, 2 (July 1937): 121; hereafter cited in text.

chest, and remain like this stuck [together], all while shaking the hips, until the *mvudi-ntoko* gives the signal of separation... There is the ordinary dance of eastern BaKongo. (Van Wing 1937:127-8)

Similar descriptions abound for almost all parts of the Lower Congo, dating to even before the colonial period.¹³³ In addition, there was also another type of dance that had become popular by the 1930's called *maringa*. The *maringa* dance was a partnered dance with hip movement¹³⁴ that was performed to the accompaniment of European instruments, and was said to imitate certain dances of Europe and the Caribbean. Van Wing wrote of the *maringa*:

Since some time the *maringa* has spread itself, imitating the whites, and takes place not in the public space but in the interior of huts of palm branches to the sound of an accordion. The couples embrace and wriggle in a so disorderly fashion that nothing remains in regards to the aesthetic. It all turns into shamelessness and obscenity. (Van Wing 1937:128)

After describing these dances that were popular at the time (*makinu ma luketo* and *maringa*), Van Wing laments, "There is the brutal fact...our people have lost the sense of honest dancing" (128). He then goes on to elucidate the numerous primary reactions provoked by Kongo dances. He explains that certain traditional chiefs regulated dances, while others were more lax. He seems less than content with the reactions of the colonial administration which "hardly has intervened. Faced with certain excesses of public obscenities, it applies sanctions" (Van Wing 1937:129). The reactions of the Christian missions, both Catholic and Protestant, and the leader of the kingunza movement, Simon Kimbangu, seem to be similar:

¹³³ See Richard F. Burton, *Two Trips to Gorilla Land and the Cataracts of the Congo. Volume II* (London: S. Low, and Searle, 1876); and Joachim John Monteiro, *Angola and the River Congo (Volume II)* (London: MacMillan and Co, 1875), 136-138.

¹³⁴ Phyllis Martin, *Leisure and Society in Colonial Brazzaville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 131.

The missions, the Catholics as much as the Protestants, maintained the severity of their disciplines. At the Protestant missions the dancer of *ngoma* was excluded from the Holy Communion. At the Catholic missions he was deprived of the sacraments and must do a required penance, if he wanted to return to the Christian practice. Kibangu [sic] came in 1921. With one word, he did away with the *ngoma*. Throughout all the country they were broken and burned...(Van Wing 1937:129)

Finally, the opinion of Van Wing clearly emerges towards the end of the article:

It is evident that the people need distractions and diversions. . . But it is also evident that no people need stupid diversions. Now the dance of the *ngoma* is only a direct preparation, public and collective, for the sexual act. . . . It destroys the physical vigor, and the sense of morality. (Van Wing 1937:130)

He goes on to suggest that the BaKongo either return to other traditional dances that are moral, or adopt appropriate dances from other Bantu groups around them. He then suggests that *ngoma* dances can become fertile ground for other “kibanguisms” [sic] or prophetic movements. He continues by saying that modern BaKongo dances can’t be called diversions, strictly traditional, or vital, and thus the BaKongo are not being deprived of these things if the dances are prohibited. He closes the article by saying: “...If someone wants to participate in the life of Christ, he must refrain from immoral dances. And thus it is no longer a question of indigenous politics...it is an essential principle of Christian morality that coincides with morality and nothing else” (Van Wing, 131).

Thus, “Les Danses BaKongo” pleads for the prohibition of modern dances of the BaKongo, almost all of which Van Wing sees as immoral. Upon examining the various reasons he gave for this opinion, from saying that the dances destroyed the physical vigor of the people to them being a possible threat to the security of the colony, he seems to be addressing the colonial administrators in particular. In this sense, in trying to police the

conduct of all BisiKongo in the colony, he seeks to expand beyond his religious authority that he has as a Catholic missionary, and enter the realm of political authority, legislation, and enforcement. The prevailing justification for the prohibition of these dances is once again a moral one. Van Wing sees them as being against a sense of Christian morality, which he then says corresponds to morality writ large.

The next year, at a seminar for Catholic priests held in Louvain, Belgium, the dances of the BaKongo came up again as the subject of a presentation and then discussion. P. Decapmaker, a priest in the Matadi area of Bas-Congo, was the presenter in this case. He starts by explaining that the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome didn't recommend the modification of practices that are not positively against the religion or morality, and he explains that the missionaries were not condemning all the dances indistinctly, since to do so would cause many problems.¹³⁵ He goes on to say that morals of theology make it possible to distinguish three types of dances:

1. The honest dances, inspired by absolutely honest motives...in this category we can place all the BaKongo dances that are not mixed. They are rather games of dexterity...2. The dangerous dances: that in themselves are not improper, but often end up in licentiousness, as a result of the circumstances that ordinarily accompany them: songs, excessive drinking, unhealthy exaltation produced by the frenetic repetition of the same rhythm, perverse tendencies of dancers, drums, darkness...These dangerous dances are condemned by morality because they constitute occasions close to sin...3. The obscene dances: are those in which the gestures, the movements, the touching are shameless, licentious, and against morality. (DeCapmaker 1938:41-44)

He then discusses dangerous and obscene dances in Matadi amongst the BaKongo, quoting the descriptions and opinions of missionaries from the 17th century to the present

¹³⁵ P. DeCapmaker, "Danses des BaKongo" in *La Mission et les Joies Populaires: Compte Rendu de la XVIe Semaine de Missiologie de Louvain*, 40 (Brussels, Belgium: L'edition Universelles, S. A., 1938), here after cited in text.

in regards to BaKongo dances, as well as descriptions of colonial agents, many of which correspond to those already given by Van Wing. He discourages acts of violence in the suppression of native dances (forcibly breaking drums, etc.), and suggests the use of missionary influence to pressure native chiefs to prevent obscene dances, as well as the creation of “honest” diversions such as football and other sports, and other past-times such as drama. He then closes his presentation by demanding suggestions for filling this moral gap, and ends with the following conviction: “...We are convinced that it is above all by—and at the occasions of dances—that Satan takes his revenge on our savior Jesus Christ and his missionaries” (DeCapmaker 1938:58). This is a telling comment, because it reveals that in his opinion many dances of the Kongo people were the work of the devil himself, and can thus be seen, by extension, as the enemy of the Christian civilizing mission.

After his presentation, an exchange of views took place among the Catholic priests present, which for the most part echoed Decapmaker’s sentiments. Father Aupiais agreed that the corruption of dances was introduced by Europeans. Monsignor Van den Bosch also suggested the promotion of games. Father de Pélichy pointed out that although the more ancient dances of the Kongo had been morally acceptable, if they were encouraged, it could be seen as an invitation to return to traditional customs. Father Cooreman proposed the introduction of scouts groups to distract people from the dancing, while Father Van Hoof advocated the collaboration of the church and state with native tribunals and chiefs to regulate dances. M.G. Beken suggested the surveillance of dances rather than their absolute prohibition. Then, a remarkable exchange took place when Father Van Hoof was asked his point of view:

The conclusions of the missionaries of the vicariate of Kisantu are in complete agreement with that of the missionaries of Matadi presented by P. Decapmaker. In fact, at the present time all the dances of the BaKongo are bad in [their] nature, or indifferent in themselves degenerating into bad in fact.

Father Secretary: Then all the dances are bad?

Father Van Hoof: Certainly all those with the “ngoma,” and all those with whatever instrument which are mixed [in sex]. (DeCapmaker 1938:61)

After this, the secretary then asked if all the dances as a whole were condemnable, and Father Van Hoof ended by saying, “...one will not condemn the good dances, but one has the hope that the bad conceptions give away little by little” (DeCapmaker 1938:61).

Thus, the exchange of ideas at this seminar of Catholic priests reveals that Kongo dances were seen by these missionaries in the Belgian Congo as a direct threat to not only a general idea of morality, but also the ideology of Christianity in particular.

Kongo dances worried Catholic priests so much that Monsignor Cuvelier initiated an investigation of all of the Kongo dances throughout the Lower Congo. He sent a list of questions to all of the Catholic mission posts in this area, and compiled the answers.¹³⁶ Some of the responses he also used for the creation of the last article of interest, “Les Missions Catholiques en face des danses des Bakongo,” published in Rome in 1939. In this article, Cuvelier presents historical and current descriptions of dances, makes distinctions between different types, and includes some discussion of the dances of *banganga*, which he describes as dances in which “all the devils of hell dance alongside

¹³⁶ Father Hugo Gotink, in discussion with the author, Mbanza-Ngungu, March 11-12, 2006. This material is apparently what Decapmaker used for his own presentation at the seminar. Gotink shared with me his copies of the two dossiers on Congo dance deposited at the Archives of the Redemptorist Fathers in Rome.

them.”¹³⁷ He sees these dances of the *banganga*, along with funeral dances and dances of mixed sex with hip movements as essentially bad dances that needed to be stopped. He ends the article by saying, “There’s a lot left to do. The improvement of moral and civil life will allow the hope of better and lasting results” (Cuvelier 1939:170). Once again, concerns for morality appear.

Some of the actual actions undertaken by the Catholics in regards to Kongo dances emerge in interviews and written texts. For example, in a document explaining the regulations necessary for the running of a Redemptorist mission in the Congo, Catholic catechists are described as having to be “model Christians,” and some of their principal functions include “...to prudently prevent evil, above all the fetishism and the obscene dances...”¹³⁸ In an interview, Tata Tuzolana, a traditional drummer near Mayidi in Bas-Congo recounted an incident in which Father Masamba, a Congolese Jesuit priest, broke the skin of his drum to prevent him from playing.¹³⁹ Similarly, Tata Mbumba, a Kongo Catholic, remembered that as a student he was threatened with expulsion from the mission school when he was caught dancing a secular dance.¹⁴⁰ These are just a few of the examples of Catholic intolerance towards dancing during the colonial period.

Overall, there appears to have been a conflict of cultural beliefs among European colonizers and between BisiKongo dancers in the Belgian Congo. The use of overt hip

¹³⁷ Jean Cuvelier, “Les Missions Catholiques en face des danses des Bakongo,” *Africanae Fraternalae Ephemerides Romanae* 17 (June 1939): 155, hereafter cited in text.

¹³⁸ Michaël Kratz, *La Mission des Rédemptoristes Belges au Bas-Congo: La Période des semailles (1899-1920)* (Brussels : Académie Royale des Sciences d’Outre-Mer, 1970), 351.

¹³⁹ Tata Tuzolana, Interview by author, Ndundu Kivwila and Hippolyte Ngimbi, July 22, 2005, Mayidi, Bas-Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo. The Kongo priest in question apparently changed his mind about these issues, as he later became one of the first people to reintroduce traditional instruments into the Catholic church. Father Masamba, Interview by author and Alain Nkisi, June 3, 2005, Kinshasa, DRC.

¹⁴⁰ Tata Mbumba, in discussion with the author, July 21, 2005, Mayidi, Bas-Congo, DRC.

movements in dance, the touching of pelvises in a thrusting gesture that occasioned dancing in a couple, the playing of the *ngoma*, and many other elements common in Kongo secular performances were not a part of the cultural milieu of most Europeans. Thus many colonial administrators and missionaries were overtly opposed to the majority of the *makinu* of the BisiKongo, seeking to reform and replace them with other diversions, or just to eliminate them altogether. Their efforts to control the conduct of Kongo people demonstrate that the prohibition of dances was one way in which their political and religious authority was reestablished and confirmed on a very intimate level for the average Kongo person.

The Influence of the Prophetic Movement on Attitudes Towards Makinu

Regardless of the violence, arrests, and punishments meted out by the colonial authorities, the prophetic movements continued unabated in many different forms from the arrest of Kimbangu until independence. Thus, other solutions began to be sought by the administration, resulting in a change in attitude towards secular *makinu* in relation to the prophetic movements. In 1924, an administrator wrote the following in a letter to the governor concerning the prophetic movements, “The natives who practice the Protestant religion can’t drink palm wine, or dance. It is true that dances are also prohibited by the catholic missionaries. Why prohibit to man the distractions that entertain the spirit and the senses?”¹⁴¹ This type of thinking wasn’t put into practice until more than a decade later. In 1936, J. Maillet, the territorial administrator of Luozi, called together many of

¹⁴¹ AA portefeuille 1630/9184, II. Q.3.a.1. 1. Dossier: Documentation Generale sur le Kibanguisme. Document B. Gungu, 13 January 1924. Objet: Mouvement Kibangiste. Letter to the governor from Noirot.

the chiefs and notables of the area for a meeting in the village of Kimbulu. According to Father Gotink:

He made it known that the villagers must begin again to dance and must make an *ngoma*. The chiefs had noticed that the pastors and the priests were opposed to dance with the *ngoma* and had prohibited it to their followers. The administrator told them that the priest and he each had their own activities but that he, chief of the region, wanted that this order be executed. The chiefs didn't hide their repugnance and said that many of the dances were frankly immoral. The administrator invited the chiefs to come and celebrate at Luozi the national celebration with a group of young men and women. (Gotink 1995:156)

In addition, Maillet wanted to make dancing obligatory in the villages between 4 and 5 o'clock, and ordered that when he stopped in a village for the night, he should be welcomed by people dancing. What was the impetus behind this shift in policy from a negative view and ambivalent approach of earlier colonial policies regarding traditional dances, to policies forcing performances upon the Kongo people? Apparently, several months before the meeting there had been incidents of prophetism that required military occupation in Sundi Mamba and Kivunda in Luozi territory. This and other outbreaks of prophetism had been discussed during the annual meeting of the territorial administrators of Lower Congo in February of 1936. In the minutes of this meeting, one of the suggested means of preventing outbreaks of prophetic movements is dance:

In the regions contaminated by prophetism the native doesn't drink palm wine anymore; dances are abolished...Dances constitute a public repudiation of the doctrine of prophetism. A propaganda for the encouragement of dances must be made by the members of the territorial service.¹⁴²

¹⁴² AIMO 1878/9981. Conference de Administrateurs Territoriaux du Bas-Congo, compte-rendu de la conference.

It was then noted that J. Maillet in particular had asked for the state to provide funding for organized dances in Luozi. Thus, Maillet thought to use secular, traditional *makinu* to distract people from prophetism.¹⁴³ Documentary evidence suggests that the agenda of Maillet had been implemented in some places. This is shown in a letter written from Father Joseph Dosogne to another missionary, where he reports that several weeks after Maillet had given his orders, a territorial agent passed through the town of Mangembo, and noted that there “the natives dance nearly routinely between 4 and 5 in the afternoon.”¹⁴⁴ The same letter reveals that in regards to this issue, the opinion of missionaries was very clearly a disapproving one:

The goal pursued by Mr. Maillet in that which I would call the politics of dance and of the *ngoma* is of preventing the extension and perhaps extinguishing the prophetic movement on this bank of the river. As a result he introduced...the *ngoma* and dances in the villages...that participated most recently in this movement...Prophetism is a deep movement that will not stop at the fragile barrier of the *ngoma*...Prophetism is a political-religious movement, which...interests and profoundly agitates the indigenous soul. It would be the most naïve illusion and the most dangerous one to think that one will impede it seriously and that one will stop it, by this attempt of returning to paganism that is the official introduction of *ngoma* and of dances. (Report about the dances, page 2).

In this situation, although they had the same goal of eliminating the movement, the colonial administrator and the Protestant and Catholic missionaries were not in agreement with this particular method.

This case of using traditional secular dances to combat prophetism is clearly one in which the ostensible collaboration between the missions, both Catholic and Protestant,

¹⁴³ Policies of forced dancing during the colonial period foreshadowed similar practices to follow in post-colonial Congo under Mobutu Sese Seko. This will be addressed in chapter five.

¹⁴⁴ Father Joseph Dosogne, Report about the Dances, Kimbuaka, June 22, 1936, page 2. Unpublished letter in Dossier of Father Cuvelier, Congo Dances, Archives of the Redemptorist Fathers, Rome, Italy.

and the Belgian colonial administration was disrupted. Although all of the parties in question had the same goal of suppressing the prophet movements, they differed considerably in their opinions of using traditional secular dance to distract people from the prophetic movements. The missionaries saw the return to this particular form of traditional practice as a step backwards in their civilizing mission because of the supposedly “immoral” influence *ngoma* dances would have on Christian villagers. However, Maillet, the colonial administrator, seemed to prioritize the issue of the security of the state over concerns about avoiding the proliferation of “immoral” dances. Thus, the case of Luozi territory in 1936 can be seen as one in which missionaries and colonial authorities bumped heads in the face of the competing authority that the prophetic movements represented, where Maillet prioritized preserving the political authority of the state over maintaining the religious authority of the missionaries. This approach of the administration was noted in other cases as well, such as Van Wing’s article, in which he wrote that the administration had reversed their position so that “the highest authority in the province encourages and makes his subordinates encourage the dances of the *ngoma*; because they say, the people need relaxation, and the *ngoma* is an excellent means of combating Kibanguism. [sic]” (Van Wing, 130). This view also resurfaced in interviews. When asked about the regulation of secular dances during the colonial period, Tata Mukiese replied:

The colonizer never prohibited dancing. On the other hand, they wished that people continue to take a lot of leisure time. Because that gave them the possibility moreover of keeping them [the colonized] in a state where they didn’t want to bother them [colonizers]...It wasn’t with the popular dances that the people were having revelations but rather with the *kingunza*...The colonizers weren’t against the dances; they encouraged them; he [the colonized] could dance like he wanted without a problem.

That doesn't bother him [the colonizer]. The thing that bothers him is the *kingunza*. (Interview, 1/30/2006, Luozi, DRC)

Conclusion

The examination of bodily practices in both religious and secular contexts during the colonial period in the Belgian Congo reveals the shifting meanings and uses of embodied practices so aptly captured in the proverb *Nsinsa wa ngoma wusobele, soba makinu maku*. This chapter explores the complicated uses of Kongo embodied cultural performances in the Belgian Congo in the establishment and maintenance of religious and political authority, but also, particularly through the embodied practices and associated ideologies of the prophetic movements, as sources for challenging that same authority.

Simon Kimbangu, as a Christian healer and prophet of the Kongo people, was placed by his followers at the top of a newly formed religious structure that challenged the hegemony of European missionaries. Through embodied cultural performances such as trembling as a sign of spirit possession, jumping, loud singing, the use of traditional instruments, and the receipt of dreams and visions from the spiritual world, Kimbangu and prophets that came after him established their own religious authority, away from the influence and eyes of Europeans. This religious authority, newly established in the colonial context, removed the need for missionaries to interpret the words and wishes of God, and allowed the Congolese people direct access to a spiritual Christian world.

Before the prophetic movement began with the Prophet Simon Kimbangu in 1921, there were secular dances called *makinu* that existed amongst the Kongo people, many of which were persecuted as immoral by both the colonial administration and

missionaries. With the arrival of the *bangunza* prophetic movements, leaders and adherents used their embodied practices to worship a Christian God, heal the sick, and demonstrate their willingness to lead their own churches, establishing their own form of religious authority, while condemning secular dances such as *makinu*. Yet, their actions were interpreted by the colonial administration for the most part as a threat to the political authority of the state, undermining the success of European owned businesses, and menacing the religious hegemony of European missionaries. Most of these parties then worked together to combat the prophetic movements. However, there were also many instances of disagreement on the methods to do so.

When Swedish Protestant missions in Manianga territory began to incorporate some of the embodied practices of the movement into their own worship in order to attract people to return to their churches, the colonial agents saw this as encouraging the subversive movements that threatened their own political authority. Conversely, when the administration began to practice a policy of promoting secular *makinu* to distract people from the prophetic movements, the European clergy were against this approach for what they understood as moral reasons and concerns about challenges to their own religious authority. Throughout all of these conflicts, there were Kongo people on many sides; resisting as the actors and leaders of the prophetic movement, collaborating as the priests who broke drums or chiefs who arrested followers of *kingunza*, and accommodating by obeying the established rules and regulations of the administration and missionary-led churches, for example. In all, the control of embodied cultural performances was very important in the ongoing struggles for religious and political authority in colonial Congo, and remained relevant after the country became independent.

Chapter 4
“The Angels Sing with Us”:
Trembling Hands, Christian Hearts, and Dancing for Nzambi in the Congo

Everyone who believes me will be able to do wonderful things. By using my name they will force out demons, and they will speak new languages...They will also heal sick people by placing their hands on them. (Mark 16:17-18)

Introduction

Trembling Hands and Sacred Dances

May 22, 2005. Today we went to one of the independent ngunza¹⁴⁵ churches for service. When we arrived, you could hear the music from outside. The church itself was a small one room white washed building with a cement floor...We came to the open door, and the music had stopped, and one of the pastors came to welcome us and invite us in. We removed our shoes at the door, and the pastor motioned for the women to enter through one door and the men through another. He then led us to what seemed like “honored guests” seats at the front of the small church, facing everyone else and next to the raised platform of the pastors...I noticed one thing immediately as I looked at the congregation. The women and men were separated. All the women and girls were seated

¹⁴⁵ Ngunza is a word in KiKongo that means messenger of a chief, a protector of the clan, a clairvoyant, a prophet-healer. This term was applied by Kongo people to Kimbangu and other prophets that arose in Lower Congo. In Manianga, the term used more often is ntumwa. See Kimpianga Mahaniah, *La Maladie et la Guérison en milieu Kongo* (Kinshasa: Centre de Vulgarisation Agricole, 1982): 90-93.

to the right of the pastor on low benches, while the men and boys were seated to the left, the same side where the drums were located.

The pastors and other leaders were wearing all white robes, with white hats... I was able to count about seven men who not only dressed in all white, but also took major roles in the service. Most of the women had their heads covered in white scarves, and if they were not white, their heads were still covered in something... There were several women dressed in all white dresses, and white scarves, and they seemed to lead the other women... In terms of the number of people present, including us, I counted at one time around 65 people, including children, in the church. Without a doubt however, women outnumbered the men. The pastors and main spiritual leaders were all men. ...

The entire church danced quite a lot, in accompaniment to the songs that were sung by the congregation. After the sermon, there was the collection, and then a healing session... Four men in the white robes lined up in front of the sick. . . . Each man had a white towel which they utilized in the healing process, waving them over their patients. The healers began to shake and tremble and lay their hands on the sick, shouting, massaging, and touching different parts of their bodies; first their heads, then their abdomens and backs simultaneously, then their legs and arms. They kept on trembling, and all the while the drums were playing loudly and everyone was singing and dancing again...



Figure 2: Pastor conducting healing practices for a couple (DMNA Church, Luozi, October 30, 2006, Photo by author)

This description from my field notes reveals my impressions of my first encounter with the DMNA church in Luozi, in the Lower Congo area. Many of the gestures described here, such as trembling, and others to be discussed later in the chapter, such as jumping and cupped clapping (*bula makonko*) have reappeared over and over again in our discussion of embodied cultural performances in the Kongo Kingdom and during the prophetic movements of the colonial period. What significance and utility, then, do they have in the present?

The previous chapter has shown that embodied cultural performances were highly significant tools in the contestation and confirmation of religious and political authority

during the colonial period. After the Belgian Congo gained independence in 1960,¹⁴⁶ the role of Europeans in the post-colonial state came to be dramatically redefined in many different spheres, not the least of which was religion. In some cases, European missionaries remained in positions of authority, while in others the leadership of their mission churches was quickly turned over to the Congolese people. However, the removal of restrictions imposed by the colonial government and the embracing of a newfound sense of religious freedom also presented opportunities for other institutions of religious worship to develop, outside of the mission churches.

This chapter examines the role of embodied practices in creating and maintaining the religious authority of the Church of the Holy Spirit in Africa, located in the town of Luozi in the Democratic Republic of Congo. This church is known by the acronyms DMNA (*Dibundu dia Mpeve ya Nlongo mu Afelika*, in KiKongo) and CSEA (*Communauté de Saint Esprit en Afrique*, in French).¹⁴⁷ Founded in 1961 by Masamba Esaie, a prophet of the *kingunza* movement who returned from forced exile in a penal camp, the DMNA church emerged from the prophetic movements of the colonial period, trying to forge a different path from the mission-led churches. The church considers itself to be Protestant, and uses biblical quotations such as the one that opened the chapter as ideological justification for some of the practices that take place in the church. However, the more embodied Christian identity that it embraces takes many of its practices from Kongo traditional healing and other ritual settings, and is markedly

¹⁴⁶ Please see chapter five for a more thorough discussion of the important events proceeding and following independence on June 30, 1960.

¹⁴⁷ I have chosen to use DMNA to reference the church throughout this chapter, although the acronym CSEA was also very commonly used. People more often referred to the church's members as a whole as *bangunza*.

different from the worship practices of the larger Protestant churches in the town of Luozi that were formerly mission churches (CEC, Communauté Evangelique du Congo, Evangelical Community of Congo).¹⁴⁸ In what ways have Kongo gestures, dances, and other embodied practices that existed during the pre-colonial and colonial periods been redefined in the context of DMNA worship? How does the DMNA church define its form of worship as Christian, when compared to the more mainstream Protestant church in Luozi (CEC) that also has its origins in mission churches of the colonial period in the area? How can the embodied practices of the DMNA church be analyzed as “enacted theologies” that in fact help to constitute a type of religious authority that challenges the hegemony of more popular CEC churches in Luozi?

I will first present an outline of a significant debate in studies of African Independent Churches, and identify the insights that can be gained through attention to embodied practices. I then provide an overview of the origins, structure, and membership of the DMNA church, highlighting the ways in which embodied practices were used as a means of establishing the religious authority of the DMNA church under the leadership of the Prophet Masamba Esaie. Then, I examine the meanings and uses of different embodied practices in religious performance in DMNA worship.

¹⁴⁸ The CEC churches are derived from the SMF churches, a group of Protestant churches established by Swedish missionaries of Svenska Missionförbundet or Swedish Covenant Church (SMF) during the colonial period. In 1961, these mission churches of the SMF, became autonomous and took the name Eglise Evangelique Manianga Matadi (EEMM, Evangelical Church of Manianga Matadi). During Mobutu’s reign, the name was changed to Evangelical Community of Zaire, and this group of churches became the 23rd community of churches in the Church of Christ in Zaire, a larger organization of all of the Protestant churches in the nation. See Kimpianga Mahaniah, *L’impact du christianisme au Manianga, 1880-1980*, for more information. I also attended services at various other Catholic churches in Bas-Congo and Kinshasa, but the main point of comparison here will be between the DMNA and CEC churches in Luozi.

The Growth of African Independent Churches

Although recent studies have emphasized an explosion of Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches since the 1990's (Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001; Meyer 2004),¹⁴⁹ a critical area of focus in studies of religion in Africa since the 1950's and continuing in the present has been that of African Independent Churches (AICs).¹⁵⁰ African Independent Churches have been described as "influenced by, but autonomous from, mission churches, these groups combine elements of Christian doctrines and beliefs with local religious traditions" (Jules-Rosette 1994:53).

One debate that dominated discussions of AICs in the past was the extent to which these churches/movements were a political reaction to colonialism. While some authors saw these movements as direct political reactions to colonialism, with no real pre-colonial antecedents and the impact of colonialism having created a decisive break with the past for indigenous populations (Balandier 1965; Lantenari 1963; Ranger 1968), later authors

¹⁴⁹ While there are a number of similarities between Pentecostal churches and the DMNA church (healing through the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, etc.), most of the embodied practices that define the DMNA church were in existence not only during the prophetic movements that began in the 1920's, but also have roots in gestures and movements found during the pre-colonial period as well. So, as mentioned in chapter two, Dona Beatrice Vita Kimpa's speech which was described by a missionary at the time as delirious and unintelligible, might well be likened today to glossalia. There are also other examples of *banganga* exhibiting similar behavior. Thus, such practices can be found to have been in existence amongst Kongo people for several centuries, which contrasts with the modern spread of Pentecostalism throughout Africa which has largely occurred over the last few decades. This dissertation shows that attention to embodied cultural performances such as gesture over time allows us to be wary of grouping together practices that today seem on the surface quite similar (healing with the Holy Spirit in Pentecostal churches and the DMNA church) but which in fact have very different histories.

¹⁵⁰ In regards to AIC terminology, although the most common term in scholarly use is African Independent Churches, other terms have been suggested due to a desire to find a term that isn't explicitly connected to orthodox churches and colonialism, since it doesn't seem sensible to use the term independent in post-colonial situations. Some of the suggested terms include African Initiated Churches and African Indigenous Churches (see Meyer 2004: 447-8). In this chapter, I choose to use the terminology African Independent Churches, not only because this is the phrasing most frequently encountered in the literature, but also because in the history of the specific case of the DMNA church, there is an explicit connection to the mission established church in the area.

challenged these conclusions in numerous ways, some with particular reference to West Central Africa.

One example of the latter is John Janzen, who proposed that within Kongo culture there is an internal continuity over time, a “religious renewal” that influenced these religious movements, as opposed to the only influence being external influences such as colonialism. One way that he demonstrates this is through an examination of a recurring pattern of the obliteration of religious objects:

It is apparent from this stretch of antecedent examples of the destruction of the *minkisi* from 1506, 1706, 1850, and 1890 (and more that are undocumented) that not everything in Kimbanguism in 1921 was new and had to do with either a reaction to colonialism or the influence of British Baptist Christianity. (Janzen 1977:81)

Through further examples of secret societies and some embodied gestures, Janzen concludes that “religious renewal in Kongo is not then limited to a particular form, but broadly exists in finding the right alternative form to redeem the situation” (Janzen 1977:112). In this sense, Janzen identifies a continuing tradition of working from a set range of options in religious practice in order to deal with novel situations.

Another example is an analysis of an ongoing tradition of religious movements in Central Africa, before, during, and after colonialism, as offered by Vansina, de Craemer, and Fox. In their article, the authors describe various components of a common Central African culture to be found in the Democratic Rep. and Republic of Congo, Northern Angola, Northern Zambia, Gabon, and parts of Cameroon and the Central Africa Republic (Vansina et. al. 1976:458). One such element is religious movements.

“A Central African religious movement exists when a collectivity not only accepts a new religious form but also transmits it to other individuals and groups...a movement originates in a leader, a charismatic figure, whose

inspiration stems from visions received in dreams or in a state of controlled possession.” (Vansina et. al 1976:460)

Like Janzen, these authors argue against the primacy of colonialism for prompting the movements, and the political nature of the movements themselves.

Contrary to the allegations of some writers, these movements were not purely or even primarily reactions to the stresses of the colonial experience or modernization. They were an integral part of the pre-colonial Central African tradition and they were primarily religious in nature. (Vansina et. al 1976:465)

Terence Ranger is yet another author who in fact reversed his past stance on religious movements as being primarily political reactions to colonialism. In his survey of studies of religion in Africa and AICs, Ranger draws the following conclusion:

There is no doubt that movements have become more frequent and have spread out over wider areas during the twentieth century. Nevertheless, they clearly have not been merely a reaction to colonialism; many of them have been concerned with internal cultural/political tensions which existed before colonialism (and exist after it); in so far as they have been responses to colonialism or to the post-colonial state they have been developing a symbolic language already available. (Ranger 1986:47)

What could this symbolic language that Ranger refers to entail? One suggestion is perhaps Bennetta Jules-Rosette’s study of the contribution that AICs can make to African theology, in which she discusses “enacted theologies,” where the “doctrines of these groups are codified through oral traditions and ceremonial performance rather than written texts” (Jules-Rosette 1994: 53). These “enacted theologies” of AICs that she refers to can be seen as forms of symbolic language, performed and embodied. Thus, AICs “reconcile tradition and imported theologies, and they recode these theologies

through religious performances” (Jules-Rosette 1994:53). What can a study of embodied practices in religious performances, theologies enacted, tell us about the DMNA church?

Embodied gestures in performance are a form of “enacted theologies” of the DMNA church, and draw on an established vocabulary of gesture (*bimpampa*) and movement, an embodied “symbolic language” as Ranger puts it, that was already available and in use in the pre-colonial context, as discussed in chapter two. In this regard, an in-depth analysis of embodied practices in the DMNA church provides further evidence that Kongo religious movements are not just reactions to colonial forces and institutions, with no antecedent tradition to draw from. In fact, a tradition of renewal/continuity does exist, as well as a pre-established and readily available set of embodied practices that are commonly used throughout many cultural contexts. What is novel is the way in which familiar embodied gestures are given new meaning and purpose in the form of worship in the DMNA church, in the larger context of major socio-cultural transformations. What particular “enacted theologies” are being defined and shaped by the DMNA church? How do these enacted theologies play a role in the creation of religious authority?

Overview of the Origins and Creation of the DMNA Church

The combination of an emphasis on healing and/or blessing through ecstatic trance (most often signified by bodily trembling), the style of singing, the emphasis on dancing, and the use of other gestures are some of the characteristics that help to distinguish the DMNA church from others. Thus, one of the ways in which non-members of the DMNA church referred to its members was as, “the people who tremble,”

or “tremblers.” The DMNA church itself was often referred to by people in Luozi as the church of *bangunza* or prophets, and one of many that developed directly out of the *kingunza* movement of the colonial period, as demonstrated by the life story of the founder of the church, the Prophet Masamba Esaie.

Masamba Esaie

Masamba Esaie was born in 1917 in Ndunga in Manianga, Bas-Congo, DRC (Lutunu 1982:9; Interview, Pastor Malala, 14 November 2005, Luozi, DRC).¹⁵¹ In 1921, another powerful and influential prophet appeared in Manianga named Philippe Mbumba. He, like Kimbangu, was arrested and relocated to a penal camp in 1921, and was replaced by one of his disciples, Samuel Kitoko. When the same fate befell Kitoko, the force behind the *kingunza* movement in Manianga fell to their disciple, Masamba Esaie (Fu-Kiau 1969:150). Masamba was first arrested in 1933, and he was arrested for the third time in 1952, after which he was deported to an agricultural penal colony for dangerous prisoners in Belingo, Bandundu province (Mahaniah 1988:77). He was not released until the massive pardoning of prisoners by Belgian colonial authorities on the eve of Congo’s independence in 1960.

After being released, both Kitoko and Masamba returned to Nzieta in Manianga to continue their religious teachings and healings. They both also remained members of

¹⁵¹ This interview will hereafter be referenced as (Interview, P. Malala). All of the interviews in this chapter were conducted in French and translated by the author, who alone takes responsibility for any mistakes.

the Protestant mission church (Mahaniah 1988:77). Problems developed between the two men, eventually leading to a major split and their founding of two separate churches.¹⁵²

After returning to Nzieta and having the disagreement with Kitoko,¹⁵³ Masamba, who had been a church member, sent a delegate to a 1960 meeting of the Swedish Mission Covenant church (SMF) that was being held in Sundi-Lutete, in order to ask whether or not the church could accept the form of prayer of Masamba's group of adepts (Interview, P. Malala, 14 November 2005, Luozi, DRC; Lutunu 1982:12-13). According to Pastor Malala, the son of Masamba Esaie and the current legal representative for the DMNA church as an organization, the meeting's members totally refused the *bangunza* manner of prayer. This included not only entering into trance but many other things:

This manner of prayer was absolutely African. How? One plays the drums...we are the first in all of Manianga...one could never find, in any church, celebrating God with this type of instrument. They say, that is an animal skin. Why worship God with an animal skin? You should take objects that are absolutely European...you play the maracas...you play animal horns also...also you must use white dress in order to pray...you must wear a hat also...Oh, that's not it. Prayer with a hat—the bible prohibits that. And then, you must heal the sick with white towels to chase away the bad spirits...the manner of dancing and then the songs that had another rhythm, which was neither Catholic nor Protestant...They said no, they cannot accept all these things. They refused the doctrine of *ngunza* overall, which existed since the secret prayer of the *pendele*.¹⁵⁴ (Interview, P. Malala, 14 November 2005, Luozi, DRC)

¹⁵² Macgaffey (1983) notes the constant disagreements and strife between a number of returned leaders of the prophetic movements which led to the founding of a large number of different churches. Many of these differences were based on regional competition (Bantandu versus BaManianga, for example) and also age differences or competing ideas about the futures of the churches. In the case of Masamba and Kitoko, problems evolved from Kitoko's continued practice of publicly identifying people engaged in sorcery, a practice that Masamba disagreed with (Mahaniah 1988:77).

¹⁵³ The church that Kitoko came to found was called the Church of the Holy Spirit in Africa by the Prophet Filipo Mbumba, also known as Dibundi dia Mpeve ya Vedila (Mahaniah 1988:79).

¹⁵⁴ According to Charles Malala Masamba, *pendele* was the name used to describe the secret meeting places where *kingunza* prayer and healing sessions were held, often in the forest, during the persecution of the prophetic movements during the colonial period.

After this rejection, a meeting was called on February 12, 1961 in Nzieta for all of the adepts that followed Masamba Esaie. The decision that emerged from this meeting was that an independent church would be formed that was “not dependent on a missionary church of western character” (Interview, P. Malala, 14 November 2005, Luozi, DRC). This new church was to have the name of The Church of the Holy Spirit (*Église de Saint Esprit* in French, and *Dibundu dia Mpeve ya Nlongo* in KiKongo) (DMN). In fact, there were quite a few Kongo Independent Churches founded by older leaders of the *kingunza* movement that took on the DMN name, so the particular church in Luozi that is the focus of this chapter is one among many churches of the Holy Spirit in the Lower Congo and Kinshasa. However, it is the final acronym that allows you to discern each church’s precise theology and the founding prophet associated with it (e.g. DMN-Difuene, DMN-Mbumba, DMN-Kinene, etc) (MacGaffey 1983:56). These churches share many similar embodied practices and beliefs, since they all have a common origin in the *kingunza* movement of the colonial period. However, they also have many differences, e.g. some have witch-finding rituals, or use potions, or focus more on divination while others do not (MacGaffey 1983).

After the death of Masamba Esaie in 1964, the words “in Africa” were added to the end of the church’s title, so that full name became *Dibundu dia Mpeve ya Nlongo mu Afelika* (DMNA). In 1980, under pressure by Mobutu’s government, which was repressing all churches that were not officially recognized by the state, the DMNA church petitioned to become a member of the Eglise du Christ au Zaïre (Church of Christ in

Zaire), (ECZ). This was a larger grouping of all of the recognized Protestant churches in the nation. It was accepted (Lutunu 1982:21), and became the 63rd community to join this recognized organization. Thus, the story of the DMNA church demonstrates a cleaving from mission churches and an “unofficial” status, and later a reincorporation into the recognized structure under political and state sanctioned duress.

Holy Spaces and Organization

Structure of the Sacred Space

The church in Luozi that is the focus of my research is a small, one-room, rectangular shaped, white washed building located a few minutes walk from the nearest road, on a small hill overlooking a residential neighborhood. It sits on a small grass covered plot of land, across from two ovens for making bricks and a small school on the same compound that the church founded and is responsible for running. It has a red tin roof, and four small windows, two on each side of the building. There are no amenities; there is no electricity, fans, and no internal bathroom. There are two front doors to enter the church, and they are both located on the same wall, separated by a distance of a few feet. When facing the entrances, there is a door to the left that is for women to enter and the door to the right is for men. Small piles of shoes are next to each doorway, as the congregants must remove their shoes before entering the ritual space. The ceiling inside is criss-crossed with exposed wooden beams. The floor inside is made of cement and to the front of the church is a raised cement platform, where the pastor, deacons, and other notable men sit facing the congregation, who themselves are sitting on wooden benches or at desks.

During worship services, there was a paucity of reading material. If anyone noticeably had a Bible, it was more often a man than a woman, although some women did have smaller, pocket sized Bibles as well. The book of hymns was also scarce in the church. The pastor usually had one, and one or two might be circulating on the men's side, while the women either sang from memory or had to be taught or reminded of the words by the pastor himself. It is not clear if this difference in access to written materials is one of means, or literacy, or something that is gender based. What it does point out, however, is the importance of embodied performance and interactive call and response singing in the worship of this church.

