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Textures of Power
Central Africa in the Long Twentieth Century

Florence Bernault,
Benoît Henriet,
Emery Kalema (eds)

Textures of Power: Central Africa in the Long Twentieth Century

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Edited by
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In memory of Prof. dr. Jacob Kivilu Sabakinu (1945-2018)

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Florence Bernault, Benoît Henriet & Emery Kalema

Thornton Dial, *History Refused to Die*, 2004
Medium: Okra stalks and roots, clothing, collaged drawings, tin, wire, steel, Masonite, steel chain, enamel, and spray paint
Dimensions: 8 ft. 6 in. × 87 in. × 23 in. (259.1 × 221 × 58.4 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

A Note on the Book's Cover: Thornton Dial's 'History Refused to Die' (2004)

African American artist Thornton Dial's unique technique of sculptural assemblages made of cast-off and recycled materials re-assorted in monumental arrangements, resonates deeply with our concept of 'textures'.[1] Dial's life in Alabama (1928-2016) was one of a poor, unschooled teenage farmer, then a factory worker in heavy construction and steel. Rooted in the enduring African-American vernacular expression of the Black Belt, where families build sculptures in their yards or on their porch, innocuous looking assemblages whose meaning only the learned eye can see, and where female artists produce quilt masterpieces, Dial's art was one of a self-taught artist. Yet, impossible to categorize, Dial was also an extraordinary 'cross-over' painter and sculptor: in 1993, his first major exhibitions in New York were simultaneously held at the Museum of American Folk Art and the New Museum of Contemporary Art.

The largest group of enslaved people shipped to the Americans from the 1600s to the 1900s came from Central Africa. Weaving textures and binding artefacts and 'things', Thornton Dial reminds us of the importance of this regional heritage in the black Diaspora and in return, the significance of African American culture and politics for Central Africans. The opacity and secrecy inherent in his art recall the inscrutability of ritual composition in Africa.

Like the black vernacular art of the Southern US, some of Dial's work refer to the symbol of the wheel, an ancient Kongolese cultural element. But more than reconstructing tradition, Dial's intricate assortments of woven stained fabric and painted clothing, twigs, branches, steel, wire, cupboard, and newspaper collage assembled by enamel and spray paint, are remarkable for making different forms and aesthetics meet. Although Dial's art pieces often depict racist devastations, they also celebrate spiritual triumph and material beauty. So do the chapters of this volume, steeped in the disasters of slavery and colonialism, but also in the vibrant energy and resilient spirit of Central Africa.

[1] Written with references taken from *Thornton Dial in the 21st Century* (2005); particularly the essays 'The Road from Emelle,' by William Arnett, and 'The Aesthetics of (In)visibility: Thornton Dial and the Politics of Art,' by J. Cubbs, M. L. McPhail, and E. W. Metcalfe Jr.

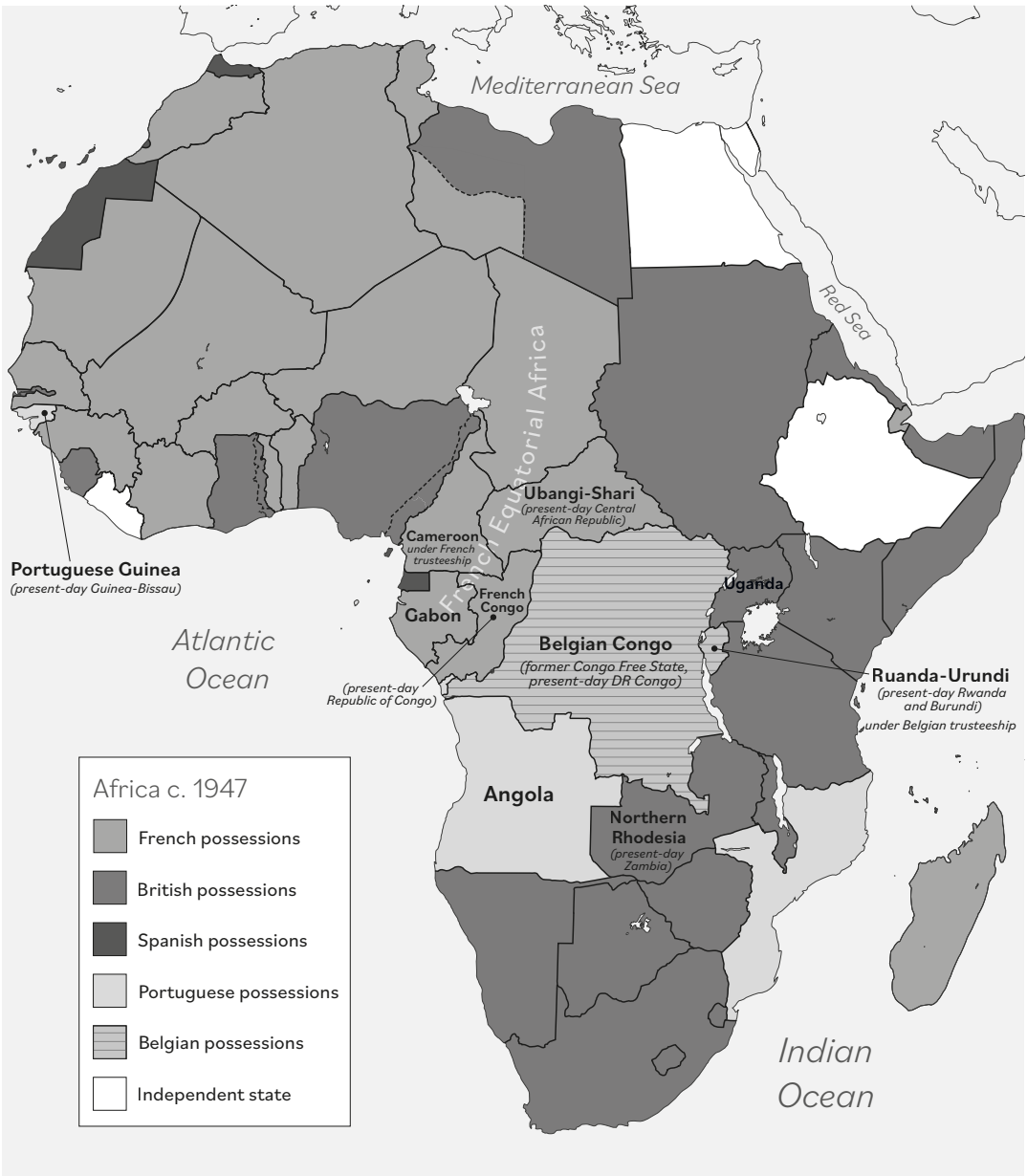


Figure 1: Political map of Central Africa, including the countries studied in the volume

Introduction

Florence Bernault, Benoît Henriet, Emery Kalema

This volume considers the long twentieth century from a Central African vantage point and pursues a twofold agenda. First, it provides a curated overview of the current state of research on power in the macro-region across the humanities, fostering productive dialogues between anthropology, history, historical linguistics and cultural studies. Second, the book recentres Central Africa as an important laboratory to study the many guises taken by 'modern' forms of power, and to understand how they were shaped by vernacular, long-standing practices and uses. In doing so, it proposes a critique of the epistemic legacy of Frederick Cooper's and Ann Laura Stoler's introduction to *Tensions of Empire* (1997), and its lasting impact on colonial studies, including of European domination in Africa. By joining these two perspectives, *Textures of Power* sketches out new directions for future research in the (post)colony along four main directions: the importance of gender, sexuality, body politics, and libidinal economies in understanding state policies and the possibility of intimate and collective agency; the mystical and nocturnal side of power; the new dynamics opened by global connectivities and digital technologies; and, finally, the potential of research on 'more-than-human' forms of power.

For centuries, power has been an object of fascination for scholars in humanities and social sciences. Its definition has occupied the minds of philosophers since the days of the Athenian agora. Its iterations across space and time have drawn historians to plough through miles of archival records. Sociologists and anthropologists have immersed themselves in countless fields to study how power circulates and (dis)organizes societies. All have pointed out its fluidity, embodied in countless combinations of control and insurgence. Yet because of its polysemy, its ability to remain intelligible across disciplines and cultures, its ubiquity when setting the gears of humankind in motion, power is elusive. As the book's broad range of contributions underline, even within a relatively contained spatial and temporal framework, power's many manifestations and locations are difficult to capture and articulate on paper in a legible way.

Among the many attempts at grasping the nature of power, philosopher Byung-Chul Han's recent offering provides a productive way forward. Chan argues that all forms of power are essentially relational, bringing together social actors in meaningful interactions. Power is thus 'a medium of communication' (Han 2019: 5-6), the guises of which can vary along an almost infinite spectrum, ranging from normalization and reward to brute coercion. For Chan, the essence of power remains stable across its myriad iterations, whether it manifests itself in public displays of sovereign violence, in laws and decrees, or in the routine performance

of obedient behaviours, to follow Foucauldian typologies. Allocating meaning and purpose to life forms and to inanimate matter, it organizes spaces and defines temporalities. In every one of its embodiments, power is about obtaining effects, curbing randomness, and fostering predictability.

However, such overarching definitions can only bring us so far in understanding what power *is,* how it is felt and what it can generate. Power is better grasped when looking at the varied *stages*, *sites*, and *situations* on which its relational, communicative guises are played out. It is when hierarchies are put into effect, when spaces are enclosed and resources divided, when structures are challenged that power is rendered visible in all its dynamism, its effectivity, and its contradictions. The ambition of this edited volume is to offer a curated overview of power's deployment by focusing on some of its most important iterations in Central Africa.

The political, economic, and environmental importance of this large and diverse area has been established by the work of Jan Vansina and his students. Indeed, the macro-region has lain close to the very foundation of the western discipline of African history, bringing key studies on historical linguistics and migrations, the slave trade, urban cultures, and colonial violence. Yet at times, it remains overlooked in global, and even in Africanist scholarship (Piccolino & Franklin 2019). Furthermore, and like other regions on the continent, the history of Central Africa is often framed by the colonial episode, preventing the deployment of *longue durée* reflections. It is the ambition of the present book's fluid chronological scope, rooted in deep historical times and branching out towards the present, to move beyond this increasingly tired chronology.

Looking at historical dynamics from the Central African field entices us to challenge Eric Hobsbawm's notion of a coherent, 'short' twentieth century, signposted by the First World War and fall of the Soviet Union (Hobsbawm 1995: 5), and to follow the lead of Giovani Arrighi's notion of a 'long twentieth century' (Arrighi 1994). Reflecting on key elements of the capitalist world economy's development crises and restructuring, Arrighi tracks these changes over six centuries. Likewise, our proposition of a 'long twentieth century' suggests that the historical transformations undergone by Central Africa in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are inextricably linked to much earlier practices of power. Although important, chronological boundaries strapped in the usual sequence of centuries make little sense when we consider how vocabularies, practices, and experience of power in this vast region are interwoven in the *longue durée*. Starting with early histories of power embedded in historical linguistics (Stephens, this volume; Leitao de Almeida, this volume) we acknowledge that the ways in which people negotiate and experience power in contemporary Central Africa are partly explained by long-term continuities and ruptures. The collection thus starts in ancient times with the research of Rhiannon Stephens on patrilineality and motherhood in North Nyanza-speaking communities, from the eighth century CE onwards (this volume). Stephens examines how people mobilized shifting and contradictory ideologies of

motherhood to reproduce political power in hereditary forms, assigning to it an emotional dimension (this volume). Marcos Abreu Leitao de Almeida (this volume) examines how the metaphor of 'slavery is carrying' (*-*pɪkà*), created 3000 years ago by proto-Bantu locutors to convey meanings of vertical social relationship, was dislodged in the seventeenth century by a new repertoire of slavery as 'plundering' *(#-bundu*: 'loot, slave'). The latter term is still active in contemporary Kisikongo, showing how ancient conceptualizations of slavery continue to animate present imaginations.

Our use of a 'long twentieth century' means that we also look at the virtual futures of power. One important question raised is whether current power formations will survive, and which new ones have emerged that can upset or reinforce them. Thus, at the other end of our temporal spectrum, Alice Aterianus-Owanga and Katrien Pype bring us towards the virtual future, studying the digitization of music as a technology of power in contemporary Central Africa, and the role of *tiktokeuses* in creating digital scripts that fuel Kinois' lust for better 'elsewheres' (this volume).

This volume also suggests the considerable fertility of conversations across scholarly boundaries, at the same time it tests the geographical definitions of 'Central Africa'. The contributions by historians, historical linguists, sociologists, and anthropologists bring together multi-angled engagements with power and its many iterations in the region. Central Africa is usually defined as stretching from the Atlantic coast (Cameroon in the north, Angola in the South) to the plateaus and mountainous regions of the East (the Great Lakes), spanning the vast ecological and historical region of the Congo Basin. Today, Central Africa includes eleven countries (Angola, Burundi, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and São Tomé and Principe), all part of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and has a total population of about 160 million. It is a region rich in natural resources, covering the world's largest tropical forest area after the Amazon. Ecological zones in Central Africa are diverse, spanning from extensive grass-fields (northern Cameroon, southern Angola, eastern Congo), high mountains in the northeast (the Virunga chains between Lake Edward and Lake Kivu, the Rwenzori range between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda) and the volcanic line of lesser mountains bordering the region in the West (starting in the islands of Sao Tomé, Principe and Bioko, peaking in Mt Cameroon, and ending northeast in the high Cameroon grasslands), to the marshy depression of the Congo Basin and the rainforest. The rainforest itself (a climate determined by the amount of annual rainfall, between 1,600 and 2,000 mm) presents a rich tapestry of landscapes, from dense canopies to forest galleries along mighty rivers, clearings, prairies, and hills. As Jan Vansina explained in his seminal study on the rainforest, 'in each spot of this large area, relief, soils and climate largely procure a specific landscape' (1990, 35). Dominant soils are rich in iron and relatively infertile, and rich soils, such as volcanic ones, are rare (Vansina 1990). Although

data is tentative before the late nineteenth century, the region has been unevenly settled, with densely populated areas along the Atlantic Ocean, rivers, and lakes, and almost empty swaths of rainforests. Today, Central Africa is the place of considerable urban areas, such as the cities of Brazzaville (2 million) and Kinshasa (16 million), facing each other across the Congo River and the Pool Malebo, and the capital of Angola, Luanda (9 million) on the Atlantic Ocean. Several cities reach one million people, in Cameroon (Douala, Yaoundé, Maroua), in the DRC (Lubumbashi and Mbuji-Mayi), in Rwanda (Kigali). In addition to the 11 countries of ECCAS, we include two countries of the Great Lakes region in the East, Burundi and Uganda, in the high mountain range and lakes bordering the depression of the Congo River Basin. In addition to long-standing political 'traditions' and 'collective imaginations' particular to the societies of the rainforest (Vansina 1990) and other ecozones (Vansina 2005), societies in the region nurtured many shared historical dynamics, encouraged by commerce and vigorous exchanges in people, languages, and ideas. At least since the era of the Atlantic trade, commercial and cultural routes crossed over the Great Lakes to reach Eastern Africa and the Indian Ocean. People travelled, as well as objects, commodities, ritual techniques and linguistic repertoires (Gromellund, Schoenbrun and Vansina 2023).

Yet colonialism fragmented this area along new boundaries and competing ruling systems: Portuguese, Belgian, French, and British. The latter often looked away from the more occidental French, Portuguese, and Belgian empires. To counter these colonial legacies, four chapters in this collection are set in Uganda, and one in Burundi, prompting us to reflect on these divisions, and the promises of shared scholarship. Rhiannon Stephens writes about the textures of power in early Nyanza linguistic communities, while Neil Kodesh reflects on the language of syphilis woven between British doctors and Ugandan communities at the Mengo hospital. Patrick Otim studies the emergence of strange new 'chiefs' in Acholiland. Derek Peterson demonstrates how dictator Idi Amin Dada used the radio to institutionalize 'arbitrariness' as an infrastructure of the state. Aidan Russell looks at the polyphonies of power in the rhythmic, inarticulate, yet highly significant phonic styles of authority, proposing a creative leap in how languages of power may be heard across Burundi's modern history. Together with chapters on seven other countries (and four colonial zones) the authors provide illuminating comparisons with other parts of Africa and the global world. Finally, we give space to the history of the Portuguese colony geographically separated from the vast area of Central Africa, Guinea-Bissau. We believe that Pedro Cerdeira's study of the relationship between the Portuguese civilian administration and military forces during Guinea-Bissau's liberation brings much needed attention to the ways in which the Portuguese colonial state functioned as a conflictual, even porous entity grappling with the expectations of populations, African authorities, and its own agents.

Power and Its Textures

We propose the notion of *textures* as a provocation and an encouragement. 'Textures' suggests something tangible and experiential. It evokes the density of threads loomed together to weave a fabric, and the sensory feeling of touching different surfaces. Textures can be warm and cold, appealing and repulsive, familiar and alien. When transposed to the realm of power, 'textures' allude to its multifaceted *experiences*, what it means and how it feels to be entrenched in dynamics of order and hierarchy, of law and arbitrariness, of violence and compliance. Importantly, too, the notion ties together the construction of scholars' objects of research, their archival and field observations, and their writing practices. Indeed, creating new social and historical analyses often requires following the thread of hypotheses, weaving together arguments, and untying the knots of contradictory sources and patterns. 'Textures', as a concept and a reading tool, helps bring together these many strands, from the manifestations of power in Central Africa to the research paths carved out by students of the region.

With an illuminating discussion by Béatrice Hibou and Mohamed Tozy's recent book, *Tisser le temps politique au Maroc* (2020), Peter Geschiere and Rogers Orock bring attention to the fact that the metaphor of weaving (*tisser*) overcomes the seduction of binary readings, as well as too linear a narrative of power. Instead of two successive modes of governing in Morocco (an imperial one, and a nation-state one), Hibou and Tozy demonstrate that these two modes articulate in contemporaneous fashion, creating a tight, constantly shifting fabric of power. This osmosis naturalizes present-day modes of government – as an *Einverständnis* (common understanding) à la Weber. In Central Africa as well, the interactive nature of power can be considered a tapestry where emic forms were woven together with subsequent modes of government and authority, creating a complex and ever-changing canvas.

In Central Africa, 'textures' tie together manifold historical situations in which power is effectively (re)produced, not as principles, rules, and agreements laid out on paper, but as it takes place when life forms are brought together in effective, meaningful relations. If we follow Chan's suggestion that power is communication above all else, then textures evoke the forms taken by these unequal dialogues. They include the possibility of agentive, interacting social agents, who can use existing threads, create new ones, and knit together original patterns – if sometimes minuscule and hidden – in the overall fabric of power. Yet, as Geschiere and Orock perceptively signal in this volume, textures do not sit well with the reality of abrupt, unpredictable shifts. In the case of conspiracy theories for instance, rumours can rapidly unravel the threads of social cohesion, creating new alliances and crystallizing powerful violence against designated victims. Tearing away at the fabric of power and authority, such incidents need perhaps to be explained through different tools of analysis. But they bring attention to another dimension

in the metaphor of 'textures' and their heuristic potential. Indeed, textures of power can hardly be written as smooth and continuous fabrics of narratives and analyses. Instead, if 'textures' can translate something of the reality of power, it can only exist as a loose, uneven patchwork of knots, holes, loose threads, and scraps of fabric. Compact entanglements of agendas, ambitions, and actions form indeed opaque knots of power, that confront scholars with the task of untying to retrieve the agency of hidden actors and factors. Holes, on the other hand, symbolize the many silences that surround and mask the manifestations of power, and the lack of traces left by conflicts large and small. Silences and the destruction of archives, moreover, are common modes of action for power, either dominant or subaltern. The proposition of 'textures of power', therefore, should not suggest the workings of a narrative cloak that would conceal the violent and destructive patterns of history.

Violence is no stranger to the long-term dynamics of globalization in Central Africa from the sixteenth century onwards. Many of the book's contributions are rooted in the deep histories of unequal and brutal exchanges, spanning four centuries of transcontinental slave trades, eight decades of colonial predation and more than sixty years of postcolonial extraversion. These succeeding and sometimes overlapping global engagements share several traits. First, they are characterized by the extraction of African natural resources and labour forces at the behest of outsiders and elite intermediaries (Bayart 1999; Ferguson 2005; Cooper 2014). Second, they impose new grammars of difference to allocate privileges along 'racial', 'ethnic', and gendered lines of fracture (Stoler and Cooper 1997, Keese 2015, Jean-Baptiste 2014, Esseng Aba'a & Tonda 2015). Third, they mobilize an assemblage of reinvented 'traditions' and guises of 'modern' legal-rationalism to bolster the legitimacy of colonial outsiders and neo-patrimonial rulers (Ranger 1993; Schatzberg 2001). Fourth, the uncertain foundations of power holders' claim for legitimacy make them prone to violence and arbitrariness (Thomas 2012; Mbembe 2001). And fifth, spirituality and religion loom large over experiences and understandings of power (Geschiere 1997; Afolayan et al. 2018; Eggers 2023). Taken together, these broad-brush strokes sketch out an imperfect, grainy picture of Central African textures of power, that each of the following chapters endeavours to sharpen, deepen, and complicate.

These global entanglements and the intercultural and unequal 'transactions' they entailed, generated in turn a broad repertoire of definitions of power for Central Africans. Nicole Eggers, in her groundbreaking study of the Kitawala movement, underlines that many of her interlocutors simultaneously invoked power in numerous and contradictory meanings. They regarded it as both spiritual and political, 'modern,' and 'traditional', Christian and animist, benevolent and malevolent. Rather than adopting the framework of syncretism to make sense of these apparent clashes, Eggers suggests that power in Central Africa can be all these things 'at once', its many guises adding up to one another without cancelling

each other (Eggers 2023: 5-8). In a similar vein, contributors to this collection bring complex architectures to light, demonstrating that power-as-communication in 'modern' Central Africa not only mobilizes actors of different capacities, but also invokes a vast array of definitions and understandings. Benoît Henriet (this volume) analyzes anew an important revolt in 1931 Belgian Congo, showing how it opened the way for transgressive, interwoven forms of power to emerge. Such textures borrowed from many sources, emerging in shapes simultaneously anti-colonial, spiritual, and channeled by 'modern' technologies. In Guinea Bissau, Pedro Cerdeira (this volume) subverts state-civil society dichotomies by showing how war added new layers of complexity and frictions in the Portuguese administration of the colony. The presence of the army, supposedly trying to reinforce the grip of the late colonial state, revealed its inner fragilities and tensions, redefining colonial power as a fragmented, tense network disputed in the field itself among its very agents. As the army and the administration clashed, the colonial state was stripped bare as a porous entity, torn away by expectations of the populations, African authorities, and its own agents.

The multifaceted states, iterations, and structures of power have been and still are intimately linked to the multilingual mosaic of the region. Across Central Africa, vernacular idioms mingle with imported 'official' languages and African lingua franca. Each of these tongues support their own episteme, which in turn helps convey specific declinations of power. Communication thus often generates polyglottic assemblages, easing the coexistence of power in many facets 'at once', as Eggers suggested. Polyglottic milieus also turn translations into fields of tension, where the selection of idiomatic equivalents and the finetuning of definitions can have tangible consequences. Neil Kodesh (this volume) sheds light on the involvement of Baganda intermediaries in the development of a colonial lexicon of venereal diseases in late nineteenth century Buganda. By doing so, these actors contributed in turn to shape on early British biopolitical interventions.

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, power holders have made use of live spectacles and radio programs to broadcast their authority, diffuse propaganda, and exercise 'sonic censorship' (Moorman 2019). Marissa Moorman's pioneer work on the radio and decolonization wars in Angola insists on the various and nuanced ways in which different actors in different political contexts used airwaves to project their respective views on the future of the country (Moorman 2019). Derek Peterson (this volume) shows how airwaves became crucial textures and media of power for Idi Amin to edict policies and castigate enemies with immediate effect. Collective indoctrination could however open the door for bottom-up critiques. Enid Guene (this volume) examines how theatre plays, coopted by the monopolistic mining company Gécamines to hammer its paternalistic ethos, served workers to convey grievances and anxieties. Finally, the performative dimension of discursive power can flow beyond the spoken word. Aidan Russell (this volume) evokes the 'musical effects' of power in Burundi, where royal authority was expected to follow

the rhythmic pattern of cyclical transformation, and where political dynamics expressed themselves in the dissonance and harmonies of polyphonic engagements.

Next to language and soundscapes, space is a key component and a primary site for the unfurling of power in pathways and infrastructures, settlements and intimate settings, public landscapes, and workplaces. Frederick Cooper (1994) famously asserted that colonial networks of power followed a specific pattern, yet critiqued Michel Foucault's notion of a pervasive, 'capillary' power, penetrating all aspects of social life. For Cooper, colonial power was rather 'arterial', that is 'concentrated spatially and socially' (Cooper 1994: 1533), aggregated along a skeletal network of strategic enclaves and the pathways that tied them together. Contributions to *Textures of Power* both validate and challenge this postulate. Valentine Dewulf (this volume), uses the spatial arrangement and the dire state of prisons in Belgian Congo as a physical embodiment of colonial contradictions, caught between 'civilizational' ambitions and the maintenance of racist hierarchies. Importantly, colonial power was not exerted only from the strategic outset of jails, missions, barracks, plantations, and mines. It also flowed and congealed across sites deemed as marginal by colonial stakeholders, such as markets, initiation societies, healing rituals, churches, and cleansing movements. With a detailed study of Matadi, the main Atlantic port in the Belgian Congo, John Lagae and the late Congolese historian Jakob Sabakinu bring original insights into colonial urban planning. They direct our attention to colonial technologies of segregation, demonstrating how the latter were defeated by Congolese inhabitants and the vibrant life of Matadi. For a more recent case-study, Brice Molo (this volume) writes a fascinating chapter on the power of monuments to 'necropolize' cities and political spaces. Fuelled by empirical research on a Cameroon train derailment in Eseka, in 2016, Molo's chapter traces the afterlives of the disaster and the ways in which inhabitants of Eseka resisted the monumentalizing of their city. Many of the spatial instruments and *dispositifs* of power were not permanent, but instead mobile and shifting. Florence Bernault (this volume), for instance, sheds light on the long history of portable containers in Central Africa, and their role in engineering occult power and 'dark capital'. Containers could be mobilized to carry mediums of exchange used to obtain slaves, to forge alliances with malevolent forces, or to transport riches borne of corruption. Likewise, David Gordon's chapter on the agentive role of precolonial power objects, and the hybrid Euro-African ones introduced during the colonial occupation, uncovers the ability of transient objects to crystallize forms of power (this volume). Ancient charms could connect the past to the present by rendering visible the invisible world, helping communities to construct varied terrains of power (Gordon 2012). During colonialism, such objects as letters, flags, and treaties began to exert power: they established new patronage and authority networks, and strengthened European power.

The animating life of objects, which sociologist Bruno Latour, in looking at society as made from agentive networks of people, objects, techniques, non-living

entities, natural factors, and so forth, famously called *actants*, brings us to the question of agency and its distribution among humans and non-humans. Although the latter will be discussed later in this introduction, researching 'agency' has long been a key issue in the field of power studies, and, in Africa, in slavery and colonial studies. Indeed, the reduction of millions of people of African descent into servitude, and, later, their submission as the racialized subjects of colonial empires, have motivated scholars to give them back a fraction of their humanity by bringing to the fore their capacity to act meaningfully, and to counter the oppressive structures in which they were forcibly enmeshed. Giving a 'voice to the voiceless' remains today one of the main incentives for students and young scholars to delve into these violent fields, to read archives 'against the grain', and to mobilize oral sources to piece together the scattered fragments of 'subaltern' agency.

Yet as early as 2003, Walter B. Johnson criticized agency as a reductive concept, a well-meaning yet hardly productive way to embrace marginalized actors and their ability to weigh in on the course of history (Johnson 2003: 113-115). Building on Johnson's critique, Lynn Thomas alerted that agency indeed risked turning into a conceptual dead-end, 'shoehorning all historical subjects into the likeness of autonomous, enlightened individuals' (Thomas 2016: 326). When used as a generic notion, agency often does little to render marginalized experiences of power in all their complexity and contradictions. Johnson and Thomas both suggested that scholars should move beyond understanding agency as the liberal 'being-in-the-world' of rational individuals seeking to maximize their welfare and autonomy. To complicate this Western-centred, all-encompassing toolkit, Thomas suggests studying fantasies, short-term satisfaction, or absent-mindedness as powerful behavioural incentives, alongside and sometimes against a conscious, political will for emancipation (Thomas 2016: 333).

It is also crucial to de-romanticize the study of agency in Central Africa, and to avoid confining social actors in a false dichotomy between 'traditional' modes of action and modern/global ones, and between 'good' or 'bad' forms of agency. The work of Naminata Diabate (2020) brings significant help in this endeavour. Set in West and Southern Africa, Diabaté's study explores 'naked agency', or the public disrobing organized by women to confront state authorities. Diabaté insists on the ambivalent character of these actions. She critiques the idea that naked agency should be reduced to a specific African ontology, demonstrating instead that it has been mobilized in many societies across the globe. Pointing to the fact that naked agency stands at a liminal position between state biopolitics and people's use of their bodies, Diabaté defines agency as co-constitutive (Diabate 2020: 37). When female activists attack patriarchal structures, they are in fact working with and within these very structures. Moreover, the act of defiant public disrobing often derives from a place of extreme vulnerability and disempowerment, and can have counter-productive effects, leading to physical attacks or social shaming within the community women are trying to defend. Along this de-romanticizing of subaltern

agency, Sylvie Ayimpam, Jacky Bouju, and Michel Bisa Kibul (this volume) offer a fascinating study of the Makala prison in Kinshasa (DRC), and the paradoxical forms of agency that have been negotiated between state authorities and prisoners. Charged by Congolese authorities to run the prison, a group of inmates led by a 'Governor general' has organized itself to exercise this power. A mafia-like organization, the group monopolizes the social regulation of the prison through violence, extorting other prisoners to capture the resources needed to reproduce the group's power. Miles away and centuries earlier, as Stephanie Rupp, Philippe Ambata, Stephane Molong, and Abel Mungoie reconstruct in their innovative chapter (this volume), the Bangando community on the border between Cameroon and Gabon, succeeded in fine-tuning an original and highly efficient political art. The authors call this art 'the power of between'. A centuries-long craft, the 'power of between' combines accommodation of and resistance to the power of the Bangando's opponents, along with a historical willingness of individuals, families, and clans to split and fragment. Thanks to these agentive skills, the Bangando have emerged as the main powerbrokers between the multiethnic assemblage of the Lobéké forest, and with outsiders.

The era of the Atlantic and slave-trade, spanning four centuries from the early sixteenth century onwards, has been crucial in reconfiguring the textures of power in Central Africa. Studies have discussed the rich tapestry of actors and their tactics in this period, from the *donas* (rich Afro-Atlantic women) of Benguela and Luanda, often former slaves themselves, yet invested in trafficking captives (Candido 2013, Candido & Jones 2019) to the slaves, commercial agents, local communities, and territorial leaders who benefitted from new opportunities or suffered from the upheavals of the times (Harms, 1981, Miller 1988, Thornton 1998 & 1999). Historians have insisted on two major historical trends: on the one hand, in contrast to the subsequent colonial domination, they argue that local leaders and polities, despite their fragmentation and the turmoil of slave capture, war, and famine, preserved political autonomy and a significant capacity for social and cultural innovation. Anthropologist Jane Guyer reminded scholars of Central Africa of the enduring significance of logics of political composition and the valuation of individual skills by big men, even in the turbulence of the Atlantic trade (1993). On the other hand, authors emphasize the diffusion of increasingly toxic forms of power such as the dependency of leaders' authority over imported goods, the lust for inert wealth, the territorializing of authority, and the capacity to produce and commodify people to answer the new conditions for pre-eminence (Gordon 2017, Harms 2019, Macola 2023). The chapter offered by Maxime de Formanoir (this volume) illustrates deep continuities between the era of the slave-trade and contemporary imaginaries of power. Mboyo, a male initiation society formerly located on the Atlantic coast, and responsible for maintaining order and making women obey, used a powerful charm in the form of a sculpted head on top of a bundle made from cloth. In this bundle, certain bones of a slave of the type 'who

comes from afar' would have been pressed or crushed. Magically captured to act as an 'invisible workforce', such slave figure transformed into a hybrid entity able to clean and to activate the Mboyo charm. This power tactic recalled the fact that slaves could be revered by host societies as powerful healers, positioned on the threshold between marginalized, kinless persons, and awesome ritual experts. A classic study written by John Janzen (1982) on *Lemba,* a cult of affliction organized to cure the illness and misfortunes of Central Africans vested in the slave trade, provides a window into the paradoxical dynamics of power-making during the Atlantic era. *Lemba* both cured commercial elites and asserted their power by creating networks of knowledge and market transactions across Central Africa. Like other major studies of forms of power in this era, Janzen follows the cult across the Atlantic, tracing its deployment in the Caribbean and the Americas (see also Miller 1988, Sweet 2003). Although our collection does not include contributions on the diasporic dimension of power in Central Africa, this dimension has become crucial to the global understanding of the region's early and contemporary history.

Beyond the New Colonial Studies

The many textures of power deployed and experienced in Central Africa over the long term were put to the test during the colonial occupation. To analyze histories of power during this period, we acknowledge the lasting legacy of Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper's seminal volume, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (1997). Histories and anthropologies of power in Africa learned enormously from the propositions articulated in the introduction to the book. Moving away from the set-up of conquest-resistance, Stoler and Cooper focused on the dynamics of encounter, circulation, and tension. By recognizing that 'Europe was made by its imperial projects', they brought attention to the ways in which colonies informed bourgeois cultures at home (Cooper & Stoler 1997: 1). *Tensions of Empire*, moreover, firmly applied to colonial history Foucault's idea of the entanglement between power and knowledge. In doing so, the authors focused on the cultural work of empires. Insisting on what was specifically 'cultural' in the technologies of power deployed by colonial domination, they asked historians to look at circuits of knowledge and communication across imperial units – a field now revived by histories of transnational imperial expertise (Cooper & Stoler 1997: 28).

Tensions of Empire provided both an early assessment of the studies emerging in the 1990s and a bold theorizing that helped these approaches coalesce into the field of the 'New Colonial Studies'. Bringing Foucault in the context of empire, historians started studying colonialism as intimate technologies of knowledge and desire, questioning colonial policies and models from the vantage point of the intimate, the sexual, and the domestic. Cooper, Stoler, and the authors they edited, argued that colonialism worked also as a struggle to establish *grammars*

of difference in the sphere of sexual economies, the labour of reproduction, and domestic arrangements (Cooper & Stoler 1997: 3-4). In the Anglophone academy, research on race, and the aesthetic politics of knowledge had been pursued by such literary critics and cultural scholars as Anne McClintock (1995), Stuart Hall (1997), and Catherine Hall (2000). In the same momentum, the New Colonial Studies rediscovered the seminal texts of Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi and Aimé Césaire, and drew inspiration from the Subaltern Studies.

Yet, with a few exceptions, Cooper and Stoler's research agenda remained firmly located in Western history. Empirical findings related to the ideologies of colonial domination rather than the experience and the agency of the colonized. As noted in Gregory Mann's nuanced critique, while *Tensions of Empire* had brought Europe and Africa in 'a single analytical field', the latter remained mostly discursive, obscuring the 'particular and ethnographic elements of colonized societies' (Mann 2005: 412; see also Vanthemsche 2012).

From a focus on empires and imperial ideologies in the nineteenth and twentieth century, studies of colonial domination are now concerned with the longer time frame of precolonial histories of power and capacity. In the 1990s, as previously mentioned, Jane Guyer had already changed interpretations of power and wealth in precolonial Central Africa: decoupling these pursuits from accumulative strategies, she argued that powerful men were primarily vested in mobilizing the unique social and intellectual value of individuals that they tried to compose around them (1993). Fresh avenues linking histories and anthropologies of power, started by Jan Vansina at the University of Wisconsin Madison (1990), combined with historical linguistics at Northwestern University. Under the lead of David Schoenbrun, a younger generation of historians set out to uncover deeper textures of politics, violence, and vulnerability in Central and East Africa (Schoenbrun 2006 & 2021, Stephens 2013 & this volume, De Luna 2016, Almeida 2020).

In the 1980s and 1990s, bolstered in part by the Subaltern Studies, students of Africa had already recentred their queries on the initiatives of local people, local forces, and local perspectives, including their impact on the colonizing apparatus. Since the 2010s, changes in the textures of power have been primarily analyzed in terms of *emic* valuation and meanings, with an eye on explaining contemporary crises. Two examples illustrate the relocating colonial history in longer Central African historical processes. In the DRC, Gillian Mathys explains how decolonization led to a renegotiation of power between the state and local 'chiefdoms'. During the colonial period and after independence, people unevenly integrated into 'customary' units and into the state. For Mathys, analyzing these processes sheds light on alternative political imageries that have often been neglected to the benefit of more nationalist narratives (Mathys forthcoming & 2021). Nancy Hunt (2016) reconstructs the rise of therapeutic insurgencies during Belgian rule not only to delineate the nervousness and fragility of the colonial state, but to suggest complex genealogies between Congolese forms of power in colonial and in contemporary times.

The term *emic* has its origins in linguistics, where an 'emic unit' (or abstract object) means an invariable form. Linguists define phoneme, grapheme, and morpheme as such units, contrasting them to *epic* ones, such as phonetics for instance (Pike, 1967). In the social sciences, emic is used to describe a phenomenon or behaviour whose perspective is specifically based on the thinking and characteristics of the people being studied rather than on pre-existing theories and information. It comprises two overlapping registers: the expressed and the expressible. The former corresponds to the subjects' or informants' discourses and utterances, while the latter refers to their representations – that is, 'local, popular notions, concepts and conceptions', or, to use Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan's terminology, the 'sets, configurations or patterns of interpretation widely shared by the subjects within a given culture or subculture' (de Sardan, 1998: 158). To be more precise, one of the main angles of this volume illustrates the discourses and, more broadly, the representations of the actors to account for the local point of view and experiences of power, something that the New Colonial Studies often failed to do.

The concepts of emic, long-term imaginaries and practices of power are crucial for understanding the dynamics of societies and the ways in which power operates both overtly and covertly. As mentioned above, emic perspectives refer to insider or subjective viewpoints, while long-term forms suggest enduring patterns or structures that shape societies over extended period. In examining new, hegemonic (or not) and enduring forms of domination, it is essential to consider the 'long twentieth century' as a chronological framework, spanning the nineteenth century and earlier periods, characterized by significant shifts in technology, politics, and culture, to the early twenty-first century. This expansive timeline captures the evolution of power dynamics, ideologies, and social structures over a prolonged period, a facet overlooked, as we already mentioned, by such scholars as Eric Hobsbawm.

When Eric Hobsbawm carved out the notion of the 'short twentieth century' from the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 to the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, he could not have foreseen the persistence of authoritarianism, nativism, productivism, and structural racism as enduring features of the twentieth century that could extend into the twenty-first century world. These dynamics have become deeply entrenched within societies worldwide, transcending the temporal boundaries of the 'short twentieth century'. The contributors to this volume have endeavoured, each in their own way, to consider these perspectives in their analyses. For instance, Emery Kalema (this volume) examines the intricacies of 'power dynamics', 'historical manipulation', and the enduring consequences of 'divergent political philosophies' on the welfare of Congolese societies, spanning from the era of Lumumba in the twentieth century to Kabila in the twenty-first century. Florence Bernault (this volume) scrutinizes the containerizing dialectics of concealment as a power mechanism from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century. Among other deep-reaching textures of power lies the enduring valence of forms and tactics of power derived from the traumas of the slave and Atlantic

trade. Melchisedek Chetima has given an arresting account of the ways in which the inhabitants of the Mandara Mountains in northern Cameroon, originating in the migrations of people seeking refuge from the slave-trade, have both occulted and symbolically transmitted the memory of this historical trauma (Chetima 2015). Although myths of origin usually concealed the slave-trade as the cause for their settling in the mountains, many traditional songs staged the violence of capture and servility. In the late twentieth century, however, new political claims used the communities' past experience as 'victims' to carve out relational positions of power and contest the hegemony of Muslim parties.

Partially dismantled by attention to emic dynamics, the metropole-colonies binary has been stretched unrecognizably because of new, systematic attention to trans-regional, national, and global networks, sometimes South-South, sometimes not. Meredith Terretta's work on exiled intellectuals and activist lawyers, and the role of such international institutions as the United Nations, brings fresh knowledge on the history of anti-colonial movements and nation-building (Terretta 2017). Elsewhere in Africa, the global networks of African professionals (doctors, nurses, social workers, soldiers and engineers), and their role in shaping the social aspirations of colonial and postcolonial men and women have doubled up and sometimes disentangled colonial and national connections (Livingston 2012, Thomas 2021). Finally, a renewed attention to global capitalism and its local entanglements demonstrates that colonial domination was made up of many layers of action. Beyond the 'nearness' of the power exercised by individual colonialists, and the initiatives of African therapeutic leaders, historians and anthropologists argue that we need to pay attention to the deadly impact of global, distant capitalist ventures entangled with local ones (Hunt 2016, Henriet 2021, Hendriks 2022).

Beyond the State: Fragilities, Nervousness, Emotions

The vagaries of the state have had a long influence on histories and anthropologies of power in Central Africa. *Textures of Power* departs from this focus. From 1983 to 1997, David Birmingham and Phyllis Martin edited a three-volume book entitled *History of Central Africa.* The first volume, set in ancient history, delved into the intersection of internal dynamics and the global economy, showing how the development of productive structures in Central Africa facilitated the emergence of trade and more intricate political systems, including the rise of kingdoms and empires. The nation-state analytical framework, despite obvious anachronism, loomed large in this approach. The second volume, guided by a political economy approach, focused on the fragility of the colonial state in terms of resources, elucidating its authoritarian and coercive nature, with Africans regarded as victims rather than actors. Birmingham and Martin's book concluded with chapters on resistance and nationalism within the boundaries of the colonial state.

In 1989, Jean-Francois Bayart explored the unique challenges that African states face due to their colonial history, political heritage, and internal systems. Bayart argued that understanding the state in Africa cannot be approached simply through Western political theories but requires a specific analysis of African realities, highlighting the role of informal networks, clientelism, and personal power in politics and governance. *The State in Africa* has become an important reference in the study of political science and international relations, offering critical and nuanced perspectives on the nature of the state and power in Africa. Today, however, it is imperative to transcend the conceptual boundaries of the state to grasp the complexities and paradoxes of our time. Traditional state structures, although often centralized and imposing, can no longer claim exclusivity in governance and legitimacy. The forces governing Central African societies today are multiple and dispersed, emanating from various sources such as social networks, transnational movements, and non-states actors. In his recent book on the *Energy of the State* (2022), Bayart himself argues that, if the model of the State has become hegemonic, and if its abstract and bureaucratic forms permeate all corners of social and cultural life, political societies remain complex and vibrant. Made of myriad temporal layers, where various styles of power relationships and long-term imaginaries coexist, societies cannot be reduced to an analysis constrained by the model of the state. This multiplicity creates a political and social landscape where the boundaries between the public and the private, the local and the global, are significantly blurred.

Moreover, state structures themselves are subject to fragmentation and contestation, facing challenges such as economic crises, internal conflicts, and environmental pressures. Fragilities become apparent at multiple levels. Societies are marked by growing tensions related to identity, belonging, and inequality, fuelling feelings of insecurity and precarity. Awareness about these processes highlights how crucial it is to transcend the traditional boundaries of political analysis to explore the multi-dimensional interstices where power operates. One of these sites, for instance, has been explored by Pedro Monaville's recent book on Congolese students and their role in decolonizing the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2022). Monaville's research methods break through the boundaries of institutional and state model. Through a rich array or 'archival materials and life stories, the political and the intellectual, events and the everyday, modes of being and modes of thinking self-representations and outside constructions', the book thrives to embrace the historical complexities of ordinary Congolese's experiences, as well as their connections to global movements and 'insurgent cosmopolitanisms' (Monaville 2022: xv, *see also* De Sousa Santos 2016).

To think beyond the state also means to acknowledge that the fragilities observed today are not only material but also conceptual. Over the past years, we have witnessed a remarkable evolution in our understanding of power dynamics in Central Africa, with the emergence of such new concepts as 'transaction',

'ecstasis', 'nervousness', and 'impotence'. These conceptual propositions are important for two reasons. First, they expand our analysis and understanding of traditional power dynamics, while recognizing that power is shaped by subtle and often overlooked forces. Second, even though they are indebted to it, they transcend the analytical framework defined in *Tensions of Empire*. They highlight the limited efficiency of (colonial apparatus of) power, its translation into frustrated relationships, where the 'colonized' had the ability to influence, to set or alter the course of the intrinsically violent, racist, and predatory relationships in which they found themselves, working the system to their minimal disadvantage. Nancy Rose Hunt (2016) in particular, by characterizing Belgian colonial power as 'nervous', created a concept able to encompass a large spectrum of emotions. In Hunt's own words, 'nervousness yields disorderly, jittery states, as in a *nervous wreck, nervous exhaustion, a nervous breakdown,* or, as history has shown, a nervous national mood' (Hunt 2016: 5; see also Standard 2018).

'Ecstasis', as developed by Thomas Hendriks (2022), is another capacious concept that invites us to explore states of experiences and action where the subject finds communion with the surrounding world, surpassing the constraints imposed by power structures. With its connotation of transcendence and displacement, ecstasis disrupts conventional boundaries and destabilizes fixed notions of authority and control, revealing moments of ecstasy and rupture where power structures are momentarily subverted. Meanwhile, 'transaction' (Bernault, 2019) highlights the fluidity and negotiability inherent in power exchanges, underscoring the intricate dance of give-and-take characterizing human interactions within complex socio-political systems. In an era marked by complexity and interconnectivity, these transactions extend beyond the realms of formal political and economic exchanges, unfolding in everyday interactions where the legitimacy of power is constantly negotiated. Finally, the analytical tool of 'impotence' (Henriet, 2021) unveils the limitations embedded within structures of power. Broadly conceptualized as a sexual, social, political, and economic formation, impotence exposes the fragilities and fissures lurking beneath the veneer of dominance and hegemony, significantly adding to our knowledge of relations of power in the colony.

Textures of Power builds upon these achievements. The collection demonstrates, first, the productivity of these concepts, and, second, the intricate textures and subtleties of power in Central Africa, where the boundaries between the local and the global, the public and the private, the visible and the invisible, blur. Margot Luyckfasseel and Alice Aterianus-Owanga (this volume), for instance, mobilize the concept of 'transaction' in their respective chapters to analyse colonial violence and spatial imaginaries of power in South Ubangi (DR Congo), as well as the music technology of power in Gabon. Charlotte Grabli's chapter, meanwhile, uncovers horizontal, transatlantic influences between musical styles in Cuba and in Central Africa (this volume). In doing so, Grabli brings new life to cultural and diasporic histories of power, adding a layer of complexity to the usual narratives of cultural

and political dimensions of agency. Andrea Ceriana-Mayneri's capacious concept of 'dispossession' (or disempowerment) translates the overpowering feeling among contemporary Central Africans (in this case in the Central African Republic) that a violent rupture (colonialism) has torn away the continuity between the past and the present, and is still at work today in the form of a cascading spiral of conditions that continue to pervert political hierarchies and to undermine the ancient ethics of authority and social prosperity (2014, and this volume). Finally, we believe that 'texture', the concept that provides the title of this collection, also brings significant novelty in understanding how various styles and temporalities of power can be woven together. As Peter Geschiere and Rogers Orock (this volume) write: '[F]or academics the challenge becomes […] to disentangle the complex articulations that have developed in everyday life between colonial and local forms. The notion of texture – evoking processes of weaving different threads into a solid fabric – is particularly helpful for this'. The remaining sections of the introduction examine in detail three innovative perspectives introduced by the collection: the mystical and nocturnal foundations of power, its sexual, biopolitical and late capitalistic deployments, and finally, the new research considering power beyond the human.

The Other Side: Mystical and Nocturnal Power

In Central Africa, power in its many forms, from individual capacity to collective leadership, cannot be disentangled from beliefs in ancestors, spirits, and extraordinary forces. These creeds are often imagined as the premise of the 'traditional' and often opposed to the Christian power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ, and God. Modern studies on witchcraft and the nocturnal world have instead approached them as entangled and interwoven. When it comes to the nature and agency of mystical entities, scholars who have engaged the 'invisible' realm of power have taken two distinct paths. Some interpret it as a rich symbolic realm constructed and, to some extent, controlled by historical agents (Mbembe 2001: 146). Joseph Tonda sees it, instead, as an active '*imaginaire*' made of the fusion of dreamed figures of power and persecution. Deprived of a clear symbolic structure, this despotic *imaginaire* grows independently of the people who imagine it, yet coerces them (Tonda 2005, 2021). In this latter theory, colonialism and global capitalism have destroyed the possibility of a symbolic imaginary able to protect people and to institutionalize social norms.

The sacred, spiritual nature of the other world is a salient dimension that seems to differ from ideologies of power in the global West (even when considering the latter's potent patterns of 're-enchantment'). Vansina traced the specific existence of these beliefs in what he called the Central African 'equatorial tradition' (Vansina 1990). The intervention of ancestors and spirits, and their ability to charge extraordinary capacity into charms, rituals, and the body of capacious people, has thus been a major component of composing power in Central Africa (MacGaffey

2000). In the nineteenth century, witchcraft (proto-bantu root: *dogi*) was the ability of some individuals to use such forces for egotistic and destructive deeds. Local societies interpreted foreigners' rule as rooted in invisible forces, both productive and nefarious. The Africanizing of Christianity from the sixteenth century onward (Thornton 1998), helped to compose complex pantheons and spiritual technologies out of these religious repertoires (De Boeck 2000).

Against colonial disasters, African prophets, healers, and priests launched spiritual initiatives to counter rampant famines, epidemics, and low fertility (MacGaffey 1983, Gordon 2012, Hunt 2016). Christianity, re-imported by the new evangelizing waves of Catholic and Protestant missionaries, was embraced and Africanized by hundreds of thousands. Independent churches split from historical Missions to offer mass baptism and healing to their followers, bringing them messages of redemption and millenarist hopes against colonialism. The church of Simon Kimbangu in the Kongo region of the Belgian Congo and the Kitawala millenarist uprising in the 1940s and 1950s are examples among hundreds of such initiatives, and these powerful movements still play a significant role in Central Africa and in the diaspora (Mélice 2010, Eggers 2023). Local systems of divination and healing also borrowed Christian elements (Bwiti Fang) or survived clandestinely (Bwete Misôkô) (Fernandez 1981, Mary 1999, Bonhomme 2005, Duarte de Almeida 2020). In popular culture, the urban, cosmopolitan figure of the mermaid Mami Wata, a metaphor for material riches and their witch origin, is a spectacular example of these accumulative, or 'all-at-once' processes (Jewsiewicki 2003, Eggers 2023).

The pregnant role of 'occult economies' of power includes that of witchcraft in all the realms of modern life (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999, Geschiere 1997). Throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, people continue to blame witches for misfortunes and calamities, and to explain the unusual success of some individuals. Pentecostal Churches (locally called *Eglises du réveil*) have thrived in the business of cleansing people from witchcraft attacks, while hundreds of 'traditional' healers offer divination and ritual help to cure their patients' mystical illness (Corten & Mary, 2000). They offer an extremely competitive market where people can choose from diverse spiritual resources and communities (Demart 2015, Lambertz 2017). Fred Biyela, in his innovative study of the prophetic Church of Zéphirin in the Congo-Brazzaville (2022) brings a new approach to the modes of governing in Central Africa through a careful understanding of the combining of religious and political power. In this volume, Fred Biyela writes a powerful critique of the older notion of religious 'syncretism', often used to explain the emergence of new forms of therapeutic cults in Central Africa. For Biyela, this approach has obscured the intricate entanglement between the sphere of the lineage, the political, and the religious. Inspired by sociologist Patrice Yengo's approach (2016), he unveils how spiritual *competition* underpinned some of the main episodes of the conquest for power in postcolonial Congo-Brazzaville.

Meanwhile, the conduits for mystical and spiritual attacks include the most modern tools of everyday life. In Kinshasa, digital objects and media technologies,

devoted to making things visible, allow invisible agents to reach victims and inflict mystical misfortune (Pype 2017). Thus, the ways in which power is composed, how it can oppress people or be fought against, endlessly combine a regime of warring visual manifestations: occult deeds and revelation, concealment and exposure, secrecy, and obscenity.

Rumours on how 'libidinal economies' (Tonda 2021: 98) thrive among politicians and '*grands*', reinforcing the ways in which people think that power is based on obscure and criminal resources (Awondo 2010, Geschiere & Orock 2020). Contrary to the argument proposed by the Comaroffs (1999), however, witchcraft accusations do not always come from the deprived and target the powerful. Indeed, among ordinary folks, love, and domestic life are also tainted by violence and witchcraft accusations (Ayimpam 2014, Yengo 2016). Again, the entanglement of camouflage and exposure, along with that of procurement and destruction, is a key metaphor for people's understanding of power and its capitalistic intrusion in family relations (Geschiere 2013, Tonda 2015).

Sexuality, Gender, and Body Politics, Late Capitalism and Dispossession

Women and gender studies have multiplied in Central Africa since the 1990s, delineating fresh ways of analyzing power relationships. Next to Scholastique Dianzingua's pioneering work on women and power during colonialism in the Republic of Congo (1998), Phyllis Martin and Didier Gondola examined the new role of men and women who occupied and shaped sites of power in the city (Martin 1995, Gondola 1997). Rachel Jean-Baptiste illuminated the strategies of Gabonese women during colonialism and the ways in which, through sexuality and marriage, they preserved and expanded their social and economic positions in Libreville (2014). Recently, historians have underlined the violence linked to the construction of racial and gendered identities. In the Belgian Congo, Amandine Lauro argued that the colonial surveillance of interracial sex (including sexual violence) policed the frontiers of racial segregation and the bourgeois morality that Belgian colonialists wished to emulate in the colony (2021; see also Tödt 2021). The contestations of these policies by the Congolese led to the emergence, in town, of what Lauro calls a 'distinctive racialized economy of sexuality and of the sensitivities that surrounded it'. The violence of sexual colonialism is reflected in that of many urban cultures. In Kinshasa and Brazzaville, again, Didier Gondola revealed the violent masculinizing labour of 'Bills', the young men who, by reworking the cowboy model of Western movies, sought to carve out positions of dominance and oppressive gender hierarchies in the Congos (2016). In this volume, Melchisedek Chetima turns to the intricate history of gender relations in a rural setting. In the Mandara Mountains, in northern Cameroon, women are usually portrayed as intimate strangers and witches within the household. Yet, they play an important

role in the social ascension or decline of their husbands. Through their fecundity, they support men's social and economic success. Divorce forms the most significant threat to the husband's rise in social engineering. Chetima masterfully suggests how women manage to objectify their status as intimate strangers to tackle a double agency: through divorce, they express their discontent and anger regarding their husband's behaviour, even contesting the patriarchal organization of mountain societies polygamic life.

The importance of biopolitical power in state policies, in popular fantasies and tactics, and in the intimate realm of bodily practices, death and illness, is a major engine for studies of power in Central Africa. The circulation and production of such imaginaries, along and against the grain of medical and biological tactics that prevailed in the region, remains an extremely fertile field to understand the textures of power in the region. In the realm of race and colonial segregation, the history of descent (*métis*), along with that of biopolitical fantasies of rulers, has recently been studied by Rachel Jean-Baptiste (2023). Hunt's notion of 'nervous state' revisited the concept of biopolitics away from a classic meaning of policies administering people as 'populations' through the work of statistics and public health. The metaphor retrieves the prism of emotions, anxieties, and initiatives that gripped both rulers and ruled (Hunt 2019). In a famous article, Achille Mbembe had pushed further the renewal of the classic concept of biopolitics, with the notion of 'necropolitics', or 'the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations' (2003: 14). Elaborating on Foucault's comments on sovereignty as the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die (1997), Mbembe unveils the strong link between modernity and terror, and the presence of death in relations of power. Along those lines, two chapters in this collection propose innovative analyses of biopolitical hegemonic understandings, be they encapsulated in state politics or in civil society's discernments. Emery Kalema (this volume) highlights the Belgian Congo authorities' use of violent *politics of death*, contrasting them to Patrice Lumumba's *politics of life*. Anthropologist Basile Ndjio (this volume) turns to contemporary Cameroon to examine the politicization of homosexuality. He explains how ruling elites view it as a sexual behaviour that endangers public order, national security, and social cohesion. Because of these understandings, violent retaliation and death threaten those accused of deviant sexuality.

If recent research has prompted us to assess the body as a central site of power, many studies have focused more radically on the question of the human body itself, on its representations, and on its complex capture in biomedical procedures. Florence Bernault signalled the ambivalent fusions that occurred between the body's sacredness and its ambiguous biologizing during colonialism (2013), while Guillaume Lachenal dissected the politics and social consequences of misguided medical campaigns in Cameroon (2017). Looking at recent medical procedures, Maheba Tonda's spectacular anthropology of blood transfusion in Gabon (2021)

considers the ways in which the commodification of blood under the pressure of global pharmaceutical and capitalist forces encouraged the rise of an 'occult economy' around the procedure. Returning the dynamics of bodily power, Naminata Diabaté's study of defiant female disrobing, puts what she calls 'affirmative biopolitics' at the centre of embodied transactions of power (Diabaté 2019: 39). In Central Africa, what anthropologist Yolanda Covington-Ward (2016) calls a *body-as-centre* approach, recognizes that the body is our first and foremost means of engaging with, and impacting the world around us. In the lower Congo, Covington-Ward illustrates the importance of micro interactions of the body in framing and staking political claims (2016: 3). In religious forms (shaking, heightened awareness, performing) and in interpersonal encounters, these performances can have a decisive effect on macro-level systems of power: as she explains, *doing something is doing something more* (Covington-Ward 2016: 9).

The horizons of late capitalism, however, have often heightened the crises and violent trappings of power in Central Africa, including in its intimate interstices. In a world of increased precarity, where global economic pressures disproportionately affect people living in fragile and dependent countries, anxiety and desperation are everywhere. The wars in Eastern Congo and Western Cameroon, the hardship experienced by refugees and citizens of dictatorial governments, along with the violence of more intimate conflicts animated by witchcraft accusations against relatives (and against people considered as marginals) continue to stain the tapestry of power with tragic histories. In one of the most devastated countries in the region, the Central African Republic, Andrea Ceriana-Mayneri's chapter (this volume) captures how witchcraft imaginaries serve today both as archives of a violent past, and a popular interpretation of contemporary evils. For Ceriana, a complex knot ties together witchcraft and the experience of a historically situated temporal fracture, located in colonialism. This tying together of history and contemporary anxieties comes from three qualities of witchcraft: it is a total social phenomenon (Marcel Mauss), onto which each major historical change leaves specific traces, while these marks become in turn windows on the broader crisis. Third, witchcraft is itself a form of history, able to reactivate 'submerged memories' (Taussig 1984) and to define political agenda based on Central African societies' anxieties about a broken world where the past and the present 'mutually poison themselves'.

In this landscape of crisis, the important oeuvre of sociologist Joseph Tonda provides a compelling diagnostic of what he calls the 'Modern Sovereign' (2005), a form of oppression born during colonialism, inherited by independent states, and animated by oppressed people's own imaginaries of evil and violence embodied in such magical figures as God, Mami Wata, Jesus, and Money. The chapter written by Tonda in this volume argues that people in Central Africa are still oppressed by unconscious, alienating formations borne of the colonial domination and the dehumanizing of Africa by the West. As a result, no real sovereignty exists in this

world, as the control of the state over its own resources, and the control of people over their own destiny are in fact 'out-of-oneself', originating in alien models and representations. For Tonda, power in Central Africa remains based on the production of death, on the fetishism of money, on the cult of commodities and sexual capital, and on enduring patterns of 'deparentelizing' (*déparentélisation*), or the dissolution of ancient solidarities.

Power Beyond the Human

In this collection, we seek to stretch and enrich studies of agency by making it reach beyond the sole premise of individual human beings. The study of power should not remain limited to the confines of humankind, as demonstrated by the rich body of works devolved to its invisible and spiritual guises. Moreover, we also argue that animals, plants, and ecosystems could also be woven back into its textures, next to the occult and the divine. For Chan, all living organisms indeed transform and alter their environments to survive, spawn and thrive (Chan 2019: 3), exerting therefore idiosyncratic forms of power on their surroundings. Research on power could thus gain from a thorough engagement with the recent wave of scholarship that challenges the anthropocentric biases of what we still call 'the humanities'.

In the broader scholarship, 'more-than-human' or 'beyond-the-human' approaches give primacy to the study of multispecies relations, instead of isolating *Homo sapiens* from its ecological entanglements (O'Gorman & Gaynor 2020: 717). These novel epistemic engagements have already produced rich empirical works on (post)colonial contexts. Jonathan Saha (2022), for instance, regards British Myanmar as an 'interspecies empire', where the labour force of elephants, the purity of oxen breeds and the fight against parasites became strategic loci of colonial concern. Sophie Chao (2022) for her part studied the shifting more-than-human life worlds of West Papua's Marind communities, confronted to the radical transformation of their environment by oil palm plantations. She paints a complex picture of human-plant relationships which underlines the latter's potential for destruction. In late capitalist landscapes, violence can become 'a multispecies act – one in which humans are not always the perpetrators and non-humans not always the victims' (Chao 2022: 11).

Central Africa has so far remained peripheral to these engagements, despite its own laden history of brutal resource extraction and destructive monocropping. Building on the rich scholarship that regards animals, plants, and even climatic phenomena to have agency (Demuth 2019: 2), Etienne Gontard (this volume) shows how blue duikers' ability to 'dodge' their hunters shaped in no small part their entanglement in the global networks of the leather trade. As Gontard demonstrates, potential avenues for more-than-human research abound. The coexistence of multiple ontologies rooted in both vernacular and (post)colonial cultures could

be mobilized to challenge Eurocentric nature/culture divides. Furthermore, the study of *longue durée* processes of dehumanization entailed by slavery and colonialism could be enriched by research on the concomitant othering of non-humans. Although intimately connected, they constituted separate dynamics which followed their own internal logic. To quote Saha, in colonial contexts, 'species were *different* from one another, while humans had to be *differentiated*' (Saha 2022: 24). Finally, the region's exceptional biodiversity and multiple ecosystems offer as many entry points as possible to craft emic, situated studies of more-than-human engagements. Practicing 'the arts of noticing' (Tsing 2015: 1) – looking for traces of multispecies encounters in the archives and in the field – can become an essential tool to craft new Central African ecologies of power.

But does power even stop at the arrangement of life and at one's ability to stimulate, control, or obliterate it? Through the concept of *geontopower*, which combines the 'contrasting components of nonlife (geos) and of being (ontology)', Elizabeth Povinelli argues that the very distinction between life as the territory of power and the inanimate, inorganic world is made redundant by the Anthropocene (Povinelli 2016: 5). Although traversed by internal rifts, fractured by its many understandings and iterations (see Haraway 2015), the Anthropocene has gained traction as a productive, cross-disciplinary way to think about the ongoing and impeding consequences of human-made environmental change. Scholars of the Anthropocene assert that humans have entered another stage of history, one where they become actors of geological transformations (Chakrabarty 2009). It thus supposes that human power has extended its scope way beyond the realm of organic life, by weighing on the composition of the atmosphere, the frequency and intensity of hurricanes, the rise of sea levels and the shrinking of the polar ice caps. The Anthropocene thus challenges the idea that nonlife constitutes the stopgap of power, therefore opening the door to a further extension of its field of action (Povinelli 2016: 14).

How can one historicize anthropogenic power in Central African fields? Building on approaches that have encouraged scholars to consider the racialized experiences of planetary ecological change (see Yussof 2018), Iva Peša has crafted situated accounts of resignation and insurgence against industrial pollution across the continent (Peša 2022). In her contribution to the present volume, she also shows how the adverse effects of large-scale extractions have escaped human control. The ubiquitous pollution of Copperbelt mining sites is now impossible to curb, which demonstrates the very limits of human ability to effectively exert power over the environment. Furthermore, on a macro-level, researching the Central African Anthropocene could open productive cross-disciplinary engagements. By working together on *longue durée* ecological changes, the temporality of historians, sociologists, and anthropologists – spanning decades and centuries – could enter into dialogue with the time of biologists, bioarchaeologists and geologists – who think in millions and billions of years.

This collection structures these new directions for research around seven sections. They were designed to both build on and move beyond the epistemic architecture that has sustained Central African studies in the last three decades. The first one, *Long Term Imaginations and Languages of Power* explores the survival and transformation of idioms and practices of power in the larger region since the first millennium of our era. Second, *Weaving and Tearing out Textures of Power in Colonial and Postcolonial Times* examines what happened to regional networks and repertoires of power during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It pays attention to transformations wrought by the colonial occupation, the emergence of new chiefs and original movements of revolt, to the role of administrations and military networks, and finally, to the fact that modern power in Central Africa needs to include anthropologies of alienation and new forms of 'out-of-the-self' sovereignty. Third, *Spatial Technologies* studies the confrontation between autochthonous and European practices of space, including the emergence of technologies of spatial violence in the colonial city and the prison. It also looks at contemporary spatial tactics, in the modern prison of Makala (Kinshasa) and in the conflictual monumentalizing of the small town of Eseka (Cameroon).

The fourth section, *Gender, Sexuality and Bodily Politics* deals with attacks on patriarchal power, medical science and local languages of disease, queer politics in Cameroon, and the conflict between (post)colonial necropolitics and the politics of care in Congo-Kinshasa. Fifth, *The Other Side: Mystical and Nocturnal Power* is concerned with witchcraft and intangible power. It examines spiritual dispossession, the issue of mystical 'slavery' in local rituals, and the power of Evangelical Churches. It also sheds light on the dark politics of secret capital embodied by containers, and on new conspiracy narratives on Freemasonry and witchcraft. The sixth section, entitled *Connectivities of Power*, presents a selection of new research on power, performances, and such (digital) technologies as radio, music, and theatre. Finally, *Power beyond the Human* focuses on what we learn about power by looking at microhistories on the agency and transformation of plants, animals, and ecosystems, and what happens to industrial power if we do not view it through the environmental transformation and pollution.