Members

How large is the membership of the DMNA church? In an interview with the pastor, deacon, and several prominent male members of the DMNA church in the town of Luozi, they estimated their local membership included about 150 people, in Manianga as a whole about 600 people, and claimed about 20,000 members nationally (Group Interview, 23 May 2005, Luozi, DRC). These numbers seem accurate, based on Mahaniah's claim that in 1979 this church had 17,269 members, throughout Bas-Congo, Kinshasa, and the two Kasai provinces (1988:80). Pastor Malala also added that the church has posts in Gabon, Angola, and Congo-Brazzaville as well. The pastor of this particular DMNA church in the town of Luozi is Pastor Kasambi, who received formal training at the Biblical Institute of the Evangelical Center of Cooperation at Kimpese, a pastoral training institute of the organization of Protestant churches. Although pastors in DMNA churches have more education and responsibility than deacons and other church

leaders, charisma is the most important attribute that they should have (Interview, Pastor Kasambi, 12 November 2005 Luozi, DRC).¹⁵⁵ Another leader in the church is Mama President, who organizes and leads the women in the church, and also happens to be the pastor's wife, Mama Ntima.

Organization

The structure of the DMNA church tends to emulate that of the Protestant mission church from which it broke away. Each country is divided into ecclesiastical provinces or regions. Each province is divided into consistories, which are further divided into parishes, and then sub-parishes (Interview, P. Malala). However, in the naming of the provinces, it is clear that the DMNA church is both connecting with tradition and kin groupings and also asserting its own religious authority to define the landscape. These ecclesiastical divisions thus do not necessarily follow current geographical delineations used by the government. For example, the province of Bas-Congo is divided into three districts by the government: Lukaya, Cataracts, and Bas-Fleuve. However, the DMNA church divides the province into 2 sub-regions entitled Bwende (everything on the northern bank of the river) and Mazinga (everything on the southern bank of the river). These titles correspond to groupings of clan names that appear throughout this particular area.

The organization extends to decision making and governance. There is a general assembly or council for the church, which meets every two years. There is an executive committee that meets twice a year to deal with transitory decisions. There is a council of

¹⁵⁵ This interview will hereafter be referenced as (Interview, P. Luyobisa).

elders, a national council for each country, a provincial council for each province, a council for each consistory, and one for each parish as well.

The administrative headquarters is located in Nzieta. It is a permanent organ as opposed to the less frequent meetings of the various councils, and is led by the spiritual chief, Robert Nsembani Zikondoloy. He is followed by the legal representative (Pastor Malala), the substitute legal representative, and financial director, and finally, many departments dealing with various aspects of the DMNA church. These include, among other things, evangelization, women and family, development, finance, and Christian education. A department of literature and communication is in the works, but has not yet been finalized.

Rules of Comportment

There are numerous rules for behavior and comportment for members of the DMNA church, including the prohibition of polygamy, adultery, eating pork, drinking alcohol or any bottled drinks, using fetishes or practicing magic, smoking tobacco, stealing, fighting, wearing shoes in the place of prayer, dancing to secular music, etc (Fu-Kiau 1969:151-152; Lutunu 1985:15-16; Interview P. Kasambi, Interview P. Malala). Some of these same rules had in the past been encouraged by prophets such as Simon Kimbangu and Phillipe Mbumba (Mahaniah 1982:100-102), showing the influence that the *kingunza* movement had on the DMNA church and its founder Masamba Esaie. The use of the body in worship shall be discussed further in the chapter.

Women in the Church

Although there have been famous female prophets such as Doña Beatrice Kimpa Vita in the early 18th century, and many female traditional *banganga* and other religious and political leaders, the role of women in the modern-day DMNA church is more circumscribed. Apparently, before the meeting of February 12, 1961 that led to the formation of the church, women were important members of the *kingunza* movement who also laid their hands on people to heal and bless them. According to Pastor Malala, this was prohibited after Feb. 12 due to a concern about women's lack of hygienic consciousness in their white dresses. He told the story of a woman who was in the process of healing someone by laying on hands and blood ran down her leg in the church. There were also others who had similar problems. Thus, after Feb. 12, women were prohibited from the imposition of the hands and even entering a church while menstruating. Pastor Kasambi gave another reason for why female pastors and deacons were not allowed, and that is that in the past, deacons and deaconesses and other leaders left their respective homes to evangelize together, and there were cases of adultery. For this reason, women were prohibited from becoming pastors and deacons. However, he supported the exclusion of women from the church when menstruating because of the belief that their condition and their presence in the church takes away the ability to enter into trance.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ Much has been written about menstrual taboos in different contexts, including in religious spaces and worship. *Purity and Danger* (1902) by Mary Douglas examines menstrual blood as well as many other substances considered in different societies as polluting and dangerous.

In the church in Luozi, women cannot act in the role of pastor, deacon, healer, or *ntwadisi*,¹⁵⁷ nor can they preach the word of God to a congregation that is mixed in sex. Preaching is only allowed if those present are all women. Women can, however, pray for the sick as well as participate in the service as church members. As previously mentioned, there is also a women's organization within the church headed by the pastor's wife, who also heads a similar, yet larger organization (Protestant Women) for all the women of the local Protestant churches in Luozi. When our conversation about the roles of women in the church continued, Pastor Kasambi admitted that some women do have the gift of healing, and the fact that it cannot be practiced can be seen as a form of discrimination within the church (Interview, P. Kasambi, 12 November 2005, Luozi, DRC). However, Pastor Malala would probably disagree, as he said that although their roles are limited, women are very important in the church and they "are not marginalized." (Interview, P. Malala, 14 November 2005, Luozi, DRC).

Women do play a vital role in the church as members of the congregation. Often females made up the majority of the congregations that I observed in the church over the course of my research, especially if one subtracted the pastor, deacon, and several other respected male members and healers of the church who most often sat in the front facing the audience rather than as a part of the audience. The gender make-up of the congregation was made even more evident through the spatial separation of the sexes, since the men's side often looked empty, while the women's side was often filled to

¹⁵⁷ The *ntwadisi* is the person that weighs the spirit of congregation members during a ritual known as the bascule that shall be discussed later.

overflowing. In the following counts that were conducted on site,¹⁵⁸ I included the pastor and other male church leaders, although they sat separately from everyone else, under the “males” category.

October 16, 2005:	Males: 15	Females: 19
October 30, 2005:	Males: 20	Females: 17
November 13, 2005:	Males: 20	Females: 29
February 12, 2006:	Males: 16	Females: 33

Moreover, women are also essential to the singing that takes place in the church (which will be discussed in greater detail later) due to the call and response pattern based on sex in which the men sing a verse, and the women answer in response. In terms of music, although the major instruments are played by men, the rhythm and general excitement is heightened by the *nsakala*¹⁵⁹ that the women play. These are passed out at the beginning of each service, and collected in a basket at the end.

The DMNA Form of Worship

Of Visions and Visionaries

The overall character of the DMNA church was determined on February 12, 1961. According to Pastor Malala, it had been told to him by his father Masamba Esaie and also appears in Esaie’s writings that,

He [Masamba Esaie] had a vision, because he was a visionary, this man...in a vision he saw the worship of angels. Angels in worship service. He saw that much of that which was in secret, in the *pendele*, was also practiced by the angels...If you are going to pray, all the men, you put

¹⁵⁸ Sometimes I did not get a chance to count the number of people in attendance, so these numbers are from the days that I actually recorded counts.

¹⁵⁹ *Nsakala* are hand held rattles made out of small, hollowed out gourds or tin containers with small seeds inside.

on your hats. All the women, you put on your headscarves... Similarly, the prayer in bare feet, he saw that in his vision, the manner of dancing, and so on (Interview, P. Malala, 14 November 2005, Luozi, DRC).

Revelations through visions and dreams play a large role in the *kingunza* tradition.

Kimbangu himself was called to become a prophet through voices that he heard, as well as a number of dreams and visions that he had (Mackay and Ntoni-Nzinga 1993:241; Pemberton 1993:204; Mackay 1987:124). However, these same revelations can also be seen as sites for threatening and contesting spiritual authority. In his study of a number of Kongo churches, MacGaffey notes, “revelations and ecstatic experiences can constitute a threat to the ecclesiastical order” (1983:70). The example that MacGaffey cites is that of the leadership of the Kimbanguist church attempting to subvert claims to spiritual authority and a position of spiritual leadership that were made by an Angolan MuKongo who had a vision of a recently deceased leader of the church (MacGaffey 1983:70-74).

Visions and dreams in the case of the DMNA church also functioned as a means to challenge the religious authority of European missionaries. In the case of the founding of the church, visions such as the ones Masamba Esaie had served as almost a spiritual commission from God, supporting separation from mission churches and allowing for claims to spiritual authority that challenged the hegemony of the European missions.¹⁶⁰ Masamba’s vision of angels in worship was not the first of its kind. While detained at the penal camp in Belingo, Bandundu Province during the colonial period, Masamba,

¹⁶⁰ Similarly, in the Cherubim and Seraphim African independent churches in Nigeria, the founders of the church had visions and dreams that helped to constitute their religious authority over others. Distinctive garments seen in these visions were then made and worn to embody the spiritual power of these founders of the church (Renne 2004).

working near a lake, saw a person come up from under the water that visited him numerous times and encouraged him to keep praying. This same spiritual being also inspired him to secretly write a book on the discarded cement bags that he found in the camp. This inspired book, called the *Wasimpama*, was hidden in the inner panels of one of his children's suitcases, and was taken from the camp. However, it remains to be published for the general public (Interview, P. Malala, 14 November 2005, Luozi, DRC).

Moreover, Masamba was not the only person responsible for influencing the form of worship; there were other adepts who had visions as well. From Masamba's vision, the clandestine activities in the *pendele*, and the visions of others, the final form of worship for the DMNA church was determined (Interview, P. Malala, 14 November 2005, Luozi, DRC). The form of prayer and worship in this church however, took on a decidedly African character because "they prayed to Christ in regards to an African reality" (Interview, P. Malala, Luozi, DRC, 14 November 2005).

Enacted Theologies and Embodied Histories in the Worship Service

Many of the enacted theologies of the DMNA church can be seen in the worship service. According to a document entitled "The great doctrinal guidelines of the Church of the Holy Spirit in Africa," published by the Department of Evangelization of the DMNA church, the liturgy can be divided into three main parts:

1. The Proclamation of the Good News,
2. The Laying on of Hands
3. Ordinary Exorcism.

The order of events in the worship service that I observed was very similar to the ideal order presented in this document, although not exactly the same. Using the terminology of the document as a guideline, this is the sequence of events that I observed on February 12, 2006, which was coincidentally the anniversary of the founding of the church:

Part I: Proclamation of the Good News

- opening prayer by a deacon followed by a song by the entire congregation
- blessing of the congregation through laying on of hands
- welcome remarks
- song by choir (kilombo group), announcement, song by congregation
- Proclamation of the Good News (sermon by Pastor Malala)
- Two songs by the entire congregation
- Prayer by an inspired man, and then a prayer by an inspired woman

Part II: Laying on of Hands

- collection
- prayer by the deacon
- other announcements
- healing of the sick (and extraordinary exorcism)¹⁶¹
- general blessing (not done by laying on of hands)

Part III: Ordinary Exorcism (defined in the document as “a solemn ceremony of the elevation of souls through diverse manifestations of the holy spirit, whether through trance or ecstasy)

- bascule

The three most notable rituals of the DMNA church seem to be the blessing, the healing, and the bascule. What follows are three ethnographic descriptions of these key

¹⁶¹ The difference between ordinary and extraordinary exorcism is not yet clear to me. I will have to consult with the pastors of the church further to explore this distinction.

rituals in DMNA worship, to allow a better sense of two of the most important embodied cultural performances; trembling, which takes place in all of these three rituals, and jumping, which most evident in the bascule.

Blessing

November 13, 2005. After the opening prayer and song, the blessing of the congregation takes place. I follow the other women from my seat on the wooden bench to a kneeling position in a single file line in the middle of the church floor, facing the men's side. The men are also facing us, on their knees in a straight line. One of the deacons stands at the head of the two lines, and says a short prayer over us. Then, the men get up and the women remain in place. The drummers begin to play, and the congregation to sing, including the women being blessed, as Pastor Kasambi takes his place, standing facing our line. He arranges his towel over his arms, which are bent at the elbows and perpendicular to the front of his body. He suddenly begins to tremble, his shoulders and upper body quaking, his fingers gesticulating, and his head intermittently making sudden shaking gestures. He brings his hands into a prayer position, and I observe his lips moving, but the words are overwhelmed by the sound of the drumming and singing. Then, with his arms at shoulder level, bent at the elbows, but on the side of his body, with the towel over his left arm, he runs down to the other end of the line, turns around, and runs back, with the towel now lightly brushing over our heads as he whizzes past. He makes three counter clockwise circles around us, and each time he passes, the towel grazes the top of my head and the others in line as well. Then, hands, arms, and shoulders still trembling, he touches each female on their foreheads one by one, with his

right hand. After receiving this final blessing, I rise to my feet and join the other women who have taken their place standing in a line facing the men's side, singing and vigorously shaking their nsakala. A woman arrives late to the service, and takes her place kneeling on the floor and the Pastor repeats the ceremony just for her. Finally, all the females have been blessed, and the men take their places kneeling on the floor to receive their own blessing. The Pastor performs the ceremony for them, and then for the drummers as well.

Healing

February 12, 2006. The deacon has just issued a call for those who want to be healed to come to the center of the floor. Four women and a man answer the call, kneeling or sitting on the floor in their respective lines. The deacon prays over them, and then the man gets up and leaves. The ceremony is to commence with the women first. The deacon bends down and each woman whispers into his ear their ailment. He gestures to them to spread out along the floor with adequate distance between them. All of the rest of the women (and then men on the other side) are in a line behind those being healed, as the music and singing begin. I sway side to side with the rest of the women as the music gets louder and the singing stronger. I watch as each woman who is to be healed spreads a cloth wrap over her exposed legs as she sits with her legs stretched out straight in front of her. Four men in soutans come to stand so that each of them is facing one of the women. They bend down so that the woman in front of them tells them in their ear the location of her pain. Each one of the men then prays, hands clasped in front of them, heads high. Each one begins to walk counterclockwise around their particular

patient. The men begin to tremble and shake, touching and massaging the part of the body of the patient that is the source of the pain. They also run their trembling hands down the patients entire body, from the shoulders to the feet, and then repeating the gesture again. The men run counterclockwise around the body numerous times, shaking and flapping their white towels over the patient repeatedly. They sometimes drape the towel over the patient; for one woman it was wrapped around the upper portion of her body. They whirl with the towels as they circle the patients, creating a sound as if they were catching the wind. Then, when this part of the healing was complete, each woman is motioned to her knees to pray while the healer drapes the towel over her head and prays over her. I watch one healer, his ministrations over, as he pulls his patient to her feet by her right hand. She jumps three times while still grasping his hand. He lets go, and she continues to jump several more time, then clasps her hands in prayer and dances backwards to join the line of singing women.

Trembling in the Worship Service

Trembling is an embodied practice that was found in the many rituals of pre-colonial *banganga*, evidence of which exists in many descriptions of the pre-colonial Kongo Kingdom, as chapter two demonstrates. Some of these same embodied practices were reincorporated into and helped to define the prophetic movements of the colonial period (Fu-Kiau, 149), and the worship of the DMNA church. John Janzen discusses how trembling has a well-established pre-colonial history (Janzen 1977:108-9). Moreover, MacGaffey talks about rituals involving trembling and cloth that were used in the past:

The characteristic DMNA rituals of healing and bascule are both rooted in classical religion...A form of public, competitive demonstration of the capacity to tremble (*mayembo*) was also held, in which the form was that of the *bascule* dance, the focus either a raffia cloth (*lubaadi*), waved by the leader, or the herb *mansusu*...believed to excite the spirit...The sign of the *nganga*'s success in returning the soul was that he would give a raffia cloth (*lubongo*) to one of his assistants, still "in the spirit" (*mu mayembo*), to lay on the head of the patient...until he could do so three times, the soul had not returned. (1986:239)

Here, the use of cloth in healing and the embodiment of trembling are both shown to be embodied cultural performances that existed in the past, both before and during more recent Kongo conversions to Christianity that occurred with European colonialism in the Lower Congo.

Trembling, as one of the major embodied theologies of the DMNA church, is even articulated in songs. Although not a song in the hymnal of the DMNA church in Luozi, the following example was one of many popular songs of the *bangunza* movement during the mid-1930's in Kingoyi, a town also in the Manianga region (the same region where the DMNA church was founded at Nzieta).

Song No. 17
Nzambi wakusola,
Wenda zakama

Mfumu Nzambi wansola,
yandi wampana salu

Kamba lendo yena yaku,
Vo Nzambi wakusola mu kedika
Vo masumu maku meni

Song No. 17
God has chosen you.
Go and shake.

The Lord God has chosen me,
He gave me the work

If you have received power,
If God has really chosen you,
If your sins are wiped out.¹⁶²

¹⁶² Anderrson, Effraim (1958) *Messianic Popular Movements in the Lower Congo* (Uppsala: Almquist & Wiksell):285.

This song illuminates the importance of shaking and trembling in the worship of *bangunza* in general, and specifically, what the embodiment of the Holy Spirit signifies in regards to your relationship with God. If a person receives the Holy Spirit in their bodied and begins to tremble, it is a sign that they have been forgiven for their sins and chosen by God to become *ngunza* (Simbandumwe 1992:167). As the accounts in chapter three showed, during the colonial period some Kongo people fell sick, and began to tremble, and it was this trembling that indicated that they had a spiritual commission from God to become *bangunza*. This embodied indicator was recognized by the Kongo people and colonial administrators alike, who then arrested and questioned anyone suspected of trembling.

Trembling also can be seen as a form of embodied history through an examination of the process of the passing on of the Holy Spirit, or *dikisa mpeve*. Simbandumwe asserts that the practice of giving the spirit to someone, *dikisa mpeve*, started when Simon Kimbangu was trying to curtail the claims to spiritual authority that were being made by people he saw as false prophets:

In order to control the situation, the Prophet Kimbangu demanded that the process of divine call must involve his dispensation of Mpeve...For Kimbangu, therefore, to feed or dispense the Spirit (*dikisa mpeve*) to his disciples became an important part of his ministry as the prophetic movement increased in popularity...As soon as Kimbangu laid his hands on the heads of his new assistant prophets, they were charged with the power to perform miracles...They, in turn, had to *dikisa* Mpeve to others. (Simbandumwe 1992:168)

This passage reveals Kimbangu's attempts to control and limit access to the very spiritual authority that he claimed for himself. The passing of the Holy Spirit and the ability to tremble from one person to the other was also confirmed in interviews in Luozi.

When you begin to pray in our church, they ask you, “who wants to receive the Holy Spirit?” They will pray for you and if you have it in your heart to receive the Holy Spirit. There are also rites that we do. We are going to move you with the songs...we lay on the hands, we move you. If it can arrive, you are transformed now. The spirit arrives in you, you begin to shiver. Now, you are going to begin to be initiated especially into dreams, dreams...in the dreams you are going to dream you begin to lay your hands on the sick...or even I begin to hear another voice (Interview, P. Kasambi, Luozi, DRC, 12 November 2005).

This passage demonstrates one way in which the power to tremble is passed on, through the laying on of hands, which Pastor Malala added was a “touch that became divine through prayer” (Interview, Luozi, DRC, 13 February 2006). Pastor Kasambi adds that these rites are a process of initiation to receive the power to heal and to chase away bad spirits (Interview, Luozi, DRC. 12 November 2005). So while everyone can have hands laid upon them to facilitate receiving the Holy Spirit, only certain people actually undergo the rites to be able to heal and protect others through the Holy Spirit. However, these are all men, as women are not allowed to heal, due to the idea of menstrual blood as a force that detracts from spiritual power and the ability to enter into trance (Interview, P. Kasambi, Luozi DRC, 12 November 2005). Thus, there actually is a list of the male members of the church that have received the power to lay on hands and weigh in the bascule.

In this regard, the passing on of the power to tremble and heal, is like an embodied historical genealogy of the prophetic movement. This is because the Prophet Simon Kimbangu passed on the power to certain prophets, who then passed it on to other followers, and so on and so forth. As Mahaniah writes,

In order to enthrone his disciples, Kimbangu laid hands on the followers. It is in this way that the *mpeve*, the spirit of the prophet, was transferred to them. Each time that the disciples, in their turn, wanted to enthrone

another person, they laid their hands on them while praying...It is through this chain of transmission that the charisma of Simon Kimbangu...was spread throughout all of Kongo country. Indeed, in order to be recognized as an *ngunza*, the bearer of this *mpeve* must be in the position to prove the origin of this force as coming from...Simon Kimbangu. (Mahaniah 1982:98-99)

So, in regards to the DMNA church, the genealogy is as follows: Philippe Mbumba, the founder of the prophetic movement in the Manianga region, passed on the spirit to his own disciples, so that it eventually reached Masamba Esaie. Mbumba received the spirit himself indirectly, from a prophet named Nzombo Ngabileli, who received it from another prophet named Mayemba Filipino, who supposedly received it himself from Kimbangu when he attended healings and prayer sessions in Nkamba during the few months before Simon Kimbangu was arrested, tried, and exiled (Mahaniah 1982:99). It is in this way that the ability to lay on hands, bless, and heal are passed on, through the body. It is only through receipt of the Holy Spirit in this manner that members are given the authority to heal others. In this way, spiritual authority in the church is not accessible to everyone; these rites of receiving the Holy Spirit thus establish the religious authority of recipients, while excluding others, namely, women.

In the first ethnographic passage above which describes the blessing ritual, I note that I saw the pastor's lips moving, but was unable to hear what was being said because of the loud din of the music and singing. This inability to hear what was being said happened most of the time when I participated in worship services; the one time that I asked about what was being said, I was told that it was a prayer. In other studies of the *bangunza* movement and churches inspired by the prophetic movement (Morel's 1921 account, Mahaniah 1982, 1988; MacGaffey 1983, 1986; Andersson 1958; Devisch 1996)

prophets, including Simon Kimbangu, are described as having exhibited glossalia, or speaking in tongues. Unfortunately, I did not inquire about glossalia as a form of practice in this DMNA church, and it was not mentioned to me in my interviews. This is not to say that glossalia is not occurring; however, confirmation of the practice of speaking in tongues and the meaning of this in the context of the DMNA church remains to be explored during my next research visit.

Weighing

February 12, 2006. The musicians are playing and everyone is singing enthusiastically. The women are dancing and playing their nsakala in their line, facing the men's line on the opposite side. There is a wide, open space down the middle of the floor between the two lines. One man, who will be acting as the ntwadisi, stands in front of the raised platform, facing the congregation. He has his white towel over his left arm, bent at the elbow, and his right hand slightly outstretched. I can see his hands trembling and he suddenly bends slightly, shoulders quaking, shaking his head. On his left side, another man is standing facing the congregation, trembling and shaking as well. He suddenly begins to do a rhythmic running skip towards the entrances, arms slightly below shoulder height, held perpendicular to his body, bent at the elbows. He turns when he reaches the back wall, and continues the movements during his approach towards the ntwadisi. The ntwadisi, whose hand continues to tremble, grasps the guy's right hand, and the guy jumps high in the air three times, after which the ntwadisi releases his hand, and he skips backwards, to repeat his approach twice more, jumping each time. After the third approach, he staggers sideways, still trembling, and rejoins the men's side. Then,

Mama Ntima, on the right side of the ntwadisi, begins her running skip towards the entrances, repeating the process for herself. Later, after a young girl completes the bascule, she falls to her knees on the floor when she rejoins the women's side. The teenage girl who follows her staggers frenetically, eyes rolling up towards the ceiling, after she completes the bascule. I recall other similar occasions, when people seemed to be possessed by the mpeve nlongo, whirling or moving recklessly, crashing into other people or objects. At those times, I continued to shake my nsakala, and tried to mask my surprise, as if I experienced things like this everyday. The only thing I can compare it to in my own life was seeing people "catch the Holy Ghost" in Baptist churches I had attended as a child. I didn't know what to do, whether to calm them down or not. I decide to just wait and see what others would do, and sometimes, other church members would try to guide the person to a more open area so that they could avoid hitting anything, although they were never restrained.

Jumping and the Bascule

The above excerpt from my field notes recounts the climax and most unique part of the worship service of the DMNA church: the bascule. The bascule is a test of the spirit (Fu-Kiau 1969:155) or a literal weighing of the purity of the spirit (*ntezelo a mpeve*) (MacGaffey 1986: 237) through embodied practice. Lutunu describes it as "[a] purely African rite [that] consists of testing the spiritual power of the congregation" (1982: 40). Fu-kiau asserts that it became a part of *bangunza* ceremony after the liberation of the jailed and deported *bangunza* leaders around independence (1969:156).

MacGaffey writes that it takes its name from Job 31:5-6: “If I have walked with vanity, or if my foot hath hastened to deceit; let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know mine integrity” (MacGaffey 1986: 237).

During the bascule, the *ntwadisi*, or person who weights the spirit, stands at the front of the church. As the instruments are played loudly, he enters into an ecstatic trance, with his right hand extended, trembling. As the men and women of the church dance and sing in separate lines, a person enters the open space in the middle, moving to dance in place, with their backs almost against the wall that faces the *ntwadisi*. Then, they dance forward, in a skipping motion, and reach out their own right hand. If the person is spiritually pure, he/she will be able to grasp the hand of the *ntwadisi* and jump high. However, if the person has sinned, the *ntwadisi* will not even be able to take their hand, which is a clear indication that they must confess their sins before being weighed again (Fu-Kiau 1969:156; MacGaffey 1986: 238).

Several times I witnessed situations in which a person’s hand was refused. The one that stands out the most was during a bascule when a young woman was approaching the *ntwadisi*, but the way that she was moving was very odd; she did not skip, but rather placed her feet gingerly one in front of the other. When she reached the *ntwadisi*, he refused to take her hand, and motioned her to the side where she knelt and prayed/confessed. Later, she tried again, and was rejected again. I was asked once by the pastor if I wanted to participate in the bascule, but I declined, not only out of respect for the fact that I was not a member of the church and had never received the Holy Spirit myself, but also out of fear; what would I do if I was rejected?

As a cultural performance, the bascule is a ritual that draws upon many embodied practices of the past. First, the bascule is a public test of spiritual purity based on your ability to grasp the *ntwadisi*'s hand and the height of your jump. The public judgment aspects harkens back to the *nkasa* poison ordeal in the Kongo kingdom, in which, under an accusation of witchcraft or other serious offense, the accused had to imbibe a drink made by an *nganga* from the poisonous *nkasa* root. If the accused was innocent, he or she would vomit the drink. If rather, the accused was in fact guilty, the drink would cause the person's death, thus publicly confirming their guilt. Janzen also links the two practices based on the meaning of the KiKongo phrase *dikisa mpeve*, or "to give a person spirit".¹⁶³

dikisa, means to nourish an ill person, to force him to eat, or to oblige him to take medicine or poison. Thus *dikisa nkasa* is used to describe the administration in the olden times of the poison ordeal. *Dikisa mpeve* has reference to the role of the prophet in guiding the novice into direct relation with higher "spirit" while at the same time thereby stirring to life a more vital being within him. (Janzen 1977:109)

As a public test of spirit (pure/unpure), the bascule then, relates to the public test of guilt/innocence that defined the *nkasa* ordeal during the pre-colonial period.

Second, the trembling hand of the *ntwadisi* can also be seen as embodying the history of the Kongo Kingdom. As stated in chapter two, when the king of the Kongo left his quarters and entered the courtyard, the soldiers and members of the court would drop to their knees, clapping (*bula makonko*) in order to ask for his blessing. As he passed each person, his fingers trembled as he was "lightly moving the fingers as if he is playing the lute" (da Roma 1964:125). If the king did not reach his hand out to you, then

¹⁶³ Here, Janzen cites Pastor Makanzu who writes, "The words *dikisa mpeve* are synonymous with the phrases 'to give a person spirit' or 'to cause a spirit to enter a person.'" (Janzen 1977:109)

you did not receive his blessing. In the modern context of the DMNA church, the trembling fingers and hand of the *ntwadisi* also give a blessing; that of the Holy Spirit. If you are worthy, spiritually pure, and can thus grasp his trembling hand, the blessing that is passed on to you is the manifestation of the Holy Spirit, which happens usually after having your spirit weighed three times. This is evidenced by the church members whom themselves begin to tremble and in others ways manifest spirit possession after being weighed.

Third, the bascule, in focusing on jumping as a form of blessing, also incorporates yet another form of embodied practice that dates to the pre-colonial period. Like trembling, the ritual jumping of the bascule can be found in some embodied practices of the past. Ritual jumping, as explained in chapter two, was used in many contexts including for example, securing the blessing of one's father or father's clan to ward off misfortune and mishaps (called *dumuna* in that context). John Janzen briefly discusses how this ritual paternal blessing is emulated in the DMNA church (Janzen 1977:108-9). Moreover, MacGaffey describes a photo of the ecstatic leaping of an *nganga* based on contact with certain charms (1986:239).

After the bascule, the closing of the church service begins with a song performed by the entire congregation, a group prayer, the closing of the service by the pastor or deacon, and then *malembe meno*, which is a ritual of saying "good bye and go with peace" to all of the members.

Other Embodied Practices in the DMNA Church

At this point in the essay, I will examine the other distinguishing embodied practices of DMNA worship as compared to the CEC churches in Luozi, and the ways in which they are “enacted theologies” that reveal the doctrines and beliefs of the DMNA church. These include dress, gestures, singing, and dance and music.

Dress

One of the most distinguishing characteristics of the members of DMNA is that they dress in all white. Although this attire is not obligatory and people can still enter the church without it, it is the preferred form of dress for the church.

The men wear white shorts or pants along with a loose white shirt called a *bou-bou*. They may also wear a long dress-like garment called a *soutan*,¹⁶⁴ which is the same name for the dress that women wear as well. The men’s heads are covered with white hats, of which there is a variety. For women, the expected attire is a white full length *soutan* that usually ends somewhere near their ankles, and a white head scarf to cover their heads. This form of dress is observed more often by the older women than by the teens and young girls.

Like the manner of worshipping, the forms of dress were reportedly represented in the “worship of angels” that Masamba Esaie saw in his vision (Pastor Malala, Interview, Luozi, DRC, 14 November 2005). In this sense, the white dress represents and embodies a spiritual connectedness to angels, and by extension, to God. In an interview, Pastor

¹⁶⁴ There are a number of striking similarities that can be seen to be shared by the DMNA church in Congo and the Celestial Church of Christ in Benin and Nigeria. These include going barefoot in the church, the wearing of *soutans/sutanas*, the importance of the color white and white garments, as well the founding of the church by prophets who had visions. The existence of possible connections or cross influences between these two churches need to be investigated further (The Celestial Church of Christ was founded in 1947, and Masamba Esaie was held in a penal camp for nearly 10 years before being released in 1960).

Kasambi added that the color white also signifies purity, and it can't be worn if you have sinned (Interview, Luozi, DRC, 12 November 2005). This is another reason that wearing the color white is important in the church. Many of the same associations can be found in Elisha Renne's study of the meaning of white cloth in traditional Yoruba religious worship and the Cherubim and Seraphim Church in Nigeria, in which she explores "the process of progressive distinction by which religious groups express new beliefs through material objects" (2005:141). Like the DMNA church, white cloth came to play an important part in the Cherubim and Seraphim Church, based on visions of angels dressed in white, seen by founders of the church (2005:146), and the association of white garments with morality and spiritual purity. In both churches (DMNA and C&S), the wearing of white cloth became a visual sign of one's membership in the church, and assumedly, one's morality and spirituality.

Moreover, in traditional Yoruba religious beliefs, white cloth was and is used for "protection, as medicine, and as a representation of spiritual connections" (2005:143; also see 1995:29). Similarly, in Kongo cosmology, the color white is associated with the spirit world (MacGaffey 1986:45; Fu-Kiau 1969). Previous studies of the *bangunza* movement have revealed that other prophets such as Mbumba Phillipe, Masamba's predecessor in Manianga, encouraged dressing in white as well which no doubt must have influenced Masamba Esaie. Mbumba's preference for this color has also been attributed to a need to protect prophets against evil spirits (Mahaniah 1982:101), a sentiment which echoes traditional Yoruba use of white cloth for spiritual protection against harm.

Another important element of dress in the DMNA church is white cloth or towels. These white towels were seen in a vision by the prophet Masamba Esaie (Interview, P. Malala, Luozi, DRC, 13 February 2006) and are worn over either the left shoulder or around the neck and over both shoulders. The men who wear these cloths have been consecrated and possess the power to heal. During the section of the church service dedicated to general blessings and healing, these white cloths are actively used. They are flapped near the patient's body to "chase away the bad spirits." (P. Malala, Interview, Luozi, DRC, 14 November 2005). This practice relates to similar forms of healing used by traditional *banganga* as shown in chapter two. For example, Laurence de Lucques, a European Catholic missionary evangelizing in the Kingdom of Kongo in the early 1700's, described one traditional healer's methods in the following way:

The fetisher...makes the sick person lie on the ground totally naked. He touches him in order to examine him thoroughly. Then he takes the skins of certain animals, with which he touches all of the body and from time to time he starts to shake it and to hit it saying that these skins will draw out the illnesses that he suffers. (Cuvelier 1953:131; MacGaffey 1986:239)

As Janzen notes, the waving and shaking of these skins near the body of the patient is one way to channel the vital principle of *mpeve*. Thus, in the DMNA church, the white cloths are used to create *mpeve* and draw the bad spirits away from the body, which can also be seen when the healers move the cloth in their hands down the patient's body and use a gesture of pulling and drawing something invisible away from them.

In the DMNA church, there are two main white cloths that are used in the rituals; a long, white bath towel, and a much wider, yet shorter thin, cotton cloth that is known as a flag. The towel is used in general healing and blessing and is carried to the church each day, while the flag is reserved for the blessing of babies, and the transfer of the power to

heal to another party (Pastor Kasambi, Interview, Luozi, November 12, 2005; Pastor Malala, Interview, Luozi, 14 November 2005). When I asked whether these cloths came from a special place, I was told instead that they are ordinary towels and cloths that one can purchase in the market, but that they had undergone a rite of sanctification (personal communication, Deacon Mindele, Luozi, 16 October 2005; Pastor Malala, Interview, Luozi, 14 November 2005).

In comparison, the CEC Protestant churches in Luozi do not have a uniform dress code for members. Although women covering their heads can also be seen, it is not in a particular color. Healing in these other churches seems to be based more so on prayer, and thus white towels and cloths are not used in healing.

Significant Gestures

Another way that the theology of the DMNA church is embodied is through *bimpampa*, or body gestures. One embodied practice that can be observed often in the ritual of the DMNA church is the use of a clapping gesture with one hand cupped over the other, usually done in sets of three. This gesture of *bula makonko* existed in the pre-colonial Kongo Kingdom, and continues to be seen today throughout Kongo culture. As noted in chapter two, it is a gesture that signifies humility, respect, gratitude, and even a greeting. In the DMNA church, this gesture has been incorporated as a way of closing prayers. At the end of a prayer the following call and response will occur:

(Person Praying) Amen!	(Congregation) Ngeta! (yes)
(Person Praying) Amen!	(Congregation) Ngeta! (yes)
(Person Praying) Amen!	(Congregation) Amen!

Then, a sequence is repeated three times in which the person praying then claps once, and the congregation then claps twice in unison. When I asked about the significance of these three claps, I was told that they referred to the holy trinity in the Christian church. “The three times according to the explanations that we received from our parents, observe the trinity...God the father, the son, and the holy spirit” (Pastor Malala, Interview, Luozi, 14 November 2005). This was the explanation as well for the three taps of a short wooden stick on the table that opened and closed the service and signified the transition from one part of the service to the other. This tapping reportedly became a part of the service on the day that the church was founded. However, the tapping on the table also indicated that all were joined in a meeting of this world and the supernatural world: “everyone is present, all human beings, and all spiritual beings” (Interview, P. Malala, Luozi, DRC 13 February 2006).

The Holy Trinity might be also used to explain the three circles the pastor makes around the congregation during the blessing, the three turns at being weighed that each person receives during the bascule, and the circles that are also made around sick people seeking to be healed. Fu-Kiau sees these circles as serving the purpose of protecting the person in the center from spiritual harm: Walking around the sick person is to build a wall of spiritual faith around him in order to prevent bad spirits from entering” (1969:155). The use of groupings of gestures in threes¹⁶⁵ and their explicit connection to the Holy Trinity is yet another way that the theology of DMNA is enacted. Moreover, the ritual use of *bula makonko* in the DMNA church, which in the past was used in

¹⁶⁵ Further research remains to be done on the significance of groupings of threes in the pre-colonial Kongo region. As accounts from chapter two show, often the *bula makonko* gesture would be done in groupings of threes, although this was not always the case.

contexts as varied as greeting another person on the road to expressing thanks to the generosity of the King of Kongo, demonstrates the reconciliation of traditional body gestures and imported theologies. The particular redefinition of this gesture in the context of religious worship is all the more salient because it continues to be used in everyday interactions in secular contexts.

In the more mainstream CEC churches in Luozi, *bula makonko* is not incorporated ritualistically in the services. When I introduced myself to the congregation during one of several visits, the pastor called out “Nkumbu ya ntete...nkumbu ya nzole...nkumbu ya ntatu” (one time, two times, three times) to which the audience responded by clapping twice after each phrase. However, this was not a part of the prayer and worship, and occurred during the welcome period during which all visitors were introduced and received in the same manner.

Another embodied gesture frequently in use in the DMNA church is *fukama*, or kneeling. During the blessing and healing ceremonies, the church members who are the recipients of the rites can be found on their knees. This also occurs during prayers, when the congregation kneels, most often on the floor in the open space in the middle of the church that divides the male and female sides. However, the men also may pray with one knee bent, and the other knee on the ground. Although I was told that this is the preferred position that men should take when praying (Interview, P. Malala, Luozi, DRC, 13 February 2006), in actual practice men used both positions (kneeling, one knee raised) when praying.

Another manner of using the body that the DMNA church emphasizes in distinguishing its form of worship from other churches is looking upward when praying,

as opposed to downward. Once, when I first began attending services at the church, I began to pray with my hands clasped and my head bowed. A deacon came over to me and gently corrected my positioning, telling me that in the DMNA church, they pray to the heavens, and so raise their heads while praying. This different emphasis in the orientation of the head and eyes, although slight, is yet another enacted theology that embodies the distinctive form of worship of the DMNA church.



Figure 3: Deacon beginning prayer with knee bent and head raised (DMNA Church, Luozi, 30 October 2005. Photo by author.



Figure 4: Fukama as a part of prayer (DMNA Church, Luozi, 30 October 2005, photo by author)

Sanctified Songs

The songs that are a part of the worship service of the DMNA church are also, for the most part, a feature that sets the church apart from the CEC (Evangelical Community of Congo) churches. Although in all of the churches in Luozi, the predominant language of the songs was KiKongo, there are differences in the composers of those songs. In the hymnbooks for one of the CEC churches for example, the vast majority of the songs were composed by European missionaries to the Congo rather than by Congolese themselves. On the other hand, a perusal of the hymnal of the DMNA church reveals that the songs were composed by prophets, leaders, and members of the DMNA church itself. Pastor Malala cited the hymnbook among the three sacred texts of the DMNA church. When asked why the hymnbook, entitled *Nkunga mia Dibundu dia Mpeve ya Nlongo mu Afelika*

(Songs of the Church of the Holy Spirit in Africa) and now composed of more than 278 songs by many different people, is considered to be sacred, he replied that the songs were “never composed, but received in visions and dreams.” (Pastor Malala, Interview, 14 November 2005, Luozi, DRC) All of the songs in the hymnal are inspired songs, which have been evaluated by a group of elders for authenticity. Thus, the emphasis on inspired songs is another way in which the theology of the church is enacted and is an important form of worship in the DMNA church, as stated in an interview:

We take songs that remain sanctified, that remain really something of saints that must allow us to communicate with the divine. Then, when the piece is here, the sense of the music, in our vision it is that the angels sing with us, together...In singing, all the songs are prayers! It's for that reason that I said that the songs [are] a substance that is transported by the music. (Pastor Malala, Interview, 14 November 2005 Luozi, DRC)

Since the songs are inspired, when they are sung by the congregation, they are like melodic prayers to God.

The Kimbanguist church also has a belief in inspired songs, and traces it back to the prophet Simon Kimbangu. According to oral history, when he sent helpers to purchase hymnbooks from missionaries, he was ridiculed for not having received “inspired hymns” and then was asked by another missionary to return some books that he had. “Kimbangu was told by God that from then on he should never look to the missionaries for anything...there and then, in the presence of the missionary, a close colleague of Kimbangu...‘received’ the first hymn: ‘Soldiers of righteousness, put on your armour’”¹⁶⁶ (Molyneux 1990: 153-4). The potentially double meaning of Christian

¹⁶⁶ The potentially double meaning of Christian soldiers preparing for battle, and the struggle between Kimbangu and his followers, and the missionaries and colonial administration, was probably not lost on the missionary who supposedly witnessed the instance of receipt of this inspired hymn.

soldiers preparing for battle, and the struggle between Kimbangu and his followers, and the missionaries and colonial administration, was probably not lost on the missionary who supposedly witnessed the instance of receipt of this inspired hymn. Moreover, the history of this practice most likely applies to the DMNA church as well, as their church is also based on the *bangunza* movement that began with the prophet Simon Kimbangu.

This oral history also shows how inspired songs are a way in which the spiritual authority of the church is established and maintained. When the colleague of Kimbangu received the inspired hymn, he also showed the missionary that Kimbangu and his followers had a direct line of communication with God, and did not need the missionaries as mediators, interpreters, or gatekeepers. Likewise, in the DMNA church, inspired hymns establish the spiritual authority of the church's members as opposed to that of the mission led SMF churches in the area. Although I did not inquire further into the process by which songs are judged, the additional requirement of verifying the authenticity of the inspired songs by a group of church elders provides a means by which the spiritual authority of the DMNA church is also maintained, since songs can be judged as genuinely inspired or not.

I have selected the texts of two of these songs, drawn from both worship service and the DMNA hymnbook in order to examine important themes in DMNA worship and ideology. The selected songs reveal not only a solid belief in God and Jesus Christ and a commitment to proselytizing, but also reference the historical experiences of the Kongo people as a whole, the persecution and belittling of *bangunza*, and the paying of homage to spiritual ancestors.

Nkunga N° 161

Song No. 161

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1. Yesu wafidisa minlonguki luenda lusamunanga mpulusu, Longa ye lubula bantu babo, Mipasi bazitisa Mvulusi.</p> <p>Tutondele, Tutondele,
Beto mu Kongo kimpwanza tuena,
Tueti kuzitisanga Mvulusi:</p> | <p>1. Jesus sent his disciples, go
Announce the salvation, teach and
Awaken all humans, so that they
respect the Savior</p> <p>Thank you, Thank you
We in Kongo, we are independent
We respect the Savior</p> |
| <p>2. Matoko zindumba luyangalala
Bika luazitisa Mvulusi wo,
Yandi waveni kimpwanza nade,
Bika tuazitisanga Mvulusi.</p> | <p>2. Young men and women, Rejoice
You want to respect the Savior
He really has given independence
Let us respect the Savior</p> |
| <p>3. Bena mu tombe ka bayezi dio ko
vo Yesu i Mfumu mu beto babo,
yandi waveni kimpwanza nade,
Bika tuazitisanga Mvulusi.</p> | <p>3. Those that are in darkness don't
know
That Jesus is our Lord, all of us
He really has given independence
Let us respect the Savior</p> |
| <p>4. Ntinu miantoto miabanzila vo
beto tukondolo Mvulusi wo,
Kansi mu bwabu bavidisi vo,
Yesu i Mfumu mu beto babo.</p> | <p>4. The kings of the land had believed
that
We were lacking a Savior
But now, they have forgotten
That Jesus is our Lord, all of us</p> |
| <p>5. Bangunza mu Kongo luyangalala
Bika tuazitisa Mfumu Yesu,
Yandi waveni kimpwanza nade,
Bika tuazitisanga Mvulusi.</p> | <p>5. The prophets of Kongo, Rejoice
Let us respect Lord Jesus
He really has given independence
Let us respect the Savior</p> |
| <p>6. Ntinu mu Kongo lubanzila dio
Kimpwanza mu Mpeve tuabakidi
kio
Mu nsuni ye menga ka tulendi dio
ko,
Mfumu waveni kimpwanza nade.</p> | <p>6. The kings of Kongo you all think of
this
We have gained spiritual
independence
Physically and through blood we
were not able to do it ourselves
The Lord really has given
independence</p> |
| <p>7. Yimbila yimbila Ngunza Nzambi
Zitisa Mvulusi zitisa Se,
Yandi waveni kimpwanza nade,
Bika tuazitisanga Mvulusi.</p> | <p>7. Sing, Sing, prophets of Nzambi
Respect the Savior, Respect the
Father
He really has given independence</p> |

Let us respect the Savior

8. Bangunza mu Kongo tubanzila dio,
Vo nsi eto yakidi mu tombe nade
Bika tuabokila Mfumu Yesu
Mpasi kakatula tomba nade.

8. The prophets of Kongo you all
think (suspect, foresee) of this
If our country is really in darkness
Let us call Lord Jesus
So that he lifts all of the darkness

(Song composed by Bindele Benjamin)

This song revolves around the prevailing theme of “kimpwanza” or independence. Independence itself as a sentiment, hope, and goal is very salient in the history and experiences of the Kongo people, especially in regards to their relationship with Western missionary hegemony and colonialism. In the case of the DMNA church, the significance of independence that one might first consider is that of spiritual independence, as specified in the sixth verse of the song, “We have gained spiritual independence.” The search for autonomy and self-determination in their spiritual lives drove the founders of the church DMNA who sought to part from missionary led and influenced churches that rejected the embodied practices of *bangunza* forms of worship. In this sense, the spiritual independence gained when the DMNA church was founded on February 12, 1961 was one in which Western missionaries were no longer the gatekeepers to salvation and contact with Jesus Christ, nor the dictators of worship practice.

The goal of spiritual independence however, fits inside the larger context of independence from colonial oppression and subjugation. The references throughout the song to the Lord having given independence reference the triumph over colonial rule on June 30, 1960. The song also affirms however, that Jesus Christ played a huge role in

gaining this independence as “physically and through blood we were unable to do it ourselves” (Verse Six). The BisiKongo played a major role in the gaining of independence for the entire country by and through A.B.A.K.O.,¹⁶⁷ a group that started out as a cultural association and eventually became a political party. It was this organization that rejected plans for gradual independence and issued a cry for immediate sovereignty in 1956: “the ABAKO from this point was firmly situated at the spearhead of militant Congo nationalism not to be overtaken until 1960” (Young 1966: 38). Yet, one of the major initial tenets of the ABAKO political party independence for the land of the Kongo people in particular. Thus, although this is not explicitly stated in the song above, the references to the “kings of Kongo,” “prophets of Kongo,” and “We in Kongo” indicate that the independence may be not only a spiritual one, or from colonial rule, but also the sovereignty of the Kongo people as a whole.

Nkunga N° 122

1. Mpeve ya tambula mpe tata
Kimbangu
I bonso mpe ya tambula Mfumu eto
Yesu
Tata Masamba weti sakumuna mi
nlongi
Mpasi salu kia tata Kimbangu kia
nieka.

Tata Masamba weti sakumuna
minlongi

Song No. 122

1. Father Kimbangu had received the
spirit
It was in this way that I received our
Lord Jesus
Father Masamba blesses the catechists
In order to spread the work of Father
Kimbangu

Father Masamba blesses the catechists
The catechists themselves dispersed to
preach

¹⁶⁷ A.B.A.K.O. was first a cultural association with the name Association pour le maintien, l’unité et l’expansion de la langue Kikongo, (Association for the maintenance, unity, and expansion of the KiKongo language) active since 1950 (Lemarchand 1961: 346). As it became active politically, the acronym became generally redefined as Alliance des BaKongo (Alliance of BaKongo). Both chapters five and six discuss ABAKO in further detail.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>Ba minlongi beti muangana mu
longa
Weti tala o kiadi mu ndonga
Kiadi kua mimvangi mia masumu</p> | <p>One sees oh sadness for the masses
Misfortune to the sinners</p> |
| <p>2. Weti fiongunina ye tala mpe mu
ndonga
Salu kiaka kina simba kua nani?
Weti bokila mpe tata Luka
Tata Luka toma simba kusalu.</p> | <p>2. Check and also look at the masses
Who will carry on the work?
Call Father Luc also
Father Luc, carry on the work</p> |
| <p>3. Toma yungusa mu lendo kia Mpeve
Toma samuna ma sonama mu
Bibila
Ye mu lendo kia Mpeve mu niakisa
Bi mbevo bieti kuiza kua beno.</p> | <p>3. Work well with the power of the
Holy Spirit
Announce well what is written in
the Bible
And with the power of the Holy
Spirit to heal
The sicknesses that come to us</p> |
| <p>4. Bu i lumwangisi mu ndambu za
zonsono
Lutoma samuna ye longa ma ya
longa
Ngieti tala o kiadi mu ndonga
Salu kiami bankaka kia beti
lembana.</p> | <p>4. As I have scattered you everywhere
Announce well and preach what I
preached
I watch, oh pity for the masses
Some are incapable to do my work</p> |

(Song composed by Mayimbi Esaie)

This second song focuses on the proselytizing mission of the church and the power of the Holy Spirit. The healing power of the Holy Spirit is discussed in the third verse, and this particular aspect of the DMNA church is an important component of its identity. Healing rites are performed quite often in the church in Luozi, facilitated by the flapping of white cloth and towels as discussed earlier, and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the body of the healer through trembling. Like many of the songs in the DMNA repertoire, this song also pays tribute to several ancestors who loom large in the history and spiritual imagination of the DMNA church, notably Simon Kimbangu, the prophet

who started the *bangunza* movements, and Masamba Esaie, the founder of the DMNA church who is also recognized as an important prophet. Although I am unsure of the identity of Father Luc,¹⁶⁸ in this song all three men are connected with the mission of spreading the word of God. Through song and the embodied practice of singing, the memories of these men are invoked in the space of the church.

In actual performance, these songs are sung loudly, accompanied by the music, generally in a call-and-response fashion between the male and female sides of the church. The practice of singing the songs loudly harkens back to the use of music and song to facilitate the reception of the Holy Spirit amongst Kimbangu and his followers during the colonial period (see chapter three). I did not witness this gendered arrangement of singing as the norm for the most part in the CEC churches, although they did have a number of choirs that were both mixed and separated in gender. I did, however, experience this form of singing, and even the same spatial arrangement of the sexes at many secular dances featuring the use of traditional instruments in settings such as celebrations for cleaning ancestral cemeteries, or marriages, for example.

Dance and Music

Like singing, dancing in the DMNA church is seen as an important aspect of communicating with God. The dancing often consists of poly-rhythmic movements, bouncing on the toes, while shaking the *nsakala* to another rhythm simultaneously, and moving forward, backward, and even sideways in space. When moving forward or

¹⁶⁸ Most likely, this is the name of another prophet of the *bangunza* movement, as evidenced by the practice of naming prophets in other songs, e.g. *Tata Fili/Ta Matai* (Father Philippe, Father Matteus), referencing *ngunza* prophets such as *Filippe Mbumba*, *Mavonda Ntangu* (also known as Philippe) and *Matai Mwanda* (Andersson 1958:286).

backward, the members of the church move three steps in either direction, rising up on the toes with the third step. The overall sense of the movements and orientation of the body is upward, rising up, as if trying to leave the ground and ascend into the heavens. The skipping step that is used by both sexes to approach the *ntwadisi* during the bascule also shows the same upward orientation. The most frequent formation of dancing was the women and men standing in straight lines facing each other with the space in the middle standing empty. The men exhibit the same bouncy movements, and also spin around occasionally.

In comparison, dancing plays little to no role in the worship of the CEC churches in Luozi, where it is limited to a small swaying back and forth in time with the music.¹⁶⁹

The importance of dance in the DMNA church was summarized in the following way:

Dance, it is an expression of joy...the Lord imposes upon us a response in movement, and we must respond...you have one dance only, it is the dance that puts you in the world of the divinity..it is a piece of heaven that fell down to us...and it affects us in divine events. When there is an event, [and] you don't sing, you don't dance...it is as if you are not in this piece of heaven...it plays a big role, our dance, because, the angels who are with us...are angels who glorify God. In order to glorify God, you must also put your body in the glory. (Pastor Malala, Interview, Luozi, November 14, 2005)

The dancing in the church is done to the rhythm of three small double-faced drums hit with batons called *bibandi*, along with two long, thin bamboo trunks hit with

¹⁶⁹ An exception to this was the popular nightly soirees that were held occasionally by the CEC churches, in which the choirs of the church showcased their talent. It also included performances by a group that sang Christian hymns to the urban rhythms of popular Congolese music. This music led to children dancing secular dances to the dismay of scout leaders surveying the event who chased and whipped them with switches to get them to stop, while the children scampered away and continued to dance when at a safe distance.

sticks (*bikualakala*) and *nsakala* that were vigorously shaken by the women. There are other traditional instruments that can be played in the sacred space, but certain ones are excluded. For example, the *patenge* (a square drum) and the *ngoma* are not usually played because they continue to be associated with profane dances (Interview, P. Malala, Luozi, DRC, 13 February 2006). However, in some youth choirs, the *ngoma* is being incorporated into the performances. The fan-fare form of music, with European style marching band instruments, was also tried, but apparently this form of music did not work as well with the songs. Thus, according the Pastor Malala, “you must have songs inspired specifically for the fan-fare” in order to use that kind of music. The fan-fare marching band form of music as a part of the worship service is most commonly used in the Kimbanguist church, as observed during my visit to the local Kimbanguist church in the town of Luozi (29 January 2006).

Pastor Malala’s comment that songs are inspired for particular types of music suggests that music and songs are in fact not separated in experiences of divine inspiration in the DMNA church. This further supports the idea that the form of music, the choice to use traditional instruments in the DMNA church, is supported by God, so that the music itself “transports the message” (Interview, P. Malala, Luozi, DRC, 14 November 2005). Moreover, music invokes “the unitary power of invisible substance and visible substance; music mobilizes all the substances,” bringing together the spiritual world with the world of the living (Interview, P. Malala, 13 February 2006).



Figure 5: Photo of *bibandi* and *bikualakuala*, (DMNA Church, Luozi, 22 May 2005)

Music and dance not only serve as expressions of joy and praise to God, but also as a form of embodied memory in the church. Besides the bouncing movement of the body, forward, backward, and in place, and the turning in place of the men, there is also a set of movements and gestures that stand out because of their different spatial orientation. The movement is based on dancing in the respective gender separated lines, and holding your hands waist high, with the palms turned down. Then, in unison, the lines move to the right side for about four counts, then the left, with the hands bouncing slightly to emphasize each count. As the church members in the lines move from side to side, they also lower their bodies toward the floor, so that after a minute or so, people are as low as they can go (some people even kneel) while continuing the upper body gestures. Several

times, church members explained to me that this dance, called *Basakata*, had come to them from Bandundu, a nearby province. In particular, this was the province where the Prophet Masamba Esaie was held in a penal camp for eight years, and apparently, he brought the dance back with him and it became a part of the dance worship practice after the DMNA church was founded. So, each time that the *basakata* is enacted, the participants are reminded of the arrest and forced exile of their founding prophet, and all of the tribulations he endured for trying to worship God in the manner of the *bangunza*. Moreover, Masamba's ability to learn a dance from that particular part of Bandundu while exiled there, which he then incorporated into the worship service, also shows the resilience of his faith and the human spirit in oppressive circumstances.

Conclusion: DMNA's Place in African Christianity, and the Body as a site of History and Authority

An examination of the meanings and uses of embodied practices such as dress, dancing, singing, trembling, jumping, and other gestures, in the context of DMNA worship reveals the extent to which the doctrines of the church are in fact "enacted theologies." During worship services, there was a paucity of reading material. Rather, the primary emphasis of the church seems to be on a fully embodied worship experience.

That these embodied practices in religious performances have their antecedents in pre-colonial, and then colonial rituals and ways of engaging the body, supports the notion that African Independent Churches such as the DMNA church were not merely isolated reactions to colonialism or colonial institutions, but rather creative ways of dealing with

novel situations that draw from a tradition of religious renewal and a body vocabulary of gesture, dance, comportment, and dress.

These enacted theologies serve multiple purposes in the context of religious worship, acting as embodied reminders of history while also proving useful for the constitution and also challenge of religious authority. Songs that recount *bangunza* leaders, rituals such as *dikisa mpeve* that enact an embodied genealogy of prophets, and dances such as the *basakata*, recalling Masamba Esaie's years of exile, act as forms of embodied history for relatively recent events, while gestures such as *bula makonko*, *fukama*, trembling, and *dumuka /dumuna* (jumping) recount the pre-colonial history of the Kongo region, from the gestures of kings and subjects, to the comportment of *banganga*.

Within and throughout this multi-layering of history also lies the struggle for religious authority. Through his visions and dreams, Masamba Esaie received a spiritual order from God to found the church that became the DMNA. In basing the dress and form of worship of the church on these visions, Masamba Esaie was able to challenge the hegemony of the Swedish mission led churches in the area, and establish a direct connection to God that removed the missionaries from the position of intermediaries. Besides the *dikisa mpeve* ceremony that must take place before a man is authorized to heal others through the Holy Spirit, in the context of the church songs must also be inspired and verified for authenticity before being accepted and used in worship. Moreover, women are excluded from being able to heal or lay on hands. For all of these reasons, the leadership of the church has several institutional mechanisms in place to control access to spiritual authority in the church. All of this demonstrates the

importance of cultural performances in the embodiment of history and religious authority.

The next chapter will further explore these issues, and really examine the constitution of political authority through performance, in the context of a post-colonial state under Mobutu Sese Seko.

Chapter 5
Dancing a New Nation:
Political and Cultural Animation during Mobutu's Period of Authenticité

Heureux le peuple qui chant et qui danse
(Happy are the people who sing and dance)
- a popular slogan of Mobutu's government

Makinu mantuma ka matomanga ko
(Dance that is ordered (by someone) is not done well.
- Kongo proverb

Introduction

March 17, 2006. I am sitting at one of the computers in the information resource library of the American Cultural Center in Kinshasa, checking e-mail and generally surfing the internet. Suddenly, I begin to hear very loud singing outside of the building. When it continued, I become curious and unsuccessfully try to peek through the window. Not able to see much, I leave my spot since the room was basically empty, exiting the library, passing through one set of doors that led outside into the sun, and then entering through another set of doors into the security screening area the one must pass through to enter this compound of the American embassy. There, one door was held open as several people looked outside at the activities across the street. I join the group of curious onlookers.

Taking a quick estimated count, I see that there is a group of about one hundred and sixty people in front of the building of the independent electoral commission. I ask one of the security officers at the door about the event, and he explained that Antoine Gizenga,¹⁷⁰ a politician of about eighty years old, was coming to the building to put in his nomination as a presidential candidate. All of the people are singing and some of them are dancing as well. Many were waving either a cloth or a small branch back and forth in the air, and most of them are dressed in similar party cloth displaying the face of their candidate. As I continue to watch, and even after I eventually collect my belongings and leave the building for another appointment, the crowd of supporters shout slogans and sing song after song together, performing their loyalty and support for their presidential candidate. Although I had only seen examples of it on videos, read about it, and heard about it from people I had interviewed, it seemed that political animation, which dated to Mobutu's era, had resurfaced in the multi-party state.

This anecdote is a good opening for a discussion of the interrelationship of performance and politics in a post-colonial Congo. The Congo state underwent major socio-cultural and political transformations after gaining independence from Belgium in 1960. The political figure who asserted the most influence on the country and instituted the most changes over a long period of time is former president Mobutu Sese Seko, who over his thirty-two year reign, consolidated power in his own hands and became a fervent dictator. Like many aspects of everyday life, Mobutu's ideologies, policies, and coercive authority also had an effect on the meanings and uses of Kongo cultural performances

¹⁷⁰ Coming in third in the total number of votes for the presidential election, Antoine Gizenga was eventually appointed the prime minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo after the elections.

under his regime, most poignantly in the realm of “animation politique et culturelle,” political and cultural animation. Political and cultural animation can be understood as organized dancing, singing, and other forms of artistic expression performed not only at political events but also in everyday settings such as businesses and schools, which has the purpose of spreading the ideas of the Mobutu-led government and exalting this same leader. Using documents about animation retrieved at the National Archives in Kinshasa, speeches, pamphlets, and other written propaganda of Mobutu’s regime, interviews with Kongo people in Luozi and Kinshasa who participated in animation at different levels of engagement, and analysis of archival video footage of animation, this chapter will illuminate the different degrees of power and authority that people exercised in their cultural performances and those required of others during Mobutu’s political regime, and examine the localized affect of national policies of political animation on Kongo people living in Luozi Territory.

Politics of Performance, Performance and Authority

Kelly Askew’s ethnography *Performing the Nation: Swahili Music and Cultural Politics in Tanzania* (2002), examines the negotiations inherent in state-citizen interactions in the production of Tanzanian national culture and nation building overall. Looking at projects, policies, and ideologies put forth to bring the island of Zanzibar and country of Tanganyika together as one unified nation, Askew emphasizes the need for governments and states to continuously perform:

The power entailed in trumpeting one version of reality (e.g., the existence of a Tanzanian nation) over others (e.g., the existence of not one but two nations in Tanzania) requires work, continual reenactment, unremitting

performance. Power breeds performance, just as performance breeds power. (Askew 2002:291)

Performance, then, is a critical component of creating national imaginaries for citizens and states alike. Thus, attention to performance “can expose the continual performance not only required *by* states but required *of* states that, just like individuals, must continuously reinvent themselves...Saying and, notably, *performing* the nation brings it into being.” (2002:292) Askew’s approach to politics and performance is quite relevant for postcolonial Congo under Mobutu, in that performances were used to help bring the new nation, first of Congo, then later of Zaire, into being. These performances also ritually solidified Mobutu’s place at the head of the hierarchy of political authority. In addition, the performances themselves, as they were often based on what were considered traditional dances and songs of different ethnic groups, embodied Mobutu’s ideology of authenticity, the revaluing of African customs and culture, and national unity.

Another component of Askew’s concept of performance and its relationship to power is that, like Foucault’s definition of power,¹⁷¹ performance is accessible to everyone.

Performance, like power, is not a product that can be given, exchanged, or recovered. It always necessarily is a process that is subject to on-the-spot improvisation, varying expectations, the vagaries of history and context, multiple associations and connotations, and remembered or projected meanings. Just as power is a diffuse resource accessible—albeit to varying degrees—to everyone, so too is performance. (2002:291)

¹⁷¹ In *Discipline and Punish* (1979) Foucault considers power “not as a property, but as a strategy...that one should decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity, rather than a privilege that one might possess...In short this power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the ‘privilege,’ acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic position” (26). In later work he defined power as the possibility of action upon the actions of others, which then can be taken to mean that everyone has power (The Subject and Power, 1983:224)

It is at this juncture that I seek to add some insights to this working theory of the performativity of power and the relationship between performance and politics (as stated in chapter one), and performance and authority. Foucault's theory of power, positing that everyone has power, has been criticized by some scholars for not fully engaging with long lasting, structured systems of domination of one group over others. In discussing his idea of power being exercised through a net-like organization of social relations, Nancy Hartsock, a feminist political theorist writes, "Domination is not a part of this image; rather the image of a network in which we all participate carries implications of equality and agency rather than the systematic domination of the many by the few" (1990:169). This leads her to later summarize that for Foucault "power is everywhere, and so ultimately nowhere" (1990:170).

While Foucault in earlier work such as *The History of Sexuality* (1990) saw power as "not an institution, and not a structure" (93) and states that he did "not have in mind a general system of domination exerted by one group over another" (92), in other writings Foucault recognized that mechanisms of power reach "into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes, and everyday lives" (1980:39). This is particularly true in *Discipline and Punish* (1979) where Foucault considers domination in his discussion of the shift in the western world from public spectacles of torture and execution to imprisonment and disciplined bodies as forms of punishment. A number of methods such as imposed time tables, collective rhythms, learned gestures, body-object articulation, and an emphasis on efficiency and precision were tools utilized for the domination of groups of people in prisons and other places:

These methods, which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjugation of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility, might be called 'disciplines.' Many disciplinary methods have long been in existence—in monasteries, armies, workshops. But in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the disciplines became general formulas of domination...What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behavior...thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies...In short, it disassociates power from the body...(1979:137-138)

Foucault's own work on disciplines, by focusing on domination, reveals that while power can be seen as a strategy that is exercised by everyone in a network of relations and social positions, not everyone equally exercises power to the same degree or in the same manner. Just because all people exist in networks of social relations and statuses does not mean that each person has the same influence on the conduct of others.

My study focuses on these differences in influence and control, by asking, how do some people come to have a large influence on the conduct of others, exercising some sort of authority that supersedes that of other people? Moreover, what role do embodied cultural performances play in constituting and maintaining that authority? The need to analyze situations of vast differences in the exercise of power, such as when states coerce embodied cultural performances from its citizens, is one of several reasons that I have found authority to be more useful as a tool of analysis than power. A focus on the configuration of religious and political authority reveals that while social positioning is important, social positions are made and unmade through interactions with others defined by and through embodied cultural performances. An examination of political and religious authority in post-colonial Congo clearly reveals that there were a number of institutions, structures, and policies, including political and cultural animation, that

operated as disciplines, “coercions that act upon the body,” placing Mobutu at the top of a hierarchy of statuses in Congo and giving him the ability to influence and even control the embodied conduct of his citizens, regardless of his legitimacy as a ruler.

In considering Askew’s alignment of her theory of performance with Foucault’s theory of power, I hope to build upon her work on performance and power by paying more attention to the “varying degrees” of power that are exercised and performed. Askew presents some very good examples of negotiations in the production of Tanzanian national culture between those with political authority and those without, and especially the negotiations of personal relationships at the micro-level in settings such as weddings. However, political and cultural animation in the Congo under Mobutu make it clear that, in a dictatorship and under coercive political authority, space for negotiation was limited by the state, and ordinary citizens did not usually have a choice in whether they wanted to “perform the nation.” Although some of these same citizens subtly found ways to subvert their forced participation, and others actively used it as a form of social mobility, the fact that these performances were coerced by a menacing state adds an additional layer of complexity to a theory of the politics of performance.

The relationship between performance and a coercive state has also been explored by Lisa Gilman, a folklorist who studies women’s praise dancing and singing for politicians in Malawi. She notes the importance of political dancing and singing in the years just before Malawi’s independence when the Nyasaland African Congress (NAC) wanted to make Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, the anticipated new leader of the country, more widely known to the people:

The NAC leadership organized performers, women activists in addition to single and mixed-sex dance groups, in locales throughout the country to perform at rallies to help energize the movement, educate the populace about Banda's imminent return, and legitimate Banda as the rightful leader. (Gilman 2004:37)

After Banda became president in 1964, women's political dancing in particular became institutionalized and controlled by the one party state, such that all women in the country were required to rehearse and perform at various party functions (Gilman 2004:38).

Through coercion and a discourse that traditionalized women's dancing to justify its use in political circles, the performances of women were used to continuously legitimize and enact Banda's political authority and leadership. Further, in the post-Banda era of multi-party politics, women's dancing has once again become commonplace as one sees "swarms of dancing women ideally clad in party fabric who elevate their party and its politicians to great heights through their songs of praise and gratitude and their castigation of the party's opponents" (Gilman 2001:43).

Through an examination of political and cultural animation that considers people's everyday experiences and its imposition on their lives and very bodies, I will explore the different degrees of authority and power that people exercised in their own cultural performances and those of others during Mobutu's reign. But first, how did Mobutu come to have such political authority? What follows is a brief history of the political situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo that led to Mobutu's rule, and the ideologies that came to define and structure national policies of political and cultural animation.

Independence and the First Republic

Political parties in the Belgian Congo only existed for about two years prior to the date of independence, June 30, 1960 (Weiss 1967:3). Most of them were organized around and grew out of the first local elections, which were held in 1957. Ethnic homogeneity defined many of these political parties such as ABAKO (Alliance de BaKongo), an organization that came to have a great influence on national politics. Seven years before the local elections, ABAKO was founded in Leopoldville by M. Edmond Nzeza-Nlandu in 1950. It began as a Kongo cultural organization that, based on its initial manifesto, sought to “unify, conserve, and perfect the Kongo language.”¹⁷² By the mid-fifties, ABAKO was becoming more involved in local politics, had grown in numbers and clout, had a new leader in Joseph Kasa-Vubu (elected in 1954), and was primed to play a key role in the struggle for national independence.

In the mid-fifties a sense of impending change was in the air all over Africa, and Congo was no exception. A number of events and publications addressing the possible independence of the Congo began to appear, eventually leading to the involvement of ABAKO. One of the most influential incidents was an article by Belgian Professor A.A.J. Van Bilsen published in December of 1955, in which he discussed a plan for the eventual independence of Congo after 30 years. His opinion of a thirty year transition to independence was echoed in July of 1956 in a manifesto published by Congolese intellectuals in a journal called *Conscience Africaine* (African Consciousness) (Lemarchand 1961:346), a journal for which the vast majority of the committee members

¹⁷² Verhaegan, Benoit (1962), *A.B.A.K.O. Documents 1950-1960*, Brussels: C.R.I.S.P: 10.

were non-Kongo Bangala and Baluba¹⁷³ intellectuals (Verhaegen 2003:178). The members of ABAKO published their own second manifesto on August 24, 1956, harshly critiquing this stance, beginning a significant tradition of political activism that played a crucial role in garnering the independence of Congo. After going over the major points of the *Conscience Africaine*, the manifesto spoke out directly against colonization.

None of us, in fact, could be found at the Berlin Conference. And however everything was decided for us...the Congo possessed neither a ruler of his race, or any at least of his choice, nor a government of his taste; the citizens were never citizens. (Verhaegen 1962: 39)

However, their most radical statement came in direct response to the thirty year plan. “Our patience has already surpassed the boundaries. Since the hour has come, it is necessary to grant us even today emancipation rather than to delay it again for thirty years” (Verhaegen 1962:40-41). Taking the lead in the calls for immediate independence, ABAKO became one of the most prominent ethnic associations in the Congo, eventually becoming a political party in 1959.

Other political parties that arose on the eve of independence were more regionally and nationally based, such as MNC/L (Mouvement National Congolais/Lumumba), the party of Patrice Lumumba. After much rioting in Leopoldville in January of 1959 by an unsatisfied urban mass, loss of Belgian administrative control over many areas of the country, and agitation by nascent political parties for immediate action, plans for independence were enacted (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002:85-87). From January to February of 1960, there was a Round Table conference in Belgium with the leaders of the Congolese political parties and the representatives of the colonial government, at which

¹⁷³ BaLuba are the ethnic group primarily in the Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of Congo. They speak Tshiluba.

the Congolese presented a united front. In May 1960, national elections were held, with the result that the MNC/L party won the majority of the votes. The agreed upon negotiation that resulted, to avoid further problems and divisions, was that of Patrice Lumumba as Prime Minister, and Joseph Kasa-Vubu of ABAKO as the first President of the new republic. Unfortunately, this young government suffered a number of problems almost as soon as offices were taken.

The first five years of independence were dominated by the immediate dislocation of failed decolonization... The initial breakdown in 1960 had four interrelated phases: the army mutiny, the flight of expatriate functionaries, the secession of the mineral-rich regions, and the collapse of the constitution and the political coalition in Kinshasa. All occurred within two months of independence (Young 1983:323).

On September 5, 1960, Kasa-Vubu dismissed Lumumba from his executive office, and Lumumba then retaliated by dismissing Kasa-Vubu (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002:108). Confusion reigned until General Mobutu neutralized them both and installed a temporary government (Young 1983:325).

And just who was General Mobutu? He had been a member of Lumumba's MNC/L party, and was made the secretary of state in the government of the first republic. However, when the national army mutinied only days after independence, protesting against the basically all white officer corps that still remained in control over them, Mobutu, who in the past had been a sergeant in the army, was appointed chief of staff of the army by Lumumba on July 8, 1960, in an effort to satisfy the disgruntled soldiers (Kannyo 1979:58; Ndaywel e Nziem 1998:571). Several months thereafter, Lumumba was murdered in January, 1961, allegedly with the complicity of the CIA, Belgian and U.N. officials, Mobutu, and several other Congolese political rivals (Nzongola-Ntalaja

2002:107). Consequently, a dis-satisfied group of Lumumba supporters set up its own government in Kisangani in early 1961, leading to the division of the country into four seats of authority: Kinshasa and Kisangani, which both claimed to rule the entire country, and the Kasai and Shaba states, which both claimed independence (Young 1983:325). However, with the aid of U.N troops to subdue the secessionist regime of Shaba, the willing return of the Kasai state, and the formation of a compromising regime between Kinshasa and Kisangani, under the leadership of Cyrille Adoula, the country was reunited by January, 1963 (Young 1983:326). One major change that did take place in the reunited country was the creation of 21 provinces with more autonomy to replace the six colonial provinces (Young 1965:533-566). Unfortunately, by 1964, the Lumumbist faction was in opposition again, and Moise Tshombe replaced Adoula as head of the republic.¹⁷⁴ Tshombe attempted negotiations with the rebel factions, but then resorted to violence, employing white mercenaries to strengthen the army. On the other hand, the rebel factions were receiving support from the Soviet bloc and weren't easy to put down. In regards to the presidency, a bitter gridlock ensued between Tshombe and Kasa-Vubu in 1965. Each had enough votes to block the other. What was there to do?

Mobutu Takes Power

On November 24, 1965, General Joseph Desire Mobutu seized power of the country. He was installed as president by the army high command, and this action was then ratified by the Parliament (Kannyo 1979:58). Between 1965 and 1967, under

¹⁷⁴ Tshombe had been the head of the successionist state of Shaba.

Mobutu, the political structure of the first republic was dismantled; the 21 provinces were reduced to 8 and lost their autonomy; and the multi-party system was prohibited (Young 1983: 329; Kannyo 1979:60). In 1967 a new constitution was adopted, putting a great amount of power in the presidency, and creating a single national party, the Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution (the People's Revolutionary Movement, also known as MPR) (Young 1983: 329).

The MPR traces its origins to the Corps de Volontaires de la République (CVR), (Volunteer Corps of the Republic) which was a quasi-political organization set up by young and nationalistic individuals in Kinshasa in December 1965 to support the political goals of the newly installed Mobutu regime. In April, 1967, the CVR dissolved itself and joined the MPR, which had just been created on the initiative of General Mobutu. The MPR soon became simply an extension of the administration and in fact disappeared as a separate institution (Kannyo 1979:60).

The MPR was the party of the state, and all Congolese citizens were members of the party automatically according to the national constitution (Kannyo 1979:60). The fact that one's membership was not a matter of choice was clearly articulated by one of the slogans popular during the time: "O linga, O linga te, O zali kaka MPR." From Lingala,¹⁷⁵ it basically translates to: If you want to, or if you don't want to, you are in MPR (Interview, Ndundu Kivuila, 20 May 2005; a slogan also repeated by many others in interviews and conversations).

¹⁷⁵ Lingala is the language of the ethnic group of Mobutu and the Equateur region, and the most popular language in Kinshasa.



Figure 6: MPR Member Card (Source: National Archives, Kinshasa, DRC)

From Nationalism to Mobutisme: the Ideologies of Mobutu's Regime

On the 20th May, 1967, the MPR released the “Manifeste de la N’sele,” the first official document outlining the goals of the new regime. In the foreword of the document, it states that the doctrine of MPR is “Nationalism” (MPR Manifeste 1967:6) and the MPR can be effective: “in the respect of democratic liberties, in the exaltation of the values of the country in the intellectual and cultural domain, for the effective liberation of the Congolese woman and Congolese youth, and for the union of all the Congolese for the force and grandeur of the republic” (MPR Manifeste 1967:6). Over the course of Mobutu’s thirty-two year regime, the ideology of the MPR has been renamed several times, but remained essentially the same. Thus, according to political scientist Edward Kannyo:

The ideological assertions of the Mobutu regime have been termed nationalism, authentic Zairian nationalism, authenticity, and Mobutuism at various periods. Whatever the terminological variations, the core of the ideology is essentially conservative anti-colonial nationalism. The aims of this orientation involve the “indigenization” of the political and economic structures of Zaire without altering them to provide for a more egalitarian and democratic socioeconomic system... The theory of authenticity has also been invoked to justify the authoritarian political system... Another important dimension of the ideology of authenticity pertains to the cultural nationalism and nativism. In this aspect, authenticity seeks to combat the sense of cultural inferiority that was inculcated by colonial domination (Kannyo 1979: 61).

An important example of the element of cultural nationalism and respect for indigenous cultures that MPR insisted on, can be found in the speech that Mobutu made to the country in his Message to the Nation for the New Year on December 31, 1971. It was in this speech that he actually announced publicly that he was changing the name of the country and many other things that went along with his ideas of authenticity.

Moved by the continual desire to research our authenticity, we decided, last October 27, to give again to our river the name that was his: the Zaïre was recognized, already by the 15th century, by the big powers at that time. This big river, vertebral column of the Republic and of which the tributaries constitute the coasts, is the natural element of connection between our populations. This is the reason, in order to seal more this national unity, we gave to our country the same name. In the same order of ideas, we changed the emblem and the national hymn, to relate them to our origins and to the realities of our homeland. (Mobutu Sese Seko 1975: 187-188)

This quote from his radio address demonstrates the importance of a return to an authentic pre-colonial past through an erasure and reinvention of significant national symbols (country name, emblem, national hymn). How then do performance and the arts in general tie in to Mobutu’s ideology of authenticity? According to Mobutu himself, in a series of interviews with Jean-Louis Remilleux, the arts are crucial to his authenticity project:

An africanist wrote that a people without a soul is a people without a future. It is a conception of life that I share. Our cultural approach thus consisted of in the first place to make Zairians conscious of their proper identity. We had to first “disacculturate,” to get rid of the results of this imposed colonial culture. . .The lightning development of Zairian arts since then can be considered like a renaissance and demonstrates the soundness of our approach. (Remilleux and Sese Seko 1989:111-112)

Hence, the development of the arts was to aid the shedding of a colonial identity and the embracing of a new national identity that not only privileged African artistic expression, but was also tied to demonstrating loyalty to the one party state and adulation of its leader, Mobutu Sese Seko. The primary way in which this new national identity was enacted, embodied, and performed was through political and cultural animation.