We hope that the histories and anthropologies gathered in this volume, and the many studies conducted by scholars of Central Africa, work as a reminder that people's agencies, however threatened and precarious, however illegible by dominant scripts, continue to resist and undermine these destructive forces, drawing better futures for the region and its inhabitants.

PART 1

Long-Term Imaginations and Languages of Power

CHAPTER 1.1

The Power of Motherhood and Wealth: Ugandan Concepts in the Common Era

Rhiannon Stephens

Introduction

What does power mean? Who wields power and how do they justify their claims to wield it? And how is power maintained and reproduced? 'Power' is a concept that is simultaneously universal and highly specific. If asked, we would likely say that we know what power means. But when pushed to define it, we would be harder pressed to do so, a reality reflected in long dictionary entries for 'power' in English.[1] Thinking about the concept of power also requires a consideration of the ideological structures that underpin it. In this way, power becomes less of a universal abstraction and is instead tangibly rooted in specific contexts. Uganda, with its long history of linguistic, cultural, and political diversity, is an apt context to examine this question as people expressed, conceived of, and wielded power in a wide array of forms. This chapter focuses on two dimensions of power in particular, power through motherhood in North Nyanza-speaking communities and power through wealth in Greater Luhyia- and Ateker-speaking communities.

From around the eighth century, people speaking Proto-North Nyanza saw motherhood as an integral, indeed necessary, element of the centralization and reproduction of political power. As they created royal families to govern, they drew on ideologies of motherhood to do so. Although they chose to follow patrilineal descent with positions of power inherited by brothers or sons of a male ruler, they saw motherhood – and the connections it created between and across families, lineages, and clans – as critical to the consolidation and maintenance of power. Queen mothers embodied the centrality of motherhood in North Nyanza political ideology. The power a queen mother wielded can be read in one sense as focused on building alliances to ensure support for her son, whether biological or not, and herself. But the power queen mothers obtained and wielded could often be violent and aggressive rather than conciliatory and placating. The concept of power as the power of motherhood was thus complex and subject to contestation.

Turning to the concept of power as wealth in eastern Uganda, among people speaking Greater Luhyia and Eastern Nilotic languages, we can see it as having contained emotional dimensions of honour and respect, which were not necessarily dimensions absent of violence, or at least the threat of it. But even where the wealthy and powerful could demand or merit respect, glimpses of discontent and contestation emerge through the co-existence of displacement with the concept of wealth as power. Wealth allowed the accumulation of power through its dispersal

among dependents and followers and power in turn allowed the accumulation of wealth, in multiple forms. This relationship was not unique to eastern Uganda, of course, but it was sufficiently important for some of the communities there that they articulated and rearticulated it through the words that they used to speak of the two.

A Brief Note on Sources and Methods

This chapter draws primarily on evidence from oral traditions and comparative historical linguistics. Oral traditions from Buganda and Busoga, in this case, mostly tell us about forms of power in centralized polities, whether the Buganda kingdom or the micro-polities of Busoga. They were collected and transcribed by various men from the late nineteenth century through to the 1970s. As a result, they tend to prioritize the lives and actions of male rulers. The fact that they also contain details about royal women and especially about queen mothers underscores the power that these women wielded. Oral traditions have their limitations, however, not least in their focus on the lives of elite members of societies, eliding some of the other forms of power that existed, such as the creative power held by healers of various kinds (Schoenbrun 1998: 12-3). Comparative historical linguistics is particularly generative as an approach to conceptual history over the *longue durée* because it allows us to identify and trace changes and continuities in concepts, like power, across many centuries and beyond elite contexts. For places like Uganda, where written records in indigenous languages exist only from the second half of the nineteenth century and remain limited until well into the twentieth century, the method allows us to use well-established principles to reconstruct the sounds and, critically, meanings of words to ancestral or protolanguages of the modern languages spoken there today. Comparative historical linguistics is premised on the recognition that related languages diverged over time from a common ancestral or proto-language and that each language has retained a proportion of the vocabulary, grammar and phonology of the proto-language from which it descends. By comparing languages descended from a common proto-language, it is thus possible to posit words and meanings used by speakers of that proto-language, even though we have no direct attestations of them. For conceptual history, it is especially important to pay close attention to synonyms, homonyms, and overlapping meanings as they allow us to identify concepts held and mobilized in the past.[2]

Uganda as a modern country has a high level of linguistic diversity, with some forty-one indigenous languages spoken within its borders today. Evidence from historical linguistics tells us that in the deep past, some three thousand years ago, people spoke Sudanic, Sahelian, and Cushitic languages there (Schoenbrun 1998). Words from those languages continue to be used in Uganda even though the languages themselves are long gone; words as key as those for ‘head of cattle’ and ‘millet’ (Schoenbrun 1997: 60, 68). For the period covered by this chapter, people living in these lands spoke

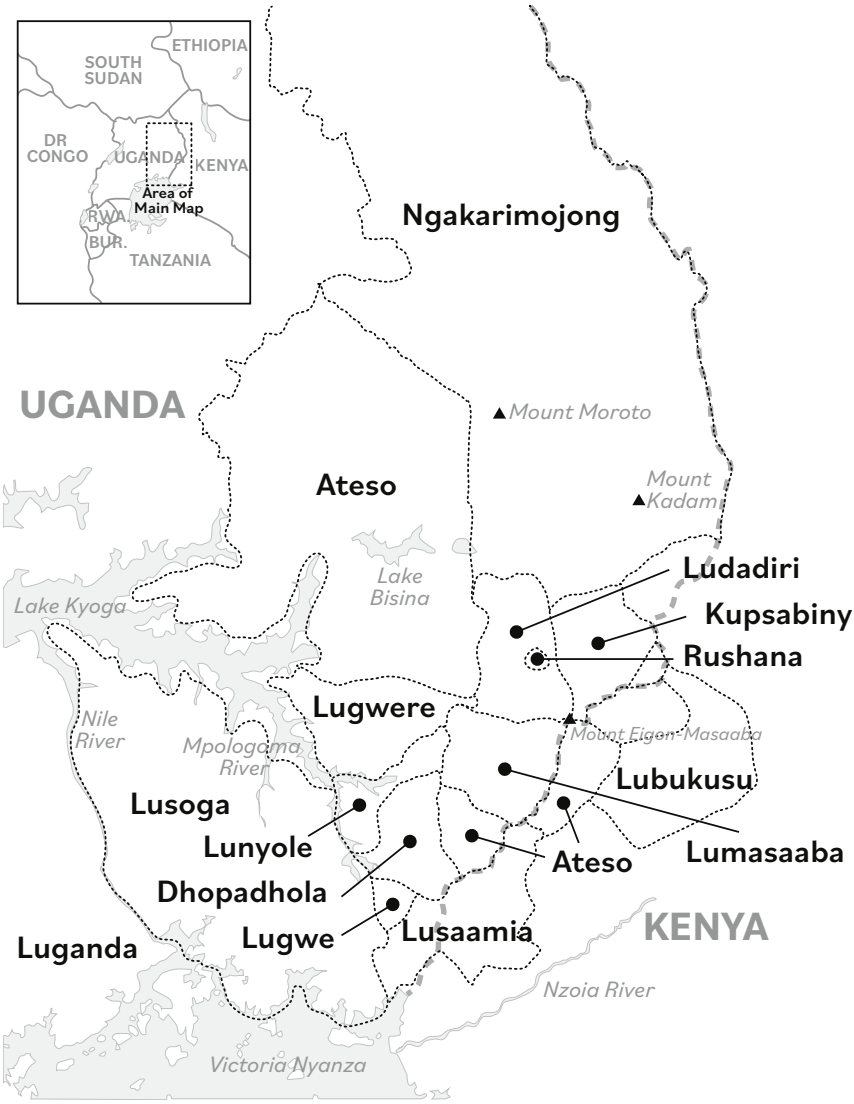


Figure 1: Map of eastern Uganda showing modern languages spoken in the region, based on an original map by Nat Case (Stephens 2022: 3).

languages from two of Africa's major language families, Bantu and Nilotic. The Bantu languages discussed in this chapter belong to Great Lakes Bantu, specifically the West Nyanza and Greater Luhyia branches of it. Proto-West Nyanza diverged to form Proto-North Nyanza and Proto-Rutara, with the former being the focus here. Proto-North Nyanza diverged in three stages to yield the modern languages of Luganda, Lusoga, Lugwere, and Rushana, spoken in an arc from the area to the north-west of Lake Victoria in the west to Mount Elgon-Masaaba in the east. Proto-Greater Luhyia,

spoken to the north-east of Lake Victoria, formed four new languages: Proto-Luyia, Proto-Gwe-Saamia, Proto-North Luhyia, and pre-Lunyole, with Proto-North Luhyia eventually yielding the modern languages of Lumasaaba, Ludadiri, and Lubukusu. Proto-North Luhyia languages are the Greater Luhyia languages I primarily pay attention to in this chapter. The Nilotic languages spoken in Uganda today belong to all three branches of the Nilotic family, but I discuss only languages belonging to Eastern Nilotic and to the Ateker sub-branch, in particular. Proto-Ateker diverged to yield Proto-Ateso and Proto-Northern Ateker. Proto-Ateso gave rise to the dialects of Ateso spoken in eastern Uganda and western Kenya, while Proto-Northern Ateker diverged to form the modern languages of Najie, Ngakarimojong, Toposa, Nyangtom, and Turkana, also spoken across eastern Uganda and western Kenya (fig. 1).[3]

Motherhood as Power

In southern Uganda, hereditary political power that included the category of nobility was an innovation of people speaking Proto-West Nyanza some time before the eighth century CE (Schoenbrun 1998: 185-95). Having chosen to prioritize patrilineal over matrilineal descent, inheritance of power passed from father to son, or from brother to brother or brother's son. After the eighth century, people speaking Proto-North Nyanza continued to follow patrilineal descent but emphasized the importance of mothers in creating networks of support in a context where exogamous marriage was preferred, and so wives belonged to different lineages and clans to their husbands. They also continued an older practice inherited from their Great Lakes Bantu-speaking linguistic ancestors in categorizing the children of daughters differently from those of sons. To do so they used the noun **omwihwa* (plural, *abaihwa*), which we can gloss into English as 'child of a female clan member'.[4] For people speaking Proto-North Nyanza, **abaihwa* had important roles in their mothers' lineages even as they had formal membership only in their fathers' lineages. Thus, **abaihwa* prepared the bodies of deceased members of their mothers' lineages for burial and they participated in rituals, especially those related to the birth of twins (Stephens 2013: 57). Further evidence for the importance of the connection between a woman's birth family and lineage and her children comes from the innovation by speakers of Proto-North Nyanza of a new noun for 'maternal uncle', **koiza*.[5] Other speakers of Bantu languages in the region continued to use a much older noun, inherited from Proto-East Bantu, to talk about maternal uncles. The decision by the Proto-North Nyanza speaker community to develop a new term suggests that they accorded more significance to the relationship between a **koiza* and his **omwihwa* or that they viewed the relationship differently than had previously been the case. This may have been related to political centralization and the importance of the institution of queen mothers. Maternal uncles offered essential support to aspiring kings and would

have benefited from the accession to power of an **omwihwa* and his mother (Stephens 2013: 57-9).

In North Nyanza royal households, the choice of an heir took account of who his mother was. This was necessary both because she would become queen mother and because her network, outside of the royal family, would be critical in mobilizing support for her son, the king, in moments of crisis. From the eighth to the twelfth centuries, the centuries in which Proto-North Nyanza was spoken, when a ruler's son inherited his political position, he was likely to be the son of the senior wife, or **kaidu*.[6] The position of **kaidu* existed in polygynous commoner and royal households alike. It is most likely that the **kaidu* obtained her position on her marriage and that she was not necessarily the first wife, but was one whose natal lineage was able to negotiate her status and ensure that she retained it even when further women married into the household (Stephens 2013: 48-9). In royal households, the ability of a mother to obtain the support of her lineage- and clan members would have been crucial to her ability to support her son when he acceded to power and to protect him from efforts to usurp his position, should they arise. Because queen mothers were **abaihwa* (nieces) as well as **abaana* (children, daughters)[7] they could draw on networks that connected them through their mothers as well as those that ran through their fathers.

The nature of the power wielded by queen mothers in Proto-North Nyanza-speaking communities is beyond the reach of the evidence available to us. In later centuries, however, in Buganda and in Lusoga-speaking polities, queen mothers could be ambivalent figures, inspiring fear and dread as well as respect and affection. In Buganda, after the thirteenth century, by which point Luganda existed as a distinct language, the queen mother was referred to as the *nnàmasòle*, a title derived from a much older verb that dates to Proto-Bantu.[8] In Proto-Great Lakes Bantu, the verb held the meanings 'remove', 'gather', and 'collect', as well as 'reveal' and 'judge by ordeal'. In deriving *nnàmasòle* from this verb, Baganda articulated the political role and power of the queen mother. Her power would likely have included the ability to raise taxes – or demand tribute – from people living on estates that she controlled. She also had her own chiefs, including one who served as her *kàtikkiro* or prime minister, mirroring the political structure of the king (Schiller 1990: 458-9; Wrigley 1996: 67; Stephens 2013: 107-8).

In the oral traditions about the rulers of Buganda, queen mothers are remembered for their – at times violent – intrigues as widows, intrigues that enabled them and their sons to accede to power. In Buganda, from the mid-second millennium, the son of the senior wife or *kaddulubaalè*, was no longer the presumed heir, and so widows used various means to position their son as heir apparent. These intrigues go back to some of the earliest named rulers of the kingdom, Kimera, his grandson Ttembo, and Ttembo's mother, Nnattembo, who would have ruled in the fourteenth or early fifteenth century.[9] According to the traditions, Kimera sent his son, Lumansi, to raid for cattle and he fell sick and died on the way.[10] When Lumansi's son, Ttembo,

reached maturity, his mother told him that Kimera had killed his father and she persuaded him to kill Kimera in vengeance, after which Ttembo inherited Kimera's office and Nnattembo ruled as *nnàmasòle*. Such violent intrigues might continue even after a royal widow had acceded to the position of queen mother. In the mid- to late-eighteenth century, Nanteza was *nnàmasòle* alongside her son Jjunju as king. She turned against Jjunju after he killed the wife of his full brother Ssemakookiro and provoked the latter to rise against the king. Ssemakookiro prevailed and Nanteza remained as *nnàmasòle* alongside him (Stephens 2013: 135-6).[11]

In the Soga kingdoms, just across the Nile to the east, queen mothers and their kin similarly worked to enthrone their sons and to defend or avenge them when needed. In the late eighteenth century, the kingdom of Bukono was ruled by Wakauli whose mother was from the nearby kingdom of Busiki. Wakauli was a violent and unpopular ruler who was overthrown and killed in a popular revolt. His maternal kin launched a military attack on Bukono to avenge the assassination of their *omwîwa* (the Lusoga form of **omwihwa*). The attack from Busiki was ultimately unsuccessful and a new king was enthroned in Bukono, one without ties to Busiki (Lubogo 1960: 9-10; Stephens 2013: 124-5). Although this tradition commemorated a failed intervention by maternal kin, the episode highlights how even an unpopular and despotic ruler could depend on his mother's lineage and clan network to support him and his power.

The relationship between a king and queen mother on the one hand and her kin on the other was reciprocal. The power and wealth that accrued to a small number of women through motherhood tended to benefit her lineage and clan. An example of this comes from the Soga kingdom of Bugabula in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The abaiseIruba clan had a daughter, Kisasi, who married the king of Bugabula. As queen mother, or *nakazaire*, Kisasi was given an estate which continued to belong to her clan members generations later (Stephens 2013: 124; Cohen n.d.: Text 331). There were widespread and multigenerational benefits of having an *omwîwa* accede to the throne and thus of having a daughter reign as queen mother. This meant that maternal lineage- and clan members had a significant investment in seeing their *omwîwa* become king, and in supporting him and the queen mother once they were in power.

Power through motherhood accrued to different people. Most obviously, a woman herself might gain power through being the mother of the heir to the throne. Yet, in Buganda, to attain the position of queen mother, she would likely have had to mobilize her political skills and her natal-kin networks to ensure that it was her son, rather than a different heir, who was enthroned. Sons in elite families could inherit positions of power because of who their mothers were, whether in a context where the son of a **kaidu* was the heir apparent, or in a context where the alliance-building skills of a mother and her brother were all important. And brothers of mothers might well share in the political success of a sister's son, most obviously in the case of Buganda where a *kojja* (the Luganda form of **koiza*)

would be appointed to one of the most powerful chiefships in the kingdom (Kagwa 1971: 104; Stephens 2013: 110). While the power of motherhood was often that of alliance-building and maintenance, both could be violent forms of power.

Wealth as Power

Queen mothers were wealthy, and their wealth reinforced their power. Wealth offered others access to power, too, especially outside of dynastic rule, and power enabled people to accrue wealth, albeit not without constraints and social criticism. In what is today eastern Uganda, people speaking Proto-Greater Luhyia, from some two thousand to fifteen hundred years ago, articulated their understanding of the entwined nature of wealth and power through a new set of words that they used to describe wealth and those that held it.[12] Speakers of Proto-Greater Luhyia spoke the word **muhɨnda* to mean 'wealthy person'; they said **buhɨnda* to mean 'wealth' or 'riches'; and they used the adjective **-hɨnda* to mean 'wealthy' or 'rich'.[13] They derived these words from the root **-hɨnd-* which they had modified from a much older root used by speakers of Proto-Bantu some five thousand years ago in the form **-pɨ̀nd-*. In Proto-Bantu, the root was used to make words meaning 'fold', 'hem', and 'plait' in a set of meanings connected to weaving, and words meaning 'turn', 'invert', and 'change' (Bastin, Coupez, Mumba and Schadeberg 2002: Main 2520 and Der 2522). For speakers of Proto-Bantu, **-pɨ̀nd-* was related to acting upon others, whether things or animate beings, and thus invoked a form of power. When speakers of Proto-Great Lakes Bantu used the root, from around two and a half thousand years ago, they did so in words meaning 'authority', 'ability', 'transformation', and 'threatening behaviour' emphasizing its meaning of power, including the potential of power to harm.[14] In choosing this root to talk about wealth – a break from its previous meanings in their ancestral languages – Proto-Greater Luhyia speakers expressed their concept of wealth as connected to power, even though they stopped using **-hɨnd-* to derive words about power and authority.

The conceptual connection between wealth and power took different forms as Proto-Great Luhyia gave way to its descendant languages. Those who spoke Proto-North Luhyia – on and around Mount Elgon-Masaaba – emphasized an emotional dimension to this connection by using the root to describe 'respected' and 'honoured' people, as well as those with wealth. They did so by appending the passive extension **-ifu* to derive the noun **umuhindifu* meaning 'respected person' or 'honoured person'. While speakers of Proto-North Luhyia drew on this old root with its connections to power to express both wealth and honour, those speaking one of its descendant languages – Lubukusu – used it to articulate a less positive perception of the wealthy and the kinds of power they asserted. Lubukusu speakers derived the verb *khuuyiinda* from **-hɨnd-* and uttered it when they talked about people 'squeezing through', 'displacing', and 'taking someone's space'. As they did so, they continued to use the noun

omuyiinda to mean both 'wealthy person' and 'respected person'. Nonetheless, they highlighted the potential abuses of power by the wealthy and respected, perhaps by seizing the land of others, and yet they continued to associate wealth with positions of respect and honour. This gives us a glimpse into contestations and conflict within the speaker community over the behaviour of the wealthy and the power they held.

Speakers of Proto-North Luhyia used words derived from a common root to express an emotional dimension of their conceptual connection of wealth and power, but they drew on a different root to articulate a more material dimension of that connection. Like, **-hɨnd-*, this second root, **-kasa-*, was ancient, having also been used by speakers of Proto-Bantu in the form **-kác-*.[15] For Proto-Bantu speakers, **-kác-* meant 'dry up', 'coagulate', and 'be hard' (Bastin, Coupez, Mumba and Schadeberg 2002: Main 1646). In Proto-Greater Luhyia, the language that gave rise to Proto-North Luhyia, the root was used to mean 'brass jewellery' or 'copper jewellery' in the form of the noun **mukasa*. The etymological connection to the older meanings was in the process of making metal jewellery and the coagulating and hardening of molten metal as it cooled. The Proto-North Luhyia speaker community used this root to reference the material trappings of leadership, such as copper and brass armbands, the material wealth a leader should possess, and the immaterial attributes recognized in such a person. Thus, the noun **obukasa* meant 'wealth', 'honour', and 'leadership', while **omukasa* referred to the person who embodied these attributes.[16]

Elsewhere in eastern Uganda, people speaking very different languages also drew connections between wealth and power, even though their forms of political power differed from the chiefships found among people speaking Greater Luhyia languages. Ateso speakers derived words from an inherited root, **-jak-*, to talk about households and those who headed them: *ojakait* for 'large household', *ejakait* for 'male head of household' and *ajakait* for 'wife of male head of household'.[17] The heads of large households in Ateker-speaking communities, of which the Ateso speaker community was one, had considerable power as well as potentially significant amounts of wealth (e.g., Webster, Okalany, Emudong, and Egimu-Okuda 1973: 15-6). Despite this, as William Fitzsimons has noted, 'wealth inequality was anathematized by many' speakers of Proto-Teso and there were 'strictures against the generation of extreme wealth' (Fitzsimons 2020: 289-90). Still, the connection between wealth and power seems to be a long-standing one in Ateker-speaking communities. In Proto-Ateker, spoken some two thousand five hundred to one thousand one hundred years ago in what is today South Sudan (Fitzsimons 2020: 115-16, 123), **-jak-* meant both 'be wealthy' and 'have power'. After the dialects of Proto-Ateker had diverged into distinct languages, yielding over time the modern Eastern Nilotic languages spoken in Uganda today, speakers of these languages continued to use **-jak-* to articulate their concept of wealth and power as coupled, as we saw for Ateso. Ngakarimojong speakers derived words for wealth from this root, such as the verb *ajakaania* meaning 'become wealthy' and the adjective *ejakaana* meaning 'wealthy', 'well-off', and 'rich'. They also derived the noun *ejakait* to mean 'chief',

which is most likely a development during the colonial period, when a new form of political organization was imposed on Karimojong communities by the British. Nonetheless, that Ngakarimojong speakers used *-*jak*- to derive this noun indicates that the new, specific meaning that they gave to 'chief', even in a colonial context, grew out of the much older concept of wealth and power as intimately connected.

Another linguistic root connecting wealth and power underscores the reality that speakers of Proto-Ateker understood them to be entangled concepts. This was the Western Nilotic root *-*pol*- and in its language of origin it meant 'many' and 'numerous' (Fitzsimons 2020: 449-50). After speakers of Proto-Ateker adopted it, they continued to use it with those meanings, but in addition they used words derived from the root 'to speak about standing and leadership' (Fitzsimons 2020: 143-4). When speakers of the modern languages descended from Proto-Northern Ateker, spoken across north-eastern Uganda and north-western Kenya, derived words from the root, *-*pol*-, they did so to convey their concept of wealth and power as interconnected (Stephens 2022: 140).[18] In Turkana, for example, we find *akapolon* meaning 'chief' and *apolou* meaning 'honour', and in Ngakarimojong we find *apoloor* meaning 'prosper' and *apolokin* 'be in charge of'.

Across eastern Uganda, people have long conceptualized wealth and power as intimately interconnected. At times, and for some communities, that had an emotional dimension in which those with wealth and power could expect – or demand – honour and respect. But those demands could be turned against the rich and powerful when others observed abuses of power. There are limits to what the linguistic archive can tell us about these kinds of contestations, because only successful ones would have remained in a language across generations. Nonetheless, the glimpses we have suggest they were more widespread than the somewhat normative framing of reconstructed vocabulary may imply. It is also important to emphasize that the examples I discuss here are the ones where speaker communities have drawn a strong conceptual link between wealth and power and honour. As with a photographic negative, the importance to these communities of that association is apparent to us because of its absence in other speaker communities with which they were in regular contact. There was nothing inevitable about associating wealth, power, and honour; rather it was an association that had to be asserted and reasserted to be maintained.

Conclusion

This chapter draws on earlier research that asked very different questions and did not have 'power' or its many textures as its central focus. Returning to that research through the lens of power has, nonetheless, proved productive. Attending to power through motherhood and/or motherhood as power allows us to see how communities speaking Proto-North Nyanza saw motherhood as part and parcel of political power. Some women, likely many more than the historical record reports,

used the power they had as mothers to create alliances that ensured that their sons inherited positions of authority, thereby increasing and consolidating the power of the mothers. Once in power, as queen mothers, they might use violence to extend and maintain power, or their relatives might use violence on their behalf. For Lubukusu speakers in Eastern Uganda, those who were wealthy and powerful were seen to have become that way through the violence of displacement of others. But others perceived the entanglement of wealth and power in more positive terms, describing those who possessed them as worthy of honour, albeit perhaps within certain limits of inequality. And the entanglement of wealth and power could take material form through the overlapping meanings of words used to describe the paraphernalia of authority. These examples are just a small number of the many ways people in what is today Uganda have understood power across the centuries. Evidence from comparative historical linguistics and oral traditions is necessarily fragmented and partial. And yet, it still offers us a way to see the variety and complexity of power as experienced and understood by people in the past.

Notes

1 See, 'power, n.[1],' *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. (July 2023), doi.org/10.1093/OED/1067997134.

2 For detailed discussions of methodology, see Stephens (2013): 20-6; Stephens (2022): 26-40.

3 For a longer discussion of the genetic classification of these languages, see Stephens (2022): 26-34. For the classification of Ateker, see also Fitzsimons (2020): 68-123.

4 **-ihwa* (noun class 1, 2) 'child of a female clan member'. Noun of Proto-Bantu origin, but with semantic shift in Proto-Great Lakes Bantu to specify child of a female clan member, with distribution in Luganda, Lusoga, Lugwere, Rushana. For full distributions, see entry number 20 in Stephens (2013): 187.

5 **koiza* (noun class 1a, 2) 'maternal uncle'. Proto-North Nyanza innovation, with areal spread to Greater Luhyia, with distribution in Luganda, Lusoga (Lusiki), Lugwere. Etymology is unclear. For full distributions, see entry number 27 in Stephens (2013): 188.

6 **kaidu* (noun class 12) 'senior wife'. Proto-North Nyanza root, with distribution in Luganda, Lusoga, Lugwere. Derived from Proto-Grat Lakes Bantu **-jIdù* (Schoenbrun 1997: 133). For full distributions, see entry number 19 in Stephens (2013): 186.

7 This is an ancient noun that dates to Proto-Bantu in the form of the root **-jánà*. See Bastin, Coupez, Mumba, and Schadeberg (2002): Main 3202.

8 **nnàmasòle* (noun class 1a) 'queen mother'. Luganda innovation from the Proto-Great Lakes Bantu verb **-sola*, 'remove, gather, collect.' See also Schoenbrun (1997): 160. This paragraph and the following draw on Stephens (2013): 106-10.

9 Historians disagree about whether to consider these as historical or mythical figures, but their inclusion in the oral traditions points to the active roles played by queen mothers from the origins of the kingdom.

10 For the full written versions of this tradition, see Kagwa (1934, Reprint, 1969): 20; Kagwa (1971): 16-17; Roscoe (1911): 215-6.

11 For full versions of this traditions, see Kagwa (1971): 90-4; Wrigley (1996): 225.

12 This paragraph and the following draws on Stephens (2022): 53-4, 83-4, 90-1.

13 **-hind-* (noun class 1, 2, 14; adj.) 'rich person, riches, wealth, wealthy'. Proto-Greater Luhyia root, with distribution in Lunyole, Proto-North Luhyia, Proto-Gwe-Saamia, Proto-Luyia. Derived from Proto-Bantu **-pind-* via Proto-Great Lakes Bantu. For full distributions, see Stephens (2022): 176-78.

[14] For authority and ability, see Schoenbrun (1997): 251.

[15] *-*kasa*- (noun class 1, 2, 14) 'wealthy person, respected person, leader, wealth, honour, leadership'. Proto-North Luhyia root, with distribution in Lumasaaba, Ludadiri, Lubukusu. Derived from Proto-Bantu *-*kác*- via Proto-Greater Luhyia, *mukasa*. For full distributions, see Stephens (2022): 194-95.

[16] On the complex relationship between metalworking and status (Herbert 1993; Kriger 1999; Schmidt 1997). In a number of Luyia-speaking societies in western Kenya political leaders and clan leaders wore copper or brass armlets and bracelets as part of their insignia (Were 1967: 13, 30, 35, 40, 56, 60).

[17] *-*jak*- (v., n.) 'become wealthy'; 'rich person,' 'leader'. Proto-Ateker root, with distribution in Ngakarimojong, Turkana, Ateso. For full distributions, see Stephens (2022): 203.

[18] *-*polo*- (n.) 'wealthy'; 'power'. Proto-Northern Ateker root, with distribution in Ngakarimojong, Turkana. For full distributions, see Stephens (2022): 204.

CHAPTER 1.2

From Hauling to Harrowing: Resilience and Change in Moral Imaginations of 'Slavery' in the Southern Lower Congo (700 BCE – ca. 1880s)

Marcos Leitão de Almeida

Introduction

This chapter explores how Kisikongo speakers, whose language belongs to a South Kongo subclade of the wider Kongo Language Cluster in the Lower Congo, shifted the millennia-old proto-metaphor of *-pɪkà – symbolizing extreme dependency – to the eighteenth-century innovation of #-*bundu*, which transformed the perception of slavery into an act of plunder and dehumanization. This conceptual shift reflects significant social upheavals in the southern Lower Congo, particularly the rise of a new oligarchy of enslavers in the Kingdom of Kongo that created unprecedented levels of violence as they responded to the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Thornton 1997: 58-60; MacGaffey 2000: 72; Almeida 2020: 237). Yet lexical evidence found in the ways peasants and villagers conceptualized slavery practices suggests such slavers' new moralities were not passively accepted by all. Kisikongo-speaking commoners marshaled their moral imaginations and dynamic social strategies to confront and resist the oligarchs' new slaving strategies. It is thus crucial to recognize the tension that resided in the moral imaginations of slavery as understood by both Kisikongo-speaking slavers and slaves in the eighteenth century. These new conceptualizations did not exist in a vacuum but rather were irrevocably intertwined, coexisting in tension alongside one another. By showing Kisikongo-speaking oligarchs weaving new meanings into the concept of slavery, and commoners and slaves unpicking these threads to hold onto older strands, this chapter reveals how shifts in conceptualization and practice within the evolving global context of the slave trade cannot be disentangled from deeper regional histories.

Historians of the Atlantic world usually explore Lower Congo forms and understandings of slavery based on what they can learn from outsiders' written records (Heywood 2009; Nafafé 2022: 33). Yet, the resilience of moral imaginations and social strategies that informed how Africans acted in this emerging global network was rarely emphasized, perhaps because the local ambitions and the terms through which Africans communicated their aims and claims were rarely recorded in European written sources (Sweet 2016; de Luna 2021). Notwithstanding the significance of the written record, its heavy reliance can inadvertently create an artificial divide between early Central African History and what came after the 1500s (Schoenbrun 2006; de Luna 2021; Stephens, 2024).

The category of slavery, as contentious as it is in today's political debates, exemplifies this division. Earlier instances of African slavery have been constantly categorized in a-historical concepts such as 'lineage slavery', the 'institution of slavery' or had its existence denied without much historical explanation (Miers and Kopytoff 1977; Lovejoy 1983[2011]; Nafafé 2022: 135). Paradoxically, historians hold to these categories despite rightfully insisting that histories of slavery must be understood according to the particulars of power struggles in specific historical contexts (Miller 2009: 72). In their classic intervention, Kopytoff and Miers heeded scholars to explore 'African terminologies' (Koppytoff & Miers: 1977: 78), but very few scholars explored what innovations, transfers and retentions of concepts of slavery revealed about the history of slaving practices during the time of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in different places of the continent (Schoenbrun 2007; Almeida and FitzSimons 2022).

Power – and struggles over power – lie at the core of this investigation because the 'African terminologies' for 'slavery' cannot be unraveled from the social-political contexts in which people created and *used* them. In this regard, languages are like fabrics; their categories are the threads that people weave into their experiences. Going beyond the silences and limits of the colonial archive underscores the need for interdisciplinary work to incorporate the intellectual currents and the worldviews through which the very enslaved Africans about whom historians write might have understood their own social histories (Almeida, 2019). To understand how southern Lower Congo peoples transformed the category of slavery in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, historians should integrate the richness of the euro-Atlantic archive with the diversity of perspectives and historical depth provided by material culture and historical linguistics (Almeida, 2019; de Luna, 2021). The issue at hand thus deals with a time frame larger than a modernity driven by Europeans and asks historians, particularly those grappling with African histories within the Atlantic world, to recognize and integrate the diversity of Africanist methodologies into their research framework.

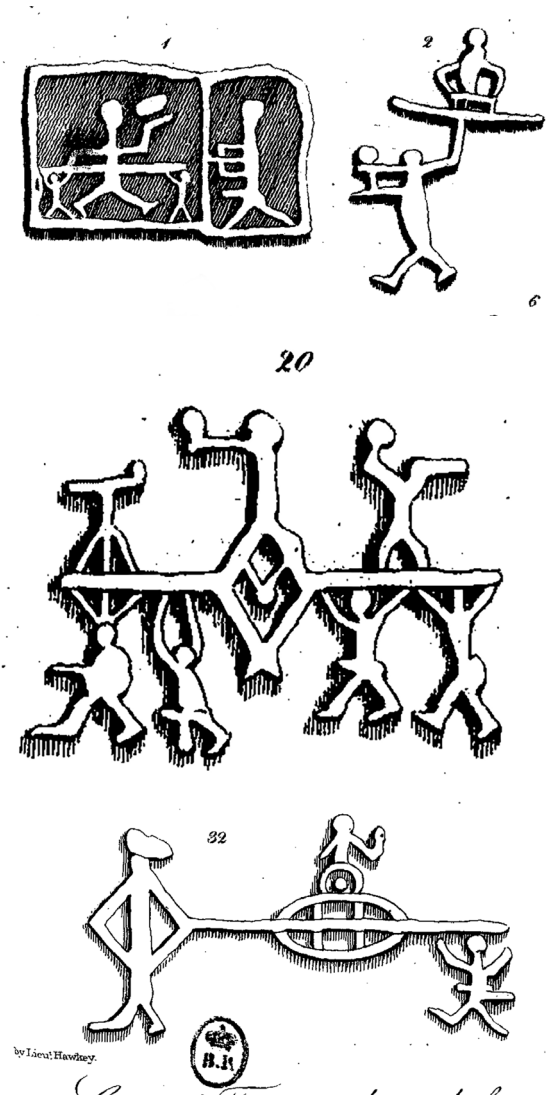
In this chapter, I show how the rise of what Wyatt MacGaffey called the Kongolese oligarchy in the eighteenth century radically transformed the slaving strategies they inherited from their ancestors, in no small part by revising the moral imaginations upon which such strategies rested. Oligarchs did not 'invent' the idea of 'slave' amid external pressures, but dislodged the prototypical old notion of 'extreme dependency' to propose a dehumanized notion of 'plunder' – although commoners, in a classical ploy, fought to retain older notions of dependency. To capture this tension between change and resilience, I begin considering the representation of 'slaves' in the carvings at *Tadi Dia Mwango,* a rock art at the Congo River, as well as evidence drawn from historical linguistics. Here, Wittgenstein's metaphor about the thread becomes illuminating: as he suggests, understanding concepts is akin to 'spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre' (Wittgenstein, 1967, 32e). The meanings of 'slavery' in Southern Lower Congo history, thus, are parsed through this intricate process of intertwining various strands of evidence and interpretation (Schoenbrun, 2012: 295-96).

Representing 'Slaves' in the Congo River (1400-1800)

Let us begin analyzing a rock art representing a 'slave' in the Congo River. It was first fully described by Captain Tuckey in his famous *Narrative of an Expedition to Explore the River Zaire* (Tuckey 1818). On 25 July 1816, upon navigating the Congo upriver, Captain Tuckey and his shipmates encountered a rock with numerous carvings on its flat façade. For the European sailors, the rock attracted their ethnographic curiosity, prompting a man called 'Lieutenant Hawkey' to draw copies of the carvings in two plates, later published in the book (fig. 1-3). For the local onboard Kikongo speakers (referred to as 'natives' in Tuckey's narrative), the rock was known as *Tadi Dia Mwango* ('Rock of the roof pole'), and it presented itself as something more than just an object of curiosity – it was a dwelling place of a *nsimbi*, a territorial spirit ruling the river (Slenes 2001: 201). Based on conversations with residents, Tuckey concluded that a 'learned priest of Nokki' who dedicated his life towards 'making fetishes' was responsible for these enigmatic carvings. Provided one was willing to offer monetary compensation, he would be willing to share his ancient knowledge. Lieutenant Hawkey, a member of Tuckey's crew, carefully reproduced thirty-three of these images, attributing descriptive names to them as per his understanding and (apparently) conversations with residents.

Rock art appears throughout different sections of the Congo River, but it is concentrated in the Lovo Massif, in the northern region of the Kongolese kingdom, where more than 5,000 rock images are located over an area of about 117 inventoried sites (Heimlich 2016). A team of archaeologists led by Geoffroy Heimlich has recently suggested that, based on pigment samples taken from one cave in this region, the drawings were made between AD 1480 and 1800, the same broad period when the Kingdom of Kongo was embroiled with European interests in the Atlantic (Heimlich et al. 2013). However, it cannot be discarded that this 'rock art could well have started earlier' (Heimlich et al. 2013: 1389). As suggested by Heimlich, rock art could be connected to several rituals, including public healing practices such as Kimpasi initiations. However, if Tuckey's testimony is correct and such rock art was indeed created and activated by a 'learned priest', such drawings were more than simple representations on the wall: they were also *nkisi*, a material manufactured to appease a *nsimbi* (Gutierrez 2009).

The depiction of 'slaves' within the carved representation on *Tadi Dia Mwango* provides important insights into the interplay of social hierarchy and ideology among Kikongo speakers during the period considered. Of particular interest is one drawing ('2') explicitly ascribed to the condition of slavery by Hawkey, showing an anthropomorphic figure engaged in carrying a man identified as a 'gentleman' on what resembles a hammock. The author defines the image as a 'gentleman borne by a slave'. Although Tuckey and his shipmate Hawkey have only conclusively designated this image as a depiction of a slave, several other suggestive representations of slaves exist, such as in images 1, 20, and 32, where the



Figures 1-3: Figures 1, 2, 20, and 32 depicted on the facade of *Tadi Dia Mwango*.

motif appears to depict a 'gentleman in his hammock' (Gutierrez, 2009: 58). There is a striking similarity between these representations and those from Theodor de Bry's edition of Pigafetta and Duarte Lopes's book about the Kingdom of Kongo, which warrants further exploration.

De Bry's book delineates what Pigafetta reported in his original text based on Duarte Lopes's testimony (Pigafetta and Lopes 1989 [1591]). They spoke of noblemen being carried by slaves or individuals from the lowest social strata (fig. 4). These carriers were demarcated by their attire, which included garments covering

Figure 4: Nobles carried in hammocks by slaves (*servorum*) or hired laborers (*conductitiorum*), according to De Bry edition.

their lower bodies while leaving the rest of the body visibly bare. This provides a stark contrast to the common inhabitants in the region, being a sign of the slave carriers' social status and a way of consolidating the inherent power dynamics at play. In line with this interpretative framework, it can be argued that images 1, 20, and 32 encapsulated in *Tadi dia Mwango* likely mirror the same trope that the De Bry images represent. The crucial distinction lies in the fact that this rock art remarkably captures a representation of enslaved carriers made by a local person, a healer, according to Tuckey. Indeed, as the anthropologist Manuel Gutierrez suggests, 'litters' were symbols of power (Gutierrez, 2009: 57).

The engraved imagery found on *Tadi dia Mwango* thus encapsulates a complex iconography of slavery, suggesting an endogenous conceptualization surrounding the conduct and implications of enslavement. What was the word Kisikongo speakers used to refer to the 'slave' engraved in rock? The location and possible dating of this rock art, between the formation of the Kingdom of Kongo and the height of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the late eighteenth century suggests that its makers relied on a particular word to denote 'slave': *mubhica*. While the first references for 'slave' date from the fifteenth century in Portuguese-written sources [*esprivo/ escravo*] (Heywood 2009, 4), the first mention of a Kisikongo word for 'slave' comes from the catechism of Mateus Cardoso in 1624 (Bontinck 1978). Later, the term appeared repeatedly in European documents. It first appears in Van Gheel and Manuel Roboredo's dictionary, which was produced in 1652 (Van Gheel 1652). From there, cognates of the term appear in several documents describing neighbouring languages (Almeida 2020a). In each of its occurrences, particularly in Kisikongo-written documents, the term refers to 'slave', 'serúús', or the 'devil's servant', all of which suggest subordination and equivalence to the European understanding of slave status. Thus, what Liut. Hawkey was recorded as a slave, the makers of the inscriptions of *Tadia Dia Mwango* likely thought as *mvika* (the reflex of *mubhica* in the eighteenth century) (Bostoen and de Schryver 2015).

In the Kongo Kingdom, the concept of *mubhica*, as depicted in *Tadi Dia Mwango*'s engravings, highlights a deep-seated tradition in Central Africa of framing slavery through a moral lens. This tradition reveals a complex interplay between the social hierarchies and ideological underpinnings of Kisikongo speakers, where the practice of slavery, represented by the act of carrying, is imbued with profound cultural and moral significance. The term *mubhica*, and the corresponding rock art, underscore a resilient cognitive framework that has arguably navigated different contexts of enslavement. This analysis sets the stage for exploring how the act of CARRYING, central to the *mubhica* concept, embodies a resilient moral imagination in Lower Congo history, serving as a pivotal 'thread' in understanding the region's nuanced perspectives on slavery.[1]

Carrying as a Resilient Fiber of Mubhica (*-pɪkà) in Lower Congo History (ca. 700 BCE– ca. 1800)

I have previously argued that the term mubhica is a reflex of the ancient noun *-pɪkà (1/2), coined by Proto-North-West Bantu speakers around 700 BCE in southern Cameroon (Almeida 2020a). This term emerged during a period of village densification and increased sedentism, despite limited evidence of social inequality in the archaeological record. By 500 BCE, climate changes connected parts of the region and allowed for the expansion of Bantu-speaking settlements across Central Africa (Grollemund *et al.*, 2023). This expansion fostered the spread

of crops like pearl millet, although early Bantu-speaking communities maintained diverse food systems and used iron, wood, and rock implements.

Cognitive semantics reveals the enduring meanings of *-pɪkà, a term rooted in moral imagination, which cognitive linguists argue is built on embodied experiences and conceptual metaphors (Johnson 1994; Schoenbrun 2016; Almeida, 2020b). Metaphors like 'carrying' emerge from physical experiences and help individuals understand complex social structures (Kovecses 2010: 64). In the case of *-pɪkà, its meaning extends to support and refusal, evoking the dynamics of mutual dependence or dominance. Comparative studies across Bantu languages reveal *-pɪkà as the antonym of *-kúmú, historically understood as a revered leader, though Kathryn de Luna offers a reinterpretation as any villager who protects communal honour (De Luna 2013). This suggests that *-kúmú represented a shared, horizontally distributed honour, contrasting with the vertical social relations connoted by *-pɪkà.

An important social change is thus witnessed with the creation of *-pɪkà by Proto-North-West Bantu speakers approximately 3,000 years ago. This term apparently stood as a counterforce to the deep-rooted conceptualization of *-kúmú, marking an important signpost in the moral evolution of early Bantu speakers: its creation signified what a historian might aptly describe as 'an involuntary relationship of mutual dependence between two distinctly unequal partners' (Toledano 2017). From the horizontally distributed sentiment of honour, *-pɪkà created a vertical social relationship, where those called as such were carriers, and those carried were *-kúmú.

Of course, the scarcity of archaeological evidence limits our understanding of how early Bantu speakers used this root to form diverse societies across Central Africa in the first millennium CE. We know that societies speaking languages of the Kongo Language Cluster, the Njila group in today's Angola and the Luban family in the Upemba depression have all retained the root (Almeida 2020b; Almeida and FitzSimons 2022). After the seventeenth century, documentary sources and material culture in both the KLC and Njila groups reveal the deep-seated metaphor SLAVERY IS CARRYING within the region. Echoing Wittgenstein's metaphor of 'spinning a thread by twisting fibre on fibre,' various strands of evidence support the hypothesis that local cognates of *-pɪkà served as a prototype (Lakoff 1987, 12) for slave status in the region, commonly conceptualized through the conceptual metaphor of CARRYING.

The proto-metaphor is well illustrated in Antonio Cavazzi's account of Queen Njinga (Cavazzi 1687), where he recounts the queen sitting over her slave as a stark demonstration of her authority, particularly in the presence of the Portuguese ambassador. In this act of 'sitting', or being 'carried', Queen Njinga was embodying the power dynamics encapsulated in the act of one being seated over another – a *mubika* in Kimbundu, Njinga's language. Similarly, in eastern Angola, Portuguese explorer Henrique Augusto Dias de Carvalho observed that among the Lunda people, 'mubika' meant 'the one who carries' (Almeida 2012:139). Further north, in

the Viya-speaking communities of modern-day Gabon, the term denotes both 'slave' and 'candlestick' – the latter serving as a metaphor from colonial times for a 'slave' of the white man's torch, essentially 'carrying' the light for the colonizers (Veen and Bodinga-bwa-Bodinga 2002). This nuanced usage underscores the metaphor's depth, signifying not just a physical act of carrying, but a broader condition of servitude.

The proto-metaphor also underscored that interdependence was a fundamental aspect of the -kúmú/-píkà relationship. Within the intricate history of early Bantu speakers, the proto-metaphor SLAVERY IS CARRYING emerged as a crucial element of Bantu vocabulary, establishing a cognitive framework that normalized new social relationships infused with paternalistic nuances. This proto-metaphor introduces several implications. Notably, when Proto-North-West speakers coined the word, they attached the prefixes ½ to it, signalling to their listeners they recognized the humanity of those so categorized. This effort supported their ongoing negotiation and re-negotiation of social roles, relationships, and, crucially, hierarchies. The concept *-pɪkà, denoting those in a position of extreme dependency under the dominion of *-kúmú, mirrors the latter's perspective, reinforcing the perceived naturalness of that hierarchical bond.

The enduring images carved into *Tadi Dia Mwango* serve as a poignant reminder of the deep-seated traditions and conceptualizations of slavery that its creators drew upon to convey meaning through depictions of litters and enslaved carriers. Yet made centuries before the arrival of Tuckey and his crew in the Congo River, or a just a few decades earlier, the representation stood in stark contrast to the era's emerging brutal realities of enslavement, marked by the rise of a new class of enslavers within the Kongolese kingdom. From the perspective of conceptual history, the eighteenth century marks a pivotal point south of the Congo River, prompting an examination of the significant role the oligarchy played in reshaping the contours of slavery in the region.

Oligarchical Innovations: Slavery is Plundering, *mvika* as *Épouses Gratuites*

The rise of the Kongolese oligarchy in the eighteenth century marks a dramatic reconfiguration of the concept of slavery in southern Lower Congo. An unsteady group of enslaving oligarchs emerged from the Kongolese Civil War amidst the unremitting violence that followed the Kingdom of Kongo's civil war (1665-1709) (Broadhead 1979; J. Thornton 1997). These factions of oligarchs were deeply intertwined with the Atlantic slave trade, which, in turn, fundamentally altered the nature of their power and influence within the region. Their *modus operandi* displayed both continuity and change: they forged alliances through clan migration histories, marriages, and offices, constituting an oligarchical class based on what the oligarchs themselves perceived as tradition (MacGaffey 2000, 72). At the same time, the burgeoning demand for slaves in the Atlantic trade led to a

reconfiguration of slaving systems, prompting oligarchs to create two distinct pathways for capturing and alienating slaves.

The first pathway was commercial enslavement, tied predominantly to what they called *-bundu(1/2)*, a commodified notion of 'slave', and directly linked to the Atlantic market. The second pathway, primarily domestic, was the *specialization* of the old concept of extreme dependency (*-pɪkà) to a concept of 'female slave' (*mvika*), through which oligarchs sought to deal with the demographic consequences brought about by commercial slaving (Sakala 2016; Thornton 2021). These effects led to an intensification of female slaves brought from the interior, coinciding with the rising importance of matrilineal principles within lineage politics (MacGaffey 1983; 2013). This divergent approach to male and female enslavement illustrates a distinct gendering of slavery, reflective of new changing social and political dynamics wrought by the Atlantic economy. These analyses based on linguistic evidence thus substantiate MacGaffey's argument that matrilineal descent 'only makes sense when a supplementary source of wives for the male members of the group is available' (MacGaffey 2005, 199). Retaining enslaved women from the interior made that supplementary source available for Kisikongo-speaking oligarchs.

Understanding the innovative ideas and methods developed by Kisikongo-speaking slavers requires first a focus on the context of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in which such slavers participated. Between 1750 and 1867, the ports of the Lower Congo (Ngoyo, Kakongo, Loango, and even Ambriz) accounted for approximately 47% of all enslaved individuals taken from West-Central Africa, amounting to over two million captives (Domingues 2013: 111). After 1780, geo-political transformations in Atlantic slavery led to more slave ships coming to the Congo coast, particularly from Portugal and Brazil, resulting in increased dependence of local oligarchs with foreign traders (Richardson and Silva 2014; Ferreira 2015). Such slave ships departing from ports North of Luanda had a high ratio of enslaved men within their cargoes, increasing continuously between 1781 and 1855 from 66 percent to a staggering 81 percent (Domingues 2017: 108). Explanations of this demographic pattern must be tied to what Kisikongo-speaking slavers tried to achieve in the hinterland. The historiography knows well the net effect of enslavement patterns in the region (Heywood 2009; Almeida 2012; Domingues 2017); we know comparatively little about the terms in which oligarchs made those new forms of enslavement possible (MacGaffey 2008).

Dominating the socio-cultural milieu at Mbanza Kongo and its nearby territories, the Kisikongo-speaking oligarchs replaced the millennia-old concept of *-pɪkà (which they pronounced as *mvika*) with the new concept #-bundu (1/2) 'loot, slave'. To create this new word, Kisikongo speakers joined the suffix of quality /u/ to the verb #-bunda 'to raid for slaves', a verb used with this meaning among Kimbundu speakers further south at least since the seventeenth century (Heintze 1985, 324; Almeida 2020a, 277-78). It is likely that Kisikongo borrowed this meaning and fashioned the new word in a derogatory reference to their southern neighbours

with whom they also preyed. Indeed, friar Cannecattim's assertion that speakers of these two languages inverted the meanings of their neighbours' ethnonyms to denote 'slave' is documented in his 1804 dictionary, where he lists the term '-Kongo' as synonymous with 'debtor', illustrating this linguistic reversal (Cannecattim 1804, 311). Kisikongo speakers also interpreted #-bundu as belonging to the prefixes 1/2, used by Bantu speakers for classifying human entities and other agents (Katamba 2003). In other words, this linguistic innovation resulted from practice: the more they raided (#-bunda) people to export in their vicinities, the more they thought about their captives as 'human loot', the desired objective of successful plunderers, not as *-pɪkà with whom they had social obligations. This new term for the enslaved spread far in Lower Congo territory. It was understood as 'slave for white slave traders' (Laman 1936, 76) among the Yombe speakers and had a similar meaning further south among Kintandu speakers in the east (Butaye 1909). From this term, Kisikongo-speaking raiders came to develop a whole new vocabulary of slavery.

Oligarchs enslaving intensively created three new terms based on the concept #-*bundu*, conventionalizing a new way of thinking and reasoning about slavery in the region (fig. 5). First, by adding the suffix -an- into the root -bundu, speakers created the verb -*bunduna* to focus on the action of slaving *many at once*. This suffix conveys actions towards several other people (Schadeberg 2003, 76-84); the term is consistent with this principle because it conveys the act of enslaving whole clans or a 'number of people because of some crime' (W. Holman Bentley 1887, 71). Indeed, eighteenth-century missionary Castelo da Vide, when attempting to prevent the selling of Kongolese subjects to the Dutch at the coast, mentioned that witchcraft accusations were a common cause of the 'loss of whole families' to the slave trade (De Vide,1788). So recurrent must have been collective enslavement that speakers once more resorted to morphological derivation to fashion a new noun out of this practice, conceptualizing the enslaver as -*bunduni*, that is, as someone capable of carrying away many people at once into slavery. By the end of the nineteenth century, the abstract notion of slavery was rendered as *ubundu*, dislodging the ancient and prototypical notion of extreme dependency to refer to 'slavery'.

However, Kisikongo-speaking oligarchs did not forget the concept of *-pɪkà: they specialized its meaning. This evidence speaks to how far the slaving frontier penetrated in West-Central Africa and how it affected the kinship patterns of local societies (Harms 1981; Miller 1988; Candido 2022). Indeed, the relentless involvement of oligarchs with the Atlantic slave trade provoked a deep-rooted gender disparity – a disparity they were able to turn to their advantage by opening a new avenue of personal advancement in southern Lower Congo.

In a region dominated by networks of oligarchs, the gender imbalance prompted male leaders to retain free women through marriages, enhancing alliances and protection (Broadhead 1997). Facing demographic challenges created by their engagement with the Atlantic trade, these male oligarchs relinquished their parental rights and focused on their sisters' fertility to expand their influence.

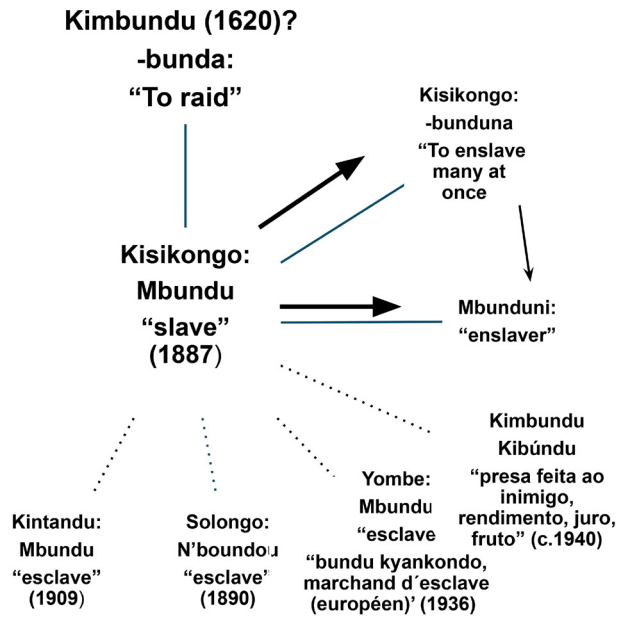


Figure 5: Morphological derivation and semantic diffusion of the word Mbundu across the Lower Congo and northern Angola. Solid lines represent morphological derivations, while dashed lines indicate borrowings.

They did so because acquiring enslaved women emerged as a strategic response, granting oligarchs control over their labour and reproduction while avoiding demographic liabilities. These *épouses gratuites*, as astutely noted by an observer, were particularly valued for their contribution to subsistence production and their capability to generate more enslaved progeny (Swartenbroeckx 1966). This evolution fostered the creation of matrilineal groups with patrifilial connections, as identified by anthropologist Wyatt MacGaffey, signifying a transformative approach to maintaining power and lineage continuity amidst gender imbalances (MacGaffey 2000; MacGaffey 2005: 201).

What is the primary evidence of this change? Kisikongo speakers narrowed down the semantic range of the concept *-pɪkà to refer only to enslaved women. Moreover, this word was borrowed many times over in the lands beyond Malebol Pool until it reached Lake Ntomba in the Upper Congo River, where it meant 'slaves who become wives' (Anon. 1913). The spread of cognates of *-vika*, bearing phonological traces indicative of borrowing, strongly suggests that the term originated among Kisikongo speakers and then traveled inland. In contrast, the movement of enslaved women, referred to as *-vika*, appears to have followed a reverse path, as evidenced by a notable borrowing of the term from Lake Ntomba languages into the Bobangi speech community near the Malebo Pool (Almeida, 2020a, 292).

Indeed, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the missionary William Bentley noticed that 'many slave wives' were offered to be sold in the great market of Manyanga, between Mbanza Kongo and Malebo Pool (Bentley 1900, 402).

Indeed, more documents suggest the trade of enslaved Upper Congo women to southern Lower Congo. The Baptist missionary John Weeks recalled that a woman, who 'lived behind the riverine folk three hundred miles above Stanley pool' (Weeks 1913: 17-18), arrived in one of the slave caravans at Mbanza Kongo during the 1880s. William Bentley's most important informant, a Kisikongo-speaking boy named Nlemvo, married Kalombo Kavwazila, an Upper Congo enslaved woman released from bondage by missionaries in 1883 (Vos 2015: 72). While these documents stem from the late nineteenth century, and linguistic evidence is famously hard to date, the transformation of the concepts of *-pɪkà to mvika and #-bundu within Kisikongo-speaking communities correlates well with the high gender imbalance within slave ships leaving the Congo coast since the late 18th century.

These changes underscore the profound conceptual innovations Kisikongo-speaking oligarchs devised to participate in the currents of the trans-Atlantic slave trade (fable 1). They wove it into two distinct conceptual realities by unravelling their millennia-old concept of *-pɪkà. First, the concept of #-bundu introduced a new metaphor, SLAVERY IS PLUNDERING, through which oligarchs conceptualized their practices, embedding ambition and violence that made some alienable to the market. Second, *-vika* refined the scope of *-pɪkà to specifically denote enslaved women, implying that FEMALE SLAVERY IS CARRYING IN THE PRIVATE SPHERE.

Finally, oligarchs retained *-pikà's CARRYING metaphor to mean power at the harrowing times of the slave trade, even if Kisikongo speakers specified the word *-vika*. Indeed, at Boma, a nineteenth-century statuette depicted a mfumu (*-kúmú) symbolically seated atop a slave.[2] Just like Queen Njinga three centuries earlier, the statuette encapsulated the enduring symbols of power and domination, this time capturing the pride and presence of an oligarch.

Anxiety and Resistance in Kongo Slavery

Although not a strict rule, slaves generally lack the power to shape the lexicon of a language to the extent that their masters do. In this context, linguistic borrowings can sometimes serve as an index of how slaves thought, reflecting external concepts that, through frequent use in slaver societies, became adopted over time. However, identifying lexical borrowings directly linked to slaves in Central African languages has proven elusive. The only potential example is *nzakomba*, a term for 'god' from the C languages upriver, which may have travelled downstream with enslaved women to the Malebo Pool (Almeida 2020a: 292). Still, while it is possible that the concept was known to Upper Congo women in Southern Lower Congo, it does not appear in Kisikongo.

However, we can sense the moral disapproval of the local population toward the actions of the oligarchies if we widen our focus to include the perspectives of peasants, who were often the common prey of these elites. For example, Bentley noted that residents of Mbanza Kongo referred to certain individuals as mfunya, meaning 'freebooter, one who plunders and does as he like, a man of violence' (Bentley 1887). Originally, *mfunya* described body parts like hairs or nails, or objects such as clothing, that individuals attached to *minkisi* like Lunkanka to make them hunt and attack (Janzen 1992: 195; MacGaffey and Harris 1993: 27). By the nineteenth century, *mfunya* had come to refer to raiders, suggesting that villagers associated raiding with the manipulation of invisible powers, rendering Joseph Miller's description of this period of slaving intensification as a 'plague of witches' particularly fitting (Miller 2009: 112). This word thus framed the way speakers drew from their theories of action to criticize what they perceived as illegitimate enslavement.

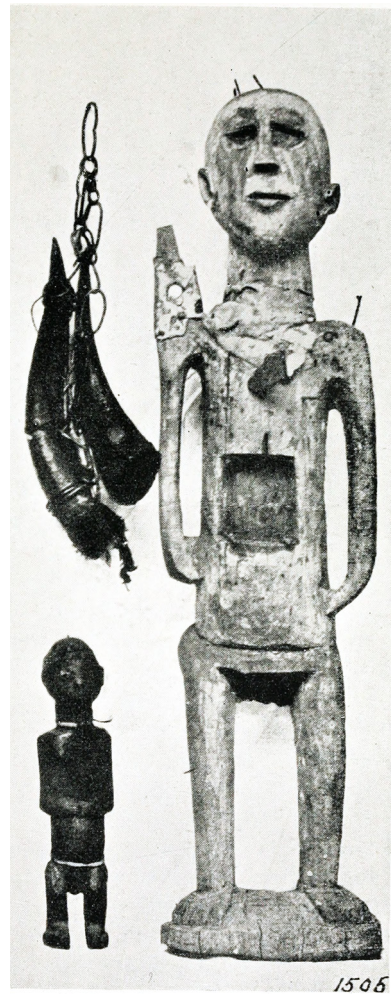


Figure 6: *Nkondi* figure (right) used by slavers in rituals to bind slaves to their masters, invoking threats of lightning and disease, as described by missionary John Weeks.

Nineteenth-century southern Lower Congo slavery is filled with stories and objects that illustrate the tension and contest between slaves and masters. While these narratives often resist precise historicization and dating, they are still worth recounting. Take, for example, two medicines through which slavers sought to coerce the enslaved. The first was known as an *nkondi*, a wooden figure activated by a *nganga nzazi* with the power to striking with lightning and imparting skin diseases to people that offended its clients (MacGaffey 2000: 97-105). By the end of the nineteenth century, John Weeks found that slavers used to 'tame slaves and bind them to their masters' by making them kneel and take an oath never to run away (Fig. 6) (Weeks 1914, 237). The second medicine, *mpungu*, circulated between widely among Kisikongo and Kitandu speakers further east. It gave their owners the power to attract runaway slaves to them and to keep their own slaves. Taming slaves through

Nkondi and mpungu were thus local innovations of what Igor Kopytoff called systems of compulsion that oligarchs made during the heyday of slavery in the South Atlantic (Kopytoff, 1989:46). Not unlike other slave masters elsewhere in the Atlantic, Kisikongo-speaking enslavers sought to instil fear among the enslaved at the very moment they were grappling with heightened anxiety over their actions, in a context where slave ownership had become the most critical pathway to prestige and self-realization.

To social historians, my argument is thus a familiar one: faced with the oligarchs' practices of plundering and commodification, the enslaved 'clung' to the CARRYING metaphor, invoking their rights under the traditional framework of extreme dependency, which allowed them to accept the social hierarchy in exchange for protections like food security and the space to pursue their modest aspirations. I have long argued that the ritual known as D*ya Nkombo* (Eating the goat) among Kisikongo speakers demonstrated how the enslaved set limit to the action of their masters by seeking out new one, especially when faced with mistreatment. (Weeks 1909; Almeida, 2012). This act of changing masters underscored a clever tactic from below, rooted in the cultural significance of goats within Central African societies as symbols of wealth and exchange.

In this context, the term -kombo, originally a borrowing from Proto-Njila to Proto-Kongo denoting 'goat'(Ehret 1999, 76; Vansina 2004, 281), evolved to encompass the notion of a 'runaway slave', illustrating the slaves' agency in navigating their bonds within the violent landscape of late eighteenth-century southern Lower Congo. Dissatisfied slaves felt it was their right to seek out a new master whenever their current bondage became overwhelming. They would flee to another master for protection, and as mentioned earlier, these masters often saw them as valuable additions to their retinues. Historical documents dating back to the seventeenth century underscore the pivotal role that runaway slaves played as political agents within the region, especially when they sought asylum in the Kingdom of Kongo after fleeing from Luanda (Ferreira 2011). But linguistic traces further reveal the profound demographic impact of runaway slaves in the late eighteenth century, with the Kisikongo word *-kombo* being adopted by Kimbundu speakers in the south during this period, highlighting the role of runaway slaves in crisscrossing the region's political and linguistic boundaries in search for new patrons that could offer better opportunities for themselves (Almeida, 2020a: 296).

In the nineteenth century, the language of slavery in the Kingdom of Kongo both shaped and expressed the stakes in the relationships between masters and slaves. While masters devised strategies for commodifying and immobilizing human beings, the enslaved reminded them that these strategies would only succeed if they respected older forms of social obligations. These two distinct visions of society were conveyed through rituals and oaths, embodied in objects and words, and permeated by fear and anxiety.

Conclusion

Scholars agree that slavery is a protean category, shaped by multiple threads weaved in multiple ways, not by a single one universally found in every instance of slavery (Taylor 2005; Patterson 2017 277; Patterson 2021 1065-66; Almeida 2020a 111). Thus, debating whether a single institution of slavery *existed* in Central Africa's distant past is unproductive. Although European concepts and interests significantly shaped the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the southern Lower Congo, they constituted merely one thread among many that Kisikongo-speaking slavers interwove to craft their new slaving strategies. These strands were a blend of the novel and the inherited (Glassman 2021, 80). They were not simply adopted. The language that commodified human beings, although an internally generated innovation, was just one such thread. Other threads, however, like the metaphorical concept of CARRYING, showcased the resilience of local interpretations of slavery, weaving through the fabric of southern Lower Congo societies' understanding and reasoning about the practice.

CARRYING demonstrated remarkable resilience, persisting even amidst the oligarchs' introduction of the concept of #-bundu, which rendered slavery in terms of plunder. The act of CARRYING, deeply ingrained in the embodied experiences of the people, transcended mere physicality to embody the complex web of moral and ethical obligations that both masters and slaves navigated. This metaphor was rich in entailments, allowing speakers to mould and interpret social relationships in multifaceted ways. It could symbolize mutual support and interconnectedness, yet it also emerged as a potent symbol of moral subjugation. This metaphor thus became itself a battleground of moral negotiation, where the stakes were the rights of protection extreme dependents did not want to lose. Indeed, by the twentieth century, the anthropologist Manuel Gutierrez found the same metaphor on wooden pot lids in Cabinda (Gutierrez 2009, 58). One of them depicted two men carrying a third, accompanied by a note below: 'L'injustice Sociale'.