Political and Cultural Animation

Defining Political and Cultural Animation

Mobutu himself, in an interview with Remilleux, defined *animation* as the following:

At the same time a dance performance, a procession, a choreographed parade and a lesson in political education. Practically, we don't have an anniversary, congress, or popular assembly without animation, and each region, each village even, distinguishes itself competing in presenting its own animation. (Remilleux and Sese Seko 1989:155-156)

In the ideological glossary of MPR, published in 1986, the following definition can be found for “animation politique et culturelle” (political and cultural animation):

action of the education, transmission, and popularization of the message of the Party through songs, proclaiming poems, the arts of performances, theatre pieces, slogans, and words of order...with the intention of exalting and glorifying the authentic Zairian revolution and its Guide. (FORCAD 1986: 80)

This official party definition resonates with definitions proposed by other scholars, such as Yoka Lye Mudaba, who defined animation as a:

body of procedures and measures implemented by a human group to politically train the masses and to assure the promotion of the national culture (...); a set of dances and formal slogans executed at the time of the arrival or departure of the President-Founder, or at the time of public demonstrations of large importance. (1982, cited in Kapalanga, 1989:118)

That political and cultural animation draws on many genres is clear from yet another definition proposed by Siradiou Diallo, “[It] holds all at once modern ballet, traditional dance, and popular meeting. Dance, sport, and politics...mixes itself there harmoniously in the middle of artistic exhibitions and sonorous slogans.” (1975, cited in Kapalanga, 1989:115)

What is also evident is the omnipresence of animation in people’s lives during Mobutu’s regime. According to George Matadi, hailed as one of the founding fathers of political animation, it became so popular that:

Even in the house the children sang it. Political animation. It was in the streets, in the market. They became the songs of everyday. Everyday songs. Animation had, they say, intoxicated the streets. I give you an example, Mobutu is dead, we don’t speak of him anymore. There are two records that came out, modern, they say. But it is a song of old Mobutu: Djalelo, when it is played everyone begins to think of that era...when they hear that, they remember the past...At the end, we had become like robots of song. Your servant, for example, he can, while working, whistle a party song because they were beautiful songs...Even if you didn’t like Mobutu but [liked] the melody. (Interview, 07/16/2005, Kinshasa, DRC)

This statement demonstrates the effectiveness of political performances such as songs for inculcating the ideologies of Mobutu’s state into the minds and bodies of its citizens.

There were a number of instances during my interviews in both Kinshasa and Luozi where, sometimes spontaneously and other times because I asked about them, people

would break into song (with others who were present joining in), songs that heralded Mobutu, his policies, and ideologies, songs that performed the nation that was Mobutu's Zaïre even after it has ceased to exist. These and other examples demonstrate that the songs had become second nature, with words spilling from people's mouths almost involuntarily even as some of them had roundly criticized political animation. Like elementary school songs in the United States that act as mnemonic tools for remembering the date of Columbus's trans-Atlantic voyage, the songs of political animation in Zaïre referenced and continue to reference the political authority and dictatorial power of Mobutu Sese Seko. Interestingly enough, the modern popular Djalelo tune that George Matadi mentions is a song that had been traditionally used for the enthronization of a chief, but during Mobutu's era, the name of the chief was replaced with Mobutu's name. In the post-Mobutu Congo state, popular soukouss musicians Les Marquis de Maison Mere replaced the name of Mobutu with their own name.¹⁷⁶ However, while the modern-day musicians are trying to give new meaning to the song, the automatic response and recognition of the song by Congolese listeners can no doubt be traced to the tremendous airplay and repeated performance of the song over the years through political animation in Zaïre.

If political animation had such an impact and presence in people's lives, where did the idea for such a practice originate? Different ideas have been given for origins of political animation. Kapalanga sees the practice as evolving from the establishment of the first political parties in the Congo, between 1958-1959 when these parties (whose

¹⁷⁶ There is a section later in the chapter dedicated to a more detailed examination of Djalelo.

membership was usually based on ethnic groupings) established youth groups to excite the general population and ridicule rival parties (1989:122-124). He also suggests the secondary influence of other African countries, specifically Guinea and Ghana that had similar practices of political dancing and singing (1989:128). George Matadi, an interviewee who had been a well-known animator in Kinshasa, believed the origin of the practice of political animation lay with a group of dynamic young singers of the Red Cross church and movement in Kintambo, a neighborhood in Kinshasa, who sang for Mobutu repeatedly on official occasions (George Matadi, Interview, Kinshasa, DRC, July 16, 2005). Regardless of their differing opinions on the antecedents of political animation, both Kapalanga and Matadi agree that the first consistent presentations of political animation associated with Mobutu's regime were through the Corps de Volontaires de la République (CVR) (Voluntary Corps of the Republic), and the groups within CVR that performed at rallies and other public functions were known as "Groupes Choc d'Animation" (shock animation groups) (George Matadi, Interview, Kinshasa, DRC, July 16, 2005). The CVR disappeared with the birth of the MPR, which was created in 1967 and continued the traditions of the CVR, and political animation became much more organized, involved dance choreography, rehearsals, and expanded and evolved even further, particularly in 1970 (Kapalanga 1989: 134-136).

According to the same MPR ideological glossary cited previously, within MPR there were two types of animators, or people who animate: 1) Political Animators, who transmit the party's ideas through conferences, popular meetings, and other sessions, and 2) Cultural Animators, who transmit the same messages through slogans and songs, and uphold the cultural values of the nation through dance and choreography, and the general

movements of the ensemble (FORCAD 1986:79). Animation ballets (*ballets d'animation*) were groups of people who danced and sang for MPR meetings and events. Both of these types of animation (political and cultural) seemed to have worked hand in hand in practice in Zaïre, hence the common phrase that brings the two together as one. What political and cultural animation had in common as their foundation was that both were ways of transmitting the ideas of the MPR party and its founder, Mobutu. In fact, the ultimate goal of animation in general, as stated in a party document from the eighties, was:

to reach and to win all the masses, their soul, their conscience and their participatory actions thanks to a sophisticated process of songs, dances, gestures, speeches, and movement with the intention of their massive adhesion to the message of Mobutuisme and of the Zaïrian revolution. (Un-numbered document, MPR carton, National Archives, Kinshasa, DRC, N.d., "Topo et Synthèse de la nouvelle conception...")

Through various types of performance (music, dance, song, theatre, speeches, etc.) party leaders wanted to impress upon the citizens of the country its ideology and its leader, who in fact hadn't been voted in democratically. Thus, political and cultural animation played a very important role in legitimizing not only the new leadership in post independence Congo, but also its associated ideologies and agendas. Politics were clearly implicated in the performances that people took part in, and were in fact the main cause for the performances taking place.

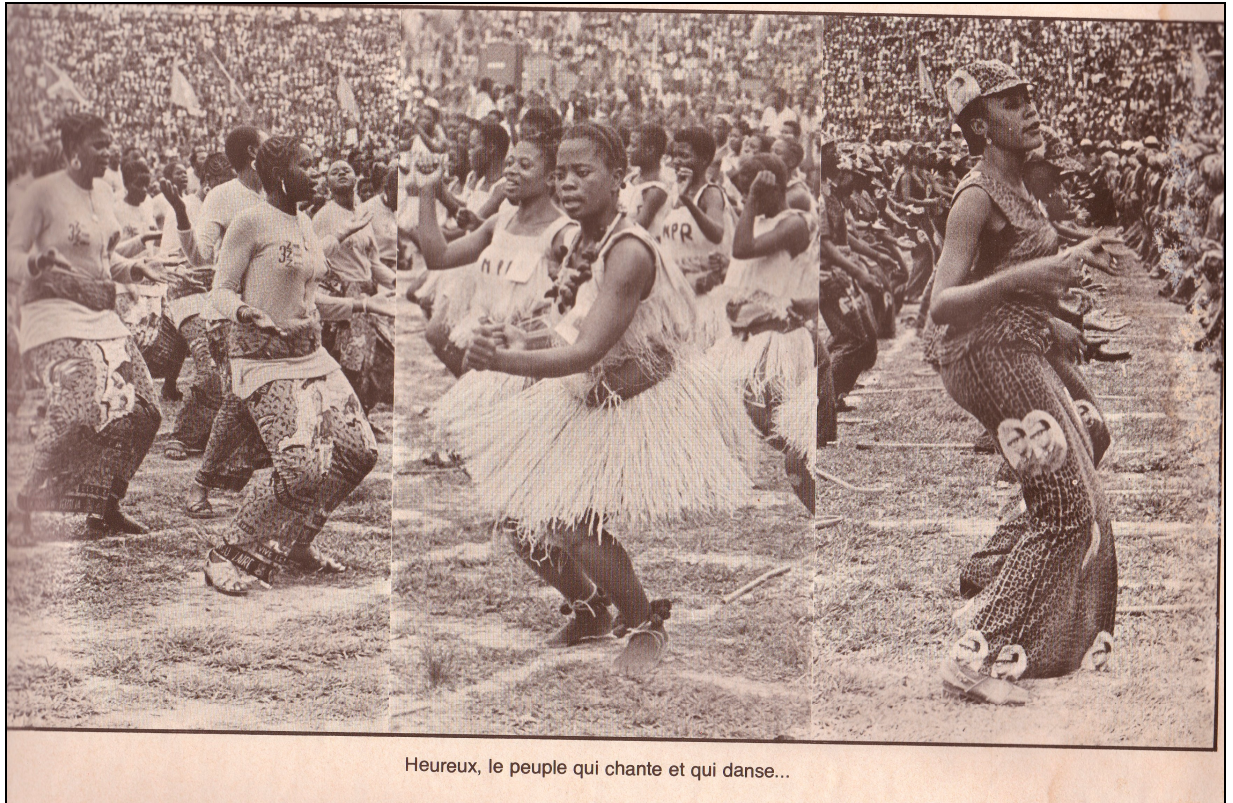


Figure 7: Image of political and cultural animation in M.P.R. Calendar, 1974, Month of November, with the slogan “Happy, are the people who sing and dance...” (Source: National Archives, Kinshasa, DRC)

Available Research on Animation

Although political and cultural animation played an important role in the dissemination of the ideologies of Mobutu’s government, after my own search of available material (especially English language publications, but also French publications included in academic databases) there aren’t many studies that address animation specifically and in great detail. Further research remains to be done on articles possibly written in lesser known or non-indexed French language journals. The most extensive and oft cited study of political and cultural animation is *Les spectacles d’animation*

politique en Republique du Zaire by Kapalanga Gazungil Sang' Amin (1989). Based on his doctoral dissertation, this study provides an overview of the history, goals, and structure of political and cultural animation, and an analysis of both its theatrical and non-theatrical aspects.

The only other book length treatment of political and cultural animation that I have found is a dissertation in dance history by Joan Huckstep entitled *Embodied Nationalism "Animation Politique" (Political Dance) in Zaire* (Temple University, 2005). Her study, based on interviews with six members of a Congolese dance company located in Philadelphia (five men, one woman), provides a general overview of political animation, the administrative structure supporting it, and an analysis of performances of animation on videotape that she retrieved from the members of the company.¹⁷⁷ Other studies of animation specifically are much more brief such as a few pages dedicated to it in a larger text on cultural policy and infrastructure in Zaire (1976), a chapter dedicated to some of the larger and more famous animators (Thassinda 1992:73-91), and mention of the omnipresent practice in other articles and chapters that focus on other topics concerning Zaïre under Mobutu. With my own study, I hope to add to the existing literature with an emphasis on political animation that is more embodied and focused on the personal experiences and recollections of interviewees.

As interviewees and others reflecting on their experiences recalled it, political animation could be seen everywhere and in nearly every aspect of one's life during its

¹⁷⁷ There is also a chapter on political and cultural animation in Thassinda Uba Thassinda H. (1992) *Zaire: Les Princes de l'Invisible: L'Afrique Noire bâillonnée par le parti unique*. France: Éditions C'est-à-Dire. In this book the fourth chapter deals briefly with political animation by focusing on three major leaders of the movement in the M.P.R., only one of whom is a woman.

heyday in Zaïre. However, for something that was so omnipresent, there has not been much scholarly writing about political animation, and even less critiquing of the negative effect of its policies. This is understandable since if you were a citizen living in the country during Mobutu's reign, you were not free to speak out openly against Mobutu's policies without fear of repercussions. Now that Mobutu is no longer in power, repressed experiences and opinions can begin to emerge.

The contribution that I seek to make in this research on political animation is to reveal how political and cultural animation affected the average Zaïrean citizen. What effect did animation have on people's daily lives? First, looking at examples ranging from official organized dance troupes to dancing and singing at schools in the mornings in front of the Zaïrean flag, this chapter will explore the ways in which the political authority of Mobutu was continuously performed, inserting itself into the everyday lives of Kongo people in Luozi. Second, the interviews that I have done provide a balance between men's and women's perspectives and one section of this chapter is dedicated specifically to the experiences of women in groups of political animation. This addresses the fact that the unique challenges of female performers is one that has been largely overlooked in the previous studies cited above. Third, by exposing the coercion, both implicit and explicit, that lay beneath performances of political animation during Mobutu's era, I hope to advance a theory of performance, power, and authority that pays closer attention to the role of force and punishment in certain instances of "performing the nation."

The Organization of Political and Cultural Animation

Types of Performers

Kapalanga discusses four types of performers who danced and sang in animation troupes: 1) animators by vocation, meaning artists, dancers, etc. who already were professional performers; 2) animators by obligation, or people who were forced by local leaders or officials to become members of a troupe; 3) animators for profit, people who became active in animation only with the intention of gaining social mobility or wealth; and 4) animators by conviction, or people who sincerely wanted to thank and honor Mobutu and his government through performance (141-143). Outside of performing troupes, ordinary citizens were also obligated to “perform” in many different ways that shall be addressed later on in the chapter. These categories that Kapalanga proposes were thus not mutually exclusive.

Places and Spaces

In the interview quotation cited previously, where Mobutu defined animation, he also intimated the types of occasions where one could see political and cultural animation. In her dissertation, Huckstep provided even more detail:

Official professional and semi-professional (those who danced but had other professions) performers were called *animateurs* and *animatrices*. According to all the interviewees, *animateurs* and *animatrices* performed at every official public gathering large or small, and before every public social/entertainment event. Additionally, people could observe political animation on television; animation occurred at the beginning of the broadcast day and before news and newsreel-type broadcasts. Moreover, every day, almost everyone danced animating the political vision of the nation promoted by the Mobutu government each morning while the flag was being raised at schools and universities, institutions, government buildings, businesses, or in villages. (Huckstep 2005: 130)

There were also huge annual festivals of political animation, bringing together many different groups from all of the different regions, sub-regions, etc. to perform in a huge stadium for Mobutu. The first such festival was held on the 24th and 25th of November, 1973. Political animation also played a huge role at events in which citizens “performed the nation” not only for themselves and Mobutu, but for the benefit of others watching outside of Zaire. A case in point is the Muhammad Ali-George Foreman fight, the infamous “Rumble in the Jungle,” at which a number of political animation troupes were required to perform (George Matadi, Interview, 16 July 2005, Kinshasa, DRC; Group members of Groupe Traditionelle Manianga, Interview, 17 December 2005, Kinshasa, DRC). The wide variety of venues and media for political animation and its omnipresence in the quotidian lives of average citizens of Zaire, illuminates its strategic importance to the authenticity project of Mobutu. Thus, during his regime, there was a particular administrative structure created and put in place specifically for the organization of political animation.

MOPAP: The Administrative Structure of Animation

The administrative structure that was established by Mobutu’s government to oversee the spread of its propaganda was MOPAP (Mobilisation Propaganda et Animation Politique) (Mobilization Propaganda and Political Animation). According to Huckstep, “Its central office was in the capital, Kinshasa, and official offices were maintained within each provincial government. MOPAP also had an extensive network of “unofficial” offices that allowed a presence in almost all aspects of Zairian life” (2005:

133). Kapalanga adds that offices were maintained on a national level and on each step of the scale descending down to towns (1989:141).

*Dipping into Tradition:*¹⁷⁸ *The Example of Djalelo*

The national headquarters of Political and Cultural Animation, under MOPAP, was also charged with the task of creating songs that espoused the ideology of the party and its leader. Many of the songs and dances that were performed in political and cultural animation in fact had their origins in traditional performance practices of different ethnic groups throughout the country. Often, the words would just be changed to reflect the party's vision and ideology. One of the most famous examples of this, although it is not a Kongo example, is the song "Djalelo," as previously mentioned in the chapter.

The song is one that was traditionally performed by certain members of the BaLuba ethnic group in the Shaba region of Congo to celebrate a deity, and then later it was applied to the investiture of a new chief. Based on an article discussing the evolution of the song (Kayembe-Buba 1970), the following chart presents the refrain and only the first eight lines of the song,¹⁷⁹ with the original song in TshiLuba, its English translation, and then the English translation of the song as it was revised for the mission of MPR and Mobutu.

¹⁷⁸ The title for this subsection comes from an article discussing the selective use of traditional songs and phrases in Congolese popular music (dipping) and how this was influenced by Mobutu, written by Bob W White (1999). Modernity's trickster: "Dipping" and "throwing" in Congolese popular dance music. *Research in African Literatures*, 30(4):156-175.

¹⁷⁹ The full versions of the songs are much longer (the tradition version has 45 stanzas in fact).

TshiLuba	English Translation ¹⁸⁰	Revised Song ¹⁸¹
Djalelo tubanjilanga ye Mulopwe Moma	Today we will think about our supreme chief Moma	Today we will think about our supreme chief MOBUTU
Mwenze wa Nkulu wa Kusebwa Musebo Baseba Nkulu Baseba ne Yumba	It is Mwenze wa Nkulu for whom we clean the paths leading to the hot water springs. We clean for him and for his brother Yumba.	If you see SESE SEKO, think about him
SHI mubamumone mubanjilei Mulopwe Moma	SHI ____ you will think about Supreme Chief Moma	If you see KUKU NGBENDU, think about him
Mwenze wa kunyemenwe, aye kasha Kanyemene Kwa muntu Lumpu Mema Mwenze wa kasanzwe minonga mingi	It is he Mwenze with whom we take refuge; he never takes refuge with anyone It is he Lumpu Mema Mwenze who was in the forest	If you see WA ZA BANGA, think about him -Z- like Zaire our country
Bamusanza wa ntanda wa nyemena wa luwi I aye Nkulu mulumya kabila	And who now lives in the hot water springs It is he Nkulu the husband of Kabila	-Z- like Zaire our river -Z- like Zaire our money
Mulumya kabila Tembo mwadi wa Monga	Woman that he wrenched away from the god Monga	The MPR is our only Party

The popular refrain interspersed throughout the revised song was, “Djalelo eh eh Mulopwe Mobutu” (Today, eh, eh, Supreme Chief Mobutu). The revised version of the song in the chart is a prime example of indoctrination of the population to the ideologies and goals of MPR. The first few lines of the song present Mobutu as the Supreme Chief of all of the citizens of the country, and through a melodic presentation of his full “authentic” name, encourages all of the people to think about him. The next few lines

¹⁸⁰ This English version is based on the author’s French translation of the TshiLuba text of the song as presented Kayembe-Buba’s article.

¹⁸¹ Kayembe-Buba presents three revised versions; the one originally penned by Kabange Muhala N’simba, chief of the city of Kamina in Shaba, a second version that is heard on the national radio, and a third version written by Kayembe Buba. I chose to use the radio version in this chart.

reinforce the new national identity that Mobutu put forth in 1971, when he changed the names of the country, river, and money to Zaire. The last line, “MPR is our only party” confirms the political situation and the fact that Zaire was a single-party state, and all citizens were automatically considered to be members. Thus, the MPR revised “Djalelo” is one striking example of the use of performance, (since the song was sung by not only animation groups but all citizens, and its catchy tune helped to make it a very popular one) to effectively create a nation. Through the words of the song, the leader is exalted, the new name of the nation, its river and its currency are promoted, and the sole political party is presented as one that all citizens belong to, thus unifying the country.

Political Animation and its Implications for Kongo People

Although political and cultural animation was a phenomenon that affected all citizens of all ethnicities in the Congo, the focus of the rest of this chapter shall be on its implications for the everyday lives of Kongo people. Most of the interviewees whose views and experiences appear here are either are currently living in Luozi or are residing elsewhere in the Congo but are originally from Luozi territory. The few extensive past studies of political and cultural animation do not include information about the experience of political animation from the perspective of one particular ethnic group or territory. Kapalanga’s study is much more general, covering political animation with examples from many different places, while Huckstep’s dissertation is limited to interviews of members of a dance company that hail from Equateur, Kasai, and Bandundu provinces (Of the two interviewees from Bandundu province, while it is clearly stated that one is Pende, it is not clear whether or not the other is MuKongo).

Moreover, the voices of women seem to be missing in both of these works. In the following section of the chapter, by including information from interviews with people representing all categories of performers, from those who were already professional artists and dancers, to ordinary people who were forced to participate, from women and men, from farmers to teachers, I hope to provide a more location specific, detailed account by focusing on the impact of political and cultural animation on Kongo people's everyday lives, especially in Luozi territory.

Women in Luozi Territory: Their Experiences as Performers

This section is based on interviews with three different women who had experiences as performers in troupes of political and cultural animation during Mobutu's reign. The first interviewee is Mama Mayazola, resident of the commune of Mont-Ngafula in Kinshasa. Born in 1953, she is married, the mother of eight children, and farms for a living. She was born in Kinshasa, yet spent a significant part of her youth back in Bas-Congo, in the village of Kimata in the Kivunda sector of Luozi territory, where her family is from. She is MuKongo, and more specifically BaManianga. She is also a member of Bundu dia Kongo.¹⁸² She was a dancer in a village based animation troupe, and based on Kapalanga's categorization of performers, was an animator by obligation. The second interviewee is Mama Ntima, resident of the town of Luozi in Luozi territory. She was born in 1959 in the village of Mpanga in the Mbanza-Mona sector of Luozi territory. She is married, the mother of six children, and works in the

¹⁸² Bundu dia Kongo is a religious-socio-political organization that has the ultimate goal of reuniting the former Kongo Kingdom. They are the focus of chapter six.

DMNA church with her husband who is a pastor. She is also the national president of the women of the DMNA church. She is also MuKongo, and BaManianga. She was a dancer in an animation troupe from her village, and was also an animator by obligation. The third interviewee is Mama Bangoma. She was born in 1953, is married, and has eight children and currently resides in the town of Luozi. The village of her family is Mamboma, where she was also born, in the sector of Kinkenge in Luozi Territory. She works as a functionary of the state, and is MuKongo, more specifically BaManianga. She was a dancer and singer in an animation troupe, and eventually became the head animatrice for the entire territory of Luozi. Although she may have begun as an animator by obligation, her success in the structural hierarchy of animation could lead to her being categorized as an animator by conviction or an animator for profit, or both.

How They Came to Perform

One aspect of political animation that is illuminated by interviews with women ex-performers in Luozi is the different opinions that exist between people who were a part of the political animation machine and others who felt as though that authority structure had been forced upon them. In my interview with George Matadi in Kinshasa, who as I previously stated played a founding role in political animation, I inquired about the nature of participation in groups of political animation. The exchange follows:

Y.C.W.: Were people paid for animation?

G.M.: NOOO! (insistently)

Y.C.W.: But, was it by force?

G.M.: No, it wasn't by force. Not forced...we say because of spontaneity, enthusiasm.

Y.C.W.: It was a voluntary choice?

G.M.: Voluntary! Voluntary! Free!...It was free. They came in numbers. They sang! They sang! They sang! Everyone was having a good time. From young mothers, to young girls, to young men, no, everyone was having a good time. When Mobutu had power, everyone was having a good time. (George Matadi, Interview, 16 July 2005, Kinshasa, DRC)

The picture that emerges in recollections of women performers in animation troupes in Luozi territory presents a direct contradiction. When each woman was asked about the objectives of political animation, their responses were very similar. Mama Mayazola said that people danced for the glory of Mobutu (Interview, 10/05/05), and Mama Ntima reiterated the same notion with her response of “during the epoch of Mobutu, it was obligatory to dance for Mobutu whether you wanted to or not” (Interview, 10 October 2005). Mama Bangoma responded with, “you were obligated...to go and sing political songs...it was animation” (Interview, 14 October 2005).

In terms of how they came to perform in these animation troupes, all three women expressed similarities by discussing the importance of coercion, although some described this in greater detail than others. When asked how she came to be a dancer in a group of political animation, Mama Mayazola explained that she was chosen from her village of Kimata by virtue of her age and marital status:

They took the young men and women from the village to go, it was obligatory, to go and sing and dance for the head of the sector...They took the youth that were single and who were not students in school, women who had one or two kids but were not married, and young men who were not married, people who were unemployed. If you refused to go, they would send soldiers to get you and take you by force, and they would take you to the sector town and you would pay a fine. (Interview, 05 October 2005)

Mama Mayazola explained that this group of selected youth was called the J.M.P.R.¹⁸³

for the village. For Mama Ntima, who was chosen to dance while living in her village in the sector of Mbanza-Mona, the story is similar:

They would choose single people, those whose marriages were not recognized by the state, girls who left school. I left the school because my mother was sick, and for this, I was chosen...the chief of the village helped to choose people because he knew whether they were married, studying, or not (Interview 10 October 2005)

Although Mama Bangoma did not go into detail about how she specifically was initially chosen to join the animation troupe, coercion still emerges as a general theme.

Because I sung very well, and I danced very well, I was chosen as an animatrice...whether male or female, it was obligatory [to dance]. O linga, o linga te. (Interview 14 October 2005)

What emerges here is the role that coercion and state violence, both implicit and explicit, played in getting citizens to perform the nation. Rather than being a completely voluntary activity, as Matadi suggested, one's age and educational and marital status determined whether you'd be conscripted to dance in local animation troupes in Luozi territory. These women were chosen by others and did not join the animation troupes of their own volition. The fact that they felt coerced to dance against their will and saw it as an "obligation" reveals the ways in which Mobutu's political authority was enacted in the lives of these women, and moreover, was in fact legitimized by their coerced performances.

¹⁸³ J.M.P.R. stood for Jeunesse de Mouvement Populaire de la Revolution, or Youth of the People's Revolutionary Movement. It was one of several wings used to organize the citizens in the country under the organization of M.P.R.

Rehearsals

There were some major differences in the rehearsal schedules that the women reported. For Mama Mayazola, practices were done based on an upcoming event and besides that there was no set schedule (Interview 5 October 2005). Mama Ntima explained that all of the members of the animation groups in the sector of Mbanza-Mona practiced for one or two weeks, learning the dances together in the sector capital of Kinsemi (Interview 10 October 2005). Mama Bangoma, as the head animatrice of the entire territory, confirmed these week-long or longer practices when she said she would teach the new dances and songs to the groups in each sector, and these practices could last a day, two days, or even a week (Interview, 14 October 2005). Moreover, Mama Bangoma also remembers traveling to many places to perform outside of Luozi territory (but still in Bas-Congo) including Inkisi, Mbanza-Ngungu, Kwilu-Ngongo, Kimpese, Matadi, Inga, and Nsiamfumu (Interview, 14 October 2005). On the other hand, Mama Ntima recalls only performing in Luozi territory (Interview 10 October 2005).

Conditions of Dancers

One theme that emerged from the interviews was that the conditions in which the dancers were obligated to perform for visiting officials and public functions were not ideal and often downright exploitative. For example, I asked a question about compensation for dancing and singing, since these women had been pulled away from their other duties to perform for the state. All three of the women said they were not paid. When it came to receiving party cloth as compensation, Mama Ntima explained that only the heads of the group received that, while Mama Mayazola said she had never

received any as well. Mama Bangoma, on the other hand, said that she did receive party cloth, which is not surprising considering her higher status in the animation hierarchy. Further differences in their points of view began to emerge when they gave details on other types of conditions such as the transportation to performance sites. Mama Mayazola relayed the following story about transportation from her home village in the sector of Kivunda when her group had been told they had to perform:

You leave the village in the morning around 7:00 am to arrive around 5:00 pm in the evening, on foot. You yourself had to prepare and bring your own food...To sleep, the people slept on the floor in the compound of the head of the sector...Because the head of the sector was from my home village, Mbanza Kimata, my group could have the advantage of sleeping inside his home on the floor or in front of his home. (Interview, 10/05/05)

Mama Ntima depicts similar conditions in relating her story of the typical deplorable transportation conditions that she endured while a member of her troupe in the sector of Mbanza-Mona:

When an authority came to our village to tell us we had to perform in another place, for example if we had to go to Nkundi, we would go from the village to Luozi, and from there to Nkundi...They would take the car of a man that they saw as having a lot of money and use it to transport us...We walked from the village (six hours of walking) to Luozi and from there the truck would take us to Nkundi...Even if you were in the fields...you must stop work and leave...there were no words to say...when we came to Luozi we slept on the floor in the compound of Hotel Madou (Interview 10/10/05)

The situation was rather different for Mama Bangoma, since she was the animatrice for the entire territory and was called to travel often to other places in the district to learn the new songs and dances that she in turn would teach to the animation groups of each sector in the territory of Luozi upon her return. The state took care of her needs: “They gave

transportation. There were state vehicles...there was food brought by the state itself...housing also by the state...clothes also” (Interview, 14 October 2005).

Thus, the position that you had in the overall hierarchy of political animation seems to have affected the types of conditions that you performed in, the accommodations that you had, and the types of gifts (if any) that you received. It is clear then, that some women benefited more than others from their participation as performers in local animation groups in Luozi Territory.

Performing the Nation in the Bedroom: Sexual Exploitation and Moral Corruption in Political Animation Performances

While coerced dancing in political animation groups were the main ways in which loyalty and support for the Mobutu led government were expected to be performed, one of the more unsavory details about the era of political animation deals with performances that were required in yet another area: the bedroom. A theme that emerged over and over again in regards to the conditions of performing in these animation troupes was the potential sexual exploitation of the female members of the groups. Mama Mayazola recounts the following:

There are [were] sisters that were called for example to go and drop off paperwork or food or dossiers or whatever and there they [the male authority figures] did tricks in order to take them and then there were sisters who became pregnant. (Interview, Mama Mayazola, 5 October 2005)

Mama Ntima reports seeing similar occurrences in her experience as a dancer for MPR:

When you arrived where you were going, they chose the beautiful girls to sleep with the people who came from MPR, the superiors. It was stupidity, really. The authorities, the chiefs, the leaders would choose... when we came to Luozi we slept on the floor in the compound of Hotel

Madou and they chose beautiful girls to sleep with the authorities in the rooms (Interview, 10 October 05)

Both of the women in this case didn't go into a lot of detail about their experiences in this regard, and it makes one wonder about the personal impact of such policies on these women and others that they knew and danced with during the time in question. Perhaps they wanted to avoid memories of past experiences, or just didn't feel comfortable sharing further information with me at that time. Seeking to respect their privacy, I did not delve any further. However, this theme of sexual impropriety was also echoed by some men that I interviewed as well, who gave it substantially greater treatment in their discussion. For example, in his explanation of why political animation was not good for the population, Tata Nkolele says:

There are certain girls for example, who were incorporated into these groups, who weren't old...who weren't old enough to be able to be carried in front of the general public...for the population, it wasn't a good thing that all of these girls were exposed to presenting shows ...there was a certain exaggeration because the girl who danced, for her, it was pleasing for the politico-administrative man... in fact, it distanced the people who sometimes were horrified to watch all these dances, that were considered as obscene...These youth that were recuperated for the needs of the party, sometimes for two weeks to learn songs, slogans, to please... the revolution. For two weeks they are absent from their work environment. Look what it does to the economy of their area and to them themselves. It is this that makes it so that many young girls found themselves pregnant as a result of all of these absences...there were young girls who discovered their sexuality too early (Interview, 14 October 2005, Luozi, DRC)

Concern for the sexual morality of young women and the compromising positions that they were placed in during this era also was discussed by another male interviewee:

Generally, I can say that the dances of the female animators were especially dances that consisted of rotating the hips really well. It is during this dance that, the chief or the animators choose them...those who must spend the night with the chief or else with this person, with that person. Animation consisted of a display, if you will, of women or else

young girls, for the selection of chiefs and animators...because you can't say anything, because you are a female animator, they take you, they say there you are, we are going to see the chief. (Ne Mosi, Interview, 10 October 2005, Luozi, DRC)

All of these interview excerpts express several interrelated themes that recur in people's remembrances and assessments of political animation: moral corruption and sexual exploitation. For unmarried women who were not enrolled in school, political animation presented a threat to their very bodies. As another interviewee explained, "it was a danger for girls" (Ne Tatu, Interview, 10 October 2005, Luozi, DRC). This danger was not only moral but a physical one as well. What justification can be given for young women expected or even forced to give the most intimate part of themselves to complete strangers? While on the one hand, some women may have used these sexual liaisons as opportunities for improving their lot through connecting to wealthy politicians and state officials, for others the moral repercussions and potential negative impact on their families and own lives loomed large (e.g. pregnancy, diseases such as HIV, psychological trauma, etc.) What cannot be lost in the discussion is the elimination of choice, whether the coercion was explicit or subtle. Forced sex is rape, even if the women cannot explicitly say no. With the aforementioned examples, the sexual exploitation of women in the service of the "nation" during Mobutu's era is probably the most extreme exercise of political authority and state control over the very bodies of the citizens of former Zaïre, and in particular, the bodies of women.

Control over the sexual practices of women can be seen as a veritable example of Foucault's theory of biopower, as the women served as both "object[s] and target[s] of power" (1991:136). Here I would point not to a diffuse power as Foucault articulates it,

but power consolidated in the hands of one person: Mobutu Sese Seko. With the full weight of a dictator-led state behind it, forced dancing and singing in animation groups and coercion into sexual activities were just a few of the ways that women were expected to perform their submission to the political authority of the Mobutu state.

Political Animation: Good or Bad?

In response to a question about what they thought about political animation overall, and whether or not they thought it had been good for the people, the responses of these three women varied once again. Mama Bangoma responds in the following manner: “It was good for the population...because in that time...the young girls and the young boys...if they received word that an authority was coming...everyone went down, they attended...it was good for the dancers...it was obligatory” (Interview, 14 October 2005).

On the other hand, Mama Ntima would disagree. Mama Ntima says that “It was bad because...like here in Luozi, people wanted to pray and when they [other people] were dancing stupid dances, it was obligatory, and it wasn’t good for the people” (Interview 10 October 2005). In fact, Mama Ntima chose to escape by getting married early, since people in state recognized marriages were not forcibly recruited into these local J.M.P.R. groups to dance for the regime. She was in the group in 1977 and got married in 1978.

Mama Mayazola also seemed to view political animation as a negative social phenomenon:

For me it was torment, I was tormented...to take this long journey...to leave your work in the fields and all that you have as an occupation, you

must drop it to go and dance for someone, without being paid, without being given food, without being lodged, it was practically a punishment... This movement created disorder... in the village, for the fact that there was obligatory traveling... In the songs there was nothing else but the glory of Mobutu (Interview, 5 October 2005)

She ran away when they were traveling out of the sector to the town of Luozi. She also said often that she was sick. Others who were caught evading their dancing duties were taken to the chief of the sector to be punished by paying fines or doing hard physical work. She was in the group from 1971 until she, like Mama Ntima, was married in 1973.

In general, it seems clear that one's position in the hierarchy of animation performers affected one's opinion about political animation and its impact on the population. Mama Ntima and Mama Mayazola, the two women who were simply dancers compelled by force, did not see political animation as a good thing for the country or themselves, and in fact used different strategies (marriage, fleeing, etc) to avoid having to perform. On the other hand, for Mama Bangoma, political animation was a good thing as she gained social mobility and status and was able to travel, and more than likely was able to use her position as an animatrice to get an even better job with the regime. Thus, it is probably not a coincidence that it is she, among the three women, who currently has a civil service job with the government. All in all, it seems as if political animation benefited her greatly in comparison to other women lower in the hierarchy of performers.

Another interviewee reiterates differing opinions about political animation when he says: "For the animateurs and the animatrices, who were concerned with the dance, it was a way for them..to unwind. But for the elderly people, in fact, it was not a very good thing" (Interview, Tata Nkolele, 10/14/05). The negative impact of political animation

that he hints at is further explained by another interviewee, who considers its influence on youth and social morality: “I think that it was there in order to deform the youth especially because...there are sometimes dances that were very exaggerated, gestures and dances were going too far, that one couldn’t even allow in the presence of one’s parents.” (Interview, Tata Nkuku, 29 September 2005, Luozi, DRC). Here, discussions of the value of political animation for the country reveal that many people saw political animation as undermining core values and morals of society, whether by interrupting holy worship, teaching sexually suggestive dances that offended Christian decorum, or placing young girls in situations where they were taken advantage of sexually by powerful men. However, political animation was not limited young men and women dancing in organized animation ballets. Animation had salience for every citizen of the nation and Luozi territory, in multiple areas of their daily lives, as explored in the next section of the chapter.

Political Animation in Everyday Life in Luozi Territory

All Citizens, to the streets!

Political animation was not a phenomena limited to performance stages in huge stadiums and festivals, or animation groups brought into towns and cities to sing and dance for visiting authorities. It was a part of the everyday lives of Zaïrois and impacted almost all sectors of society, as the following exchange demonstrates:

Y.C.W: How was political animation visible in daily life for the average citizen?

D: Here in Luozi, for example, when you learn that there is a leader who is going to come, then, they mobilize everyone. Then, rather than going to

work, everyone must stay in order to wait for the leader...all along the route, from the beach all the way to the market here, from the market to the air strip.

Y.C.W: And the people must do what?

D: The people must remain there in order to sing a little and to watch a group of dancers, so, there are men and women who come into the sector, who come to meet the superior authority figure...when the group [of the authority figure] arrives, group after group passes in front of them to show what they have prepared. (Interview, Tata Kimfumu, 29 September 2005, Luozi, DRC)

The visual image created by this description is surreal; people lining the route from the beach where the ferry lands all the way to the unofficial airport runway, a distance of several miles, leaving jobs and other obligations just to sing and welcome the arrival of one or another dignitary of Mobutu's government. Apparently, this happened all over the country, as other interviewees have talked about having to stand on the side of the road in Kinshasa and clap and sing as Mobutu's motorcade sped by. Moreover, in this particular Luozi example cited above, citizens were also expected to actively watch groups of political animation that were performing. This adds a twist to the phrase "captive audience," as citizens of Luozi were expected to not only perform their own nationalism through singing and lining the road, but also to watch others perform their nationalism in groups of political animation dancing for the pleasure of the visiting authority figure(s). The remainder of this section explores how political animation was experienced and lived in three types of local spaces: schools, businesses, and churches.

Schools

The political authority of the Mobutu state was imposed in other ways upon the everyday lives of citizens not in performing political animation troupes. One such area

was that of the primary and secondary schools of the nation, including Luozi territory. Although secondary level students were expected to play a more active role in MPR activities than primary school students, all students were automatically members of JMPR and all students had to participate in morning animation sessions.¹⁸⁴ Tata Nkuku, a retired primary school teacher who'd worked in both Mbanza-Mona and Mbanza-Mwembe sectors, summarized the way political animation worked in people's everyday lives: "It was an obligation. Before beginning work, it is necessary to go to salute the flag. When you go to salute the flag one must sing, one must dance...before going to work or else before entering the classroom. It was first of all, the first task." (Interview, Tata Nkuku, 29 September 2005, Luozi, DRC). Tata Kimfumu, the director of a primary school, provided more detail about political animation in the schools:

In the Mobutu era, the objectives [of political animation] were to honor, to recognize, the chief...At the school specifically, it was saluting the flag, each morning, we must first sing the national hymn, after which we follow political animation, singing political songs...and dances also...We began from seven o'clock...to seven thirty, it is animation. At eight o'clock we begin the courses...The arrival of a territorial head, the arrival of an inspector, the arrival of a head of state, the arrival of a governor, thus, all the authorities, when they arrive at the school, we must greet them with animation, for some minutes. (Interview, Tata Kimfumu, 29 September 2005, Luozi, DRC)

Teachers and school administrators were expected to not only take part in political animation, but also to lead it. Schatzberg discusses the role of primary school teachers in political animation when he writes:

¹⁸⁴ The information in this section is based mainly on primary schools. For further information on the different levels of participation between primary and secondary students, see Michael G. Schatzberg, "Fidelite au Guide: The J.M.P.R. in Zairian Schools," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Sep., 1978), pp. 417-431.

At the primary level, the students themselves are involved in the organization of the J.M.P.R. only in the most cursory and passive way...each class is a J.M.P.R. cell and the teacher is the cell chief...[A]t the primary level then...party activities are generally confined to learning chants and slogans by rote.¹⁸⁵

Here, one sees how the party ideology was actively taught to young children, who had to memorize, repeat, and perform the songs and slogans. The important role of teachers as leaders of animation was also confirmed in interviews: “Each teacher must train their children then, each teacher must also show how they [the children] must dance.” (Interview, Tata Kimfumu, 29 September 2005, Luozi, DRC). He also added that the teachers themselves composed the songs that the children sang.

Like other interviewees who expressed their opinions about political animation in other parts of this chapter, a big problem that these teachers that were interviewed seemed to have with political animation in the schools was the potential immorality that the students could be exposed to. When asked whether he felt pressure to participate in political animation, Tata Kimfumu frankly explained, “Well, as it was an order, one couldn’t refuse.” (Interview, 29 September 2005, Luozi, DRC). However, when asked his opinion about political animation in the schools, he had this to say: “It wasn’t good because we mustn’t habituate the children to dancing. It wasn’t good...They could misbehave. It is that which one invited.” (Interview, Tata Kimfumu, 29 September 2005, Luozi, DRC).

¹⁸⁵ Michael G. Schatzberg, “Fidelite au Guide: The J.M.P.R. in Zairian Schools,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Sep., 1978), p. 421.



Figure 8: Mobutu watching a group of students performing, unknown date (Source: National Archives, Kinshasa, DRC)

Businesses

Like the schools, all businesses in Luozi territory, even those privately owned, were affected by political animation. Ne Mosi remembers the routine he took part in as a worker on a cattle farm: “Each morning before beginning work they made the workers dance...Each morning...for thirty minutes, one must dance, to glorify the Guide.” (Interview, Ne Mosi, 10 October 2005, Luozi, DRC) He also noted that the owners of the businesses had to take the lead in these performances. “You the head, you must make your workers sing also, they must dance...you are first of all the animator...it is you that calls out the animation shouts.” (Interview, Ne Mosi 10 October 2005, Luozi, DRC) In

the case of an official of the state or party visiting the business “it was necessary to mobilize the workers. When they gave the schedule that they were coming to your business, if you didn’t do it, you have problems.” (Interview, Ne Mosi, 10 October 2005, Luozi, DRC).

On a larger scale, enterprises played major roles in political animation, especially after Zairianization began in 1973, during which the businesses of foreigners were confiscated and given to citizens of Zaire, who most often were friends and allies of Mobutu.¹⁸⁶ The CEO’s of the major companies that were nationalized sponsored animation ballet groups to sing the praises of Mobutu, using the groups’ performances as “an expression of loyalty” and gratitude to Mobutu, who had appointed them to their positions.¹⁸⁷ Major companies sponsoring animation groups included SNEL (Société Nationale d’Electricité, or National Electrical Company), OZACAF (Office Zairoise du Café or Zairian Coffee Bureau), and Regideso (Régie de Distribution d’Eau, or State Water Distribution Company), among others, who not only had their groups perform at major festivals but also paid the national television station to air performances of their groups.¹⁸⁸ All in all, political animation was not only an obligation, but also a way in which the heads of major nationalized companies ensured that they would be able to keep their jobs and standard of living, and remained in good favor with Mobutu.

¹⁸⁶ Interview, Professor Mbala Nkanga, July 19, 2007, Ann Arbor, MI. See also “The State and the Economy: The “Radicalization of the Revolution” in Mobutu’s Zaire,” by Michael G. Schatzberg *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines* (1980).

¹⁸⁷ Interview, Professor Mbala Nkanga, July 19, 2007, Ann Arbor, MI.

¹⁸⁸ Interview, Professor Mbala Nkanga, July 19, 2007, Ann Arbor, MI.

Oh, that Mobutu may be with you!: Churches and Mobutu's Religious Authority

During Mobutu's regime, especially after his turn to an ideology of authenticity, a tension developed concerning the role of religion and churches in Zaire, and the expansion of the power and ideology of the one party state. In many ways, the M.P.R. had become a sort of national religion that sought to replace other religions in people's lives, taking on many of the roles that churches served. As Adelman writes:

In addition to presenting authenticity as a secular theology, the party attempts to fulfill functions and meet needs ordinarily accomplished by religion. It prescribes social conduct...instills identity by stressing that every Zairean is a party militant...uses symbols...celebrates its own holidays...provides its own rituals in the form of party chants, dances, and songs; emphasizes its historical heritage...and places itself as the guiding light or unifying force in the life of its members...the party thus serves as a religious surrogate, an attempt to satisfy the personal need for meaning, identity, and values which are normally filled by a religion. (1975:103)

Moreover, party halls were called "Temples," a number of songs and prayers from churches were modified to praise Mobutu, and even common religious phrases were transformed, so that "May God be with you," became "Oh, that Mobutu may be with you!" (Adelman 1975:103). All of these measures demonstrate that M.P.R. sought to impose itself not only as a political authority, but also as religious authority. Further confirmation of this is found in how Mobutu was presented to and thought of by the nation.

Loyalty and adherence to Mobutu were part and parcel of the M.P.R. ideology, placing him at the head of this national party as not only its guide, but also its "prophet" (Adelman 1975:103). In reflections about their experiences during Mobutu's regime and the role of political animation, several interviewees suggested that Mobutu was presented and viewed by some as god-like:

The era of Mobutu, it is then that we had songs that invoked Mobutu like a king, invoked Mobutu like a god...it is especially during the era of Mobutu, they elevated Mobutu like a god. They were blind. These people...many came to think that Mobutu wasn't going to die. He did whatever he wanted...(Interview, P. Kasambi,11/12/2005, Luozi, DRC)

Another interviewee recalled daily television broadcasts where Mobutu's face would appear in the clouds (Interview, Ne Tatu, 10 October 2005, Luozi, DRC). Propaganda such as this, with Mobutu's face hovering in the heavens, symbolically demonstrates how Mobutu was visually presented as god-like,¹⁸⁹ above the rest of the population and nation. In fact, as one interviewee explained it, people "no longer knew the living God, they only knew the god that was Mobutu" (Interview, P. Kasambi,12 November 2005, Luozi, DRC). This usurpation of the power and ideology of the church by the Mobutu-led state resulted in a number of conflicts in the struggle for religious authority.

According to Adelman, the following statement by Mobutu really encapsulated the conflict between church and state during this time: "In Zaire, it is the M.P.R. and not the Church that will lead the way" (Adelman 1975:113). With this statement, Mobutu places himself and M.P.R as the highest authorities in the nation. A number of conflicts occurred between churches and their leaders, (especially the Catholic Church), and Mobutu and his government that point to the goals of Mobutu's regime of suppressing the power of churches, quelling opposition, and attempting to supplant religious ideologies and institutions with the M.P.R. After Cardinal Joseph Albert Malula made several public critiques of Mobutu, he was expelled from the country in January of 1972. Other

¹⁸⁹ The expansion of Mobutu's political power into the religious realm, and representations of Mobutu that cast him as divine again bring our attention to the interrelatedness of political and religious authority. In a sense, it could be argued that Mobutu was trying to present himself as a divine king, with his almost absolute power over the citizens fully sanctioned by the spiritual world. See chapter two for a similar discussion of the divinity of Kongo kings.

issues of conflict both before and after the expulsion included the installation of the J.M.P.R. in religious seminaries, the mandatory dropping of Christian and other non-African names to be replaced by authentic African names, and the government ban of religious youth groups, religious television and radio broadcasts, and religious pamphlets and publications (Adelman 1975). Moreover, in 1973 people were prohibited from attending any regional and national religious meetings, and were only allowed to meet locally. Large regional and national meetings were reserved for M.P.R. events (Adelman 1975:110). However, one of the ways in which submission to the political and religious authority of Mobutu was felt most intimately by religious leaders was through forced dancing and singing.

As chapters two, three, and four demonstrate, in Catholic and Protestant churches in the Lower Congo, secular dances have often be associated with licentiousness and immorality. Thus, one role that these churches play is that of policing conduct in regards to dancing, and prohibiting the participation of church members in any dances that can be seen as immoral. Many churches, such as the DMNA church, prohibit any form of dance outside of the church, while others frown on dancing in any context. Under Mobutu's regime however, neither ordinary congregation members nor church leadership were excluded from performing their adoration of the president. "According to the President, Zairean priests are required by the Constitution to be militants in the M.P.R. Even the Bishops are supposed to participate in party chants and dances praising the party and President," (Adelman 1975:104). Imagine the lasting impression of seeing a man or woman of God dancing basically in praise and worship of Mobutu. This policy, in seeking to reinforce the ideologies and authority of Mobutu through the body, had an

impact on not only the people dancing, but also everyone else who witnessed priests and other religious leaders dancing. In these instances, the dancing and singing physically enact the idea that Mobutu and his government are higher in spiritual authority than local church rules, national clerical leaders, or even the Pope himself.

Although there was a lot of pressure and threats of arrest, fines, and even death if one didn't comply with the demands of the government, for some religious communities it was exactly on the question of dance that they sought to take a stand against Mobutu's regime. The example that I consider in this regard is that of the refusal of members of the DMNA church in Luozi to participate in dancing for Mobutu. Pastor Kasambi explains the history of this protest in the following exchange about political animation:

K: The authorities, when they present themselves in your village, you must search for a beautiful girl that you must give them. That is the M.P.R. And then people had become very, very, very profane. Religion went away more and more. Even the people who didn't have a strong faith, the religious, there were certain pastors and priests who danced in the era of Mobutu.

Y.C.W: But, do they have a choice? They didn't have a choice.

K: They didn't, well, because if you didn't dance, they are going to kill you. But, among the *bangunza* in our denomination, there were a large number of arrests, the time from 1970 to 1975. Because they rejected this. Thus, they were against the movement.

Y.C.W: Against the movement of---

K: Against the movement of M.P.R...They didn't want to dance. And so, they forcefully arrested us. Here, in 1970...they arrested people who didn't want to dance.

Y.C.W: Here in Luozi?

K: Here in Luozi. And they were freed in 1975...they took pastors and deacons...arrested us over two months, three months, four months, put in the prison...you weren't in the dungeon but you couldn't pray...They

were arrests where you were tied up like a sausage...they couldn't function spiritually. It was hard.

With this recollection, Pastor Kasambi singles out the DMNA church as having the courage to stand up to the moral turpitude that was represented by dancing for M.P.R and Mobutu. He distinguishes his church members as having a stronger sense of faith than other religious leaders who complied with the demands to dance and sing, and discusses the persecution of these church members who refused to dance over a number of years. This harkens back to *bangunza* during the colonial period who continued to practice their form of praise and worship that included ecstatic trance and trembling although they continued to be arrested and exiled to labor camps for several decades. In both the colonial case (persecution by the Belgians) and the post-colonial case (persecution by Mobutu's government), the *bangunza* maintained a sense of a higher spiritual authority that guided their principles and conduct, one that challenged European missionaries who condemned their embodied forms of worship, and upheld their belief in secular dancing as contrary to the wishes of a higher God. In the telling of the story of one particular member of the church in Luozi who was arrested, Pastor Kasambi reiterates the courage *bangunza* showed by sticking to their religious beliefs in the face of arrests and punishment:

If you refused, they arrested you, took you to Mbanza-Ngungu. And if you were taken to Mbanza-Ngungu, where you met hardened people, they kill you. It wasn't anything. It was like that. But fortunately we didn't have any people that they killed. But it was hard...I know an *ngunza* that they arrested here, on the road to Mbanza-Ngungu. His son who had some means, went to release him...they said to him [the arrested *ngunza*], you can't pray! He [said], I will pray to my God. Come and dance! I won't dance. (Interview, Pastor Kasambi, 12 November 2005, Luozi, DRC)

In this story of bravery, the arrested *ngunza* explicitly refuses to accept the imposition of the religious and political authority of the state on his body. By seeking to pray even when prohibited to do so, and refusing to dance even when required to do so, he challenges the impingement of Mobutu's religious and political authority on the religious authority of the DMNA church, whose tenets, principles, and practices are believed to have been received from God. His and the protests of other *bangunza* forcefully pushed back against the ability of Mobutu and his government to control their conduct, thus undermining the total political and burgeoning religious authority that Mobutu sought to have over the citizens of Zaïre.

In short, political and cultural animation was not limited to animation ballet troupes, but was evident in most areas of daily life for citizens of Luozi territory and the nation during Mobutu's reign. The presence of coerced dancing and singing in schools, businesses, churches, and on streets when national leaders and representatives visited local areas demonstrate a form of political and even growing religious authority that Mobutu exercised over the population. As such, he also used political and cultural animation to legitimate his rule over and over again on a daily basis. Whether or not you recognized him as the nation's leader, when you were compelled to perform for him and his government, the very actions of singing and dancing demonstrated his authority over you—his ability to influence and control your actions. These embodied cultural performances were crucial to spreading Mobutu's ideology across the nation. The last section of this chapter considers the impact of political and cultural animation for the Kongo people on a larger scale—in the public spectacles and festivals that were staged for the entire nation.

Kongo Cultural Performance on the National Stage: Animation Festivals

National political and cultural animation festivals became annual events starting with the first festival on November 24, 1973. The reason for the selection of that particular date is clear, as it was on November 24, 1965 that Mobutu took over the country. The purpose of this first festival, as stated in a speech by Bokonga Ekanga Botombele, at that time the state commissioner for culture and the arts, was the following:

The first great National festival of Culture and Animation is composed of representatives of all classes of the population coming from all the regions and all the tribes of the country, including the city of Kinshasa and the Zairean Armed Forces...The festival symbolizes a Zairean reality in which all Zairean citizens, notwithstanding the diversity of their tribes, languages, and customs, consider themselves members of a united family within the People's Revolutionary Movement (MPR)...It makes possible a genuine fusion of the 250 Zairean tribes...Everyone becomes the image of everyone else and that is the image of this Festival as a symbol of national unity and concord. (Botombele 1976:46)

This quote demonstrates the significance of this festival and others like it for bringing a country consisting of hundreds of fragmented ethnic groups together as one nation. Like Askew's study of Tanzania, animation festivals in Zaire were one of many ways in which the nation was performed into being.

After an animation seminar, lasting from a week to a month in Kinshasa, during which the best performers were selected from the troupes that came from different provinces, an estimated three hundred people from each of twelve provinces were chosen to perform, or around 3600 people total (George Matadi, Interview, 07/16/2005, Kinshasa, DRC). Thus, animation groups representing each of the twelve provinces

performed for Mobutu, and for the rest of the nation, as the events were televised. How exactly did Kongo people fit into this performed articulation of the nation?

Praising Mobutu in KiKongo

As the previously cited example of Djalelo clearly shows, traditional songs that have their origins in the experiences and histories of particular ethnic groups were transformed to reflect the ideology of Mobutu's regime. Moreover, new songs were created, in the languages of different ethnic groups, so that its people could sing their praises to Mobutu in their own languages. The Kongo people were no exception. This section considers several songs as performed during the first national festival of animation, held in a major stadium in Kinshasa on the 24th and 25th of November in 1973.

In the National Archives in Kinshasa, amidst the deteriorating walls of a small, building next to a police station, there are several cartons of material about political animation. In one carton, there were a few documents detailing the songs and slogans used by groups from each region during the festival of animation in 1973. Among them was the document for "shock repertoire" of the region of "Bas-Zaire," as Bas-Congo was known at the time.¹⁹⁰ In the chart below and those to follow, the first two columns are copied directly from the archival document of the repertoire of songs of Bas-Zaire, while in the third column I provide an English translation of the French in the second column. The first song to be considered emphasizes national unity and reinforces the acceptance of the national party and leader.

¹⁹⁰ (National Archives, Kinshasa, Carton MPR (juillet IV) Festival d'Animation, 24 novembre 1973. Repertoire Choc des Chansons et Slogans, Revolutionnaires du Bas-Zaire).

Beto na Beto	Tous, des freres et soeurs	Everyone, brothers and sisters
Bas-Zaire – Kinshasa iyo beto na beto	Au Bas-Zaire et à Kinshasa nous sommes tous des frères et des soeurs	In Bas-Zaire and in Kinshasa we are all brothers and sisters
Bandundu – Equateur iyo beto na beto	Au Bandundu et à l'Equateur nous sommes tous des frères et des soeurs	In Bandundu and in Equateur we are all brothers and sisters
Kasaï na Shaba iyo beto na beto	Au Kasaï et au Shaba nous sommes tous des frères et des soeurs	In Kasaï and in Shaba we are all brothers and sisters
Kivu – Haut-Zaire iyo beto na beto	Au Kivu et Haut-Zaire nous sommes tous des frères et des soeurs	In Kivu and Haut-Zaire we are all brothers and sisters
Iyo beto na beto	Nous sommes tous des frères et des soeurs	We are all brothers and sisters
(Refrain) A a bana Mobutu	Des enfants de Papa Mobutu	(Refrain) Children of Papa Mobutu
(Solo) Parti na beto	Notre Parti	(Solo) Our Party
(Tous) A Parti na beto M.P.R.	Notre Parti c'est le M.P.R.	(Chorus) Our Party is M.P.R.
(Solo) Buala na beto	Notre Pays	(Solo) Our Country
(Tous) A buala na beto Zaire	Notre Pays : le Zaire	(Chorus) Our country Zaire
(Solo) Mfumu na beto	Notre chef	(Solo) Our Chief/leader
(Tous) A mfumu na beto Sese	Sese est notre chef	(Chorus) Sese is our chief

In this song, the emphasis is placed on the unity of all of the people of the country who inhabit the different regions. In a country inhabited by more than 250 different ethnic groups, saying the “we are all brothers and sisters” establishes a familial, kinship type relationship with other citizens of the country. Moreover, “Our Party...Our Country...Our Chief” all focus on core elements that help to define the different people who inhabit the country, as one and the same, in that they are all citizens of Zaire, members of MPR, and subjects of Mobutu. Thus, this song can be seen as yet another

example of the use of performance to bring the oft-fragmented nation into being and to unify its disparate citizenry.

The second song to be considered focuses more on Mobutu rather than the unity of the country.

Tulanda Tata Mobutu	Suivons le Guide Mobutu	We follow the Guide Mobutu
Eh landa ah a landa ah a Ta Mobutu ikuenda landa	Suivez à jamais le Guide C'est Tata Mobutu, le guide qui je suis[sic]	Follow the guide forever It's Father Mobutu the guide who I follow
Kina ye wonga ko eh e e Eh landa ah a landa landa eh	Je n'ai pas peur Suivez, suivez le Guide	I am not scared Follow, Follow the guide
Ulembi landa Mobutu, ngeyi nani ?	Si vous cessez de suivre le Guide Mobutu, qui êtes- vous ?	If you stop following the guide Mobutu, who are you?
Uzoba, dianene	Vous êtes un idiot, un grand imbécile	You are an idiot, a big imbecile
Eh muana eh eee muana eh e	Un pauvre enfant qui pleure	A poor enfant that cries

This song demonstrates the dedication and loyalty of those who sing it, to following Mobutu as their leader. It berates those who chose not to follow Mobutu by insulting their intelligence, and overall stands as a performed praise of “Mobutu the Guide.” The last line, interestingly enough, is often used in a call and response pattern during the performance of traditional *makinu* that I witnessed in Luozi and Kinshasa. It is yet another example of “dipping into tradition” for the purposes of political animation.

Refashioning *Makinu* and *Bimpampa* for Mobutu

This section of the chapter shall consider two examples of the ways in which Kongo cultural performances, in terms of *makinu* and *bimpampa*, were transformed to embody the message of MPR and praise for Mobutu Sese Seko. The first is an

examination of a performance of *bimpampa* by a group representing Bas-Zaire at the first festival of animation on November 24, 1973. The second, and the longest, is an analysis of a ten minute long videotaped performance of political animation of a group representing Bas-Zaire during a large festival in a stadium in Kinshasa on an unknown date (most likely 1987 according to certain clues).

Bimpampa for the Nation

In the performance of the group representing Bas-Zaire at the first festival of animation in 1973, some of the *bimpampa* gestures that have been discussed in previous chapters were incorporated into the show. Although I was not able to obtain the video of this performance, using the document from the National Archives that outlines the entire repertoire for the group, and an analysis by Kapalanga of the same performance, we will be able to provide further detail.

After two introductory songs, the third part of the program was titled “ancestral greetings.” Kapalanga’s description of what happened next gives us an idea of the gestures used:

At the sound of a signal given with the help of a “gongi”...the song and the dance stop. There is silence. At the second signal, the animators touch the ground with the right hand, touch with the same hand the head on the left side, then again the ground and the right side of the head. They raise the two hands to the chest before clapping the hands three times. During all of this sequence, the animators have the head inclined as if they’re saying a prayer. This operation is repeated three times in succession. (Kapalanga 1989:154)

This description shows several *bimpampa* gestures that have been previously discussed. The first is the touching of the hand to the ground and then to the head or face. This seems to be a restrained version of covering oneself and one’s head and face in dirt in the

presence of an authority figure as a way of showing submission, respect, and giving thanks that we saw in chapter two. The clapping of the hands, *bula makonko*, as a sign of respect, gratitude, and also as a greeting is also a *bimpampa* used quite frequently in the pre-colonial Kongo Kingdom and in current everyday life. In the archival document outlining the repertoire of the group, explanation is provided, assumingly for the comprehension of those reading it who are not from the Kongo culture:¹⁹¹

The genuflection is a sign of respect due to the chief. Very significant also are the gestures of the hands which touch successively the ground (riches) the cheeks (love) the chest (conviction). Then a clapping of the hands by way of thanks. In the simplicity of this moving ceremony they clearly express all the respect, all the obedience, and all the submission that the people must to their chief whose person is inviolable.¹⁹²

In this description, *dekama* (genuflection) appears as another *bimpampa* used during this performance that seems to have escaped Kapalanga's notice. Moreover, the unknown author of the document provides a meaning for each gesture of the hands¹⁹³ that gives the reader a portrayal of a positive sort of blessing and sign of gratitude that the performers are offering to the chief, Mobutu. The last phrase of the quote clearly demonstrates that the main point that the author wanted the readers to have is that these gestures were signs of "respect, obedience, and submission" to Mobutu. Like the words of the slogans and

¹⁹¹ It is not clear who the audience for this document of the repertoire of the Bas-Zaire group was. Since there were other similar documents in the archival file for groups representing other regions at the same event, it can safely be assumed that a document outlining the repertoire was produced for each group. However, it is not clear whether the audience is officials in MOPAP who look over the content, or if it was mass produced for the audience at the stadium.

¹⁹² (National Archives, Kinshasa, Carton MPR (juillet IV) Festival d'Animation, 24 novembre 1973. Repertoire Choc des Chansons et Slogans, Revolutionnaires du Bas-Zaire).

¹⁹³ Due to the many examples of the multivalent nature of *bimpampa* hand gestures that we have encountered in previous chapters, it can be argued that the exact meanings insisted upon in the document are overly simplistic. But they are meanings that can be added to the multiple ones that we already have accumulated.

songs that emphasize the same message, Kongo *bimpampa* have been appropriated to embody the allegiance to Mobutu that every citizen is expected to have, and to perform.

Analysis of Video

I purchased the video that the following section is based on from the Congolese National Radio and Television Station. After a lot of haggling,¹⁹⁴ (which would never had been possible were it not for Tata Ndundu Kivuila, who spoke on my behalf during the meeting) I received a low-quality video tape of about 10 minutes in duration of the performance of a group representing Bas-Zaire during a large political animation event of unknown date and location. In this section of the chapter, I describe the setting, costumes, and provide an analysis of the use of Kongo traditional *makinu* in the performance of political animation of this particular group.

Setting

The setting of the video is a large field in a stadium, most likely in Kinshasa.¹⁹⁵ Although there was no date given on the video, since the event was the 20th anniversary of some momentous occasion, Mbala Nkanga¹⁹⁶ estimates that the event being celebrated was most likely the founding of MPR in 1967, which would date the videotaped performance to on or around May 20, 1987. The stadium is packed with people, and the

¹⁹⁴ The negotiations went on over several days. In the initial meeting, I refused to be convinced to pay several hundred dollars for a videotape of the entire event. I tried to appeal to the sympathetic side of the official with whom I was negotiating, reiterating my status as a student without a lot of money, and trying to establish fictive kinship bonds based on the fact that his daughter and I had essentially the same names and were the same age. Tata Ndundu played a crucial role in these negotiations, eventually convincing the official to sell me a copy of only the Bas-Zaire portion of the video for around \$35.

¹⁹⁵ This is most likely 20th May stadium.

¹⁹⁶ Mbala Nkanga is a scholar in theater and performance studies who was once the head of the National Institute of Arts in Zaire. He is currently an associate professor in theater at the University of Michigan, and is also one of my dissertation committee members.

dancers seem to be facing Mobutu, who sits up in the stands with his wife. He is also surrounded by foreign dignitaries, who seem to delight in the events taking place before them. 90-100 dancers and singers representing Bas-Zaïre are on the field, and the name of the group is on the backs of their t-shirts: Mbengo Mbengo du Bas-Zaïre. This group is most likely from the Bas-Fleuve region of Lower Congo, based on costume, gesture, and linguistic cues.

General Program

To begin their performance, the dancers, facing Mobutu's side of the stadium, are arranged in 10 vertical lines on the field, which starting from the each of the outside lines, consist of a line of men, two lines of women in white t-shirts, and two lines of women in button down shirts. The performance begins with the call and response of a number of slogans, including "Mobutu Oye." Then, the air is filled with the sound of drumming, which is then overlay with the sound of an electric guitar. Several male singers' voices can be heard through the microphone, singing a song in Lingala, "Bana Zaïre Toyokana" (Children of Zaïre, let's agree with one another). According to Professor Mbala, who translated the song from Lingala to English, the words are as follows:

*Children of Zaïre, let's agree with one another
That it would be a shame if we broke MPR's rules
Because we raised you within the ranks of MPR
You went to the school of our Revolution
And now you want to divide the country with your demagoguery
Stop it, just follow the rules
You, the leaders of MPR, know that you are bad
One foot inside, One foot outside
Lost lambs, Lost lambs,
You want to spoil the name of Zaïre
We raised you in the revolution, now you want opposition*

The late eighties were apparently the peak of corruption and mismanagement during Mobutu's regime, and moreover, there were increasing numbers of people who themselves were a part of the higher ranks of MPR, but were trying to create their own political parties. Furthermore, UDPS¹⁹⁷ had been founded by this time, and thus, there were many dissenting voices on the political scene, which becomes even clearer by 1990, when Mobutu agreed to accept multi-partyism and stepped down as the head of MPR.¹⁹⁸ Thus the words of the song explicitly send a message berating those who although having received their training in MPR, now act against MPR and Mobutu.

The music that accompanies this performance is similar to Congolese popular music (rumba or soukous) popular at the time and even now. The dancers begin to move, rolling their hips and executing a number of simple foot patterns that move them side to side, and arm movements that compliment their dancing. When one of the singers indicates a break by singing "Ta, Ta, Ta, Ta-Ta," the dancers switch to another step that involves more rapid rotation of the hips. The singer animates this session by shouting out phrases in KiKongo like "Kwiza" (come) as the dancers move forward, and "Ta Mobutu, tala!" (Father Mobutu, look!). He ends this section of the performance with "Ta, Ta, Ta kanga" (*kanga* means to close or to end), and the dancers respond by stopping with their hands on their hips. He leads another short call and response session of slogans, and then makes a short speech wherein he repeats some of the key lyrics of the song to the audience, emphasizing the lesson of the song, and adding "if you are seeking trouble, you

¹⁹⁷ UDPS stands for Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social (Union for Democracy and Social Progress), a political party that was formed as a challenge to Mobutu's dictatorship. Etienne Tshiekiedi wa Mulumba became its most popular leader (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002:185).

¹⁹⁸ Interview, Professor Mbala Nkanga, July 24, 2007, Ann Arbor, MI.

will find it.” After another slogan, the music begins again, and the dancers continue by repeating the same routine over from the beginning.

The singers then begin a second, slower, song in KiYombe¹⁹⁹ (*Mfumumu, Mfumumu eto*, Chief, Our Chief) that the music simply transitions into with both drumming and a keyboard and the dancers respond by executing slow rolls of the hips as they move into their second configuration. This formation is based on dividing the group in the middle, and consists of three distinct lines on the left hand side (one line of men, one line of women in white t-shirts, and another of women in button down shirts) and four more messy lines on the right. Both sides are facing each other rather than the stadium, in between the two sides is a large open space. As the singing ends and the music switches to just drumming, two men come dancing down through the center of the space, toward a microphone that has been set up in front of the group. The music stops, and the dancer in the white *mbokula*²⁰⁰ leads a call and response in KiYombe, (*Mobutu yala! Yala kaka! Mobutu reigns! Only [he] reigns!*) He then dances backwards as the singing and music begin again. As he leaves, he passes between two swaying masked Woyo²⁰¹ figures that advance into the center space. Another dancer in a multi-colored *mbokula* enters between the figures, and rolls his hips vigorously while bouncing in time with the music. In the back behind the Woyo figures, a straight line of six men in different *mbokula* can be seen, kicking their right legs gently with the music, while the dancers in the seven lines

¹⁹⁹ KiYombe is a dialectical variation of KiKongo, and is spoken by the BaYombe sub-ethnic group, located in the region closer to the coast and port cities of Boma and Matadi.

²⁰⁰ The *mbokula* is a kind of skirt worn by men that consists of a large number of cloths arranged to hang down to the grounds from a cord tied around the waist. They are arranged in such a manner that they look like individual strips.

²⁰¹ The BaWoyo are another Kongo sub-group, located near the Atlantic coast.

perform a new routine, which includes bouncing the entire body, including the head, several times with the music. Another masked figure enters to dance next to the Woyo figures.

Then, the music changes to rapid drumming for the third song, and the performance speeds up once again. The seven lines of dancers perform quick eight count rotations of the hips in place punctuated by raising both arms shoulder level in front of themselves on the second and sixth counts, and lowering the arms on the fourth and eighth counts. They then continue to roll, as they move into the third and last formation using a step in which they lightly swing and plant their right leg, and then their left leg in front of them on the first and fifth counts, respectively. The women move to form a semi-circle facing Mobutu's side of the stadium, and the men and several women move into a horizontal line in the middle, facing out as well. The men carry in their arms large palm fronds, baskets assumingly filled with produce, and even an *nkombo* (goat). As they dance, they sing a song in KiYombe that seems to be a response to the call of *salongo*, the national motto for community and agricultural work:

Beto me kwiza ye ye ye ye
Tuna sadila bilanga ya
Tuna bokila kiese
Tuna kutomisa kweto

We are coming
Let's work in the fields
We are bringing happiness
We are improving ourselves

A man in a leopard print hat (which Mobutu is famous for wearing and which he sports even at this event), button down shirt, dress pants, and a cane, along with a woman nicely dressed in party cloth, walk to the center of the field to stand in front of the group. He and his partner are apparently standing in for Mobutu and his wife. The dancers in the

center line fall to their knees as they continue to dance and sing before the couple, who make gestures as if inspecting the crops. The music stops, and the man in the suit faces the audience and makes a speech in Lingala supporting the idea of *salongo* that the president is pushing for the population. When he finishes, the drumming, dancing, and singing commence again for several counts of eight, until the drumming stops and the audience claps for the group's performance.

Costumes

All of the dancers, both male and female, in the 10 lines on the field are wearing khaki-colored cloth hats with Bas-Zaire written on one side and 20th (ineligible text in film) on the other. The women are wearing two types of costumes. The first group is wearing white t-shirts with Mobutu's face printed on the front under the words "20th anniversary." They are also wearing lengths of cloth wrapped around their waists (*pagnes*) that reach all the way to their ankles and are emblazoned with pictures of Mobutu, the word MPR, and other party propaganda. Around their waists, atop the *pagnes*, they wear *nzebula*²⁰² in the same material, setting on their hips so that there is visual emphasis on the rotation of the hips that is the foundation for almost all Kongo dances (and dances of many ethnic groups through DRC as well). The second group of women is wearing khaki colored shirts with dark sleeves, collars, front pockets, and light colored gloves. They are also wearing ankle length khaki colored skirts enlivened by an

²⁰² *Nzebula* is the word in KiKongo to describe a length of cloth that is rolled and tied around the waist to accentuate the hip movements of the dancers.

nzebula in the same party cloth as the other women. All of the women are wearing white sneakers.

The men on the outside two lines of the ten are wearing raffia skirts that fall just below their knees, and light colored *nzebula* around their waists.²⁰³ They are bare-chested, and barefoot. The man who is animating the entire performance and who makes a short speech in the middle of the first song is on another part of the field with other singers, and they all are wearing the same hats and short sleeved shirts in the same commemorative party cloth mentioned above. The six to eight male dancers who enter during the second song are also bare-chested, but wearing *mbokula* of different colors. One of these dancers enters the main “stage” of the performance between two whirling Woyo figures, most often called *Ndunga*, which consist of large, masked, dancing mounds of dried leaves.²⁰⁴ The single dancer entering between them is wearing a white *mbokula* along with white lines in the form of an “H” on his chest, and white paint at the corners of his eyes, from his brow down his nose, and around the upper arms. This form of painting is reminiscent of that which accompanied the initiations of the BaKhimba male secret society that in the past existed in Lower Congo, particularly in the MaYombe area.²⁰⁵ He leads a brief session of call and response with the dancers, before the signal is given to return to performing the second song. When he is finished, another male

²⁰³ These may or may not be party cloth. The low quality of the video makes it difficult to tell.

²⁰⁴ See “The Lower Congo; a Sociological Study,” by Richard Cobden Phillips in *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* (1888), page 229.

²⁰⁵ See *La Société Secrète des Bakhimba au Mayombe* by Léo Bittremieux (1936) for more information, and in particular page 49 for a description of the painting of the bodies of initiates with white earth. For an image of male members of the society in full regalia, see the photo insert in the middle of *Culture Confrontation in the Lower Congo* by Sigbert Axelson (1970).

dancer comes center stage, in an *mbokula* and with two large beaded necklaces criss-crossing over his bare chest.

The references to “traditional” Kongo culture through the costumes are clear, from the use of *mbokula*, which typically are worn by men during village and community dances, and *nzebula* which are worn by both men and women in the same setting, to the masked Woyo figures and the BaKhimba body painting referencing the male secret society of the Lower Congo. The women’s clothing, on the other hand, can be seen as more contemporary due to the use of party cloth. However, the entire visual presentation is one that not only glorifies Mobutu and MPR, but also physically embodies the ideology of authenticity that was touted by the regime.

Dance and Rhythm

When looking at the movements that were performed overall, the formations and some of the most common gestures seem emblematic of the regimented movements and formations of the military, as Huckstep observed in her own analysis of a political animation performance (2005:147). However, to an eye that is more familiar with traditional Kongo dances, there are also many elements of Kongo *makinu* in this particular performance of political animation.

To begin, one of the first observations that I made of the video in relation to *makinu* was the spatial formation of the group performing, in particular the second and third formations. As noted by European observers in chapters two and three, and my own observations during field research at dances featuring drumming with traditional instruments, the most common spatial arrangements in Kongo *makinu* are either a circle,

or two lines, usually with the men on one side and the women on the other. In the middle is the *mbazi ya makinu*, which is the open space for dancing between the two lines or in the middle of a circle.²⁰⁶ The second formation of the dancers, in which they are in lines all facing into the *mbazi ya makinu*, mimics the arrangement found at Kongo *makinu*, except that they are in 3-7 lines rather than two long ones. The lines however, do remain segregated by gender. The semi-circle that the female dancers form in the third formation, around the mostly male dancers performing in the middle, is also reminiscent of Kongo *makinu* spatial formation. However, usually the other half of the circle, which we don't see in this performance of political animation, is made up of men. Thus, although both the second and third spatial arrangements of the dancers in this performance could have been chosen to simply space the dancers in a visually appealing way on the field, it is likely no coincidence that the formations chosen are also ones that we see in Kongo traditional *makinu* performances.

In terms of actual movements, the movement that was the foundation of the entire performance and was used by both men and women was the rolling of the hips. This movement is the most important one in *makinu mu luketo*, dances of the hips, which were most commonly used for Kongo community celebrations and general festivities. The rotation of the *luketo* or hips is a movement that can be found throughout DRC, but it particularly key in the Kongo cultural region. In the animation performance of the group from Bas-Zaïre, hip-rolling is a constant movement throughout the entire performance, from the first step, a quick eight count rotation of the hips while in place punctuated by

²⁰⁶ Ne Nkamu, Interview, 04/08/05, Kinshasa, DRC.

raising both arms shoulder level in front of themselves on the first and fifth counts, lowering the arms on the third and sixth counts while simultaneously placing the left foot forward on the first count, to the last step of the performance in which they roll while simultaneously swinging and planting their right leg, and then their left leg in front of them on the first and fifth counts, while moving into the last formation. The fact that large *nzebula* are a part of the costume for both sexes also reinforces the importance of hip-rolling for the entire performance.

In addition, yet another movement that was demonstrated by the lines of male and female dancers was that of quickly jumping forward on both feet toward a partner and hitting their outstretched hands, then jumping backwards from them, dropping the hands, all while continuously rolling the hips, and all to the rhythm of the music. Mbala Nkanga noted that this movement was one that was very typical of the Yombe area of the Lower Congo.²⁰⁷

Another movement that one also finds in *makinu* is the low kicking gesture and the carriage of the arms used by the men who entered wearing the *mbokula*. The kicking gesture is also known as *ndosa*,²⁰⁸ from the kikongo verb *kulosa*, which means to throw or throw away. In the context of the gesture, the literal meaning seems to refer to the physical throwing of the leg away from the body. This gesture is one used by men wearing *mbokula* in many *makinu mu luketo*, in particular the one called *ndosa* (after the gesture). It is used to invite female partners to dance, to thank the drummers and drums, and as a general movement. It is often done in a synchronized manner by all the men in

²⁰⁷ Interview, Professor Mbala Nkanga, 07/24/07, Ann Arbor, MI.

²⁰⁸ Ne Nkamu, Interview, 09/19/05, Luozi, DRC.

the line, but is also performed by individual male dancers as they enter the *mbazi ya makinu*. While performing the *ndosa*, their hips are still rolling, and the upper part of the body is the most still, especially the trunk, while the arms are held downwards, slightly in front of the body and slightly curved. In *ndosa* dances, the arms can also be held up higher, slightly below or at shoulder level, bent at the elbows and parallel to the ground. However, what seems to be present both variations of the arm position is a softer movement of the arms (in comparison to the vigorous rolling of the hips for example) an air of dignity, of grace, of total composure that the dancers portray in their carriage of their arms while dancing the *ndosa*. Thus, in the animation performance of the male dancers in the video, the general carriage of the arms and the *ndosa* kicking gesture is also present.

Another way in which the influence of Kongo *makinu* can be seen in this particular political animation performance is in the drum rhythms used. For the first two songs, as the drumming is overlay with electric guitar and keyboard and singing, it is hard to discern the types of rhythms being used. But the last song, which is supported by drumming only, makes it possible to hear the particular rhythms through the singing. In my estimation, the drum rhythm being used is a very rapid rhythm called *wala*, which is one of around seven major drum rhythms that can be found throughout present day Bas-Congo.²⁰⁹ This rhythm is more often used for funerals, wakes, and other solemn events, although it can also be used for joyous occasions as well, although more rarely.²¹⁰ In this performance of political animation, the *wala* rhythm is used to end the group's routine, as

²⁰⁹ *Wala* and the other six major rhythms will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 6.

²¹⁰ Drumming Lesson, September 28, 2005, with Ne Nkamu, Luozi, DRC.

the women form a semi-circle and the men dance into the center bearing palm fronds and gifts.

In all, many elements of Kongo culture were incorporated into this performance of political and cultural animation—from costumes, to drum rhythms, to dances, to gestures. What is clear is that in this particular context, on a national stage, all of these elements are bestowed new meaning and purpose: to honor the Guide, Mobutu Sese Seko.