More than simply reflecting a singular institution, or a linear evolution, the coexistence of millennia-old ideas with more recent ones highlights the heterotemporalities of slavery entangled in the Kingdom of Kongo, as people continually debated and contested their meanings and implications.

Illustration credits

Figure 1-3: Tuckey, J. (1818) *Narrative of an Expedition to Explore the River Zaire, Usually Called the Congo, in South Africa, in 1816*. New York: William B. Gilley, 380 & 382.

Figure 4: Filippo Pigafetta and Duarte Lopes, *Regnvm Congo hoc est Vera Descriptio Regni Africani, Qvod tam ab Incolis Qvam Lusitanis Congus Appellatur.* (Francofvrti: Excudebat Erasmvs Kempffer, impensis haeredum Ioan. Theod. de Bry, 1624), 8.

Figure 5: Laman, K. E. (1936) *Dictionnaire Kikongo-Français*: *avec une étude phonétique décrivant les dialectes les plus importants de la langue dite Kikongo*. Bruxelles: Librairie Falk fils, Georges van Campenhout, successeur, 76; Assis Junior, A. de (s.d.) *Dicionário Kimbundu-Português: linguístico, botânico, histórico e corográfico*. *Seguido de um índice alfabético dos nomes próprios*. Luanda: Argente, Santos & Ca., 115; Visseq, A. (1890) *Dictionnaire Fiot-Français*. Paris: Maison-mère, 28; Bentley, W. H. (1887) *Dictionary and Grammar of the Kongo Language as Spoken at San Salvador, the Ancient Capital of the Old Kongo Empire, West Africa*. London: Baptist Missionary Society, 71, 195,196; Heintze, B. (1985) *Fontes para a história de Angola do século XVII*. Stuttgart: Steiner-Verlag-Wiesbaden-GmbH, 324; Butaye, R. (1910) *Dictionnaire Kikongo-Français, Français-Kikongo*. Roulers: Jules de Meester, imprimeur-éditeur.

Figure 6: John H. Weeks, *Among the Primitive Bakongo: A Record of Thirty Years' Close Intercourse with the Bakongo and Other Tribes of Equatorial Africa, with a Description of Their Habits, Customs & Religious Beliefs* (London: Seeley, Service & Co. Limited, 1914), 241.

Notes

[1] In this chapter, following the suggestion of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980), metaphorical concepts are denoted using SMALL CAPITALS.

[2] The Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren (Verly archive), <https://www.africamuseum.be/en/discover/focus_collections/display_object?objectid=30628, accessed 1 October 2024>

CHAPTER 1.3

The Powers of Objects and the Collapse of Lunda (Angola and Western DRC), 1850-1900

David M. Gordon

Introduction

For the historian and anthropologist of central Africa, Jan Vansina, art brings 'an immediacy from the past that cannot be replaced or ignored, and it gives us a further tool to probe the significance of both small breezes and long trade winds in the atmosphere of history'. But crafted objects not only represent the past; they inform action. In this regard, Vansina ends his overview of African art history with a further suggestion: 'Art, produced by forces outside itself, expresses metaphors which in turn can lead to further cultural and social change' (Vansina 1984: 213). Taking Vansina's afterthought as inspiration, this chapter suggests that crafted objects are effective sources for history not only because they record the past but also because they inspire action.

This chapter examines the structured power relationships in which crafted objects are implicated by emphasizing 'object agency', the impact of created objects in networks of power. For anthropologist Alfred Gell, who pioneered this approach, objects distributed the agency of their creators by inspiring action through the visual powers (Gell 1998). Art objects, in Gell's view, are like technologies that act, reproduce, and even transform social relations independent of the creator of the technology. Gell's theories have been applauded in anthropology as charting a new way of understanding relations between peoples and art objects, and, in part, inspiring a biographical approach to such objects (Hoskins 2006). In an insightful reflection on Gell's philosophy of art objects, anthropologist Daniel Miller reminds us that the anthropologist (and historian, I would argue) nonetheless needs to locate such abstractions about human-object relations within contexts of everyday social and historical meanings (Miller 2005).

Ideas of object agency resonate with central African theories of power, most famously for the renowned *minkisi* power figures of west-central Africa, which anthropologist Wyatt MacGaffey describes as the 'personhood of objects' (MacGaffey 2000: 78-133). *Minkisi* power objects draw on their artistic visual impact to induce harm, heal, love, jealousy, and hate; they connect the past to the present, the ancestors to the living. They provide one way to render visible aspects of an invisible world that constructs varied terrains of power (Gordon 2012). In a different example from the region, Cécile Fromont's study of art objects that resulted from the Kongo Kingdom's engagement with Portuguese Catholics, hybrid art objects helped to construct hierarchies of authority in the Christian Kongo Kingdom (Fromont

2014). Such hybridity suggests not simply a central African theory of object agency at work: this chapter points out that, like Catholic Iberians of the early modern period, nineteenth-century Europeans also created objects that inspired agency.

By emphasizing the agency of these objects, the analysis in this chapter shifts from how an object is used or the intention of its use by creator or patron, to the actions that an object inspires. Even as the object biography approach might have been partly inspired by an appreciation of object agency (Hoskins 2006), too often the biography of objects only considers how objects passively passed through human societies: how objects were created, manipulated, stole, bought, sold, maimed and celebrated, and, ultimately commodified, in their social life (Appadurai, Kopytoff, 1986). Instead, in this chapter, art objects, through inspiration, act to influence, structure, and reproduce power relationships.

The emphasis here is on the actions inspired by art objects in the Kasai region of eastern Angola and western DRC during the late nineteenth century, a fascinating case of the contested transformation of power with the onset of the colonial occupations of Central Africa. Once a stronghold of the Lunda influence, in the second half of the nineteenth century traders and mercenaries, self-identified as Chokwe, undermined the Lunda tributary system, brokered access to Lunda state, influencing accession to the *mwant yav* title, and even invaded the capital, the Mussumba, in 1887. Ambakista and occasionally Ovimbundu caravans sought ivory, beeswax and rubber from the Chokwe for global trade; and captive labour, especially enslaved women, still lubricated regional circuits of exchange. In nineteenth-century Kasai, cultural imaginations, articulated in stories and associated networks of political titles, along with art objects, generated and exercised precarious power rarely supported by overwhelming military force.

Amid growing trade and political turmoil, the scientific and commercial agents of Germany, France, Britain, Portugal, and King Leopold II of Belgium arrived. Around the Kasai River, the Congo Free State (CFS) and the Portuguese attempted to firm up the limits of their influence following the vaguely demarcated areas of influence after the Berlin Conference (1884-85). But the European presence was slight and dispersed, not quite a conquest, but rather a series of trading caravans, scientific expeditions, and violent raids (and often all of these at the same time), marked less by hegemony than by vulnerability. Europeans too grasped onto objects, flags, and treaties to shore up their authority.

This chapter shows the actions that objects inspired in late nineteenth-century Kasai. The point is less that object agency was a particularly central African phenomenon, as might be implied by studies of the *minkisi* figurines, or even an element of African-Atlantic Catholicism of the Kongo Kingdom, but rather that crafted objects played a key role in structuring political transitions. The chapter shows how objects generated power relationships, especially in frontier lands just prior to colonial rule. The role of objects is demonstrated by the close contextual study of three types of art objects.

The first type of art object intervened in the realm of the imagination, providing a way to imagine political leadership. Sculptures of the hunting hero Chibinda Ilunga defined qualities of leadership, disseminating the idea that the hunter was an archetype of prestigious leadership that would restore order to the Lunda polity, and justified the usurpation of power by skilled foreigners.

The second type of object helped to build alliances. The machete-like knife, the *mukwale*, an elite weapon, exerted agency through the weighty impression of this finely crafted and lethal iron object. It inspired leaders to create alliances, principally between Chokwe and Lunda elites. An alliance secured through the *mukwale* meant not having to pay tribute to the owner of the *mukwale.* For the Lunda, the *mukwale* needed to be redeemed from the Chokwe to the Lunda titleholder, the *mwant yav,* to restore the political and economic structure of the Lunda state.

The third type of object made a claim to conquest by defining and marking out space and affiliation. By the end of the nineteenth century, hybrid Euro-African objects, including letters, treaties, and flags, began to influence power relations. Flags pinned to the ground were demonstrations of power over a defined territory. Treaties also performed power, particularly in imperial boardrooms. Flags and treaties inspired new forms of patronage that underpinned the colonial occupation.

Objects of the Imagination: The Wood Sculptures of Chibinda Ilunga

In the second half of the nineteenth century, a version of the Lunda love story, became a popular alliance-building narrative across the caravan routes of south-central Africa. The story told of a hunter, Chibinda Ilunga, who fell in love with a queen, Lueji, enthroned by her father who had disinherited her rebellious and violent brothers, Kinguri and Kinyama. The story became of lynchpin of political relationships between the Lunda capital, the Mussumba, and outlying polities and peoples, including the Chokwe, an expansive group of hunters organized under independent leaders from the Kasai to Zambezi rivers. Chibinda Ilunga (literally, the hunting man), became a key figure in power struggles over Lunda rule (Gordon 2023). Even as the story is most closely associated with the founding of the Lunda, the inspirational figure of the wandering hunter seduced by a local owner of the land is far more widespread in Central African oral traditions. The oral tradition, as many have noted, provided a symbolic template for Central African leadership and even cosmology (De Heusch 1982; Reefe 1981; Hoover 1978; Palmeirim 2006).

The visual components of these oral traditions have, however, rarely been appreciated, except for Allen and Mary Nooter Roberts's groundbreaking work on the Luba (Roberts 1996). The Kasai versions of the oral tradition, including those told at the Lunda court, came to be represented in Chokwe figural sculptures. Chokwe men were excellent hunters; perhaps because of their skills in creating and maintaining weaponry and artifacts for the hunting and collection of ivory,

rubber and beeswax for trade, Chokwe men were also excellent wood carvers and metalsmiths. By the nineteenth century they distinguished themselves in the creation of masks for male initiation (*makanda)*, alongside figural sculptures of heroes, and, by the late nineteenth century European-style chairs with an elaborated scenography linked to daily life, ritual, and leadership.

From masks to figurines, Chokwe wood sculpture was an influential aspect of visual art of Kasai during the nineteenth century. Beyond the spoken word in legends, praises and oral traditions, such art provided a visual map of social relationships and hierarchies. One of the most remarkable genres of this art were the wood sculptures of heroic figures, particularly the hunter-founder, Chibinda Ilunga. Only a handful of still-remaining Chibinda Ilunga figurines date definitively to the late nineteenth century.[1] Nonetheless, these nineteenth-century Chokwe sculptures of Chibinda Ilunga, which accompany other figural depictions of men and women of importance, come in sufficient diversity to suggest different artists and workshops devoted to the representation of the hunter across a wide region.[2] This chapter provides only one well-known illustrated example of these figurines, collected by German explorer Otto Schütt in 1879 (Fig. 1) (Bastin 1965; Schütt 1881). Even as Schütt described it as a 'well-carved fetish', it is unclear that such figures were fetishes in the sense of the Africa-Atlantic religious objects upon which Schütt based his categorization. Art historian Marie-Louise Bastin prefers to describe it and similar figurines as 'commemorative effigies' that celebrated a cultural hero rather than religious objects.

Figure 1: Hunting figure described by Bastin as Chibinda Ilunga, and collected by Otto Schütt in 1879.

The style of the Chibinda Ilunga figurine is that of an ancestral hero with typical and prominent Chokwe insignia (Gordon: forthcoming). Yet the Chibinda Ilunga of the Lunda oral tradition is thought to be 'Luba' – in a reference to the hunting prowess of the leaders of the reputed Luba empire to the east (and from whom the Lunda dynasty claimed descent). That the Chokwe, a group of loosely affiliated lineages who claim descent from the Lunda but have no relation to the Luba, depict and celebrate Chibinda Ilunga might seem an enigma. It is less puzzling, however, if less emphasis is placed on the purity of ethnic origins, a colonial and even postcolonial obsession, with different meanings and

saliency in the DRC and Angola, and instead on what the figure itself represented, a *chibinda* (in Chokwe, a hunter), with all of the apparel that a noble Chokwe man possessed: the rifle, the hunting knife, and especially the diadem (*yipenye*).

This sculpted hunting man demonstrated what it meant to be a Chokwe male leader in the late nineteenth century: in other words, it inspired certain qualities of leadership. These qualities are not difficult to appreciate when examining the figurine: He is a mobile hunter, with powerful legs that travelled and large capable hands that grasped his rifle and staff; his facial expression is both alert and primed for action and dreamy, in touch with the spirits of the bush (the *mahamba*) who adorn the two wings of his diadem and next to his left foot. In his one hand is the staff, a symbol of chiefly power that provided fecundity; in the other hand is the rifle that provided meat. Their spiritual, political, and symbolic elements are elaborated through the component parts of the figurine: the *mahamba* spirits that guide action, the headdress, the gun and ammunition belt, the staffs, and the axe at his side. This powerful and spiritually attuned hunter hero was not only the key figure of Chokwe society but a model for political leadership across Kasai.

The celebration of the hunter hero occurred as the Lunda state fragmented. Inheritors to the title of *mwant yav*, the supreme Lunda ruler, competed among themselves and employed Chokwe mercenaries to rid themselves of rivals. The figurines were thereby part of a process of conquest. Even as European documentary evidence presents the Chokwe as ruthless traders, mercenaries, and slavers, through the Chibinda Ilunga figurines the image we have of the Chokwe is quite different: they idealize a hero who would deliver food and fecundity. The figurines celebrated these movers, hunters, and traders, men of many lands, agents of globalization who appropriated and replaced sedentary politics of the old such as the Lunda.

Chibinda Ilunga, the hunter, held the promise of a restoration of ordered politics: he was a mythical hero who inspired peace, fertility and fecundity in a land in turmoil. This artistic figurine was primarily an intervention in the politics of leadership, allowing people to imagine rulers in a way that modelled the Chokwe hunter. Other objects translated that imagination into actual control over people, goods, and land: Before Chibinda Ilunga could reign, or in practical terms a legitimate *mwant yav* titleholder lead a *pax Lunda,* objects had to be possessed by the correct titleholders. Key to doing so was placing the *mukwale* knife at the side of the *mwant yav*.

Objects of Tribute and Alliance: The Mukwale Knife

The *mukwale* knife of war was a symbol of power for rulers across the Kasai region. Titleholders proudly wore a sheathed *mukwale*; frontline soldiers employed them in a line of attack; executioners amputated body parts of prisoners or criminals with one swing of the knife. The *mukwale*, before the rifle, was the elite weapon of Kasai.[3] It could also be exchanged between rulers in request for an alliance.

This is precisely what occurred when, in the early 1870s, the Lunda lord Xanama (Ambumba) sent his *mukwale* to the Chokwe lord Quissengue (the modern Angolan titleholder, Mua[t]chissengue) in exchange for his support for his claiming the *mwant yav* title and to kill his rival claimant Xa Madiamba (who Xanama had accused of killing his relative, presumably by sorcery).[4] Due to Chokwe mercenary support, Xanama became *mwant yav*, reigning from 1874-1883, and Quissengue was freed from tribute obligations to the Lunda paramount, including Xanama but also his successors, at least as long as he held the *mukwale*.[5] Nonetheless, Quissengue refused to fulfil the order to kill Xa Madiamba, even as he kept the *mukwale*.[6]

Since Quissengue controlled one of the main trade routes westwards, the lack of tribute payments cut the Lunda from a valuable source of revenue that underpinned their patronage system. Probably for this reason, the reign of Xanama was one of decline for the Lunda state; after his death, there was competition over titles and political instability.[7] The *mukwale* was an instrument for Chokwe autonomy, which helped in their ascendency over Lunda titleholders. Successors to Xanama tried to redeem the *mukwale* from Quissengue, but he remained in too powerful a position and resisted its return.[8] Moreover, in December 1885, Chokwe mercenaries, probably supported by Xanama's son Quiboko, who named himself Muxid (or Mushid), after the Bayeke warlord Msiri to the east with whom he had spent time in exile, killed *Mwant Yav* Muriba, and captured several insignia of the Lunda state, including the *lukano* bracelets.[9]

With the rise of players like Quissengue and Muxid, the influence of a centralized Lunda state waned in favour of the more decentralized structure typical of Chokwe men supported by mobile followings. Titleholders relied on these armed followers – youth, described by outsiders as their sons or boys – to underpin their authority. Elder councillors still surrounded and influenced titleholders, but support relied on patronage. And in the absence of the flow of tribute through regular trade channels, the youth, ready to raid and go to war for ivory, captives and imported caravan goods, played an ever more significant role. In this context, the redemption of the *mukwale* seemed urgent, as, for Lunda elders especially, it promised to restore the older structures of patronage that underpinned a *pax Lunda*. For Quissengue and his Chokwe followers, on the other hand, the *mukwale* implied autonomy from Lunda overlordship along with the ability to raid independently.[10]

During this political and economic fragmentation, European expeditions, with different ambitions and resources, arrived. The Portuguese wanted to protect their claims against the Belgians and the English. Since they had few resources, the Portuguese relied on alliances with interior polities who claimed allegiance to the Portuguese crown. With these aims, the explorer-diplomat Henrique de Carvalho undertook his mission to the Lunda from 1884-88. He not only sought an alliance with the Lunda, but attempted to strengthen the integrity of the polity by ensuring smooth succession of *mwant yav* titleholders who were less beholden

to the Chokwe and to a rebellious and militarized youth. To that end Carvalho, supported by a faction of Lunda elders and Ambakista traders, wanted to restore power to the line of *Mwant Yav* Noeji (Nawej II, reigned approx. 1820s-1852), which had been usurped by the rival lineage of Xanama and his Chokwe mercenaries (who Carvalho's allies considered illegitimate). Restoring the legitimate line of succession, Carvalho and his allies thought, would restore peace and good governance to the region.[11] In August 1885, he allied with the exiled son of Noeji, Xa Madiamba, who Xanama had tried to kill, to travel with him to the Lunda capital, the Mussumba, where he would become *mwant yav*.[12] But the Lunda state, and the title of *mwant yav*, held little power until the *mukwale* was redeemed from the Chokwe lord Quissengue and Lunda structures of patronage restored.

In the published version of his expeditions, Carvalho celebrates these negotiations and subsequent redemption of the *mukwale*.[13] By contrast, Carvalho's unpublished diaries reveal quotidian frustrations. To redeem the *mukwale*, Carvalho negotiated with Quissengue, first through correspondence in April of 1886, and then in person during August of that year.[14] At first Quissengue wanted to give the *mukwale* to Muene Puto (Portugal), the real power behind the Lunda, rather than recognize the Portuguese ally and claimant to the *mwant yav* title, Xa Madiamba.[15] Quissengue's councillors also could not agree on what should be given in exchange for the *mukwale*. In the end, according to the published version and his unpublished diaries, he gave numerous articles for the personal use of Quissengue, including, among other objects, a uniform and a revolver.[16] The official instructions and advice to Carvalho prior to the expedition insisted that he should not become involved in Lunda-Chokwe intrigues; Carvalho thus doubted that the Portuguese administration would sanction or support this ransom of the *mukwale*, and recognized that these expenses might have to come out of his personal budget.[17]

The men around Quissengue were not happy with Carvalho's gifts. The attire and revolver for Quissengue were personal and thus could not be distributed to his followers. These prestige objects differed from the typical sources of tribute that Quissengue gained by keeping the *mukwale*. Quissengues's councillors (the Lunda honorific *quilolos* or elders *velhos*) and his 'boys' (*rapazes*) wanted ivory and slaves instead. In late August, as revealed by Carvalho's unpublished diaries, but obfuscated in the published version, Carvalho mediated in the exchange of slaves between Xa Madiamba and Quissengue, to accomplish the redemption of *mukwale*. Ultimately Quissengue received around fourteen slaves and the promises of ivory once Xa Madiamba came to power. Quissengue's entourage was, however, still unhappy with the arrangement, claiming the Lunda could not be trusted to pay their debts and complained of the low quality of slaves delivered, including ugly girls ('as raparigas que vieram eram muito feias').[18]

On 30 August, an agreement was nonetheless reached. The *mukwale* was delivered to Carvalho, and he promised to return it to Xa Madiamba, who would use it to

legitimize his claim as *mwant yav*. The restored revenues, now that Quissengue had recognized his tributary status, could be used as a basis for the reconstruction of the Lunda state. On 31 August, Quissengue sponsored a *mpêmbe* ceremony, whereby Quessengue and his subordinates recognized the authority of the Lunda *mwant yav* and Xamadiamba's legitimacy in his pursuit of the *mwant yav* title. Carvalho told his audience that the Lunda should now cease their internal rivalries and the Chokwe should support the Lunda state under Xa Madiamba. In return, the Lunda would govern justly and end what the Chokwe claimed were arbitrary executions.[19]

With the *mukwale* in his possession, along with the support of Quissengue, his Ambakista trading allies and Carvalho, Xa Madiamba could advance triumphantly to the Lunda capital, the Mussumba. With Mwene Puto (Portugal) at his side, Xa Madiamba could claim the royal relics, particularly the *lukano* bracelet, which, when placed on his arm, like his paternal ancestor, Chibinda Ilunga, would make him the supreme ruler of the Lunda, the *mwant yav*. Or so it was hoped.

In the fragmented political economy of late nineteenth-century Kasai, such agreements were fragile. For one, while some tribute reached the elders and councillors, the boys (*os rapazes*) received little benefit from friendship and peace with Portugal and Lunda: they wanted to go to war, to raid, since this was the source of their wealth. Other titleholders also wanted to be paid out before they once again accepted Lunda authority. Everyone, including Quissengue, was suspicious of the Lunda-Portuguese alliance, fearing that it would only be used to make war against them (Quissengue, however, decided it was better to be on the Portuguese side of the alliance; others took their chances). Conflict was quotidian. And in spite of Carvalho attempting everything to reinforce the authority of Xa Madiamba, it was evident to all that Portugal (Carvalho) had redeemed the *mukwale*, not Xa Madiamba, who had only given a puny gift of poor-quality slaves. Moreover, Carvalho was not a generous patron, always lacking the goods needed to shore up his authority. Still Carvalho and Xa Madiamba persisted, planning to return with the *mukwale* to the Lunda capital.

Many more objects needed to be controlled and adorned in this ascent to power, particularly bodily ornamentation. The *lukanga* needed to be put around anklets before embarking on a journey to the Mussumba capital. The crowns and beaded hairstyles of titleholders carefully elaborated. Chairs, or thrones, would seat those in power. The *cimba* necklaces, usually holding shell or brass pendant, placed around the neck. And finally, the ultimate authority would come when the *lukano* bracelets made from human sinews were placed on the arms of the *mwant yav*, as had been done with the original Chibinda Ilunga (fig. 2).[20]

The restoration of the Lunda state did not occur as Carvalho and Xa Madiamba hoped, however. By 1886 Chokwe who supported Muxid, Xanama's son, surrounded the Lunda capital. By November 1886, Xa Madiamba, fearing that the Lunda would only deliver him to Muxid who would in turn kill him, refused to advance with Carvalho's expedition to the Mussumba.[21] This was a major blow to Carvalho's

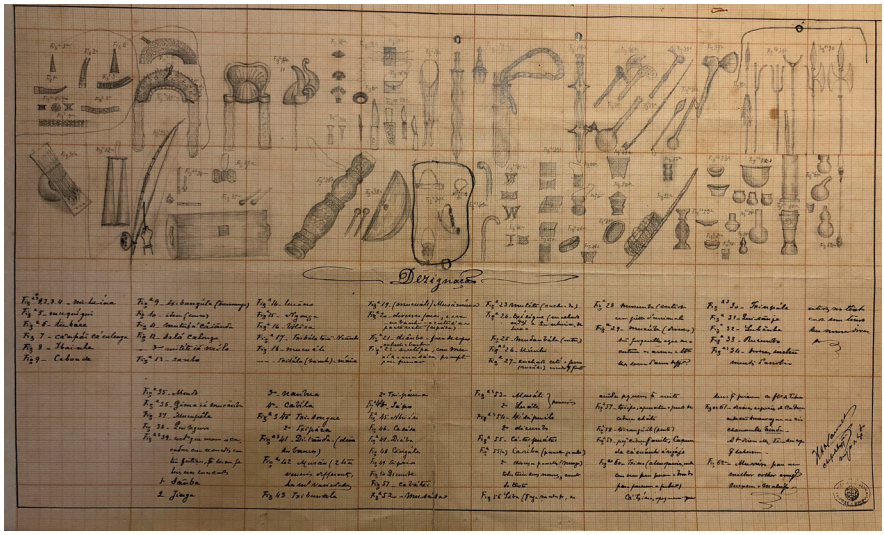


Figure 2: Henrique Dias de Carvalho's sketches of Lunda prestige objects in AHU 1092 Etnografia including Mukwali knife in the centre, headgear and diadems to left, and *chimbwa* axe in right centre.

efforts; he still went on to the Mussumba to try to assert Portuguese protection over Lunda. In truth, though, the Lunda state had disintegrated, and the royal relics dispersed.

Objects of Conquest and Spatial Statehood: Flags and Treaties

By the end of the century, the royal Lunda insignia began to give way to a new constellation of power objects, notably Europeans treaties and flags. In the face of the collapse of older systems of predation and protection, such as the Lunda state, the European explorers, the advance guard of colonial conquest, describe a demand for written treaties that offered protection. In his publications, Carvalho provides several examples. Yet his unpublished diaries show that treaties were in demand not as objects in themselves but because they gave access to flags. Treaties held power in the boardrooms of European politicians as they decided on their spheres of influence rather than the actual terrain of conquest. On the other hand, the Portuguese flag (*bandeira*) was in demand in Kasai, an object overflowing with significance for Portuguese and Kasaian societies in the late nineteenth century. Unlike treaties, flags placed in the ground demarcated alliance for African leaders and an incipient control over territory and people for Europeans.

The powers of European flags derived from distinctive features and historical context. African leaders had to have noticed the emotional attachment of Europeans

to their flags during the expeditions of nineteenth-century explorers. For example, Henry M. Stanley had African chiefs pose in front of a giant Union Jack (he subsequently used this image for colonial propaganda in his travelling lanternslide lectures).[22] The Portuguese, particularly during the late nineteenth-century, had a pride in their national flag that bordered on the obsessive. The flags of the CFS and the charted companies, however, were not national flags, and did not always inspire such emotional patriotism. They were used for strategic ends.

Within the cultural and economic context of nineteenth-century Kasai, flags also held political and economic valence. A flag was a piece of cloth, one of the key items for trade, but with distinctive design, making it even more valuable. African polities could display flags to indicate identity much like ancestral heroes (specifically for the Chokwe that of the giant hunter, Samuangi) found at the entrances of villages. Like the staff of a ruler, a flag was mobile and could be planted into the ground, to signify identity and allegiance.

For both Africans and Europeans, flags provided protection. Before redeeming the *mukwale*, Carvalho celebrated the 'shade of the flag [that] saved thousands of Lundas from being sold as slaves by the Chokwe and the hordes of Tippu Tip.'[23] This was consistent with other European expeditions at the time: David Livingstone, who hardly mentions a flag in his *Missionary Travels* 1857, makes use of a flag to offer protection to members of his entourage in the context of the Nyangwe massacres on 15 July 1871: 'I sent men to rescue him with our flag to protect them….without a flag they might have been victims.'[24] The Arab-Swahili also made use of flags at their Kasongo and Nyangwe outposts.[25] Ovimbundu trading caravans displayed flags at the head of the caravan and in the temporary villages they set up (fig. 3).[26]

The flag also played a role in negotiations over the rescue of the *mukwale*. At the outset of the negotiations, Carvalho sent 'a flag of peace and good friendship' to Quissengue, and, despite Quissengue not having viewed the Portuguese flag before, it allegedly pleased him greatly.[27] For the next few days at least, Quissengue would carry the Portuguese flag to signal his arrival and his alliance with the Portuguese.[28] These are all striking examples of the agency inspired by viewing a flag.

The flag at the time of redeeming the *mukwale* came to signify alliance. But it began to transform into an agent of colonial occupation: Carvalho's expedition established permanent stations that would hoist the flag. As such the flag came to play an even greater role in defining the areas under Portuguese authority and influence. The flag as agent of conquest and occupation became even more significant as Carvalho and Xa Madiamba failed in their plan to reach Mussumba and take the Lunda throne. Instead, the Congo Free State (CFS), under the ambitious officer Francis Dhanis, secured the Lunda Mussumba for the CFS. Carvalho's expedition was, in this sense, a double failure: Xa Madiamba lost his claim to the *mwant yav* title; and Portugal lost control over the Lunda court to the CFS.

In the context of Carvalho's and Xa Madiamba's failures, along with colonial conquest proper, which unfolds from the 1890s, the flag assumed a disproportionate

Figure 3: Bailundo Ovimbundu flag illustrated by Simão Cândido Sarmento, 7 September 1891.

role as a power object. When Carvalho returned to Lisbon, two new officers, Simão Candido Sarmento and Frederico Cesar Trigo Teixeira, took over the Lunda expedition. From 1888-92, they attempted to protect as much eastern territory as they could from the CFS. Their efforts became especially desperate after the perceived humiliations of the British Ultimatum of 1890, which surrendered the Zambezi territories to the British South African Company. Shortly afterwards, the renowned Portuguese commercial sponsor of Ovimbundu trading caravans, Silva Porto, committed suicide, in the context of disappointments over the British Ultimatum and his own decreasing fortune and prestige. Wrapped up in the Portuguese flag, Silva Porto surrounded himself with barrels of gunpowder and then ignited them. He died several hours later (Madeira Santos 1991).[29] The Portuguese mythology around Silva Porto's suicide, draped in the national flag, was an example of the emotive and high stakes flag politics that extended from the commercial routes of eastern Angola and Kasai to imperial Portuguese politics. It also inspired another artistic performance, the Portuguese national anthem, *A Portuguesa*, which would rally the Portuguese towards a republic.

In Kasai, having lost the Zambezi to the British, Teixiera and Sarmento struggled to protect the north-eastern boundaries of Portuguese influence from the encroachment of the CFS. Their attempts to extend Portuguese influence, involved a village-by-village battle, fought with flags. The village of Capenda Camulemba, documented in Portuguese and CFS (Dhanis) archives, is instructive. On 1 June 1891, Teixeira recorded his great joy upon witnessing the raising and the unfurling of the Portuguese flag by his colleague, Sarmento.[30] Together, they decided to 'expend on diverse *sobas* [chiefs] … to ensure that the Belgians are

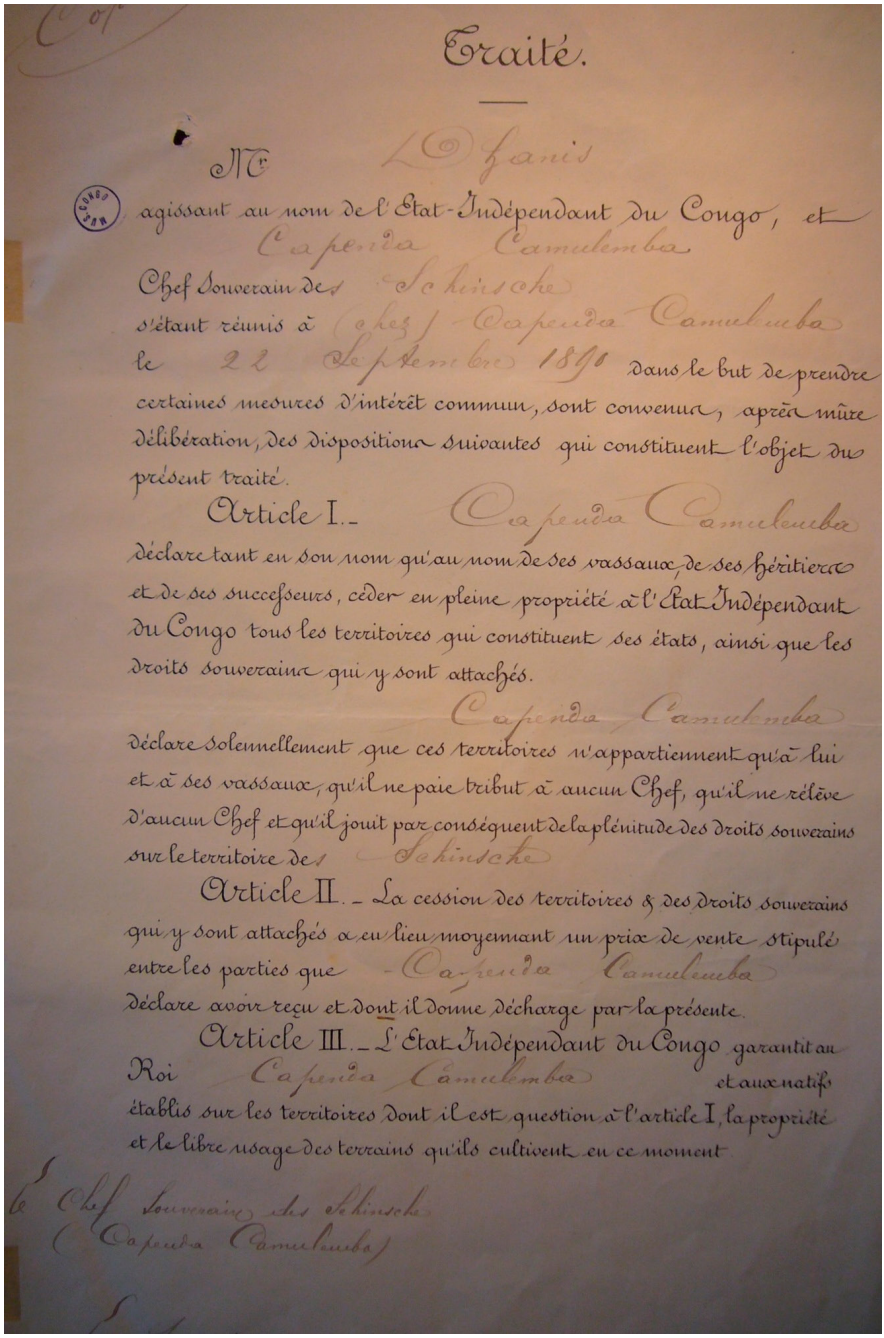
expelled from these territories.'[31] As they decided on their course of action, a young man, who appeared to be a boy of ten to eleven years, but perhaps an older individual afflicted by illness, arrived at the station, declaring himself the son of god (Mona N'gana Zambi). Surrounded by singing followers, he played a drum and carried a rectangular flag made out of red string and cotton.[32]

Was the son of god, with drums and flag, leading an expedition, a parody of the Portuguese expedition? Regardless, the Portuguese officers decided to use him in their efforts to thwart the Belgians. Sarmento and Teixeira gave him another flag, that he 'accepted with much satisfaction, substituting his flag for this one'. He cried out: 'This is the flag of Muene Puto [Portugal] and would be presented to all those in this territory who are bad!!!' Teixeira and Sarmento noticed that even their soldiers and porters respected this young man. They told him: 'You, who are the son of god [Mona N'gana Zambi], who knows the intrigues of men, fall upon Capenda Camulemba and make him see that the ingresas (Belgas) who purchase at your village, are there only to rob the land…' The son of god agreed to go to Capenda Camulemba immediately, that he would not be tricked by the Belgians, and gathered people to accompany him.[33]

The mission of the son of god to Capenda Camulemba was complemented by an official committee with presents and a Portuguese flag. Should the Belgians discover this mission, Sarmento and Teixeira informed them to deny their contacts with the Portuguese and only admit to being merchants. Communications with Capenda should be in secret. The mission carried a piece of paper, a newspaper report, that showed how the Belgians killed a *soba* who had allied with them. The Belgians were not traders, they were to tell Capenda, but soldiers who would rob him of his land and murder him. For that reason, Capenda should 'hoist our flag in his village'.[34] Ten days later, they heard that their envoy to Capenda had failed. Two Belgian soldiers knew some of their emissaries. They found that Capenda already had a flag given by Carvalho which he kept along with that of the CFS. But next to his settlement, the Belgians expressed their intention of opening a rubber trading post (casa borracha) and raised the flag of the CFS.[35]

In fact, Francis Dhanis, the most ruthlessly efficient of CFS agents, had already signed a treaty (*traite*) with Capenda Camulemba on 22 September 1890.[36] In the treaty in exchange for an agreed-upon *prix de vente* and the continued use of land for cultivation for his subjects, Capenda Camulemba, 'déclare tant en son nom qu "au nom de ses vassaux, de ses héritieres et de ses successeurs, ceder en pleine propriété à l'État Indépendent du Congo tous les territoires qui constituent ses états, ainsi que les droits souverain qui y sont attachés."'[37] In this *traite*, however, Capenda Camulemba was not required to raise the CFS flag (fig. 4).

The CFS administration had written that Dhanis need not wait agreement with the Portuguese to secure Lunda lands, with instructions to proclaim the southern boundary of under CFS control: 'pour limité mérédioniale le ligne Kapenda Kumulemba, Kimbanga, Maï Munene et Mussumba.'[38] As indicated by



Traité.

Mr Dhanis

agissant au nom de l'Etat-Indépendant du Congo, et

Capenda Camulemba

Chef Souverain des Tchinsche

s'étant réunis à (chez) Capenda Camulemba

le 22 Septembre 1890 dans le but de prendre certaines mesures d'intérêt commun, sont convenus, après mûre délibération, des dispositions suivantes qui constituent l'objet du présent traité.

Article I.- Capenda Camulemba déclare tant en son nom qu'au nom de ses vassaux, de ses héritiers et de ses successeurs, céder en pleine propriété à l'Etat-Indépendant du Congo tous les territoires qui constituent ses états, ainsi que les droits souverains qui y sont attachés.

Capenda Camulemba déclare solennellement que ces territoires n'appartiennent qu'à lui et à ses vassaux, qu'il ne paie tribut à aucun Chef, qu'il ne relève d'aucun Chef et qu'il jouit par conséquent de la plénitude des droits souverains sur le territoire des Tchinsche

Article II.- La cession des territoires & des droits souverains qui y sont attachés a eu lieu moyennant un prix de vente stipulé entre les parties que Capenda Camulemba déclare avoir reçu et dont il donne décharge par la présente.

Article III.- L'Etat-Indépendant du Congo garantit au Roi Capenda Camulemba et aux natifs établis sur les territoires dont il est question à l'article I, la propriété et le libre usage des terrains qu'ils cultivent en ce moment.

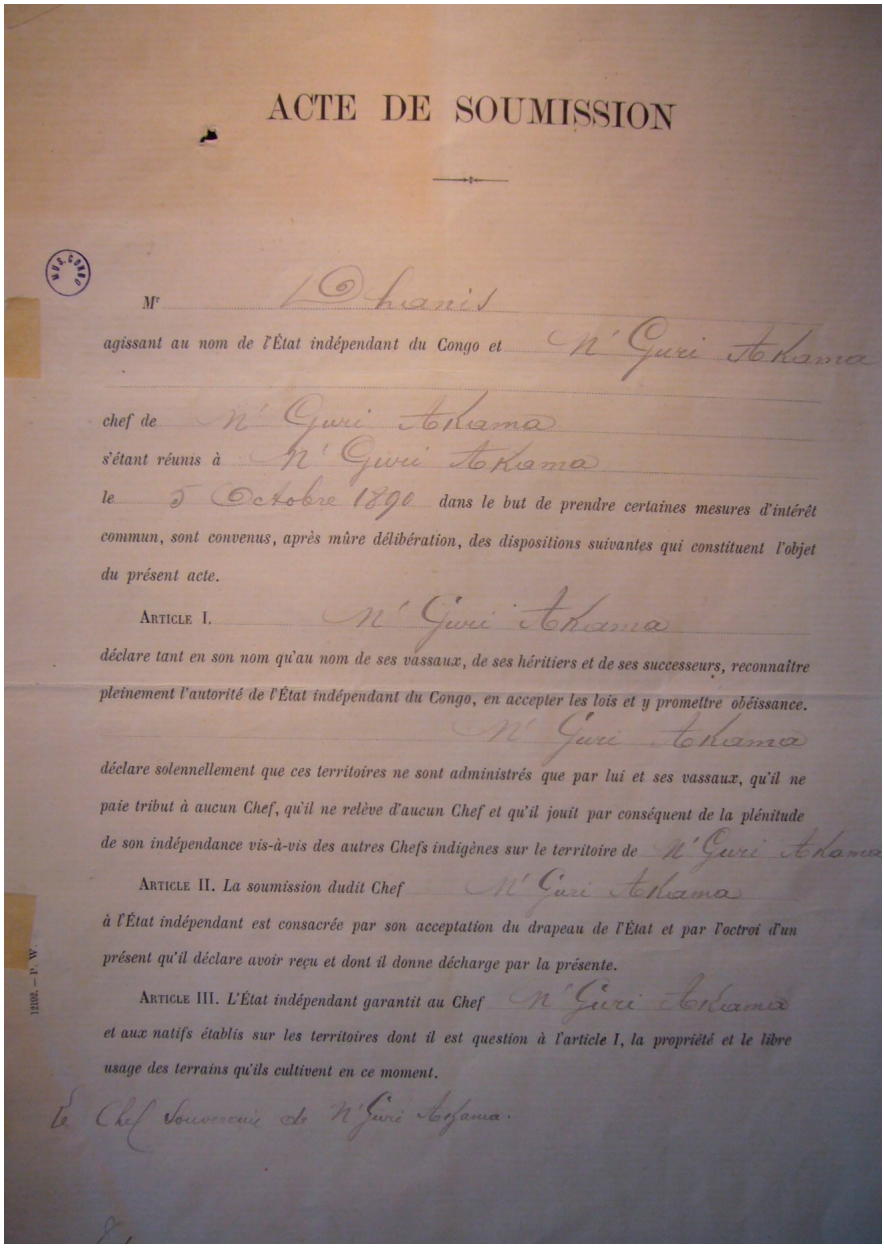
Le Chef Souverain des Tchinsche
(Capenda Camulemba)

Figure 4: Treaty between Francis Dhanis and Kapenda Kumulemba.

the CFS Administrator General Van Eetvelde's correspondence, the CFS support for violent conquest and elimination of oppositional chiefs was quite different to the unsupported Portuguese administration, who, even if they wanted to act in this fashion had not secured the resources or alliances with men of violence to do so (and Carvalho was specifically instructed not to intervene in local conflicts).[39] The Portuguese identified Dhanis as the original Bula Matari, a name given to the most ruthless of colonial agents and would come to represent the brutality of the colonial state. So successful was he at securing the western boundaries for the CFS that he was sent to conquer southern Katanga, particularly the Bayeke polity of Msiri, banishing British influence there, and then the Arab-Swahili from the East.[40]

Dhanis did not write much of flags. He made sure not to attack those under the British flag; Portuguese, African, and Arab-Swahili flags were up for grabs, however. Indeed, Leopold II encouraged Congo Free State agents to capture flags and bring them back to Brussels as war trophies, where museums exhibited them as pro-colonial propaganda (Couttenier 2019: 340-1; Couttenier 2010: 126,134,136) In Kasai, Dhanis also made use of the CFS flag, but less as an object of trade and influence, as the Portuguese did. For example, barely one month after the *traite* with Capenda Camulemba, Dhanis made another titleholder, Nijuri Akama, sign an *Acte de Soumission*, with exactly the same language as the *traite* with Capenda Camulemba, except instead of the simple agreed upon *prix de vente*, the submission of Nijuri Akama to the CFS 'est consacrée par son acceptance du Drapeau de "État et par l'octroi d'un present qu'il declare avoir reçu…."'[41] The flag here was less the hybrid technology of power as for the Portuguese and the Lunda-Chokwe, and more of a statement of submission (fig. 5).

For the Portuguese and their Lunda-Chokwe dependents, the CFS flag flying at Nijiri Akama or at the Force Publique camp adjacent to Capenda Camulemba signalled the failure of their mission and the broader humiliation of the Portuguese in the eastern hinterlands of Angola. The Portuguese officer Teixeira lamented, 'Instead of witnessing the development of our prestige, we have suffered constant humiliations!!!'.[42] The borders were finally settled in an agreement between the Portuguese and the CFS. Even as Capenda Camulenga in the end fell in Portuguese territory, the CFS had managed to direct the most lucrative trade through their newly charted companies, to the detriment of the Portuguese and the Lunda and Chokwe allies. For the Portuguese, the humiliation of their losses only increased the Portuguese sense of betrayal and tragic patriotism, symbolized in their flag and remaining colonial possessions. These emotions reverberated through Portugal, contributing to the end of the monarchy with the pro-colonial republican revolution of 1910.[43]



ACTE DE SOUMISSION

M^r Dhanis

agissant au nom de l'État indépendant du Congo et N'Giri Akama

chef de N'Giri Akama

s'étant réunis à N'Giri Akama

le 5 Octobre 1890 dans le but de prendre certaines mesures d'intérêt commun, sont convenus, après mûre délibération, des dispositions suivantes qui constituent l'objet du présent acte.

ARTICLE I. N'Giri Akama

déclare tant en son nom qu'au nom de ses vassaux, de ses héritiers et de ses successeurs, reconnaitre pleinement l'autorité de l'État indépendant du Congo, en accepter les lois et y promettre obéissance.

N'Giri Akama

déclare solennellement que ces territoires ne sont administrés que par lui et ses vassaux, qu'il ne paie tribut à aucun Chef, qu'il ne relève d'aucun Chef et qu'il jouit par conséquent de la plénitude de son indépendance vis-à-vis des autres Chefs indigènes sur le territoire de N'Giri Akama

ARTICLE II. La soumission dudit Chef N'Giri Akama

à l'État indépendant est consacrée par son acceptation du drapeau de l'État et par l'octroi d'un présent qu'il déclare avoir reçu et dont il donne décharge par la présente.

ARTICLE III. L'État indépendant garantit au Chef N'Giri Akama

et aux natifs établis sur les territoires dont il est question à l'article I, la propriété et le libre usage des terrains qu'ils cultivent en ce moment.

Le Chef Souverain de N'Giri Akama.

Figure 5: Act of Submission by Nijuri Akama to Francis Dhanis.

Conclusion

This chapter has used art objects crafted in wood, metal, cloth and paper to illustrate how artefacts mediated issues of power. The object agencies of the celebratory Chibinda Ilunga figurines and the *mukwale* knife were compromised by competitive colonial conquest that insisted on the powers of new objects. The Chokwe capture of the Lunda insignia of state was a severe blow to the Lunda polity. The Portuguese, an under-resourced European colonizer with little prospect of hegemony relative to their European competitors, redemption of Lunda power objects such as the *mukwale* had the effect of undermining the power of the *mukwale* and ending Lunda collaboration with the Portuguese. With colonial conquest, flags planted in the ground signalled new alliances and dependencies, new spatial arrangements, and economic patronage structures, which would be represented to European audiences in treaties. A new colonial Lunda polity mobilized under the CFS (Bustin 1975). The Lunda objects of power still inspired interpretations and actions, but now from the display cases of emerging European museums (Price 2001; Monroe 2019). As the older insignia of state had for Lunda and Chokwe title-holders, objects like flags now mobilized power for colonial agents in the former lands of the Lunda.

Illustration credits

Figure 1: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum / Claudia Obrocki.

Figure 2: AHU 1092 'Ideas Geraes Artigos de Vestuario, adereces e adornoz, armas, facas, e outros que mais ou menos usam e de que se fazem acompanhar estes povos e também instrumentes,' 4 May 1887. Now located in AAV_ICON_D,D921.

Figure 3: AHU Manuscritos da Biblioteca, Simão Cândido Sarmento, Sala 7 Caixas 13.

Figure 4: Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale, Tervuren, Fonds Francis Dhanis, Traités conclus entre Francis Dhanis et des chefs locaux concernant la cession de la pleine propriété de leurs territoires et de leurs droits souverains au profit de l'EIC, HA.01.0003.210, https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12624/001-0001-0000007347.

Figure 5: Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale, Tervuren, Fonds Francis Dhanis, 'Acte de soumission', Acte de soumission du chef n'Guri Akama à l'autorité et aux lois de l'EIC, HA.01.0003.211, https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12624/001-0001-0000007348.

Notes

1 Many more were produced after art historian Marie-Louise Bastin identified the figurines as the Lunda hero Chibinda Ilunga in the 1956, and collaborated with the Dundo Museum in a cultural workshop that she developed with the Dundo museum. These figurines, with provenances, have been extensively written about by Marie-Louis Bastin. (Bastin 1966; 1978).

2 Examples of Chokwe figurines that likely trace origins to the nineteenth century are scattered across prominent museums and collections in Europe and North America. One of the best selections of nineteenth-century figural Chokwe sculptures that can be definitively traced to the nineteenth century exists in the Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa. This collection is not available online, but has been considered by author and is elaborated in a forthcoming monograph.

3 'Facas de guerra', see note on *mukwale* in AHU 1092. Carvalho, 'Ideais Gerais Artigos de Vestuario, adereces e adornoz, armas, facas, e outros que mais ou menos usam e de que se fazem acompanhar estes povos e também instrumentes', Colónia Príncipe D, Carlos Fernando, 4 May 1887.

4 Xamana (aka Ambumba) took the *mwant yav* title from Muteba and his successor, the boy Umbala, who he had killed, at least in the partial version of the story recounted by Carvalho in *Ethnographia e História,* 596-600.

5 Carvalho, 2 June 1886, AHU MOÇ DGU 1146

6 Carvalho in *Ethnographi e História,* 617 and Quissengues testimony in Carvalho's 1886 diaries 27-28 August 1886, AHU DGU 1156 Lv 1886.

7 See unflattering portrayal of reign of Mbumba (Xanama) and successors in Carvalho, *Ethnographia e História*, 600-665.

8 Carvalho, *Ethnographia e História,* 622. Reiterated in negotiations over the ransom in 27 August 1886 AHU DGU 1156, Lv. 1886.

9 23 December 1885, but has audience and discussion on 25 December 25 in 23-25 December 1885.AHU DGU 1152, Lv 1885.

10 As revealed in Carvalho discussions with Quissengue, on 27 August 1886 AHU DGU 1156, Lv 1886.

11 17 November 1885, AHU DGU 1152, Lv 1885.

12 First met 26 August 1885, AHU DGU 1151, Lv 1885.

13 Carvalho, *Descripção*, Vol. 3, 763-792.

14 Copia da Carta dirigida a Quissengue, príncipe quico, pelo chef da Expedição, Carta de Quissenge, n.d. (1886), file, 'Correspondencia, 1884-1888 Expedição ao Muatianvua', AHU 1092. In person negotiations told in 25-30 August 1886, AHU DGU 1156, Lv 1886.

15 28 August 1886, AHU DGU 1156, Lv 1886.

16 Carvalho, *Descripcão,* Vol. 3, 767-9, confirmed in diary entry, 27 August 1886, AHU DGU 1156, Lv 1886.

17 Carvalho, 'Relatório: Estação Serpa Pinto', AHU 1092.

18 28-9 August 1886, AHU DGU 1156, Lv 1886.

19 31 August 1886, AHU DGU 1156, Lv 1886.

20 Most of these objects, especially the *lukano* and *lukanga*, are described in detail in *Museu Colonial e Ethnographico da Sociedade de Geographia: Coleções Especiais: Coleção Henriques de Carvalho* (Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional, 1896). The descriptions here are based on manuscript in AHU 1092 'Ideas Geraes Artigos de Vestuario, adereces e adornoz, armas, facas, e outros que mais ou menos usam e de que se fazem acompanhar estes povos e também instrumentes,' 4 May 1887. Now located in AAV_ICON_D,D921. For details over the lukanga ceremony before embarking to Mussumba, see 25-29 Nov., 1885, AHU DGU 1152, Lv 1885.

21 1-16 November, AHU DGU 1153 Diário Expedição P. ao Muatianvua, Lv 1886. Also see Carvalho, *Descripção Vol 3*, 869-871, and in the same volume, 'A S. Ex. p Sr Ministro dos Negocios da Marinha e Ultramar, 17 Novembro, 1886,' 936-949.

22 Part of the Stanley collection of 63 lanternslides donated to the RMCA, inventory number HO.1954.72.291.

[23] Copias de diversos documentos. Officio dirigida á SGL de Lisboa, 9 June 1890, AHU DGU 1157 SEMU 1884-1888.

[24] David Livingstone, Original 1871 Field Diary, 15 July, accessed https://livingstoneonline.org/spectral-imaging/three-versions-the-1871-field-diary.

[25] Captured Arab-Swahili flags were displayed in the military section of the Brussels / Tervuren 1897 exhibition and remain in the RMCA collections. One of them carries the inventory number HO.1931.734.3, identified by Noemie Arazi for her ongoing research as part of the Congo Arab Heritage in Historical Narratives (CAHN) project.

[26] Sarmento Diary, 7 September, 1891. AHU Manuscritos da Biblioteca, Simão Cândido Sarmento, Sala 7 Caixa (Cx.) 13.

[27] 28 August1886, AHU DGU 1156.

[28] 24 September 1886, AHU DGU 1156.

[29] There is much discussion over ambiguous motivations of Silva Porto's suicide, but they nonetheless demonstrate profound disappointment, aligning with national Portuguese republican sentiment, with the failure of Paiva Couceiro's mission to Barotseland and the 1890 British Ultimatum.

[30] Trigo Teixeira, 1 June 1891, 'Expedição à Lunda', Arquivo Naçional de Angola (ANA) Cx. 419.

[31] 2 June 1891, Expedição a Lunda, ANA, Cx. 419.

[32] 2 June 1891, Expedição a Lunda, ANA, Cx 419.

[33] 2 June 1891, Expedição a Lunda, ANA, Cx. 419.

[34] 4 June 1891, Expedição a Lunda, ANA, Cx. 419.

[35] 14 June 1891, Expedição a Lunda, ANA, Cx 419.

[36] Baron Dhanis, 'L'Exploration e l'Occupation du Kwango Oriental,' in *Bulletin de la Société royale de géographie d'Anvers* (1906), 53-57, with quote on p. 57.

[37] The 'traite' with Capenda Camulemba, in Dhanis Papers, Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA), Box 6.

[38] Ed. Van Eetvelde, AD, to Gouverneur Général Wahis, 10 April 1891, in Dhanis Papers, RMCA, Box 4.

[39] For support for occupation, see RMCA Dhanis Archives. Adm. Generale Ed. Van Eetvelde a Governer General Wahis, 10 April 1891, Dhanis Papers, RMCA, Box 4, and instructions to Dhanis, in Vice Governer General, Wahis, to CcD Lualaba [Dhanis], 2 January 1892, Dhanis papers, RMCA, Box 4. Portuguese correspondence to Carvalho, by contrast, was specifically to avoid conflict. In terms of practice, it is instructive to think of how Portuguese alliance with the Lunda of Xa Madiamba, rather than Chokwe mercenaries, limited the Portuguese agency. Compare to Belgian alliance with violent men, specifically Ngonga Luteta, in the east in Gordon (2017).

[40] Ed. Van Eetvelde, AD, to Gouverneur Général Wahis, 10 April 1891, in Dhanis Papers, RMCA, Box 4

[41] 'Acte de Soumission,' 2 October, 1890, Dhanis Papers, RMCA, Box 6.

[42] 14 June 1891, Expedição a Lunda, ANA, Cx. 419.

[43] The British Ultimatum and loss of Portuguese territories, with symbolic acts like the suicide of Silva Porto, led to national humiliation and contributed to the downfall of the Portuguese monarchy. New nationalist symbols, like the Portuguese national anthem, became rallying points for the victory of pro-colonial republican forces.

CHAPTER 1.4

The Power of Between: Political Power of the Bangando Community, Southeastern Cameroon

Stephanie Rupp, Philippe Ambata, Stephane Molong, Abel Mungoie

Introduction

We offer this note to introduce the authors, proceeding in order of seniority as Bangando would. Mungoie Abel was born in the mid-1940s and has lived in the village of Dioula in southeastern Cameroon for his whole life. An accomplished hunter, cultivator, fisher, and gatherer, Mungoie's special contributions to the village are in iron smithing, musical performance and composition, and recounting oral histories, proverbs, and legends. Ambata Philippe is a Bangando elder who was born in the early 1960s, and was born and raised in Dioula, and has lived most of his life in southeastern Cameroon. Throughout the region, Ambata is recognized as a custodian of Bangando history and social understanding; people seek him out for his knowledge of the past, guidance about contemporary strains and issues, and advice for the future including cultivation, local and regional politics, conflict resolution, and family life. Stephanie Rupp is an American anthropologist born in the early 1970s, who first came to southeastern Cameroon for her doctoral research in anthropology in the summer of 1995. Ambata and Stephanie met in September 1995, and have been partners in research, based in Dioula, ever since. Stephane Molong was born to Philippe's younger sister in 2000; Stephanie delivered the baby (which is why we are homonyms, or as Bangando say, *kola*). Molong is now completing a master's degree in anthropology to complement his bachelor's degree in history, both at the University of Yaoundé I.

The methodology of this chapter hinges on the nature of our collaborative research relationships. Mungoie, Ambata, and Molong all hail from the village of Dioula in southeastern Cameroon, where they are in constant contact with each other. Their shared interest in community engagement in all manner of issues cultural, historical, political, social, and economic brings them together in conversation with each other, and with elders in other villages throughout southeastern Cameroon who are similarly engaged. It is this interest in inquiry that led Ambata and Mungoie to invite Stephanie to base her doctoral studies in Dioula in 1995. Ambata and Stephanie have been working together across most of three decades to gather oral histories, ethnographic reflections, kinship diagrammes, archival documents, and many other kinds of qualitative data concerning the complex cultural, political, economic, and ecological contexts of the Lobéké forest region. Mungoie and Stephanie have a close friendship based on shared passion for music and history – and how these modes of expression fold into each other; Mungoie

has been one of Stephanie's closest friends, teachers, and guides in southeastern Cameroon since her arrival in 1995. Molong has joined our research team as a young, dynamic, and engaged scholar of history and anthropology of southeastern Cameroon. Mungoi, Ambata, and Molong are Bangando given names that we use in everyday contexts in Dioula, but which are formatted as 'noms' – surnames – in postcolonial francophone Cameroonian documents, and in structuring their names as authors of this publication.

This chapter offers a collaborative account of Bangando political history, drawing on many years of layered research and interviews with many dozens of elders across the years. The goal of this chapter is to centre African voices and experiences in historical understandings of power. This chapter contributes to the significant body of literature that documents and analyses historical patterns of power in western equatorial Africa [*inter alia* Thompson and Adloff (1960), Mveng (1963), Suret-Canale (1964), Coquery-Vidrovitch (1972), Smith (1978), Vacquier (1986), Stoecker (1987), Ngoh (1990), Owona (1996), Guillaume (2001), Coquery-Vidrovotch and Moniot (2005), Tiebel (2008), Schaper (2012), Vellut (2021)]. However, these secondary sources include few first-hand accounts of power offered by local Africans who endured colonialism in their home spaces – including how their forebears shaped, implemented, resisted, and contested power. Likewise, publications on the political history of western equatorial Africa rarely consider that African leaders used colonial institutions and individuals to shape their own indigenous power, in some cases – such as the case of the Bangando, presented here – continuing to build pathways to power begun prior to European arrival in southeastern Cameroon and that continue today. A small body of scholarship address the intermediary roles of African clerks, interpreters, and employees in both facilitating and subtly resisting colonial administration (see, e.g., Lawrance, Osborn, and Roberts (eds) 2006; Cooper 1994; Echenberg 1991). Such analyses illuminate the fascinating and oft-overlooked role of Africans as agents, facilitators, collaborators, and resisters during the colonial period, drawing heavily from archival records and colonial-era publications. Information about Africans who were engaged in colonial activities and work can be imputed from archival accounts of colonialism; yet often, such accounts of Africans' roles and experiences were formed in the minds and transcribed in ink of European colonial memories. In contrast, this chapter brings African oral histories of leadership during the colonial period to the foreground, highlighting the role of specific African leaders in shaping how communities of southeastern Cameroon received and accommodated European colonial overtures, and resisted European colonial demands.

The information and analyses presented in this chapter rest on thirty-eight in-depth interviews with elders whose life trajectories span 1890 through 2024. Many of these elders are those who shaped the lives and heritage of Mungoie, Ambata, and Molong, teaching them about the history of the Bangando community, their neighbours Baka, Bakwélé, and Mbomam, and the history of the region.

Over three decades of collaborative field research, Ambata, Mungoi, and Stephanie – and now including Molong – have integrated our information about and knowledge of the history of southeastern Cameroon. In preparing this chapter, all four authors met in person and discussed intensively over two summer field seasons (2023 and 2024), bringing together our collective knowledge of Bangando political history that we had each accumulated over many years in conversation with others and with each other. We made hours-long recordings of these discussions, which Stephanie transcribed and translated. This lengthy transcription provided a rough draft of this chapter. Within the chapter we also cite the elders whose narratives most directly inform this historical reconstruction; we include a list of elders whose contributions and conversations have shaped our knowledge of Bangando history as an appendix. Stephanie installed solar panels and a satellite-capable Wi-Fi system in Dioula in the summer of 2024; by communicating via WhatsApp messages, Ambata, Mungoie, and Molong assisted Stephanie in addressing the queries of our anonymous reviewers and contributions of the volume's editors, to whom we are very grateful.

We offer this brief account of Bangando political history to establish key figures, dates, places, and events in this understudied region. This chapter demonstrates that cultural qualities of Bangando leaders that span many generations – including capacities for adaptation to changing ecological, social, political, and economic contexts and a penchant for the adoption of people, techniques, and ways of living suitable to changing contexts – placed certain Bangando leaders in ideal positions to pivot towards new roles in the dynamic circumstances that first German and then French colonial rule precipitated in southeastern Cameroon. For the purposes of concision required by the word limit of this chapter and following the suggestion of the volume's editors, we omitted a detailed discussion of Bangando political history during the centuries prior to 1850, including oral histories of Bangando migration, conflict, and the role of an influential Bangando woman military strategist. We will publish this early political history of the Bangando community elsewhere. We regret this omission, as precolonial configurations of power provided political and social architecture that is essential to understanding colonial (and postcolonial) dynamics of power in southeastern Cameroon.

Finally, we do not pretend that this chapter provides anything approaching a complete version of Bangando political history; we bear in mind Jan Vansina's caution that incomplete accounts of African history easily slip towards being partial in two senses – incomplete and biased (Vansina 1990). Thus, we plan to translate this chapter into French for further scholarly publication, discussion, and expansion. Most importantly, we will translate it into Bangando, Baka, Bakwélé, and Mbomam. We will share this oral version of the chapter widely with communities in southeastern Cameroon to seek their input, additions, and modifications, as we continue our collaborative research to produce ever-more, ever-better scholarship on this important but overlooked region of the Congo River basin.

Contexts of Turbulence

The Lobéké Forest region of southeastern Cameroon is a dynamic mélange of language groups, ecological zones, and frictions of political and economic power. Located at the southern edge of the Sangha interval – a geographical funnel shaped by the confluence of the Sangha and Ngoko Rivers that has channelled social movements from the northern savannah-forest mosaic southward into the equatorial African forest – this region has been characterized by flows of people and their networks, ideas and objects, demands and supplies, power and pressures. In this region of complexity, leaders of the Bangando community emerged as powerbrokers in the mid-nineteenth century, establishing their regional dominance through their effective negotiation of countervailing parties rather than through establishing dominance through military force or violent conquest.

The history of the Bangando community over the past several centuries is a history of displacement, forced migration, adjustment and adaptation, and onward movement. Today, as in the past as far as oral histories reach, the Bangando community has been a minority group. Comprising speakers of a Ubangian language, the Bangando community today is slightly out of step with its Bantu-speaking neighbours in southeastern Cameroon in terms of language and culture, even though Bangando occupy positions of political, economic, and social leadership throughout the region. The extended Bangando history of being outliers – families, clans, and even the broader community splitting from communities and places of origin, fragmenting and creatively reconstructing their lives in new places, adapting to new contexts and circumstances for centuries prior to European arrival – has resulted in this overarching Bangando orientation towards *jonglage* – flexibility, entrepreneurialism, and adaptability that enabled Bangando to emerge as powerbrokers during the colonial period, and that still characterizes the community today.

Mossadikou Raphaël Eugène, a Bangando elder with deep knowledge of and passion for the oral history of the region, describes the political qualities of Bangando with three adjectives: discrete, nimble, and cunning (interview with Mossadikou, 2018). Drawing on conversations with nearly forty elders (see Appendix), we find that Mossadikou's pithy synopsis of Bangando political qualities is both apt and applicable across many generations of Bangando political history. Bangando endured centuries of flight and migration by engaging in tactics of political discretion, by shaping flexible social relationships, and by devising strategies for both accommodation and resistance to outside forces. This chapter argues that Bangando power emerged through their ability to navigate the in-between spaces. By working as diplomatic shuttles in the tense interstices first of precolonial interethnic relationships and then of colonial regimes of resource extraction, Bangando leaders Ngbangaa Nadia, Nadia Yendje, and Wangowango emerged as regional apical leaders, with outsized influence and power. This chapter analyzes power as the successful manoeuvring between junctures of enslavement and

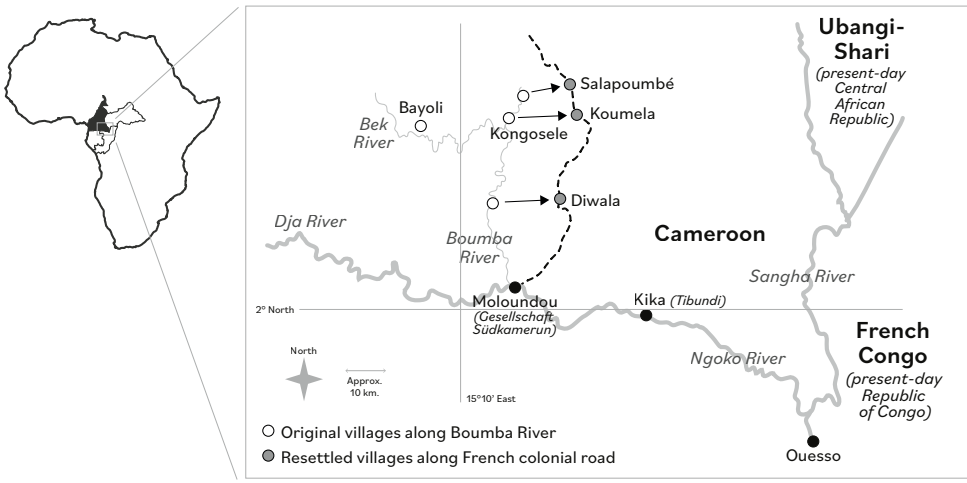


Figure 1: Southeastern Cameroon, 1880-1930 (drawn by the author).

extermination, interethnic conflict and interethnic integration, and colonial pressures of extraction and violence, focusing on three key political leaders of the colonial period from 1890 until independence in 1960. The art of Bangando diplomacy rests on their ability to develop social and political leverage in contexts of tension and conflict, to rise to influence as negotiators between countervailing parties, and to emerge as powerbrokers in contexts of chaos and crisis.

Deep History of Migration, Adaptation, and Integration

In the centuries before arriving in the Lobéké forest region of southeastern Cameroon, the Bangando comprised an outlying subgroup of the broad Gbaya community, in the grassland region spanning northern Cameroon and the Central African Republic (Roulon-Doko 1998). Facing mounting pressures of land dispossession and enslavement, Bangando ancestors known by the ethnonym Gbaya-Ngombé (and eventually simply Ngombé) fled from the Gbaya grasslands following the southward flow of rivers Boumbé, Kadeï, and Boumba. This period of migration and turmoil and flight forms the heart of Bangando oral histories about who they are and where they came from. The chaos of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – intercommunal violence as communities struggled to assert power and gain leverage over neighbouring groups by waging war, capturing slaves, and extracting tribute – provided the crucible that solidified the Bangando community (see also Burnham 1982, Roitman 2005, Rupp 2011). This background provides essential context for understanding the emergence of Bangando diplomats and powerbrokers, who would guide the community during the century between 1890 and 1960.

In the mid-nineteenth century, having endured violence, flight from enslavement, and long-distance migration, the Bangando community began to settle along the Boumba River, in the region near the village that today is known as Salapoumbé. Patrilineal families established small satellite hamlets near the main village. In these first decades of stability, the most influential clan to emerge was the *bo dawa*, the people of the monkey.[1] As explained by Mungoie,

> The clan *bo dawa* – from way back in the beginning – became powerful and numerous because they were always juggling, integrating people they captured in war, or people whom they encountered as they moved into new spaces – captives known as *motamba bilo* – instead of killing them. The *bo dawa* were especially powerful because of their power of threading themselves between, acting as intermediaries. That is an example from way back in the beginning, of how Bangando built power by integrating people, finding ways to juggle relationships.

The *bo dawa* clan expanded significantly not only because of the good fortune of plentiful male descendants, but also because the extended family consistently embraced newcomers through adoption, known in Bangando as *bwaia*. Before long, the *bo dawa* clan was large enough to have split into two sub-clans, the *bo dawa ndedi* based in Salapoumbé, and the *bo dawa kanga* based in the next village south, known today as Koumela (Djoadjoa, 1969). These *bo dawa* subclans were not fractious, but branching into two offered the chance for the Bangando community to extend its influence southwards from Salapoumbé toward the Ngoko River. The apical head of the larger *bo dawa ndedi* clan was Mboumo, who was succeeded by his son, Ngbangaa Nadia, 'Big Nadia' or 'First Nadia'. Ngbangaa Nadia, in turn, was succeeded by his younger brother, Nadia Yendje ('Nadia Squirrel'), who would emerge as a key powerbroker during the French colonial period (Ndokanda Bonaventure, 2016).

Hospitality: Building Warmth and Welcome

Boosted by the rise of collaborative alliances (*kuu kasa*) that they developed with neighbouring groups, the *bo dawa* clan of the Bangando community came to be known for hospitality and the welcome they provided to outsiders. Since the 1870s, Europeans, including Dutch, Greek, Portuguese, Belgian, and French, had been trading along the Sangha River, a tributary of the Congo River in the northwestern region of the Congo River basin (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1972, Guillaume 2001, Vellut 2021). As Bangando clans continued to spread southward from Salapoumbé towards the Ngoko River, which intersects with the Sangha, small numbers of Bangando families developed relationships with these early traders, and with the advance parties of African soldiers and porters who had begun moving through the forest, prospecting for wild rubber and for sites to build commercial outposts. During these

initial contacts, Bangando elders of the *bo dawa* clan emerged as significant intermediaries, bridging the differences in language, culture, power, and expectations by means of their already honed arts of diplomacy, welcome, and relationship-building.

In the late 1890s, we estimate around 1898, Ngbangaa Nadia and his younger brother, Nadia Yendje, encountered a contingent of African soldiers who were not from the region, but were working for the German company, *Gesellschaft Südkamerun* (GSK), which had been granted a massive concession headquartered at Moloundou, on the northern bank of the Ngoko River. As recounted by Mayoné, daughter of Nadia Yendje:

> The soldiers were in Kongosélé (the second village of the *bo dawa kanga* clan, eight kilometres south of Salapoumbé), where they had stopped to get supplies. Ngbangaa Nadia and his brother, Nadia Yendje, had also come to Kongosélé to visit their cousins. And that's where they ran into a contingent of soldiers working for the Germans. Ngbangaa Nadia had some provisions with them: *ngondo ne dia folo*.[2] Ngbangaa Nadia saw that the African soldiers and porters were hungry, so he gave their packets of *ngondo ne dia folo* to them. Nadia Yendje, just a youth at the time, said in his heart: 'You are giving away all the food that we have brought with us!' But this is how Ngbangaa Nadia was: he gave away all that they had, forgetting his own hunger. (Interview with Mayoné Épouse Gourdel, 2001)

In 1899, we estimate, the first contingent of German officers came to Salapoumbé to contact Ngbangaa Nadia, the regional political leader. To reach Salapoumbé from Moloundou, the German officer and two African (non-local) soldiers walked along the bank of the Boumba River, passing first through Kongosélé, one village south of Salapoumbé. It was in Kongosélé that Gboabea, the head of the *bo dawa kanga* subclan, became the first Bangando elder to catalyze collaborative relations with the Germans. Ndokanda Bonaventure explains:

> It was Gboabea, a *bo dawa kanga* of Kongosélé, who received the first white officer. It wasn't Ngbangaa Nadia, who was head of the *bo dawa ndedi* clan of Salapoumbé. This German officer came to the village from downstream: he left Moloundou on foot and walked along the Boumba River northward. Because Kongosélé is downstream (south of) Salapoumbé, the officer arrived in Kongosélé before he reached Salapoumbé.
>
> Gboabea saw these strangers coming towards his home along the Boumba: he saw a white person accompanied by two Africans. And Gboabea shouted to his family – to the women and children who were in the kitchen house: '*Ene gba gala – ene ele ne kuloyu*!' – get out of the house, go quickly! His family rushed into the forest behind the house. Gboabea wasn't certain who these strangers were, and if they were coming in peace. He (Gboabea) was sitting in the *mbanjo* (the open-air hangar

where men gather) with some other men of the community. The strangers arrived at the *mbanjo*. Gboabea indicated that they should sit down on the bench, a bench made from poles supported by forked branches.

One of the African guides spoke on behalf of the German official, explaining that he was coming to villages in the region to meet elders, and was walking to Salapoumbé to meet Ngbangaa Nadia.

Then Gboabea called out to his family, 'You can come back. These are not bad people.' And so, the women and children came back to the kitchen house.

Gboabea told the German official and his guides, 'You will stay here, you will sleep here.'

At this time, Bangando didn't allow domestic animals to wander around freely because there were too many leopards in the forest. We always kept our domestic animals tied up. If you had a goat, you would tie it to a tree near the house so that someone from the household could keep any eye on it.

Gboabea had a large, fat male goat. He told his eldest son to untie the goat and slaughter it, and to give it to his wife and daughters to prepare for the strangers. The German officer and the African soldiers stayed with Gboabea for two days.

The news went out, that truly, a strange man has arrived at Gboabea's house, and he welcomed this man and hosted him. The other villagers carried this news to Salapoumbé.

When the German officer was preparing to leave, the villagers began to say *Kouma ela*; which means 'the famous person (*kouma*) is leaving (*ela*)'. As he prepared to depart, the German official heard this phrase repeated, and he misunderstood it to be the name of the village. And that is how the village of Kongosélé came to be known as Koumela, as it is still called today.

Gboabea had charmed the strangers. He welcomed the strangers and hosted them beautifully; it was honourable. It was the hospitality, Gboabea's hospitality, that struck everyone. This is the kind of power that Bangando have: it's a mixture of welcoming, diplomacy, and strategy. (Interview with Ndokanda Bonaventure, 2014)

Although Gboabea did not rise to political prominence, his welcoming attitude towards German colonial officers set the tone for Bangando political engagement with Europeans throughout the German period, prior to the eruption of the First World War.

Ngbangaa Nadia

By the time German commercial agents and administrative figures arrived (c. 1899) in southeastern Cameroon to exploit rubber, ivory, palm nuts and oil, and animal products under the auspices of the *Gesellschaft Südkamerun*, Ngbangaa Nadia was already well established as the apical chief of the Bangando community. The *bo dawa* clan was hierarchically structured and internally organized, presenting a structure of engagement that was legible to the Germans. Ngbangaa Nadia had already been designated as the paramount chief of the Bangando by a council of clan heads, and became a regional political celebrity, attracting the attention of other communities in the region. At one point prior to 1880, Ngbangaa Nadia had been captured by the Pomo, a community from today's Central African Republic, who hoped to learn his political techniques and military strategies. Ngbangaa Nadia had also forged close relations with the Mbomam, a small regional community that was integrated into the Bangando sphere of influence through adoption, intermarriage of both Bangando men with Mbomam wives, and Bangando women with Mbomam husbands, and the sharing of land. Ngbangaa Nadia also forged relations of solidarity with Mpiemou, a large community that straddles the Sangha River:

> It was Ngbangaa Nadia who welcomed the Mpiemou who lived near Mwamboié (on the western bank of the Sangha River). This small Mpiemou clan had been mistreated by their chief on the Central African Republic side (the eastern bank of the Sangha River), and so crossed over to the west. This group moved further west, to take refuge among the Bangando. And Ngbangaa Nadia ceded a parcel of land to these Mpiemou, so that they could settle themselves. (Interview with Aloula, 2017)

Ngbangaa Nadia was continuing to build his political authority as he had all along, by integrating with, interceding on behalf of, and building diplomatic relations between the Bangando and their local and regional neighbours. Ngbangaa Nadia also solidified positive relations with European traders plying the Ngoko and Sangha Rivers. Ngbangaa Nadia's prominence was symbolized by an elaborate brass French firefighter's helmet and a sword that French traders had given him, prior to the arrival of the Germans, as a gift to mark his prestige and power. The firefighter's helmet became a kind of crown, an emblem of highest political and social rank among Bangando elders. So, when German concessionary agents arrived in the region, it was Ngbangaa Nadia whom they sought out as their point of contact with indigenous leadership (Interview with Yendje Hubert, 2014).

Because early interactions between the Bangando and Europeans concerned commerce, Bangando elders recall these relationships as complementary. Although European traders sought to extract particular resources from the forest, the ensuing exchanges also brought benefit to Bangando (Interview with Togom,

1985). As described by Kebikibele Philomène, an elderly Bangando woman whose childhood unfolded during the period of German colonization:

> The way the German traders engaged local hunters stimulated them to have good relations. If you are an elephant hunter, they (the Germans) would give you ammunition. And then after your hunt, you can come and sell the results of your hunting to them. They give you the materials for hunting – guns, powder, and ammunition – so that you can hunt well. And then you can also sell them the benefits of your hunting, the tusks, head, tail, and sometimes legs. This way was to let you know that, 'No, we (Germans) are here so that you (local hunters) can also enrich yourselves, and can benefit.' It (the German presence) was not just to exploit us (Bangando). (Interview with Kebikibele Philomène, 1998)

We don't argue that German commercial, colonial relations were simply benevolent; German traders in the region were certainly working to profit from forest resources and to take advantage of the expertise of local hunters. Bangando experiences with German colonial officials and concessionary agents diverged from other more violent encounters between Germans and communities in regions of Kamerun such as the grasslands, and from the significantly more violent encounters that the people of southeastern Cameroon endured under French administration after the First World War. Indeed, colonial records of the *Gesellschaft Südkamerun* (GSK) reflect that company agents did not struggle to access forest resources from Bangando and others in southeastern Cameroon, instead finding that local people were amenable to trade and adaptable to new patterns of exchange. However, local people resisted serving as porters to carry rubber and other heavy goods from their forest villages to Moloundou, from where they were sent downriver by steamboat (BArch-R-1001/3360, 3442, 3443, 3444, 3447, 4374; Oestermann 2017; Geschiere and Oestermann 2017). Because these early trade relations in southeastern Cameroon were based on layered forms of complementarity, Bangando leaders and local people, men and women alike, found strategic reasons to collaborate with German partners. In memories of these early days of colonial contact, Bangando elders recall their parents' and grandparents' enthusiasm for new commodities such as matches, soap, knives, and new kinds of colourful, cotton fabric, which quickly replaced traditional *bolélé*, Bangando cloth made from woven raffia fibres, or *kété*, bark cloth made from the light-coloured bark of the *we mfembou* (Bangando name), the *Ficus mucuso* (western scientific species name) tree, pounded with a short-handled, round mallet until it was soft and pliable (Rupp 2001, 2011). One Bangando woman named Kouda, who was the sister of Wangowango, whom we shall discuss further, married a commercial agent of the German concessionary company, and left the forest with him when the Germans retreated from the French advance at the start of the First World War in December 1914. Such examples demonstrate that, during the relatively short period

of German colonial presence in the Lobéké forest region, from the late 1890s until 1914, not only Bangando political leaders but also hunters, small traders, and even women used their skills of collaboration, diplomatic negotiation, and engagement to create relationships that could be, if handled judiciously, stable and beneficial.

Nadia Yendje

The younger brother of Ngbangaa Nadia, who went by the name of Nadia Yendje (or Nadia Squirrel), grew up as the constant companion and apprentice of his elder brother, the supreme chief. Nadia Yendje had seen how his elder brother accommodated and negotiated with German concessionary officials and other European traders, ensuring relative balance in their terms of trade. Although Bangando power tends to follow patrilineal lines of descent, towards the end of his life and reign Ngbangaa Nadia brought his family together to announce that his successor would be Nadia Yendje, his younger brother, instead of his eldest son. Ngbangaa Nadia's reasoning was that, because Nadia Yendje had spent his entire youth and young adulthood side-by-side with his older brother, Nadia Yendje had learned the delicate art of diplomacy and would be best suited to carry on the work of ensuring that the Bangando community maintained and extended its politically prominent position in southeastern Cameroon.

> Nadia Yendje was a character who was not stout or fat or strong. He was skinny. He didn't have a physical appearance that indicated that he could influence people. His appearance influenced nobody. But he really knew how to work the colonists. He experienced the German period when he was a youth, and he paid attention to his older brother, Ngbangaa Nadia, and how he interacted with the white newcomers.
>
> So even though inheritance and power usually pass from a father to a son, Ngbangaa Nadia said to his younger brother, 'Truly, I see that you could secure and sustain our family's dynasty and our community.' But this decision made a big problem with Ngbangaa Nadia's widow and his sons.
>
> There was a gift left by French traders, who met Ngbangaa Nadia even before the Germans were here. They gave him a helmet (a brass firefighter's helmet) as a token of appreciation and prestige. The widow (of Ngbangaa Nadia) and her children did not turn the helmet over to the little brother, Nadia Yendje, as they should have, because the helmet was a symbol of power. And it is still there, with Ngbangaa Nadia's descendants in Salapoumbé. They have not yet given it back to the family of Nadia Yendje (even though he became the paramount chief of the Bangando). Still today, even the descendants of Nadia Yendje don't have the helmet. (Interviews with Mboumo Andre, 2015 and Yendje Hubert, 2014)

When Ngbangaa Nadia passed away in 1911, Nadia Yendje assumed the paramount chieftaincy, but not with the support of all Bangando, in particular his deceased older brother's wife and sons. As Nadia Yendje was seeking to resolve this internal tension, the French colonists who assumed power in Moloundou in December 1914 also struggled to resolve tensions with local communities. On the eve of the First World War, German concessionary agents, merchants, and officials assured Bangando and other local communities that they would return to southeastern Cameroon at the end of the war. Before retreating, the Germans dug a series of two dozen large pits near Moloundou, lined with stones set in concrete, and filled these pits with their belongings, trade goods, and weapons. They planted false graves on top of the pits to discourage the French from disturbing the area, promising to return after the war. The arriving French forces took over German buildings and posts, and quickly asserted themselves over local people, fomenting resentment and resistance from Bangando and other local communities. In particular, Bangando elders who had worked with the Germans, such as Beabom, the grandfather of Mossadikou Raphaël Eugène, and Wangowango, whose sister had married a German officer, staunchly refused to cooperate with the French.

The French found in Nadia Yendje a Bangando notable who could help them overcome local resistance to their imposed administration. At their urging, Nadia Yendje agreed to move his family – including his wives and children, his brother-in-law, and his maternal uncle – from Salapoumbé to Moloundou, where he would serve as the key intermediary between the French colonial regime and the local populations. Mungoie, Ambata, and Molong parsed and integrated the various oral historical narratives we have accumulated over years of interviews:

> Mungoï: Nadia Yendje knew through his way of doing things, how to engage with the French. He engaged at such a high level that we say, even today, that he is part of the reason why the French succeeded in getting through to the elders and notables of the local communities.
>
> Molong: We have to mention that the French colonial system was one of direct rule. So, they found a community that was already well structured, and was already obedient to hierarchy.
>
> Ambata: Nadia Yendje offered the French a political opportunity that was quite advanced, compared to the other chiefs of nearby communities. There were already the Essel and Bakwélé – they already had their chiefdoms – in Moloundou. The Bakwélé chief was Angombe. But the French ignored them, and instead solicited Nadia Yendje. Having seen his way of governing, his power, they took Nadia Yendje as the paramount chief of the region. They made him the paramount chief of the whole subdivision of Moloundou, over all the other chiefs.

> Mungoï: Nadia Yendje had to go with the French colonial officials on administrative tours of the villages and cantons in the region. By choosing Nadia Yendje, it was as if the French were signalling to the other communities: 'This one was peaceful with our predecessors (the Germans), so you also should be like him – be peaceful with us.'
>
> Ambata: So, in this time the colonial officials imposed their own choice of chief. They wanted to have allies among local leaders. They wanted to install chiefs who were not opposed to French colonization, who weren't against colonial penetration.
>
> All of that is not to say that Nadia Yendje was a very strong ally (of the French) or who cooperated very easily – too easily – with the French, especially light of the fact that essentially the entire Bangando population was opposed to the arrival of the French, always having in their minds the idea that the Germans were going to come back. For getting through, for waiting until the time when the Germans would come back, it was necessary to come up with a practical strategy to please – a strategy of flexibility, diplomacy – they needed a way to slide across the skin of the colonial bosses, to get around the (inevitable) obstacles.
>
> Mungoï: So he (Nadia) had to play his role, once again, as soon as the French arrived in Moloundou, to put into place a strategy of hypocrisy. It is as if Nadia Yendje said to the French, 'I am with you, but at the same time I am not with you.' *Óó nè bó* – We are together, but we are not united.

Diplomacy became more challenging for Nadia Yendje when the French began forcing Bangando to undertake forced labour – building the colonial road by hand and gathering wild rubber from the forest – and to move their villages from original locations along the Boumba River to the shoulders of the new road. Bangando resisted and resented the French forced labour regimes, and the violence and imprisonment meted out against them if they did not comply. As discussed by the eldest grandson of Nadia Yendje:

> During the period of wild rubber, *nda*, and the imposition of tonnage (weight of rubber that had to be collected and portaged to Moloundou), and when the French forced people to work, some families fled from their villages to hide themselves away in the forest. And so the French forced Nadia to find these people in the forest, to bring them back to the village. So, in his difficult position, he also had to be passive and not undertake what the French wanted him to do. He said to people, 'You must do this (collect and portage rubber). But you can also flee.' He was also an accomplice (with the Bangando). Nadia Yendje juggled his relations with the French, and his relations with the members of his community. (Interview with Mbano Georges, 2014)

Nadia Yendje was placed in a very difficult situation, which Mungoie and Ambata describe as *dambe a soko nyi* – the tongue caught between the teeth. Even though the majority of the Bangando community was fiercely opposed to French colonial power, it was still essential to find a way to avoid antagonizing the reality of French power on the ground. Nadia Yendje tapped into the Bangando strategy of flexibility and diplomacy to 'slide across the skin of the colonial bosses', to get around, as much as possible, the obstacles and challenges posed by French colonialism.

Wangowango

The elders of the *bo dawa* clan who became successive paramount chiefs of the Bangando community, Ngbangaa Nadia and Nadia Yendje, were not the only influential Bangando who were working out their relationships with colonial agents of power. Wangowango was another prominent Bangando leader who worked to balance strategically his engagements with the Germans and then the French, to augment his own influence, the position of his family, and to work towards self-determination of the Bangando community. Patriarch of the *bo we* clan, a clan famous for their courage and bravery in war, Wangowango was renowned as a warrior and hunter; when the Germans arrived in southeastern Cameroon, he readily took up hunting for them, as they offered firearms, ammunition, and gunpowder in exchange for the ivory, meat, and carcasses that he provided. As Molong comments, 'Wangowango was an important hunter. He didn't think about conquering (political) power. He prioritized hunting, selling his products of the hunt, and advancing himself and his family through those activities. His ways were not the same as Nadia's, who sought to accumulate political power, for himself and for the Bangando community, through diplomatic relationships.' Wangowango's cordial relations with the Germans were solidified by the marriage of his sister, Kouda, to a *GSK* agent. When French troops invaded Moloundou in December 1914 arriving from Ouesso, Kouda fled along with her German husband. Wangowango held fast to his desire for Kouda, and the German traders, to return after the war.

Wangowango was well-known throughout the region for his hunting abilities, his military prowess, his courage, and even his ability to harness occult forces; newly arrived French colonial officials viewed him with scepticism and even alarm. The French colonial administration fully expected him to accede to their demands for forced labour, rubber collecting, and migration of his family and hamlet from their location near the Boumba River to the newly created colonial villages along the colonial road. But Wangowango refused, instead retreating further into the forest to the top of a hill, where he built his family compound and remained with his wives and children. Bangando elders, including Wangowango's daughter, Kebikibele, explain Wangowango's tense relationship with French colonial officials:

Many Bangando who had built up relationships with German merchants and officials had no interest in cooperating with the French. They resisted French demands to perform manual labour and to gather rubber, resulting in physical beatings and imprisonment. In 1917 the French colonial official in command in Moloundou, M. Giraud, launched a 'regroupement' campaign, forcing all villagers to relocate their villages to the new colonial road, which the French administration had forced them to build, hacking it out of the forest by hand. During M. Giraud's tour of the region to deliver his orders, he came to the village of Diwala. Wangowango, however, did not attend this meeting because he was deep in the forest, hunting. Upon his return, Wangowango learned of the French demands. But he refused to comply with the French order, saying that if Giraud wanted him to live by the road, the French should change the road to pass by his hamlet by the Boumba River. When Giraud learned of Wangowango's defiance, along with an apparent insult about his fat stomach, M. Giraud sent soldiers back to Diwala with the message that Wangowango was summoned to Moloundou to explain himself. Wangowango refused to go to Moloundou. So, Giraud sent his soldiers back to Diwala to arrest him. Wangowango resisted arrest, and the soldiers returned to Moloundou empty handed and humiliated.

Rather than enduring the recurring pressure from French officials and soldiers, Wangowango retreated from the village of Diwala to live with his family on the bank of the Boumba River, in the old village where he had spent his childhood. Bembé, the village chief and Wangowango's uncle, stayed in Diwala; he was hassled day in and day out by the new army (the French). Sometimes, they took Bembé to Moloundou to subject him to interrogation and to whip him. The villagers of Diwala were constantly subjected to the terror of the French soldiers.

Despite the exhausting labour that they did for the French, beatings and other forms of torture did not cease for the people of Diwala, who were accused of keeping up relations with Wangowango. It was the intensity of pressures endured by the people of Diwala who had already moved to live alongside the French road that caused them to flee back into the forest. After a short sickness, Bembé gave up his spirit (passed away), perhaps because of all these worries and stresses. All this information went straight to Wangowango, and this reinforced his distrust towards the French.

And so, Wangowango left his hamlet to reinforce his advantage deeper in the forest. Wangowango and his family had left Diwala for Mopondo, and then they moved further to Lomba and on to Bossende (these are names of rivers in the forest). He decided to create a fortress on the banks of the Bek River, located at the top of a mountain more than 600 meters tall, called '*Bayoli*', which means 'Stop!' On this summit, to ensure security, he built three shelters: the first one, for himself; the second for his older children and his half-brothers; the third and last, for his wives, young children, and parents-in-law. He also built a forge in the second shelter.

French soldiers came to Bayoli, having been alerted to the location of Wangowango by a Bakwélé informant, who was named Aoupa. With this contingent was the Bangando paramount chief, Nadia Yendje. They did not find Wangowango at Bayoli; Wangowango realized they were coming, and he hid himself away in the forest. The contingent left Wangowango's camp to return to Moloundou. As they were crossing a river, they were surprised to see a strange apparition on the far bank who spoke to them: 'What are you looking for, and where are you going?' Nadia responded, 'Don't kill us, Wangowango.' The phantom disappeared into the forest and left them a free path (to depart).

A few months later, Simbelo, Wangowango's half-brother, wished to leave Bayoli to return to Diwala for a visit. Wangowango refused (to allow him to leave), saying that his talisman bracelet was signalling to him that danger was imminent. But Simbelo's desire to return to Diwala was so strong that he left Bayoli in contradiction of his older brother. On his way through the forest to Diwala, Simbelo was intercepted by a French military expedition. The chief of the battalion forced Simbelo to guide them back to Wangowango's camp. As they approached Bayoli, Simbelo cried out to his half-brother, Wangowango, warning him that soldiers had arrived. At that very moment, the head of the battalion launched the assault, and the soldiers fired on Wangowango and his family. Sembé and Agouabouti died. The first (Sembé) was the nephew of Wangowango and the second (Agouabouti) was his brother-in-law. The French soldiers pinned Simbelo, the one who alerted the camp, to the ground using the forked branches of small trees. Then the French soldiers forced thorny vines into his anus. He died because of these wounds. The shooting lasted all night long. The family managed to escape to regain safety at an encampment that was not known by the soldiers. The next day the soldiers retreated (to Moloundou), having killed three of Wangowango's family members, but not having succeeded in trapping Wangowango himself.

The months passed by, and another expedition was launched. The army arrived in full daylight shooting bullets in all directions. As a little girl, I was taken hostage. Nyamandjokou, my older brother, killed a French soldier with his rifle, and recuperated me. This time, on the side of the French, there was one death.

The chief of the Bangando canton, Nadia Yendje, offered himself as a mediator to seek an end to this conflict. He came through the forest to Bayoli accompanied by French soldiers. The presence of soldiers in his ranks implied an arrest. Wangowango had no trust in the French or in Nadia Yendje, who seemed to be complicit with the French. Meanwhile, he (Wangowango) was informed of their presence just as they crossed the last river, giving him enough time to retreat to his forest encampment. The attempt at mediation turned into a fiasco.

After seven years of exile in the forest (1917-1924) and victim of numerous attacks that resulted in death on both sides, including Wangowango's family members, he

finally decided to emerge from the forest. Wangowango's children were growing into youths and young adults, crossing the border into their own lives and desiring marriage. Wangowango, touched by this aspect of his family, decided to leave the forest. As soon as he arrived in the village, he sent a message to announce his arrival to the French administration based in Moloundou.

The day having arrived for Wangowango to turn himself in, the inhabitants of Diwala carried him on a *kipoïe* (a sedan chair reserved for the most honoured members of Bangando society) to Moloundou, carrying him thirty kilometres on their shoulders.

It was at the beginning of the year 1924 that Wangowango arrived in Moloundou. His sons Ndende, Nyamandjokou, his little brothers Andé and Bébélé, and Wangowango himself were all thrown into prison. Wangowango, his little brothers, and his sons were subjected to forced labour. They had the difficult task of filling in a swampy lowland called *Bakoungoulou* with laterite and rocks, to connect the administrative neighbourhood to the rest of Moloundou. This forced labour lasted for three years for Wangowango and two years for the rest.

But what was Wangowango actually accused of? There were a number of pretexts. First, his absence at a meeting held during the tour of the French official concerning the resettlement of the village, and his refusal to move from his original village and his gardens, as quickly as possible, to resettle along the colonial road. And to this charge was added the accusation of the death of Aoupa, the Bakwélé man who had informed the French of Wangowango's forest camp. While some attest that Aoupa died of a strangled hernia and that Wangowango was blamed unfairly for his death, others say that Wangowango threw him into the large pit trap lined with sharpened ebony stakes that we call *béà* and use for hunting large animals, and left him there, impaled, to die. These accusations formed the motives for arresting and condemning Wangowango.

The French officials were filled with fear about Wangowango's potential leadership. They believed that Wangowango, through his broad influence among local people, could encourage others to resist and revolt against colonial authority. So, they demanded his execution.

The year 1926 and the 14th of July, the French national anniversary, Wangowango was sitting in his *mbanjo* (hangar) early in the morning. I was young, and came from the kitchen house to bring him food. As I liked to do in the mornings, I stayed with him while he ate. I saw the soldiers arriving, and cried out: 'Papa, why are there soldiers coming towards us?' He responded, 'It is about me that they are coming.'

My father told me to run back to the kitchen house. I ran, terrified. The soldiers took him away, and I was told much later that they had brought him to the shooting range.

According to custom, he was accorded one final speech. Taking his turn, he exclaimed: 'I have mastered numerous arts, except for writing, which escapes me. And so, I ask all my children to go to school.' And then the soldiers tied him to the gallows.

Four times in a row, the soldiers shot at him in vain. The bullets had no effect against his skin. 'You will not be able to kill me', he cried out. 'But I surrender on this day because of my children, so that they will be free like others. And so, therefore, I ask you to take off the bracelet that I am wearing. And then, you will be able to kill me.' And the fifth time, the twelve soldiers fired at him and killed him.

Wangowango was buried in the administrative quarter of Moloundou, not far from a building that today holds the PTT (Poste et Telecommunications) of Moloundou. The next day, those who went to the tomb noticed that it had been trampled by an elephant. (Extended discussions with Kebikibele Philomène about her childhood, 1997-2000; Supplementary interviews with Biang Jean, 2014; Gouekouma Jean-Pierre, 2018; Ngoma, 2010; Popondé, 2014; Mboumo Andre, 2014.)

Conclusion

Bangando oral histories of *jonglage* – developing and asserting power in the between spaces of colonial politics of control – fit into literature on intermediaries in African colonial history that centre African voices and experiences (e.g., Eckert 2001, Cooper 1994, Lawrance, Osborn, Roberts 2006, Lunn 1999). Focusing in depth on three historical figures – Wangowango, Nadia Yendje, and Ngbangaa Nadia – and presenting the political history of southeastern Cameroon through embedded, situated memories, allows us to understand the political arts of the Bangando community. Bangando leaders engaged in techniques of both accommodation of and resistance to opponents' power across generations. Bangando leaders adapted to changing cultural, economic, and ecological contexts that they encountered. While our larger project points to the emergence of patterns of *jonglage* long before the colonial period, this chapter examines in detail the subtlety of Bangando political manoeuvring under German and then French forces. Analyses of Ngbaanga Nadia, Nadia Yendje, and Wangowango highlight that, despite being a minority community, the Bangando community developed political influence by strategically navigating between countervailing interests. Bangando power derives from knowing how to negotiate between oppositional forces, knowing how to work with opponents in strategic ways that lead to long-term power. Molong offers this summary: 'Bangando were powerful because of their power of going between, as intermediaries. From way back in the beginning of Bangando history, this is how they constructed their power, their influence. Going in between is actually a way to accumulate power across social relations.'

Through this study, we aim to highlight indigenous analysis of the political history of southeastern Cameroon. Mungoie and Ambata analyze the delicate and

influential 'power of between' that characterizes Bangando politics by referencing the relationship between two common plants that grow throughout the forest. 'Bangando are like *ndji ngwele a soko niya dalei. Ngji ngwele* are the round leaves that we use for wrapping food, for medicines, and for weaving baskets.[3] *Niya* is a vine that has very long, sharp thorns (*dalei*).[4] Bangando gather this vine, strip its thorns, and use it for the fabrication of many items, from house poles to baskets to fish traps. These two plants are very different, even oppositional: the leaves of the *ngwele* are large and soft when they unfurl, but the *niya* vines are hard and sharp, and can tear through *ngwele* leaves. But *ngwele* and *niya* tend to grow near each other. The *ngwele* finds a way to slip its very thin leaf shoots through a tangle of thorny vines before the round leaves unfurl above the tangle of *niya*, thorny vines. Ambata elaborates:

> Bangando are like the *ngwele a soko niya dale*. Because they had to go through, around, in, and among numerous communities of enemies and allies in the midst of their migrations. It is this long history of slipping through relations and politics that makes Bangando who they are. And when the colonial powers arrived, the Bangando understood that, ohhh – we have to figure out how to penetrate, to stand, and to manipulate those who are more powerful than we are.

Mungoie adds,

> This is Bangando diplomacy. It's not only diplomacy, it's a kind of social intelligence. Bangando were able to understand these situations very quickly. And Bangando didn't always just go along with their opponents in order to infiltrate and survive, as Ngbangaa Nadia and Nadia Yendje often did. Bangando leaders, such as Wangowango, were also revolutionaries, resisters – people who contested outsiders' power by learning from them and creating new strategies, and by building up communal energy for resistance by defying the brutalities of colonialism.

Focusing on three major political figures – Ngbangaa Nadia, Nadia Yendje, and Wangowango – this chapter highlights the capacity of the small Bangando community to rise to political, economic, and social prominence by navigating and negotiating the spaces in between. Still today, Bangando juggle relationships across the four ethnic groups of the Lobéké forest region of southeastern Cameroon, balancing social and familial, economic and political interests with their neighbours. More often than not, it is Bangando who emerge as the powerbrokers between this multiethnic assemblage in the Lobéké forest region today, speaking up about community concerns to outsiders – including national officials posted to Moloundou, logging companies, safari hunters, conservation organizations, missionary churches, newly arriving economic migrants from the west and north of Cameroon – to advocate for the needs and concerns of the community. The power of between is alive and well, and as necessary as ever, today.

Appendix: Oral history sources

Name	Birth (est.)	Ethnic Community	Clan	Location	Notes
Angoum	1870	Bangando	Bo folo	Dioula Village	Founder of village; 1917, sub-chief
Boumba	1908	Bangando	Bo folo	Dioula Village	Elder
Togom	1900	Bangando	Bo dawa maleke	Mbateka, but earlier at Nguinda post	Hunter; confidant of Germans
Djapea	1880	Bangando	Bo we kony	Dioula	German soldier; 2nd chief of Dioula; 22 Dec 1914, he retained his German rifle, which the French confiscated
Ndende	1894	Bangando	Bo we kony	Dioula	Blacksmith; oldest son of Wangowango
Gnamadjokou Paul	1900	Bangando	Bo we kony	Dioula	Blacksmith, fisherman; 3rd chief of Dioula; son of Wangowango
Tombombo	1890	Bangando	Bo nue	Yenga	Elder; hunter
Mokompea	1880	Bangando	Bo nue	Yenga	Founder of Yenga Village; formerly notable at Ngoffi, (German post)
Djoadjoa	1900	Bakwélé by birth; joined Bangando community by adoption	Bo dawa kanga	Koumela	Fisherman
Yoya	1894	Bangando	Bo mekele	Salapoumbé	Elder
Andé	1896	Bangando	Bo we kony	Dioula	Elder, hunter
Sameloe	1904	Mbomam	Ya misula	Mikel	Elder
Gnamajdjokou Paul	1890	Bangando	Bo we	Dioula	Chief of Dioula; son of Wangowango
Nguinde Joseph	1900	Bangando	Bo folo	Dioula	Elder; Sub-chief of Dioula; hunter
Kebikibele Philomène	1910	Bangando	Bo we	Dioula	Cultivator, female elder

Tendele Suzanne	1929	Bangando	Bo folo	Mbatka	Cultivator, female elder
Moyindo Epouse Kpatola	1926	Bangando	Bo goo	Mambélé, Moloundou	Cultivator
Mossadikou Raphaël Eugène	1936	Bangando	Bo folo	Salapoumbé	Elder; French colonial administrative official; first mayor of independent Moloundou
Ngolli Jean-Claude	1960	Bangando	Bo mbiko	Yenga, Moloundou	Mason
Wenoumbou	1934	Baka	Ye ndonga	Dioula	Hunter, cultivator, elder
Ndama Jean	1939	Baka	Ye ndonga	Dioula	Planter
Atasso Jacques	1950	Bakwélé	Unknown	Kika, Moloundou	Forester (logging industry)
Niami Ngongo François	1946	Bangando	Bo mbisa	Mbateka, Salapoumbé	Retired administrative officer, Cameroon
Ndjoumbe Thomas	1952	Bangando	Bo folo	Dioula	Elder, planter
Ndong Moïse	1950	Bangando	Bo we	Dioula	Chief of Dioula
Weti Martin	1948	Bangando	Bo go	Mbateka, Yenga	Planter
Yelima Fermin	1966	Bakwélé	Ya Boze	Nguilili, Dioula	Machinery driver; chief of Ngiulili
Ndokanda Bonaventure	1937	Bangando	Bo dawa kanga	Koumela, Mambélé	Chief of Koumela; grandson of Kumaela (Gboabea)
Yendje Hubert	1934	Bangando	Bo dawa ndedi	Salapoumbé	Chief of village, Salapoumbé; grandson of Ngbaanga Nadia
Poponde	1940	Bangando	Bo ngilo	Salapoumbé	Chief du quarter, Salapoumbé
Mayone Epouse Gourdel	1928	Bangando	Bo dawa ndedi	Moloundou, Bertoua	Daughter of Nadia Yendje
Mboumo André	1934	Bangando	Bo dawa ndedi	Moloundou	Chief of quartier, Pézam (Moloundou); son of Nadia Yendje
Messakop Goga	1928	Bakwélé	Clan unknown	Adjala	Chief of Canton, Djako-Essel
Aloula	1935	Mbomam	Clan unknown	Ngolla 115	Elder
Medjila	1938	Baka	Ye Ndonga	Mbangoy 2	Elder
Ndong Edmond	1937	Bangando	Bo ndikasa	Mbangoy 2	Retired administrative officer, Cameroon
Gouekouma Jean-Pierre	1941	Bangando	Bo nue	Mbangoy 1	Chief of Mbangoy 1
Nanga Daniel	1919	Bangando	Bo nue	Ouesso, Socambo	Ouesso, Rep. Congo; Mayor

Notes

[1] Bangando clans are patrilineal, with each clan taking a forest animal as its totem. While the structure of Bangando clans derive from Gbaya clan structure, the animals representing clans reflect the forest environment of southeastern Cameroon. Bangando clans are discussed in detail in Rupp 2001 and 2011.

[2] *Ngondo* is ideal food for carrying along on a trip. It is meat (in this case, elephant meat) that is cut up into chunks, mixed with a thick paste of pounded squash seeds, and then steamed in a leaf packet crafted from *sàà té*, the large, round leaves of *Megaphrynium macrostachyum*, a variety of *marantaceae*.

[3] *Haumania liebrechtsiana*, another plant in the *marantacaea* family.

[4] *Laccosperma secundiflorum*, a rattan that is common in the northwestern Congo River basin.

PART 2

Weaving and Tearing out Textures of Power in Colonial and Postcolonial Times

CHAPTER 2.1

A Transgressive Economy: Revolt, Repurposing, and Redistribution in 1931 Belgian Congo

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> Niaka of the village of Djeho, and Koti of the village of Kitengo were the first to go to Kilamba. They came back with one of the white man's hand and a large bag of tokens [….] On their way back from Kilamba, they met the named Kondji and Katshinga, who also went to Kilamba to fetch up a piece. Niaka told them that everything had been shared, that there was nothing left. Then Niaka gave Kondji a piece of the hand and a part of the tokens to Katshinga.[2]

Introduction

On 5 September 1931, Belgian judicial police officer Michiels interrogated Boma, a Congolese man, during a frantic quest to retrieve the discarded remains of Maximilien Balot. This *agent territorial* (field public servant) was killed and dismembered by Congolese insurgents in the village of Kilamba in late June. A close reading of Boma's words opens a window into the dynamics of power, trade, and sociality set in motion by Balot's murder. For instance, Boma mentions in one breath two supposedly starkly different entities: fiscal tokens, distributed by the administration as proofs of tax payment, and a severed body part of the European administrator. Furthermore, his testimony alludes to an underlying logic presiding over the distribution and circulation of these items, allocating flesh to Kondji, tokens to Katshinga, and putting both protagonists on the move to collect them. Seemingly mundane objects and heavily laden organic matter thus entered a new economy, born out of the transgressive inversion of colonial dynamics of violence. They garnered new meanings, new values and uses, which in turn influenced their spatial and social distribution.

This essay proposes to use these reconfigurations and circulations to revisit the so-called 'Kwango revolt' of 1931, of which Balot's death constitutes the apex. It fostered a brief episode where new textures of power could be woven, brought forward and contested before being swept away by a brutal campaign of repression. Although successive generations of scholars have already investigated the revolt (Sikitele 1986; Vanderstraeten 2001; Thomas 2012: 301-325; Weiss et al. 2016), new sources and perspectives allow us to read its archival and memorial traces to search for previously overlooked vernacular aspirations, political imaginaries and internal tensions. First, the recent retrieval of the records of colonial Congo's court-martials (Henriet et al. 2023), in front of which many alleged participants to

the revolt were tried, offer new – albeit heavily mediated – fragments of Congolese voices. Second, the Kwango revolt has never been studied to take African 'vocabularies of power at face value' (Bernault 2019: 3) providing insights into Congolese aspirations for change.

In essence, revolts are states of exception, during which the routine exercise of authority is suspended to quell an existential menace to power holders (Agamben 2008). They also constitute crucial moments of open-endedness, where alternative futures and political trajectories could be envisioned. To quote Agamben, it is as if they 'freed a force or a mystical element […] that both the ruling power and its adversaries […] seek to appropriate' (Agamben 2008: 51). The Kwango revolt was indeed experienced by its European and African protagonists as a time of uncertainty; essentially as an existential threat for the former, and as a potentiality for the latter. In the summer of 1931, several missionaries and public servants hastily left their dwellings to find safety, well beyond the regions in effective state of upheaval.[3] In parallel, many 'medal chiefs' appointed by the colonial administration to act as 'customary' leaders, waited until the revolt's certain demise to join ranks with the state.[4]

Transgression can help us make sense of this short-lived state of exception. Balot's murder was transgressive not only because it inverted the racialized license to kill, but also because it opened alternatives to Belgian rule. Transgressions are dynamic events, which suppose crossing cultural and/or social thresholds to challenge the status quo to produce effective changes. For Paleczny, transgressions are 'a form of contestation not directed "against something", but rather "towards something"' (Paleczny 2016: 237). Furthermore, by acting against established norms and expected behaviours, acts of transgressions are open-ended. They constitute transformative performances which might generate unexpected results. This is particularly true when transgressions, as in the case of the Kwango revolt, were designed to invite invisible forces to intervene closely in the tangible world (Rao & Hutnyk 2006). Balot's murderers felt empowered by spiritual support. They were associated to *Tupelepele*, a movement seeking to harness the help of the ancestors to put an end to Belgian rule (see below). Ritualized transgressions, in the form of taboos to be avoided and rules to be followed, were expected to foster the optimal conditions to bridge the gap between the realms of the dead and of the living.

The transgressive dynamics of the Kwango revolt transformed the nature and purpose of both human remains and material objects. The violence directed at Balot's body allowed its reconfiguration as a token of political authority and legitimacy (on the power attributed to body parts, see: Bernault 2006: 215). Simultaneously, fiscal tokens and identity booklets, originally designed to embody the subjection of the 'colonized' to the state, were remobilized as mediums of communication between the ancestors and their forebears.

This chapter attempts to map as accurately as possible these reconfigurations, to shed light on the effective textures of power that the participants in the revolt

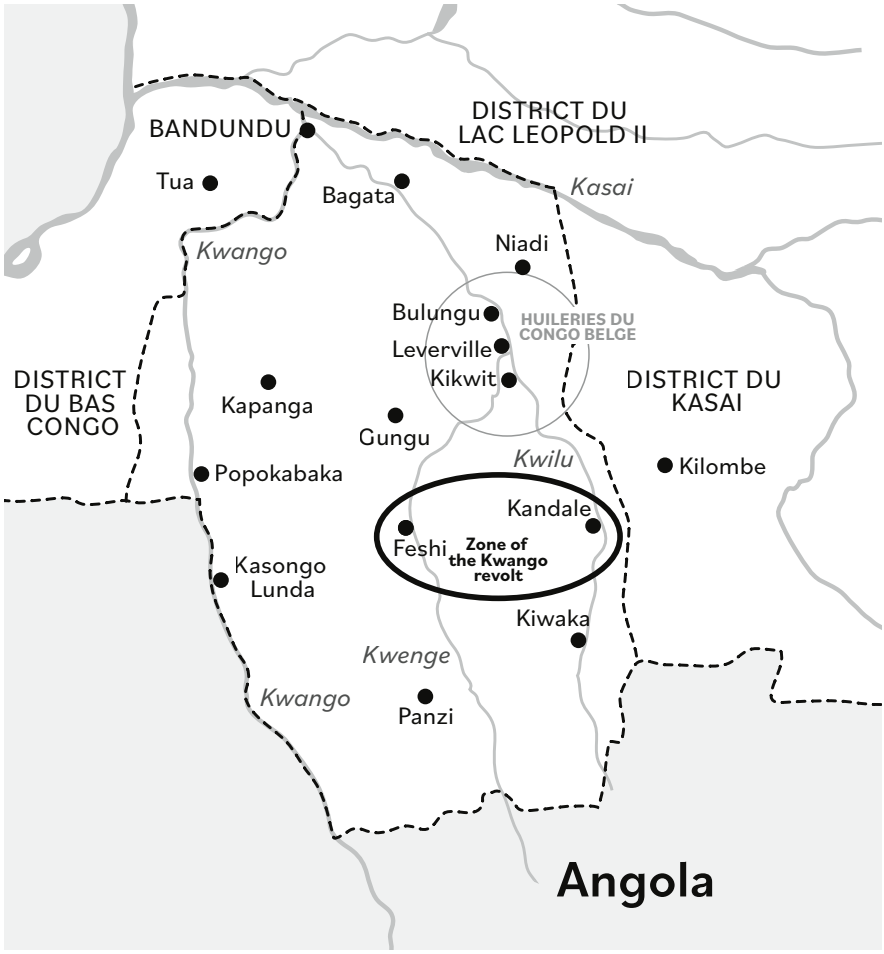

Figure 1: Map of the Kwango district showing its main palm oil concession and the zone of the Kwango revolt (FAB AA, Cartes (55), map of the Kwango district, undated).

hoped to weave before the movement's ultimate failure. Spiritual insurgencies in colonial Africa have already been studied as attempts to restore order, collective welfare and predictability when facing the distress wrought by imperial violence and extraction (see Janzen 1992, Hunt 2016, Henriet 2018), yet little is known on the practical and political arrangements that they were supposed to generate. In the context of the Kwango revolt, colonial technologies were recycled rather than rejected, while newcomers attempted to take advantage of the ongoing turmoil to build up their political capital. As we shall see, these dynamics are rendered visible when one transversally looks for references to Balot's remains and everyday objects in the investigations and trials of 1931, and in the memories that the revolt left in the former Kwango district.

In the following pages, we will first see how *Tupelepele* functioned as a reconfiguration of the dynamics of capitalism, although it mobilized colonial technologies and infrastructures. Second, we will look at the repurposing of both Balot's remains and of administrative documents as means of communication between the living and the dead. And third, we will consider how the redistribution of body parts both strengthened vernacular bounds of subordination and solidarity, and rendered visible insurgent claims for power. Taken together, the Kwango revolt and the repurposing and redistribution of material items it entailed draw the contours of a 'transgressive economy'. This trade involved both visible and invisible agents, and used human remains and standardized objects as currencies to amass and allocate political and spiritual power.

Capitalism Reconfigured

The Kwango revolt occurred in a context of economic disarray and exacerbated colonial violence. The district hosted Belgian Congo's most prolific palm oil exploitations, situated in the forest corridors stretching along the Kwilu and Kwenge rivers. The drier, Southern part of the district, where *Tupelepele* would eventually emerge, served as a pool of forced recruitment of mostly Pende men for the nearby oil mills and concessions (Henriet 2021: 100-106). In the early 1930s, the Great Depression added a further strain on local communities. In order to keep the colony's economy afloat as the prices of raw materials plummeted, Belgian authorities increased the poll tax in the district, which rose from 42 franks in 1930 to 45 franks a year later, while the 'supplementary tax' on polygamous households rose from 15 franks to 40 franks in the same time span. Simultaneously, the price of a 30kg crate of palm fruits decreased from 2,5 franks to 1 frank. According to a report sent to the colony's governor general, 'the polygamist with two wives' now had to pay 85 franks of taxes a year, 'which forces him to collect more than two tons and a half of fruits before being able to tend to his own needs'.[5] In the field, the constrained extension of the oil companies' workforce depleted local communities, as 'recruitments went well beyond [their] demographic capacity'.[6]

It is amid this multifaceted crisis that *Tupelepele* gained ground. *Tupelepele* can be considered a therapeutic insurgency, a 'charm to expel colonial rule' (Hunt 2016: 12), one of the many that Congolese crafted from the late nineteenth century up to the eve of independence. Therapeutic insurgencies are protean assemblages of rules, taboos, spiritual medicines and mediations with the invisible world. They were led by visionaries who diagnosed collective woes and claimed to be able to mend them thanks to their ability to intercede with spiritual forces. In the first months of 1931, several inhabitants from the Southern Kwango recalled being visited by their ancestors in their sleep. The spirits (*vumbi*) spoke of the help they would offer to their descendance if it strictly followed a set of rules. Should they

abide, *Tupelepele* visionaries claimed, the dead would help the living in two ways. First, they would bring 'riches' (*ikumba*) at night into sheds (*sombolo*) specially built to store them, via pathways that were laid out for this sole purpose. Second, they would strengthen the movement's followers in their struggle against the Europeans, either by rendering them invincible to bullets,[7] or by endowing them with the power of invisibility.[8]

The instructions given by *Tupelepele* intercessors vary from one account to the next and were most probably inconsistent. Indeed, the rapid diffusion and sustained popularity of spiritual movements in Central Africa are linked to their malleability (MacGaffey 2000: 74). A general narrative of spiritual liberation could be tweaked in its finer points to ease its adoption in communities who shared a common cosmogony yet held to their respective folklore. However, these rules broadly fall into two categories of transgression: the suspension of everyday habits, and an outright break with colonial institutions.

Food taboos were thus prescribed, which excluded raw groundnuts, manioc leaves, and specific species of fish, birds, and insects, like the grasshopper *zugu*, from the followers' diet. Furthermore, a series of activities were also forbidden, including the grinding of cassava in the evening or early morning, and on intercourse at any time (Sikitele 1986: 109). All spiritual insurgencies comprised similar prohibitions, which were intended to bring the visible and invisible worlds in greater resonance (MacGaffey 1977: 174). Metaphors and metonymy presided over their selection: the shape or attributes of an animal or a plant that the movement's followers were to emulate made it unfit for consumption (Strother 2000: 51). For instance, the proscription of *zugu* echoes the comparison made by Richard Tumbye, an elderly Pende man, between *Tupelepele* and 'grasshoppers'.[9] By this, Tumbye highlighted the rumoured ability of the movement's initiates to disappear and reappear at will, like a jumping grasshopper. You don't eat what you yearn to become.

The second set of proscriptions was specific to *Tupelepele*. They included stopping to use fiscal tokens, identity booklets and bank notes for their original purpose, refusing to pay taxes and to work for the state or for private companies.[10] The two registers of rules underline the state of exception incepted by this therapeutic insurgency. The former marks a sheer break with daily routines, by forbidding its followers to eat and behave as they usually would. The latter manifests an open defiance against European demands. Together, these transgressions would create a favourable climate for the direct intervention of ancestral spirits in the tangible world, which would eventually suppress the extractive and oppressive dynamics of colonial capitalism.

The promises formulated by *Tupelepele* intercessors indeed amounted to a reconfiguration of the prevailing economic order. New pathways and sheds were to be built for *ikumba* to be brought to villages, instead of relying on the infrastructural network used by companies and the state to drain people and wealth from their communities. The daytime capture of workforce, money and resources by

Europeans was to be replaced by the nighttime provision of 'riches' by ancestral spirits. According to Pende cosmogony, the night is regarded as 'the daytime of the dead', while dreams are the only space where the deceased and the living can directly speak to each other (Strother 2000: 56). However, this 'reconfiguration' of capitalism still mobilized material means, commodities, technologies and modes of exchange that were intrinsically linked to colonial occupation and resource exploitation.

First, the *sombolo*, specially designed and built to host the ancestors' gifts, constituted variations of the warehouses built by palm oil companies on the riverbanks to store their harvests. In a December 1931 report on the revolt, the Kwango District commissioner described the *Tupelepele* hangars as '*sombolo* or "beach", named after the fruit warehouses used by the companies buying palm fruits'.[11] Historian Gize Sikitele reports that oral sources, with whom he primarily worked, also refer to these same two denominations interchangeably (Sikitele 1986: 103). The English word 'beach' was and still is used in Congo to name the fluvial anchor points where people and goods can cross waterways. Furthermore, according to dated ethnographic research on Pende proverbs, the 'beach' was a symbol of the permanence and strength of kinship bonds when compared to the fragility of conjugal unions, metaphorically represented by a pirogue: 'if the pirogue dies, the beach doesn't' (De Sousberghe 1966: 87-88). This would reinforce the idea that the beach was perceived as a stable shelter and a durable point of passage, which spiritual and practical uses superseded its pivotal role in colonial extraction.

Second, *ikumba*, the 'riches' that ancestors would bring to the *sombolo* at night, must have comprised many standardized commodities intrinsically linked to the colonial market economy. Although reports on the nature of *ikumba* are also inconsistent, they often mention manufactured and imported items including cloth, gunpowder and rifles,[12] wine and beer,[13] or tools and motorized vehicles (Sikitele 1986: 105-106). Administrative reports penned in 1931 described *Tupelepele* as a way to bypass economic precarity to fulfil the material needs and desires of the Congolese. For the Kwango district's adjunct-commissioner,

> Our occupation fostered new needs for the natives. They got accustomed to them. They used the most of their resources to obtain objects that have now become essential, such as gunpowder, textiles, salt, tools. [Yet] the depreciation of native products has not been counterbalanced by a proportional drop in the price of exchange goods, whose price remains as high as before.[14]

His immediate superior similarly described *ikumba* as 'all the objects' that the Congolese 'envied'.[15] For Sikitele, *ikumba* were to be of better quality and available in larger amounts than the merchandise the Congolese could afford in the market economy (Sikitele 1986: 105). As an inversion of capitalism, *Tupepelele* would thus dispose of existing economic flows, but not of the commodities they involved.

Third, archival and oral accounts of the movement do align on the use of motorized vehicles for the nighttime shipment of *ikumba*. According to different reports, the ancestral spirits would travel by car or steamboat,[16] with the car via an underground path,[17] or with the help of trucks. First-hand recollections of the revolt compiled in 1970 mention that the strong winds of the dry season of 1931 were interpreted to be the sounds made by the large trucks used by the *vumbi* to carry their goods (Gusimana 1970: 56). The mobilization of such technologies for spiritual transportation was not specific to *Tupelepele*. Some Congolese Evangelical movements of the colonial era for instance delivered 'passports to Heaven' to their followers, on which planes and trucks figured prominently as the mediums that would bring them to paradise (Bonhomme 2021: 135). Cars, ambulances, and firefighter trucks also played a key role in frightful rumours circulating in colonial Central and Eastern Africa. Vampires driving around at night would abduct passersby to bleed them dry (White 2000: 123-147). Both the promise of deliverance embodied by soul-carrying planes and in the terror of kidnapping trucks rest on the secrecy surrounding their provenance, their destination, and what happened inside of them (White 1997: 448-450). Although motorized vehicles were a regular fixture of the everyday landscape, they remained off limits to those who devised on their spiritual uses. Cars, trucks and steamboats were both familiar and alien, which resonated with the netherworld, simultaneously invisible and tangible. Like *sombolo* and *ikumba*, vehicles were materializations of capitalism that could be granted meaning and purpose outside of their original use.

Finally, initiation into *Tupelepele* was probably monetized. Followers of the movement might have had to pay a fee before entering the *sombolo*, to witness on their own account the gifts brought by the *vumbi*.[18] According to one field public servant, 'the native who would be willing to confirm the existence of these alleged treasures, has to pay 50 cents to [the initiate]'.[19] The ban prescribed by the movement's intercessors on bank notes as a currency did not extend to the use of coins for spiritual transactions. This was by no means unique to *Tupelepele*; many Central African curative movements entailed a form of payment. Janzen showed for instance that prominent corporations of *nganga* (healers), active for centuries in lower Congo, were remunerated for their services (Janzen 1992: 204-210). Furthermore, in 1932-33, in the adjacent district of Kamtsha-Lubue, another therapeutic insurgency allowed elders who were too old to enter wage labour to earn a living by trading spiritual secrets (Henriet 2018: 230).

Taken together, these different facets of *Tupelepele* show that it amounted to a reconfiguration, rather than to a suppression of colonial capitalism, even if it were to bring an end to European rule. The new era that the movement was supposed to incept still mobilized imported infrastructural forms, means of exchange, technologies and commodities. The difference lay essentially in the flows of wealth, which would be redirected towards communities previously drained out of their human and material resources. *Tupelepele* would also outsource the production process

to the *vumbi*, who were entrusted in Pende cosmogonies with the provision of crops, plants, and animals to their descendants (Strother 2004: 277). The increased porosity between the invisible and visible worlds was also rendered tangible in the repurposing of human remains and administrative documents as mediums between both realms.

Power in Flesh and Paper

If *Tupelepele* was meant to invert existing economic flows, the transgressions it entailed also fostered new uses of and labels for the flesh and paper embodiments of colonial rule. In two separate interrogatories, Balot's remains were for instance designated as 'meat' by the men put under question. On 17 September 1931, a witness equated his left foot with a 'piece of meat' that the inhabitants of Bangui would have 'shared among themselves'.[20] Two months earlier, the following exchange was also written down by a court clerk:

> Q: What happened with the piece of foot originating from the remains of Mr. Balot, which chief Mukoso went to fetch in the village of Kilamba?
> A: If Mukoso went to fetch a piece of meat from the remains of the *Bula Matari* (N.B.: state representative) killed in Kilamba, it is his business. […]
> Q: You thus confess that Mukoso is in the possession of a piece of meat originating from the white man's remains?
> A: YES, AFTER THE DEATH OF THE WHITE MAN, MUKOSO WENT TO KILAMBA TO PICK UP A PIECE OF MEAT OF THE KILLED WHITE MAN.[21]

Evidently, these transcripts were heavily edited and should not be taken at face value. The questioning must have been conducted in Kipende or Kikongo, and most probably required the mediation of a Congolese translator. He would have been expected to convey the points made by the witnesses and accused in a way that bridged the cultural gap that separated them from public servants. Equating human remains with meat fitted well with colonial anxieties of African cannibalism, which might explain why the interrogator doubled down on this lexical shift.

If the semantics of meat could speak more of European expectations than of vernacular perceptions, it is still highly probable that they did reflect the witnesses' own perceptions. Indeed, repackaging the administrator's corpse as 'meat' effectively played into Pende cultural repertoires, allowing its mobilization as a token of power and social stratification (see below). Balot's flesh had to 'become meat' to garner new political and spiritual meanings.

Central African cosmogonies shared a common belief in the fact that human remains contained a fraction of the life-force of the deceased (Bernault 2006: 215). In Pende culture, this life-force was *muhehe*, a word that could be translated as

'speech', 'air', or 'wind'. Capturing someone's *muhehe* beyond death required possessing a piece of their corpse (Strother 2000: 58-63). This process also necessitated the utterance of specific words. Central African spirituality regarded words and sentences underlining the analogies and similarities between different items, states, or actions as crucial to imbue them with spiritual meaning (Tonda 2000: 52). Using the right words was essential to set in motion the intervention of invisible forces in the tangible world. Furthermore, for the Pende, the breath was the 'substance of life itself', and the vessel used by the spirit to travel (Strother 2000: 68). Giving a new sense to Balot's remains, by orally designating them as 'meat', could thus help their repurposing as a power object.

Indeed, meat should not be understood as a mere foodstuff. Throughout Central Africa, meat consumption was a marker of social prominence (Rich 2007: 88-89; Schatzberg 2001: 150-151). Furthermore, there were no herds of large cattle in the Kwango district, and red meat had to be hunted rather than reared, which rendered its supply both unpredictable and rare. For Pende communities, game hunting also had a strong spiritual connotation. The residence of chiefs was sometimes called 'the house of meat', for it acted as a portal through which the ancestors sent game to their descendants (Strother 2004: 278). Finally, to keep its *muhehe*, Balot's body parts had to be preserved against decay, most probably by being smoked, like meat would have been (Weiss et al. 2016: 64). When considering the discursive and metaphorical processes through which Pende spirituality operated, it is thus unsurprising that the administrator's corpse 'became meat'.

Next to human remains, administrative documents also underwent their own metamorphosis. Fiscal tokens, identity booklets and banknotes were not merely discarded by *Tupelepele* followers. Instead, they were strategically positioned and reconfigured as bridges between the visible and the invisible worlds. An administrative despatch documenting the movement's progress in late May 1931 for instance mentioned that 'in the villages of Kaminia, Kisenzele, Kissenge, Kibe, Kizashi and Kiambo, most taxpayers have [thrown] their fiscal tokens in the middle of pathways, and tore up and threw to the wind the banknotes they were holding.'[22] According to Sikitele, *Tupelepele* visionaries ordered that fiscal booklets would be preferably disposed of 'at a fork in the road, where they could be found by the tax collector' (Sikitele 1986: 136), while labour contracts and identity tokens were to be 'thrown in the river, where the pathway to the *sombolo* ended' (Sikitele 1986: 108).

All these ways to dispose of the paper trails of colonial rule were imbued with political and spiritual meaning. Shredded fiscal documents were positioned in plain view of public servants, clearly marking a refusal to further take part to fiscal obligations. Bank notes were 'thrown to the wind', and thus circulated along *muhehe*, the very substance of life and the medium used by ancestral spirits to travel. Identity booklets would end up on the threshold of the realm of the dead, at the foot of the *sombolo*, where the *vumbi* would come out to bring *ikumba* at night. It should be noted that spiritual appropriations of administrative documents were

not limited to *Tupelepele*. As we have seen, Congolese millenarian churches such also delivered 'passports' to their followers, which drew inspiration from the form and content of colonial identity booklets (Bonhomme 2021: 126-143).

If administrative documents were repurposed under *Tupelepele*, they nevertheless kept their role as a physical embodiment of power relations. The deliverance of identity booklets and fiscal tokens was an important performance of authority for colonial public servants, who only fleetingly visited the villages of the Kwango district (Henriet 2021: 62). Official papers were the main material traces left of their presence after their departure, and materialized the legal status of the 'colonized' (Nativel 2019: 1000). They limited their ability to move, identified them as taxpayers and as targets for recruitment. In the new era uttered by *Tupelepele*, booklets, tokens and contracts would no longer serve their original purpose, and were used instead to mark an inversion of the flows of power. They were not a medium between an extractive colonial state and local communities anymore, but a token of engagement with the *vumbi*.

Flesh and paper were thus mobilized in the transgressive trades incepted by the 1931 revolt. The movement operated as a reconfiguration of capitalism which still relied on colonial infrastructures and sustained the same material needs. Similarly, tangible markers of the Belgian rule, such as administrative documents and the very body of a public servant, still functioned as currencies of power before and during the state of exception arising from *Tupelepele*. They were renamed and repurposed, and yet maintained their status as power objects, manifesting one's position in the social and political order. The scattered limbs of Balot, in particular, would come to reveal both long existing bounds of solidarity and the contested nature of 'customary' authority in the Kwango district.

Embodied Power

The repurposing of body parts as tokens of power and solidarity is rendered particularly visible in their distribution and circulation. On the one hand, inhabitants of neighbouring villages visited Kilamba in the aftermaths of Balot's murder to collect his remains, as highlighted in the chapter's opening vignette. These exchanges demonstrate the collaborative relations that bind communities together, and which often escaped the gaze of colonial administrators. On the other, a well-documented dispute surrounding the possession of the public servant's head lays bare the tensions over political legitimacy heightened by the revolt. *Tupelepele* did not amount to a restoration of pre-existing power structures, but rather exacerbated existing contentions over the very form and nature of 'customary' leadership.