Conclusion

In many of the previous chapters, we have seen that embodied practices, because they can impart whole ideologies and belief systems, are often targeted by institutions and groups that are seeking to make new subjects—whether in African independent churches or the Kongo Kingdom. This chapter shows that political and cultural animation was administratively structured, institutionalized, monitored, and forced upon the population because it was so important to re-making the nation, and the mindsets of the citizenry, in a very particular way. It was through these embodied cultural performances that the ideologies of Mobutu's regime (whether authenticity, Mobutism, etc.) were lived and enacted on a daily basis, not only by people recruited into dance troupes, but also by ordinary workers, students, and even people in religious worship.

From the antecedent Voluntary Corps of the Republic (CVR) which performed at political rallies in the sixties, to animation ballets and festivals, to modified traditional songs, to lines of people singing and lining the streets as Mobutu passed, political and cultural animation played a huge role in the public constitution of Mobutu's political

authority when he first came into power, and the daily confirmation of that political authority throughout several decades of his dictatorship. His rule, which had not resulted from a democratic process, was legitimized over and over again with every dance, song, and gesture performed in his honor. As political and cultural animation became even more institutionalized and omnipresent in the media and multiple arenas of everyday life, efforts were even made by the government to encourage animation and loyalty to Mobutu and the M.P.R. to supplant religious beliefs and authority, signifying the growth of Mobutu's religious authority. The example of political and cultural animation in Mobutu's Zaire demonstrates that both political and religious authority were constituted through embodied cultural performances; in this case, the performances of Zaire's citizens. The case of political and cultural animation also reveals the importance of attending to coercion and force in any discussion of the interrelationship of performance and power, and especially, performance and authority.

Chapter 6

Embodied Revolutions: Performing Kongo Pride, Transforming Modern Society

Introduction

October 1, 2005. I am in Luozi, in the Lower Congo, staying in the home of Professor Kimpianga Mahaniah, while partaking in daily lessons in the KiKongo language and traditional music and dance with Ne Nkamu, a griot of Kongo cultural performance. We have negotiated payment for his services for several weeks, and he traveled with me from Kinshasa to the town of Luozi. His family is originally from the territory of Luozi and due to past performances and connections, he knows many people in the town of Luozi itself. Today we are supposed to have lessons, but they didn't materialize. I wake up really late, and Ne Nkamu is already in the C.V.A library,²¹¹ where they had the generator²¹² running. We work together on my computer on putting one of his performances that he did in France on VCD, and later made several copies, including one for the library. After, we are to go to an event that the local chapter of the

²¹¹ The C.V.A. library is one of several buildings of the Centre de Vulgarisation Agricole (Center for Agricultural Popularization), a non-profit organization founded and directed by Professor Kimpianga Mahaniah. It is the only major public library in the town, and it based on a small but growing number of the professor's own private collection of books. It is part of a compound that also includes the professor's home and quarters for the family of Mama Jacqueline, the cook and general housekeeper.

²¹² As already mentioned in chapter one, Luozi is a rural town that lacks electricity. Some local institutions, such as the Catholic church, water company, and the C.V.A. library for instance, would often run generators during the night and even the day.

group Bundu dia Kongo (BDK²¹³) was having. I am more than a little worried about the event. Ever since I'd gone to speak with the local leader a few weeks ago, people had begun to warn me about the group, saying things like, "Bundu dia Kongo, they're dangerous," and "You have to be careful---people have been killed." But since I was not going alone, I feel reassured.

The event is being held not only to honor the memory of great Kongo leaders and prophets who had important events occur in October (e.g. the death of Simon Kimbangu on October 12, 1951) but also to commemorate some of their fallen members who had been killed in a confrontation with local police in 2004. David, Mama Jacqueline's son, came along to help film.²¹⁴ We run into the members of BDK on the main road, where they are singing, walking, and waving small green branches. There are mostly men, and the few women present have their heads covered with either cloth, a scarf, or a special yellow BDK head covering decorated with the six-pointed star that is the group's

²¹³ BDK is the acronym for Bundu dia Kongo, which shall also be used to refer to group throughout this chapter.

²¹⁴ David and another young man, Pierre (a pastor's son who lived next door) were both teenagers in high school who often helped me by letting me know about events, walking me there and helping me to secure permission to film and participate, and by helping to film the events. This would occur after school and during the break from the academic year. I developed close relationships with both of their families, and considered them both to be good friends. Pierre's father was the pastor of the church that is the subject of chapter four, and Pierre and I played on the same basketball team during my time there and traded KiKongo/English lessons (along with another teenager named Matata) during my time in Luozi. Although I gave them both money here and there for their help, and gave money to their families, there was no explicit "fee for service" type relationship. The relationship that we had was more like that of a big sister to younger brothers, and so I had to fulfill my side of the bargain in terms of obligations to help with school fees, clothing, and any other financial problems that came up in their lives. It all started one day in August when my husband and I (he was visiting for a month) sought to make a short film about the inhabitants of Luozi to be shown publicly in the library. As Luozi is a small rural town, teens are often looking for something exciting to do. Both teens offered to take my camera and video camera to get footage of areas that we didn't have the time to visit ourselves. From that point on, although at first I was overly concerned about my cameras and was reluctant to allow others to operate them, eventually they coaxed me into letting them film one and then another event, and finally I was comfortable with it. I remain close to both of their families to this day and send remittances when I can to help with everyday needs, and for occasions such as Christmas, birthdays, and for school needs at the start of the academic year.

emblem. On the way to the main cemetery in the middle of the town (which they partially walk around) first one, then another woman begins to swoon and stumble about in an off balance manner as if possessed or in a trance. Everyone walks clockwise around the cemetery to the entrance. As we were walking, the local leader from the group with whom I had talked before several weeks prior, says that the mundele²¹⁵ had wanted to come and that they said no. He looks at me fiercely, and says, “We can’t reveal all of our secrets.” (He’s referring to the fact that Ne Nkamu had asked permission for a Swedish student missionary to come to the event, and that they refused). He then went on to say, “But you, you are our sister and so you can come.” Numerous instances such as this illuminate the ways in which my status as a person of African descent in an African country placed me in a position of being “neither native nor stranger,” revealing the importance of one’s identity in gaining access to different resources, events, and people while doing ethnographic research.²¹⁶

As we enter the cemetery, the same man tells Ne Nkamu to tell David that he doesn’t want us taping in the cemetery. Once in the cemetery, the leaders seem to be searching for a place to begin the ceremony. People are gesturing here, and there, and as I enter the cemetery I saw a man fall backwards into the brush. At first I think it was an accident, but when he gets up he seems dazed, and in a trance, and he moves slowly, gesturing to the ground next to him. As a result, all the others come over to that spot to conduct the ceremony there. Afterwards, Ne Nkamu tells me that spot was where the bodies of several BDK members lay who had been killed. Everyone groups around

²¹⁵ *Mundele* is the KiKongo word for white person.

²¹⁶ See chapter one for further discussion of African American positionality in the Congo.

several graves in a circle, and they open the ceremony with the bula makonko clapping gesture, and several men lead prayers in KiKongo. I follow suit, although I can't understand the vast majority of what is being said. I am wearing a nice skirt outfit in a wax print that I'd had tailored in Kinshasa, out of respect for their view that women shouldn't wear pants. I also had my hair covered with a matching piece of cloth. There is a goat that had been brought to the cemetery for the ceremony. It is innocently chewing on the plants near the graves, unaware of its impending fate. Someone digs a small pit in the ground. After the prayers, two of the men grab the goat and try to position it to be sacrificed but they are having trouble. The goat is bleating and bleating, which to me sounded like crying. A tall, thick man next to me sucks his teeth and goes over there to show them how to do it. He grabs the goat by its hind legs so that its head and throat were facing downwards. Another man holds the front feet. One of the leaders who had said the last prayer then takes out a long bladed knife. I feel shocked to be there, as I have never experienced animal sacrifice up close, but I am determined to see it through, all of it. After all, are these not the stereotypical experiences that anthropologists write about in ethnographies, as if they are rites of passage for all ethnographers? I watch as they cut the throat of the goat, and blood, like a mixture of red and pink, spills out into the waiting pit. The goat is struggling, but as the blood flowed, it eventually stopped moving after a while. I just watch, as if I am not even in my body.

After the sacrifice is done, the men pass the carcass to one of the women, who puts it in a big plastic bowl to be transported back to be cooked and eaten. One of the men begins another prayer, but suddenly, I don't know if it was the heat, or the fact that I was a bit hungry, or what, but suddenly I have a feeling of vertigo. My head was spinning

and I feel closed in, I can't breathe, and my throat is hurting. I look around wildly, to exit the circle, and have to almost push my way out of the circle. I stumble a few steps away from the group and bend down, hands on my knees, trying to breathe normally. What was happening? I have to admit, I thought to myself, "Am I being visited by a spirit?" I feel so light-headed, and I fight against the overwhelming urge to lie on the ground, amongst the graves. The feeling is really odd, and totally unexpected. David comes over to me, and asks me if I am okay, and I lean on him as we walk out of the cemetery. Pierre hops on someone's bike to go and get me a plastic chair, and in the meantime I sit on someone else's bike that David helps to hold up. After a while I feel better.²¹⁷

After the ceremony in the cemetery is finished, they dance in a big counterclockwise circle on the road next to the cemetery, with two guys playing the bibandi in the center. The group members sing revolutionary songs in KiKongo, about the restoring of the Kongo Kingdom, the feats of great Kongo prophets and leaders, and about changes to come in the future for the Kongo people. There also is someone (always a man) leading the singing in the center, while everyone else responds not only with song, but also with gestures. After all the dancing, which I participate while David tapes, I meet another leader of the group. We talk to him briefly about my research, and he then he talks to me about coming to the church on Sunday when I returned from Kinshasa, and he would do an interview with me about Bundu and even political animation. One of the group members with him has a photo of the leader of Bundu dia Kongo, Ne Muanda Nsemi. With a serious and reverent expression on his face, the group

²¹⁷ Although I found this episode of near fainting odd, no one attributed it to a spiritual attack. Some people just blamed it on standing in the intense sun and heat for too long.

member holds up the photo for me to see. I fight back a small smile, because my first impression was that Ne Muanda Nsemi sort of looked like an older, slightly darker-complexioned Marvin Gaye.²¹⁸ We return back to the house, and although I am excited about the overall experience that I had, I am also very apprehensive and wary about the group, not only because of the warnings that I'd received, but also because of the overall aggressive tone of the group, and the hostile response that they continued to receive from the local authorities. I didn't want to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Conflicted Feelings: The Decision to write about Bundu dia Kongo

Initially, I did not intend to write about Bundu dia Kongo. In fact, when I left my last BDK event in February of 2006, I stated emphatically to my friends, “Je suis fini avec BDK!” (I am finished with BDK). I was angry at all of the accusations that were continuously leveled at me of being a spy although I had done all that I could to alleviate their suspicions. I was upset at the almost schizophrenic behavior of being embraced as a sister of the Diaspora whose research in Kongo performance culture and history aligned with their goal of revitalizing Kongo culture, to then being ridiculed for not doing more to support the group and for attending other churches that were Christian, and even being denounced as a spy because I hadn't brought hard copies of pictures I'd taken although I'd given them CDs and VCDs with the photos and video footage. I was threatened that I

²¹⁸ This is just one of many instances when I saw faces and features in the Congo that reminded me of family, friends, and even celebrities of African descent. This constant recognition typified my everyday experience. I remember going with my husband and a friend to an outdoor recreation center in the commune of Masina, in Kinshasa. As I scanned the groups of people playing basketball, I gasped when I saw a person who I actually thought was my younger sister! For a second, I irrationally asked myself, what is she doing here? The girl had the same eyes, build, light brown complexion, and an extremely similar face. It was so incredulous that I continued to watch her for another several minutes, trying to make sense of what I was seeing.

would be spiritually attacked if my motives were impure, and I avoided their more overtly political activities not only because I didn't want to be explicitly associated with the group during a tension filled campaign season, but also because of the potential for violent conflicts with police. I argued with them over what I saw as historical facts that they'd creatively re-written and was told, "You got that from a white man's book. That is not the truth. Read the black man's book!" Coming from a family in which strong women reign and females dominate numerically, I bristled at their ideas of inherent male superiority and rolled my eyes in defiance as I was told what my "proper" role as a woman should be.²¹⁹ To be candid, their overall aggressive attitude and even militarism frightened me; although they often reminded me of Black Power groups in the United States like the Black Panthers, whom I respected. When the memory card in my camera failed at the February mass meeting, I came back just as the crowd dispersed. I then asked the permission of a leader to take photos of some the remaining banners, signs, and the general area, and he refused. "Why do you want photos with no people in them? This is not a museum!" Frustrated, I complied, and left the area, vowing to never deal with them again.

Due to my conflicting feelings about writing about the group, I only did a few interviews with local group leaders, only one of which was recorded due to their suspicion of recording equipment, while I took notes during the other interviews. Most of the data that this chapter is built upon is based on my experiences as an observing participant in several worship sessions, a mass meeting, and several other organized

²¹⁹ Most of my interactions with Bundu dia Kongo members were with the men. I did not interview any of the women.

events. Moreover, I incorporate the numerous published writings of Ne Muanda Nsemi, which guide the ideology and development of the group as a whole. In all, when I look back on my experiences, I realize that although I didn't always like it, the members of Bundu dia Kongo continuously challenged my motives and position as a Black American woman ethnographer who until then hadn't had much trouble gaining access and permissions for events in other settings.

Although I did not agree with some of the points of view and ideology of Bundu dia Kongo, and even their tactics and behavior at times, as a member of the African diaspora there were a number of principles that I was unequivocally in agreement with, or at least sympathized with. Their emphasis on a religion that is Kongo focused, their mission to rehabilitate the use of KiKongo, their need for a history written by and for Kongo people, their goal of self-government and the erasure of colonial borders, their belief in Pan-Africanism, their recognition of the ill treatment of people of African descent all over the world by Europeans and their descendants including slavery and colonialism—all of these principles struck a chord within me.

It is true that when writing this dissertation, I hadn't planned on including Bundu dia Kongo. There are several reasons that I have decided to include them in this work. First, there hasn't been much scholarly attention paid to the group, especially in English language publications, although the group has been in existence for several decades.²²⁰

²²⁰ Some of the few English publications that do exist include the following. John Thornton devotes a paragraph to the group in relation to discussions of the origins of the Kongo Kingdom in his article "Origin Traditions and History in Central Africa," *African Arts*, Spring 2004, 37, 1:36. There is a master's thesis that was written about the group by Wendy Lee Bernhard entitled, "Bundu dia Kongo: A New Non-Christian Religious Movement in Zaire (1997), Fuller Theological Seminary. However, as it focuses primarily on the writings of Ne Muanda Nsemi and was written from the point of view of a Christian

For this reason I have dedicated a large portion of the chapter to explaining who Bundu dia Kongo is as a movement. Second and most importantly, as I reflected on their influence in politics, the revitalization of Kongo culture and language, and finally, the redefinition of Kongo cultural performances, I realized that I could not write about the relationship between performance and authority in modern Kongo society without talking about Bundu dia Kongo.

Focus of the Chapter

The intent of this chapter is to explore ever evolving relationships between political authority and performance for Kongo people in the context of a post-colonial and post-Mobutu nation. This chapter will examine the use of embodied cultural performances in Bundu dia Kongo, a Kongo politico-religious-nationalist group that is fully engaged in a struggle for political representation and governance of Kongo people, with the ultimate goal of establishing a separate Kongo nation-state. Their activism has led to the election of their spiritual leader as a national congressman, and their political engagement and overall challenge to the status quo has sparked numerous confrontations (often fatal) with state and government law enforcement, capturing recent national headlines. However, embodied gestures have come to play a huge role in the marshalling of popular sentiment and spiritual power toward the social and political goal of creating a sovereign Kongo nation. Changes in the ways the members use their bodies in their

missionary seeking to combat BDK's attacks on Christianity, its partial nature necessitates an extremely careful reading. Ernest Wamba dia Wamba's chapter on BDK in *East African Expressions of Christianity* (1999) provides a very useful introductory overview to the group and their ideology, from the point of view of a MuKongo scholar able to decipher the nuances of the KiKongo terms and phrases found throughout BDK literature.

interactions with each other, other Kongo people, and the spiritual realm, and the meanings associated with these embodied cultural performances, call our attention to the importance of the body in advancing ideologies and political goals and establishing other forms of authority that subvert the prevailing status quo.

Encounters and Embodied Revolutions

Saturday, February 18, 2006. On the way to an interview, I see a large group of people coming down the main road in Luozi. Carrying a five or six foot tall painting of their leader, Ne Muanda Nsemi, they are members of Bundu dia Kongo, singing, waving small branches with green leaves, and walking in time to the percussive sound of three bass drums and an ngongi²²¹ being played by several men in the back of the group. Some of the women are wearing highly recognizable yellow BDK head coverings. Many members of the crowd have backpacks or sacks over their shoulders, on backs, or on heads, with food, blankets, and other items needed for an overnight stay for the two day meeting. One of the local leaders of the group had told me that there would be a general assembly from Friday to Sunday that I could attend, and so I run to get my video camera. As I dash back, out of breath and panting, I open the camera to begin to film, assuming that the people are members of the Luozi based BDK group. Almost immediately, people in the crowd begin to protest and wave their arms erratically. I stop the camera, and several people approach me and began to fiercely throw questions my way.

“You have to ask for permission!” A tall man in a red shirt states emphatically.

²²¹ The *ngongi* is a metal double bell that in the past was associated with the aristocracy and the royal court in the Kongo Kingdom.

“Ok. Ok. I’m sorry. Who do I ask?” I respond quickly, closing the camera and putting it back in my purse.

Another person chimes in, “Who are you and what are you doing filming?”

I anxiously reply, “I am a student working on my dissertation at the University of Michigan. I am a black-American from the United States. I am doing my research on Kongo culture and dance, from the Kongo Kingdom to the present day. I was given permission by the members of Bundu dia Kongo here in Luozi.”

It turns out that this group was actually from Kinshasa, and was not the group from Luozi. So, they didn’t know me, and thus I was suspect. I explain my research and intentions several times to several different people. I reassure them that I am not a government or foreign spy. When the leader of this group from Kinshasa arrives, I explain everything to him, and he gives me and several others who were helping me permission to film that group, and tells us to come to the meeting area in the evening at 7:00 pm. My friend and assistant David runs ahead and films the group some more. Then, as I was waiting for him to come back, another group appears but there is something going on. There is a tall, non-member of the group in the middle, in dark tan khakis. As people argue and fuss around him, Mama Jacqueline and others who are near me watching begin to piece things together. It turns out that he was on a motorcycle and hit one of the people marching, when he came through the crowd without beeping or giving advance notice. This person was hurt, and the other members of the group “arrested” him. It does not help that he isn’t MuKongo, but rather a Swahili speaker. They take his motorcycle and hold him “hostage” in the center of the group. I don’t know

what they did with him. Mama Jacqueline said that they said they were going to take him to the authorities.

Later that evening, I arrive with two friends at the meeting site to observe the proceedings. A clearing about the size of a soccer field is filled with men, women, and children, all facing a small area of ground acting as the stage, located just in front of a thatch covered structure under which group leaders and honored guests are seated in chairs. There is a musical group to the left of the stage, and the music is infectious, and sounds like popular soukouss dance music with lyrics espousing BDK's ideas and politics. If I close my eyes, I could swear that I am listening to Werreson!²²² I note that curious non-members of BDK, attracted by the singing and thronging crowd, walk by leisurely or stand at the fringes of the clearing, observing the goings on. Many BDK security people, in blue uniforms with red berets and armbands, surround the open space in the middle. I approach a "welcome" desk where dues were being collected, and ask for the local leaders that I am acquainted with, explaining to the security people that we had been given permission. They said wait, you have to see the chief. Then, a serious escort leads us to a small house, where there are several men in sunglasses, tight pants, and serious faces guarding the door, with arms crossed. They again tell me to wait, and finally, who emerges? Ne Mosi, whom I'd interviewed several months before. We exchange pleasantries, and I explain that I am asking for permission to film.

"How can I give you permission to film, and you still haven't given me the film and pictures you took last time?"

²²² Werreson (also known as "Le Roi de la forêt, the king of the forest) is a popular musician of Congolese soukouss dance music. At the time that I was conducting my research, his song "Alerte General" was one of the most popular songs that year.

The skeptical look that he gives me is not helping matters. I am frustrated and a bit annoyed. By that point, it seemed as though everyone at every event I attended expected that I would print every last one of the pictures that I took and give it to them. Since I was using a digital camera in an area where facilities for printing such photos were hard to come by, it was hard to fulfill such requests immediately, although I gave VCDs and CDs of events and photos to people, and actual photos when I had the chance to print them out.

“It depends on you,” I respond.

“I will give permission, but on the condition that you give us a copy of the pictures and photos that you take, and the others ones you took already.”

I said, “If you give me a blank CD, I can do the copy of the photos and other film right now!”

After he responds that he did not have a CD, I explain that I can do this in Kinshasa, as I didn't have any more CDs with me in Luozi. We agree that I will give the copies to his wife. After finally getting his permission to film, my two friends and I walk back to the open area. However, when I open my video camera, yet another leader stops me and tells me that I need his permission to film. This happens several times over and over again and finally, after at least an hour and a half, I am finally allowed to film. Seated amongst the honored guests with two friends who accompanied me, I face the crowd, seeing that men and women dressed in security uniforms are placed at intermittent points not only to maintain order, but also as I have realized from visits to their church, to ward off possible attacks by government and police forces. The crowd continues to grow, spilling over past the clearing, as members have come from Boma, Matadi, Mbanza-Ngungu,

*Kinshasa, and other places in the Lower Congo especially.²²³ As the meeting gets underway, I stand when everyone else stands, kneel when everyone kneels, and generally act as a silent participant-observer of the events. When I feel more comfortable, I leave the space of the honored guests and begin to record the meeting and take photos. There are several iconic images that are strategically placed around the stage area. One is a painting of “Mama Vita Kimpa,”²²⁴ majestically posed in front of roaring flames that took her life on July 2, 1706, anachronistically depicted wearing one of the female BDK yellow head coverings discussed earlier. Another image is that of Ne Muanda Nsemi, three paintings of which animate the stage, as he was unable to attend the meeting. During a lull in the program, I approach the most elaborate of these paintings for a close up. At the top are the words “Ne Muanda Nsemi, The Vehicle of Kongo Wisdom, The Kongo Nationalist Movement,” and at the bottom is the sketch of a map showing a restored Kongo Kingdom. However, what is even more interesting to me is the image of Ne Muanda Nsemi himself. In the painting, he is depicted in a black suit with a red scarf tied around his forehead, with his right hand slightly cupped and raised over his left hand, which has two scarves (yellow and blue) draped over it. In this and the other three paintings, he is thus shown enacting the *bula makonko* gesture (see figure 9).*

²²³ See chapter one for a map of the Lower Congo to get a sense of the locations of these cities.

²²⁴ Mama Vita Kimpa, also known as Doña Beatrice Kimpa Vita, was a powerful prophet who holds a treasured place in the history and collective imagination of the Kongo people. Possessed by the spirit of Saint Anthony, she tried to restore a crumbling Kongo Kingdom, and was burned alive at the stake for the threat that she posed to not only certain elite rulers, but also to European Catholic missionaries stationed there at the time. See chapter two for further detail, and also John Thornton, *The Kongoese Saint Anthony: Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian Movement, 1684-1706*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998; Rudy Mbemba, *Le procès de Kimpa Vita: la Jeanne d’Arc congolaise*, Paris: Harmattan, 2002.

What significance and use could this gesture have in Bundu dia Kongo? This particular example brings our attention to the ways in which bula makonko, other bimpampa, and makinu take on multiple meanings and uses as they enable the very embodiment of the overall cultural and political mission of Bundu dia Kongo.



Figure 9: Still Video Image of one of the paintings of Ne Muanda Nsemi (without the accompanying inscription) (Luozi, February 19, 2006, image taken by author)²²⁵

Overview

After the overthrow of Mobutu by Laurent Kabila in 1997 and Kabila's subsequent assassination in 2001, a transitional government was formed, headed by his son, Joseph Kabila. The Democratic Republic of Congo stood poised at the precipice of

²²⁵ Due to the delicate political situation in the Congo in regards to Bundu dia Kongo, I have tried to be extremely careful to protect the identities of those members that I came into contact with. Besides using pseudonyms, I have chosen to minimize the number of images that I use in this chapter, and in those that I do include, to make sure that any markers of identity (such as faces) are not visible.

an uncertain future. For the first time since June 30, 1960, free democratic elections were finally going to be held in 2006.²²⁶ This new environment engendered not only fear and wariness about the future, but also hope and numerous opportunities for challenging existing political authority structures. This was directly reflected in the large number of registered political parties (267) several months before the presidential elections;²²⁷ parties with numerous agendas and visions for the future, intent on transforming the nation that had become a decrepit shadow of its former self, economically, structurally, politically, and culturally. However, this urge to transform was by no means limited to political parties or the political arena, but also existed in other aspects of Congolese society and manifested itself in myriad ways.

The Bundu dia Kongo movement has appeared in a number of headlines in recent months in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Some examples include “Ne Muanda Nsemi, Elected Member of the National Assembly from Luozi, called to reaffirm peace in Bas-Congo;” (February 19, 2008), “Terror at Luozi and Seke-Banza: Bundu dia Kongo Challenges the Authority of the State!” (February 28, 2008), “MONUC Promises to Initiate an Investigation into the Violation of Human Rights in Bas-Congo.” (March 13, 2008)²²⁸ Notwithstanding the fact that many of the newspapers do not agree with the group’s politics and ideology, and often sensationalize the news that they report, over the

²²⁶ The presidential elections were held on August 30, 2006.

²²⁷ Website of the Independent Electoral Commission of the Democratic Republic of Congo < http://www.cei-rdc.cd/parti_politique.php3?page=0 > [Accessed December 14, 2007]

²²⁸ *Agence Congolaise de Presse*. 19 February 2008. “Le député national élu de Luozi Ne Muanda Nsemi appelé à raffermir la paix au Bas-Congo” < <http://www.digitalcongo.net/article/49911#> > [Accessed February 29, 2008]; *Uhuru*. 28 February 2008. “Terreur à Luozi et à Seke-Banza : Bundu dia Kongo défie l’autorité de l’Etat !” < <http://www.digitalcongo.net/article/50102> > [Accessed February 29, 2008]; Célestin Lutete. MMC. 13 March 2008. “Affaire BDK: la MONUC promet de diligenter une enquête sur les violations des droits de l’homme au Bas-Congo.” < <http://www.digitalcongo.net/article/50367> > [Accessed March 13, 2008]

last several decades, Bundu dia Kongo has reappeared over and over again in and around political issues in the Lower Congo, with conflicts with authorities most recently leading to an expansion of the United Nations military presence in Bas-Congo.²²⁹ What is Bundu dia Kongo? What are their politics and ideology, and how are they related to embodied cultural performance? The first section of this chapter will examine the goals and ideology of this group. The second section seeks to provide a historical and diasporic context for Bundu dia Kongo by exploring the antecedents of the group's political and socio-cultural activism, (in particular, the importance of ABAKO), the role of Pan-Africanism in the movement, and some similarities that Bundu dia Kongo may share with certain African-Diasporic religious movements. Finally, the third section of the chapter will discuss the ways in which bodies are used to physically enact Bundu dia Kongo's goals through embodied cultural performances, particularly in gestures associated with both everyday interactions and spiritual collective worship.

What is Bundu dia Kongo?

Bundu dia Kongo is a group and movement that combines religion, politics, and cultural revitalization in furthering the overall goal of restoring the former Kongo Kingdom. Composed of BisiKongo people (which members of BDK refer to as Bena Kongo), it was founded in 1986 in the Democratic Republic of Congo by Ne Muanda Nsemi, who remains the spiritual leader of the group. Born Badiégisa Zakalia in Mongo-

²²⁹ Le Potential. 4 March 2008. "Calme précaire à Luozi: la MONUC renforce son dispositif militaire au Bas-Congo." <<http://digitalcongo.net/article/50199>> [Accessed March 4, 2008]

Luala,²³⁰ a northern sector in the territory of Luozi, he received a spiritual calling to continue the work of Simon Kimbangu, the famous Kongo prophet who catalyzed a religious movement during the colonial period that threatened the authority of the Belgian colonizers. In a newspaper interview, Ne Muanda Nsemi explained that he was called to take on a mission in 1969 while in his third year at Lovanium University studying math, physics and chemistry:

I began to have visions. For someone who, in his youth, only saw math, physics, and chemistry, and who had never prayed, it was a whole other world. I began to see a giant being who measured more or less four meters. And this being came...to tell me: “Vakatukidi nganga, nganga uvingananga vana (this means: here where a chief/priest retired, another chief/priest must take the place.) And he goes on to add: “Here is the mission that you are going to take on. It is going to now be your turn. But you, you will be at the same time a mixture of Kimbangu and Kasa-Vubu” (Ne Muanda Nsemi, Interview with Freddy Mulumba Kabuayi, *Le Potential*. 15 May 2006).²³¹

Ne Muanda Nsemi describes denying this call for seventeen years before accepting his mission and founding Bundu dia Kongo in 1986. The visions that Ne Muanda Nsemi reports having continue a long tradition of continuous revelation that permeates Kongo culture and history, in both traditional religious beliefs and Christian practices, from the possession of Dona Beatrice Kimpa Vita by Saint Anthony, to Simon Kimbangu’s own

²³⁰ Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba, 1999, “Bundu dia Kongo: A Kongolese Fundamentalist Religious Movement,” in *East African Expressions of Christianity*, Thomas Spear and Isaria Kimambo, eds., Athens: Ohio University Press, 216.

²³¹ Freddy Mulumba Kabuayi, *Le Potential*. 15 May 2006. “Ne Muanda Nsemi, chef spirituel de Bundu dia Kongo: “Il faut absolument un mini-dialogue avant le 30 juin 2006...” < http://www.lepotentiel.com/afficher_article.php?id_edition=&id_article=27678?> [Accessed February 29, 2008]. Information about Ne Muanda Nsemi’s visions is also provided on the new website of BDK, under the subsection “L’appel” < <http://bundudiakongo.org/Francais.htm>> [Accessed June 25, 2008], and also in Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba, 1999, “Bundu dia Kongo: A Kongolese Fundamentalist Religious Movement,” in *East African Expressions of Christianity*, Thomas Spear and Isaria Kimambo, eds., Athens: Ohio University Press, 216. For further in depth discussion of Simon Kimbangu and his religious movement, see chapter three.

visions, to the visions of other Kongo prophets such as Masamba Esaie as discussed in chapter four. Inspired by the visions that he had, what objectives does Ne Muanda Nsemi and Bundu dia Kongo as a group and movement seek to fulfill?



**Figure 10: Ne Muanda Nsemi, Picture Taken from website, <
<http://www.bundudiakongo.org/Ne%20Muanda%20Nsemi.htm>> [Accessed July 16, 2008]**

Mission and Ideology

The overall mission of Bundu dia Kongo was described in one of the many pamphlets written by Ne Muanda Nsemi as the following: “the diffusion of the Kongo religion, the promotion of scientific research, and the moral and spiritual education of political leaders of the country practicing the Kongo Religion.” (1994b) The overall ideology of Bundu dia Kongo can best be encapsulated through a discussion of

trinities,²³² so that when I asked about the teachings of Bundu dia Kongo, one interviewee explained that the essential teachings of BDK were threefold: spiritual, scientific, and political. Each aspect of the group's ideology is associated with particular colors, ancestors, and characteristics. A similar type of trinity is reflected in the concept of God in BDK.²³³ God (in KiKongo called Nzambi Mpungu) is one, but has three principle attributes: power (Nzambi 'a Mpungu); love (Nzambi 'a Kongo); and intelligence (Nzambi 'a Mbumba).²³⁴ According to the teachings of BDK as espoused in their pamphlets,²³⁵ small books, newspaper interviews, and interviews that I myself conducted, these three attributes correspond to the three children of the primordial ancestors who became the Bena Kongo, or Kongo people:

1) The ancestor Nsaku was a prophet, great priest, religion, spirituality, the color blue, divine love, the spiritual church, Kinlongo kia Kongo, Mfumu'a Nlongo. 2) The ancestor Mpanzu was a blacksmith, artisan, sciences and technology, the color yellow, divine intelligence, the academy of sciences, Kinkimba kia Mazayu, Mfumu'a Lusanga. 3) The Ancestor Nzinga was a king, the government, the color red, divine power, the political party, Kabu dia Mayala, Mfumu'a Mayala. The names of these three children became the names of the three clans at the base of the Kongo Nation: the clan Nsaku, the clan Mpanzu, and the clan Nzinga... The ancestor Nsaku is the incarnation of the love and the wisdom of God. The ancestor Mpanzu is the incarnation of the creative intelligence of God. The ancestor Nzinga is the incarnation of the power of God that governs the universe. The Kongo trinity is thus the

²³² Many different sorts of trinities abound in the teachings and philosophy of Bundu dia Kongo.

²³³ Ne Mosi, Interview, October 10, 2005, Luozi, DRC.

²³⁴ Ne Muanda Nsemi, *L'espace Culturel Kongo*, 2-3; Ne Muanda Nsemi, *L'union Federale du Kongo*, 6.

²³⁵ There are numerous pamphlets published by Bundu dia Kongo that are printed in KiKongo, Lingala, French, and even English. Some of these documents, authored by Ne Muanda Nsemi, are available at select libraries in the United States, such as at Northwestern University, for example. They are published on a number of topics, from historical pamphlets about the Kongo Kingdom, to a discussion of the need to dissolve colonial frontiers, to information about the return of African-AmDavidans and others of the "Kongo Diaspora" to the Congo. A listing of the pamphlets and longer documents can be found on their website at www.bundudiakongo.org. The smaller pamphlets, which can be handed out on streets to passerby, are very important tools of transmitting BDK's message to the larger community.

representative, on the earth, of the trinity of the skies. It is the chosen people made in the image of God. (Ne Muanda Nsemi 1995: 11-13)²³⁶

According to Ne Muanda Nsemi, the name of the *kanda*, or clan, of each person can be traced back to one of these three founding ancestors²³⁷ and your own individual attributes will reflect that association (e.g. if you have a propensity for music, this can be traced to your belonging to one of the clans of Mpanzu). All of these ideas and associations have been captured in the following phrase in KiKongo: Makuku Matatu Malamba Kongo; The three hearthstones upon which the Kongo was prepared/cooked.²³⁸ Moreover, two of these trinities (Nzambi ‘a Mpungu, Nzambi ‘a Kongo, Nzambi ‘a Mbumba) and (Nsaku, Mpanzu, Nzinga) are arranged on top of one another to form a six pointed star that is the emblem of Bundu dia Kongo as a movement.²³⁹

²³⁶ Ne Muanda Nsemi, *L'Union Federale du Kongo*, 11. Two of these trinities (Nzambi ‘a Mpungu, Nzambi ‘a Kongo, Nzambi ‘a Mbumba) and (Nsaku, Mpanzu, Nzinga) are arranged on top of one another to form a six pointed star that is the emblem of Bundu dia Kongo as a movement. *L'Union Federale du Kongo*, 6.

²³⁷ Ne Muanda Nsemi, *Les Enfants de Ne Kongo*, 3-5.

²³⁸ Ne Mosi, Interview, October 10, 2005, Luozi, DRC; Ne Zole, Interview, September 19, 2005, Luozi, DRC; Freddy Mulumba Kabuayi, *Le Potential*. 15 May 2006. “Ne Muanda Nsemi, chef spirituel de Bundu dia Kongo: “Il faut absolument un mini-dialogue avant le 30 juin 2006...” <http://www.lepotentiel.com/afficher_article.php?id_edition=&id_article=27678?> [Accessed February 29, 2008]

²³⁹ The emblem of Bundu dia Kongo is a six pointed star that I, like many others, first think of as the Star of David and associate it with Jews. In the writings of Ne Muanda Nsemi, the six pointed star is said to symbolize “the alliance between the trinitary God of the sky and his chosen people, the Kongo people, who are also a trinitary people: Nsaku, Mpanzu, Nzinga” (1995: 13). However, the star is also explained as coming from the long history of the Kongo people in the world. “As a result of the marriage of King Solomon of Jerusalem with queen Mankenda Saba, of the clan Bena Kongo, King Solomon married the six pointed star with the Menorah.” Ne Muanda Nsemi, *L'Union Federale du Kongo*, 1995: 15.



Figure 11: Video Image of Bundu dia Kongo flag with Emblem, (Luozi, February 19, 2006, image taken by author) and image of BDK emblem taken from the website www.bundudiakongo.org [Accessed June 15, 2008]

The influence of the trinities of God and the characteristics of the three major ancestors are thus reflected in defining what Bundu dia Kongo is, as shown in the response given by Ne Muanda Nsemi to a question about the nature of Bundu dia Kongo in a newspaper interview:

Bundu dia Kongo is in effect a crystal with three faces: when you look at Bundu dia Kongo on the face of the ancestor Nsaku, you say that Bundu dia Kongo is a church. But when you look at the face of the ancestor Mpanzu, you find that it is technology, applied science. Bundu dia Kongo is thus an institute of scientific research. And when you go to look at Bundu dia Kongo on the face of the ancestor Nzinga, it becomes politics because the king is political. (Ne Muanda Nsemi, Interview by Freddy Mulumba Kabuayi, *Le Potential*. 15 May 2006)

With this knowledge, the painting of Ne Muanda Nsemi discussed at the beginning of the chapter makes even more sense; he wears the color red on his forehead because he belongs to the Nzinga clan and thus is a leader and engaged in politics. Yet the fact that he holds the blue and yellow scarves indicates that he is also powerful spiritually as the leader of the movement, and is well-regarded intellectually as well, as the author of

numerous pamphlets and small books on Kongo culture, history, and the mission and ideology of Bundu dia Kongo. The next section of this chapter shall briefly examine the three major “faces” of Bundu dia Kongo.

Spiritual Teachings

In the spiritual teachings of BDK, an ancestral Kongo religion called BuKongo is privileged. In this religion, there exists a spiritual hierarchy in which a supreme being rests at the top, who is the same for all races and people, who is called by BDK members Nzambi or Ne Kongo Kalunga (Ne Muanda Nsemi 1994b:3). Beneath the supreme being is a grouping of beings in a celestial hierarchy who again are at the service of all humanity. Beneath them is the “supervisory genie” of the Kongo people, as each nation or grouping of people has their own. Then, lowest in the spiritual hierarchy are divinized ancestors of the Kongo people (*mvidi bakulu*) (Ne Muanda Nsemi 1994b:2). Thus, the prayers of the Kongo people are believed to go up through each level of the spiritual hierarchy before reaching Nzambi.

En route to God, man passes obligatorily through the first bridge that is made up of his divinized ancestors. The second bridge through which he passes is constituted by the supervisory genie of his nationality, and at last through all the great celestial hierarchies devoted to the service of God. (Ne Muanda Nsemi 1994b:2)

In the religion of BuKongo, Christianity is scorned. This is significant because the vast majority of people in DRC are Christian, and mostly Catholic. The members of Bundu dia Kongo see Christianity as a religion created by and for *mundele*, or white people. According to another interviewee, when a Kongo person prays, the prayers go first to divinized ancestors, such as Simon Kimbangu or Dona Kimpa Vita, a powerful

prophet who tried to reunify the Kongo Kingdom during the early 18th century and was burned alive. Then, these divinized ancestors carry the message on to Ne Muanda Kongo, the archangel and supervisor of the Kongo people, who then carries it to Tata Nzambi Mpungu, who is the highest God.²⁴⁰ The important role that both Simon Kimbangu and Kimpa Vita play as divinized ancestors can also be seen in the lyrics of many of the songs sung by group members in worship, of which the following is but one such example:

Song in KiKongo

Oh, Mfumu Kimbangu wiza

Oh, Ya Kimpa Vita wiza

Wiza kunguna

Masangaza mu meso meto

Oh, lu babosono

Mansanga lwiza kumuna

Mu meso meto

Song in English

Oh, Mfumu Kimbangu come

Oh, Ya Kimpa Vita come

Come wipe

The tears from our eyes

Oh, everyone

You all come wipe the tears

From our eyes

²⁴⁰ Ne Zole, Interview, February 7, 2006, Luozi, DRC; Ne Muanda Nsemi, *Connaitre le Kongo*, (pamphlet), 19.