In preamble, it is important to note that it is impossible to accurately retrace the allocation of Balot's body parts. His corpse has never been entirely reconstituted – only his head, a part of his torso and his pelvis were retrieved.[23] Furthermore,

testimonies recorded in the aftermaths of his murder were obtained under duress. Eugène Jungers, a colonial magistrate sent to the Kwango district in November 1931 to report on the repression campaign, was appalled by the 'systemic *chicottages* (fustigations, nb) performed with such cruelty that numerous victims died while others, more than a month later, still had large purulent wounds on their lower backs, exposing their bare flesh.'[24]

Those problematic evidences nevertheless point towards the division of Balot's atomized body within a broad network of communities. The testimony of Boma for instance mentioned inhabitants of Djeho and Kitengo visiting Kilamba to collect human remains.[25] Another extensive interrogatory alludes to the redistributive dynamics set in motion by his murder:

> The village of Otengo represented by the named Kondji, the village of Bangi by chief Kamulebe, Kilolo of the village Binga, the medal chief of Gobambulu has sent the messenger of his village [...] to collect a piece of flesh. The water carrier of Kakobola, the village chief of Kimbuende, Makandu of the Potopoto village, the other villages who came by later haven't received a piece of Mr. Balot's flesh because everything had been distributed. [...] Mundele-Fundji sent his messenger Sindani in the different villages to let them know that they had to come and collect a piece of the white man. The named Katshinga, Lemba of the Yongo chiefdom, sent four natives to Mundele-Fundji to demand body parts, and they went back carrying those pieces [...] The village chief Kobo, chiefdom Musanga, a former soldier, came in person to Kilamba to demand a piece of Balot's body, and came back empty handed, because everything had been distributed.[26]

In spite of the climate of saturated violence in which this interrogatory took place, the practices to which it refers seem credible. Indeed, they are consistent throughout several testimonies, and would help explain the administration's inability to effectively find most of Balot's discarded remains. As such, the circulation of Balot's limbs allows for three crucial observations. First, the extensive and seemingly uncontested redistribution of body parts points towards the existence of collaborative dynamics among neighbouring communities. They might have formed together what Jan Vansina identified as a 'district' in the Central African political tradition. Districts comprised groups of villages united by reiterated bounds of kinship, trade and solidarity, which shared a common language and similar social organization, beliefs and rites (Vansina 1990: 81-82). These units remain often difficult to spot by colonial field actors, who essentially understood vernacular political organizations as both marred by internecine conflicts and as starkly divided along territorial, cultural and 'ethnical' lines.

Second, the interrogatory of Kazinga enumerates several actors entrusted with the important task of fetching pieces of Balot's corpse in Kilamba, such as messengers, a water carrier, or an army veteran. This reinforces the idea that 'customary'

hierarchies, the position that one played in social structures that at least partly existed outside of colonial stratifications, hardly overlapped with the categories of prominence and precedence through which public servants attempted to make sense of vernacular societies. Finally, Mundele-Fundji seems to occupy a paramount role after Balot's murder, manifested here by his ability to preside over the distribution of human remains. His rise to prominence, and his lasting impact on collective memories of the revolt, are crucial evidences of the contested nature of power in the wake of *Tupelepele*.

Matemo-Kelenge was Mundele-Fundji's original name – he would only take the latter patronym after Balot's murder.[27] Mundele-Fundji can roughly translated as the 'white man-wind' (Sikitele 1986: 128), a name that both underlined his prominent role in the death of Balot, and his ability to remain impossible to grasp, like the wind, the essence of life and of spiritual force. Elderly people interviewed in 2015 still recalled in similar terms his alleged triumph over colonial forces, although he was probably killed in Kilamba during a military raid in July 1931. 'Mundele-Fundji was like the wind, he has never been found,'[28] 'Mundele-Fundji was the one who became invisible, the one who revolted against the Whites.'[29] 'Mundele-Fundji could become invisible and reappear at will [...]. He could kill soldiers and policemen by surprise, then disappear. When he was surrounded, he shouted one last time and disappeared for good.'[30]

According to several testimonies collected by Sikitele, Mundele-Fundji was not born in a leading clan, but was renowned for his physical beauty, his strength, his bravery and his overall leadership qualities (Sikitele 1986: 129). He would have been one of the first visionaries of *Tupelepele*, and used his oratory talents to rally his community to the movement.[31] He also took part to Balot's murder, and might even have been one of the main catalysts of the administrator's fateful visit to Kilamba. Indeed, three weeks prior, Matemo's two wives were reportedly raped by Collignon, an employee of the *Compagnie du Kasaï* who visited the village to collect taxes and recruit palm oil workers. Matemo would later violently confront Collignon, who rejected his demands of financial compensation. Collignon subsequently filed a complaint against Matemo, which Balot was charged with investigating on the spot.[32]

Two separate testimonies allude to a dispute occurring between Mundele Fundji and Shakindungu, the village chief of Kilamba, over who should keep the head of the administrator.[33] Shakindungu would have refused to give it to Matemo, arguing his right to keep it as token of his own paramount position, and as a consequence of Matemo's absence when the last blow was struck on Balot – he would have 'only partially fulfilled' the *vumbi*'s orders (Sikitele 1986: 148-149). This conflict sheds light on the fleeting and contested nature of 'customary' power in the wake of the Kwango revolt, which would allow an insurgent newcomer to challenge an established authority figure for a position of spiritual and political leadership. This upheaval emerged at the crossroads of two converging dynamics.

First, co-optation of 'medal chiefs' by the Belgian administration challenged the legitimacy of vernacular authority figures. They were supposed to both embody 'traditional' authority and act as interfaces between local communities and colonial public servants. However, the Kwango revolt shed a crude light on their impotence; they were insignificant to the point of having been plainly ignored by the rebels. According to a report penned in December 1931, 'none of the chiefs we invested led the revolt movement, but they didn't oppose it either. They were mostly kept aside.'[34] The Kwango district administrator also noted that 'years of hard work' will still be needed 'to make those populations admit chiefly authority, which has so far been inexistent, not to say systematically countered.'[35] One of the many impediments to their legitimacy was their absence of spiritual responsibilities (Van Bockhaven 2020: 73). By failing to act as intercessors between the tangible and the invisible worlds, they could not safeguard the welfare of their community, which depended on the benevolence of ancestral spirits. This situation opened a chasm in which emerging figures such as Matemo could stake a claim as rightful intercessors with invisible forces.

Second, customary authority is by essence fluid and subject to change, able to take new guises in shifting circumstances. Competing claims for chieftainship regularly emerged in Central African communities (Verwijen & Van Bockhaven 2020: 8). Charisma, and the display of energy and strength that one would put at the service of the community, could play a crucial role in legitimizing an insurgent leader (Tonda 2000: 54). Furthermore, for Pende communities, one's ability to speak well in public, to convince, asserted one's natural authority (Strother 2000: 59). Matemo's strength and power of persuasion could have reinforced the legitimacy of his claim.

Both by essence and contingence, 'customary' authority encompassed contradictory understandings, and left space for the emergence of challenges to established power holders. If the dispute arising between Matemo and Shakindungu sheds light on the political open-endedness resulting from *Tupelepele*, the wide redistribution of Balot's body parts rather points toward the continuity, and even the strengthening, of intercommunal bounds of solidarity. The repurposing of the administrator's corpse as an atomized power-object thus helped reveal the underlying political arrangements that briefly emerged out of this state of exception.

Conclusion

In the dry season of 1931, among a connected network of rural communities of Southwest Belgian Congo, a series of spiritual and political transgressions violently challenged the colonial status quo. Populations who experienced the strain of abusive extractive practices turned towards a new iteration of longstanding 'therapeutic insurgencies', on the lookout for answers to their woes. However, contrary

to most of these healing movements, *Tupelepele* ultimately fostered the inversion of colonial dynamics of violence, by precipitating the murder and dismemberment of a Belgian public servant.

This spectacular event generated significant archival and memorial thicknesses, which we can revisit to better understand what vernacular aspirations for a future 'expelled' from colonial domination could have meant for local communities. Studying the ruptures and continuities in the meanings and uses of material objects helps bring these expectations to light and reveal different facets of the experience of colonization in interwar Central Africa.

First, the transgressive nature of *Tupelepele* and of the violent guise it took after Balot's murder set in motion new forms of transactions. They inverted or repurposed economic flows, objects and human remains, yet mobilized infrastructures, technologies and documents inherently bound to colonization. As Florence Bernault noted, the protean imaginaries of power in Equatorial Africa could easily encompass and reconfigure imported elements (Bernault 2019: 29). Trucks, booklets, warehouses were mobilized to sustain the harmonious relationship between the tangible and invisible worlds, which was crucial to ensure collective welfare. The reconfiguration of colonial capitalism under *Tupelepele* amounted thus to the emergence of a transgressive economy, rather than to a mere suppression of the prevailing practices of exchange and production.

Second, the porosity between colonial and vernacular spheres, highlighted by this very transgressive economy, invites us to reconsider the nature of the Kwango revolt. For colonial administrators, the movement was 'xenophobic', for it aimed to expel European outsiders, while historical research made of *Tupelepele* a key episode in the history of anti-colonial movements in Belgian Congo. However, one could argue this perception to be overtly Eurocentric. Nicole Eggers observed for instance that Kitawala, an African iteration of Watchtower with subversive undertones, 'always supported visions of the world that were more radical than the absence of colonial rule', and instead promised to its followers 'a world in which they could be spiritually and physically free from all forms of malicious, self-serving forces and the individuals and institutions who wielded them' (Eggers 2020: 30). Similarly, *Tupelepele* offered promises of a better, ordered future, which went beyond the mere expulsion of colonialism.

Taking these movements at face value and trying to render them in their complexity and contradiction help us replace the violent opposition to colonial actors in a broader web of political and spiritual aspirations. Rather than a 'revolt', the events of 1931 might be considered as a 'transgression', as the inversion of everyday habits and power dynamics to move beyond today's dire situation towards a better future.

Notes

1 This chapter has been written with the contribution of Renaud Juste.
2 State Archives of Belgium, African Archives (SAB AA), CG 142, Minutes of the interrogatory of Boma by Territorial Agent Michiels, 5 September 1931.
3 Belgian Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, African Archives (FAB AA), AE 3268, Enquiry on the Kwango Revolt, 29 November 1931.
4 FAB, AA, AI 4739, Letter of General Commissioner Maron to General Governor Tilkens, 4 February 1932.
5 FAB, AA, AI 4739, Controverses and polemics related to the Kwango events, undated.
6 FAB, AA, AI 4739, Unsigned note for the Governor General, 23 July 1931.
7 FAB, AA, AI 4739, Directives to Cpt. Vissers, instructed by Col. Servais, 20 June 1931.
8 Interviews with Christophe Mwazita (b. 1946), Lusanga, 4 August 2015; Paul Njingu Pulushi (b. c. 1934), Gungu, 10 August 2015; Fabien Kalaki (b. 1933), Ifwani – Kakobola, 10 August 2015.
9 Interview with Richard Tumbye (b.c. 1930), Mwebe, camp Kitambo, 3 August 2015.
10 FAB, AA, AI 4739, Report on the Bapende revolt by district commissioner Vanderhallen, 31 December 1931.
11 FAB, AA, AI 4739, Report on the Bapende revolt by district commissioner Vanderhallen, 31 December 1931.
12 FAB, AA, AI 4739, Minutes on the interrogatory of Mabongo by district commissioner Vanderhallen, 7 July 1931.
13 FAB, AA, AI 4739, Report on the Bapende revolt by district commissioner Vanderhallen, 31 December 1931.
14 FAB, AA, AI 4739, Note of adjunct district commissioner Dewilliamort, 7 August 1931.
15 FAB, AA, AI 4739, Report on the Bapende revolt by district commissioner Vanderhallen, 31 December 1931.
16 FAB, AA, AE 3268, Enquiry on the Kwango Revolt, 29 November 1931, p. 99.
17 FAB, AA, AI 4739, Letter from territorial agent Michiels to district commissioner Vanderhallen, 25 May 1931.
18 FAB, AA, AI 4739, Note for the Provincial governor on the Kwango revolt, 23 June 1931.
19 FAB, AA, AI 4739, Report on the events taking place in the territories of Kandale and Kikwit, by territorial agent Burnotte, undated.
20 SAB, AA, CG 142, Minutes of the interrogatory of P. Mukwakifumu by territorial administrator Michiels, 17 September 1931.
21 SAB, AA, CG 153, Minutes of the interrogatory of Mimvuri by judicial police officer Weekx, 23 July 1931. Capitalization in the original document.
22 FAB, AA, AI 4739, Letter from territorial administrator Weekx to District Commissioner Vanderhallen, 30 May 1931.
23 FAB, AA, AE 3268, Enquiry on the Kwango Revolt, 29 November 1931.
24 FAB, AA, AE 3268, Enquiry on the Kwango Revolt, 29 November 1931.
25 SAB, AA, CG 142, Minutes of the interrogatory of Boma by Territorial Agent Michiels, 5 September 1931.
26 FAB, AA, AI 4739, Minutes of the interrogatory of Kazinga, by district commissioner Vanderhallen, 7 July 1931.
27 FAB, AA, AI 4739, Minutes of the interrogatory of Mabongo by district commissioner Vanderhallen, 7 July 1931.
28 Interview with Fabien Kalaki (b. 1933), Ifwani – Kakobola, 10 August 2015.
29 Interview with Paul Njingu Pulushi (b. c. 1934), Gungu, 10 August 2015.
30 Interview with Christophe Mwazita (b. 1946), Lusanga, 4 August 2015.
31 FAB, AA, AI 4739, Minutes of the interrogatory of Mabongo by district commissioner Vanderhallen, 7 July 1931.
32 FAB, AA, AE 3268, Enquiry on the Kwango Revolt, 29 November 1931.
33 FAB, AA, AI 4739, Minutes of the interrogatory of Sindani by territorial administrator Vandewalle, 26 September 1931.
34 FAB, AA, AI 4739, Report on the Bapende revolt, by District commissioner Vanderhallen, 31 December 1931.
35 FAB, AA, AI 4739, Report of District commissioner Dewilliamort on the Kwango troubles, 24 June 1931.

CHAPTER 2.2

‘Strange Men Who Call Themselves Chiefs’: The Practice of Power and Authority Among the Acholi of Northern Uganda

Patrick Otim

Introduction

In late October 1902, Rwot Olango of Paibona chiefdom and Rwot Kitara of Palaro chiefdom, two hereditary chiefs (*rwodi moo*) from east of the Aswa River, approached Major Charles Delmé-Radcliffe, the British colonial official sent to oversee the extension of colonial rule in Acholiland, a region in northern Uganda, to make their case for a joint British-Acholi expedition to western Acholi. Their proposal entailed a mid-October journey to attack Rwot Awich, a neighboring chief. Before Delmé-Radcliffe’s arrival, Awich had been demanding that the two chiefs pay tribute to him. The plan sounded hasty, and Delmé-Radcliffe rejected it, saying it was not the right time. He, instead, asked the two chiefs to wait until late November or early December, when he would have enough troops from Nimule, where the British colonial state had been established.

On 27 November 1902, when Delmé-Radcliffe called on Olango and Kitara to join him for a war expedition against the chiefs in western Acholiland – who had declined to sign a treaty with the colonial state – both Olango and Kitara rejected Delmé-Radcliffe’s request, telling the colonial agent they had momentarily lost their powers and that he should wait for them to regain their powers in six weeks. Unable to make sense of the chiefs’ change of stance, Delmé-Radcliffe wrote to his superior in the Buganda kingdom, saying he was confused by the nature of power and authority these chiefs wielded. ‘They refused to work with us for now’, he reported. Eight weeks later, the two chiefs returned to Delmé-Radcliffe and told him that they had regained their powers and were ready to join the expedition. This was even more confusing for Delmé-Radcliffe, and he dismissed these chiefs as ‘strange men who call themselves chiefs’. ‘They do not have powers’ like the kings of Buganda and Bunyoro, Delmé-Radcliffe concluded. He became the first person to recommend that new the colonial state depose existing chiefs and replace them with men who were serious about working with the government.[1]

Following Delmé-Radcliffe’s ‘pacification’ efforts, missionaries and colonial officials agreed with him about the vague nature of the Acholi chiefs’ powers. Reverend A. B. Lloyd of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), the first mission to establish a church in Acholiland, noted that chiefs did not have the kinds of powers exercised by the kings of Buganda and Bunyoro.[2] Similarly, J.R.P. Postlethwaite, a British colonial official sent to establish the colonial presence in northern Uganda,

concurred with Lloyd that he could not find a chief to work with who wielded substantial power in the region (Postlethwaite 1947: 56)

In the end, the reports from Delmé-Radcliffe and other colonial officials and missionaries raise interesting questions: Who were the Acholi chiefs? What was the nature of chiefs' powers? Under what circumstances did chiefs – like the two in Delmé-Radcliffe's report – temporarily lose their powers? Who oversaw chiefdoms after chiefs had lost their powers? What sort of royal activities were executed during this interregnum? There is still a shortage of studies around these questions, owing to the nature of sources available to scholars. For the most part, studies on late precolonial and colonial Acholiland have continued to draw heavily on early European documents, which are generally disparaging of, and at times hostile to, Acholi chiefs and their court officials.[3] In so doing, they have neglected local sources, particularly those of mission historians and later generations of Acholi intellectuals (Okech 1953; Anywar 1954; Ocan 1971, Odongo 1979). As a result, the existing literature has continued to portray chiefs as weak and lacking power to govern their own people. This body of work, therefore, has failed to explain satisfactorily how power functioned in decentralized Acholiland.

By carefully assembling scattered bits of information from Europeans and local sources, some of which have never been used before (Okeny 1974; Opira 1978; Opige 1981), this chapter shifts the focus away from the present portrayal of chiefs to a more complex understanding of power and authority in decentralized Acholiland. I argue that, while chiefs were the topmost rulers in their chiefdoms, the nature of power they wielded differed significantly from that of the leaders in the centralized states of Buganda and Bunyoro, whom many colonial officials and missionaries had dealt with before coming to Acholiland. In fact, there were certain moments during the Acholi calendar year when chiefs lost their powers and became ordinary citizens. During this time, their powers were transferred to court officials, and Europeans who were visiting at this time of the year often exaggerated the weakened nature of chiefs' powers, portraying chiefs as lacking control of their polities.

The goal of this chapter is twofold: first, to examine the circumstances under which chiefs lost their powers in Acholiland and, second, to demonstrate what 'royal activities', if any, were executed and where they were executed during this period. Ultimately, the chapter seeks to draw attention to the practice of power in the decentralized Acholi political system in late precolonial and early colonial Acholiland.

The Acholi Political System and Transition: A Brief History

In 1911, when colonial rule began in Acholiland, after almost two decades of making the region part of the Uganda Protectorate, the area was composed of over sixty similarly organized chiefdoms (Finnström 2008: 42) (Fig. 1). The chiefdom was the largest political and social unit. Every chiefdom had its hereditary male

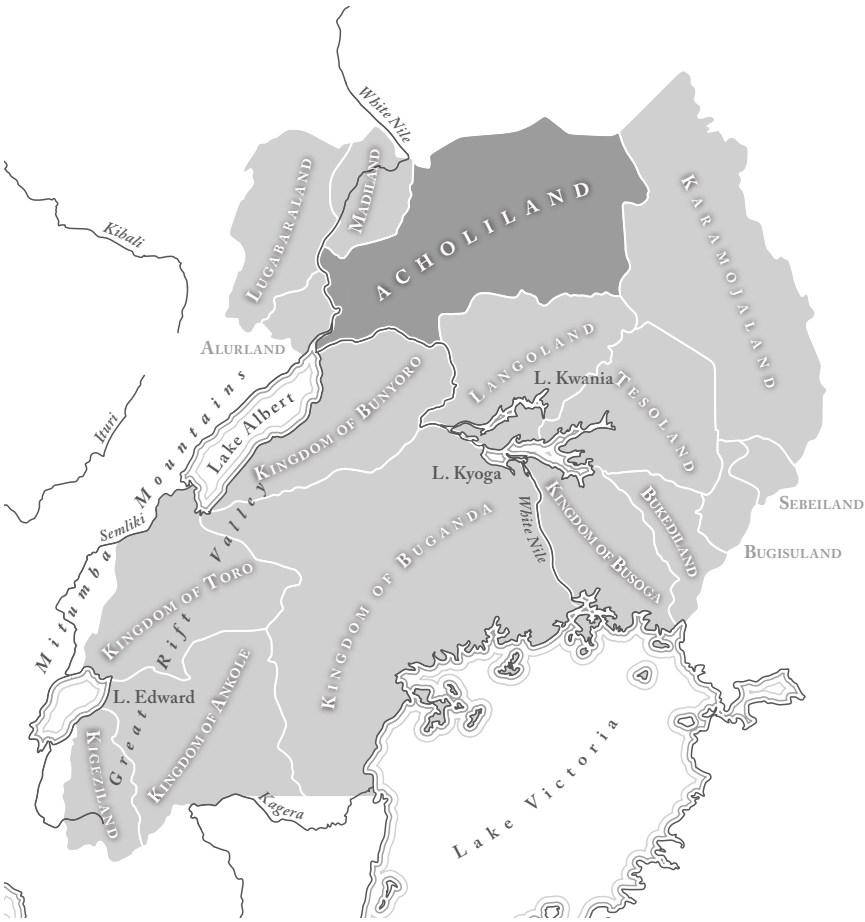

Figure 1: Location of Acholiland. (Map by Daniel Huffman).

ruler, called *rwot moo* (plural *rwodi moo*), often referred to as 'the chief' (Atkinson 1994: 78; Odongo 1979: 64).

The chief's most important responsibilities were making rain, mediating major conflicts, ensuring land fertility, and keeping his subjects healthy. To accomplish all of this, the chief brought in competent court officials. These court officials, whom many Europeans wrote disparagingly about, performed important specialized roles and therefore shared decision-making and authority with them (Atkinson 1994: 78; Behrend 1999: 14-15).

The number of court officials varied from chiefdom to chiefdom. However, two of these court officials were women. When a chief was installed, his mother would automatically become a court official, *min rwot*. His favorite wife, who was installed with him, became his royal wife, a court official called *daker* (sometimes referred to as *dako ker*). The *min rwot* and *daker* played vital roles in almost all major court

rituals. The *daker* was also the caretaker of royal regalia, which included a stool, a drum, and spears (Atkinson 1994: 90; Girling 1960: 86). The chief often consulted the *min rwot* and *daker*. As a result, they had influence on the chief, and they played a significant role in the chief's decision-making. Put simply, they wielded a lot of power within royal politics but in less public ways (Girling 1960: 86).

In addition to the two women, there were many other court officials. Perhaps the most important of these court officials in any chiefdom was the *ajwakaker*, or what some early Europeans called the 'royal diviner'.[4] I refer to this court official as 'royal healer', because his role extended beyond divination. This role was reserved for men, and only one man held the position at a time. He was responsible for planting and hunting rituals (Atkinson 1994: 150; Odongo 1979: 65; Garry 1971).

Another court official was the *latumpiny*, often rendered in English as 'priest' (p'Bitek 1971: 60; Behrend 1999: 14-15). Like the *ajwakaker*, a *latumpiny* was a commoner, or someone not from the royal clan (called *kal*), and was an experienced healer. The position of *latumpiny* could be occupied by men or women, and the chiefdom could have many priests (plural *lutumpiny*). The priest was responsible for 'individual reproduction and group survival,' including the ability 'to conceive children, to bear living children, and to have them survive into maturity – to reproduce the social group' (Feierman 1995: 79). Not all court officials, however, were ritual specialists.

The first category of nonritual court officials was the *oteka*, or war leader, always a man. Chiefdoms could have more than one *oteka* (Girling 1960: 102; Webster 1970: 5-7). Although the authority to declare war belonged only to the chief, he never led the fighters to battle (Ocitti 2010: 42). It was the role of the *oteka* to lead all war expeditions (Girling 1960: 102). The second category of nonritual court officials was the *la or Pa rwot*, or royal messenger, who was the official mediator between the chief and his subjects and between the chiefdom and other polities. The role of royal messenger appears to have been reserved exclusively for men. As with priests and war leaders, the chief could have as many royal messengers as he wished.

Under the chief and his court officials, there were other leaders at the levels of the clan, lineage (*kaka*), and village (*dog gang*) (Girling 1960: 63, 170; Allen 1984: 30, 42-45; Otunnu 2017: 63-64). Below these leaders were the last and largest group of people in the sociopolitical system, the *lubong*, or the rank and file (Allen 1984:17, 32-33). They provided labour and other forms of tribute, including military service in times of war. In exchange for their service, *lubong* expected their chief to provide necessities for their livelihood, such as rain, fertile soil, abundant harvests, fertility for women, and health for their children. When their chief failed to meet their demands, the chief was rebuked by his subjects, as we shall see later. However, if the chief continued to fail in his role, 'dissatisfied' *lubong* could move to another chiefdom, which was considered the most serious challenge to the chief's power (Atkinson 1994: 84; Garry 1976: 321).

The British conquest of Acholiland, beginning in the late 1890s with the 'pacification' of the region, upset many of these titled positions. When colonial officials and missionaries arrived, some chiefs exploited the European presence to consolidate their powers – they tried to defeat their rivals, and that was exactly why Olango and Kitara, two chiefs from east of the Aswa River whose stories I started this chapter with, approached Delmé-Radcliffe for a joint British-Acholi expedition to western Acholi before losing their powers. But under what circumstances did chiefs temporarily lose their powers? Who was then in charge of the chiefdom's activities?

The next sections take on these questions; specifically, they seek to shed light on two important rituals in which chiefs relinquished their powers. These rituals, if examined carefully, open windows into the practice of power and authority in Acholiland. However, despite their massive scale and significance, these rituals have yet to receive sufficient scholarly attention.

Powers of Chiefs During a Calendar Year

On 18 November 1904, five months after arriving in Acholiland, Lloyd, of the CMS, reported witnessing part of a ritual during which a chief lost his powers and was treated as an 'ordinary member of the domain'. Lloyd, therefore, became the first missionary to write about the vague nature of chiefs' powers. Like Delmé-Radcliffe before him, Lloyd noted that chiefs lacked powers and ceded their powers to 'heathen priests' – by which Lloyd meant *lutumpiny* – at certain times near the end of every calendar year. However, unlike Delmé-Radcliffe, Lloyd noted that there were 'two important heathen rituals' during which chiefs were forced to temporarily relinquish their roles.[5] Lloyd did not name these rituals; he simply noted that they were carried out at the end of every harvest and at the beginning of every planting season.

To understand the exercise of power that Europeans saw, especially how chiefs lost their powers and to whom these powers were bestowed, and to understand why the two chiefs whom I began this chapter with abandoned Delmé-Radcliffe, let us begin by exploring the first ritual, which, as Lloyd noted correctly, was performed at the end of every harvest ceremony. We will then focus on the second ritual, carried out just before the beginning of the planting ceremony. Re-creating these rituals, I argue, enables us to appreciate the importance of overlooked court officials in the functioning of the Acholi chiefdom. Specifically, it opens windows into the practice of power and authority in Acholiland, allowing us to comprehend why, when, how, and to whom chiefs relinquished their thrones. Moreover, re-creating these rituals enables us to see the roles that *lubong*, commoners, played in governance in Acholiland.

The first ritual, which Lloyd witnessed only a fraction of, was called *tero cam ki jok* (henceforth *tero*). It was a highly political ritual carried out in the dry season, usually in November, December, or, at the very latest, January, immediately after the end of the agricultural season.

The name of this ritual – *tero cam ki jok* – translates simply as 'taking food to the spirit' (in this case, the chiefdom spirit), but this is misleading. While people did take food to the chiefdom shrine to thank the spirits for having granted them a good harvest, there were also some people who used the opportunity to thank the spirits for having granted them their personal requests from the previous year. For example, some women who conceived during the year or those who had good health throughout the year used this occasion to thank the chiefdom spirits. Others, however, used *tero* to ask the chiefdom spirits to grant them favours in the coming year. These requests – which included women seeking fertility, men seeking more children, and farmers seeking good harvest – were some of the issues endlessly debated by chiefs' subjects, and they were the issues that made the ritual much more complex than the name suggests. It is this complex set of issues and requests that forced every chief – who did not have the required knowledge and power – to work with the chiefdom spirits, stepping aside from his role to allow the priests to carry out a successful ritual to meet the subjects' demands.

The ritual began with consultations between the priest (or priests) and the chief. The priest, in consultation with the chiefdom spirits, not the chief, set the date of the ritual. Once a date had been agreed, the chief invited his subjects to court for the announcement. The day's event was led by the priest, not the chief. The most important ceremonial act on this day occurred when the priest, beating the royal drum repeatedly, emerged from an enclosure erected in the middle of the courtyard (p'Bitek 1971: 79). The drum, which was 'the primary symbol of authority within the chiefdom and sovereignty in inter-polity relations', was kept exclusively in the chief's courtyard and 'played only on special occasions' (Atkinson 1994: 96).

As the priest began playing the drum with a single stroke, it exhilarated the subjects gathered at the courtyard, who reacted with ululations, chants, and mock fights (p'Bitek 1971: 79). The priest then stood in front of the crowd, announced the date of the ritual, and gave instructions for those who intended to go to the shrine. Specifically, the priest told people to settle disputes and refrain from fights, theft, and murder between that moment and the ritual. Additionally, the priest warned people to suspend sexual activity before the day of the feast because such activity would make them 'unclean' in front of the chiefdom spirit.[6]

From the moment the priest finished addressing the crowd, all other chiefdom activities were suspended. It was after the address that chiefs 'lost their normal chiefly prerogatives' and 'became private persons', temporarily handing over their chiefly powers to the priest. This transfer of power was 'necessary, if the priests were to carry out their onerous and dangerous tasks effectively and with dignity and honour' (p'Bitek 1971: 82). This loss of 'chiefly prerogatives' was why Rwot Olango and Rwot Kitara declined to join Delmé-Radcliffe for a war expedition against neighbouring chiefs, telling him they had momentarily lost their powers and that Delmé-Radcliffe should wait six weeks for them to regain their powers.

Once the chief had lost his powers, ceremony preparations began. The priest sent royal messengers to clans, lineages, and villages that had not been represented at the announcement ceremony to invite them to participate.[7] Contributions of food and beer were required of every family, including the chief's family (Allen 1984: 17). Women brewed beer from freshly harvested millet. Men brought whatever animals they could afford, such as sheep, goats, or chickens, to be sacrificed and fed to the ritual participants.[8]

On the morning of the ritual, people who wished to go to the shrine gathered at the chief's court (Girling 1960: 99). Before the procession began, the priest asked those who had violated any of the instructions – by engaging in fights, theft, murder, or sexual activity – to stay home. Failure to obey the priest's orders was believed to result in punishment in the form of sickness or death.[9] Those who did not violate the instructions were issued further instructions. For example, participants were asked to follow a dress code. 'Women dressed in the string skirt, *ceno*, and girls wore the bead skirt, *cip*.' There was no specific ritual meaning for the women's dress code, except that *ceno* and *cip* marked the difference between women and girls (Girling 1960: 24; Ngomlokojo 1999: 59). Men dressed in any type of animal hide, except leopard or lion skins, which were reserved for royalty.

During the entire time of the ceremony, though, even the chief did not wear his leopard or lion skins, because he had temporarily relinquished his power.[10] Moreover, the chief himself 'was not usually allowed' to go and 'participate or even attend [the event at the shrine] in person' (Allen 1984: 26). This was to give his subjects space to voice their concerns, or even criticize the chief, without fear, especially if the chief had failed to provide conditions for subjects to thrive. Therefore, the chiefdom shrine was not a place of just 'worship', as many scholars have noted, but also of raising concerns and rebuking chiefs who had failed in their responsibilities.

In the throng that followed the priest to the shrine were the priest's assistants, called *lutedjok*; 'barren women and girls whose breasts had not developed'; and other 'men and women who wished to go to the shrine' (p'Bitek 1971: 67-68). The participation of women who had not borne children and young girls suggests that the chiefdom shrine served as a site for seeking fertility and that the chiefdom sought to harness women's reproductive potential. Upon reaching the shrine, the priest and assistants addressed the crowd and received the sacrificial gifts of animals, flour, and beer.

The ceremony officially began with the priest invoking the spirit and the crowd joining in (p'Bitek 1971: 69-70). The ritual supplication included pleas for specific favours: fertility for women and young girls, good crop yields, sufficient rain, and protection from sicknesses and diseases. These supplications reveal issues of concern in the chiefdom and things that subjects demanded from their chiefs. They also reveal that chiefdom shrines were spaces where subjects 'spoke to the powerful, and expected to be heard' (Hanson 2022: 3). After the supplication, the

priest entered a trance and communicated directly with the chiefdom's spirits. Chiefs could not perform this role, which is why they had to enlist powerful healers as priests.

Upon emerging from the trance, the priest performed the final part of the ritual: giving the spirit the newly harvested food. A substantial amount of time was given to the spirit to eat. After the spirit had eaten, the priest relayed instructions to the people who had made final pleas to the spirit for the new year. The priest then distributed medicine, after which the people were allowed to eat. After the meal, men and women performed a mock fight against one another, marking the end of the ritual. Generally, a mock fight symbolized defeat over an imaginary enemy, and in this case, it may have signified triumph over forces responsible for women's infertility, low crop yields, drought, or disease.

Following the mock fight, the priest led people back to the royal courtyard to join those who had been barred from going to the shrine. The chief then reemerged, and in the priest's last significant ritual act, the priest re-clothed the chief with leopard and lion skins, thus transferring authority over the chiefdom back to the chief.[11] The chief gave a speech, thanking his subjects for participating in the ritual and assuring them that chiefdom spirits would grant them their requests. He then served them food and beer. From this moment on, people were set free from all the pre-ritual regulations. For example, people were free to resume sexual activity.

Singing, drumming, and dancing began after the meals, continued through the night, and could go on for many days. The most important things, however, were the types of songs and dances: they reflected public sentiments from the year. If the year had ended with a plentiful harvest and good health, the songs and dances were celebratory and signalled approval of the chief and his courtiers. But if the year had not ended well, such as with a bad harvest, women failing to conceive, or an outbreak of a disease, then the songs and dances criticized the chief and his court officials (Grove 1919: 168). After the dance, priests distributed medicine to clan heads to take back 'for further distribution' to the sick who were unable to attend the ritual (p'Bitek 1971: 72-73). Thereafter, chiefs gave gifts to priests and clan leaders who had organized *tero*, bringing the ceremony to an end.

The accounts of *tero* show the importance of priests in their chiefdoms. Specifically, they reveal the knowledge, power, authority, and, most importantly, roles of priests. The priests' prominence came from their ability to intercede with the spirits and avert adversity, including illness, disease, infertility, drought, and famine. Consequently, a priest served both individuals and entire chiefdoms. At the individual level, for example, a priest could help an infertile woman conceive. At the community level, a priest could ensure that the chiefdom avoided droughts and epidemics.

These tasks, which chiefs could not do on their own, elevated the status of skilled priests and earned them widespread support from people who had benefited, or hoped to benefit, from the priests' intercession with the spirit world. These

tasks also forced chiefs to consult priests at all times and to relinquish their powers to priests during the ritual period. However, this does not mean that chiefs were weak or incapable of governing, as many Europeans portrayed them.

During *tero* was not the only moment when chiefs relinquished their powers. We now turn to another moment, when a different court official – the royal healer – took charge of the chiefdom.

Royal Healers

Like the priest, the royal healer was a skilled and powerful court official. He was locally called *ajwakaker* or *wonngom* ('father of the soil') (Girling 1960: 99). Unlike priests, however, there was only one royal healer in each chiefdom, and only males could assume this position (Girling 1960: 123). The major responsibility of the royal healer was to conduct another important ritual called *kwer me coyokodi* (hereafter referred to as *coyokodi*) (Girling 1960: 97; Girling 1952: 189; Garry 1976: 328; Webster 1976: 350). Unlike *tero*, performed at the end of the year, *coyokodi* was performed at the end of the dry season, usually in January or early February, 'just before the time to plant' (Atkinson 1994: 150).

The ritual's aim was to ensure a good harvest to feed the chiefdom. Unlike *tero*, which was performed at the chiefdom's shrine, *coyokodi* was carried out in the chief's personal shrine or in the courtyard. Like *tero*, the day for holding the *coyokodi* ritual was decided by the royal healer, and the royal messenger delivered the information to those absent. As soon as the date was agreed on, chiefs also relinquished their powers to royal healers (to allow the royal healer to organize and execute the ritual) – but for a much shorter time compared to *tero* – and preparations began.

On the morning of the ritual, subjects would gather in the chief's courtyard. Attendance at the ceremony, as Postlethwaite noted in 1915, was a must 'for every man or woman in the domain' (see the quote in Girling 1952: 190). Men's and women's roles were identical to those in the *tero* ritual: women provided beer and flour, and men brought animals (Girling 1960: 99).

The planting ritual began with the royal healer calling an assembly in front of the chief's shrine. There, the royal healer, with the help of the *lutedjok* (who also served as the priests' assistants), slaughtered the goats and, according to historian Ronald Atkinson, removed the 'content of the goats' intestines'. Next, these contents 'were sprinkled around the *Abila* [shrine], and on the nearby graves of previous *rwodi* [chiefs], and then on the chests of the people present' (Atkinson 1994: 150). F.K. Girling noted that 'the contents of the intestines [were also] mixed with the seed to be used in the sowing' (Girling 1960: 98). Neither Atkinson nor Girling explained the significance of this act, but we now know that the Acholi thought the contents of the goat's intestines had regenerative power that promoted human fertility and plant growth.[12]

The *lutedjok* then took the meat and began preparing it for the feast. The royal healer – accompanied by the chief, the clan heads, and other people – walked to the chief's nearest garden and symbolically struck the ground with his *talker*, the most significant object in the royal healer's regalia. Specifically, a *talker* was a sceptre. It was first mentioned in European documents in 1903, though not by name, during Lloyd's evangelization tour of Acholiland. When he visited a village identified as Pugwinyi in Patiko chiefdom, Lloyd met the chief and 'his right-hand witchdoctor' carrying a 'long stick'. This stick, Lloyd continued, was highly revered 'by everyone in the domain'.[13] In 1907, A. E. Pleydell, another missionary, wrote about this stick, stating that the Acholi do not give as much respect to their chiefs' scepters as they give those of their 'witchdoctors [royal healers]'.[14] Like Lloyd, Pleydell did not tell us more about the stick, perhaps because he did not fully understand its significance.

The best insights into the *talker* and its significance come much later, from two local Acholi historians. In 1971, Luka Ocan described the *talker* as a stick about two to three meters long that was used during planting rituals and meetings, adding that if the *ajwakaker* pointed it at someone, that person would die.[15] Perhaps the best observations came from Loka Otto. '*Talker* was the only thing that distinguished the royal healer from other healers' Otto recalled. He described it as 'about two to three meters in length' and said it was used for carrying out trials in the court. 'If someone was accused of a serious crime, like witchcraft, and there was no evidence to support the accusation', Otto explained, 'the suspect was brought to the chief's courtyard. … The royal healer was brought in. He placed his *talker* on the ground and asked the suspect to lift it off the ground.' If the suspect lifted the *talker*, 'the suspect was innocent and was set free'. But if the suspect failed to lift the *talker*, 'it meant the suspect was the witch and had committed the crime'. He concluded that if the 'royal healer wanted to kill the witch [or anyone deemed a threat to his authority or that of the chief], he would just point at the witch with the *talker*, and the witch would die'. According to Otto, 'The *talker* could kill anything that the royal healer wanted dead'.[16]

Why then was the *talker* used to strike the ground? The goal of striking the soil was 'to kill all soil-borne plant diseases and other creatures that could eat away the seeds of the chief'.[17] After the striking of the soil with the *talker*, the royal healer and other people present returned to the courtyard to celebrate the beginning of the new agricultural season. At this point, the chief regained his authority. Singing, drumming, and dancing began after the meal, and court musicians entertained the crowd. The festivities of the new season could go on for days. But some of the songs and dances performed during the ceremony were more than celebratory dances for the new season; people also sang and danced 'to encourage rain' (Atkinson 1994: 150). After the ceremony, 'people were permitted to begin work in the fields', but planting began only 'after the [first] rain had fallen' and after 'the signal for cultivation to begin was given by the *rwot*' (Girling 1960: 97).

Obviously, executing the planting ritual was not the royal healer's only responsibility (Garry 1971: 1-3, 14). This role and many other roles – which included involvement in the chiefdom's judicial affairs by carrying out trials by ordeal, presiding over chiefdom meetings, and performing other rituals, such as those geared toward helping hunters and war leaders win battles – reinforced the royal healer's power and authority as a leading figure in the chiefdom. Like the priests, royal healers accumulated their own followers, and they included people who had benefited, or hoped to benefit, from the royal healer's rituals and other roles.

Royal Activities During the Two Ceremonies

That chiefs lost their powers at certain moments during the year, and who replaced them at those times, may now be clear. However, two questions emerge: What kinds of royal activities, if any, were executed during these two rituals, after the chiefs had been temporarily replaced by his court officials? And where were those activities performed since the chief had relinquished his role? Exploring these questions will enable us to better understand the practice of power and authority in decentralized Acholiland.

The best insights into the kind of activities executed during this moment come from three early Europeans in Acholiland. The first one is Delmé-Radcliffe, the colonial agent whose story begins this chapter. On 27 November 1902, when Delmé-Radcliffe called on two chiefs to join him for the expedition to western Acholiland, this gave him the opportunity to observe the chiefs in their courts. Delmé-Radcliffe reported that he did not receive the welcome he had earlier received before *tero* had started. The courts of the two chiefs, he added, were deserted. 'All I saw', he continued, 'his men were absent', meaning court officials were away, and the chiefs were unwilling to support Delmé-Radcliffe in his proposal to conquer west Acholiland. There were no activities in the courts during *tero*, and Delmé-Radcliffe was left 'disappointed' with the chiefs because of their refusal to work with him. The chiefs, he concluded, 'do not have the power to command their subjects', compared to 'the leaders I have visited in Uganda [Buganda] & Unyoro [Bunyoro]'.[18]

Like Delmé-Radcliffe, Lloyd of the CMS was also disappointed with his treatment during *tero*. In November 1904, Lloyd reported an incident in which he visited Patiko, and, because the chiefdom was already 'observing the rules of their heathen thanksgiving ritual', he could not get any work done. The chief, whom Lloyd referred to as the 'Larema', which means a very close friend, 'refused' to have any audience with him. The chief, Lloyd continued, went 'away and hid himself in the village', sending his children, who may have been court officials, to tell Lloyd 'to go away'. Lloyd witnessed a similar thing Delmé-Radcliffe had witnessed, reporting that the chief's court was completely abandoned, with no one there to welcome 'visitors'. The only person Lloyd saw was 'a tall woman' walking

with water in a gourd, who may have been the *min rwot* or *daker*. Lloyd concluded that the woman refused to talk to him but went about her business 'sprinkling water on the ground', suspecting that he might have brought a curse to the home of their chief.[19]

For Delmé-Radcliffe and Lloyd, there were no royal activities during *tero* ceremonies; everything came to a halt. A.L. Kitching, a missionary and linguist who witnessed both *tero* and *coyokodi* in the Patiko chiefdom in 1904 and 1905, attempted to go beyond Delmé-Radcliffe's and Lloyd's actions, inquiring about what happened when the chief lost his powers, and he used his findings to advise his fellow missionaries. On 21 November 1904, Kitching warned his colleagues that from around mid-November, when *tero* had begun, they should not expect much church and school attendance. The explanation he offered was that all adults were under strict orders of their 'chiefs' and 'chief-priests' to prepare for 'an important ceremony of harvest' that could take up to two months. On this occasion, in 1904, Kitching did not observe any royal activity, because he was blocked from entering the chiefs' court.[20]

However, in November 1905, on his return to the Patiko chiefdom, Kitching found an even warmer welcome than he had enjoyed in 1904. Muca Ojwe, his former student at the CMS school who had dropped out after just five months, had become a *latumpiny*, or priest, in the Patiko chiefdom. They talked of old times and the progress of the mission. They 'prayed together' and 'sang old hymns', and Ojwe confessed to Kitching that he had left the school abruptly because he had been chosen to be a priest, and he could not refuse. Ojwe then told Kitching that at the time of his visit, he, Ojwe, was in charge of the chiefdom because his chief had relinquished his power to allow Ojwe to organize *tero*.

Ojwe informed Kitching that his role was to perform the *tero* ceremony, which would take him seven weeks. He also informed Kitching that most royal activities were on halt, and that was why Kitching could not find the chief. He added that it was his responsibility to solve any problems that would arise in the chiefdom, concluding that all problems were resolved at the chiefdom shrine, which might explain why Delmé-Radcliffe and Lloyd had reported that the chief's court was deserted. Kitching used his friendship with Ojwe to ask if he could visit the chiefdom shrine. Ojwe denied the request, responding that the 'ancestral spirits do not allow people from outside the domain to visit the shrine'. Kitching concluded that the time during *tero* was the most peaceful in Acholiland because most activities, including inter-chiefdom warfare, were set aside, as no chiefdom was allowed to attack another.[21]

Kitching went on to write that he had been told 'the ceremony for the new [agricultural] season', which occurred in either late January or early February each year, but for a much shorter time (two to three weeks) compared to *tero*, was led by 'another priest' who was given full powers by the chief to punish anyone who violated the rules of the ceremony. According to Kitching, 'another chief priest', meaning the royal healer, 'took over the chief's home' and carried out his

ceremony, recalling that it was this 'chief priest' who oversaw everything in the chiefdom.[22]

What do we make of all the European accounts? More specifically, what kinds of royal activities, if any, were executed during these two rituals? And where were those activities performed? From the different European observations, we can see that chiefs clearly relinquished their powers to arguably their most powerful court officials – priests and royal healers – to allow them to exercise arguably the most important chiefdom rituals, geared to meet the demands of their subjects. During these two ceremonies, chiefs became ordinary people: they did not wear their leopard or lion skins, which were symbols of their power. As a result, royal activities were scaled down. Additionally, when problems emerged during the time of the two ceremonies, it was the role of the court official in charge of the chiefdom – not chiefs – to resolve the issue. Specifically, during *tero*, it was the role of priests to resolve all the issues at the chiefdom shrine, while during *coyokodi*, it was the role of the royal healer to resolve all the issues at the chief's shrine, located in his courtyard. These were the sites where these court officials worked.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to explain the nature of power and authority in Acholiland, highlighting how power functioned, circumstances under which chiefs lost their powers, how powers were transferred from chiefs to court officials, and how chiefs were treated when they lost their powers. In so doing, this chapter has shown there were moments during the year when chiefs had to relinquish their power to allow for certain important rituals, which chiefs could not do on their own, and that, during these ceremonies, the court officials leading the rituals took charge of the chiefdom. The duration for which a court official reigned depended on the time the court official needed to prepare for and perform the ceremony; chiefs could not determine the durations of the rituals. They had to wait until after the ritual was complete to regain their powers over the chiefdom.

While differences in the exercise of power between centralized states (such as Buganda and Bunyoro) and decentralized societies may now be clear, it may be unclear how the Acholi political system compares with that of other decentralized societies – for example, the Lango or the Alur. The lack of scholarship on the complexity of power and authority in these other decentralized societies makes comparing them difficult. However, given the linguistic similarity, the regular contact, and the degree of borrowing among these societies from the mid-nineteenth century, there could have been some similarities in the exercise of power and authority in these decentralized societies, which further research might help show.

What we do know is that the British imperial conquest that began in the late 1890s disorganized the power structures in these decentralized societies in

northern Uganda. In the case of Acholiland (as in other societies), the imperial conquest resulted in many visits to the area. Europeans arrived at different times, and sometimes their visits coincided with the important chiefdom rituals discussed here, meaning they observed chiefs at their 'weakest' moments. Their observations shaped the perception that chiefs were weak and never in command in their chiefdoms. By 1913, when most chiefs did not meet colonial officials' expectations by not collecting enough taxes or recruiting more men for forced labour, colonial officials thought this was due to the chiefs' lack of power and began ousting hereditary chiefs, replacing them with 'strong men' whom they believed could implement their policies. To make the appointed men effective, the state backed them with force, creating what Mahmood Mamdani has called 'despots' (1996: 23). In so doing, colonial officials failed to understand how power and authority functioned in Acholiland.

This chapter, I hope, brings much-needed clarity to, and helps us understand the complexity in, the practice of power and authority in decentralized Acholiland. The fact that chiefs sometimes temporarily lost their power did not mean they, as Postlethwaite assumed, had no authority over their people and were, therefore, incapable of governing their chiefdoms (Postlethwaite 1947: 56).

Notes

1 UNA/A16/2: Shuli (Acholi) Correspondence, *Inward* 2 (1902-3).
2 CMHLG/001: Visit to Patigo, 1904.
3 There are some exceptions, such as p'Bitek, *Religion*; Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity*; Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings*; and Brach, *Displacing Human Rights*.
4 CMHLG/001: Visit to Patigo, 1904.
5 CMHLG/001: Visit to Patigo, 1904.
6 Loka Otto, interview, Gulu, November 1, 2013.
7 Matteo Otema, interview, Gulu, October 15, 2013.
8 Loka Otto, interview, Gulu, November 1, 2013.
9 Loka Otto, interview, Gulu, November 1, 2013; Girling 1960: 160.
10 Loka Otto, interview, Gulu, November 1, 2013.
11 Loka Otto, interview, Gulu, November 1, 2013.
12 CMHLG/104: Acholi Rituals/Ceremonies.
13 CMHLG/104: Acholi Rituals/Ceremonies.
14 CMHLG/104: Acholi Rituals/Ceremonies.
15 Loka Otto, interview, Gulu, November 25, 2013.
16 Loka Otto, interview, Gulu, November 25, 2013.
17 Martin Okello, interview, Gulu, November 10, 2013.
18 UNA/A16/2: Shuli (Acholi) Correspondence, *Inward* 2 (1902-3).
19 CMHLG/312: A. L. Kitching, 1904-1908.
20 CMHLG/312: A. L. Kitching, 1904-1908.
21 CMHLG/312: A. L. Kitching, 1904-1908.
22 CMHLG/312: A. L. Kitching, 1904-1908.

CHAPTER 2.3

The Tension From Within: Soldiers and Administrators Disputing Power in Late Colonial Guinea-Bissau (1961-74)

Pedro Cerdeira

Introduction

From 1963 to 1974, the Portuguese colonial state was permanently engaged in a war against the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cabo Verde (PAIGC) in its West African colony of Portuguese Guinea (now Guinea-Bissau). It started on 23 January 1963, with an attack launched by the liberation movement on the Portuguese military quarters of Tite, south of the colony. The attack had been preceded by acts of sabotage and disobedience promoted by the PAIGC in the south but also by attacks by the Liberation Movement of Guinea (MLG) in July 1961 and January 1963 in the northern São Domingos area (Amado 2011; Martins & Neves, 2019). While the MLG never came to launch attacks anywhere else in the territory, the PAIGC, following the attack on Tite, spread out quickly (Amado 2011; Silva 1997; *Resenha Histórico-Militar* 1988). By the middle of 1964, the situation was of 'great optimism' for the PAIGC, whereas the Portuguese struggled to keep their positions and mostly limited themselves to react to enemy attacks (Afonso & Gomes 2020). In this chapter, I consider war as a crucial variable in the history of local administration in late colonial Guinea-Bissau, as it meant the arrival and installation of military units across the territory, which became a new presence in the populations' everyday life. Indeed, the military brought a new layer of complexity and potential friction (other than the one provoked by warfare) to the local colonial administration. It appears clear that the relationship between soldiers and officials was nurtured by both sides and was perceived as an endeavour of cooperation, something even memoirs of former soldiers have insisted upon (Matos 2009; Riquito 2018). The civilian administration profited from the presence of the military, as the latter strengthened the former's capacity for surveillance and helped accomplish different tasks. However, coexistence was not always peaceful, and I explore the ways in which the presence of the military could be a source of tension. This mostly arose when one of the parties believed the other was undermining their efforts and authority. Conflicts between the military and the African population, which the colonial state was supposed to protect and care for, were also perceived as damaging to the colonial project. I argue that the military account for another layer of daily management that the civilian administration had to deal with while running an empire in war. António de Spínola's accession to the government of Portuguese Guinea in May 1968 further complexified their relationship. Not only were new

military positions created above civilian ones, but also both entities were expected to cooperate in undertaking the new governor's policy of winning over the Guinean population, through a programme of welfare investments in infrastructures and farming projects (Amado 2011; Afonso & Gomes 2020).

This chapter thus examines how the relationship between civilian administration and the military unfolded. It does so by investigating the specific case of the coastal district of Cacheu, northwest of the colony, which was first attacked in 1965. The local approach allows me to explore how their interaction played out on the ground as I expand the scope of my analysis to encompass experiences of power, exploring the fragilities and tensions of the late colonial state from within. Research on these fragilities has benefited from concepts like colonial nervousness, anxiety, panic, and obsession (Hunt 2016; Stoler 2009; Fischer-Tiné 2016; Keese 2013). However, the relationship between the Portuguese civilian administration and military forces in the context of Guinea-Bissau's liberation war has not received significant academic attention. Existing literature has predominantly focused on the PAIGC's military operations and political action, and on the Portuguese war strategy (Dhada 1993; Silva 1997; Amado 2011). Some of that literature has even alluded to the usual 'tension' between military and civilian officials (Afonso & Gomes 2020: 331), without however thoroughly investigating it. I intend to fill that gap by expanding the social history of the late colonial state power as fragmented and disputed among its very agents in the field. I resort to emotions and notions of colonial prestige as keys to enriching the analysis of such an experience. I find the colonial state, especially at the local level, to be a conflictual, even porous entity which grappled with the expectations of populations, African authorities, and its agents. This contribution shows how the military, deployed initially on the ground to protect and keep the colonial state in place, could ultimately become a disruptive presence to order and routine as they added pressure to an already tense space. The day-to-day dimensions of the civilian/military relationship during wartime have remained largely unexplored, which renders this case study even more relevant.

Firstly, I analyse the military deployment process as perceived by the civilian administration. Notably, the latter was required to help the former settle in and provide them with accommodation. Despite seemingly warm welcomes, the presence of military units had a logistical impact, as they often occupied administrative buildings, and incidents soon occurred regarding protocol and administrative procedures, which were seen as an outrage to colonial prestige (Saada 2002; Saada 2003; Lauro 2011).

Secondly, I examine more extensively how the relationship between civilian administration and the military unfolded. This relationship was perceived as an endeavour of cooperation which reinforced state power. It intensified as the war continued, and Governor Spínola implemented an ambitious socio-economic development programme. From partners, military personnel and civilians turned into competitors, with competences clashing and overlapping. Therefore,

expectations collided and diverged – the military complexified the life of local administration and could become a source of tension, with soldiers and officials exchanging criticism and expressing mutual frustration.

Finally, I break down how the military's presence could further complicate the colonial administration's task of governing African populations. Ultimately, the civilian administration could perceive the military as detrimental to the state's prestige due to their behaviour and the abuse of Africans. This was a particularly dramatic arena as local officials had to balance the expectations of different actors, with peacetime colonialism being a rather complex phenomenon that relied on local structures, like the so-called traditional authorities (Burbank & Cooper 2010; Osborn 2006).

It is not the goal of this chapter to undertake a military history; instead, it seeks to examine how the troops interacted with the local administration, mainly from the administration's point of view. This examination will be conducted by exploring administrative sources from Guinean and Portuguese archives, including service journals, reports, and correspondence. Different voices within the administration are summoned: those of post commissioners, district administrators, and inspectors who periodically visited the territory. The extensive paperwork they generated provides a comprehensive overview of their experiences with officers and soldiers in different parts of the district throughout the period. African voices appear through the mediation of administrative sources, which further illustrates how both officers and officials mobilized African protests and complaints as leverage when clashing with one another. Such an inquiry intends to expand the possible approaches to the local exercise of late colonial power in Guinea-Bissau, and more largely in the war-ridden African Portuguese colonies, thus, complexifying the history of late colonial states (Darwin 1999).

The Military Settle in

The military had been the main actor of the Portuguese colonial occupation at the turn of the twentieth century, in line with other contemporary colonial enterprises in Africa. However, from the 1910s, the new Portuguese Republic had progressively replaced the military administration with a civilian one, and that in all continental African territories, including Guinea and Angola (Reis 2001; Wheeler & Pélissier 2011). As the colonial administration established itself and territories came under control, the military forces were increasingly sidelined, and that even though the governor of Portuguese Guinea was frequently an officer himself. Therefore, in 1961, the Guinean military force, besides the colony's command headquarters, was made up of two companies of *chasseurs* and one artillery battery of African recruitment, stationed respectively in the cities of Bissau and Bolama. In Bissau there was also a reinforcement of three metropolitan units. The colony was two companies

of chasseurs short of what the law stipulated (*Resenha Histórico-Militar* 1988).[1] This meant that the Portuguese military presence in Guinea-Bissau had become rather small and consequently that administrative officials did not usually cross any soldiers when on the job, especially in rural areas. Administrators indeed held vast powers over local populations, including administrative and judicial jurisdiction over Africans (Havik 2010; Cerdeira 2018).

In the early 1960s, the changes in the military presence in Guinea-Bissau – and specifically in the district of Cacheu – were a sign of the colonial state's unease, reinforced by events like the massacre of Pidjiguiti, a violent police response to a dockers' strike in Bissau on 3 August 1959, and the attacks of July 1961 on São Domingos, as well as the war outbreak in Angola that same year. Movements of Portuguese troops were visible in the district before the actual war started in Guinea, as it witnessed an increasing military presence in the territory throughout 1961. Therefore, the military became a feature of the district's daily routine, attested by the increasing mentions of troops and officers and their interactions with local officials. These local officials were the commissioners of post – the lowest-level representatives of the colonial state – and the district administrator above them. The district of Cacheu included six posts: Bula, Cacheu, Caió, Calequisse, and Pecixe each of which had a commissioner. The administrator oversaw them from Teixeira Pinto (current Canchungo), the district seat. All of them helped the military settle down. The commissioner of post of Bula himself, Lopes Pereira, supervised the construction of local military facilities from June 1961.[2] In late August, the first soldiers moved into the new facilities and started to participate in the local weekly ceremony of hoisting the Portuguese flag.[3]

A similar presence was noted at the other administrative posts. By early April 1961, the Platoon of Chasseurs no. 5 settled in Cacheu. They took over the maternity building, forcing the maternity services to move to the administrative secretariat's building and the secretariat to move into the maritime delegation facilities.[4] This settlement thus had a direct impact on the administration's logistics, despite being met with no apparent resistance from the administration. That exact impact was felt in the post of Caió, where a platoon took over the local granary as housing facilities in August 1962.[5] In Teixeira Pinto, the district seat, the garages and the backyard of the administration, as well as two district granaries, were taken over by the military.[6] As for the posts of Calequisse and Pecixe, these were increasingly visited and patrolled by military units, which, however, did not settle down permanently.

The military presence reinforced the colonial state's strength and capacity of action, along with its ceremonial apparatus, but they soon proved to be disruptive and competing forces. During an administrative inspection conducted in April 1963, shortly after the war broke out, inspector Guilherme Libânio Pires noted that throughout the colony, the settlement of military units had created complications regarding the utilization of accommodation for state officials and granaries, most

of which had been taken up by the military services. Concretely, he believed the occupation of granaries by the military could disturb the rice and peanut harvest campaigns.[7] The presence of the military affected the civilian administration in its most practical aspects. The better part of Guinea's economy consisted of Africans producing peanut and rice crops that the colonial government systematically enforced and controlled (Galli 1995). Therefore, the inspector saw the military as disruptive to the colonial economy.

Furthermore, the arrival of the military soon proved to be the cause of friction among different state agents (Tsing 2005). The port town of Cacheu, lying on the banks of the homonymous river, was the backdrop to incidents between civilian officials and the military from the very beginning. On 26 April 1961, sergeants of the escort ship *Boa Vinda* disembarked on the harbour of Cacheu. They asked for help getting provisions, which was provided by the then commissioner of post Taveira Pimentel. The latter noted, however, that the ship's captain did not express any regard or gratitude to the local authority (himself), as required by the protocol.[8] Taveira Pimentel felt personally affected in his position by the lack of respect from the sergeants.

Other than the alleged outrage at the administration's symbolic power, officers in Cacheu were perceived as potential disruptors of more concrete expressions of state power. That much was visible when both forces exerted similar surveillance tasks on the populations' movements through the control of their respective transit permits, in what supposedly represented a reinforced assertion of colonial order (Dalberto 2021). In the town of Cacheu, a highly demanded transit point for migrants, travellers who arrived from São Domingos were checked both at the post and the military barracks.[9] However, on 4 June 1965, Jorge Miranda Lima, commissioner of Cacheu, reported that he had been unable to inspect boat passengers because the second lieutenant at São Domingos had instructed the boat master to present only the transit permits at the military quarters in Cacheu and that the administrative guard José Fanda, 'who usually escorts the passengers from the Military Quarters to the Post was prevented from doing so'. Therefore, after having been checked at the military quarters, the passengers scattered without presenting themselves at the post, 'a case without precedent'.[10] Just as they strengthened the colonial state's control and surveillance mechanisms, the military also appeared as a competing entity that could undermine the civilian authority's efforts to exert its power thoroughly.

Therefore, not only did the military presence disrupt the usual mechanisms of mobility control, but it could also be perceived as damaging to the prestige of colonial authorities, who felt their status threatened. This notion was also fundamental in other colonial contexts, like the French and Belgian ones (Saada 2002; Lauro 2011). Studies show how 'poor whites' and uncaring officials were a source of concern to such prestige before the population due to the example they should set, and the Guinean war shows how the military could also play into such concerns.

Two Entities at War: Between Cooperation and Competition

Cooperation and reinforcement of the colonial state

The military presence boosted the colonial state's capacity for action. Joint inspection tours around chiefdoms and villages became a feature of local life,[11] with the commissioner of Calequisse assigning African guards and guides to accompany the military units.[12] Those police guards fulfilled their role as intermediaries as they put their knowledge of the territory and of the populations to the service of the military. Policing and law enforcement were fundamental tasks of the different modern colonial states in Africa, and the troops reinforced such devices (Lauro 2011; Bat & Courtin 2012). The participation of the military in civilian tasks was visible during census season in the post of Cacheu in September 1962, with the local commissioner of post carrying it out in the company of a military escort.[13] Elsewhere, officers held meetings with chiefs and village heads, whom they would advise to 'seek to work in peace', 'denounce anyone who per chance comes into the village with subversive propaganda' and send their children to school.[14] These could be descriptions of commissioners' and administrators' daily activities during peacetime (Cerdeira 2018). In a colonial context, the military took part in the same kind of discourse and duties undertaken by the civilian administration.

A close interaction between military and civilian authorities regarding security, surveillance and information sharing became part of the district's routine. During his tenure as district administrator of Cacheu, Campos Gramaxo (1963-1967) regularly provided information to the commanders of military companies stationed at Teixeira Pinto, that might be of interest to them. He kept the companies' commanders informed of events he had permitted, such as evening film sessions or funeral rites that could lead to the gathering of persons,[15] in addition to upcoming population movements related to the administration's projects, including street cleaning and harvesting.[16] For instance, on 8 December 1964 Campos Gramaxo informed the commander of Company of Artillery no. 527 that the commissioner of post of Calequisse had notified him that 'in the Bó and Timate areas the harvest celebration is taking place which, due to the assembly of a high number of natives it assembles, may induce mistakes on aerial observation or on any patrolling action'.[17] Therefore, the district administrator warned the local military authorities of events that could alarm them or interfere with their duties. Furthermore, officials informed local military units of apparent abductions of persons by the PAIGC.[18] In exchange for the help given by the local administration, the military collaborated with them. They helped maintain infrastructure that was also of use to them, such as roads and airfields.[19] The military appeared as concerned as the administration regarding the maintenance of infrastructure, as it affected the efficiency of their patrolling duties. Moreover, officials asked the military to escort peanut farmers.[20] While conducting warfare, itself a tool of preserving colonial

power, the Portuguese troops strengthened the colonial state's overall control and assertion mechanisms.

Howbeit, such cooperation did not always go smoothly, with each side trying to put forward their own agendas. Cooperation thus became a process of dispute between colonial agents. On 10 December 1964, a second lieutenant asked the commissioner of Calequisse to order the destruction of termite mounds along the local roads. Since it was already his intention to clear the roadsides, the commissioner decided the two jobs – mound destruction and roadside clearing – would be carried out simultaneously. With that intention, he asked for picks and levers to be provided initially by the military.[21] Nevertheless, the tools were not arriving.[22] Therefore, something the military requested would wind up delayed as they failed to provide the necessary tools. As for the commissioner, he used the military demands to obtain the tools needed for the task. Cooperation gave way to powerplays in which both entities pressured one another to pursue their respective agendas, eventually opening cracks in the notion of unified and cooperative power. As the military came to be a partner in accomplishing the colonial project, it rendered the relationship between officials and troops all the more complex, putting colonial power to a delicate test.

Indeed, on their side, the military could also express complaints regarding what they saw as a lack of cooperation from the civilian administration. In June 1973, the Battalion of Chasseurs no. 3863 complained to administrator Alexandre José de Pezerat Correia (1972-1973) about the commissioner of post of Pecixe for having failed to provide transport to the centre of the island on their two last visits – contrary to what usually happened and to which the military contributed with fuel. The frustrated commander alleged that if the situation continued, 'our troops will not be able to efficiently cover the Island since they would waste all the time expected for patrolling in travelling to and from the centre'.[23] Just like the civilian authorities saw the military as capable of undermining their duties, the military complained when they believed the civilians were undermining theirs. The Pecixe situation was used to show that the state was preventing the battalion from conducting an efficient war effort.

Spínola's war in Cacheu

António de Spínola's tenure as governor of Guinea (1968-73) further complexified the military presence in Cacheu and its relationship with the local civilian hierarchy. In the context of his strategy to nullify the PAIGC's action, Spínola specifically allocated resources to the district of Cacheu, hoping to prevent the spread of the movement's influence to the island of Bissau (Amado 2011). Therefore, he established the colony's first Operational Coordination Command (*Comando de Agrupamento Operacional*) in the district in January 1969, for better control of the Portuguese military forces in the area (Afonso & Gomes 2020). Consequently, all forces in the district were

put under its control. At the same time, Spínola's government promoted different initiatives in pursuing its policy of catering to the population's needs to undermine PAIGC's effectiveness, notably through an unprecedented investment in welfare projects. At the local level, the military took part in the government's efforts, collaborating in endeavours such as the construction of schools.[24]

This phenomenon represented a significant acceleration of post-war concerns with colonial development, which followed contemporary international trends, with the British and French governments investing unprecedented sums in their colonial territories from the end of the Second World War. Portugal launched its overseas development programs in the 1950s. However, it would be the colonial wars in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau that eventually led to a definite expansion in such investments from the mid-1960s, both in funds and scope, to include the development of social infrastructure and the welfare of African populations (Castelo 2014). Furthermore, the Portuguese war strategy included an intense 'psychosocial action', meaning the military forces were to invest and participate in those programmes themselves to win over the African populations, and that in all three war theatres (Afonso & Gomes 2020).

Indeed, towards the end of Spínola's tenure in 1973, inspector Simões Pinto made a positive assessment of the military's participation in the 'socio-economic progress of the rural populations' in cooperation with the administration, which had allowed for the expansion of the road network and of the education and healthcare outposts, despite the PAIGC's attacks and ambushes.[25] In fact, under Spínola, commissioners in the district noted how the military provided money and materials for the construction and maintenance of infrastructures such as water collection systems, airfields and roads.[26] However, the sense of the power they actually retained was a fundamental notion to civilian officials when assessing the situation. In fact, the military psychosocial action brought about a competitor into a domain until then exclusively under civilian responsibility.

Moreover, Spínola's strategy included the creation of a new hierarchical position in the district of Cacheu – that of government delegate. The government delegates were military officers directly appointed by the governor to oversee the ensemble of political and military activities in a given administrative division, especially those concerning socio-economic development and psychological action over the populations, which meant the subordination of local civilian authorities to them.[27] If inspector Simões Pinto made a good assessment of military and civilian collaboration, he expressed frustration regarding the existence of government delegates, which he found to create confusion and undermine the power of the civilian officials.[28] Out of concern for the officials' position and prestige, he suggested to abolish the position altogether, in favour of the colonial officialdom he saw as sidelined. As this never came to be, the overlapping and friction continued.

Conversely, there were also complaints from the military regarding civilian authorities in the context of Spínola's policy. In June 1969, a report by the

Command-in-Chief of Guinea's Armed Forces accused the civilian administration of not having worked to promote Bula's growth, the local population having received barely any benefits compared to the taxes the district collected. According to the report,

> [i]t seems there is a serious failure of the Administration, which is urgent to correct, for the whole psychosocial action thins out if it is not supported by actual facts, [by] public achievements which promote the taxpayer's social welfare.[29]

These were severe accusations made by the military hierarchy. In response, Francisco António Fialho Salgueiro, the district administrator (1969-72), countered the accusations, by declaring that a mere month and a half had passed since he had taken up his position. Furthermore, he stated he had already surveyed Bula's needs and allocated a budget for the town's development.[30] Interestingly enough, such overt criticism fully reflects how the Portuguese armed forces had taken up a sense of responsibility over the African populations' welfare. Literature has indicated how they embraced it to give a wider sense of purpose to their presence on the field (Afonso & Gomes 2020), an aspect accounts by former or then-soldiers have also pointed out, be it in Guinea (Matos 2009; Riquito 2018) or elsewhere, as in Angola (Antunes 2005; Antunes 2022). Spínola's development policy became a disputed space between the two entities tasked with enforcing it. While strengthening its control mechanisms across the empire in order to counter the liberation movements' action, the colonial state itself created spaces of tension and conflict.

That much is visible regarding the brokerage of African expectations and colonial projects, where the government delegate became a new actor. On 13 November 1973, João Manuel de Sousa Teles, the government delegate to the district, wrote to the head of the colony's Education Services, asking for the opening of a school post in Nangã (post of Pecixe). According to the delegate, the populations of five villages in the area had been 'insistently asking' for such improvement. There were forty-five local children of schooling age, and the closest school post was too distant from their villages, which meant they never attended school.[31] The presence of different actors rendered colonial encounters disputed ones and that at different levels. For one, this situation constitutes an example of colonial populations using the colonial institutions in their favour. The military, while becoming agents for the co-optation of the population (notably via the government delegate), became a new actor in the bargaining of colonial rule. Moreover, it also confirms the situation inspector Simões Pinto denounced that same year, as the government delegate bypassed the district's administrative hierarchy and directly transmitted a request by the population to the government in Bissau. Through the acceleration of development programmes and the implication of the military in daily administration, Spínola's governorship represented a disruption to the usual rhythms and forms of local administration in Guinea. The military presence

reinforced the colonial control mechanisms, helping the administration enforce the colonial project. Cooperation between the two forces allowed for a more efficient war effort and the achievement of welfare policies. Notwithstanding, those policies meant a greater military involvement in local affairs, making them a true actor in local politics, sometimes putting civilian officials in an uncomfortable position, as they felt diminished and unjustly scrutinized.

'Such Effrontery and Indiscipline': The Military and a Colonial Project at Risk

Military presence and colonial prestige

Indeed, the military presence in Guinea-Bissau sometimes put local officials in an awkward position vis-à-vis their notions of respect and prestige, which took another dimension regarding their relations with colonial populations. Colonial hierarchies saw a dignified apparatus as a way to impose itself on the colonized (Saada 2003). As agents of the colonial state, the troops played into such concerns when their behaviour was perceived as contrary to the colonial state's interests. That was the case, for instance, regarding something as apparently trivial as speed limits. In September 1964, Teixeira Pinto's municipal commission asked the Company of Artillery no. 527 to have military vehicles transit around town within the speed limits imposed by the Highway Code and municipal rules on civilian vehicles. Other than preventing road accidents, that measure would allow the commission to enforce regulatory speed on civilian drivers, which it was 'currently inhibited of doing'.[32] Civilian officials thus saw military behaviour as preventing them from duly fulfilling their regulatory projects.

A delicate incident occurred in February 1965 when a soldier fired his weapon in a village in Calequisse 'with no plausible justification' (he was apparently hunting for pelicans), inducing panic in the population. The shooter was summoned to the commissioner's presence, to whom he said he had the 'permission to shoot whenever and wherever he wanted'. As he left the post, he threatened the commissioner saying '[w]hoever messes with the troops is fucked (sic)'. When reporting the situation to the commander of Company of Artillery no. 527, administrator Campos Gramaxo's comment on the situation is clear:

> Such effrontery and indiscipline before the administrative authority do not go with military correctness, pride and duty; [and] besides the military and the administrative authority hold hands defending a common cause, within a spirit of loyal comradery and frank cooperation.[33]

How the military acted – the same as with public officials – was perceived as impacting the prestige of colonial authority and thus fragilizing the colonial state.

This incident was particularly delicate as the firing soldier not only alarmed the population in an already tense context, but also disrespected the 'loyal comradery and frank cooperation' between the troops and civilian officials. Vague notions of dignity and prestige were powerful and consequently disputed devices among colonial agents. The sense of superiority and entitlement the soldier expressed outraged the administrator's own sense of power over the local context.

Feeding the military

A particularly crucial space of friction and power disputes was to be found in the obligation of colonial populations to provide foodstuffs for the military across the district, as it implicated different actors with conflicting interests. Commissioners of post were responsible for arranging food supplies for the military, for which they called on the African authorities, the usual intermediaries to accomplish tasks requiring the population's participation. Ultimately, providing food supplies for the troops represented yet another form of violence on colonial populations, and the administration found itself mediating conflicting interests. This shows those authorities' lasting importance in the daily rule of empire and how the power balance of their relations with the administration could be put at risk due to the tension the military requests brought upon them, confirming colonialism to be a complex and negotiated phenomenon also during wartime. As early as 16 August 1961, the commissioner of post of Bula, Mário Lopes Pereira, instructed the acting chief of Có to organize a gathering of bovine livestock 'with the biggest amount of cattle as possible' for the Military Services to buy.[34] However, the commissioner found that officers wanted to buy livestock for a meagre price.[35] Eventually, another livestock gathering was put up a few days later with the help of the African authorities of Có, with a more successful outcome.[36] The administration acted as a broker for food supplies for the military, resorting to its network of allegiances (and repressive mechanisms) to achieve what was demanded. However, commissioners of post felt they needed to intervene in favour of the African populations, whose interests they had to conciliate with the hierarchical expectations of them complying with the military's demands; these moments became a source of conflict between different colonial actors. Indeed, buying livestock could be a source of tension, and commissioners expressed their supposed duty to act on behalf of the African populations' interest in order to avoid alienating the latter in a time of war. For instance, in September 1964, the commissioner of post of Cacheu Alves Ferreira wrote that 'I flatly prohibited the troops from going to native villages to directly acquire foodstuffs, in order to avoid certain irregularities that occurred; it was settled that should they need anything, they must ask for an administrative guard to accompany them'.[37] This demonstrates the administration's will to keep some degree of power over the entire process. In December 1964, as the chief of Costa de Baixo, Joaquim Baticã Ferreira, complained about the 'abusive way' the military

were 'acquiring' goat kids and chickens at the villages, the district administrator asked a local commander to put a stop to such 'practice, as it goes against the very insistent and superiorly determined psycho-social action'.[38]Administrative officials found themselves mediating the military and the populations' interests.

Eventually, in 1969, the abuses that the military units committed in the purchase of animals from Africans led the government in Bissau to impose that each administration established a minimal price – a 'fair price' – for the sale of a domestic animal. Acting otherwise was 'prejudicial to the native's economy and sparks a disinterest regarding an increase of productivity, so that one can say it is also damaging to the Province's economy'. The government was aware that sometimes the sale itself was not the result of an actual offer, 'especially if persons in a position of authority are interested in any purchase' and decided the price themselves. The government found the practice to dishonour those who acted in such a way, besides its damage to the population's economy and their social development'.[39] Indeed, the violence of providing the military with food opened multiple instances of conflict. Populations themselves sometimes protested the obligation, such as the Pecixe islanders, who petitioned the administration to relieve them of such duties in 1973. The request was denied.[40] Despite its mediation efforts, the local administration was bound to comply with the obligation of providing foodstuffs to the military and, in an 'uneven power relation' (Osborn 2006: 57), imposed its will.

African complaints, military offenders: the administration as a mediator

Military violence against colonial populations took a more direct and overt expression in the form of theft, harassment, and sexual assault, as stated by state officials themselves, yet again putting the colonial project at risk. On 21 April 1967, district administrator Júlio Pereira Pinto da Silva (1967-1969) issued a transit permit to village head Jau Injai, so that he could see the commander of Battalion of Cavalry no. 1905 in Teixeira Pinto and file a complaint regarding elements of a garrison that had shot one of his animals and taken it to their quarters.[41] The administration acted as the guarantor of the African authorities' position, as African authorities were key elements in enforcing daily colonial rule. On 30 December 1968, Pinto da Silva wrote to the Civil Administration Services, reporting that marines had stolen animals from two men. The administrator asked his superior, the head of the Civil Administration Services, to have the aggrieved parties compensated and for measures to be taken to prevent situations like that from happening again 'for the serious repercussion they have and, all the more, for the exploitation the enemy will make among the populations by using them'.[42]

In November 1969, a female African patient at the Teixeira Pinto maternity named Umo complained that a military man had 'abusively entered' the building at night and gotten into her bed. As Umo resisted, the soldier left before being identified.[43] An unfruitful inquiry led to the case being closed.[44] By abusing African

populations, the military hence appeared as a potential danger to colonial order. They could compromise the colonial project of securing compliance from the colonized population. The military could not only undermine the state's efforts, but according to state officials, they also could, through their actions, motivate the population to join the enemy. Indeed, these actions very much resemble those of theft and rape French soldiers committed in wartime Algeria (1954-1962).[45] It went against the French authorities' alleged purpose of psychological action and winning over the populations, and ultimately putting colonial authorities in a difficult position (Branche 2001). Dissimilarly, these situations show how Africans were able to resort to the colonial administration to protect their interests. They appropriated different colonial institutions in their favour, as they pursued their own interests – that also was the case when the villagers in Nangã had asked the government delegate for a school to be set up – subjecting the exercise of power to dispute and fragmentation.

Conclusion

In the early 1960s, the entire district of Cacheu was gradually covered by military presence, be it by permanent settlement (Teixeira Pinto, Bula, Cacheu, Caió), or by increasingly regular visits and patrolling (Calequisse, Pecixe), following decades of a scarce military presence. The overall tone was one of cooperation and goodwill, with officials welcoming and helping the troops in any way they could. Their presence benefitted the local administration as state apparatus and surveillance mechanisms were reinforced. Nonetheless, their arrival still had a logistical impact and, more importantly, brought about tensions regarding protocol and jurisdictions. The military presence created inconveniences from the get-go, with troops occupying administrative facilities and incidents occurring. Both agents of the same colonial state, military and civilian officials collided, the friction causing 'everyday malfunctions' (Tsing 2005: 6). Dignity, prestige, and honour were synonyms for an efficient and legitimate colonial rule and officials often perceived military action as contrary to them.

The two entities collaborated throughout the conflict. Indeed, the military proved to be useful as they reinforced the administration's surveillance capacity. They established a relationship of cooperation: the administration helped the military, and in return, the latter helped the former. The deployment of troops across the territory, a means to counter the liberation movement and thus keep the colonial state in place, constituted a means of reinforcing the usual colonial power mechanisms. In 1973, inspector Simões Pinto wrote in his report on Cacheu's administration that the district's 'situation has been improving, thanks to a thorough and well guided military structure put into effect. Currently, thanks to such occupation, one lives with a certain safety, especially in the western part of the District'.[46] Regardless, their presence accentuated the power fragmentation the local colonial state was subject to

during peacetime. The fact that the administration came to depend on the military's help partially made their relationship all the more complicated. As the war went on, their cooperation became even closer, especially under the tenure of Spínola as governor and commander-in-chief, in the context of which the military helped with infrastructure construction and maintenance under the supervision of an overarching military officer. Portuguese war strategy made both corpses see the populations' welfare as their responsibility which led to conflict and mutual frustration.

Finally, the presence of the military proved to be a source of tensions and conflict regarding African populations. Officials felt the military undermined their efforts through their behaviour, particularly when they abused Africans. Consequently, the administration found itself in the delicate position of mediating between the military fighting the war, the population they were supposed to protect and control, and the African intermediaries that were structural elements of colonial power. In trying to protect colonial rule, the colonial state and its many functions, the two entities clashed. They feared the other would undermine their authority. In reality, they were competing and conflicting forces within the colonial state itself, which the African population took advantage of to protect themselves and pursue their own interests, proving to be active and relevant actors in the process.

Notions of tension, friction and frustration appear as useful tools which allow for a more complex approach to power experiences under colonial war. They help to decode the daily interactions between colonial agents on the ground. The local experiences of power show how grandiose and seemingly straightforward colonial projects such as development programmes and warfare strategy were subject to friction, tensions and overt conflict while being carried out. A certain colonial common sense made of prestige and dutifulness found itself at odds with everyday realities, not only those of negotiation, violence and accommodation between state agents and Africans, but also those of dispute between colonial agents themselves. During the war against the PAIGC, the local Portuguese colonial state's power became even more fragmented, its very agents being overcome by feelings of anxiety and frustration as they struggled to maintain both symbolic and actual forms of control over territories and populations.

Notes

[1] Angola, by far a much more important territory in Portuguese imperial politics, found itself in a similar situation at the time (*Resenha Histórico-Militar* 1988). In 1961, the Portuguese African colonies were very much unprepared for military conflict due to structural disinvestment in that domain.

[2] Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas – Arquivos Históricos Nacionais (INEP-AHN), B1/A29.312, Posto Administrativo de Bula. Diário de Serviço, June 9, 1961.

[3] INEP-AHN, B1/A29.312, Posto Administrativo de Bula. Diário de Serviço, August 28, 1961.

[4] INEP-AHN, B1/A29.312, Posto Administrativo de Cacheu. Diário de Serviço, March 15, 1961, March 20, 1961, April 3, 1961, April 4, 1961.

[5] INEP-AHN, B1/A29.313, Posto Administrativo de Caió. Diário de Serviço, August 20, 1962, August 23, 1962.

[6] Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Ministério do Ultramar, Inspeção Superior da Administração Ultramarina (AHU, MU, ISAU), A2.01.001/03.00013, Província da Guiné. Inspecção Administrativa Ordinária. Apontamento respeitante à inspecção realizada ao Concelho de Cacheu e postos de Bula, Cacheu, Calequisse, Caió e Pecixe. 1963: pp. 3, 4.

[7] AHU, MU, ISAU, A2.01.001/03.00013, Inspecção Superior de Administração Ultramarina. Inspecção Ordinária à Província da Guiné, 1963: pp. 8-9.

[8] INEP-AHN, B1/A29.312, Posto Administrativo de Cacheu. Diário de Serviço, April 26, 1961.

[9] INEP-AHN, B1/A29.311, Posto Administrativo de Cacheu. Diário de Serviço, May 13, 1964.

[10] INEP-AHN, B1/A41.465, Nota n.º 53 do Administrador do Posto de Cacheu, J. Miranda Lima, ao Administrador do Concelho de Cacheu (June 4,1965).

[11] INEP-AHN, B1/A29.312, Posto Administrativo de Cacheu. Diário de Serviço, April 15, 1961, April 24, 1961; INEP-AHN, B1/A29.313, Posto Administrativo de Pecixe. Diário de Serviço, November 7, 1962; INEP-AHN, B1/A29.311, Posto Administrativo de Pecixe. Diário de Serviço, January 15, 1964, March 11, 1964, October 3, 1964, October 21, 1964, November 12, 1964, November 16, 1964, November 18, 1964, November 26, 1964, December 21, 1964, December 29, 1964. INEP-AHN, B1/A29.313, Posto Administrativo de Cacheu. Diário de Serviço, June 23, 1962; INEP-AHN, B1/A29.313, Posto Administrativo de Calequisse. Diário de Serviço, July 27, 1962. INEP-AHN, B1/A29.311, Posto Administrativo de Bula. Diário de Serviço, February 12, 1964, February 27, 1964, November 13, 1964. INEP-AHN, B1/A29.311, Posto Administrativo de Cacheu. Diário de Serviço, August 24, 1964, August 28, 1964; INEP-AHN, B1.2/2, Posto Administrativo de Bula. Diário de Serviço, December 20, 1969, January 14, 1970; INEP-AHN, B1.2/2, Posto Administrativo de Caió. Diário de Serviço, July 8, 1970, July 22, 1970, August 7, 1970, October 26, 1970.

[12] INEP-AHN, B1/A29.312, Posto Administrativo de Calequisse. Diário de Serviço, August 6, 1961, August 24, 1961, Deember 6, 1961; INEP-AHN, B1/A29.313, Posto Administrativo de Calequisse. Diário de Serviço, January 9, 1962, August 13, 1962, February 20, 1962, May 3, 1962, May 21, 1962.

[13] INEP-AHN, B1/A29.313, Posto Administrativo de Cacheu. Diário de Serviço, September 11, 1962, September 13, 1962.

[14] Ibid., May 6, 1962.

[15] INEP-AHN, B1/A41.465, Cópia da nota n.º 36 do Administrador António Isidro de Campos Gramaxo ao Comandante da Companhia de Artilharia n.º 527 (Teixeira Pinto) (January 9, 1964); INEP-AHN, B1/A41.465, Cópia de nota n.º 404 do Administrador António Isidro de Campos Gramaxo ao Comandante da Companhia de Artilharia nº 527 (Teixeira Pinto) (May 1, 1964). INEP-AHN, B1/A41.465, Cópia da nota n.º 69 do Administrador António Isidro de Campos Gramaxo ao Comandante da Companhia de Artilharia nº 527 (Teixeira Pinto) (January 18, 1965). INEP-AHN, B1/A41.465, Cópia da nota n.º 18 do Administrador António Isidro de Campos Gramaxo ao Comandante da Companhia de Cavalaria 789 (Teixeira Pinto) (January 8, 1966).

[16] INEP-AHN, B1/A41.465, Cópia de nota n.º 1035 do Administrador António Isidro de Campos Gramaxo ao Comandante da Companhia de Artilharia n.º 527 (Teixeira Pinto) (November 14, 1964).

[17] INEP-AHN, B1/A41.465, Cópia de nota n.º 1921 do Administrador, António Isidro de Campos Gramaxo, ao Comandante da Companhia de Artilharia n.º 527 (Teixeira Pinto) (December 8, 1964).

[18] INEP-AHN, B1/A41.465, Cópia do ofício n.º 952 do Substituto legal do Administrador do Concelho de Cacheu, Caetano P. Pereira de Borja, ao Comando de Batalhão de Caçadores n.º 1911 (December 14, 1967); INEP-AHN, B1/A41.465, Nota n.º 97 do Administrador de Posto interino de Cacheu, J. Miranda Lima, à Administração do Concelho de Cacheu (November 27, 1967); INEP-AHN, B1/A41.467, Nota n.º 8 do Administrador do Posto interino de Cacheu, J. Miranda Lima, à Administração do Concelho de Cacheu, (January 22, 1968); INEP-AHN, B1/A41.467, Nota n.º 14/68 do Administrador de Posto interino de Cacheu, J. Miranda Lima, à Administração do Concelho de Cacheu, (January 22, 1968); INEP-AHN, B1/A41.467, Relação dos indivíduos raptados na noite de 21 do corrente (January 22, 1968).

[19] INEP-AHN/B1/A29.311, Posto Administrativo de Calequisse. Diário de Serviço, October 15, 1964. INEP-AHN, B1/A29.311, Posto Administrativo de Caió. Diário de Serviço, April 1, 1964.

[20] INEP-AHN, B1/A41.465, Cópia de nota n.º 98 do Administrador do Concelho de Cacheu, António Isidro de Campos Gramaxo, ao Comandante do Batalhão de Cavalaria nº 790 (Bula) (February 4, 1966).

[21] INEP-AHN/B1/A29.311, Posto Administrativo de Calequisse. Diário de Serviço, December 10, 1964.

[22] Ibid., December 14, 1964, December 18, 1964.

[23] INEP-AHN, B5/2.31, Nota n.º 514 do Administrador interino do Concelho de Cacheu, Alexandre José de Pezerat Correia, ao Posto Administrativo de Pecixe (July 21, 1973).

[24] INEP-AHN, B1.2/2, Administração do Concelho de Cacheu. Diário de Serviço, March 9, 1970, November 16, 1970, December 3, 1971. INEP-AHN, B1.2/2, Posto Administrativo de Bula. Diário de Serviço, October 15, 1970.

[25] AHU, MU, ISAU, A2.49.001/36.00219, Inspecção Administrativa à Província da Guiné em 1973 pelo inspector administrativo Dr. J. Simões Pinto: p. 17.

[26] INEP-AHN, B1.2/2, Posto Administrativo de Bula. Diário de Serviço, December 1, 1969, October 16, 1970, November 9, 1970.

[27] AHU, MU, ISAU, A2.49.001/36.00219, Inspecção Administrativa à Província da Guiné em 1973 pelo inspector administrativo Dr. J. Simões Pinto: p. 22.

[28] Ibid.: pp. 22-24.

[29] INEP-AHN, B1/A41.467, Nota n.º 1532 urgente do Chefe dos Serviços da Repartição Provincial dos Serviços de Administração Civil, António Raimundo da Cunha, à Administração do Concelho de Cacheu (June 19, 1969).

[30] INEP-AHN, B1/A41.467, Cópia da nota n.º 492 do servindo de Administrador do Concelho de Cacheu, Francisco António Fialho Salgueiro, à Repartição Provincial dos Serviços de Administração Civil (June 27, 1969).

[31] INEP-AHN, B5/2.31, Nota n.º 413 do Delegado do Governo no 'Chão Manjaco', João Manuel de Sousa Teles, ao Chefe da Repartição Provincial dos Serviços de Educação (November 13, 1973).

[32] INEP-AHN, B3/1.4, Cópia da nota n.º 47 do Presidente António Isidro de Campos Gramaxo ao Comandante da Companhia de Artilharia nº. 527 (September 22, 1964).

[33] INEP-AHN, B1/A41.465, Cópia da nota n.º 151 ao Comandante da Companhia de Artilharia nº 527 (Teixeira Pinto) (February 8, 1965).

[34] INEP-AHN, B1/A29.312, Posto Administrativo de Bula. Diário de Serviço, August 16, 1961.

[35] Ibid., August 17, 1961.

[36] Ibid., August 20, 1961, August 22, 1961.

[37] INEP-AHN, B1/A29.311, Posto Administrativo de Cacheu. Diário de Serviço, September 19, 1964.

[38] INEP-AHN, B1/A41.465, Cópia de nota n.º 1948 do Administrador António Isidro de Campos Gramaxo ao Comandante da Companhia de Artilharia 527 (Teixeira Pinto) (December 15, 1964).

[39] INEP-AHN, B1/A41.467, Repartição Provincial dos Serviços de Administração Civil. Informação n.º 33/969 (October 24, 1969).

[40] INEP-AHN, B5/2.31, Nota n.º 654/973 do Administrador interino do Concelho de Cacheu, Alexandre José de Pezerat Correia, ao Posto Administrativo de Pecixe (September 6, 1973).

[41] INEP-AHN, B1/B44.516, Administração do Concelho de Cacheu. Guia nº. 1197 (April 21, 1967).

[42] INEP-AHN, B1/A41.467, Nota n.º extra do Administrador do Concelho de Cacheu, Júlio Pereira Pinto da Silva, à RPSAC (December 30, 1968).

[43] INEP-AHN, B1/A41.467, Nota n.º 256/969 do Delegado de Saúde de Teixeira Pinto, Fernando António Maymone Martins, à Administração do Concelho de Cacheu (November 14, 1969).

[44] INEP-AHN, B1/A41.467, Cópia da nota n.º 1140 (pel') servindo de administrador, Francisco António Fialho Salgueiro, ao Comando do Batalhão de Caçadores n.º 2845 (Teixeira Pinto) (November 20, 1969); INEP-AHN, B1/A41.467, Ofício n.º 2688/SG do Comandante de Batalhão de Caçadores n.º 2845 (Teixeira Pinto), Armando Duarte de Azevedo, ao Administrador do Concelho de Cacheu (November 26, 1969).

[45] Regarding Angola, Maria José Lobo Antunes argues that former Portuguese soldiers remain to this day dismissive of sexual violence against African women during their missions (Antunes 2022).

[46] AHU, MU, ISAU, A2.49.002/43.00291, Província da Guiné. Inspecção Administrativa Ordinária. Informação da inspecção à Administração do Concelho de Cacheu, Comissão Municipal de Teixeira Pinto e Junta Local de Cacheu, 1973: p. 26.

CHAPTER 2.4

Governing the Living Through the Dead: Necropower in a Post-Disaster Context in Cameroon

Brice Molo

Introduction

On 21 October 2016, there was a train accident in the small town of Eséka, about two hours from the capital Yaoundé. According to official sources, there were 78 deaths. Before the derailment, the Intercity train, which left Yaoundé for Douala at around 11:15am, had become a living train on social networks, which were buzzing with rumours and images of its derailment. The train passengers themselves took note of this information. The specific nature of the event lies in the overlapping spheres of power at work in its creation, in the various times articulated in the process of producing the disaster, and in the interweaving of memories mobilized later in the construction of its commemorative stele.

The Eséka disaster is first and foremost the result of the intertwining of the early colonial period of forced labour to build the railway and the town of Eséka, and the late colonial period of Cameroon's decolonization, centred around the emblematic figure of Ruben Um Nyobe, the independence martyr who died in the *maquis* on 13 September 1958. The accident then reawakened memories of a past that had not been repaired, and the memory of the decolonial struggle led local activists to say that Eséka was the 'city of Cameroon's conscience' (interviews 2023). For these reasons, which clearly establish a link between the city, the memories of the disaster, and the struggle for independence, the Eséka derailment goes beyond the simple counting of victims to become a site of necropolitical experimentation. In other words, a place where power is exercised through its anchoring in death which serves to prioritize lives; in short, death as an attribute of sovereignty (Mbembe 2019).

In the wake of Achille Mbembe's reflexions (1986: 62) on the way in which the memory of nationalism continues to shape the present as a 'category of judgement and interpretation', the purpose of this chapter is to propose analyzing in a new light the relationship between the living and the dead in a stricken town that has been doubly traumatised: the trauma of the colonial past and that of a disaster whose consequences for the territory have led to a reconfiguration of space through the controversial construction of a monument to the dead. The latter resurrects the memory of another dead person who must be killed again because he continues to disrupt public order and constituting a spectral figure of dissidence.

Ruben Um Nyobe was born in 1913 in the Bassa terroir in Cameroon. He very quickly became involved in the demand for independence and reunification of the

two Cameroons, which had been separated after the First World War. He became spokesperson (*Mpodol*) for the Union of the Peoples of Cameroon (UPC) where he was secretary general, and was forced to fight the colonial authorities, who assassinated him on 13 September 1958 in the maquis of Central Cameroon. His memory, unacknowledged and unrestored, has been censored, the mere mention of him has been considered provocative by successive post-colonial regimes (see Mbembe 1986). The conflict over the memory of Ruben Um Nyobe is superimposed on another that is more closely connected to public action in the department.

In Eséka, the disaster sheds light on how public action lacked popularity and the legitimization schemes that ensue. Since in the region, the progressive abandonment of the transport infrastructures by the authorities was the object of complaints by the residents. When the demands were not satisfied, the train derailment appeared to be the result of a collective act of witchcraft performed by some of the residents of Eséka as part of a demand for the redignification of the town and the construction of buildings dedicated to the disappeared Bassa department (Molo 2023). For the local population, death had travelled by train. For the authorities, the derailment was a major disaster, justifying the construction of an imposing stele to pay homage to the victims. However, this attempt by the State to make death part of its heritage was opposed by the residents who voiced their disapproval of the necropolization of their town. The notion of necropolization, inspired by the above-mentioned concept of necropolitics, here refers to the way in which death transforms the urban landscape both [directly] through the architecture and the dead and symbolically through its inclusion in the collective memory to the point of becoming an identity marker,

In the context of the necropolization of Eséka in the wake of the October 2016 disaster, it is useful to emphasize that necropower, as will be demonstrated below, is not exercised here as a sovereignty that governs by producing death, as described by Mbembe. On the contrary, it functions as a system in which the dead are brought back to life to govern the living (and/or kill other dead), whether it is by their simple evocation thereby influencing public action or by their patrimonialization in the territory. In Eséka, this geographical anchoring means that we can observe a declension of necropower in a kind of 'rébellion des milieux' (Chateauraynaud 2013), culminating in the launch of work on the commemorative stele in 2018 and its inauguration in December 2022.

Necropolizing a Martyred Town: The Status and Power of the Dead

The official narratives considered the Eséka disaster to be the most significant accident ever to have occurred on Cameroon's railway network. The narrative of the authorities celebrated the deaths of the seventy-eight victims, as well as the hundreds of injured and the dozens reported missing at the scene. For several days, the

public press focused intensely on Black Friday, which had plunged the entire nation into mourning, and on the process of nationalizing mourning and uniting hearts to pay tribute to all the victims of this disaster. Paul Biya, President of the Republic, decreed national mourning on Monday 24 October 2016 to, as he said in Yaoundé, 'unite the nation with the families in their grief'. These speeches were broadcast throughout Cameroon's diplomatic missions abroad, in regional capitals and in the country's other major cities. The step to create a National Day of Mourning was followed by an attempt by the state to turn the memory of the disaster into a heritage site by building a commemorative stele dedicated to the victims at the site where the train derailed. Thus, Éseka has become a special town, steeped in the colonial past and the path of decolonization. It is the only town where the memory of Cameroon's UPC nationalist movement has an architectural presence, symbolized by the statue of Ruben Um Nyobe that stands at the entrance to the town.

In November 2016, an international commission found CAMRAIL (Cameroon Railways) liable for the disaster, which later led to it being ordered to pay reparations. This judicial decision satisfied the official rhetoric by giving society a scapegoat, in the shape of a company owned by a French industrialist. The figure of Vincent Bolloré, CAMRAIL's majority shareholder at the time, reminded locals of the colonial period and its share of injustice linked to the construction of the railway: forced labour, murders, humiliation, and so forth. The company's conviction thus served multiple purposes. First, it gave authorities the opportunity to be ostentatious in their attempts to give heritage status to a disaster whose perpetrator was a foreigner. This removal of responsibility used the monument as a symbol of the innocence of the authorities, as a time when an ever-increasing number of voices were calling for the arrest of certain ministers whom public broadcasters claimed were the real culprits. In addition, CAMRAIL's conviction resonated with the many recriminations levelled by locals against the company that ran the train, particularly as regards the removal of the planned stops in the department of Bassa. The residents had asked the State to intervene and restore these stops, but to no avail (see Molo 2024).

Confronted with the many grievances against CAMRAIL, perceived locally as provocative, anger turned the company into a symbol of neo-colonialism. For politically committed residents, it was unthinkable to think that the department should relive the humiliation suffered during the war of independence, marked by the assassination of one of its most eminent sons, Ruben Um Nyobe. For these players, the construction of a stele as a tribute to the victims of the disaster honoured and officially recognized these victims as children of the nation, in the very town of Ruben Um Nyobe, deprived of such national recognition. The stele was therefore seen as reinforcing the invisibility of the martyr. The rivalry between the two memories was thus established and presented as problematic.

This question of Ruben's place in the management of urban space was superimposed on another connected to the identity of the dead and therefore their

Figure 1: The monument to Um Nyobe at the entrance to the city of Eséka (Photo by the author).

legitimacy to be assigned to residence in someone else's city. The identity of the victims of the derailment referred to a death that had 'come from elsewhere' (interviews 2022). As the victims of the train were not residents known locally, memorializing their memory presented a problem for the locals: 'they did their things in Yaoundé, people came to die here in Eséka' explained a bookseller from the town centre, who had been established at the sight for around ten years and witnessed the disaster (interviews 2023). The origins of the disaster were invoked at this level to justify the refusal to see dead foreigners leave a permanent mark on the city's landscape by attaching a mortifying image to it. It was Pastor David who first drew my attention to this question: 'And what's become of Um? You came through Butrans, didn't you? Have you seen the state of the statue of Ruben Um Nyobe? You have to start there, this is his home.' (Interview 2021) (Fig. 1). Another local resident insisted that 'if I want to build a house in your village, I'll first find out where you sleep. Can I come to your village, and start carrying out work without asking you if it's in line with what you want for your village? Who can agree to this?' (Interviews 2021) Obviously, while the residents of Eséka were the main witnesses to the disaster and their territory was directly affected, their interpretation of the event made them less inclined to consecrate the memory of the accident through building public structures.

In Eséka, the statue of Ruben Um Nyobe is the main symbol of Cameroonian nationalism and patriotism. Although the monument was built in June 2007 by former minister Augustin Frédérick Kodock, it was not the result of an official government initiative, but rather the commitment of members of the UPC, the political party formerly led by Um Nyobe. In 2017, despite local reluctance, the State started working on the stele that commemorates the train. This decision seemed to offer the authorities an opportunity to relegate the memory of radical nationalism, symbolized by the statue of Um Nyobe, to a secondary position in terms of size. The stele dedicated to the disaster thus became a 'monument to the

dead', making the history and influence of the nationalist martyr invisible in the only town where he was commemorated.

For the local actors, the battle that resurfaced around the memory of Ruben Um Nyobe was intended not only to oppose the consolidation of their city as a city of death, but also to demand 'a minimal "redignification" of the status' of the nationalist in the city first and foremost, but also, and above all, in the narrative and hierarchy of national values, in a country in the throes of a profound identity crisis (for redignification, see Landivar 2021; Allard 2022).

Eseka Train Accident or Eseka Rail Disaster? Two Conflicting Narratives

Despite local opposition, the stele was inaugurated in December 2022 after a long process marked by several interruptions and closures of the construction site. The 18-metre-high monument occupies an imposing place in the urban landscape, extending over an enclosed area of more than 3,000 m². It represents a train entering the station, the rails of which have broken. The engine rises towards the sky, causing the death of Cameroonians from the four cardinal corners, hence the presence of four concrete columns framing the work.

At the inauguration ceremony for the stele, a carefully crafted banner made of white fabric could be seen on the pediment at the entrance and was still visible on the site in March 2023. It read: '*the population of Nyong and Kelle division, together with the entire nation, pray the almighty God for the eternal rest of the souls of those who died in train accident of October 21st at Eséka*'. The State coat of arms on the left indicated that the banner was the work of administrative authorities, while the national flag at the far right underlined the national dimension of the event. These two dimensions were also reflected in the architecture of the monument, with four pillars representing the four points of the compass, symbolizing the fact that the victims came from all regions of the country, and underlining the importance of not ethnicizing this memory. However, there was a discrepancy between the message on the banner and that engraved on the tombstone. The banner had been commissioned by the local Prefecture of Nyong-et-Kelle, the department for which Eséka is the capital. The message was in English on the outside and French on the inside. More importantly, the host Prefecture used the dative form '*train accident* at *Eséka*', while the official narrative from Yaoundé emphasized the genitive form 'Eséka disaster'. (Fig. 2-3) At departmental level, people were more aware of the disputes over the name of the event. The social designation is more than revealing of this logic insofar as the locally made sign evokes not a disaster, but rather an 'accident at Eséka'.

Inside, signs in French were placed on the stele itself. In French, it reads 'En mémoire des victimes de la catastrophe ferroviaire d'Eséka le 21 octobre 2016', and in English *'In memory of the victims of the Eseka railway disaster – October 21st*

Figure 2: Banner of the '*train accident at Eséka*' at the entrance to the monument (Photo by the author).

Figure 3: Epitaph on the tombstone of the 'Eséka disaster' (Photo by the author).

2016'. Beyond the platitude of the epitaph, the government settled the dispute over the name of the event without allowing itself to be influenced by the local criticism. The official name of the event was adopted as the 'Eséka disaster' the State's 'of' taking precedence over the local prefectural authority's 'a', the latter being more in line with the aspirations of the residents of Eséka regarding the death of others in their own area. In addition, however, where the government authorities saw a 'disaster', the local community could see nothing more than an 'accident', a term that clashed with the others because it downplayed the seriousness of the event, contrary to the logic of the State actors who wanted to give it greater importance when responsibility lay with a foreign company.

These two categories reflected a relationship with space between a statutory policy of remembrance and a local representation of the event that guided the actions of local government officials, in this case the prefecture, without being able to change the logic of the central State. In short, since the prefect was the local figure of State authority and power, two official narratives clashed, reflecting two different perspectives, that of the residents contrasted with that imposed by the central government. It is also a question of two distinct relationships to the site of

the disaster: one sees the site as a heritage site, the other as a place to legitimize power, the authority of the State and, once again, the death of Ruben Um Nyobe, the disturbing dead man.

When I interviewed the officials at the prefect's office in 2023, they said they had not noticed the difference, blaming the prefect. He refused to see me. However, local council officials, including the town mayor, told me that the town council had not been involved in making the sign, leaving the prefect with sole responsibility for it. The narratives reflected a refusal to see the city forever bear the marks of the death of others, and to accept the mortifying image of the city thus created. The question of the stele's legitimacy then followed the paths of the quest for existence, the conquest of recognition and the test of justification to which the authorities were subjected.

Building Social Acceptance Around the Death Memorial

With the monument being built in a symbolically hostile environment, the government had thought about how to make it useful to the local population to legitimize it. During the long years leading up to its inauguration, the latter complained that, in addition to the reasons given above, this 'thing brings nothing new to the city!' (interviews, February 2023). Putting the memory of Cameroonian nationalism in competition, the 'monument to the Camrail dead' did not provide a solution to the problems of the Esékaiens and was therefore of little benefit to them; it was 'off to a bad start' (interviews, February 2023). It is not an oversimplification to say that profit and utility, at this level, were primarily assessed in terms of immediacy and the ability of a thing to add material value to people's daily lives. How this problem is solved and 'things' made useful was undoubtedly a major concern for the central authorities. They had to take criticism into account to make the monument acceptable, if not legitimate. The question asked by Sofiane Baba and Chantale Mailhot (2016) takes on its full meaning here when they ask about 'how actors can reach an agreement despite diverging interests and values'. At this level, the co-production of imaginary worlds by institutional and local actors led to a neutralization of the dispute, since the State, while imposing the monument, had to justify its merits for the community. This situation placed decision-makers in a 'justification imperative' (Boltanski and Thévenot 2002).

In Eséka, the authorities decided to attach an external tap to the monument to provide residents with free drinking water. The Nyong et Kelle departmental delegation for culture explained that this function had not been foreseen when the stele was designed. However, the question of the utility of a monument built in a hostile environment having become critical, it was necessary to find ways to integrate it into the framework of local public policies by identifying a public problem to which the monument would provide a solution. Giving the stele a function to extend

Figure 4: Children are the primary users of the well that supplies drinking water to the city centre and many neighbourhoods (Photo by the author).

Figure 5: Long queues often form in front of the tap, reflecting the high demand for the facility (Photo by the author).

public action, making the monument acceptable and ensuring that it is accepted thus became a quest for affection and a conquest for its survival. In the context of a public water supply service in deficit, this was an effective way to create a link and a utility for the monument and build local consent and consensus around the stele. Water, which local people call 'life', seemed to emanate from the dead, and from the way in which they could be transformed into a resource for the living.

As soon as the water supply was opened to the public the installations were unable to cope with the heavy demand. (Fig. 4-5) With demand so high and the public so undisciplined, taps broke and water supplies were exhausted. To the great astonishment of the residents, the authorities were unusually responsive and quickly intervened to fix the taps[1] What was particularly notable on this occasion was the legitimization undertaking was so significant in the eyes of the monument's

builders that it led them to break with the immobility of which they were often accused. They then sought to win the sympathy of residents to establish a form of legitimacy around their commemorative monument. In Eséka, despite the lack of any intrinsic heritage value, the monument was given a practical purpose. Initially designed to build and perpetuate a collective memory of the tragedy, its immediate social relevance (running water) became part of the fabric of the imagination around a government perceived as accessible, attentive and so hard-working. Nadine, a resident who used the fountain every morning said that 'the ministers worked very diligently on this. As soon as they found out that the water was not running, they would come back to fix it and change the pump, similarly, the caretaker also changed the timetable.' (Interview, February 2023). The space to negotiate legitimacy opened by this tap allowed for a change in status for the stele.

This duplication of functions could mean that, in the long term, the monument's pre-eminence, as regards social utility, could surpass its initial objective of erecting a memorial that conforms to the status of national disaster as defined by the official narrative. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that these two dimensions are not mutually exclusive. The commemorative function benefits from the retributive social function. Consequently, the monument ceases to be simply 'useless', as soon as it changes from an unwanted social artefact to a building of proven public utility. To this day, it remains the only monument in Cameroon to enjoy such status.

However, the government has said little or nothing about the Eséka monument. It is only through the monument that we are truly able to decipher what it is saying, what it wants or what its policy is, implemented in the supply of drinking water. For the sociology of translation, the spokesperson speaks for others, but they also 'silence[s] others' (Callon, Lhomme and Fleury 1999). In this kind of device, not speaking is communication, because the silence that covers the operation says what speaking does not say. This 'performance' of government makes it omnipresent whenever the monument's social function and public service are called upon.[2] This was observed whenever the fountain broke down. It was the people themselves who reported the problem and asked for it to be repaired, making the monument an object that, as soon as requested by residents, became legitimate to occupy the physical space of the city.

The relationship that is beginning to develop may lead us to believe that, over time, the monument will produce an effect of attachment and social dependence that will justify its legitimacy in the city. Against this, Henry, a local activist, argued that 'the monument is being built with taxpayers' money, which means our money. And the water that comes out of 'its fountain is pumped from our soil' (interview, March 2023), implying that, if the public company that supplies water in Cameroon is incapable of fulfilling its mission effectively, the monument is merely fulfilling a mission where the state is still failing. Above all, the water in question comes from no other source than the Esékaiens' own land. If it is the State that distributes it

and makes it available, this is done with money derived from the efforts and taxes of local people, just as the water that comes from their soil is first and foremost their property. This state, which takes from the land to redistribute, ceases to be considered an entelechy (see Chateauraynaud and Debaz 2017), and so its legitimacy is no longer automatically acquired by the public and State character of a company, but is won over in the face of the recipient publics, or it is the latter who distribute it depending on whether or not they accept, accommodate, or consent.

Conclusion

The dual function of the Eséka death memorial has made it acceptable and accepted in the town. This bifurcation of its meaning and usefulness has enabled residents to see it as a source of life beyond death. Now, when residents look at the death memorial, they see not so much a memorial to the victims of the disaster as they do a source of drinking water. Nonetheless, for the authorities, the source of drinking water is first and foremost the success of a public action that was initially rejected but finally accepted as legitimate for occupying the urban space of a post-disaster and historically hostile city. So, it is not so much the nature of what is being looked at that counts, but the way in which it is symbolized and interpreted by those involved. In June 2024, a deconcentrated head of department in Eséka explained to me that 'the water source blends into the background, so you don't even notice it. When we come here, it's the monument we come to see, not the water. I don't even often remember that there's drinking water here, you see' (interview, June 2024). The same monument thus plays two distinct roles that satisfy the expectations of antagonistic actors who manage to make it functional in two different ways. This case is an example of a successful agreement that opens the debate on the post-disaster town of Eséka where there is experimentation with a form of necropolitics.

After the Eséka disaster, necropower consisted of determining who could live on after death. In this context, a conflict existed between the Sovereign, who claimed the power to decide how the dead should live after their death (nationalization of mourning and construction of the stele), and the residents, who had to live with the stele while seeking to assert their own death (Ruben Um Nyobe). Just as Foucault's biopower illustrated the ability to distinguish between those who were to live and those who were to die, so the necropower of this state, as observed in Eséka, distinguishes between those who deserve to live after their death and those who, like Um Nyobe, are to be killed a second time or forgotten once and for all. The distinction between the living is thus, in a way, also made among the dead. Necropower and biopower, as they have been theorized so far, must be discussed in relation to the form of life observed in this chapter, that of the living dead or the zombie. When Mbembe, because of M. Foucault, sees the

right to 'kill or let die' as an attribute of the Sovereign, existence seems reduced to a binary: either you are alive, or you are dead. The Sovereign therefore has the power to take life or to allow life (another way of giving life). However, in Eséka, death is not the end of life as such. The victims of the disaster, who are given a new form of life in a monument that bears the memory of their existence, are certainly biologically dead, but symbolically present in a new mode of existence, in which they can be placed in competition with the living and another dead person. This use of death reflects a specific ontology of the state in Cameroon, which can no longer be described only in terms of the categories of political science (clientelist, patrimonial, or neo-patrimonial state, etc.). The railway disaster announced before it happened, the zombification of the train, and the memorial processes to which the accident gave rise invite us to see another form of necropower that I have chosen to characterize, following Bernard Hours (1985), as a wizard's state (Molo 2023, 2024). In this wizard state, necropolitics is also the interweaving of two ways of being, the possibility of being at once dead and alive.

Notes

[1] During the last site visit in March 2023, the caretaker turned the water on at 9 in the morning to allow students, the primary users of the well, to replenish their water reserves. Then he would open it again at 4 in the afternoon, often with a few minor changes in the times. But for the caretaker, it was also a way to maintain authority because he was the one who regulated usage, and the local residents would sometimes have complaints about how he managed the public asset.

[2] *Ibid.*, Callon shows that the spokesperson brings into existence the social group for whom he translates. By saying what the group wants, requests or requires, the spokesperson contributes to bringing this group into existence and so he participates in what Callon calls 'the performance of social groups'.

CHAPTER 2.5

The Out-of-Self Sovereignty of the Dark Continent

Joseph Tonda

Introduction

This chapter reflects on contemporary power in Central Africa as a sovereignty 'outside itself' (or an 'out-of-self' sovereignty), an alienated power whose reality, actions and representations continue to depend on the Western unconscious that invented it. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Western unconscious created what may be termed 'the Dark Continent', a psychic reality made of fears, anxieties and monsters that the bourgeois subject rejected outside itself and imposed onto Africa. The 'out-of-self' sovereignty of the Dark Continent has important affinities with the power of money and death in the modern capitalist world. It also has affinities to the sovereignty exercised by the *ewusus* (the masters of the night in Cameroon), those who operate in 'the second world', as described by the author Mutt-Lon in a recent novel. Beyond classic Africanist studies, my first hypothesis is that the greatest theorists of the kind of sovereignty that exists in the *Dark Continent* include Mutt-Lon (2017), Thomas More (2012), Sigmund Freud (1924), Mary Shelley (1979), George Orwell (1950), Michel Foucault (1976) and Félix Guattari (1979).[1] *Ceux qui sortent dans la nuit* (*Those who go out into the night*), the first novel by Mutt-Lon, 'an editor working for the Cameroonian public television after serving as a teacher of mathematics', was published in 2017.[2] It is a particularly captivating and evocative text for what it says about the unconscious power and sovereignty of the 'Dark Continent'.

But what is this 'Dark Continent', and what do I mean by 'sovereignty outside the self'? My first idea is that the Dark Continent, which is something more than Africa or the 'African continent', is a psychic reality, invisible on maps of the world, but whose reality is not questioned by anyone. As for sovereignty, I see it as the power to dispose of the lives of others. The reference to Michel Foucault is obvious here. Foucault distinguishes between 'a 'sovereign power that makes people die' and 'a sovereign power that lets people live'. Thus, for Foucault, sovereign power was once based on the 'right to cause death'. This regime contrasts with that of biopower, composed of anatomo-politics and biopolitics (Foucault 1976). What I call 'modern sovereignty' (Tonda 2005) is a form of power that functions on a massive scale through the production of death, the fetishism of writing (including the Bible and the Koran), money (which intensifies the fetish nature of the latter), the body, commodities, sex and deparentelization.[3] The sovereignty of the Dark Continent is 'beyond itself' because it is the sovereignty of all those who do not doubt its reality, of those who created it outside the continent itself. As such, this invisible yet real sovereignty is like the sovereignty of death, money and the State. The sovereignty

of death is implacable, and no one escapes it. The sovereignty of money, too, is an implacable force in capitalist societies. As for the State, it is the form of sovereignty that, in these societies, recapitulates the unique hegemonic power that shapes the relationship to bodies, things, and power. Mutt-Lon's novel will be used here as a paradigm of the invisible but real sovereignty of the Dark Continent.

The Dark Continent or the Invisible State

The title of Mutt-Lon's novel is *Ceux qui sortent dans la nuit* (*Those Who Go Out Into The Night*). It speaks of an ordinary reality for people of the sub-Saharan countries: the powers of the invisible realm that, with the development of Pentecostalism, forms the idiom that most people use to interpret both misfortune and happiness, power and powerlessness. As such, it recalls Thomas More's utopia and George Orwell's political dystopia. *Ceux qui sortent dans la nuit* is also an account of the imaginary worlds generated by techno-scientific power, as it is portrayed in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. But it is also the story of the 'sovereign power' as described by Michel Foucault, the principle of which is to make *die and let live.* The paradox of this power is brought to light by Foucault as follows:

> In the classical theory of sovereignty, the right of life and death was one of sovereignty's basic attributes. But the right of life and of death is a strange right, strange at the theoretical level; what does it meant to have the right to life and death? In a sense, to say that the sovereign has the right to life and death, basically means that the sovereign can cause people to die and allow them to live; that life and death are not natural, unmediated phenomena, originary or radical events that fall outside the scope of political power. (Foucault 1976: 214)

Here is the paradox of sovereignty uncovered by Foucault:

> If we push this a little more, and, if you wish, to the point of paradox, here is the issue: with respect to power, the subject is, by right, neither alive nor dead. From the perspective of life and death, the subject is 'neutral,' since it is for the sovereign to decide whether the subject has the right to be alive, or has the right, eventually, to be dead. Thus, the life and death of subjects can only be realized as a political right through the sovereign's will. That, if you like, is the theoretical paradox.

In my view, this theoretical paradox of the power of sovereignty means that the life and death of subjects are *outside themselves.* They depend on a sovereign power that has the capacity to attribute a certain *value* to its subjects (Delori). Without this value, these subjects are neither alive nor dead, they remain 'neutral'. Now, in my opinion, to be in this state of neutrality means that the subject exists in the

unconscious of the power of sovereignty, in a virtual state, before the power of sovereignty *realises* this virtuality, making it visible and manifest through images, materialities, individualities, corporealities, and actualities. From this point of view, the conception of the unconscious that I use here is not so much that of Freud as that of Guattari, who presents the unsconscious 'as something that is all around us everywhere, in our gestures, in everyday objects, on television, in the 'atmosphere' of the times, and perhaps above all, in the great problems of the day (Guattari 1979: 7)'. These 'gestures', these 'objects, this 'TV', this 'zeitgeist' and these 'issues of the day' only acquire value or significance when they are *valorised*, that is, *interpreted* as realities endowed with value, meaning, and importance.

If we agree that the unconscious is what makes individuals and groups act without their knowledge, the link we establish between the unconscious and sovereignty outside the self becomes evident, insofar as objects and abstractions are both 'products' and representatives of the unconscious. The unconscious is then seen as the sovereign power that acts outside the self and outside self-consciousness. The unconscious is not self-conscious, its sovereignty is not self-conscious, and the human subjects it unknowingly commands are under the illusion that they are acting in full self-consciousness. The Dark Continent – invisible on the physical or digital maps of the world, but visible on the psychic screens of mental geographies – is the colonizing power of such 'social subjects', both colonial and post-colonial.

The Two Theses of the Sovereignty of the Capitalist State

The first pillar of the capitalist state is the sovereignty of money. Money, as we are told, derives its value from the power of the state. According to Christian Geffray:

> The name given to the metallic body of the universal signifier of value was precisely the name of the 'law', *nomos* or *numos*. The body of the universal signifier of value, which is the master signifier of value, which is the master signifier of commodity discourse [...] was named 'law' from the moment the state signified, by affixing its hallmark to it, its absolute authority and exclusivity over its production and circulation (Geffray 2001: 180).

However, in the French-speaking states of sub-Saharan Africa, the value of money is decided by a foreign state, France, which becomes 'familiar' to the subjects of these states through the value of the monetary sign that represents its sovereignty. In other words, the presence of this foreign state is materialised by the money that circulates within the societies of supposedly sovereign states. From this perspective, the sovereignty of these French-speaking African states is guaranteed by the value of a currency (the CFA franc) which, in fact, represents the sovereignty of the French state.[4] In other words, the sovereignty of French-speaking African states is 'outside

itself': it acts like the unconscious of the value of the currency, the power of a foreign sovereign state, invisible on the maps showing these African states, but visible on the psychic screens and in the unconscious of the citizens of these same countries.

The second pillar of the capitalist state rests on the conflict between the state and civil society. The problem has often been articulated by social scientists as follows: is 'traditional society' (also known as 'primitive society') 'against the State' or, on the contrary, 'for the State'? The first formulation takes us back to Pierre Clastres and, to some extent, to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who wrote: 'Capitalism has haunted all forms of society, but it haunts them as their terrifying nightmare, the panic fear they have of a flow that evades their codes (Deleuze and Guattari 1980: 164). The second formulation refers us to Frederic Lordon (2015). According to this author, as summarised by Jean-Loup Amselle: 'Rather than seeing 'the' primitive Society, as Clastres does, as a bulwark against the cold monster of the State, a society aiming, in a kind of intentionality, to 'preserve' itself from the emergence of a coercive State apparatus, Lordon considers that any form of clan power, any 'primitive' social or religious organization prefigures, or contains the State' (Lordon 2015, Amselle 2019: 81). However, in my view, both the theories about 'the societies against the State' or 'the societies for the State' (and hence the kind of sovereignty they represent) construct the State as a central, *unconscious* reality in 'primitive' or 'traditional' societies. According to them, the State and sovereignty exist *outside the consciousness* of these societies, while, at the same time, being the hidden object and target of their 'resistance' and 'desire' (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, Lordon 2015).

In this theory, an 'out-of-self' sovereignty thus exists outside the subject's and the society's consciousness, although it is present in their unconscious. By contrast, my concept of the 'out-of-self' sovereignty of the Dark Continent (the Dark Continent of value and savagery) is that such sovereignty is present both in invisible mental cartographies, in the unconscious of the subjects, in material objects (art objects, for example), as well as in symbolic or abstract objects that materialise or symbolise the psychic and invisible power of this sovereignty. Next, we will see how the opposing theses that I discussed in this section – on the one hand, the theories of the 'societies against the state' and against capitalism, and on the other hand, 'societies for the capitalist state' – are all represented in what unites them, namely, the fiction of Mutt-Lon. In so doing, Mutt-Lon's novel establishes itself as the Dark Continent of savagery, a typical modern and post-colonial creation by an African author.

Mutt-Lon and the Sovereignty of the Dark Continent of Savagery or Primitivism

Mutt-Lon asserts his modernity through the voices of his novel's characters. The story depicts the imaginary power of sovereignty embodied by the *ewusus*, people who in Bassa language are 'those who go out in the night' and are 'essentially

negative beings' (2017). The *ewusus*' power of sovereignty lies outside themselves and outside their conscience, insofar as their exploits, their prowess and their deliberations are sealed in radical *secrecy.* All those who transgress this law of secrecy are punished by death. However, to keep silent about what happens in the invisible (here synonymous with both the Dark Continent and the unconscious), is a strategy that contributes to the production and reproduction of the sovereign power of the invisible. I will attempt to show here that the *ewusus*' modern sovereign power, exercised over and from the invisible continent – to the point of being synonymous with it-, is the paradigm of the power that governs African societies.

Mutt-Lon's story starts with the transgression of the law of secrecy by Dodo, a particularly gifted young woman. Initiated by Mispa, her grandmother, Dodo goes out into the night (i.e., into the invisible), where she is able to witness an assembly of *ewusus* debating and deciding on the death of certain people. The invisible assembly (or the assembly in the invisible), is therefore able to exercise sovereign power. Although out of place (because it is secret), it has the *power of life and death* over members of ordinary 'village society'. After witnessing the assembly, Dodo is sentenced to death for *speaking out.* Her grandmother Mispa, who taught her to go out into the night, desperately tries to save her. She brings Dodo to the city, where Mispa's friend, a powerful *ewusu* by the name of Jean-Paul Ada, a physics graduate, can protect her. Yet, despite her best efforts, Dodo is caught and killed by an *ewusu* commando in charge of punishing her.

To avenge Dodo, her brother Alain Nsona is initiated by Mispa, and decides to eliminate the physicist and great *ewusu*, Jean-Paul Ada, the friend of his grandmother's. The only way to get rid of the lively Ada, an old man by day but a dashing young man by night – when he's cavorting in nightclubs with young women –, is to approach his sleepy body on his bed, and cover it with chilli pepper. This way, when Ada returns from the realm of the night, he will not be able to get back into it. However, while Alain Nsona chases Jean-Paul Ada in the invisible realm, he does not know that he has been spotted by the old *ewusu*. The latter is also a member of a multinational learned society whose research focuses on the power of *dematerialization*.

Right when Alain Nsona thinks he has finally achieved his goal of killing Ada, the latter turns the tables on him: he 'turns' Alain Nsona as one does with spies. Ada sets the condition to spare Nsona's life: the young man must agree to make a *return journey* to the year 1705, in the middle of the 18th century. There, he must meet the young Jam-Libe, who lives in the Bassa village of Soma-boye, and before Jam-Libe dies, he must learn from him the secret of *dematerialization.* This secret, according to Ada, will save the 'Third World and the whole of humanity'. Nsona successfully completed his mission, despite extremely difficult conditions, and bring the secret of dematerialization back to the 21st century. However, despite this success, the 'Third World' remains prey to the misfortunes of the sovereign power of the Dark Continent. The question then is why, despite mastering the immense

sovereign power of dematerialization, is the 'liberation' of the Third World so slow in coming?

This can be answered as follows. The young Jam-Libe, the 18th century inventor of the secret of dematerialization, is in possession of a power whose immense importance is beyond his consciousness. Because Jam-Libe, like the secret of the power of dematerialization, exists only in the author's creative imagination. Mutt-Lon's novel of expresses the author's unconscious as a Cameroonian citizen and a product of modernity, that is, of coloniality. Mutt-Lon's unconscious is no more than the schizo-analytical, post-colonial unconscious of a mathematics teacher and state television technician, who is caught up in the 'issues of the day', including the 'powerlessness' of the Dark Continent (Tonda 2023).

Mutt-Lon's strategy thus falls within the logic of contemporary literary imaginations in Africa. Like all creators of utopias, he tries to turn around the current situation of *Africa* by creating a narrative that aims to bring the continent out of the deep night and, thanks to the power of dematerialization, to restore its sovereign power. If the strategy targets Africa, however, it cannot do anything about the Dark Continent, since the latter is the name of the 'out-of-self' sovereign power that governs the psychic life of the State and of capitalism. The Dark Continent is really about the sovereign power of death, the ultimate *ruler* subjugating all, the powerful and the weak, the rich and the poor, the dominant and the dominated, to their mortal condition. The strange life of capitalism's 'automaton subject', whose body is reduced to money (Jappe 2003: 96), also sets the scene for this paradigm. In short, death, as a timeless sovereign, outside-the-self, and as a blind power like the automaton subject of capitalism, is the true sovereign power that sets the stage for the invisible power of the *ewusus*. It is also the power at work in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), the force that Hannah Arendt later theorized as the 'ghostly world of the dark continent' (2002: 121).

The Omnipotence of the Subject's Dark Ideas

The 'out-of-self' sovereignty of the Dark Continent is the creation of the white, masculine bourgeois subject (Jappe 2017: 46). From this perspective, it is the product of the *internal split* that, under the guise of a 'false universalism', characterises the white, masculine bourgeois subject (Jappe 2017: 46). In this world, only part of humanity is defined as a subject and, even within this restricted framework, only *some* human qualities can make the individual a subject. Everything else – including 'nature' – forms the 'dark side of the subject', a place where reigns a repressed reality, a frightful realm with a distinct existence. Indeed, the subject feels threatened by this external/internal dark reality, which is nonetheless its own creation and which, in turn, justifies its existence' (Jappe 2017). Jappe believes that

the 'subject' establishes an ambiguous relationship with 'non- or minor subjects', a relationship made partly of repulsion – which can go as far as the desire to annihilate them – and partly of attraction, as these 'non- or minor subjects' represent everything that the subject has had to expel from himself to achieve subject status' (Jappe 2017). These ambiguous relationships are in fact relationships between the subject and himself.

This idea resonates with the following quote by Deleuze and Guattari in *Mille Plateaux*, about 'the Face' with a capital F, or the figure of the white middle-class subject:

> If the face is indeed Christ, that is, the average White Man, the first deviations are racial: yellow men, black men, second or third category men […]. They must be Christianised, in other words, they need to be made more visible. European racism, as the assertion of the white man, never proceeded by excluding or by assigning someone designated as 'Other': rather, it was in primitive societies that the foreigner was grasped as an 'Other'. Racism proceeds by determining the rate of deviations circling away from the face of the White Man, and by integrating non-conforming features into increasingly eccentric and primitive waves. Sometimes, racism tolerates them if they exist in such and such a place and under such and such conditions, in such and such a ghetto. Sometimes, it erases them on the wall that never tolerates otherness (he's a Jew, he's an Arab, he's a Negro, he's a madman, etc.). From the perspective of racism, there is no outside, there are no people who can exist outside. There are only people who should be like us and for whom the crime is that they are not [like us] (Deleuze et Guattari 1980: 218).

What I understand from this quote is that no *outside* can exist for the White Face. Consequently, the Dark Continent does not exist outside the Face, a great narcissist figure confronted with its own negativities. It seems to me that this is also what Jean Baudrillard meant when he wrote: 'The part of us that we escape, we don't escape it. The object (the soul, the shadow, the product of our work that has become an object) takes *revenge* […]. This part of us, sold and forgotten, is still us, or rather it is the caricature, the ghost, the *spectre*, which follows us, prolongs us, and takes its revenge' (Baudrillard 1970: 305).

This explains why the white subject, the subject of the Face, feels threatened from without and from within by the Dark Continent, a phantasmatic reality that he himself created. This explains also why Mary Shelley was able to imagine the plot of her novel: born directly as an adult and as a techno-scientific product, 'the Creature' is unable to find, in the eyes of his creator (Victor Frankenstein), the *face* that would make him a subject. Therefore, he transforms into a terrifying monster that pursues and exterminates his creator in the polar snows of the 'white continent'.

The Paradigm of the Female 'Sovereign'

The powers of the invisible, as well as the powers of Pentecostal churches share a belief in the existence of a duplicate world, a 'second world' that parallels the world-of-the-day. The first is the world of sovereign power, its explains and determines the second one, the power of the day. The discourse of Pentecostalism, with its characteristic rhetorical virtuosity, did create a character called 'The Female Sovereign' *(La Souveraine)*, whose powers, as suggested by anthropologist Sarah Demart, appear to be the transfiguration of the powers of the colonial State (Demart 2017). Here is, for instance, how a Congolese grandmother interviewed by Demart talked to her grandson when introducing him to the powers of the 'second world' (like Mispa, grandmother to Dodo and Nsona):

> 'Little piggy, that's no way to talk to a *Sovereign*[5] […]. Don't try too hard to find out why and never ask me questions again. I will not tolerate that you ask me any questions anymore. You will just do what I tell you to do' (Demart, 2017: 159).'

To acquire the sovereign's extraordinary powers, the young man owes his grandmother absolute obedience and should not question her. Her world, indeed, is not the world of *knowledge*. As a *Sovereign*, whose power flows from the 'second world' (symbolizing here the 'Dark Continent'), she has the *right of life and death*, like the sovereign power described by Michel Foucault. She is the *revelation* of the postcolonial state, (Hours 1985) associated with the vampire state (Bernault 2019, Tonda Maheba 2021).

Such repression of the 'desire to know' recalls Mutt-Lon's novel: in the novel, the story puts on trial the *lack of* knowledge. Alain Nsona's return trip to learn the secret of dematerialization is a paradigmatic example. What both the 'Sovereign' and the Cameroonian Bassa *ewusus* talk in fact about, is the life of the subject' white power, caught in its *African historicity*. In other words, what they bring to light is the true creator of the Dark Continent: the middle-class, capitalist and Christian unconscious, materialized by the State, Science and Technology, whether outside or inside the subject. What I call a sovereignty 'outside-the-self' is therefore understood as the sovereignty of the middle-class white male, exhibiting himself on the stage on the phantom continent that he has created. At the same time, this subject, through the excesses and the monstrous fury of Africa, examines his own projected interiority, *a spectacle* that makes him shudder, threatening him with death, in the same way that Victor Frankenstein created the techno-scientific monster that would, in the end, exterminate him.