In all, BDK advocates a return to a traditional Kongo religion that is based on the Kongo people and their experience, and eschews Christianity. One such example of this is the sacred book of BDK. It is called *MaKongo* or *Makaba*, and was written by Ne Muanda Nsemi, who was inspired by visions, communications, and revelations from the ancestors.

*Scientific Mission*²⁴¹

The scientific (or cultural) teachings of BDK revolve around a revitalization of Kongo culture and history. The centerpiece of activities in this vain is the privileging of the use of the KiKongo language. KiKongo is the preferred language for everyday conversation, speeches, and community worship. Members drop any European names that they may have had and privilege their KiKongo names. Men also place the word “Ne” in front of their names as a male honorific term, like the use of “Mr” or “Sir” in English, and women are referred to a “Ma,” which is a term already in common use (I was referred to a Ma Mayazola or Mama Mayazola by most of the people I came in contact with in Luozi, whether members of BDK or not). The speaking of French or other languages of the Congo, such as Lingala—the dominant language in Kinshasa and in the popular music scene—is discouraged. The women in BDK don’t wear pants, make-up, or hair extensions or wigs. Polygamy is authorized as one of many ways to return to traditional, pre-colonial practices. This stands out because polygyny is rare in

²⁴¹ As “science” was one of the elements of the trinity as explained to me in interviews, I have chosen to use this term for my section subheading. However cultural is probably the term that is more fitting to describe this particular aspect of their ideology and mission.

the DRC, perhaps because it was extremely discouraged and actively combated by missionaries during the colonial period, and was taxed and then restricted by the Belgian government. The use of drugs is also not condoned, and periods of sexual abstinence are required for those people who are very spiritually advanced in the group²⁴² (Ne Mosi, Interview, October 10, 2005, Luozi, DRC).

Political Strivings

Bundu dia Kongo is most well known for their political activities. The political teachings of BDK are based on one central objective: the reunification and rebuilding of the Kongo Kingdom as a separate nation-state. The major goal of BDK is to have sovereignty over the area that during the pre-colonial period made up the Kongo Kingdom and its surrounding areas, which includes parts of Republic of Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, (and even Gabon in some BDK writings). BDK members call this area Kongo dia Ntotela. The Kongo people were split into these different political entities during the colonial period, and BDK advocates their reunification based not only on righting past colonial wrongs, but also on satisfying the will of God.

The politics of Bundu dia Kongo...must first be a politics that must be in accordance with the law of nature, the law of God. That is to say, first to do all to accomplish the will of God, this politics must be in accordance with divine law. Thus, we for example, the Kongo people, it is God that created us, so that we are BaKongo. And the colonialists came and divided us. The BaKongo were divided in three countries, Angola, Belgian Congo, French Congo. Whereas...God in his will had created one

²⁴² This requirement of sexual abstinence for the spiritually advanced is very interesting, as similar restrictions were laid out for *bangunza* prophets and healers to enable them to amass spiritual power for healing. This was also discussed briefly for *bangunza* in chapter four.

people. Then, it was the colonial politics that go against divine will. And, it is for that reason that Bundu dia Kongo, to rehabilitate, to conform to the will of God, searches to reunify that which God had created united, that is to say, the reunification of the Kongo people. (Ne Mosi, Interview, 10/10/2005, Luozi, DRC)

Thus, Bundu dia Kongo's goal of the reunification of the Kongo people is based not only on erasing arbitrary colonial divisions, but also finds authority in the spiritual will of God, who is said to have originally created a unitary Kongo people. In this way, Bundu dia Kongo is able to put forth spiritual backing for their political mission.

Sovereignty is a huge issue for BDK members, who insist that Kongo people rule over their own land. Currently, as Bas-Congo is still a part of the D.R. Congo, BDK members protest the fact that people from other provinces who are not Bena Kongo have been placed into positions of power in Bas-Congo. These cultural foreigners usually don't speak KiKongo and members of BDK see them as ineffective leaders who can't understand how to govern in Bas-Congo, and whose political authority shouldn't be respected or acknowledged because they are not Kongo people. A recent example of this were BDK challenges to the gubernatorial elections in Bas-Congo, in which Simon Mbtashi Mbatshia (a candidate that some Kongo people see as loyal to non-Kongo interests) and Déo Nkusu, his running mate for vice/deputy governor, were declared the winners in an extremely close race with Léonard Fuka Unzola and Ne Muanda Nsemi, who of course had the support of BDK.²⁴³ Clashes with police forces during BDK protests and marches throughout the Lower Congo led to more than 100 deaths in late

²⁴³ *Le Potential*. 1 February 2007. "La Cei coupe court a la contestation par l'UN de l'élection du gouverneur et vice-gouverneur du Bas-Congo." < <http://www.digitalcongo.net/article/40745> > [Accessed March 5, 2008]

January and early February of 2007, followed by other confrontations, and then twenty-two further fatalities in late February of 2008 in the county seat of Luozi.²⁴⁴ Before this, there have been numerous incidents of violence in which people have been killed on both sides in confrontations between BDK and police or military forces sent to quell protests and restore order (although the vast majority of the fatalities have been of BDK members).

The first major victory for Bundu dia Kongo in the political arena was in a competitive election in 2006 in which Ne Muanda Nsemi won the sole seat in the National Assembly to represent the territory of Luozi. This became a spring board for his subsequent bid for vice-governor in 2007, demonstrating the growing political power of Bundu dia Kongo as a movement, a point that we will return to later in this chapter.

Bundu dia Kongo Organization, Membership, and Reception

In his description of an organizational structure that can be used to develop reformulated Pan African religions across the world, Ne Muanda Nsemi discusses members of religions being organized into “prayer and research groups” rather than churches: “These groups are not churches, they are centers of research charged with gathering, in each nationality (in each tribe), the materials that constitute the doctrine of the Negro African Church, of which the Kongo religion is the principal axis” (Ne Muanda Nsemi 1994b:11). More specifically, Bundu dia Kongo members are organized into groups called *zikua* (*mazikua* in plural) (Wamba-dia-Wamba 1999:217; Ne Muanda

²⁴⁴ *Forum des As*. 5 March 2008. “Révolte de Bundu dia Kongo: La sang continue à couler a Bas-Congo.” < <http://www.digitalcongo.net/article/50216> > [Accessed March 5, 2008]

Nsemi 1994b: unnumbered page). However, whether because of the types of questions that I asked or in order to translate their message to a foreigner, this term was not used in the interviews that I conducted with BDK members. Thus, during my research I was unaware that *mazikua* was the correct terminology to use, and so in my recollections from my field notes the word church is still present.

In regards to the membership of the BDK movement, according to Wamba-dia-Wamba, in 1994, there were close to 50,000 members in around 500 *mazikua* (1999:217). More than a decade later, although I did not get any estimate of the current membership, the numbers are likely growing as the movement gains popularity.

So far, this chapter has discussed the reception (or lack thereof) of the Bundu dia Kongo movement by the government, police, and military forces as evidenced by the numerous conflicts and fatalities. Evidently, many groups and institutions are threatened by BDK's growing calls for sovereignty and political power. Yet, what do other Kongo people who are not members of Bundu dia Kongo think of the group and movement?

In my conversations with Kongo people both in Kinshasa and Luozi, the overwhelming sense that I got was that many Kongo people applauded the call for political power, the revitalization of Kongo culture, and the recognition of important Kongo cultural heroes. The goal of reforming the Kongo Kingdom also was seen as a positive, for the most part. People often said that Bundu dia Kongo was saying publicly the things that many Kongo people thought themselves. However, the point at which many Kongo people tended to diverge from the group was that of religion. Many Kongo people who were not members of Bundu dia Kongo berated the group for its derision of Jesus Christ and Christianity. In fact, there have been several instances of physical

confrontations between Bundu dia Kongo members and members of Christian churches.²⁴⁵ However, the possibility of larger political and ethno-national goals to override religious loyalties can be seen in the results of the election that led to Ne Muanda Nsemi winning the seat as a national congressman representing Luozi Territory.

Before Slavery, Christianity, and Colonialism: Longing for a Lost Past

October 9, 2005. Today I went to the Bundu dia Kongo church. Ne Zole comes to get me about 15 minutes after 9:00 am, and David goes with me. We walk to the church, which is a brown thatch and stick structure, with a thatch roof as well. People have their shoes off, and when I finally sit down and remove my shoes, two guys come around to collect everyone's shoes and put them outside. The seats are elevated wooden slats that form benches, and I notice immediately that the men were on one side and the women were on the other side, like in the DMNA church. I count those in attendance several times throughout the service, and the numbers are something like this: 24 adult men, 11 adult women, and 15 children and teenagers, including 6 boys, and 9 girls. Men are definitely in the majority, which contrasts vividly with the congregations that I have observed in the DMNA, CEC, and even Kimbanguist churches in Luozi. There is a desk in the front center of the space, with three cups on it, red, blue, and yellow, to represent Nsaku, Mpanzu, Nzinga (religion, science, and politics). Underneath the desk are three baskets, red, green (supposed to be blue), and yellow, and when the offering takes place, people

²⁴⁵ For examples of some of these conflicts, see newspaper article citations.

place their money or gift in the basket that corresponds to their ancestral clan.²⁴⁶ The man leading the session is seated behind the desk, and there is a chair on either side of him, and Ne Zole sat in one of the chairs. I am seated on the side in a more gender neutral space. As an invited guest, I am asked to stand and am introduced to the congregation. A small group of people come to the front of the church, and as I continue to stand, they sing a song that was composed in my honor, the text of which I include below, first in French then in English:

Song In French

I.
 En Egypt, ils étaient nos esclaves
 Ces Européens qui envient toujours nos richesses
 Au point de se réunir et se partagent
 l'Afrique
 Voilà la source de notre malheur !

(Ref)
 Du partage de l'Afrique commençaient nos souffrances
 Notre ancêtre Nzinga fût enterrée vivante,
 Yaya Vita-Kimpa notre sœur jetée vivante
 au feu !
 Tandis qu'ils ont condamné à mort notre grand prophète Kimbangu.
 Oh ! Quel enfer pour toi noir qui se dit
 (éparse?) de Jésus ?

Qu'as-tu fait du mal pour mériter ce sort ?
 Uniquement parce que Dieu te donne un pays riche!
 Et toi albinos qui t'a donné l'Europe ?
 Rentre chez-toi, je t'en prie
 Ramène avec toi les armes et ta bible.

Song in English

I.
 In Egypt, they were our slaves
 These Europeans who envied all of our riches
 To the point of meeting and dividing up
 Africa
 There is the source of our misfortune !

(ref)
 With the dividing up of Africa our suffering began
 Our ancestor Nzinga was buried alive
 Yaya Vita-Kimpa our sister thrown live
 into the fire !
 While they condemned to death our great prophet Kimbangu
 Oh ! What hell for you black person who
 tells himself to hope in Jesus ?

What wrong did you do to deserve this fate?
 Only because God gives you a rich country !
 And you albinos what has Europe given you?

²⁴⁶ As an intellectual, I was told to give to the Mpanzu basket, and at the end the tallies from each basket were announced to the group members.

II.
Ils ont amené des fusils pour tuer les noirs
La bible et leur religion nous a été imposée
par la force,
A grand prix ils ont vendu les noirs
Nos objets d'art et autres biens prétendus
(impie, impie) !

III.
Dans leurs belles maisons, une fortune sale
Fruits de leurs vols et de l'exploitation des
noirs
Du fond en comble, ils pillé notre pays,
N'est-ce pas qu'ils disent que voler c'est un
péché !

Go back home, would you please
Take back with you the weapons and your
Bible

II.
They brought guns in order to kill Black
people
The Bible and their religion were imposed
upon us by force
At a high price they sold Black people
Our objects of art and other goods laid
claim to (ungodly, ungodly)

III.
In their beautiful homes, a dirty fortune
Fruits of their thefts and the exploitation of
Black people
From top to bottom, they pillage our
country
Isn't it true that they say that stealing is a
sin!

One of the things that is evident to me is that while portraying some of the key ideological elements of Bundu dia Kongo, the composer(s) of the song are also trying to connect with my identity as an African-American. My positionality is particularly important in that not only was the song composed for me (the hastily scribbled words were handed to me on a piece of paper at the end of the song) but it was also written in French, since my hosts knew that I did not have enough of a grasp of KiKongo. This stands out as members of Bundu dia Kongo make a concerted effort to speak in KiKongo as opposed to other languages. As a “sister” of the African diaspora (and potentially the Kongo diaspora as they explained to me) and student of Kongo culture and history, it is clear that they expected many of the themes in the song to resonate with my own experiences and sentiments, which they did.

The major themes in the song seem to be those of a direct critique of Christianity and injustices dealt out by European perpetrators. Treachery and hypocrisy on the part of Europeans are contrasted with African suffering at their hands and nostalgia for a great African past before their arrival. The song chronicles the unjust deaths of divinized ancestors such as Simon Kimbangu and Vita Kimpa, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the parceling of the African continent at the Berlin conference and thefts, violence, and exploitation that defined subsequent European colonization in Africa. These stand in stark relief against Christianity, a religion that is supposedly stands for peace and love, and yet, “the bible and the gun” often worked hand and hand in oppressing native populations during the colonial period.

The opening line, “in Egypt they were our slaves” references not only a longing for a past in which relative positions of authority were reversed, but also indicates a kinship bond with the great civilization of Egypt as an African society, a point that has been expounded upon considerably in writings of Ne Muanda Nsemi and in the sacred book Makongo which consider the migration of the founders of the Kongo Kingdom from Egypt. The suffering of Africans which continues in the present is juxtaposed with the riches and relative comfort that Europeans have gained through slavery and colonization, and continue to gain through the exploitation of Africa’s natural resources.

The song ties directly into many of the goals of Bundu dia Kongo: to have Kongo people reject Christianity, which members of BDK see as a white man’s religion that has been used to oppress them, to have Kongo people govern not only Kongo people but historically Kongo land so that they benefit from its vast resources, and to reform the Kongo Kingdom that was so divided by arbitrary colonial boundaries.

The Continuity of Kongo Nationalism

Bundu dia Kongo is not the first, and will likely not be the last group organized around the goal of reuniting the Kongo people under a restored and sovereign Kongo Kingdom, or to deal with issues of the revitalization of Kongo culture. L'Association Musicale BaKongo (AMUBAKO),²⁴⁷ founded in 1940 by J. Tangala and Renaissance BaKongo (RENAIBAKO),²⁴⁸ founded in 1944 in Kinshasa by J. Mavuela, are two examples of early associations that were formed during the colonial period that dealt with Kongo cultural issues.²⁴⁹ However both of these organizations had basically ceased to function when the most memorable, significant, and really most revolutionary organization was founded in 1950 by M.E. Nzeza-Landu: ABAKO (Association des BaKongo).²⁵⁰ This organization would eventually play a crucial role in later calls for a sovereign Kongo nation and independence from colonial rule for the country as a whole.

ABAKO began as a cultural organization that, based on its initial manifest, sought to “unify, conserve, and perfect the Kongo language.”²⁵¹ Created in Leopoldville²⁵² as a

²⁴⁷ BaKongo Musical Association.

²⁴⁸ Bakongo Renaissance was a group formed for alumni of the Kisantu Catholic mission schools in Lower Congo.

²⁴⁹ Centre de Recherche et d'Information Socio-Politiques, *A.B.A.K.O. Documents 1950-1960*, Brussels, 1962: 10.

²⁵⁰ AMUBAKO, RENAIBAKO, and ABAKO are all examples of Kongo cultural organizations that were focused more so on Kongo people as an entire group rather than local or regional differences. Before and after these organizations were founded until the present day, there continue to be many mutual aid societies or organizations that are focused on members being Kongo people from particular sectors, districts, and even villages. For further information on local and regional ethnic organizations and alumni associations in Kinshasa in general, see L'ABAKO et L'indépendance du Congo Belge (2003: 55-85).

²⁵¹ Centre de Recherche et d'Information Socio-Politiques, *A.B.A.K.O. Documents 1950-1960*, Brussels, 1962: 10.

²⁵² Leopoldville, named after King Leopold of Belgium, was the colonial name for the capital city now known as Kinshasa, located on the Congo river right across from the capital of modern day Republic of Congo, Brazzaville. Founded by Henry Morton Stanley in 1881 as a post at an already preexisting trading center between the overland route from the coast and the Upper Congo river, it grew slowly, becoming the new capital of the Belgian colony in 1930 (the capital was transferred from Boma on the coast).

“scientific, linguistic, cultural and social organization” (A.B.A.K.O. Documents: 14) based on the KiKongo of “Ntotila” or “Mbanza Kongo,”²⁵³ the organization sought primarily to publish a journal in KiKongo and organize cultural activities. This focus on the KiKongo language took place in a context in which although the Kongo ethnic group made up an estimated 60% of the African population of Leopoldville (La Fontaine 1970: 40-41) the preferred language of the city was quickly becoming Lingala, a trade language based on the Bobangi language of the Upper Congo River (L’ABAKO 2003: 90-91). As a language developed for trade purposes between Europeans and middlemen on the Upper Congo River, Lingala also came to dominate the colonial army, administration, and many missions in Leopoldville as many of the workers in these institutions were also from this area (L’ABAKO 91-92). The people from the Upper River areas are often collectively referred to as Bangala²⁵⁴ although Lingala is not the true indigenous language of any one group. Moreover, “Bangala” was also used interchangeably with the term “gens de haut” (people of the upper [river]) that was often used to refer to any non-Kongo people in post 1945 Leopoldville (L’ABAKO 2003: 170-1).

Thus, in the growing city of Leopoldville, although the BaKongo dominated numerically, their language was in fact not the primary non-European language being spoken. There were even several investigations and studies made around this “linguistic

Leopoldville was largely European at first (in 1923 the ratio of Europeans to Africans was 15:1) (La Fontaine 1970: 29) and native Congolese migration into the city was restricted and regulated. This largely changed with the industrial boom caused by the Second World War as labor needs exceeded supply and native Congolese flocked to the city to work (La Fontaine 1970:12).

²⁵³ Mbanza Kongo was the capital of the former Kongo Kingdom while Ntotila, in this context, is often taken as an alternate way to refer to the Kongo Kingdom, although the word itself refers to the head, leader or ruler of the Kongo Kingdom. The meaning of Ntotila continues to be debated by some Kongo scholars.

²⁵⁴ Bangala refers to the people, while Lingala refers to their language, just as BaKongo refers to the Kongo people and KiKongo refers to their language.

problem” in Leopoldville during the 40’s and 50’s with missionaries and academics advocating in favor of one language or another (L’ABAKO 2003: 95-98). Therefore, the emphasis of ABAKO on the preservation and expansion of the KiKongo language had critical salience in the plural society of Leopoldville at the time, and even in the present, as demonstrated by organizations such as Bundu dia Kongo that seek to promote KiKongo.

Although the urge to preserve and advocate the use of KiKongo was a very important objective of ABAKO, calls for Kongo nationalism were also appearing simultaneously. The unification of dialectical variants of KiKongo in the pages of the journal of ABAKO can be seen as a sort of “linguistic nationalism” (L’ABAKO 2003: 94) that sought to include not only all of the Kongo sub-groups in the Belgian Congo (Bantandu, Bandibu, BaManianga, etc.) but also “a page for the BaKongo of the A.E.F.²⁵⁵ and another, for our dear brothers of Angola.”²⁵⁶ In fact, all Kongo people who felt themselves “brothers who came from the same founder/roots: Kongo dia Ntotila” were encouraged to join.²⁵⁷ Thus, this first manifest had most of the major ideological components of later manifestations of Kongo nationalism; discussion of a Kongo cultural unity based on a shared language and the history of the Kongo kingdom, revitalization of Kongo culture and language, and an outlining of the Kongo areas geographically,

²⁵⁵ At the time, the A.E.F. was the acronym for the Afrique Équatoriale Française, or French Equatorial Africa. This was a conglomeration of all of the French colonies in Middle Africa, including what are today the countries of Gabon, the Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, and Chad. In the Republic of Congo, in particular, the majority of the population is people of the Kongo ethnic group (estimated 48% of population), CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cf.html#People>, [Accessed May 29, 2008]

²⁵⁶ Manifest, *A.B.A.K.O. Documents* 1962: 12.

²⁵⁷ Ibid; 11.

including the relevant provinces in the Belgian Congo, people in the French Congo, Portuguese Cabinda and Angola (L'ABAKO 2003: 127). These are all key elements that also define the ideology of Bundu dia Kongo today.

The call for Kongo nationalism became even more pronounced and included the missing component of the creation of a sovereign Kongo nation in a letter authored by Edmond Nzeza-Landu in the ABAKO journal *Congo Pratique*. Addressed to his “BaKongo compatriots,” he asked them to “work for the common good of their ethnic group...thus united in heart and spirit the BaKongo will become one day a great prosperous nation in Central Africa.”²⁵⁸ Perhaps to assuage Belgian colonial fears of a rising Kongo nation, Nzeza-Landu clarified this statement in November of the same year in *L’Courier Afrique*, a daily newspaper in Leopoldville. “We are far from the idea of constituting a N’Kongo state. We want only and simply to unify ourselves in heart and spirit under the vigilance of the Belgian government, so that we better comprehend and better defend our common BaKongo interests.”²⁵⁹ However, this conciliatory tone was to change with the more militant leadership of Joseph Kasa-Vubu.

On March 21, 1954 Edmond Nzeza-Landu stepped down and Joseph Kasa-Vubu was elected president of ABAKO. In August of the same year, ABAKO made its first attempt at political action, by presenting to the colonial administration some of its leaders as candidates for the position of administrative head of the Congolese section of the city. Although another non-Kongo person was chosen, this attempt foreshadowed the

²⁵⁸ June 15, 1953, *L’ABAKO* 2003: 125, footnote.

²⁵⁹ *A.B.A.K.O. Documents* 1960: 18, footnote.

increased political engagement of ABAKO that would take place in the future. (A.B.A.K.O. documents 1962:29-30).

In the mid fifties, a sense of impending change was in the air all over Africa, and Congo was no exception. A number of events and publications addressing the possible independence of the Congo began to appear, eventually leading to the involvement of ABAKO. The most influential ones were an article by Belgian Professor Van Bilsen published in December of 1955, in which he discussed a plan for the eventual independence of Congo after 30 years. His opinion of a thirty year transition to independence was echoed in July of 1956 in a manifest published by Congolese intellectuals in a journal called *Conscience Africaine* (African Consciousness) (Lemarchand 1961:346), a journal for which the vast majority of the committee members were non-Kongo Bangala and Baluba²⁶⁰ intellectuals (L'ABAKO 2003:178). The members of ABAKO published their own second manifest on August 24, 1956, harshly critiquing this stance, beginning a significant tradition of political activism that played a crucial role in garnering the independence of Congo. After going over the major points of the *Conscience Africaine*, the manifest spoke out directly against colonization.

None of us, in fact, could be found at the Berlin Conference. And however everything was decided for us....the Congo possessed neither a ruler of his race, or any at least of his choice, nor a government of his taste; the citizens were never citizens. (A.B.A.K.O. Documents 1962:39)

However, the most radical statement came in direct response to the thirty year plan. “Our patience has already surpassed the boundaries. Since the hour has come, it is necessary

²⁶⁰ BaLuba are the ethnic group primarily in the Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of Congo. They speak Tshiluba.

to grant us even today emancipation rather than to delay it again for thirty years” (A.B.A.K.O. Documents 1962:40-41).

This manifest signaled ABAKO’s crucial turn to politics and its growing recognition as one of the most important ethnic associations in Leopoldville. The recurring antagonism with the non-Kongo “Gens de Haut” in the city continued in different forms, one of which included published debates about which of the two groups (Kongo or non-Kongo) had more rights to the land of Kinshasa based on historical evidence (L’ABAKO 2003:176).²⁶¹ However, the public demonstration of ABAKO as a force to be reckoned with was most evident in the first local elections held in the communes of Kinshasa in 1957.

In March and May of 1957, two decrees were issued by the Belgian colonial administration in regards to the administrative restructuring of major cities in the country (Young 1965:106). Kinshasa was to be divided into smaller communes, which were urban districts that consisted of groupings of neighborhoods. Each commune was to have an elected council and a *bourgmestre* (local mayor) selected by the members of the elected council. In this first major step towards Congolese involvement in politics, ABAKO played a major role. In the Kinshasa election results in 1957, 133 out of 170 of the elected council members were from the Kongo ethnic group,²⁶² and out of nine communes in Kinshasa, six of the chosen *bourgmestres* were also Kongo, including

²⁶¹ The rebuttal of Kongo claims to Kinshasa, which was published as an open letter to the governor general in the Congo journal, was signed by representatives of the Federation of Mongos, the Kasaian federation, and the Federation of Bangala (L’ABAKO 2003: 176).

²⁶² Crawford Young, *Politics in the Congo: Decolonization and Independence* (1965: 118-119); Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem, *Histoire Générale du Congo* (1998: 526); A.B.A.K.O. Documents 1962: 123-125).

Joseph Kasa-Vubu, *bourgmestre* of the commune of Dendale. On July 28, 1959 ABAKO officially became a political party.²⁶³

Active in politics, linguistic matters, and the cultural scene, ABAKO has already proven to be an impressive model for groups like Bundu dia Kongo to emulate. However, what most non-Kongo people saw as the most radical move of ABAKO, and what movements like BDK see as the most inspirational, was ABAKO's actions surrounding the issue of Kongo sovereignty.

On June 21, 1959, ABAKO presented administrative plans for an autonomous "Kongo Central Republic" to Maurice Van Hemelrijck, the Minister of the Congo at the time. The plans, which included a proposed administrative structure, rules governing elections, and the geographic boundaries of the proposed republic, were soundly disapproved of by the colonial administration.²⁶⁴ In protest of the rejection of the plan for the Kongo Central Republic, ABAKO members organized a massive non-cooperative boycott of elections for districts outside of the cities, and later in national elections. In the elections held in May of 1960 for the new government of an independent Congo, an estimated 70% of Kongo people abstained in Leopoldville and near 100% abstained from voting in Bas-Congo.²⁶⁵ When independence was granted on June 30, 1960, a compromise was eventually reached between Kasa-Vubu and Patrice Lumumba, who had

²⁶³ Centre de Recherche et d'Information Socio-Politiques, *A.B.A.K.O. Documents 1950-1960*, Brussels, 1962: 226.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid*; 229-235.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 308.

garnered the most votes nationally; Kasa-Vubu would be president and Lumumba Prime Minister.²⁶⁶

In all, ABAKO serves as the closest and most relevant predecessor of the mission and ideology of Bundu dia Kongo. At the moment of the critical transition to independence in the late fifties and early sixties, Kongo people rallied together and organized in pursuit of the goal of not only political power, but also Kongo sovereignty. Likewise, as the country transitions to yet another new governmental structure (the third republic),²⁶⁷ political conditions are now amicable to fostering the rise of Bundu dia Kongo as a movement that renews dormant sentiments for a restored Kongo Kingdom and seeks to augment the political strength of Kongo people overall.

Bundu dia Kongo and Pan-African Consciousness

Bundu dia Kongo has many similarities with movements and ideas from throughout the African diaspora. Moreover, amongst the many ideological sentiments of Bundu dia Kongo lay explicit calls for Pan-Africanism and efforts to establish and maintain connections with people of the African diaspora worldwide. This section shall briefly explore some of the Pan-Africanist tendencies and beliefs of BDK, and then the similarities and differences that BDK shares with other African-Diasporic religious movements. With this, it becomes clear that Bundu dia Kongo, while a locally based organization grounded in KiKongo and histories and cultural ideas relevant to the Kongo

²⁶⁶ For further discussion of post-independence Congo until the take-over by Joseph Desire Mobutu, see the first few sections of chapter five.

²⁶⁷ The first republic refers to the first government of the Congo post-independence under Kasa-Vubu and Lumumba. The second republic refers to the country under the rule of Mobutu for nearly three decades. The third republic refers to the new government formed in 2006 in the first free elections since independence.

people, also has and seeks to have a broader appeal and relevance that extends beyond Kongo cultural borders.

Pan-Africanism in Images and Ideas

Pan-Africanism can be generally defined as “a wide range of ideologies that are committed to common political or cultural projects for Africans and people of African descent” (Appiah and Gates, eds, 1999:1484). Appearing first in the African diaspora in the nineteenth century, Pan-Africanism involved ideas such as the unity and common destiny of people of African descent around the world, divine providence derived from the Bible, the need for the establishment of an independent nation state, and a focus on emigration of the African diaspora, often but not always, back to Africa, amongst other ideas.

Ne Muanda Nsemi and Bundu dia Kongo as a movement advocate many of the aforementioned theoretical components of Pan-Africanism. For example, Ne Muanda Nsemi prophesizes and encourages the return of Africans in the Kongo Diaspora back to Kongo, in which the Kongo diaspora as I understand it means people descended from enslaved Africans possibly taken from the Kongo area, and also Kongos in Liberia.²⁶⁸ In preparation for the moment when there will be a massive migration of the African Diaspora to the Lower Congo, BDK has laid out several rules for their integration into society, including: accept and follow the true religion of the Kongo people, which is

²⁶⁸ The term “Congo” used to describe Americo-Liberians and the existence of a “Congotown” in Monrovia were pointed out to me as evidence of this connection to the Kongo people. Historically, a number of slave ships with enslaved Africans from the Kongo area were captured by patrolling American ships combating the slave trade in the 19th century, and they were often resettled in Liberia, and even apprenticed to Americo-Liberians already there, so that the “Congo” designation seems to have been eventually applied to all non-indigenous Americo-Liberians.

BuKongo, including its rules of conduct and rituals of prayer; learn and speak only the KiKongo language; register with the Minister of the Interior of the Kongo government, and share all of your knowledge with your Kongo brethren and work for the well-being of the Kongo people (Ne Zole, Interview, February 8, 2006, Luozi, DRC).²⁶⁹

Ne Muanda Nsemi's ideas of Pan-Africanism can also be seen in his objectives regarding Kongo sovereignty and how these interact with the larger continent of Africa. Seeking first to establish an independent Kongo nation, he then envisions abolishing all colonial frontiers, forming medium sized autonomous states that can then be grouped into five confederations,²⁷⁰ which themselves would then form the United States of Africa (1995:unnumbered page). While the United States of Africa is not a new concept, dating back to Kwame Nkrumah's ideas and the debates surrounding the original formation of the Organization of African Unity, it is clear that the larger objective of uniting all of Africa plays a key role in Ne Muanda Nsemi's writings and the goals of BDK as a whole.²⁷¹

One of the best visual representations of Pan-Africanism in Bundu dia Kongo can actually be seen on their website, www.bundudiakongo.org, which was first published in 2007. The opening page allows visitors to choose links to pages in either KiKongo or French, and instructs visitors to seek to know themselves and the history of their own

²⁶⁹ Further in-depth discussion of the return of the Kongo Diaspora can be found in Ne Muanda Nsemi, *La Diaspora Kongo*, publication # 47.

²⁷⁰ He calls these confederations common markets, and these include North Africa, West Africa, East Africa, Central Africa, and South Africa. "Le Panafricanisme Veritable," (the true Pan-Africanism) in *Les Enfants de Ne Kongo*, unnumbered page.

²⁷¹ For further discussion of these issues and Ne Muanda Nsemi's articulation of Pan-Africanism, see *Le Culte Pan-Africaine*, 1994. The European Union is the modern day articulation of the type of structure that Nkrumah envisioned for the United States of Africa.

countries first before seeking to know that of others. Visitors are also greeted by a speech by Ne Muanda Nsemi that plays in the audio player. On the page entitled, “Our Message to the World,” the website decries the savage attack that the West has made on Africa over centuries, through slavery, colonialism, and outright violence, and at the end again calls for the reunification of the Kongo people, erasing former colonial borders.²⁷² On the left side of the webpage next to the message is a compilation of images of scenes and leaders from throughout the African diaspora. The three scenes include a photo of the lynching of a black man, and two sketches, one of a slave auction, and the other of enslaved Africans in the hold of a packed slave ship. The photos are of many revolutionary leaders of African descent from around the world, most of whom stood up to white oppression in one way or another. These photos include the prophet Simon Kimbangu, Kwame Nkrumah together with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Marcus Garvey, Patrice Lumumba, Malcolm X, Thomas Sankara,²⁷³ Nelson and Winnie Mandela, and Simon Toko.²⁷⁴ By surrounding their message with images from the Pan-African world and experience, Bundu dia Kongo is trying to highlight the ways in which their own experience and mission resonates with that of people of African descent around the world. Thus, through their use of images, they forward the Pan-Africanist goal of establishing a bond between people of African descent throughout the diaspora.

²⁷² “Notre Message au Monde” (Our Message to the World), www.bundudiakongo.org [Accessed July 7, 2008].

²⁷³ Thomas Sankara was the former president of Burkina Faso from 1983-1987, who promoted policies of government for the people, women’s rights, and had many anti-imperialist ideas. He was assassinated in 1987.

²⁷⁴ Simon Toko was Kongo prophet (Zombo sub-ethnic group) from just across the border in northern Angola who spent a number of years living in Kinshasa and started his own religious movement in 1949, which also involved much ecstatic trembling as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. See F. James Grenfell, 1998, “Simao Toco: An Angolan Prophet,” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 28(2): 210-226, and António da Silva Rêgo, 1970, “Syncretic Movements in Angola,” *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 7(2):25-43.

Revolutionary Religions: Bundu dia Kongo and African-Diasporic Movements

Observers of the movement of Bundu dia Kongo might note its resemblance to certain other socio-religious movements of the African Diaspora, such as that of Rastafarianism in Jamaica and the Nation of Islam in the United States. Indeed, there are a number of ideological and practical similarities that they share (Watson 1973).²⁷⁵ However, there are also some key differences.

One similarity that these three movements seem to share is that they emerged out of similar social, cultural and economic situations in which their adherents have historically experienced some form of oppression and exclusion in relation to the general society. In both Jamaica and the United States, histories of slavery and marginalization from the economy in post-bellum and post-colonial societies explain the lower class, mostly urban African American population, and often peasant, lower class Afro-Jamaicans that make up the membership of these two groups (Watson 1973: 196; Simpson 1985: 286). In the case of Bundu dia Kongo, the history of economic exploitation and violence that characterized the colonial period was further exacerbated by the marginalization of Kongo people in a post-colonial society. In a country in which most political powers are still organized around ethnic allegiances, the Kongo people have not been able to garner any major political clout, not since the election of Joseph Kasa-Vubu as the first president of a newly independent Congo in 1960. Moreover, the Lower Congo province is still a mainly rural province (outside of the major towns dotting

²⁷⁵ G. Llewellyn Watson, 1973, "Social Structure and Social Movements: the Black Muslims in the U.S.A. and the Ras-Tafarians in Jamaica," *The British Journal of Sociology* 24(2):188-204.

the railway and main road between Kinshasa and the port city of Matadi) that has not experienced much development since independence.

Watson points out another similarity that the black Muslims and Rastafarians share: “Most Muslims and most Rastas testify to a search for something to belong to, for a dignity they know they are being denied, for self-respect and identity, for a means to material, moral and emotional regeneration and for social renewal” (1973: 198). These are certainly characteristics that apply to Bundu dia Kongo as well. However, while the Rastas look to Ethiopia and Black Muslims to Islam for that belonging, Bundu dia Kongo seeks to recreate the Kongo Kingdom in the space in which it formerly existed and to extend its influence so that all Kongo people will once again have a nation to belong to. By having their own nation, Kongo people will once again garner respect as a people, such as the mutual respect that guided at least the initial interactions between the Kongo King and the Portuguese in the late 15th century.

Other similarities the Nation of Islam and Rastafarianism share are a rejection of orthodox Christianity, a fostering of entrepreneurship and self-sufficiency, and advocating a withdrawal from the larger society (Watson 1973). These characteristics also define the movement of Bundu dia Kongo, and disdain for Christianity in particular was discussed previously in this chapter. However, a common feature amongst all three movements that Watson fails to mention is the marginalization of women. In Bundu dia Kongo, although women are present, men dominate in numbers and in the leadership of the group. Moreover, they teach that women are inferior in status to men (Ne Zole, interview, February 7, 2006, Luozi, DRC). The worship of female prophets such as Dona Beatrice Vita Kimpa, who plays such a tremendous role in the ideology and worship of

BDK, seems to be the exception to this rule, marking an obvious contradiction in BDK's professed belief in the inferior status of women and their actual practice in regards to the worship of a female Kongo prophet.

In addition to the similarities already discussed, these different movements are also coeval and so can have an effect on one another. While attending the Bundu dia Kongo general assembly meeting on February 18, 2006, I noticed what I perceived to be Rasta influences evident here and there throughout the crowd. "I saw more than a few men with locks, with the Rasta hats of Jamaica and other things, and even with long beards. I even saw some smoking what I thought was 'ganja weed'" (Field notes, 2006). Although the possible ideological influences of Rastafarianism on Bundu dia Kongo deserve further investigation, these physical manifestations of an association with Rastafarianism reveal the complex interactions that these revolutionary diasporic religious movements have with one another.

The major differences that can be seen between religious movements such as Rastafarianism and the Nation of Islam in the Diaspora, and Bundu dia Kongo seem to relate directly to the fact that the movement of Bundu dia Kongo is based in Africa, in the Congo, in the Lower Congo, in the heart of a land that was formerly ruled by Kongo people themselves. While Rastas and Black Muslims speak of living in exile, Bundu dia Kongo speaks of building up the land that Kongo people already live on, and have lived on for centuries. BDK also has a vehicle that neither of the other movements has; a shared non-European language (KiKongo) that can be rallied behind for the unification of Kongo people. And while many elements of Kongo culture and history have been manipulated, selectively chosen, or even ignored by Bundu dia Kongo, there do exist

particular cultural symbols (the Kongo Kingdom, Simon Kimbangu, Dona Beatrice Vita Kimpa, etc.) that are near and dear to the hearts of Kongo people across national and religious lines that BDK members amplify in their rhetoric, actions, and worship. The overall ideology of Bundu dia Kongo has many different ways that it is manifested: in pamphlets and sacred books, in protests and demonstrations, in songs and emblems, but also, as the rest of this chapter shows, in their embodied cultural performances.

Reformed Bodies, Re-formed Histories: *Bimpampa* in Bundu dia Kongo

As we have seen throughout the previous chapters, *bimpampa* play an important role in creating, confirming, and challenging social orders, structures, and ideals of authority. The members of Bundu dia Kongo have made a concerted effort to not only publicize and popularize their points of view through printed pamphlets translated into multiple languages, vocal protests and gatherings, but also through the ways in which they use their bodies. As Bourdieu acutely notes, “Body *hexis* is political mythology realized, *em-bodied*, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable manner of standing speaking, and thereby of *feeling* and *thinking*.” (1977: 93-94, original emphasis) Citing Bourdieu’s concept of the bodily practices as a form of mnemonics, John and Jean Comaroff emphasize the importance of targeting bodily reform in situations of social transformation for the Tshidi in South Africa: “Scrambling this code—that is, erasing the messages carried in banal physical practice—is a prerequisite for retraining the memory, either to deschool the deviant *or to shape new subjects as the bearers of new worlds*.” (1992:70, emphasis mine)

Along these same lines, Kongo *bimpampa* and modifications to other forms of embodied practice and comportment have been used by Bundu dia Kongo to remake its members, and other people, (both Kongo and non-Kongo) who come into contact with them, as the creators of a very particular social world: a re-formed Kongo Kingdom. Simultaneously, *bimpampa* are used as a form of mnemonics to activate particular cultural memories of the glory of, and everyday practice within, that same Kingdom. *Bula makonko* (cupped handclapping), *dekama* (genuflection), *fukama* (kneeling), and *yinama* (bowing) all play very significant roles in the everyday efforts to recreate the former Kongo Kingdom here on earth.