I believe that the 'female Sovereign' analysed by Demart in her research is a revelatory figure of the postcolonial state, a historical creation of coloniality that preserves the *right to life and death* on its subjects. For me, the pattern of powerlessness and incompleteness portrayed in Mutt-Lon's novel reveals the real

helplessness that reigns at the root of current fantasies of omnipotence, fantasies dominating the social, political, economic and cultural life of sub-Saharan societies and other societies as well.

After all, the products of white Science and Technology have been and remain the central paradigms of the sovereign power that creates the *spectacle* of the world of the *ewusus*. This 'second world' (called 'a world of witchcraft mutations' in a 2016 book by Patrice Yengo), is strongly connected to the latest technological advances in the modern world. I remember that, during the 1960s and 1970s, urban legends circulated about the fact that 'those who went out in the night' were careful not to be struck by electric cables, as had been the case in the 1950s. In fact, according to the rumours, they were flying hyper sophisticated planes belonging to legendary (yet invisible) airlines like *Air Makana*, famous in the Republic of Congo-Brazzaville. According to these popular legends, the planes were crossing the oceans to Paris, New York and other cities in the techno-scientifically developed world, stupefying the local air technicians in the same way that UFOs (Unidentified Flying Objects) did at the time.

To conclude, I would like to suggest what the diverse strands of my analysis have conspired to bring to light: the fact that the 'out-of-self' Sovereignty of the Dark Continent is nothing more, *in fine*, than the power of the White Face, the true creator of this invisible continent.

Notes

1 As was already the theory I offered in my work *Afrodystopies* (2021).

2 Back cover of *Ceux qui sortent dans la nuit*, Paris: Grasset, 2013.

3 I theorized 'deparentelizing' in my article 'Entre communautarisme et individualisme: la "tuée tuée", une figure-miroir de la *déparentélisation* au Gabon', *Sociologie et sociétés*, vol. 39, n° 2, 2007, p. 79-99.

4 However, not all French-speaking African states belong to this CFA franc system. Rwanda and Burundi each use their sovereign money (franc). In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the partial 'dollarization' of the economy shows the importance of the economic control outside France and the United States.

5 Emphasis added.

PART 3

Spatial Technologies

CHAPTER 3.1

More Than Meets the Eye: Colonial Violence and Spatial Imaginaries of Power in South-Ubangi, DR Congo

Margot Luyckfasseel

Introduction

Frantz Fanon (1963: 38-39) described the colonial world as 'cut in two' and 'inhabited by two different species'. He argued that spatial policies divide the colonial world into compartments that physically segregate the exploited from those in power through the presence of soldiers and policemen. Consequently, the colonially introduced spatial features of this world are experienced in radically different ways by each party: while they represent safety and protection for the colonizing subjects, they signify violence and discrimination for the colonized. According to Fanon, true decolonization is only possible by breaking this colonial order, a process that inevitably requires the inversion of the violence that constitutes it: '[t]his approach to the colonial world, its ordering and its geographical layout will allow us to mark out the lines on which a decolonized society will be reorganized.' (Ibid: 37)

Since Fanon, however, several authors have argued that historians of colonial Africa should move beyond a simplistic colonizer-colonized antagonism to come to nuanced and complex understandings of the colonial situation and the ways people navigated it. Cooper (1994: 1517), for example, argues that

> '[t]he binaries of colonizer/colonized, Western/non-Western and domination/resistance begin as useful devices for opening up questions of power but end up constraining the search for precise ways in which power is deployed and the ways in which power is engaged, contested, deflected and appropriated'.

In a similar vein, Bernault (2019: 5) proposes rethinking how 'proximate, conversant and compatible imaginaries of power' integrated French and Gabonese subjects into one transactional colonial setting.

I take a micro-event in Congolese colonial history, namely, the relocation of a state post in the Belgian Congo in the 1920s, as an entry point to reason with Fanon and to suggest that thinking beyond the colonial binary has its limits in addressing conflicting spatial imaginaries of power in contexts of long-lasting colonial violence. The case presented here shows that colonial domination and resistance *were* often experienced in a profoundly different, incompatible way that, radically and literally, set Belgian colonial agents and subjected Congolese

actors apart. Yet, it also demonstrates that the disruptive violence that was at the heart of this incompatibility was often performed by Congolese middlemen.

The chapter is part of a growing body of literature on colonial road infrastructure in Africa. Libbie Freed (2010: 217), for example, explores how the French used roads to implant new colonial landscapes to confirm their power over Central African territories and the people that inhabited it. She asserts that the main concern of the French colonial regime was to build roads simply and cheaply by using local labour. Andreas Greiner (2022: 347), writing about resistance to colonial road implementation in German East Africa, argues that the enduring idea of infrastructure in Africa as a European invention should be challenged more vigorously but recognizes that it is methodologically challenging to do so by means of archival sources only.

For the Belgian Congolese context, Laurence Heindryckx (2020: 14) shows that Headrick's *tools of empire* (1981) is an applicable but reductive notion to understand how top-down road technologies were implemented and contested on the ground. According to Peer Schouten (2022: 70), building on Vansina (1990), the colonial desire for control over movement clashed with fundamental aspects of Central African livelihoods, 'of which unrestricted mobility was an essential feature'. He argues that colonial roads were either experienced as avenues of economic and political opportunity or as catalysts of violence. In the case of the latter, people systematically moved away to escape colonial domination. Consequently, the inhospitable territories they used to hide away, such as dense forest areas and swamps, were endowed with 'magical powers of protection' (Schouten 2022: 76). This chapter highlights this observation and argues that studying road infrastructure from a Congolese point of view should address the realm of the invisible.

Additionally, this chapter also presents the methodological exercise that lays bare the challenges inherent to juxtaposing oral history accounts and written archival sources to study the (in)compatibilities of colonial imaginations of power. In doing so, it welcomes Achille Mbembe's invitation to focus on '*imaginaires* and autochthonous practices of space' (2000: 262) and brings them into dialogue with narratives found in the Belgian colonial archive. Belgian written accounts and Congolese oral narratives represent profoundly diverse types of sources in terms of mediation, conservation, storytelling, and so on. They push vastly different agendas, and it is precisely this radical paradigmatic difference that underscores the difficulty to cross to the colonial opposition described by Fanon.

Central to this chapter is a local oral narrative about the relocation of the state post of Kalo to Gemena in 1924, in the South-Ubangi region in the northwest of the Democratic Republic of Congo (Fig. 1). To understand the spatial imaginaries of power at play, it is necessary to explain how Gemena's contemporary road infrastructure is connected to the larger South Ubangi region. Five major roads leave Gemena, today the capital of the South-Ubangi province (Fig. 2). The road to the east leads to the Scheutist mission of Bominenge, and further on to Karawa, a town

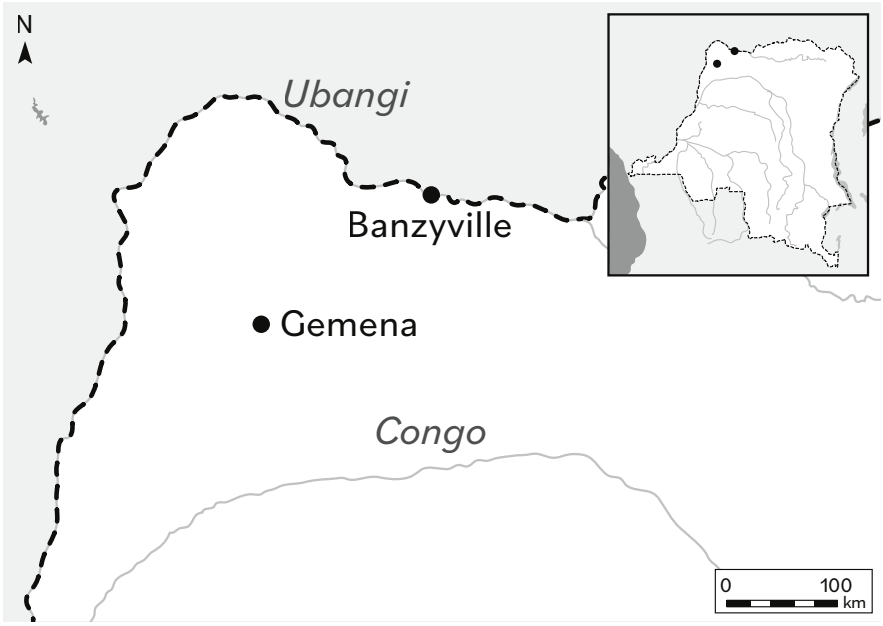

Figure 1: Map of South Ubangi region (Map by Hans Blomme).

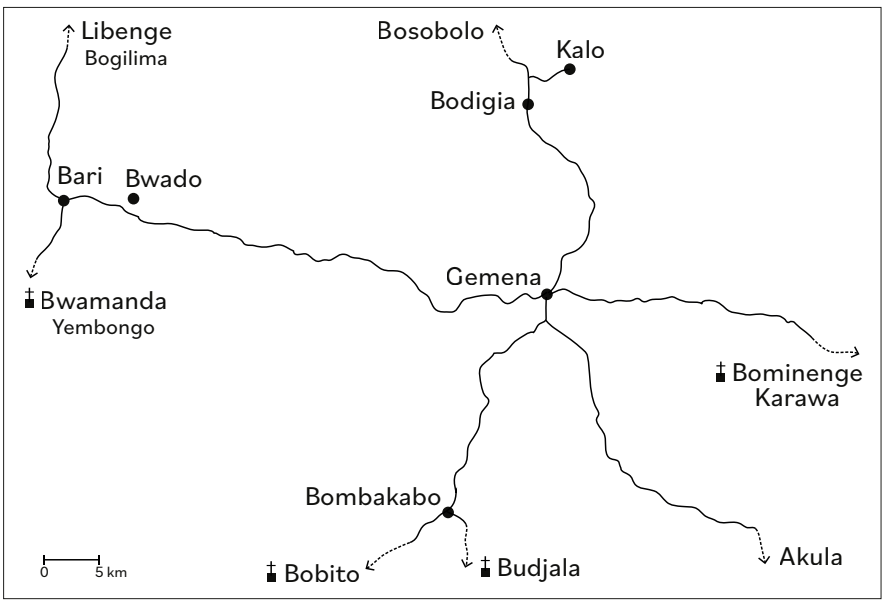

Figure 2: Map of Gemena and its road infrastructure. (Map by Emilia Ockerman)

referred to in the region as disobedient to colonial rule. The one to the southeast leads to the river port town Akula, which is the most important gateway for import and export in the region. The road to the southwest divides into one heading to Budjala, where the headquarters of the Catholic diocese is situated, and another leading to the Scheutist mission in Bobito. The road to the west passes along the former state post Bwado and splits into a road leading to Libenge, former capital of South-Ubangi and an economically strategic border town, and another leading to Bwamanda, where the Capuchins built a mission post in 1926 (see Meeuwis 2011). CDI Bwamanda, a non-profit organization focusing on integral development, now runs the mission with the support of the Belgian NGO Memisa. Only the road to the north does not lead to important missionary or developmental activities.

Below, I first provide historical background for the larger Ubangi region to describe how early colonial presence disrupted local social structures at the turn of the twentieth century. King Leopold II's greed for rubber turned the area into a battlefield in which numerous villages got uprooted and ethnic oppositions intensified. The chaotic situation that resulted out of these violent confrontations displeased the Belgian state that had adopted Congo in 1908, and it tried to implement spatial strategies to make the region and its subjects more governable. Second, I present the narrative of a former *chef de secteur* from the region, a man called Pele Ngamo. His story explains how the local population made sense of one of these spatial strategies, including the relocation of the state post from Kalo to Gemena. I then juxtapose his story with the narratives that are available in the colonial archive. This confrontation not only displays the incompatibilities between the ways in which the colonizers and colonized made sense of their spatial environment and each other's life worlds. It also exposes the disruptive violence that, on the one hand, sets both parties apart, but, on the other, forms the sole common ground to tie their conflicting spatial imaginaries of power together.

Early Colonial Presence in South-Ubangi

As was the case in many contexts of early colonial settlement, the fluvial network of the Congo River provided an important geographical asset for the European exploitation of the Central African hinterland. In the late nineteenth century, delegates of the Congo Free State sailed the Ubangi, a tributary of the Congo River, as an axis to penetrate the region today known as the South-Ubangi province.[1] By 1889, colonial officials founded the state post of Banzyville (today Mobayi-Mbongo) on the left riverbank of the Ubangi, next to the village of Banzi.

In the following years, Banzyville became a main colonial hub for the organization of the Leopoldian rubber exploitation. From 1902 to 1908, the region provided 156,646 kilograms of rubber, a considerable amount that was only reached due to the extremely aggressive exploitation of people and resources. As Ngbwakpwa Te

Mobusa (1993: 302) writes, the violent nature of the rubber campaigns had a devastating impact on the local social tissue near the state post: 'the rubber exploitation undermined the unity of villages everywhere, either because of the death of the village chief due to military reprisals, either because of flight, which generated the dispersion of inhabitants'. By 1904, the populations inhabiting the region of Banzyville, ethnically classified as 'Ngbandi', were unable to meet the exuberant rubber quota as forests in the surroundings were depleted. Out of fear for the notoriously violent reprisals of unmet harvest standards, some of them started buying rubber on the right Ubangi riverbank, which was under French, less exigent control and had therefore less plundered forests (Ibid: 301). Such undertakings show the desperation of a population under extreme economic pressure.

To compensate for the numeral lack of European officials to enforce the exploitative rubber economy, colonial strategies on the ground altered, and several Ngbandi were provided with rifles to exploit more remote areas, including the area south of the Lua-Dekere River.[2] Many of the people living in this region were identified as 'Ngbaka', although this ethnic label, like any other, requires careful historical deconstruction, for it is unsure to what extent it was used in precolonial times as a stable marker of group identification. If anything, the colonial instrumentalization of the populations near Banzyville sharpened and defined the antagonism between so-called Ngbandi and Ngbaka.

Since the populations identified as Ngbaka had not been exposed to direct colonial encounters before, the raids and the technological weapon advantage of their invaders formed a traumatic experience.[3] Although numerically advantageous, their spears and arrows could not protect them against the colonially provided guns of their aggressors, and most of them had to submit to colonial domination or flee to more distant areas, mostly in southwestern direction (Maes 1997: 47). As such, the disintegration of the villages near Banzyville at the turn of the century was in fact repeated a couple of years later in areas further south. Today, elders in the region of Gemena still remember this period of Ngbandi raids as the *Bolo Mbati*, 'the war with the colonial allies'.

Records of resistance during the *Bolo Mbati* exist in both the colonial archives and oral memories. Several legendary Ngbaka chiefs are said to have ambushed their Ngbandi invaders to the extent that they were able to recuperate the latter's guns for their own protection.[4] Some are said to have magically multiplied the guns they obtained.[5] Bwado, a Ngbaka chief known for his resilience against colonial occupation, was one of the first to get hold of some of the attacker's firearms, thus attracting many families to live under his protection (Pecheur 1928: 9). Yet, according to Maes (1997: 50), he surrendered and signed a blood contract with state official Bocconi in 1907, implored by women and elders longing for peace and stability. On February 29, 1908, a state post carrying his name was founded to crystalize the newly gained colonial authority over the region. Ten years later, the state post was moved from Bwado to Kalo, some twenty to thirty kilometres to the northeast.[6]

During the 1910s, colonial occupation solidified as many 'rebel' leaders surrendered. René Pecheur (1876-1954), appointed as the region's Territorial Administrator in 1921, argued that this period brought more stability in the region, but at the same time he acknowledged that local populations were 'not prepared to undergo the numerous exigencies' brought by colonial occupation, probably referring to obligations of fixed settlement and taxation (Pecheur 1928: 10). Hence, despite certain signs of surrender, like Bwado's eventual cooperation, Ngbaka populations remained highly mobile and suspicious of the colonial regime.

From a governmental, colonial point of view, such mobility was highly undesirable, for it made it hard to pinpoint the location of colonized populations that could be exploited as labour and for taxation (see Scott 1998). Hence, part of René Pecheur's task as Territorial Administrator was to regroup all individuals supposedly belonging to the Ngbaka ethnicity into one bounded area.[7] This strategy was part of a larger shift in Belgian colonial guidelines, which, from the 1920s on, demanded that colonial agents dedicated more time to study, fixate, and instrumentalize 'the familial, social, and political organization of the indigenous'.[8] After seven years, however, Pecheur resigned, disillusioned by the infeasibility of his fixative task in an area where human mobility was uncontrollable (see Luyckfasseel 2019). It is during this period, in 1924, that Pecheur decided to move the *chef-lieu* of the territory from Kalo to Gemena.

From Kalo to Gemena: Confronting Oral and Archival Sources

Pele Ngamo's Narrative

In July 2014, I conducted fieldwork in the surroundings of Gemena to study the impact and aftermath of Pecheur's attempts to fixate Ngbaka mobility. To guarantee the geographical spread of my fieldwork data, I interviewed elders along the five roads that depart from Gemena. On the road to the north, I visited Kalo, where I was told that the Belgian state post there had been removed in the 1920s due to the disturbance of recurrent lightning strikes. Upon my return to Gemena, I stopped in the village of Bodigia and interviewed Pele Ngamo, a former *chef de secteur* born in 1925.[9]

During our interview, Pele Ngamo elaborated upon the cruelties committed by the colonial agents living in Kalo. He spoke of imprisonment, enchainment, and whip flogging, mostly as a colonial reaction to unsatisfying rubber collection and cotton cultivation, or absence at the daily roll call. One colonial state officer, nicknamed Ipapa or Apapa, was particularly known for his cruel behaviour.[10] Pele Ngamo described how the elders in the area agreed that something had to be done to put an end to the colonizers' mistreatments. They decided to send thunderbolts to the Belgian state post to chase the officials away. According to local oral accounts,

these thunderbolts were the reason why the colonial regime eventually decided to relocate its state post to Gemena in 1924.[11]

To make sure that the European colonizer would never return to Kalo, its inhabitants appointed an elderly lady to install two pots of powerful medicine on either side of the beginning of the road from Gemena to Kalo. These pots functioned as a barricade for white colonial agents. Today, however, the people of Kalo regret the blocking effect of the pots, for it prevents NGOs and Christian missions from developing the villages to the north of Gemena. As a local leader, Pele Ngamo had done what he could to retrace the pots and to undo their effects, but to no avail. According to him, these pots are the reason why there are no foreign development projects along the route from Gemena to the north.

This story clearly shows how the realm of the invisible forms an essential framework to understand not only local arrangements of space but also anti-colonial resistance. It had a particular impact on our motor driver Viola, a young man in his late twenties who lives in the more urbanized environment of Gemena and is more fluent in Lingala than Ngbaka.[12] Viola had never heard the story before. For him, this interpretation of Kalo's history led to some sort of aha-experience about the structure of his spatial environment. He yelled '*ce papa a raison!*' ('this man is right!') and explained that he had never understood why so little developmental activity took place along the road to the north. This in contrast to the other roads that meet in Gemena, along which regionally important mission posts as Bwamanda and Bominenge have been founded in colonial times and along which NGOs are still active today.

Pecheur's Narrative

Pele Ngamo's story prompted me to go back to the colonial archives in Belgium and to compare his version of this historical event to the available written sources. Unfortunately, some of the relevant documents were barely consultable because they were poorly preserved. The state post was indeed moved from Kalo to Gemena in 1924, but the available archival sources made no mention of lightning. Rather, they address how Pecheur tried to convince his superiors to relocate the state post for strategic reasons.

On May 16, 1923, Pecheur presented the traced-out road between Libenge and Karawa to his District Commissioner and proposed relocating the state post from Kalo to this road.[13] He suggested the name *Ngemena*, which means 'reunion' or 'regrouping' in Ngbaka language, which fitted within the broader scope of his above-mentioned task to unify the Ngbaka population onto one territory. Later that year he sent a letter to insist on the relocation, saying that 'there is nothing to do in Kalo' and that the soil seemed to be much more fertile in Gemena.[14] By early December 1923, he obtained the consent of his superiors and started with the necessary works on the new location. He planned to make Gemena 'a more vivid

place than Kalo' with a commercial centre along the road to Karawa. According to Pecheur, the local population did not complain about the workload this new state post implied because the region was densely populated and the work well divided.[15]

From these documents, the main reason to move to Gemena thus seemed to be the fertility of its soil and its strategic location on the road between Libenge and Karawa. Moreover, Pecheur's superiors had been complaining about the fiscal incomes of the region in 1923. Especially the reluctance of the territories of Libenge, Dongo, and Kalo to pay taxes caused the South-Ubangi district to be the only one in the Equatorial province without fiscal progression.[16] Relocating the state post might have been a strategy to manage these incomes more efficiently. A year and a half after the relocation to Gemena, Pecheur described the condition of the road between Kalo and Bosobolo: the right bank of the Lua Vindu River regularly flooded the road and they were unable to deforest large areas along its trajectory.[17] A state post along the more frequented and better-maintained route between Libenge and Karawa seemed to be a more strategic option.

However, in parallel with the letter about the start of the works in Gemena, Pecheur sent a complaint to the District Commissioner about the aggressive behaviour of his assistant Mostinckx. He claimed that Mostinckx should know that 'it is not allowed to treat the indigenous with brutality and cruelty, that their property has to be respected and that above all their women have to be preserved from his violence'.[18] He continued that he lost all hopes concerning his colleague's attitude. Mostinckx had given a charged weapon to a messenger to obtain chickens from the people of Kalo. Pecheur could not understand why Mostinckx would use violence, for asking was enough to get food supplies from the local population. The letter shows that, besides strategic environmental and fiscal considerations, hampered relations with the population of Kalo, due to misbehaving colonial officials, might have also played a role in the motivations to relocate the state post. Although Pele Ngamo's story about the relocation of the state post shows little to no similarities with Pecheur's written accounts, there is one recurrent feature in both narratives: the disruptive impact of the violence committed by colonial agents. Digging deeper into the colonial archives about the region of Kalo showcases an even more grim image, replete with violent episodes.

Broadening the Scope: Colonial Nervousness, Violence and Spatial Policies

In general, Pecheur's colonial career reads as a gradual and profound disillusionment with the possibilities of top-down implementations of colonial rule. It fits within Hunt's description of the colonial state as 'nervous' about its limited ability to 'understand, perceive and control its colonial subjects' (2016: 237, see also Henriet 2021). Pecheur's inability to make sense of his work environment and the people under his administration is a recurrent theme in his letters to superiors. In

March 1923, a couple of months before suggesting the relocation of the state post, Pecheur wrote to the District Commissioner that it was not only necessary that all local officials learned the local language – Ngbaka – but that they should also be provided with machinery to facilitate the tapping of conversations between Congolese:

> I would want to possess some sort of acoustic machine that allows me to follow the conversations from a distance, they exist, the war [the First World War] must have provided them. You have been able to notice yourself how much even the blacks at our service are reserved when we want to obtain information with them about their customs, they get tired of our inquisitions and answer in whatever way to discard our importunities.[19]

As this quote suggests, Pecheur was frustrated with his impotence to capture Congolese life worlds to the extent that he fantasised about war technology to be able to do so. More generally, colonial officials anxiously tried to grasp and make sense of local imaginaries and hidden transcripts (see Scott 1990). In November 1922, for example, all administrators in the Ubangi District were asked to keep a list of the local nicknames given to the Belgian officials working in the region.[20]As Likaka (2009: 60) points out, such nicknames were often 'drawn from personal actions, behaviours, and the ways in which each European official carried out colonial policies'. They provided local populations with a symbolic toolbox to individually nominate the agents who shaped their colonial living conditions. The list of nicknames was maintained in 'the special archives of the *politique indigène*' and had to be updated regularly.

From a methodological point of view the cross-sources comparison between Pele Ngamo's story and Pecheur's record of the relocation of the state post had resulted in little overlap, but the nickname list proved to be a valuable resource to tie Pele Ngamo's story to the archival trail. It mentions the name Apapa, which referred to the Italian military agent Antonio Rao. Rao had been in service of the *Force Publique* since 1896 and remained active in the Belgian administration until at least 1922.[21] His personal file testifies to several violent events. In March 1916, for example, he was accused of beating up a woman who refused to sleep with him. This annoyed his supervisors because he had 'considerably harmed the prestige that a European has to preserve with every black', thereby violating the 'reasonability' that the colonial state and its archival track pretended to represent (see Stoler 2009: 58).[22]

In March 1922, he caused another scandal by whipping three Congolese soldiers, leaving injuries that were shown to Captain-Commander Stensbak-Davidsen, who summoned him.[23] Rao replied to his superior that he did not deny having beaten them, but that this happened with a little stick and not with a whip. He deemed it impossible to have left marks of aggression on their bodies, since he only 'lightly

beat them on the legs with his little cane'. He did admit that these events took place in 'a moment of overexcitement'.[24] District Commissioner Parker did not believe this explanation and, considering that it was not the first time Rao was accused of violent behavior, he punished him by cutting his salary in half for eight days. In January of the same year, Rao's colleague Gabriel Vlamynck had been the author of another excessive display of power by incarcerating the local chief Kangala in Yembongo for no legitimate reason.[25]

It was not only European officials who brought terror to the region. During the early 1920s, several documents about the position of the Ngbandi chief Kangayani also circulated. Kangayani had established his non-customary authority thanks to colonial support at the time of the *Bolo Mbati*, during which his troops adopted the strategy of encircling villages to force the village elders to surrender to colonial rule.[26] Most of them did, since they stood no chance against Kangayani's weapons. Others fled to swampy and bushy regions, inaccessible to their attackers, or sought refuge with Bwado.[27] In the inspection report of the region of Bosobolo, District Commissioner Parker expressed his worry about what would happen to the populations that lived under the 'iron rule' of Kangayani if another chief were to be appointed.[28] He praised Kangayani's 'unlimited devotion to the Administration' and feared that the appointment of a locally chosen chief would destabilize the loyalty to the colonial regime in the region.

This approval of Kangayani, who earned a silver medal for his services, reveal a striking contrast with accounts that are less focused on the governmental benefits of his authoritarianism. In his semi-annual report about the political situation of 1924, Pecheur wrote that the planned construction of a motorway in the region of Bosobolo was upsetting to its inhabitants because entire communities had to be 'transplanted', but that they at least had 'the motif of relief and consolation: their liberation from the Mongbandi of Kangayani'.[29] Although the archive mainly praises Kangayani's merits for colonial domination, his rule was experienced as extremely oppressive by most Ngbaka.

This quote also reveals that the implementation of new road infrastructures, such as the one between Karawa and Libenge, was not always as easily accepted by the local population as Pecheur claimed in his plea in favour of the new state post in Gemena. Another incident in September 1922 showed that the Congolese willingness to 'help' in colonial construction works, as described by Pecheur in the case of Gemena, was not guaranteed. On September 21, Pecheur visited the village Bogilima, along the road to Libenge, and summoned its chief Balo to clean the road and to construct a shortcut. Balo explained that his people refused to fulfil this task, but that he would insist with them. The next day, Pecheur received the message that the men upon whom Balo had tried to impose the job had chased him away with spears, while his son had been beaten by a man of another clan named Daduwa. Pecheur sent four soldiers to arrest Daduwa, who launched a spear when the soldiers arrived at his house, hitting the soldier Mbapara in the

right arm. Mbapara tried to overpower Daduwa but was stabbed with a knife and died a little later. The soldier Likele shot and killed Daduwa.[30] As this episode indicates, the local power differences that were at play in the context of colonial labour mobilization were not set in stone and had constantly to be renegotiated, sometimes leading to violent encounters.

Concluding Remarks: Conflicting Infrastructures of Power

These records give an impression of how colonial presence evoked a context of agony and insecurity for many people living in the region. The archival sources about the moving of the state post to Gemena in 1924 do not mention lightning attacks, but when looking at the larger documented entity of which they are part, they share an important overlap with Pele Ngamo's story: the colonial violence and the disruptive impact it had on people's lives. As Fanon noted, the colonial desire for control over the spatial environment was profoundly enmeshed in this violent essence of the colonial condition.

In the case of the conflict between Balo's and Daduwa's clan, the implementation of colonial road infrastructure represented the direct cause of a deadly encounter between two Congolese parties. As the figure of Kangayani indicates, violent incursions could indeed be performed by local middlemen, but the track records of Mostinckx, Vlamynck, and Rao show that European colonial officials did not shy away from using physical violence either. The light sanctions to such behaviour – if documented in the first place – did little to protect its victims. While Belgian colonial rule has often been portrayed as 'more peaceful' than the Leopoldian period, these records show that gratuitous physical violence remained a recurrent trope after 1908. The fact that such an agent as 'Ipapa' Rao, who had 'earned his stripes' during the time of the Congo Free State, continued to represent the Belgian colonial state in the region confirms that continuity.

This brings us back to Pele Ngamo's story about the state post of Kalo, where Rao's problematic behaviour is remembered even a century later. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, historians warn against an excessively European understanding of infrastructural technologies. Anthropologists of infrastructure, in their turn, argue that African spatial understandings go beyond visible geography and physical materiality (see, e.g., De Boeck 2011, Trovalla and Trovalla 2015). If the juxtaposition of Pele Ngamo's story and Pecheur's written accounts show one thing, it is indeed that both men make sense of their spatial environment through significantly different paradigms. They both acknowledge that local populations resisted colonial presence and its accompanying road infrastructure.

In the case of Pele Ngamo's pots, resistance to colonial power was twofold: not only did the pots block the colonizer's physical presence, it also did so in a way that the latter was not even aware of, which, in itself, represented a form of power to

the people of Kalo. As such, Pele Ngamo's story invites us to rethink the supposed monopoly of the colonizer to control Congolese movement and to reimagine restrictions of mobility in the opposite direction. The postcolonial aftermath of the pots, and the villagers' failed attempts to undo their effects, are part of a larger regional history of roadblock politics (Schouten 2022) and centre local agency in a way that colonial actors would never acknowledge. Or, as Pecheur's desire to have more access to Congolese voices shows, never *could* acknowledge.

'Moving beyond the colonial binary' represents an important intellectual exercise to rethink colonial interactions and to find a common ground uniting all actors involved as human beings with hopes, anxieties, and imaginations that influence one another. Yet, this chapter shows that, on the ground, colonial oppositions were often felt and emphasized more starkly than correspondences. After all, as Fanon reminds us, radical difference and its violent imposition formed the essential premise of the colonial enterprise.

Notes

1 The Ubangi separates the Democratic Republic of Congo from its neighbouring countries, the Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic.

2 Gaston Crabbeck, *Rapport en vue de la creation du secteur de la Bari*, 22 October 1938, Archive of Gemena Territory.

3 Interview Gbafo Ndate Antoine, Bozoko 1, 29 July 2014; Focus group discussion, Bogo Wazi, 14 July 2014.

4 *Rapport Annuel du Congo belge*, 1926, p. 69, Africa Archives (AA).

5 Interview Manza Charles, Bokuda, 22 July 2014.

6 Vedast Maes, *Aantekeningen over de Volksverhuizing van de Ngbaka*, s.d., 21. A specific reason for this relocation is not given, although Maes mentions that the pacification of the region remained difficult throughout the 1910s. Possibly, this was a reason to relocate the colonial administrative center of the region.

7 Personal file René Pecheur, SPA 28245, AA.

8 *Rapport Annuel du Congo belge*, 1922, p. 43, AA.

9 Interview Pele Ngamo, Bodigia, 24 July 2014.

10 *Lipapa* (plural *mapapa*) means 'slipper' in Lingala.

11 Interview Senemona, Gemena, 31 July 2014.

12 Lingala is one of Congo's four national vehicular languages, Ngbaka is the local vernacular language.

13 Letter from Pecheur to the District Commissioner, 16 May 1923, GG 5232, AA. Most letters do not mention the name of the district commissioner. Most likely, they are addressed to District Commissioner Parker.

14 Letter from Pecheur to the District Commissioner, GG 5232, AA, affected by mold and insects, date unidentifiable.

15 Letter from Pecheur to the District Commissioner, 3 December 1923, GG 5232, AA.

16 Letter from District Commissioner Parker, 17 October 1923, GG 6307, AA.

17 Letter from Pecheur to the District Commissioner, 7 May 1924, GG 8754, AA.

18 Letter from Pecheur to District Commissioner Parker, 3 December 1923, GG 5232, AA.

19 Letter from Pecheur to the District Commissioner, 9 March 1923, GG 6307, AA.

20 Letter from District Commissioner Parker to René Pecheur, 19 November 1922, GG 8269, AA.

21 Personal file Antonio Rao, SPA 28488, AA.

[22] Letter from the District Commissioner to Rao, 19 March 1916, SPA 28488, AA.

[23] Letter from Captain-Commander Stensbak-Davidsen to Antonio Rao, 21 March 1922, SPA 28488, AA.

[24] Letter from Rao to Captain-Commander Stensbak-Davidsen, 31 March 1922, SPA 28488 AA.

[25] Letter District Commissioner Focquet to Vlamynck, 30 January 1922, SPA 19880, AA.

[26] Maes, *Les Ngbaka*, 46.

[27] GG 5232, AA, document affected by insects, no date or legible sender name.

[28] *Rapport sur l'inspection du territoire de Bosobolo* by District Commissioner Parker, 12 October 1922, GG 8163, AA.

[29] Rapport politique: I semestre 1924 by Pecheur, 11 July 1924, 2, GG 7010, AA. Mongbandi refers to Ngbandi, Kangayani's ethnic affiliation.

[30] Letter Pecheur to the district commissioner, 22 September 1922, GG 6307, AA.

CHAPTER 3.2

Policing the Colonial City: Urban Planning and the Politics of Order in the Port City of Matadi, DR Congo, 1928-1960

Johan Lagae, Jacob Sabakinu Kivilu (†)

Introduction[1]

On 26 November 1945 a major strike initiated by African dockworkers halted all activity in the colonial port city in Matadi for three full days. The event not only constituted a major blow to Belgium's confidence as a colonial power, but also hit Belgium's extractive colonial economy in its heart. It was indeed from Matadi that all goods were shipped to the metropole after arriving from Congo's immense hinterland via the railway running all the way to Kinshasa and bypassing the stretch of the Congo River between both cities which was unnavigable due to the many rapids. In the immediate aftermath of the strike, two schematic plans of the port city were produced, presenting two potential scenarios for a new spatial regime of order in the city (fig. 1-2). Drawn in colour pencil by an unknown author, these schemes provide a synthetic view of Matadi's urban form around 1946. Two green areas make the city's centre, one being the CU or *Circonscription Urbaine* which coincided with was then the *ville européenne* of Matadi adjacent to the port infrastructure on the bank of the Congo River and connected to Kinshasa through the railway, indicated as an arrow with C.F.M.L. on the right of the maps. Situated across a river that crosses the urban territory and runs almost perpendicular to the Congo River, is situated the second green area, indicated here as CEC, an acronym standing for *Centre Extra Coutumier* that from the 1930s onwards was the official term to indicate African quarters or native towns in colonial cities, also known in local parlance and indicated on urban maps of the time as *cités indigènes* ('native towns'). Next to this core of the city of Matadi, the two maps highlight the major roads as well as a series of sites in the urban territory of the port city considered to be of strategic interest: the harbour installations and military camp of Ango-Ango as well as the facilities of the *Petrocongo*-company on the left, and the railway station and hydro-electric installation near the Mpozo river on the right. In addition, the main hospital of the city, and a nearby large-scale farm complex, as well as the Camp Thys, a major workers' camp, are clearly indicated. The main feature of both maps, and their *raison d'être*, however, is the red-cross dotted line indicating the proposed perimeter of the area that needed to be surveyed by the so-called *Police Urbaine* of Matadi. This perimeter differs in size according to the scenario proposed: minimal and excluding the hydro-electric installation in the first, and more extensive and including the latter strategic facility in the second. Strikingly, in both maps, the border of the Congo

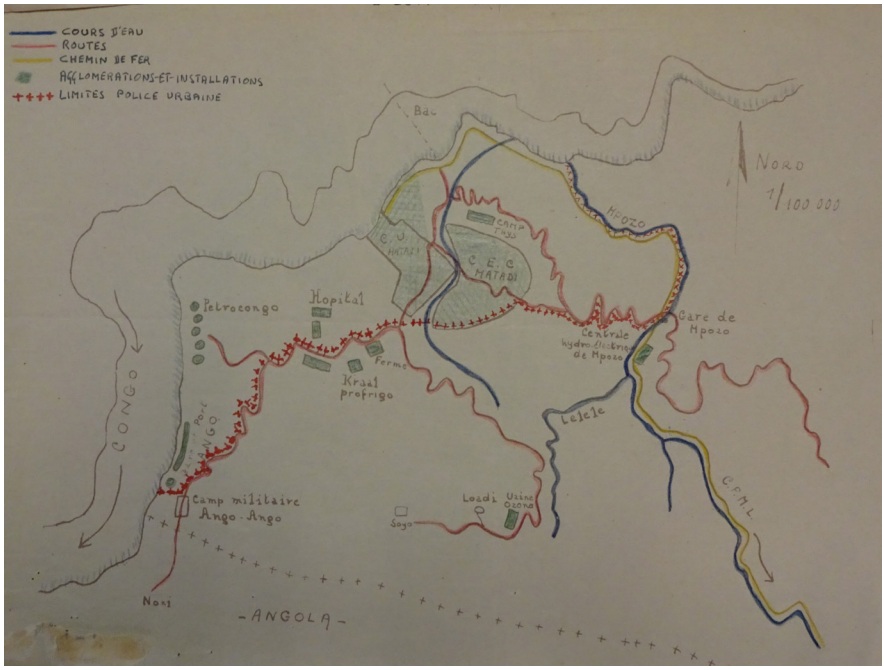

Figure 1: Scenario 1 for defining the perimeter of the working terrain of the Police urbaine in Matadi, and joined to a letter of the then Commissaire Provincial, F. Peigneux, to the Provincial Governor of the Lower Congo region, dated 10 November 1946.

River is highlighted as a hatched zone in blue stripes, suggesting that the natural boundary was also considered a potential threat and a space to be monitored.

The schematic plans are part of a series of archival documents from the colonial administration that provide insight in the reform of the regime of surveillance and maintaining order that was introduced after 1945 in the port city of Matadi. Drawing on the notion of 'spatial technologies', an expression coined by urban geographer Stephen Legg in his analysis of policing in British ruled new Delhi (Legg 2007), we aim to highlight in this chapter the importance of such 'spatial technologies' in any discussion of the textures of power at play in the racially segregated port city during colonial times. Segregating cities is, indeed, to large extent, but, of course, not only, a spatial policy. Moreover, as Carl Nightingale has argued, 'putting a coerced residential color line in place is fundamentally a political act – it involves enormous amounts of power. But wielding that power always involves negotiation and conflict' (Nightingale 2012). While similar stories could be told about other Congolese cities where policing was a challenge – Kinshasa being a prime case in point – we will argue here that Matadi offers a very telling case to unpack the complexity of 'Textures of Power' in colonial Congo: as the main port city of the Belgian colony, it was a node of extreme importance in the infrastructural network underpinning the *mise en valeur* (exploitation)[2] of the colonial territory, requiring a constant influx of labour

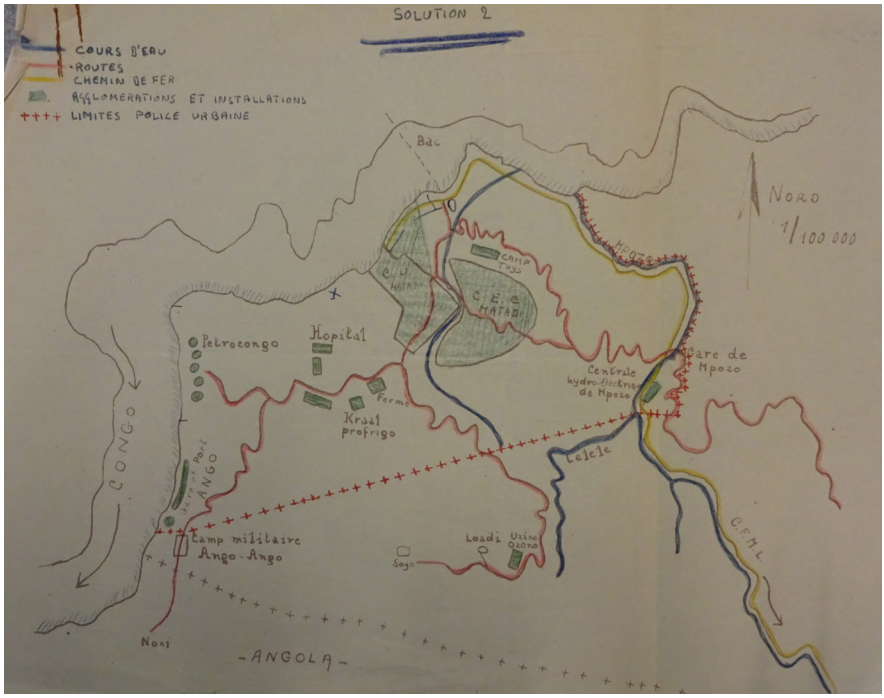

Figure 2: Scenario 2 for defining the perimeter of the working terrain of the Police urbaine in Matadi, and joined to a letter of the then Commissaire Provincial, F. Peigneux, to the Provincial Governor of the Lower Congo region, dated 10 November 1946.

which often needed to be recruited from regions far away; situated on the Congo River, and only a few miles from what was at the time Portuguese-ruled Angola, Matadi moreover was a site of national strategic interest. Rivalry with Portugal for colonial territories, and especially over the strategic connection of Central Africa's vast hinterland to the ocean via the Congo River, had sparked tensions since the establishment of the Congo Free State. As a port city, Matadi was by default a *ville flux*, with its dynamic and ever-changing population including members of communities from the Lower Congo region, reputed for their discontent of colonial order, as well as inhabitants who had access to other, potentially subversive contexts, such as the community of seafarers employed on boats navigating to Antwerp who were a target group of the surveillance strategies of both colonial agents and missionary fathers. Policing the port city thus was a challenging task, and it required action from both the colonial army and urban police forces, while several companies active in the port city had their own police force.

In this chapter, we will demonstrate how from the 1920s onwards the booming port activities as well as a series of epidemics caused colonial policy makers to develop and implement explicit 'spatial technologies' to monitor and maintain order in the bustling port city. In line with emerging scholarship on policing in

colonial contexts (Blanchard et al. 2017; Brunet-la-Ruche 2012; Fourchard & Olawale 2003, Lauro 2011), our narrative will both discuss these strategies from above and address moments of tension and failure, witnessing the inherent 'weakness of colonial power' and the 'nervousness' of the colonial state (Hunt 2016). The location where the city of Matadi was built was chosen because it constituted the farthest navigable point upstream the Congo River when coming from the Atlantic Ocean. The topography of the site, an extremely hilly area comprising mainly rocks, would prove the city's Achilles' heel, something, as will be argued, was well understood by those eager to challenge the colonial order.

Safeguarding a Strategic Gateway to and Exit From the Belgian Colony

In the context of the so-called 'Scramble for Africa', during which European powers negotiated the division of the continent (Pakenham 1991), King Leopold II proved a skilled diplomat, securing for himself during the notorious Berlin Conference of 1884-85 an immense territory in Central-Africa. The King understood very well that if the immense territory of the future *Etat Indépendant du Congo* (or Congo Free State) was to be of any benefit, it would require that he gain access and control, if only partially, over the estuary of the immense *Fleuve Congo* on the Atlantic Ocean, as the river could guarantee unlimited access to and from this territory from the Atlantic Ocean via the Congo River. In the Lower Congo basin, the Congo River formed, to quote a 1933 study, the 'vital artery' of the infrastructural network undergirding the extractive colonial economy (Devroey & Vanderlinden 1933). It was precisely for this reason that Matadi was chosen as the farthest point upstream the Congo River from the ocean, since rapids made passage all the way up to Kinshasa impossible. A railway bypassing this unnavigable stretch, constructed between 1890 and 1898, formed the crucial cornerstone of the infrastructural network undergirding the project of *mise en valeur* (exploitation) of Congo's immense hinterland. Without it, as Stanley famously stated, 'Congo would not be worth a penny'. Of course, Portuguese rulers understood the interest of this access to the ocean via the Congo River all too well. A 1952 study of the borders of the Belgian Congo by an official from the Ministry of Colonies reminds us that the southern border between what was to become the Congo Free State and Portuguese ruled Angola had been defined at the Berlin Conference of 1884-85 '*d'une manière générale et lacuneuse*' (Jengten 1952, 53). From the ocean up to a point near Matadi, the centre of the Congo River constituted the border between the two colonial territories, from where it turned into a straight demarcation line running deep inland, parallel with the latitude of 6° South. It would take several decades before the border took its final form. Yet even today, anyone walking from Matadi's city centre to the southwest will cross the frontier after a short distance of only eight kilometres, arriving immediately in Noqui, a small settlement already situated on Angolan soil.

This condition explains why there was, from the very beginning, a strong presence of the *Force Publique*, the colonial army, in Matadi. Founded to guarantee the sovereignty of the colonial territory, the *Force Publique* played an important role in maintaining order in the urban centres during the early days of the colonization of Central Africa (Mabiala 2019). It would not be until 1928 before a proper urban police force became operational in Matadi, even though, in 1898, the *Compagnie du Chemin du fer du Congo*, responsible for the construction of the railway line between Matadi and Kinshasa, had put its own police force in place to safeguard its installations (Sabakinu Kivilu 1981, 122). The early presence of the *Force Publique* in Matadi is evocatively depicted in a detail of the so-called *Panorama du Congo*, an immense painted canvas of 14 by 115 meters that was the centrepiece of the Congo Palace on display at the Ghent World's Fair of 1913 (Lagae 2013), while an unpublished map of 1904 indicates the existence of a large military camp and a training ground close to the *Place de Commissariat*, where the residence of the local governor was situated. When, in the 1920s an additional port infrastructure was built a little downstream on the Congo River, in the nearby site of Ango-Ango, we quickly see the traces of a second military camp appear on this spot in the urban maps of the time. Ango-Ango's strategic importance resulted from the fact that it was here that inflammable goods were stored, a safe distance from the city centre, and that the installations of *Petrocongo*-company were built there. But it is the *Camp Redjaf*, the new, large military camp constructed in the immediate post-war years, that till today speaks in the most telling way of the continuing rivalry between the two colonial powers of Belgium and Portugal and of Matadi's crucial role as the gateway to and from the immense Congolese hinterland. This camp's location, being somewhat outside of the city centre, also indicates that, by the 1950s, the *Force Publique* no longer functioned as an urban police, but rather acted primarily as the armed forces responsible for safeguarding the integrity of the territorial sovereignty of the Belgian Congo and the protection of the ever-growing port infrastructure. Yet, as will be discussed below, the *Force Publique* would also be fundamental in maintaining order in the port city in moments of great social discontent, as was the case during the 1945 dockworkers' strike.

Expanding a Booming Port City

The decision to establish Matadi at precisely that point on the river, beyond which navigation upstream was no longer possible, was the result of strict economic reasoning rather than of careful considerations of whether the site was in fact suited to building a city. This became particularly clear when the port city started to thrive from the 1920s onwards because of the large investment plan that was launched at the time by the then Minister of Colonies, Louis Franck. Port traffic in Matadi increased steadily, with more and more international vessels berthing there, and

Figure 3: 'Le port et une partie de la ville de Matadi en 1926' [original caption].

the total amount of cargo handled rose considerably. In his famous travel diary, a Belgian journalist writing under the name Chalux, described the port city in 1923 as follows: '*Matadi est une révélation. Quelle activité ! Quel modernisme ! Voilà ce qui est encourageant ! S'il n'y avait pas les noirs, l'ambiance et la chaleur, on se croirait dans un port européen*' (Chalux 1925, 24). This increase in the economic activity of Matadi inevitably required large investments in the port's infrastructure, but also a need to increase significantly the labour force working for *Compagnie Maritime Belge* and the *Compagnie du Chemin de Fer du Congo*. The white population, including a substantial amount of non-Belgian Europeans, remained quite small throughout the colonial era, but from the 1920s onwards Matadi witnessed a major demographic growth by more and more Africans arriving in the city, often from far away regions: the total population more than doubled in two decades, from approximately 5,000 inhabitants in the early 1910s to almost 12,500 in 1930, increasing to almost 19,500 by 1945, and growing further in the post-war years: from around 36,000 in 1950 to almost 75,000 on the eve of independence in 1960 (Sabakinu Kivilu 1981). Photographs of Matadi in the mid-1920s, illustrate the extent to which the port infrastructure had developed by then, with large quays dotted with cranes (fig. 3). Workers' camps accommodating the ever-growing labour force, were beginning to constitute a large part of Matadi's urban fabric.

Two events that took place in 1927 would have a fundamental impact on the reshaping of Matadi's urban form. The first was a fire that devastated a large part of the city centre, which required the rebuilding of a large part of the urban tissue, an operation that resulted in a beautification of the city's skyline. On 22 December 1927

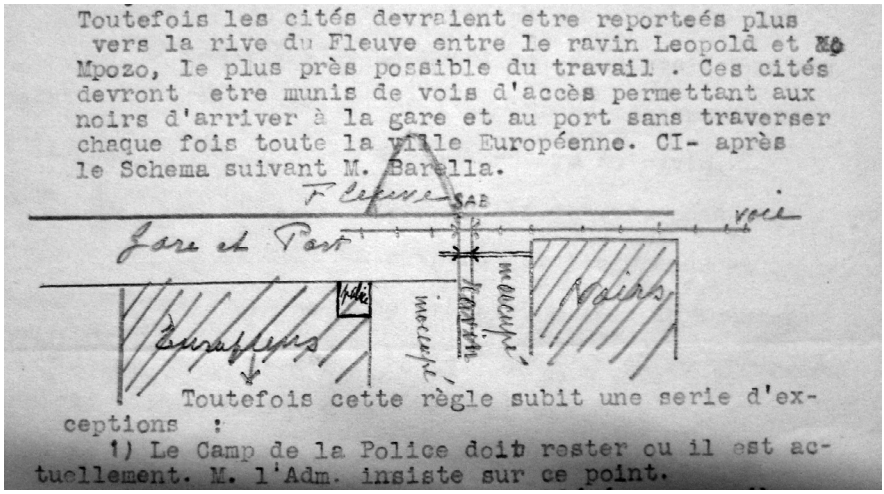

Figure 4: Sketch included in the minutes of the meeting in Matadi on 20 September 1928 on the issue of the 'emplacement définitif des Cités indigènes et du camp Construcol'.

the port city was confronted with the outbreak of a yellow fever epidemic, which had a devastating impact, as colonial authorities were forced to shut down the port for almost two months. The affair triggered measures to sanitize the port city and in 1928 a radical decision was taken to completely segregate the city according to racial lines (Lagae Sabakinu Beeckmans 2019). The minutes of a meeting between prominent members of Matadi's society, organized on 20 September 1928, including a diagram of the city's new spatial organization, are particularly revealing in respect to the racial reasoning that underscored this operation (fig. 4).

To create distinctive urban zones for Europeans and Africans, their residential areas would be separated by a *zone inoccupée*, for which a natural cliff named the *Ravin Léopold*, running in North-South direction, almost perpendicular to the Congo River, served as the backbone. Moreover, the diagram prescribed that a direct connection was to be created between the 'native town' and the port and railyard infrastructure, without the workers having to cross the city centre, where Europeans lived, on their way to work. The existing police camp, as the meeting minutes reveal, was seen as to be ideally located to allow a control of the flows to and from the port area and could thus be maintained.

Future extensions of the port city of Matadi largely followed the guidelines proposed in the 1928 meeting, guidelines that were, in fact, already in practice in other colonial territories in sub-Saharan Africa and would soon become common principles of colonial urban planning throughout the Belgian Congo, after architect-engineer René Schoentjes had published his template for a *ville congolaise* in 1933 (Beeckmans & Lagae 2015). But because of the complex topography of the site and the rocky soil in those areas where the new extensions of Matadi's *Centre-Extra-Coutumier* were

Figure 5: Bird's eye view of Matadi, ca. 1956 with in the front the railway yard and, on the right, part of the port facilities. The city center is in the middle ground on the right, with left of it the police camp, military camp and the prison. Running diagonal in the image is the Ravin Léopold with across it Matadi's C.E.C.

planned, these operations proved quite challenging, especially as regards urban sanitation. As can be seen from maps and photographs of Matadi dating from the late 1950s, the urban fabric of Matadi's CEC on the eve of independence was a patchwork, consisting of several workers' camps and *cités indigènes*, with telling names like *Bruxelles-Sud* and *Bruxelles-Nord* (fig. 5). Remarkably, the lay-out of new extensions followed a grid, the square nature of which conflicted with the extreme topography of the site, witnessing the disconnected nature of planning principles defined by the colonial administration based in the metropole and realities on the ground.

'Spatial Technologies' for Maintaining Order in Matadi's CEC

While the minutes of the 1928 meeting had stipulated explicitly that the African neighbourhoods needed to be connected directly to the port and railroad facilities (fig. 4), most of the inhabitants living in the CEC would take a steep urban staircase downhill and cross the *Ravin Léopold* via the centrally located bridge called today the *Pont Kiamfu*. As a result, this narrow passage turned into a major bottleneck

for the large flows of people going to or coming from work in the port facilities or railway yard. But because of its rather central location in the urban territory, the *Pont Kiamfu* also forced them to walk right through the city centre to reach their destination. Not coincidentally a small police office was located next to the bridge, while a *Camp de Policiers* also already existed nearby. A military camp would be added in this zone during the 1930s, where a new prison was built to replace the previous one which not only had become obsolete but moreover was located, '*contre tous les principes admis, en plein centre de la ville européenne*', as the *Commissaire de Province* wrote to the central administration in Kinshasa in 1934.

Considered together, the infrastructural cluster comprising the *Camp Police*, the new prison and the *Camp militaire*, all located on the side of the '*ville europeénne*' in close proximity to the *Ravin Léopold* and the various bridges that crossed it, especially one leading directly to the *cité* of Sanza, was clearly conceived as a buffer zone allowing a control of mobility between '*la ville haute*' and '*la ville basse*' of Matadi. As such, it constituted a crucial 'spatial technology' of the segregated port city. Within the boundaries of the CEC, this 'spatial technology' was complemented with a series of public facilities, including a tribunal, an anti-venereal clinic, a social centre for Congolese women and the *Cercle Paquet*, a leisure club for African men and women. Dominating the CEC like an acropolis, and built on top of an existing cemetery, stood the impressive missionary complex of the *Paroisse Notre Dame de Fatima* comprising a church, a residence for the fathers, and two schools with a major sports terrain (fig. 6). Today, the older generations of *Matadiens* remember vividly the unsettling effect that erasure of the cemetery had on the population of the CEC. The overall spatial organization of Matadi's CEC thus speaks of the extent to which architecture and urban planning were instruments of a much broader project of social engineering, reaching its peak during the era of the Ten-Year Plan which sought to introduce a 'welfare colonialism' in the Belgian Congo.

While on paper, 1930s urban plans of Matadi seem in tune with the 'sanitary syndrome'-principles which defined colonial urban planning in the interwar period (Beeckmans & Lagae 2015), the specific solutions implemented in the port city posed challenges. The *Ravin Léopold* made the racial division in the urban form very palpable. But because it was a natural cliff, with a river running through it, it did not constitute a 'cordon sanitaire' protecting the *ville européenne* from potential health threats coming from the CEC. During long periods of the year, the *Ravin Léopold* indeed was full of pools of stagnant water, creating ideal breeding grounds for mosquitos. Many, often large-scale infrastructural projects aimed at the channelling of the *Ravin* were designed by the technical services of the colonial administration, yet none of them left the stage of paper architecture because of a lack of funds. Overall, sanitizing the city and particularly the CEC proved a mission impossible (Lagae, Sabakinu & Beeckmans 2019): until the eve of independence, Matadi suffered from a significant lack of public toilets and the provision of drinkable water was extremely complicated. Moreover, as the CEC expanded, so did the

Figure 6: Public facilities in Matadi's C.E.C., situation mid-1950s, with at the center the impressive missionary complex the Paroisse Notre Dame de Fatima consisting of church, a residence for the fathers, and two schools with a major sports terrain, which was built on an existing cemetery. Below is the Ravin Leopold, with the Point Kiamfu as the main crossing.

risk of erosion. Because of the booming demography, triggered by the increase of activities in the port city, dwelling conditions in Matadi's CEC soon became extremely very precarious as many internal reports of the colonial administration reveal. During a meeting of the *Comité Protecteur des Centres-Extra-Coutumiers du Bas-Congo* held in 1952 doctor Schlesser evocatively stated that '*des situations semblables à celles du CEC de Matadi ne se rencontrent qu'à Singapour, Shanghaï, Hong Kong*'.

Monitoring the Booming Port City

The colonial administration desperately tried to monitor and get a grip on the situation in the CEC. Weekly, monthly and annual reports full of statistics were produced and circulated in between the different levels of colonial bureaucracy, to provide a solid basis for action and urban operation. This paper regime, however,

created an impression of control, rather than constituting a truly effective policy instrument. Part of such documents capture the extremely heterogeneous composition of the port city's African population which complicated policy matters further. In terms of demographic data, the reports on Matadi's CEC dating from the 1950s are particularly rich. They provide detailed information not only on the distribution of men, women and children, but also give indications on profession, marital status, and ethnic origin. Particular attention was given to the significant number of African *Matadiens* who were arriving from Portuguese-ruled Angola in the south and the enclave of Cabinda in the north, as the boundaries between the two colonial territories were extremely porous. Many people resided in the CEC on a contemporary basis, which required a specific permit. Urban citizenship in the African quarter of Matadi thus was a complex affair, requiring not only the right permits, but also a constant negotiation of one's position, as having work was a prerequisite to being able to remain in the city.

To maintain order in the booming port city of Matadi, a *Police urbaine* had been created in 1928, to take over the work of surveillance from the *Force Publique.* It complemented the *Police Manucongo,* which was run by *Otraco,* the company in charge of the port infrastructure and railway yard and of supervising the control of the port area and its workers' camps which were situated in the CEC. Throughout the interwar years, complaints were voiced in official reports regarding the lack of sufficient numbers of policemen, as well as their quality, or the absence of adequate equipment and gear. The number of policemen would be raised in the coming years, and by 1946, after a reorganization, a tripartite force was set up to maintain order in the port city: a *Police urbaine* at the time numbering 95 staff members, which was responsible for the area of the city centre; a *Police CEC* of 40 men, specifically tasked with safeguarding order in Matadi's African quarters, and a *Police Otraco* counting 35 members, protecting the port infrastructure and railway yard. However, maintaining order in Matadi's CEC involved not only the Africans who belonged to one of these three police forces. In times of trouble, soldiers of the *Force Publique* could still intervene. Moreover, several Africans were recruited to help govern the CEC. A report on the situation of Matadi's CEC, written by F. Peigneux, the then assistant of the *Commissaire de District*, in December 1937 provides detailed information on these intermediate figures, like *chefs de centre* and *conseillers*, who formed a crucial connection between the African population and the colonial authorities and were responsible for, among other duties, raising and collecting taxes, staffing the CEC's tribunal and helping organize all kinds of activities. Postwar reports suggest that the recently appointed *Chef du Centre*, Michel Ngadi, proved to be a major asset for the colonial administration because of his motivation and his uncontested authority, while colonial administrators' comments on African *conseillers* were often bleak and derogatory. However, so were many passages regarding the widespread problematic behaviour and incompetence of the European staff within the colonial bureaucracy.

Colonial Order and Its Discontents: The Strike of 1945

Maintaining order in the segregated port city of Matadi was, first and foremost, a question of monitoring mobility, as the daily rhythm of the city, structured through sirens calling workers to and from work, created flows of huge crowds between the *ville haute* and the *ville basse* of Matadi. If Matadi's urban planners had conceived the cluster of the *Camp Police*, the *Camp militaire* and the new prison as a buffer zone, in spatial terms the city's segregated urban form was, as we argued above, flawed from the very beginning because most labourers working in the port or the railway yard took the *Pont Kiamfu* and crossed, on their way to work, the city centre of Matadi and the centrally situated *Place de Commissariat*, Matadi's main urban square where the residence of the provincial governor, the main post office, the central bank, the cathedral and the *Hôtel Métropole* were located. Everyday patterns of mobility in Matadi thus contradicted the very spatial principle of the segregated colonial city.[3]

The drawback of this peculiarity in the city's spatial organization was to become clear when on 26 November 1945 a major strike broke out among the dockworkers living in Matadi's CEC. Tensions had been rising for some time, as the war-years had proved to be extremely demanding on the African population throughout the territory of the Belgian Congo and particularly in Matadi, the main port city. This had created strong discontent among the large population of workers active in its port and railway yard and resulted in this major strike. Interestingly, the bridges over the *Ravin Léopold*, and particularly the *Pont Kiamfu*, played a major role in the way the strike developed. In an article providing an account of the event, published on 1 December 1945 in *Le Courrier d'Afrique*, a newspaper of catholic signature, it was reported that the strike started on Monday morning with African workers, armed with '*machettes, batons, lances, tubes en acier, etc.*', assembling on the bridges, thereby blocking passage and bringing the port city to a complete standstill. A faction of the strikers made their way from the bridges to the installations of *Ango-Ango* and *Pétrocongo*. On the other side of the city, they also succeeded in occupying the bridge over the Mpozo and the railway line, thus closing all access to and from Kinshasa, either by car or train. The strike, so the newspaper reports, soon turned into a revolt (*émeute*), causing the colonial authorities to install armed forces near the bridges and the barricades close to the Mpozo bridge, and finally opening fire on the strikers the next day, killing seven and injuring another sixteen *émeutiers*. With the road to Kinshasa reopened, armed forces from the capital city were brought in and the whole CEC of Matadi was quickly seized. A spatial mapping of the conflict reveals how the segregationist logic of colonial urban planning could be reversed by the African population and how the *Pont Kiamfu* suddenly became the city's Achilles' heel. It is a case in point of how colonial strategies of spatial segregation could be completely undermined by tactics deployed by the colonized.[4]

Urban memory work conducted in the 1970s among Congolese inhabitants reveals the ruthless way in which the uprising was crushed by the colonial government (Jewsiewicki, Lema and Vellut 1973). House-to-house searches were conducted, often violently and intrusively, bars were closed throughout the CEC, and the curfew became even more restrictive, allowing no circulation between the two parts of the city from 5 PM to 6 AM. Europeans experienced the conflict very differently, and, as we learned from some interviews, many of them had sought refuge in the *Hôtel Métropole*, while the prominent members of Matadi's colonial establishment, including the directors of major enterprises, retreated on a boat to be ready to leave immediately when necessary. Yet, archival sources indicate that the strike was not only a question of discontent with harsh labour conditions, but was, at least in part, also triggered by a much more fundamental contestation of colonial power. In fact, as stated in the above-mentioned account published in *Le Courrier d'Afrique,* during the night the *émeutes* were accompanied by '*des cris et chants Ngounzistes*', a term used in colonial jargon to refer to spiritual practices having their origin in the *Kimbanguist* prophetic movement which had emerged in the Bas-Congo in the early 1920s (Vellut 2005, M'Bokolo & Sabakinu 2014). Quickly becoming a major concern for the colonial government, this movement, which, in fact, was more of an ensemble of different factions with divergent agendas, had already led to massive actions of civil disobedience among the rural population during the interwar years, including the refusal to pay taxes, to comply with sanitary guidelines or to enrol in tasks of forced labour.

An inquiry commissioned by the colonial administration suggested that the 1945 Matadi strike was fuelled by the influence of such discourse of civil disobedience thriving in parts of the Bas-Congo region, particularly among the inhabitants of *Manianga*, a small settlement near *Luozi*, situated some 200 kilometres on the Congo River upstream from Matadi. In a note to the central administration in Kinshasa, dated 20 May 1946, colonial authorities in Matadi described workers recruited from this region as '*gangrenés par des theories mystico-religieuses à tendance xenophobes*'. Getting rid of these workers was a tricky affair, however, as the colonial enterprises who employed them were mostly positive about their performance at work. Moreover, the colonial administration feared that the arrest of a member of their community, accused of being one of the instigators of the strike, could potentially fuel an uprising in *Manianga*. A 1946 report of an internal inquiry conducted by Zita Baka, *Chef de secteur Sumbi à Matadi*, suggests that the role of members of the *Manianga*-community in the 1945 strike was not unanimously welcomed by all inhabitants of Matadi's CEC, however, as it stated that many considered the conflict '*une affaire de ngounza et non plus une affaire de salaires*'. In the aftermath of the 1945, various factions within the CEC population were indeed trying to carve out a space of their own within the port city's urban society. Yet, if not all favoured the agenda of the *Manianga*, the slow response of colonial authorities in bringing to justice the '*vrais coupables*' behind the strike did

result in an overall feeling of disappointment and even of general distrust towards colonial authorities among the population of Matadi's CEC.