Bula Makonko and Fukama

The primary example of the modification and amplification of certain embodied practices to further the goals of Bundu dia Kongo is *bula makonko*, a form of *bimpampa* based on a cupped clapping of the hands that has been discussed in previous chapters. As previously noted, it was and is used to say thank you, to ask for forgiveness or demand pardon, as a gesture of respect, or additionally, as a greeting. Many Kongo people do still use this gesture in Luozi and other parts of Lower Congo, but it doesn't seem to be the main form of greeting used in interactions. Rather, one observes men touching heads three times while shaking hands and women kissing on the cheek thrice in Kinshasa, and handshakes by both sexes (often while grasping the right wrist or elbow with the left hand) combined with *dekama* for women and *yinama* for men in Luozi. However, in Bundu dia Kongo *bula makonko* (combined with *dekama* for women and *yinama* for men) is used as their way of greeting not only other members of the movement but also

almost all people that they come in contact with. This is demonstrated by an example from my field notes while in Luozi:

I attended an event held by Bundu dia Kongo in the town's oldest cemetery... After all the dancing, which I participated in while David taped, I met another leader of the group. Ne Nkamu introduced me to him, and I stretched out my hand for a handshake, and he just looked down at it. I said, "Oh," and switched to the clapping motion. (Field notes, October 1, 2005)

This vignette demonstrates the ways in which members of BDK, through their responses and lack of responses in interactions with others, can subtly influence one's embodied practices. In fact, if you see people on the road in Luozi or in the streets of Kinshasa who greet each other in this particular way (cupped handclapping rather than touching one another), it is an embodied signifier that they are most likely members of Bundu dia Kongo. In conversations with members, it was explained to me that this way of greeting one another was the normal form of greeting in the Kongo Kingdom, and that they are bringing it back into present day use.²⁷⁶ It can thus be seen as an embodied form both of history and of cultural revitalization, a way of moving that represents an ideology and appreciation for Kongo culture and history that is put into practice in everyday gesture for members of Bundu dia Kongo. The moments of awkwardness that arise when a person reaches out to shake hands and is met by empty air, are used as opportunities for educating non-members of Bundu dia Kongo about the meaning and history of the gesture. In fact, BisiKongo who are not members of the group are often scolded for not embodying this form of greeting, which is touted as the most authentic and traditional

²⁷⁶ See chapter two for further discussion of *bula makonko* as a form of greeting during the pre-colonial period in and around the Kongo Kingdom.

form by the members of Bundu dia Kongo, in comparison to the “white man’s” handshake that is disdained.

Bula makonko as the preferred method of greeting is one example of the way in which, through embodied cultural performances, members of Bundu dia Kongo are in fact establishing their own authority in their local settings. As I observed in Luozi, people in the town knew who the members of Bundu dia Kongo were, and would in fact be sure to use *bula makonko* as a greeting when interacting with them, even if only to avoid a verbal chastisement. Thus, with every cupped handclapped greeting of their members and especially the people around them who are not members of the group, Bundu dia Kongo challenges the cultural and political authority of non-Kongo people while simultaneously laying the ground for their own authority in regards to Kongo people.

Bula makonko is also incorporated into the ritual practices of Bundu dia Kongo. In this particular context, it seems to take on meanings more associated with opening and closing prayers, asking for forgiveness, and expressing gratitude rather than being simply a greeting. *Fukama* or kneeling also plays a major role in that during services that I attended in the local BDK church and even more so during the February mass meeting described earlier in the chapter, the vast majority of the worship service was done while kneeling. In this posture, pants are rolled up and skirts pushed out of the way so that the bare skin of the knees actually touches the rocky ground. It was explained to me that by being on your knees, you suffer while you are in the process of repenting (Ne Zole, Interview, February 8, 2006, Luozi, DRC). The leader of the service faced everyone else in the audience, also on his knees, with a microphone in hand. During the first opening

songs of the service during the mass meeting, the crowd sang along as everyone simultaneously clapped. Then, the next part of the service involved a vocal call of “Yenge,” (peace) issued by the leader to which the crowd responded bodily with three cupped claps, followed by a short prayer that began “Nzitusu kwa batata bampungu tulendo” (give thanks to the all powerful fathers). This sequence was repeated several times. In this instance, *bula makonko* was used to open the prayer giving thanks to the spiritual beings of the Bukongo religion, which we have seen include the divinized ancestors, supervisory genie, upper celestial hierarchy, and Nzambi.

One of the most notable and important aspects of the service of Bundu dia Kongo is a long, intense prayer punctuated by *bula makonko* that is done by the kneeling members of church. I witnessed this at the mass meeting and local church services as well. In unison, the church members begin to simultaneously pray out loud and clap quickly with their hands cupped in four, four time. According to Ne Zole, the clapping is done is for purification and to demand pardon from *Nzambi Mpungu* (God) for sins committed (Interview, February 8, 2006, Luozi, DRC). I did, however, note some differences in this particular worship practice in regards to the number of times that it was enacted. At the mass meeting, the leader called out “Iya, Sambodia, Iya,” or “Four, Seven, Four” in KiKongo, which perhaps was a reminder to the participants of the number of times that they were to repeat the prayer for each section. The members present then repeated the prayer four times with clapping,²⁷⁷ seven times without clapping, and then another four times with the clapping. However, at the services that I

²⁷⁷ I counted the number of claps during the first sequence of four prayers, and there were eighteen claps per prayer, 72 claps altogether.

attended in the local church, the prayer was repeated 40, then 72, then 40 times. When I asked about this particular sequence and number of claps, I was told that they represent the number of stages of the passage of the prayers to God: from the BisiKongo, to divinized ancestors, to Ne Muanda Kongo the archangel, and finally to Tata Nzambi Mpungu.

The text of the prayer is as follows:

Prayer in KiKongo

*Kembo, Kembo, Kembo,
mu kayengele vava ntoto,
yenge mayangi mingi kiese
mu kumbwa tata mpungu tulendo
tu lombele mlemvo watata mpungu tulendo*

Prayer in English

*Joy, Joy, Joy
in the sky, Joy here on land
A lot of joy, happiness
In the name of the all powerful father God,
We demand pardon from the all powerful
father.*

As the prayer is repeated over and over again with the clapping, it becomes like a chant intoned in unison by the members of Bundu dia Kongo. In the context of the worship service, the repetitive gesture of *bula makonko* takes center stage as an embodied cultural performance for *Nzambi* that is an act of simultaneous repentance and demanding forgiveness. This chanted and clapped prayer thus presents a challenge to the hegemonic Christian “prayer pose” of unmoving palms clasped together, fingers pointing upwards, that one finds in all of the worship services of Christians churches of Luozi, whether Protestant or Catholic, DMNA or CEC. Moreover, as this prayer and especially the clapping are seen as a means of purification and seeking absolution, *bula makonko* in this

ritual context presents an embodied alternative to global mainstream Christian rituals such as water immersion, confession, and in the past, self-flagellation. The number of claps represents the number of stages that the prayers must pass through in order to reach Nzambi. Thus, this particular use of the gesture of *bula makonko* actually embodies the religion of BuKongo and enacts an alternate spiritual realm in which divinized ancestors regain their rightful place, an archangel looks out for the Kongo people, and the messages of the BisiKongo ascend a spiritual hierarchy in which Jesus Christ has no place. In this sense, *bula makonko* can be seen as a direct challenge to the religious hegemony of Christianity in the Lower Congo and its relevance to the experience and needs of the Kongo people.



Figure 12: Image of Bula Makonko, in the zikua of Bundu dia Kongo, Luozi, DRC, October 9, 2005, image by author.

There are other ways in which *bula makonko* is used in the spiritual worship service of Bundu dia Kongo. For instance, the three principal attributes of God are also reflected in handclapping practices to open, close, and punctuate prayers, such as when the leader vocalizes and the congregation responds with three claps:

- Mu zola (3 claps) (love)
- Mu ngangü (3 claps) (intelligence)
- Mu lendo (3 claps) (power)

Bula makonko in a sequence of three cupped claps was also used in other parts of the service, for example in response to a call intoning the names of the three founding ancestors of the Kongo people “Nsaku, Mpanzu, Nzinga.” Moreover, at times the congregation would respond to calls of “kunda” or “tukunda” to open or close a prayer with three cupped claps. *Kunda* in KiKongo (*kukunda* in the infinitive) has several related meanings, including to salute or honor someone by clapping and bowing slightly, to worship, to implore, to invoke, to ask for pardon (Laman 1964: 335).²⁷⁸ In this case, prayers and embodied practices are both intertwined in the carrying of the message of the group to the spiritual world. *Bula makonko* then, is a multivalent embodied cultural performance that can be used to address and interact with both the spiritual realm and beings here on earth. All of these examples demonstrate the importance of embodied cultural performances such as *bimpampa* like *bula makonko* for manifesting in the body

²⁷⁸ The “tu” in “tukunda” is simply the first person plural (we) form of the verb *kunda*.

the beliefs and goals of Bundu dia Kongo, both in ritual space and also in interactions in everyday life.

Yinama

Another way of using the body that I consider is *yinama* (bowing), which again is a sign of respect often coupled with *bula makonko*. For example, Bundu dia Kongo members bowed in unison at the end of several prayers that began with *bula makonko* during the worship services. However, there is another part of the service in which *yinama* plays a major role, one which BDK has creatively re-imagined. The cosmology of the Kongo people has been studied by MuKongo scholars such as Tata Fu-Kiau Bunseki and anthropologists such as Wyatt MacGaffey, and one concept that they have written about is the idea that there is a cycle of life that follows the counterclockwise path of the sun, and has four major points.²⁷⁹ Thus, contrary to popular belief, the cross was not introduced to Africans by Christian missionaries, but was known in Kongo culture before the arrival of Europeans. Life was seen as a cycle between the two worlds, with the upper half of the cross representing the world of the living, and the lower half that of the dead, with the two worlds thought to be reflections of each other across a large body

279 The first person to really explicate this cosmology was Fu-Kiau, A. kia Bunseki-Lumanisa (1969) *N’Kongo ye nza yakun’zungidila; nza-Kôngo/ Le Mukongo et le Monde qui l’entourait*. (The MuKongo and the World that Surround him). French Translation by Zamenga Batukezanga. Kinshasa: Office National de la recherche et de développement. This publication is likely the most important survey of Kongo cosmology to have ever been produced. Written in both French and KiKongo by a MuKongo who comes from the Manianga region upon which much of my own research is based, it explains many of the symbols and ideas that prevail in Kongo cosmology. It is the main source for most studies written in English that include information about Kongo cosmology. These include influential studies such as Wyatt Macgaffey (1986) *Religion and Society in central Africa: The BaKongo of Lower Zaire*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, and Robert Farris Thompson and Joseph Cornet (1981) *The Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in two worlds*. Washington: National Gallery of Art and (1983) *Flash of the spirit: African and Afro-American art and philosophy*. New York: Random House.

of water often known as Kalunga, which divides the two worlds (Macgaffey 1986; Thompson & Cornet 1981; Thompson 1983). Thompson and Cornet further explain the four points in the cycle of life between two worlds as four moments of the sun:

The Four Moments of the Sun---that is, dawn, noon, sunset, and midnight...the right hand sphere or corner stands for dawn which, in turn, is the sign of a life beginning. Noon, the uppermost disk or corner, indicated the flourishing of life, the point of most ascendant power. Next...come change and flux, the setting of the sun, and death, marked by the left-hand median point or disk.²⁸⁰

There are many symbolic drawings of this concept, including a spiral, a diamond, but namely a cross. The cross is symbolic of the meeting of the two worlds, and the crossroads (where four roads meet) thus has significance as a place of extreme spiritual power.

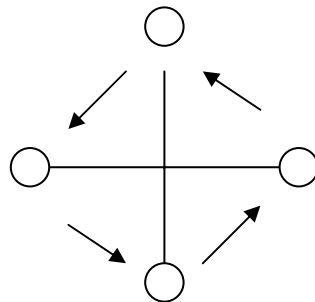


Figure 13: Image of the Four Moments of the Sun, (Source: Robert F. Thompson and Joseph Cornet (1981) *Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo art in Two Worlds*.)

In the worship services of Bundu dia Kongo, there is a practice of the entire congregation turning to the four cardinal points while in the midst of song and bowing at each point in unison. The chorus of this song is, “O Kongo Dieto, Tulombele.” *Lomba* as a verb (*kulomba* in the infinitive) has a number of related meanings, including: to pray, to beg, to ask forgiveness or permission, to demand (Laman 1936:404). Thus, in this

²⁸⁰ Robert Farris Thompson and Joseph Cornet, (1981) *The Four Moments of the Sun*, Washington: National Gallery of Art, pages 27-28.

particular context, “O Our Kongo, we ask of you/beg of you, etc,” is an impassioned, sung prayer being sent up to the sky as Bundu dia Kongo members sway gently from side to side with their arms stretched upwards, rocking back and forth in time to the music. At the end of each verse and chorus, the crowd bows to that side, and turns in unison to face the next cardinal point and continue the song.

When I asked what the turning to the four sides represented, I was told:

We are paying homage to 4 great angels of the Kongo people: Ne Fwani kia Nzambi; Ne Makinda Ngolo; Ne Nganga Buka; Ne kia kwa Nzambi. They are at the door of the people, and we have to honor them by turning to the four cardinal points at each session.²⁸¹ (Ne Tatu, conversation, October 23, 2005, Luozi, DRC)

Ne Zole referred to them as “spiritual beings who know the great secrets of the world” (Interview, February 8, 2006, Luozi, DRC). The embodied cultural performance of bowing to the four moments of the sun, maps the divinized ancestors of Bundu dia Kongo onto a long standing Kongo cosmological tradition while at the same time making irrelevant Christian theology and the cross as a symbol of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Thus, *yinama* serves as an embodied rejection of and challenge to Christianity, supplication to ancestors, and means of establishing the religious authority of Bundu dia Kongo as a spiritual organization.

The Place of Dance and Traditional Instruments in BDK Worship

Other types of embodied cultural performances that demonstrate the ideology of Bundu dia Kongo and in some instances really set them apart from Kongo Christian churches are secular dances and the use of traditional instruments in the worship setting.

²⁸¹ This was reiterated in an interview as well. (Ne Zole, February 6, 2006, Luozi, DRC).

The members of BDK had an accepting attitude towards *makinu* that differed from that of other Kongo churches, in particular to dancing to traditional instruments that may occur at larger community or clan functions. Due to their goal of restoring value in Kongo traditional practices, I was told that members of the movement can participate in such dances, but only outside of the church. They also may participate in ancestral, reserved, and spiritual dances. However, “dances of the bed,”²⁸² dances of the kind that you see on television in popular Congolese dance music are prohibited. (Ne Zole, Interview, February 8, 2006, Luozi, DRC). The importance of forms of spiritual dance to the worship practices of Bundu dia Kongo was also elucidated in an interview:

(Yolanda C-W): Do traditional dance and music play a role in the church of Bundu dia Kongo? Or, are they not important?

(Ne Mosi): Yes, Yes, they are important. First of all, there is dance, and there is dance. There are vulgar dances, there are dances of great priests, dances of joy, there are popular dances, it is in our culture...But, because you talked about the church, coming from religion, in the rites of Bundu dia Kongo, the dance that we can talk about, there is also another dance, a dance, if you will, that is sacred, that is spiritual. It is a way, like yoga, a way of making the body move so that your body relaxes, the body of the grand master or the master that executes this dance, can put himself in contact with a certain force that must come inside of him so that he can accomplish that which he wants to do. Thus, this dance, it is not an obscene dance...it is the dance of an *nganga*...like in the bible, *makinu ma David* (the dance of David)...the dance of a great priest. *Makinu ma ngudi nganga ka mazingi langa ko*, the dance of a great *nganga* doesn't last long...dance has an impact on our religious culture. (Ne Mosi, Interview, October 10, 2005, Luozi, DRC)

²⁸² Dances of the bed was a term used by European missionaries to describe certain secular dances that they felt were too sexual. See chapter three for a discussion of morality and Kongo secular dances.

In this text, the dance that Ne Mosi focuses on as the most important in BDK is the dance of the *nganga*, or traditional priest-healer.²⁸³ The fact that the use of the title and position of *nganga* is being reclaimed in the BDK church signals yet another challenge to the authority of Christian churches. An *nganga* in the BDK church may thus use this dance to relax himself so that he becomes open to spiritual possession. It is unclear whether Ne Mosi's likening of the dance to yoga and to the dance of David was for cultural interpretation purposes (to explain to the foreign anthropologist) or whether this analogy is often used to lend a sort of legitimacy to the dance in the eyes of others, who may still hold negative stereotypes about *banganga*. When I then asked if I had witnessed this dance before, I was told that I had not. However, there were other dances in the church that I had seen:

Evidently, the dance that they [the church members] did...it is not the dance of the head *nganga*. That is the dance that accompanies the songs. It is in the rhythm of the songs. When you sing, you are fixed, the songs won't be animated. But, when you add...the dance, the people come, it contributes to the good presentation of the songs. There is an impact of dance on our songs. (Ne Iya, Interview, October 10, 2005, Luozi, DRC)

Here, Ne Iya points out the interrelationship between dance and song in the BDK church, and even how important dance is for attracting people to the church services. But what types of dance can be seen in the meetings and *mazikua* of Bundu dia Kongo?

In my observations of the worship services of Bundu dia Kongo, I actually was disappointed in the lack of dance that I saw. Since I'd learned about BDK's mission to revitalize Kongo culture and history, and had already visited the DMNA church several

²⁸³ *Nganga* is a term that in most Kongo Christian churches continues to have negative connotations. As chapters two and three show, during the pre-colonial and colonial periods, European missionaries seeking to usurp the spiritual authority of *banganga*, often claimed that they were witches and practitioners of harmful sorcery who should be persecuted.

times, I'd expected dance to play a large role in Bundu dia Kongo. Rather, most of the bodily motions were restricted to simple side to side swaying with the body and arms that I often saw in both the CEC and Catholic churches in Luozi, although this swaying in BDK worship was often punctuated by gestures that illustrated certain lines from a song. Overall, although their ideology privileges dance, especially those that are seen as traditional dances of the Kongo people, in actual practice dance doesn't have a large role in the embodied worship of Bundu dia Kongo.

The cultural policy and BDK's mission to revitalize Kongo culture and history has also led to the group taking a different stance towards traditional instruments in worship practice than has been taken by most other Kongo churches in Luozi. I asked why during my visits to the BDK church in Luozi, I'd only seen the *bibandi*²⁸⁴ being played.

Ne Mosi: That's because that is all that they had here in Luozi. (Ne Iya): There are people who play the *ngoma*, there are people who play the *bibandi*.

Y-CW: You can find an *ngoma* in the church?

Both Ne Mosi and Iya: Yes, yes. You can find that.

Ne Iya: Not only the *ngoma*, there is also the *nkonsi*, the gong... Sometimes, also the *matutu*.²⁸⁵

Ne Mosi: We took all of the ancestral instruments. There are many. (Interview, October 10, 2005, Luozi, DRC)

²⁸⁴ The *bibandi* is a double faced drum used in many Kongo spiritual worship services, including the DMNA church. *Nsakala* are shakers or rattles that are often shaken by the women.

²⁸⁵ The *ngoma* is a tall (waist high) thick, wooden drum with one side covered by an animal skin that is often tightened by heating it.

This acceptance of all ancestral (read traditional, non-European) instruments in the place of worship is a departure from many of the other churches in Luozi. During the colonial period, it was often missionary policy that instruments such as the *ngoma*, associated with secular dances, were banned in the Protestant and Catholic churches.²⁸⁶ Such sentiments have persisted to some degree in modern day churches in Luozi with these missionary histories, especially with regards to the *ngoma*. Thus, Bundu dia Kongo's mass acceptance of all ancestral instruments in spiritual worship demonstrates the interlocking spiritual and cultural mission of Bundu dia Kongo as a movement.

Overall, while Bundu dia Kongo is more accepting in general of secular *makinu* in comparison to Kongo Christian churches, there still seems to be an effort to keep these secular *makinu* outside of the ritual space of the church. Although BDK encourages a return to "traditional" values, practices, beliefs, and embodiment, dancing plays a minimal role in the worship service of the church when compared to the DMNA church, for instance.

Conflicting Performances: Machine Guns, Karate Chops, and the Subversion of Official Ideologies

Feb 18, 2006. I was at the general assembly meeting of BDK in Luozi, waiting to be given permission to film. There was a group of singers and musicians enthusiastically playing music, and as I waited, I surveyed the scene and took in the music that was animating the space. Although like everyone else I rocked to the familiar rhythms,

²⁸⁶ See chapter three for further discussion of these issues. This topic is also covered in Yolanda Covington-Ward, "Threatening Gestures, Immoral Bodies: The Intersection of Church, State, and Kongo Performance in the Belgian Congo," In *Missions, States, and European Expansion in Africa*. Chima Korieh and Raphael Njoku, eds. New York: Routledge Press. Pg 73-100. (April 2007)

frankly I was disappointed, for what I was seeing didn't seem to go along with the "traditional" ideology of Bundu dia Kongo. I was expecting a concert of traditional instruments, the likes of which I hadn't yet seen during my field research. What I saw instead were an electric guitar, a synthesizer, European made congo drums, bass drums such as found in marching bands, a lone ngongi painted blue, red, and yellow, and several nsakala. The group had in fact rented the instruments from the Protestant church right up the road. The performers were basically singing nationalist, battle songs to modern rhythms. As long as you didn't understand KiKongo, the music could have been that of any number of popular Congolese artists, from Koffi Olomide to Le Marquis de Maison Mere.²⁸⁷ For example, the lyrics of one song included the following lines:

²⁸⁷ These are both artists of Congolese popular soukouss dance music.

Song in KiKongo

*Wiza, Dumuka Mu Mvita,
Muanda Nsemi Wiza, dumuka mu mvita
Tata Kimbangu, Wiza, Dumuka mu mvita
Etc.*

Song in English

*Come, Jump into the fight,
Muanda Nsemi, Come, Jump into the fight
Father Kimbangu, Come, Jump into the
fight
Etc.*

The song implored the great heroes of BDK and the Kongo people in general to join the fight, and the implications of which fight are numerous; the fight for Kongo sovereignty, the fight against police and state suppression of the movement, the fight against the erasure of Kongo culture, the fight against neocolonialism—all fights that Bundu dia Kongo wants to win. Later in the evening, after receiving permission to film, it became clear to me that words and songs were not the only things being marshaled against enemies of the movement, but actual bodies were “jumping into the fight” as well.

In the midst of filming members singing to a tune reminiscent of Congolese Rumba from several decades earlier, I noticed a woman crouching on the ground in front of the crowd. Some people beside her were moving out of her way, and so I turned my camera towards her. I saw her arms outstretched as she rose slightly to a deep bend of the knees, quaking slightly. It looked as though she were possessed. I then had a flash of recognition. Earlier in the day, as I gathered my equipment to film arriving Bundu dia Kongo members, Ma Sylvie, the daughter-in-law of Ma Jacqueline, had done the same gesture, making sounds like a machine gun and mimicking shooting. She said, “This is what the people in Bundu dia Kongo do. Ka Ka Ka Ka.” Astounded and incredulous, I’d left not knowing what to expect.

Now, as I filmed, the woman (who was a bit heavyset) began to jump up and down, and finally, did a tuck and roll right in my direction, and then crouching again, did

another tuck and roll back towards the crowd. Several security guards came to loosely encircle her, and she began making a shooting gesture again, this time with one arm. She punched outwards, and then on her knees, continued to shoot, this time using her middle and index fingers on each hand, going all the way down to the ground. By this time, many more guards surrounded her, and one motioned for her to get up. As they closed the circle tighter around her, they began to escort her away from the front of the crowd. I didn't see how it ended because one of the organizers of the event came up to me and indicated that I should not continue filming that incident. I took the hint, and turned my camera elsewhere.

The next day, when I came back to the assembly, I saw that towards the back of the crowd there, a circle had formed in which people manifested their possession. Many of them did fighting gestures. They would punch straight outwards with their arms as if doing karate, lift up their knees, and thrust their leg forward to end with a powerful planting of the foot on the ground. They often had their fingers or arms held so that they seemed to be imitating a gun. One guy even made the sound of the machine gun spitting bullets: Ka Ka Ka Ka! As the day went on, here and there in the crowd, people were jumping, doing fighting gestures, and imitating shooting. Several times, another person came to put their hand on the possessed person's head and calm them down. The security guards readily stepped in when people became possessed and started to embody the possession. At one point, when many people started manifesting all at once, the security guards told them to go to the back of the crowd and to do it back there. It seemed as though they were trying to hide it.

When I witnessed the aforementioned events, the first thing that came to my mind was that karate and machine guns had nothing to do with Kongo history and traditional culture. How do these embodied possessions fit in with the ideology of Bundu dia Kongo, if at all? Why were the leaders and organizers of the meeting reacting in the way that they did to these instances of possession?

Karate came from Asia, and machine guns couldn't be found in the pre-colonial Kongo Kingdom. Yet both of these things are familiar to Congolese; from the popularity of karate films throughout Africa (Barber 1987:25; Frederiksen 1991:143) to the prevalence of civil war and machine gun toting soldiers on the streets of most cities and towns in the country. Although these gestures may signal a heightened spiritual warfare, and maybe even actual actions that people are willing to take to fight against state suppression, these particular embodied possessions can be seen as going against the Kongo traditionalism that BDK advocates and seeks to return to. The reactions to these types of possessions prove most fruitful for revealing the attitude of leaders of the movement. As people became possessed, security guards were sent to escort them away from the crowd, where they were almost hidden at the back, away from the gaze of the camera. Rather than embracing the spirit possession, and using it as the focus of the service, as it is in the DMNA church in chapter four, the leaders, organizers, and security personnel present at the event seemed almost embarrassed by it all. It seemed clear that this particular embodied practice was not sanctioned by Bundu dia Kongo.

The karate chops, punches, and machine gun arms were like embodied challenges to the existing authority structures within BDK because not only did they subvert the official narrative of "traditional" with their insertion of foreign modernity, but the fact

that these gestures occurred while they were possessed by spiritual forces presented a challenge as well. Spirit possession presents possible access to authority sanctioned by the spiritual realm, authority that may confirm or contradict the authority of Ne Muanda Nsemi, who himself was first called through visions and dreams of spiritual beings. For example, what would happen if someone received a revelation while possessed and spoke to the crowd? Would the leaders present recognize their authority to speak? What if they claim to be the true leader of the Kongo people? What if what they say challenges the writings and speeches of Ne Muanda Nsemi? Like the Capuchin missionaries in the Kongo Kingdom in the early 1700's who sought to monopolize the authority to interpret the bible and teach Christianity, and were thus threatened by the possession and revelations of Dona Beatrice Vita Kimpa, continuous revelation and the challenges it presents are issues that loom ever present in the movement of Bundu dia Kongo as demonstrated by the contentious embodiment of Asian martial arts and automatic weapons.

Conclusion

The ideology and objectives of Bundu dia Kongo, from a Kongo centered religion to the reformation of the Kongo Kingdom, all run counter to the structures of political and religious authority; and openly challenge their basis of relevance for the Kongo people. In their pamphlets and publications, marches, speeches, songs, and embodied cultural performances, the members of Bundu dia Kongo espouse a message of redemption and autonomy for a BisiKongo population whose political power and cultural influence has diminished since the country gained independence.

The religious authority of Bundu dia Kongo is legitimized by the prayers and songs, but one of the most important ways in which the spiritual beliefs of the group are shown is through embodied cultural performances, such as the gestures of respect and gratitude to the ancestors that are said to carry the message of the Kongo people to Nzambi Mpungu. *Bula makonko* is used to open and close prayers and as the key component of a chanting prayer that embodies the number of stages in BDK's spiritual hierarchy that the prayer must travel through to reach Nzambi. *Yinama* is also used to close prayers, and also to enact the paying of respect to divinized ancestors that can be found in the BuKongo religion. *Fukama* is used in many different contexts, for repentance and to demonstrate respect or gratitude. The cultural mission of BDK is shown in respect for traditional dances and the adoption and allowed use of all Kongo traditional instruments. In all, embodied cultural performances serve as an excellent medium for the transmission of the values and beliefs of Bundu dia Kongo as a movement.

Moreover, the responses from the spiritual realm in the form of visions, revelations, and even spirit possession at times serve as spiritual legitimation of Bundu dia Kongo's practice, mission, and ideology. If messages come from the spiritual realm, are they not as valid (if not more so) as those messages received by Christians? How can their mission be challenged if it comes from God? In this way, Bundu dia Kongo offers a compelling alternative to religious traditions such as Christianity: that of a religion with its foundation in the particular history and experiences of the Kongo people. However, contact between the world of the living and the spiritual world not only confers legitimacy on the movement, but also presents a potential space to subvert the authority

of BDK, an authority that is still being established. This can be seen in the efforts of the meeting organizers and security personnel at the February 2006 general assembly in Luozi to control and curb the manifestations of modern warfare (karate, machine gun gestures) in the spirit possessions of certain members of the group.

By focusing on reforming bodily practice inside and outside of ritual contexts, Bundu dia Kongo effectively re-forms the history of the Kongo people in a contemporary space. New subjects are being shaped, and the social world that they are bearing and attempting to create is that of a considerably re-imagined, yet not less real, Kongo Kingdom. Embodied cultural performances such as *bula makonko*, *dekama*, *fukama*, *yinama*, and participating in *makinu* outside of the church represent a revitalization of Kongo culture, as well as a reaffirmation of the spiritual, political, and cultural ideology of BDK through the body.

By advocating a religion that places Kongo people at its center and scoffs at Christianity and “white gods,” Bundu dia Kongo presents a direct challenge to the religion authority of numerous Protestant and Catholic churches that dot the landscape throughout the Lower Congo. By not only actively pursuing Kongo sovereignty by supporting candidates such as Ne Muanda Nsemi for member of the National Assembly, and then Vice-governor of the province, but also protesting the legitimacy of non-Kongo administrators to govern Kongo people (as seen in the bloody confrontations in 2007 and 2008), Bundu dia Kongo openly defies the political authority of the state in the Lower Congo.

In all, the ideology and political mission of Bundu dia Kongo becomes more concrete and real to its members through influencing their embodied practices not only in

the *zikua*, but also in everyday life. These changes in everyday cultural performances play a key role in the transformation of the mindset and vision of possibilities for not only participants in the movement, but also other Kongo people observing their actions. The case of Bundu dia Kongo also shows that embodied cultural performances can have multivalent meanings and uses that may be subversive of authority, both within and outside of the Bundu dia Kongo movement. Thus, these embodied cultural performances can even be seen as embodied revolutions, playing a key role in transforming the place and future of not just individuals, but the Kongo people overall in modern society.

Chapter 7

The Place of Embodied Performances in History and Authority

In 1666 an Italian Capuchin missionary named Michael Angelo of Gattina traveled to Pernambuco, Brazil, on the first leg of an evangelizing mission to the Kingdom of Kongo. Upon his arrival, he was struck by the curious behavior of one particular black woman that he encountered:

As soon as we landed in the port of Fernambuco[sic], we saw a great crowd of people, as well Blacks as Whites, about us, and among them a Black Woman, who kneel'd, beat her Breast, and clapt her hands upon the Ground. I enquir'd what the good Woman meant by all those motions with her hands; and a Portuguese answer'd me: Father, the meaning of it is, that she is of the kingdom of Congo, and was baptiz'd by a Capuchin; and being inform'd that you are going thither to baptize, she rejoices and expresses her joy by those outward tokens. (Churchill 1704:616)

This story of the role of embodied cultural performances in a chance encounter on the other side of the Atlantic illustrates the important role that the body plays in chronicling history, in the sense that embodied cultural performances related to past institutions, social structures, and experiences, are re-enacted in new contexts, across space and time, largely because they have become second nature, and are “sedimented in the body” (Connerton 1989:72). Embodied cultural performances, whether consciously learned or unconsciously absorbed, are a crucial means of instilling ideologies, beliefs, and values systems in the bodies of subjects in all societies. So, while the woman in this story was

thousands of miles away from her home in Congo and living in a foreign society based on plantation slavery and the racial subjugation of Africans, she continued to enact Kongo cultural performances such as *fukama* and *bula makonko* upon recognizing a Capuchin missionary. Her actions reference her own past experiences in the Kingdom of Kongo, while simultaneously alluding to a history of social hierarchy that went back several centuries in which political and religious authority were constituted, confirmed, and also challenged through embodied cultural performances such as these.

Embodied cultural performances act as an important means of incorporating the history of Kongo society, as demonstrated by this story from Brazil, as well as many other examples in this dissertation. Moreover, new histories continue to be reflected in bodily practices, such as the history of the exile of *bangunza* prophets told through the *basakata* dance, or more recently the use of fictive machine guns in Bundu dia Kongo spirit possession. Such findings build upon the work of Pierre Bourdieu and take it a step further. For although he examines the relationship between the body hexis and objective structures, he does not adequately address the question of what happens to embodied practices in situations of major social transformation. Thus, this dissertation shows that the embodiment of history reflects a process that does not just reproduce histories of past centuries. Rather, it actively incorporates recent events and social transformations that have affected and been affected by Kongo people.

Indeed, this reworking of history through embodied cultural performances such as *bimpampa* and *makinu* is made possible by their multivalent meanings and uses over time and in different contexts. An illustrative example of this is the cupped handclapping of *bula makonko*. During the pre-colonial period, this was used as sign of respect to

someone of higher social status, as sign of gratitude or to ask forgiveness, or even as a greeting. In the immediate post-colonial period it was incorporated into performances on a national stage to honor Mobutu under a coercive regime. This gesture was also simultaneously used as an embodiment of the Holy Trinity in the DMNA church. More recently, *bula makonko* acts as a form of greeting and embodied prayer that, through repetitive clapping, signifies belief in the neo-traditional religion of Bundu dia Kongo. While the uses of *bula makonko* have varied over time, what seems to connect them is the actual form of the gesture (cupped handclapping), and recurring principles of usage, such as the fact that *bula makonko* is used in interactions between two parties of different statuses (e.g. clapping before the Kongo King, sacred consecrated medicines, the president of the country, and also before God).

Another major finding of this study is the importance of interactions such as embodied cultural performances in the active and ongoing constitution of quotidian social life. While most scholars of embodied histories continue to focus on performance events (Argenti 2007; Taylor 2003), this study privileges gestures, postures, and movements as everyday performances, in the sense of Goffman (1959), that not only have social impact in everyday interactions, but also are the building blocks of larger performance events. Social positions are made and unmade through everyday interactions with others that are defined by and through embodied cultural performances. For example, in the seventeenth century, when a prospective provincial governor kneeled and threw dirt on himself before the Kongo King, the King confirmed the authority of his political appointment by giving the new governor a scepter, after which he kissed the King's hand. Or when Simon Kimbangu performed healing miracles through trembling, jumping, and the laying of

hands, he was recognized as a powerful prophet during the colonial period. Likewise, when Mobutu Sese Seko organized national festivals of animation that were built upon the everyday songs and dances of his subjects, their performances legitimized his position as the president of a one-party state. These examples demonstrate the importance of gestures and dances for establishing and reconfirming political and religious authority on a daily basis.

In this dissertation, I have built upon and expanded work on the relationship between performance and power by focusing specifically on performance and authority. Gestures of respect, war dances, trembling during the *kingunza* movements, political and cultural animation, and *yinama* in BDK worship, are just a few examples of the role of embodied cultural performances in constituting, maintaining, and challenging authority. While the fingers of the Kongo King trembled as he blessed his subjects, confirming his own authority through this performance, the trembling body of the Prophet Simon Kimbangu served as a sign of spiritual authority from a Christian God that directly challenged the power of the Belgian colonial administration. Attempts by the leadership of Bundu dia Kongo to control members who during possession represent foreign modernities such as machine guns and karate, which might be used to contest the religious authority of the leaders of the movement, provide yet another example of the potential use of gestures to challenge authority. The multiple uses and meanings that the same set of gestures may have underscores Margaret Drewal's point that "indeed both subversion and legitimation can emerge in the same utterance or act" (1991:2). Thus, any discussion of the interrelatedness of performance and authority must attend to the role of embodied cultural performances in the making and unmaking of that same authority.

Cultural performances can be used to challenge authority; nonetheless, another finding of this project is that both coercion and prohibition must be accounted for in studies of performance and power, and performance and authority. Mobutu's policy of political and cultural animation, essentially based on coerced dancing and singing, stands as the best example of explicit coercion, along with Maillet's policy of forced dancing in Luozi territory to combat people's participation in the prophetic movements during the colonial period. In both instances, coerced embodied cultural performances were used as not only a means of distracting the population, but also to impress the political authority of both the colonial administration and Mobutu upon the very bodies of colonial subjects and Congolese citizens, respectively. Prohibition of embodied cultural performances also stands out as another way in which religious and political authority was constituted. European missionaries during the colonial period prohibited the embodied practices of the *kingunza* movement, as well as participation in secular *makinu*, and yet these prohibitions were creatively deployed or undermined by Kongo people seeking to accomplish particular goals.

Another striking aspect of this study is the interrelatedness of political and religious authority. In several of the chapters, both types of authority were often intertwined, from beliefs in divine kingship in the former Kongo Kingdom (Hilton 1985; Cuvelier 1953b), to Mobutu's political authority as a dictator that began to expand into a type of religious authority, to Ne Muanda Nsemi, who is both the spiritual leader of the Bundu dia Kongo movement and a national congressman representing Luozi territory, while still seeking to restore the Kongo Kingdom as a separate nation-state. In many instances, it is often the religious authority that precedes the move into state governance;

in most cases both forms of authority feed off of one another. What this suggests is politics and religion cannot be seen as distinct, separate spheres of influence; rather, they are often intertwined and are both crucial elements of any articulation of authority.

I recall once again the description of embodied cultural performance in Brazil that opened this chapter to point to one of the most important implications of this study in terms of the possibilities of further research. My own intellectual journey began in the Americas, eventually moved across the Atlantic to Congo, and now has come full circle to look toward the New World once again. This study has great significance for research in the development of New World embodied cultural forms by providing key information useful for comparative purposes, as well as simply pointing out the importance of embodied gestures that may have been overlooked by scholars before. It was only after I had done extensive research on Kongo *bimpampa* in West Central Africa that the gestures of the woman in Brazil made sense to me. In fact, I had read that same passage before but had skipped over it as insignificant for my project. How often have other scholars failed to notice descriptions of embodied practices such as these?

Enslaved Africans brought their ideologies and beliefs with them to the New World, carried in their gestures, dances, and general comportment. Recognition of the importance of embodied cultural performances in the constitution of social life and authority in Africa challenges us to look again with fresh eyes at the embodied practices of enslaved Africans in the Americas. Some scholars have argued that during slavery it was largely impossible to reproduce “institutions” under the duress of the slavery regime (Mintz and Price 1976). However, perhaps they focused on the wrong cultural elements. While enslaved Kongo people were unable to rebuild the Kongo Kingdom in the New

World, the social hierarchy and concepts of spirituality lived on in their embodied cultural performances, which themselves may have been a source of challenging the authority of their owners and oppressors in New World societies. Yet, like their counterparts in Africa, these performances had various meanings and uses over time and in changing contexts. Attention to embodied cultural performances will renew dialogue on the development of New World cultures, and bring a new focus on the everyday interactions that referenced larger social structures, institutions, and belief systems that were embedded in the bodies and gestures of enslaved Africans who were taken to the Americas.

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N.d. Unnamed video of Political and Cultural Animation, Mbengo Mbengo du Bas-Zaire.