Reforming a Failing Police Force and Reinforcing Its Spatial Technologies

The report on Zita Baka's inquiry was particularly unsettling for the colonial authorities as it demonstrated that members of the *Police CEC* had been largely complicit in the 1945 strike, stating that '*la police du centre est complètement pourri, penche ouvertement pour le clan Ngounza*', while the same could be said of the *Police Manucongo*. Only the *Police urbain* had remained loyal and even played a crucial role in bringing down the uprising, together with soldiers from the *Force Publique*. It led to a reform, installing a *Police Territorial*, which should be composed of a '*corps d'élite*'. To achieve this, great attention was given to providing agents with decent accommodation, uniforms and gear of good quality, as well as a sufficient and powerful armoury. Most importantly, numbers of the police force were to be increased significantly, from a total of 170 elements at the time of the strike to around 230 or even, if possible, 250, preferably recruited among the younger generation and from far away regions so that they would not be influenced by the subversive community of the *Manianga*. This police force should be complemented by a *Service de sûreté*, which, by using so-called *détectives*, would be able to infiltrate the community of Matadi's CEC to collect sensitive information, much as was being proposed around the same time in the mining city of Lubumbashi, for instance.[5]

This reform also had consequences for the spatial organization of policing in Matadi. The existing police camp was complemented by a new one, located at the former *Camp Otraco*, near the *Ravin Léopold*, while a new major military camp, the *Camp Redjaf*, was also erected, strategically located on the crossing of the roads leading from the city centre to, respectively, the port infrastructures of *Ango-Ango* and of *Pétrocongo*, which had been targeted during the strike. The working terrain of this newly established *Police urbain* was the subject of some discussion, as the two maps we described in the introduction of this chapter make clear (fig. 1-2). But the reform was about more than just defining the perimeter in which the *Police urbain* could perform its action. During 1947-48, multiple meetings were organized to develop spatial strategies to protect the city's strategic sites. Proposals included the protection of the port infrastructure with a fence, conceived as a 3-meter-high metal grill with high-voltage current cables, complemented by watchtowers and powerful floodlights. Entry to the port site for Africans would depend on the possession of an aluminium ID-card, a so-called '*dispositif chaînette-bracelet*', which each African worker was supposed to wear around the wrist. Similarly, there was a plan to close off the installations at *Ango-Ango* and *Pétrocongo*. The Congo River itself was seen as a potential threat and a restriction was imposed on navigating with *pirogues*, canoes used by local fishermen. No canoes were allowed within

a ten-meter-wide zone along the river's bank, and none after dusk. Finally, the port was to receive its own *Camp police*, where a *corps d'élite*, tasked with the surveillance and protection of the crucial port infrastructure, would be housed. Due to a lack of funds, little came of implementing these new 'spatial technologies'. As often in the Belgian Congo, pragmatism prevailed over ambition by necessity.

Surveillance of Everyday Realities in a Port City

Port cities, by their very nature, are very complex urban environments to monitor, as they are subject to continuous flows of people and goods moving in and out. In that respect, we should not only focus on extraordinary episodes like the 1945 strike but also try to grasp emic experiences of everyday 'Textures of Power' at play in Matadi. The accounts on Matadi written in the mid-1950s by Antoine-Roger Bolamba, a Congolese journalist working for *Le Voix des Congolais*, a government-initiated periodical providing a platform for the emerging class of so-called *évolués*, provide us with some elements (Bolamba 2009, Tödt 2021, 27). As do internal reports of the colonial administration on the port city and its CEC, when addressing, for instance, issues like alcohol consumption, prostitution or theft in the harbour.

The above-mentioned 1937 report written by F. Peigneux contains explicit passages on the failing capacity of the colonial authorities to monitor with precision what was really going on in the *cités*. His report mentions 230 officially reported infractions on nocturnal movements for the year 1937, although it is fair to assume that this number only presents a fraction of the times the curfew was in fact bypassed. Peigneux also stressed the impossibility of monitoring with precision the consumption of alcohol in the CEC, even if it was subject to a very specific tax regime. The policeman in charge of controlling the tax payments was accused of being corrupt and bars possessing a licence to sell beer often functioned, so Peigneux suggested, as brothels. The supervision of prostitution in the CEC was equally deficient, while its practice in the Belgian Congo was already clearly regulated by an Ordinance dating from 5 November 1913 (Lauro 2005). According to Peigneux, there were at least 200 prostitutes '*non soumises à la visite médicale*' and the doctor responsible for their inspection did not keep records. Reports on the activities of the *dispensaire anti-vénérien*, a facility situated near the *Pont Kiamfu* and which, according to Bolamba, '*est très actif*', provide detailed statistical data on the matter. The 1954 report, for instance, lists 1,021 patients under treatment for syphilis. In one of his accounts, Bolamba touches on the topic, pointing at the 'troubling' presence in the port city of '*femmes vagabondes*' who would arrive via the Kinshasa – Matadi railway line, but also from the adjacent territories of Portuguese-ruled Angola in search of opportunities (Bolamba 2009, 49-51).

Apart from information related to prostitution, postwar annual reports also provide data on the consumption of alcohol in Matadi and do so in surprising detail.

In 1953, for instance, it was noted that there were twenty-five bars in the African quarter of Matadi, compared to three in Thysville and nine in Boma, the two other major urban centers in the Lower Congo region. The total consumption of bottles of alcohol was also monitored, indicating that in 1951 on average a *Matadien* was said to drink 87.73 bottles annually. In all, infractions related to *ivresse publique*, 'public drunkenness', that led to an official public penalty notice, documented in official reports, remained remarkably low: fifty-four in Matadi for 1951. Bolamba, by contrast, writes that especially on arrival of a '*cargo américaine ou anglaise*' the bars in Matadi's CEC would be packed and that '*la consummation de la bière et du "stout" est formidable*' (Bolamba 2009, 51). As such, it is fair to assume that average statistics on alcohol consumption compiled in the official reports fail to consider the different rhythms of daily life in the port city. Discussions on the number of bars that should be allowed in Matadi's CEC indicate the colonial administration's ambivalence to the issue. Indeed, the consumption of alcohol was not only a matter of concern, but also fundamental to the economic survival of the colonial city as taxes on alcohol constituted a crucial portion of the revenues allowing investments in the infrastructure of the CEC's infrastructure. The colonial authorities' attitude towards beer consumption, similarly to that of economic activities of *femmes libres* for that matter, were often driven by pragmatic reasoning rather than by considerations of sustaining the image of a *mission civilisatrice*.[6]

Similarly, positive accounts on the '*vigilance des policiers*' in Matadi appearing in newspapers, especially those targeting a metropolitan readership, contrasted with realities on the ground. In September 1948, for instance, at the precise moment discussions on the police reform were ongoing, the port city witnessed a wave of thefts in the warehouses of the *Otraco* that lasted for months. It necessitated a long inquiry of the *Police Territoriale* before the gang (*bande de voleurs*) involved could finally be apprehended. The results of this inquiry were troubling, however. Apart from the involvement of some Belgian and Portuguese traders, four African staff members of the custom service turned out to be complicit, as well as 17 policemen of *Otraco*, a number that, quite significantly, constituted one third of its actual manpower. The Matadi case thus confirms what recent scholarship has already made abundantly clear, namely, that colonial policing often 'shows the essential weakness of colonial empires' and that the colonial police force always was a 'two-headed beast', with the African population being both subject and actor of policing, which inevitably blurred the effectiveness of operations (Blanchard et al. 2017).

'*Quand la Ville Bouge*': Sailors in the Port City

To grasp this 'weakness' and, more broadly, the complex 'Textures of Power' in the port city of Matadi, it is useful to turn attention to one specific group within Matadi's urban society, namely, the *marins Congolais* or sailors. Urban memories we collected

in the period 2009-2010 reveal that when a boat arrived in Matadi, coming from the *métropole*, '*la ville bougeait*' (Lagae, De Palmenaer & Sabakinu 2012). Indeed, as sailors were paid on arrival, such moments always created an atmosphere of expectation among the inhabitants of the CEC. For a couple of days, local commerce would thrive in the African quarter, where, according to a 1951 report, around 160 small traders were active, while bars would see a strong upsurge in clientele, as would the city's prostitutes. The soundscape in the CEC also changed, as the arrival of the sailors was the moment *par excellence* to see the many orchestras and bands perform. After a trip in July-August 1946, Bolamba pointed explicitly at this phenomenon, writing that '*à leur arrivée à Matadi ils [les marins noirs] "brûlaient" leur argent sans souci avec les amis et les desmoiselles d'un jour*' (Bolamba 2009, 50). Because their travels to the metropole provided them with opportunities, the Congolese sailors who lived in Matadi for only some months during the year occupied a somewhat distinct position in Matadi's urban society. Mocked for their distinctive dress code, wearing elegant shirts, costumes, shoes and hats purchased during their trips in European port cities, and often nicknamed by the inhabitants of Matadi '*les trop chauds/trochauds*' ('those who cannot tolerate the heat') because they walked around weaving their handkerchiefs, sailors tried to carve out a particular place for themselves in Matadi's urban culture in a way not unlike the so-called *Sapeurs* of Congo-Brazzaville and Kinshasa were and still are doing (Gondola 1999, Charpy 2021) (fig. 7).

When writing to the central administration in Kinshasa at the end of 1949 to request an immediate implementation of the promised reorganization of Matadi's police force, the Provincial Governor Nauwelaert explicitly singled out the sailors as a group of concern within Matadi's urban society: '*Si l'on n'envisage que la seule surveillance des équipages de bateaux (marins européens et marins de couleur), il faut admettre que cette surveillance demande à elle seule une organisation spéciale.*' Further internal reports indicate that *ivresse publique* (public drunkenness) was one of the causes of discontent among the administration and Matadi population associated with sailors, both African and European, navigating the city. Tellingly, a sign

Figure 7: Unidentified sailors walking Matadi's C.E.C.

next to the entrance of the *Hôtel Métropole* mentioned '*ni chiens, ni marins*' ('no dogs, no sailors'), as we learned from our urban memory work.

Because of their capacity to travel between the colony and its metropole, sailors were ideal intermediaries for those who were seeking to smuggle goods and information in one direction or another. Already in the 1920s, colonial authorities started to become aware of the role played by Congolese sailors in the spreading of communist propaganda in the Belgian Congo, and Bolamba's accounts reveal that the phenomenon continued after the war. '*Le complexe matadois*', he wrote, '*est un veritable problème. Matadi est un port international; comme telle cette ville est le centre de toutes les illusions et d'idéologies perverses*', stressing the 'noxious' influence of ideas being brought in by sailors from different European origin as well as the so-called 'coast-men', coming from mainly West-African coast areas (Bolamba 2009, 53).

Displaying great concern about this matter, the colonial authorities, as well as the *Compagnie Maritime Belge* and the Catholic missionary congregations active in Matadi, took measures to monitor the movements and activities of African sailors, both in Matadi and Antwerp. This included the founding of a home for sailors in both port cities (Lagae, De Palmenaer & Sabakinu 2012). In Antwerp, a new home *Amicale des marins congolais* was opened and inaugurated in the early 1950s. In Matadi, the home for Congolese sailors was built in the immediate postwar years. Called *Ndako Ya Biso*, or 'Our House', it was located near the *Pont Kiamfu*, close to the *Foyer Social* of Matadi, which was the place where their spouses were welcomed and would receive training in practical and social skills, in order to turn them into docile spouses. One striking initiative developed by Father Nuyens, the catholic priest responsible for running the sailors' home in Antwerp, was to provide the often-illiterate sailors and their family members an opportunity to send recorded audio-messages to and from the home front. Remarkably, these pre-recorded audio-messages would be broadcast publicly, to be heard by the whole population of the CEC, using the loudspeaker infrastructure installed a few years before in the context of the development of radio programmes targeting the African population in Matadi. That the colonial authorities noted with surprise that soon after its launch in 1953 the broadcasting initiative already had to be put 'on hold', because it was met with a complete '*désintérêt de la population*', speaks of its incapacity to anticipate African discontent with what were, in essence, extremely patronizing experiments of social engineering.

Conclusion: Colonial Policing and Negotiating Urban Citizenship in a Congolese Port City

Matadi, as we have tried to demonstrate in this paper, offers a particularly interesting case for gauging the discrepancies between colonial policies of surveillance and maintaining order, and realities experienced on the ground. We argue that

investigating 'spatial technologies' of segregation and their, often limited, impact and porosity forms a particularly useful lens through which to study such discrepancies. The site on which Matadi was planned and built proved extremely challenging with respect to constructing a healthy and fully segregated city, due to its extreme topography. Its segregated urban form, as initially planned in 1928, was implemented with a major flaw regarding the mobility patterns it generated: large flows of African workers needed to cross the city centre on their way to work. Moreover, because of the very heterogeneous and fluid African population, which continued to grow exponentially during the colonial era, maintaining order in the port city proved highly complicated. The police force set up to tackle the issue was never sufficient in number, nor did it constitute the *corps d'élite* that the colonial administration deemed necessary to conduct a successful policing of Matadi. Furthermore, the colonial agents proved not always up to their task and at times displayed conduct contrary to what was expected. Specific moments of turmoil, like the 1945 dockworkers' strike, in addition to more mundane episodes of everyday tension and conflict, especially at times when '*la ville bougeait*' because of the arrival of ships bringing large flows of sailors into the city, reveal that colonial authorities understood well the issues at stake, but were, in the end, incapable of responding to them efficiently and with lasting effect.

Archival Research

This article draws on substantial archival research in collections both in Belgium and the DR Congo. In Belgium these include the archive of the former Ministry of Colonies and the papers of the former *Gouvernement Général* in Kinshasa, which are held in the State Archives in Brussels. A key file for this chapter is GG 18597, which contains numerous internal reports on the situation in Matadi's CEC and the required police reform dating from the second half of the 1940s. The collection of maps held in the *Cartothèque* fund also provided crucial source material. We also used the extensive photographic collection of the Africa Museum in Tervuren. In DR Congo, archival research was conducted in the 1970s and 80s by Jacob Sabakinu Kivilu in the administrative archives in Matadi, which have, unfortunately, since disappeared, and now only exist as copies in the personal archives of his family. This material included many reports on the functioning of the CEC, like those of the *Comité Protecteur des Centres-Extra-Coutumiers du Bas-Congo*, and also the report written by F. Peigneux, entitled 'Note sur le fonctionnement du CEC de Matadi', dated 22 December 1937 from which we have frequently cited.

Illustration Credits

Figure 1: Africa Archives, Brussels, File GG 18597.
Figure 2: Africa Archives, Brussels, File GG 18597.
Figure 3: HP.1960.5.1471, coll. RMCA Tervuren; photo E. Karlman, 1926.
Figure 4: File GG 16485 (courtesy AA, Brussels).
Figure 5: photograph taken from an album of the Amicale des marins congolais, coll. Felixpakhuis Antwerp
Figure 6: Drawing by Sam Lanckriet & Bram Vandemoortel, based on archival documents from the Africa Archives, Brussels. © Ghent University, 2015.
Figure 7: Photograph taken from an album of the Amicale des marins congolais, coll. Felixpakhuis Antwerp.

Notes

[1] This paper is based on research on Matadi conducted at the Department of Architecture and Urban Planning of Ghent University (UGent) since 2005 in close collaboration with Jacob Sabakinu Kivilu. It complements the latter's PhD dissertation on the socio-economic history of Matadi presented in 1981 at the University of Lubumbashi. The research benefitted from the input of many UGent students during research seminars and master's dissertations, and was made possible through funding from FWO, MAS and UGent. The research has resulted in several article publications, book chapters, and presentations at international conferences. Its final form will be the forthcoming publication of a historical atlas of the port city of Matadi during the colonial period, co-authored by Johan Lagae and Jacob Sabakinu Kivilu, in collaboration with Luce Beeckmans and several UGent research assistants, in particular, Sam Lanckriet and Bram Van de Moortel. This chapter is dedicated to the memory of the late Jacob Sabakinu Kivilu (1945-2021).

[2] In this context, we will translate *mise en valeur* as exploitation, following a translation used in Goddeeris et al., *Colonial Congo. A History in Questions*, 2024.

[3] It was not until the late 1940s, when the *Camp Thys* was built by *Otraco*, that such a direct connection between the CEC and the place of work of their African workers was established.

[4] For a similar tactical undermining, see our discussion of the *ruelles sanitaires* in colonial/postcolonial Lubumbashi (Lagae, Boonen & Lanckriet 2017).

[5] The use of such *detectives* infiltrating the CEC's population was also deployed in Lubumbashi in the postwar period (Boonen 2019, De Nys Ketels 2022).

[6] This is not unsimilar to what was done in other colonial territories, e.g., in British India (Legg 2014).

CHAPTER 3.3

Building Walls, Arranging Rooms: Values and Designs in Prisons of the Belgian Congo, 1908-1960

Valentine Dewulf

Introduction

Over the last twenty years, research has shown that the articulation of sub-Saharan colonial prisons aligned with the political and economic imperatives of colonization (racial segregation of prisoners and widespread use of penal work). Colonial prisons were a significant tool for the reaffirmation of colonial domination (Bernault 1999 and 2007). Several studies have introduced nuances to these conclusions and argued that after the Second World War, colonial authorities began to pay attention to the rehabilitation of detainees, echoing the European penological trends at that time (Killingray 1999, Hynd 2011, Bruce-Lockhart 2022). These new ambitions, however, yielded a limited number of results. Research has documented the disastrous state of certain prisons and has pointed out that the colonial authorities linked the precarious conditions of detention to structural difficulties, like as great a lack of funding for prisons, as for individual behaviours, for example, abuses committed by European wardens, African intermediaries or by prisoners themselves (Fourchard 1999, Diallo 2005, Konaté 2018, Tiquet 2019). In the Belgian Congo, colonial authorities used the same narratives to justify the state of the prisons (Piret 2014).

While these arguments are not without foundation, they are also, at least in the Belgian case, full of contradictions. Thus, throughout the colonial period, colonial authorities drew attention to the lack of financial resources in the colony but never budgeted for the cost of building and maintaining a Congolese prison.[1] So, beyond structural deficits and individual abuses, it is perhaps through the very contradictions of different types of power conveyed by colonialism that one should interpret some conditions of detention. This chapter defends the ideas that the architecture and layout of Congolese prisons are based on a series of principles that the colonial authorities were unable to reconcile and that the resulting tensions sometimes led to the deterioration of detention conditions.

Architecture is based on a set of values and reflects is found (Norberg-Schulz 1968). In Congolese prisons, the distribution of spaces was based on three ontological principles that convey values associated with the Metropole and/or that reproduce practices of segregation and hierarchies more widely shared in colonial societies. Through the notion of 'less eligibility', developed below, the first principle explores the colonial conception of prisoner. As the chapter shows, the principle of less eligibility presented concrete consequences for the layout of

prisons and detention conditions. The principle of racial segregation was also a crucial component in the conception of prisons. It reaffirmed racial hierarchies and resulted in quarters in urban prisons where white (men) and black (men or women) prisoners were normally not in contact. Finally, gender segregation had also an effect on the architecture of Congolese prisons, creating female and male quarters in penal institutions. G

Based on original archives, this chapter raises questions about the interrelation of penological, imperial, and colonial aspects in the Belgian Congo and tries to show how colonial authorities used and routinized (or tried to do so) different types of power in a unique institution. The chapter is divided into three parts, each briefly examining one of the principles identified above.

Less Eligibility

The principle of less eligibility is based on the idea that a prison sentence is a deterrent – and thus effective – only if the living conditions of the poorest are better than those of the condemned. Still widely adhered to today, this concept originated in Great Britain during the Victorian era (Sieh 1989). During the colonization of Congo, it was also commonly defended by colonial authorities. In 1920, while addressing members of the Belgian Parliament, the Minister of the Colonies Louis Franck advocated for an extension of the colonial administration's authority in the judicial domain, as the dispersal of courts would make it impossible to adapt the principle of the separation of powers to Congo without significant injustices:

> When a crime is committed today in Congo, the culprit is not to be pitied: if convicted, he will be put in prison, where he will be housed and fed in a way he has never experienced in his village, and he will live peacefully and tranquilly. […] Those who are to be pitied much more than the culprit and the victim are the witnesses. They will be taken away from their environment for a long time […] and be transplanted into conditions of food and housing very different from those to which they are accustomed; it has happened that some have died on the journey to the *chef-lieu* or while waiting for the trial.[2]

By associating prison with housing and food, the Minister linked the penitentiary system to the paternalism promoted by colonial authorities in the interwar period. The Minister's statements also predict the possible tension between paternalistic ambitions and the principle of less eligibility. This tension is made more visible in another area of paternalistic action: the provision of medical care. In 1946, when questioned about the distribution of sanitary agents in the region, the chief medical officer of the Équateur province objected to assigning one of them to the detention camp of Itotela, arguing that the surrounding populations were too far from the

camp for the sanitary agent to be able to simultaneously care for both them and the prisoners. Furthermore, according to the chief medical officer, the surrounding populations 'deserve more of our attention than seventy or so convicts.'[3] This point of view, based on the principle of less eligibility, is not incompatible with the law, which stipulates that sick prisoners have to undergo medical examination only 'if the conditions of the medical service permit.'[4]

In other contexts, the colonial authorities used the principle of less eligibility to challenge legal prescriptions. This included prison layouts, as illustrated by the debates in the early 1930s regarding the surface area and volume of cells for Congolese detainees. These issues attracted the attention of the colonial authorities after a fire in 1932 killed forty-six of the seventy-six inmates of the prison of Dubulu (province of Équateur). An investigation into the fire concluded that a detainee had started a fire in the prison and that the blaze had spread through the straw on which prisoners slept. Detainees, chained and panicking, could not escape. Subsequently, the architecture of the prison, which neglected prescriptions regarding the surface and volume of cells, was criticized. The Minister of the Colonies himself, Paul Tschoffen, expressed to the Governor General

> The painful astonishment, I would even say indignation that I felt when I noticed the inhumane way in which the indigenous prisoners were treated in Dubulu. I cannot fathom how a State agent, whose first and most important duty is to represent, in all circumstances, in the eyes of the indigenous populations, the tutelary and paternal sovereignty that Belgium intends to exercise over its African subjects, can forget even the most elementary principles of humanity by putting 76 human beings in a 38 square meter hut.[5]

The Minister of the Colonies concluded his statement by recalling the prescriptions regarding the surface area and volume of cells for Congolese detainees.

These regulations, however, were quickly contested by the chief engineer of the colonial administration, who opposed them with the principle of less eligibility: 'to comply with these instructions […] we would need cells 8.33 meters high! I assume that is not what was intended. […] I also assume that we don't want to show more concern for detainees than for workers' whose accommodations are smaller than the cell dimensions prescribed by law. The chief engineer concluded, 'We don't want to treat detainees better than workers.'[6] Faced with the paternalism promoted by the Minister of the Colonies, the engineer used the argument of depreciation inherent in the principle of less eligibility to negotiate a new spatial distribution in prisons.

The engineer's arguments did not lead to any new regulations, but the legal prescriptions were still not complied with. In 1933, a fire again had disastrous consequences at the prison of Bosobolo. The police commissioner in charge of the investigation conceded that some prisons were often 'absolutely inadequate, poorly ventilated and in a very advanced state of disrepair.'[7] This description

seems to fit the Bosobolo prison, as each prisoner at the time of the fire had less than half a square meter in which to sleep, leading the police commissioner to remark, 'It is not much, obviously.'[8] In his conclusions, however, the policeman rather predictably did not mention the detention conditions, which inevitably tarnished the image of the colonial administration, from the factors that facilitated the spread of the fire or the asphyxiation of the prisoners. Instead, he highlighted 'the carelessness and recklessness of the natives' who 'like to huddle together in order to share warmth with each other' and 'have the habit of sleeping with fire.'[9] In contrast to the chief engineer of the colonial administration, the police commissioner did not use an argument based on the principle of less eligibility to justify the cramped conditions of the prison. Instead, he drew a portrait of the natives based on cultural differences with Europeans and on well-known prejudices such as the idea of 'gregarious Africans'. This image also served to legitimize another fundamental principle of prison organization: racial segregation.

Racial Segregation

To maintain a hierarchy of races, European and indigenous convicts in most African colonies were submitted to different prison regimes. The differences concerned disciplinary sentences, forced labour, dietary regime and, most important of all, segregation. Given the belief among the colonizers of the 'gregarious nature' of Africans, indigenous prisoners were detained together while Europeans were held in individual cells (Bernault 1999). In the Belgian Congo, many metropolitan and colonial authorities believed that the mere presence of European detainees on Congolese soil weakened the racial hierarchies. In 1934, the Minister of the Colonies Paul Tschoffen encouraged the repatriation or expulsion of white repeat or long-term sentence offenders on the grounds of 'the requirements of our civilising mission, our determination to ensure effective protection for the natives, our concern [...] for the prestige of the white man and the respect for his authority.'[10] In the Congo, the colonial authorities largely shared the view of Tschoffen and translated it into concrete issues. Many argued that keeping European convicts out of sight of Africans was a necessary condition to maintain order and racial hierarchies. To meet this requirement, the colonial authorities dealt with two related issues: the construction of prisons reserved for Europeans and the control of the movement of European detainees out of the prisons.

In 1911, one of Tschoffen's predecessors, Jules Renkin, encouraged the construction of prisons reserved for European convicts.[11] If Western prisoners were detained most of the time in a specific quarter closed to indigenous convicted quarters in urban prisons, a few prisons exclusively reserved for European detainees were built during the interwar period. One of them was located in Bandundu. Surprisingly, this prison also served as a pied-à-terre for transient European free

men while white detainees were housed in tents.[12] The change in the use of the Bandundu prison raised a series of questions about the nature and the applicability of the prison regime to which Western convicts were subjected and about the compatibility of preserving racial hierarchies in prison and the principle of less eligibility. These issues were also at the heart of policies put in place to control the movement of European detainees.

Throughout the interwar period, the colonial authorities attempted to adapt the prison regime to minimize the presence of European convicts in prison. In 1936, the district commissioner of Léopoldville called for medical visits to white detainees to take place inside the prison rather than at the hospital, stating that 'it is preferable, for many reasons, to expose them to the public view as little as possible.'[13] One of these reasons was probably the behaviour of some European detainees outside the prison. In 1933, still in Léopoldville, a Belgian convict was escorted by a soldier of the *Force Publique* to a clinic to receive treatment for an ear infection. On the way back, the Belgian stopped at a café, because, in his words, he 'had been deprived of beer for a long time and couldn't resist the desire to have a drink.'[14] When the prison director questioned him about this bold detour, the convict downplayed the significance of his actions, saying that he 'had a drink, left the rest of the bottle and left.' He added: 'I stayed there for barely two minutes. There were no other customers in the café. Nobody knows me. The soldier stayed next to the café and no one could have noticed that I was escorted.'[15] Aware of the challenges facing the colonial authorities when detaining Europeans, the prisoner presented arguments related to visibility and the preservation of racial hierarchies to negotiate a more lenient disciplinary sanction. If the scene described by the prisoner did occur, it implies a confusion between the prisoner and a free man ('no one could have noticed that I was escorted'). From this perspective, the preservation of racial hierarchies in prison comes into tension with the principle of less eligibility.

This tension is further complicated by the fact that in colonial prisons the principle of less eligibility applied to European detainees involved two distinct types of depreciation logic. First, it referred to the discrepancy between the detention conditions of European inmates and the living standards of white settlers. Second, it referred to the discrepancy between the detention conditions of Europeans held in Congolese prisons and those of prisoners incarcerated in Belgium. A brief example illustrates the nuances that the principle of less eligibility encompasses. In 1932, an entrepreneur established in Costermansville hired a butcher still in prison for embezzlement. The former employer of the butcher protested against the hiring to the provincial administration. Using an argument based on the principle of less eligibility, he considered this hiring scandalous with regard to unemployed free settlers: 'If the [new employer] is currently associated with a common convict, it seems to us that he could break off his association and take up a new one with one of the too many unemployed Europeans who have remained honest despite their

misfortune.'[16] The governor of the province shared this view, although he interpreted the principle of less eligibility from a different perspective. According to him, 'given the nature of the work to which [the European convict] was subjected, and the conditions under which it was performed, it can be said that he completely escaped the penal treatment, already so mild in'.[17]

More generally, the penal work of white prisoners raised other issues, such as the nature of work (in comparison to the work to which Congolese are subjected, inmates or not) or the monitoring of work, in principle managed by African soldiers. These issues became more urgent when the (European) warden of the prison of Stanleyville entrusted white convicts with the task of monitoring African penal labour, as a substitute for African jailers (Piret 2016: 142). Other wardens protested the alleged rudeness displayed by African soldiers towards white detainees.[18] Again, these examples illustrate the constant tensions between the preservation of racial hierarchies and the principle of less eligibility.

The inability of the Belgian colonial authorities to integrate racial hierarchy and the principles of less eligibility into the prison regime had indirect consequences for the detention conditions of other prisoners. These inmates constituted a sort of category of the 'invisible' (Odasso 2020): those who were neither white nor black. In 1932, during a meeting with the Minister of the Colonies, a delegation from the Association of Hindus pleaded for Indian convicts in Congo to be subjected to a prison regime distinct from that of Africans, citing the requirement to preserve racial hierarchies.[19] The following year, a gubernatorial circular gave instructions on the prison regime to be applied to Indians, hierarchising the regime between Europeans and Asians: Indian convicts were subjected to the same dress code and penal work as Europeans but had a food ration 'as close as possible to that of Asians.'[20] This new hierarchy also influenced the spatial organization of the prisons: the gubernatorial circular mandated that, like the case of Asian inmates, a common cell be reserved for Indian detainees and separated from the indigenous and European prison quarters.

In addition to the case of (non-Western) foreigners, the hierarchy of 'races' disregarded the case of mixed-race or *métis* detainees. This silence is hardly surprising. In a classic study, Ann Stoler has shown that *métissage*, because it transcended established racial categories, was perceived as a source of subversion by colonial regimes, which saw it both as a threat to colonial prestige and as a symptom of the European moral decay (Stoler 2010: 80). Despite the subversive potential that the very existence of *métis* posed to colonial domination in the Belgian Congo, the prison authorities had no specific policies for this type of convict until the end of the 1940s. Most of the time, *métis* detainees were assimilated to indigenous prisoners. At the end of the colonisation, while new legislation framed the rights of *métis* (Heynssens 2017), the highest colonial authorities urged prison administrations to reconsider the case of mixed-race inmates.[21] No uniform policy was put in place, however, until the independence.

If the importance given by colonial authorities to racial hierarchies blurred the visibility of non-Western foreign and *métis* inmates, another category of prisoner remained invisible: women. Gender segregation, which concretely consisted of the construction of quarters exclusively reserved for female inmates, is the third principle by which Congolese prisons were organized.

Gender Segregation

During the nineteenth century, policies of separating male and female jailers and inmates were introduced in Western prisons. Although the principle of gender segregation remains variably applied over time and space for prison staff, the separation of male and female convicts is still a structuring principle of prison organization today (Rostaing 2017). While this separation still aims to preserve a certain morality, it is based on conceptions of women and men that evolve. For instance, the well-documented case of France shows that the image of a fragile woman subject to male violence gradually replaced the dominant conception of the 1830s, according to which women are dominated by their 'urges' and are therefore the main obstacle to male convicts' rehabilitation (Perrot 2002). More generally, historiography tends to show that prison architecture is partly based on gender stereotypes constructed at cultural, structural and individual levels (Britton 2003: 220-24). In the Congo, penal institutions were gradually influenced by similar mechanisms.

During the Belgian colonial rule, it seems that gender segregation was linked less to the colonial authorities' view of women than to their view of Congolese men. It remains difficult, however, to go beyond this hypothesis: while gender segregation was already enshrined in legislation at the end of the nineteenth century, it was little commented on by prison administrations until the 1950s. This silence was partly due to the low number of women imprisoned over the decades (Piret 2014). A simple transposition of gender stereotypes circulating in Western prisons to the colonial context was, at best, ill-suited. The notion of rehabilitation or amendment, for example, only entered the discourse of colonial authorities at the end of the Second World War, while the bodies of African women *and* men were (hyper)sexualized throughout the colonial period.

Colonial prison authorities referred only to male sexuality, albeit sporadically, and most of the time saw it as predatory. In 1950, in Stanleyville, the warden of the central prison reported that a fight had broken out between two prisoners because the first one 'had approached the women's quarter and his opponent had told him to stay away, that he wanted to reserve the female prisoners as "mistresses" for him and for the inmates categorized "dangerous."'[22] A few years later, an official from Kivu charged the African jailers, concluding that native guard could abuse their authority and reclaim sexual favours from the female inmates.[23] The colonial

press also echoed this type of accusation. In 1956, a journalist wrote anonymously that 'there are prison jailers who take a malicious pleasure in stripping certain female prisoners in the presence of men so that they can mock them. Are we also talking about women who are raped or the unnatural acts that take place every day in prison? After all a Congolese in prison is a human being and deserves respect.'[24] This quotation calls for at least two comments.

Firstly, it suggests that the colonial prison authorities did not institute sexuality-control policies in line with the moral standards of the time. As in the metropolitan area, the authorities implicitly tolerated homosexual relationships (in prison or elsewhere), even though most condemned them morally. Some prisoners shared this ambivalence. In a letter censored by the penal administration in Stanleyville, a detainee wrote in 1956: 'What I hate most in the world is having [a] homosexual relation with another man. But as so many others do, I will try it once to get the idea.'[25] Others more clearly associated homosexuality with a form of deviance. Describing the daily life in the same prison of Stanleyville, Patrice Lumumba testified that 'to console themselves in their misery, [the prisoners] invent everything that is condemned by morality: men transform themselves into women, and most of the influential detainees each have their own 'special' woman. […] This is commonplace in prisons. How scandalous it is!'[26] This vision, associating a sort of predatory sexuality with power, is still common after the Congolese independence (Monaville 2021: 277-81).

Secondly, the newspaper quotation shows that, despite the imposition of gender segregation, a strict separation between men and women was not guaranteed in Congolese prisons. Until the end of the Second World War, only a few voices openly opposed the promiscuity between male and female inmates. One of these voices was the influential philanthropist Jeanne Van der Kerken, founder of the metropolitan association *Pour la protection de la femme indigene* ('For the protection on the indigenous woman'). In 1935, she made three suggestions to the Minister of the Colonies to improve the situation of Congolese female inmates. She called first for a clearer separation between men and women, pointing out that 'measures were taken in the past to isolate in more suitable places women who were nursing their children; this measure, taken in a spirit of great humanity, cannot, however, be favourable from a moral point of view to the black woman, whom isolation depresses.'[27] Van der Kerken also wanted the staff in contact with female detainees to be women. Finally, she favoured the introduction of sewing courses, cooking, vegetable gardening and childcare for female prisoners.

Tinged with racism, Van der Kerken's suggestions echoed the social engineering mechanisms that circulated in the colony at the same time, aimed at confining Congolese women to domesticity and motherhood (Hunt 1990). During the interwar period, however, the colonial authorities never launched ambitions programmes to train female convicts in domestic tasks. Only local initiatives appeared, such as in the Élisabethville prison, where social workers provided weekly sewing

and housework classes to female prisoners in 1936.[28] This initiative stood at the crossroads of specific colonial social policies developed during the interwar period (with the development of *foyers sociaux*) and of rehabilitative programmes related to the new conception of penology in Europe, the 'penal welfarism' (Garland 1985), that won popularity in colonial spheres after the Second World War. This entanglement had concrete consequences. As long as learning domestic tasks was seen as an extension of the social policies deployed in the Belgian Congo, it remained potentially ephemeral in prison (because of the tension with the principle of less eligibility). During the 1950s, however, when it was clearly defined as part of the rehabilitation of female convicts, the highest members of the colonial administration considered the absence of learning programmes as the default and questioned the capacity of penal structures to provide workshops or classrooms.[29]

Conclusion

Architecture and layouts of Congolese prisons transcribe a diffuse, contradictory yet invasive practice of the exercise of colonial power. Prison designs are based on a complex articulation of depreciation and segregation mechanisms that encompass penological, colonial or imperial logics. While the principle of less eligibility was conceived in Europe and applied to both African and Europeans inmates in Congolese prisons, racial segregation was consubstantial with colonial power. Gender segregation was based on conceptions shared in Europe and at the same time on stereotypes specific to Africans. The multiplication of ideological frameworks on which colonial prisons were based resulted in contradictory situations. This is illustrated by the potential incompatibility of the principle of less eligibility and the respect of racial segregation in the circulation of European condemned in public spaces. Furthermore, the articulations privileged by colonial authorities varied from one prison to another and presented concrete impacts on detention conditions, resulting for example in illegally exiguous quarters for African inmates. In this sense, the articulations of principles were profoundly invasive.

The inability of the colonial authorities to reconcile a series of ontological principles in prisons placed penitentiary practices in arbitrary or even ambivalent forms of power. Hesitations met by prison administration in the imposition of a compulsory work to European prisoners illustrate the inability of the colonial authorities to impose a coherent prison regime. The polysemy of the principle of less eligibility applied to European inmates reinforced the ambivalence of colonial power. This ambivalence was still at stake in the treatment of foreign or *métis* prisoners. The cases of these inmates illustrate that prison architecture failed to grasp all the asperities of social dynamics of the colonial situation. Furthermore, the inability to translate ontological principles in the mobility and segregation of detainees reinforced ambivalence and arbitrariness. The discrepancy between

moral vision linked to gender segregation and the usual contact of female inmates and male prisoners or jailers highlights the limits of colonial power.

Finally, articulations between principles of less eligibility, racial segregation and gender segregation illustrate the various and plastic conceptions of colonial power. While discourses about less eligibility shed light on paternalistic ambitions of colonial powers, carceral mobility imposed by segregation is as much a mechanism of colonial domination as an illustration of the disciplinary power imposed in prisons. After the Second Word War, the introduction of social workers in a few Congolese prisons linked carceral power to rehabilitative ambitions as much as more global welfare and development paradigms proper to the end of the colonisation.

Notes

1 Minister of the Colonies to Governor-general. 15 June 1933. Brussels. AA, GG 15799.
2 *Annales parlementaires de la Chambre des Représentants*. Session 1920-1. 24 November 1920: 19.
3 Chief medical officer to provincial governor of Équateur. 24 August 1946. Coquilhatville. AA, GG 12613.
4 Gubernatorial ordinance of 15 October 1931. Art. 12.
5 Minister of the Colonies to Governor-general. 9 July 1932. Brussels. AA, JUST 150A.
6 Chief engineer to chief medical officer. 29 September 1932. Léopoldville. AA, GG 15799.
7 Fire incident report. 20 March 1933. Coquilhatville. AA, JUST 150A.
8 *Ibidem*.
9 *Ibidem*.
10 Minister of the Colonies to Governor-general. 30 June 1934. Houthulst. AA, JUST 75B.
11 Minister of the Colonies to Governor-general. 22 November 1911. Brussels. AA, GG 7396.
12 Assistant medical officer to chief medical officer. 24 September 1928. On the road. AA, JUST 149A.
13 District commissioner of Léopoldville to provincial governor of Léopoldville. 29 July 1936. Léopoldville. AA, GG 16500.
14 Detainee file. 12 July 1933. Léopoldville. AA, GG 16158.
15 *Ibidem*.
16 Director of the SAAK to district commissioners of Kivu. 25 August 1932. Costermansville. AA, JUST 149A.
17 Governor of Province Orientale to Governor-general. 21 February 1922. Stanleyville. AA, JUST 149A.
18 Warden of Léopoldville prison to officer. 1st March 1934. Léopoldville. AA, GG 16201.
19 President of the Association of Hindus to provincial governor of Costermansville. 17 December 1934. Costermansville. AA, GG 7803.
20 Governor-general to provincial governor of Costermansville. 9 November 1933. Léopoldville. AA, GG 7803.
21 Provincial governor of Kivu to district commissioners of Kivu. 19 January 1956. Bukavu. AA, GG 7803.
22 Warden of Stanleyville prison to district commissioner of Stanleyville. 22 March 1950. Stanleyville. AA, GG 13924.
23 Conclusions to the stage made in Belgian prison. 1956. Not located. AA, GG 7803.
24 M.D.V., 'Un scandale !', *La Chronique congolaise*. 22 December 1956.
25 Letter from Gabriel M. 1956. [Stanleyville]. AA, GG 11028.
26 Lumumba P. (1961) *Le Congo, terre d'avenir, est-il menacé ?* Bruxelles: Office de Publicité: 89.
27 Jeanne Van der Kerken to Minister of the Colonies. 11 June 1935. Brussels. AA, JUST 149A.
28 Annual report on penitentiary regime. 1936. Not located. AA, JUST 149B.
29 Second *Plan décennal*. 1959. Not located. AA, JUST 150A.

CHAPTER 3.4

Textures of Power in Kinshasa Prison: Regulation by Violence and Mafia-Style Arbitrariness

Sylvie Ayimpam, Jacky Bouju, Michel Bisa Kibul

Introduction

This contribution analyzes the textures of power tested by a group of inmates at Makala prison in Kinshasa (DRC). For indeed, in 'experimenting new propositions and untapped resources' to manage the Makala prison, the Congolese Ministry of Justice has created textures of power of a particular style, entrenched in multifaceted 'dynamics of order and hierarchy, of law and arbitrariness, of violence and compliance'. Therefore, the texture of power at Makala prison brings together the experiences of a particular time and place. But before going any further, we need to clarify the concept of power that underpins our analysis. The notion of power has been the subject of countless theoretical discussions in political sociology, which are impossible to account for within the limits of this chapter. We shall therefore confine ourselves here to presenting the arguments that justify our analytical grid to account for the textures of power at Makala prison.

Despite the diversity of competing interpretations of power, the most recent analyses of this concept (Morriss 2002, Pansardi 2012a, Dowding 2008) have in common defining it in a non-normative manner (Pansardi 2012c), both as an 'ability' to act and as an 'ableness' to mobilize the resources necessary to achieve the result sought in the action. Ableness refers to the notion of 'capability' (Sen 1987, 1993; Dawding 2008: 239). This ability/ableness distinction is a considerable advance in thinking about power. Nevertheless, the above definition is too general to describe our case. So, to the individual conception of 'power to' based on an actor's personal competencies, talent, or skills (Dahl 1957), we prefer a relational or social conception of power, 'power over' (Pansardi 2012b), which refers to the 'ability to control others' (Wrong 1968: 677). This relational, or social, conception of power involves considering the strategic use of other actors' power that can weaken or strengthen control (Dawding 2008: 255). The difference between ability and ableness to exercise social power, can thus be interpreted as the difference between a social actor's capacity, what he is entitled to do 'theoretically' (depending on his place, social status and resources) and his ableness, what he is able to do 'in practice', by strategically using his resources depending on those of other actors in the specific context and circumstances of the action (Dowding, ibid.). We believe this relational conception of power is apt to render the grain of power relations as they occurred in the field. In addition, our emic approach to the inmates' view and experience of power will highlight the representations of the actors.

As we shall see, at Makala, the power of the inmates' leader is grounded in his ability to control the inmates by making decisions and taking actions that engage the whole inmate community. This power is legitimate since it has been officially delegated to him by the supervisory official authority. However, his ableness to exercise power, that is, to control the inmates effectively, relies on a single resource: the monopoly of violence. But unlike the Weberian model, the monopoly of violence held by the holder of power is neither legitimate nor legal. It is not illegal, but it is non-legal, a simple consequence of the *laissez-faire* of legal authority. From then on, the inmates' leader and his staff exercise power as they see fit, subject only to their own judgment. Without any external constraints, they exercise an undivided 'domination' over the prison community (Pansardi 2012c: 23; Weber 2013). Governing by violence is a means of extorting prisoners' property and thus sustaining the 'Power Syndicate' organization (Catanzaro 1993, Grajales 2016) of the inmates' leader. It is the empirical analysis of the sources and resources of power held and used by the Makala prison wardens that has led us to elaborate this power conceptual grid. We believe it provides a clearer picture of the textures of power used at the Makala prison.

After presenting the historical context behind the transformation of Makala prison into a 'warehouse prison' (Combessie 2009), we will show that the prison authorities' decision to endorse a two-headed management system that gives the whole prison management power to a group of inmates (Ayimpam and Bisa Kibul 2020), is at the root of this group's transformation into a mafia-style organization, peculiarly a 'Power Syndicate' as defined by Anton Blok (1974) and Raimondo Catanzaro (1993). We then present the sources and resources of this Power Syndicate, its legitimacy, its 'ability' to govern inmates and its ableness to do it through the monopoly of violence. The Power Syndicate is also an 'economic Syndicate' through the pervasive extortion of inmates that feed its organization. We will take a closer look at the extortion system, and especially the sharing of the booty that characterizes this texture of power at Makala. We will then turn to a comparative perspective, highlighting the surprising similarity between the mafia-like fate of the Congolese prison of Makala today and that of the Calabrian prison of the Castello del Carmine in Naples in the nineteenth century (Saggiorato 2016, Dickie 2020). This comparison will allow us to conclude by showing that what is common to historical, geographical, and cultural contexts as different as twentieth-century DRC and nineteenth-century Italy, is the absence of the state (as holder of the monopoly of legitimate violence able to oppose social violence) or the weakness of its regulatory ableness (Reynaud 1988, 1997).

The Historical Context

To describe the textures of power of Makala prison and analyze its characteristics, we will first present the context in which the site of this prison was officially

organized as a 'warehouse prison', entrusted to the custody of certain inmates as part of an official delegation of management by the prison administration. The textures of power we describe at Makala prison are thus a creation of the institution, and more specifically of the Ministry of Justice.

The Site

The prison's current governance is the result of a very specific historical context. Since 1982, the Congolese state has been subject to the restrictions of Structural Adjustment Programs, and in the 1990s found itself in a situation of bankruptcy, and consequently unable to finance the country's prison system, whether for the upkeep of inmates, the salaries of prison staff or the organization of the prisons themselves. As a result, Makala prison has become a site in which there are no longer any police officers or guards inside the detention center. There are, however, police and military members of the presidential guard, who only secure the outer walls. To maintain the incarceration of criminals and delinquents, and therefore the functioning of the prison, it was decided to ensure a minimum of prison management and to maintain a prison director.

However, these measures did not solve the crucial problem of financing prison operations. The Catholic and Protestant prison chaplains took up the slack, mobilizing charitable associations to provide food and sanitary donations, and asking prisoners' families to make a financial contribution towards their upkeep. As a result, inmates are almost exclusively cared for by their families, who bear the costs of detention, including legal fees, food, and material upkeep. This humanitarian solution has been a success. To this day, families send money to their detained relatives, and food supplies from national and international charities regularly stock the prison.

The Style: The Mafia-Like Drift of the Inmate Aid Management System

Over time, however, this management system has gone astray. The large sums of money collected and managed by the chaplains attracted the covetousness of the inmates who assisted them in the management and distribution of aid. Seeing this as an opportunity for personal enrichment, these inmates, who were sentenced to long prison terms, removed the chaplains from the management of the aid, which they took entirely into their own hands. The power to manage the prison has thus passed into the hands of the inmates. Powerless, the official prison administration ratified the situation by allowing the prison director to 'officially' delegate the internal management of the detention center, the prisoners' security, and guard duties to the inmates' leader, who had taken over the management of external aid. This leader is a heavily sentenced prisoner, locally known as Governor General or Kapita General. He heads a team of prisoners-inmates who rule the prison with an iron fist.

This political decision has had far-reaching consequences on the dynamics of order and hierarchy. First, prison governance officially became two-pronged. Management power is shared between the official Director (who resides in the administrative building outside the prison) and the Kapita General, head of the inmate-guards, who rules inside the prison. Second, it turns the prison into a 'warehouse prison'. This is a type of prison conceptualized by Stastny and Tyrnauer (1982), in which the sole aim is to neutralize the inmates, and in which prison power is shared between the official warden and the inmate society, to whom certain aspects of internal organization are delegated (Combessie 2009: 82). The Makala warehouse-prison is isolated, separated from the administrative building, where a few prison officers and civil servants from the Ministry of Justice (secretaries, accountants, intelligence officers, etc.) have no direct contact with the inmates. The only contact between the outside administrative space and the inside prison space is ensured by the close relationship between the 'official' prison warden and the 'real' warden, the Kapita General. What's more, unlike other types of warehouses-prison at Makala the entire internal organization is delegated to the 'inmate society' headed by the Kapita General. This delegation of authority establishes a 'fundamental divide' (Ibid: 7) between inmates, now divided into 'inmate-guardians' who are members of the Kapita General's governing organization, and 'inmate-prisoners' who are subject to them. The distinct style of the Makala prison is that of a 'total institution' (Goffman 1979), namely, a physical social institution where individuals, placed in a homogeneous situation, are cut off from the outside world, and where their lives are regulated by the institution without their consent.

The Dynamics of Power and Hierarchy

The group of prisoners led by the Kapita General can be analyzed as a 'Power Syndicate', in the sense defined by Alan Blok (1980) and Raimondo Catanzaro (1993). The concept of a Power Syndicate refers to 'a political organization' that controls a territory and demands tribute for all the affairs that take place there. The power Syndicate is a classic example of political specialization: 'The fundamental aim of the power Syndicate is the control of the environment and of the individuals who are part of it; and so, from this point of view, the mafiosi have been defined as power brokers' (Catanzaro 1973: 3). Within this conceptualization framework, the Kapita General can therefore be seen as a 'political entrepreneur', a power broker who organizes and directs a Power Syndicate.

We will now examine the specific political organization of the Makala Power Syndicate. Drawing on his legitimacy, the Kapita General has *carte blanche* to organize his governance of the prison territory under his authority. He relies on an organization of loyal and submissive inmates, most of whom are criminals or

serious offenders sentenced to long prison terms. The organization is structured according to a paramilitary model, highly hierarchical and decentralized in the six pavilions under his governance, of which he knows all the inmates. The hierarchy of titles and roles is also paramilitary. At the top of the hierarchy is the Kapita General, surrounded by a 'general staff' who lay down the rules, perform the policing function and centralize information. At the lowest level, each of the penitentiary pavilions in the prison territory is run by a team consisting of a 'pavilion governor' (appointed by the Kapita General), who is responsible for maintaining order and security in the pavilion. He is assisted by an administrative officer and a 'pavilion chief of staff' in charge of security. At the base of the pavilion hierarchy is a team of guards, known as MP, responsible for maintaining daily order under the authority of the pavilion chief of staff.

As we shall now see, the power of the Kapita General rests on one main source and one main resource. The main source of his 'ability' is the legitimacy he draws from his official recognition by the prison administration and the main resource of 'ableness' he relies on is the monopoly of violence to govern inmates (Catanzaro 1993). It allows him to extort prisoners and to embezzle external humanitarian aid. Mastery of these sources and resources of power enables the Power Syndicate to 'govern by violence' (Grajales 2016).

Legitimacy: The Power Syndicate's Main Source of Power

Legitimacy is an important source of power (Weber 2013). The Kapita General is recognized as the official representative of the inmate-guardians, and his authority is unquestioned. The conditions and exact content of the delegation of authority are unknown, but it is clear from all the interviews we have had with former inmates that the prison administration imperatively requires the Kapita General to prevent escapes, mutinies, and fights. In return, he is totally free to manage the organization and internal security of the prisoners and prison space as he sees fit. Legitimized by 'the top', the official prison administration, he is also legitimate 'from below', with the inmate-guardians as the most senior *Primus inter pares* among criminals sentenced to a long prison term. From this legitimacy springs his ableness to regulate the inmates' lives through violence.

Regulation

As part of his political enterprise, the Kapita General holds all the power of regulation (Reynaud 1988, 1997), that is, 'regulation' proper (the ability to promulgate rules) and 'control regulation' (the ableness to sanction their application). At Makala, regulation is based on an informal but binding body of regulations drawn up by the General Staff of the Power Syndicate, which sets out all the 'practical norms' (Ayimpam 2019) that govern the conduct of prisoners and the

inner workings of the prison. In addition to the daily obligations and prohibitions applying to inmates, this corpus organizes inequalities of access to external resources and codifies the countless taxes that inmates must pay daily. Finally, it sets out the numerous prohibitions that must not be transgressed under any circumstances, and the sanctions incurred in the event of infringement or failure to comply. Regulation is a fundamental element of the government by violence established by the Syndicate.

Establishing and controlling the 'rules of the game' (Reynaud 1997) in the prison environment is a basic element of the power Syndicate's 'government by violence' (Grajales 2016). Violence is exercised daily by the MP armed with sticks and chains, but the threat of force is generally enough to maintain prison order. To assert their domination over inmates, the MP organize networks of denunciation and surveillance. They are also the ones who collect the daily racketeering, impose fines, and enforce sanctions when the rules are not respected. Violence is exerted on prisoners' morale and bodies. Certain chores, like cleaning toilets and emptying septic tanks every day, have a punitive and humiliating purpose, and certain sanctions, like banning access to toilets or showers, directly undermine personal dignity. As for inmates who steal or take drugs, they are arrested and sent to either solitary confinement or the *étouffement*, an overcrowded dormitory where inmates sit lined up on the floor, unable to lie down to sleep. 'Our role is to put an end to those who disturb the order and tranquility of the prison' confided a member of the staff.

However, according to former inmates, the purpose of violent control is not so much to ensure the tranquility of the prison, but to guarantee the smooth running of the widespread extortion system organized by the Power Syndicate. Indeed, as we shall see, regulation by violence also undermines the moral and physical integrity of inmates by controlling their movements, communications, exchanges, and so on.

Extortion, a Fundamental Resource of Power for the Power Syndicate

Like the criminal power brokers of the Mezzogiorno described by Catanzaro, whose main activity consists of extorting money in exchange for protection (Catanzaro 1993: 3), at Makala, the MP use of violence is aimed at systematically extorting money from detainees. But unlike the Italian case, at Makala the trade-off for extortion is not mafia protection as such. In fact, the prison is a hermetically sealed territory in which the inmates, victims of extortion are locked up. As a result, the only protection the prison Power Syndicate can offer inmates is that which it can exert over them. For a fee, it can protect them from its own violence. But if they are unwilling or unable to pay, or if they don't comply with the rules imposed on them, they will endure it.

Bolstered by his legitimacy to regulate prison space through the violence of his organization, the Kapita General devotes most of his energy to maintaining and developing the resource that underpins his power and the economic wealth of the power Syndicate's cadres, namely the systematic and widespread extortion of inmates and their families, and the demand for tribute for all business conducted in the prison territory under his control. It is therefore essential to highlight some of its most significant features.

The general principle of the extortion scheme set up at Makala is simple. It consists in making prisoners pay for the slightest access to the satisfaction of a natural need or to any basic good. No service or activity is exempt. As the prison is overcrowded and its infrastructure in a state of disrepair, there are few accommodation places available in the cells. As a result, the Power Syndicate has turned the allocation of cell space into an extremely lucrative business. To get a place to lay a sponge mattress, or even a loincloth to serve as a bed, an inmate must pay a non-refundable 'rental guarantee' worth 30 US dollars, when it comes to an average standard pavilion like Pavilion 6A. But in the case of a high standing pavilion, such as Pavilion 8, which offers relative comfort, the price can go up to 300 US dollars. Then, when a prisoner is housed in a medium-standard pavilion, he must pay a weekly rent of 1,000 Congolese francs (around 40 US cents) or face eviction. But insolvent inmates are dealt with brutally. They must sleep either in the corridors or in what is known as 'accommodation', that is, the prison yard, where they spend the night under the stars. Those who sleep in the corridors are relatively sheltered from weather conditions but find themselves in an unhealthy promiscuity. Those who sleep outside, on the other hand, are exposed to heat, rain, and insect bites.

But extortion, being the principal mode of social regulation through violence, can only thrive in a social environment populated by solvent victims. Unlike the mafia that exists in open environments, the solvency of the inmates victimized by the Makala prison Power Syndicate must be preserved, like a 'goose that lays golden eggs'. Nonetheless, poor, insolvent inmates who have no family to support them are of no interest to the power Syndicate. Those who survive the bullying, malnutrition and inclement weather must, to survive, accept a condition of virtual slavery at the service of the solvent inmates and the MP. For example, as they are unable to pay the obligatory 'chore fees' to the ward staff, they are the ones who must carry out these chores every Sunday.

Another highly lucrative business is the exploitation of prisoners' and their relatives' movements around the prison. In each pavilion, movements are controlled by the MP at toll gates where inmates and their visitors must pay circulation fees. The fees for moving from one pavilion to another are higher, and to get through these barriers, one has not only to pay to pass through, but one must also put on the prison uniform. It costs US$100 to buy, but it can be rented for a more modest sum. Finally, MP posted at the entrance gates to the pavilions also charge each visitor a

'message fee' for notifying the inmate receiving a visit. They also charge visitors an 'escort fee' to take them to the inmate. Lastly, the chairs used to receive visitors must be rented. For this purpose, the pavilion government has a rental fleet of plastic chairs (100 Congolese francs, or around 6 US cents). Without rental, visitors are left standing, as the few public benches available are permanently occupied by inmates. Long serving or well-to-do inmates have the privilege of having their own plastic chairs. Relationships between inmates are monitored and are also an opportunity for extortion. To ensure that they run smoothly, the power Syndicate has set up a sort of concierge service which, for a fee, brings together inmates like borrowers and loan sharks, exchangers of goods and services, or potential employers and poorer jobseekers. But it is the matchmaking between inmate buyers and inmate sellers that is the most lucrative form of intermediation. This petty trade generally involves the sale of everyday consumer goods (cigarettes, paper, pens, envelopes, razor blades, soap) as well as food (maize or cassava flour, bread, peanuts, salted fish, cassava bread, salt, oil), and so on (Ayimpam and Bisa Kibul, 2020: 97).

Finally, although the possession and use of mobile phones is officially prohibited in prison, the General Staff of the Power Syndicate has put in place highly restrictive standards to make the most of its use by inmates. Today, financial transfers are accessible by mobile phone, and the smartphone is the indispensable tool that enables relatives to send money to inmates. As the Power Syndicate has a vested interest in ensuring that prisoners are always solvent, so that it can enrich itself at their expense, it allows the illegal use of the telephone in prison. Then, in the prison there are inmates who run mobile financial services. Of course, they must pay a tax to the ward staff to be allowed to do business. As for the inmates, they must pay the MP for the 'right' not only to own a phone, but also to use it. However, this highly profitable system of control does not prevent the Power Syndicate from ordering the MP to carry out surprise cell searches to confiscate mobile phones. This is not very complicated, as the MPs know who is using the electric recharging points, access to which is subject to a charge, and which are under constant surveillance… Shortly after the raid, the phones are sold back to their former owners (Ibid.: 99).

In addition to the direct extortion of prisoners, the power syndicate also embezzles outside charitable aid. Indeed, apart from the salaries of the few prison staff working in the administration, Makala prison has no operating budget from the state. The day-to-day running of the prison and its supplies, including daily food for inmates, medicines, and health care, access to justice and the follow-up of legal cases, religious services, and funerals for deceased inmates, are all entirely covered by religious organizations (Catholic and Protestant) and national and international charitable NGOs that regularly visit the prison. These endowments involve a considerable monthly flow of goods into the prison. Of course, the Power Syndicate's general staff closely controls the entry and receipt of donations from

NGOs and charities. This enables it to divert some of them, including sacks of corn and rice, boxes of milk, sugar and medicines, and bales of clothing. The Power Syndicate earns a substantial income from the resale of these products, either to inmates inside the prison, or to others outside the prison, where bags and bales can be found on the Kinshasa markets. The rest of the food received is used by the general staff to organize meals for the inmates. They receive a daily ration of a mixture of beans and corn, known as *vungulé*. However, when there are too many poor prisoners or insufficient food stocks, the meal may not be served for several weeks, with the result that many inmates suffer from malnutrition-related deficiencies.

In the event of serious illness, a prisoner who can afford it can be transferred 'at his own expense' to a medical facility of his choice. For a fee, the official prison management then assigns a police escort to monitor him during his stay in hospital (Ibid.: 17). As for the poorest sick inmates, they can and do wither to death.

Sharing the Booty

The financial resources generated by extortion and aid embezzlement are not used to run the prison; they are entirely dedicated to the personal enrichment of the Kapita General, his staff and the members of the pavilion governments. The Power Syndicate's vertical system for redistributing the proceeds of extortion from the bottom to the top works as follows. The entire amount is passed on to the next level up, which in turn passes on its share to the level below it, before passing on the remainder to the level immediately above it, from which it receives its share, and so on. In each pavilion, the daily extortion proceeds are shared between the MP, their commanding officer, the chief of staff and the pavilion governor.

The example provided by one of our informants, a former inmate, gives an idea of the scale of extortion revenues. The pavilion where he was held had a staff of around 3,300 prisoners. Knowing that every prisoner was obliged to pay, each Sunday, the chore fee, which at the time amounted to 1,000 Congolese francs, the collection of Sunday chore fees alone by the pavilion staff raised an amount of around 3 million Congolese francs, equivalent to around US$3,000 per Sunday by the time he left prison. Each pavilion governor keeps half this sum (1,500 US dollars) and gives the other half to the Governor General. With chore fees alone, a pavilion governor's monthly income can thus reach 6,000 US dollars per month. But if we add the income from the other fees, taxes, and resales of donations mentioned above, a pavilion governor's monthly income may reach 10,000 US dollars a month. This is a considerable amount. We do not know how much the Governor General of the prison earns per month, but we can get an idea of the monthly royalties he receives from the various pavilion governors under his authority.

The Executives of the Power Syndicate organization therefore have a very substantial monetary income, which benefits long-standing inmates who are close

to them (through ties of kinship or affinity). Pavilion governors and chief of staff benefit from the advantageous position they occupy in the organization. Their privileges are so exorbitant that they live better in prison than in freedom. So much so, in fact, that they generally have little desire to leave. As a result, the position of Kapita General is highly coveted, as it comes with immense privileges and ableness. But the positions of pavilion governor and chief of staff are also coveted, as they are also highly lucrative positions of power.

Little is known about the rules and process for succession to the post of Kapita General. According to some of our informants, when the incumbent Kapita General reaches the end of his sentence and cannot be retained, long-serving prisoners who have served him (usually as pavilion governor) 'apply' to the prison official director to fill the vacancy. And some of them, it seems, accompany their application with a small envelope containing up to 200 US dollars. A bribe that the prison director does not refuse. Indeed, as several informants have told us, the Kapita General and the official prison director who appointed him share the weekly spoils of extortion and embezzlement. We know no more about it because *omerta* is the rule. However, we can speculate that, when the prison's official director delegates authority to a new Kapita General, appointment comes with a secret arrangement for sharing extortion loot. In DRC, where political clientelism and corruption are widespread, such a case of outright bribery from a high-ranking official is commonplace (Médard 2006).

Therefore, delegating power is coupled with a classic clientelist exchange. At the first level of the exchange, the prison administration, unable to manage the Makala prison, delegates the whole power (ability and ableness) to the Kapita General on condition that he neutralizes any risk of mutiny or escape. In return, he is given carte blanche to rule prison and prisoners with violence and extortion. But at the second level of the exchange, there is a clandestine, secret, morally illegitimate clientelist transaction that organizes the sharing, between the Kapita General and the prison Director, of the 'loot' amassed by the Power Syndicate.

The Textures of Power in Makala Prison

Initially, we thought that Makala was a highly unusual case of prison organization. However, the indisputably mafia-like nature of the prison's governance prompted us to take a closer look at the sociology and history of the mafia (Saggiorato 2016, Dickie 2020). We thus learned that the 'co-management' of public order between authorities and criminals was far from being a Congolese singularity. In Europe, the practice dates to Napoleon I, and was adopted in the nineteenth century by the ruling Bourbon in Naples. Even more remarkable than the Makala case is the advent of the Camorra, reported by John Dickie, 'which appeared in the 1850s in the most malodorous and dangerous prisons in Calabria, including the Carmine

Castle in Naples' (Dickie 2020: 39). For his part, Francesco Saggiorato confirms that 'under the reign of Ferdinand I of Bourbon, the Camorra acted like a secret police force, with the police and the criminals "co-managing" public order' (Saggiorato 2016: 193).

John Dickie then gives a precise description of the extortion mechanism set up in the prison by the Camorra, which closely resembles the one we found at Makala prison:

> On June 4, 1851, Duke Sigismondo Castromediano was imprisoned in the dreadful Carmine Castle in Naples for having taken part in the revolts of 1848-1849. He is quickly approached by a prisoner who contrasts with the other beggars, as he wears black velvet pants with shiny buttons on the hips and a colored belt. A watch and chain dangle from a matching vest. […] 'I'm the head of the Camorra here, the one in charge. Everyone is at my complete disposal, even the commandant and the prison guards.' This excess of courtesy is misleading and short-lived. Duke Castromediano discovers that the camorrists, like the man in the black velvet pants, extort money under threat, as they do from everyone in prison – which he endured during the seven and a half years of his imprisonment. The most insignificant advantage – a place to lay a mattress, a piece of bread, a candle… – could be bought from the Camorra at exorbitant prices. 'Even fleas can be turned into gold', the organization boasted. Faced with serious cash-flow problems, the government had handed over management of its prisons to the most brutal prisoners. These camorrists were organized into a brotherhood, called the Honorable Society, based on a Masonic model. (Dikie 2020: 40.) In return for collaborating with the police in their fight against the insurgents, the camorrists were given carte blanche to control the gambling and prostitution businesses. They also managed extortion networks in many areas, such as transportation by boat or overland. (Ibid.: 41).

This lengthy reference to the Italian Camorra has the merit of showing that, across centuries and continents, the co-management of law and order between authorities and criminals is a solution conducive to the emergence of a Mafia order. But what are the conditions that make such an emergence possible? What is the factor common to these contexts that is so decisive that it plays on in such distant and different historical, geographical, and cultural backgrounds?

One common factor emerges from our readings. Authors agree that the necessary condition for such an emergence is the failure of the state, or the weakness of its regulatory ableness. In the nineteenth century, for example, the formation of the state in Italy left the inhabitants of peripheral regions to fend for themselves. The weakest had to develop mutual aid strategies and negotiate the support of powerful patrons, called 'friends', able to act as protectors. In other words, they had to enter clientelist relationships with powerful protectors who could protect them from the violence of others. Whether in nineteenth-century Italy or

twentieth-century Congo Kinshasa, the management of prisons and prisoners was abandoned to criminal organizations, which took the place of the State's public service to guarantee public order. Similarly, in Italy as in Congo, the criminal organization has pursued a policy of intelligent, targeted corruption that imposes itself on corrupt prison officials and thus neutralizes any opposition.

At Makala prison, the textures of power are based on a system of extortion regulated by violence. What distinguishes this Mafia-like organization from other types of Mafia organizations in the open is that, like the Camorra, it is the result of an official 'co-management' of prison order between the official authority and a criminal organization made up of prisoners serving long sentences.

PART 4

Gender, Sexualities, and Bodily Politics

CHAPTER 4.1

Engendering Domestic Space: Polygamy, Witchcraft, and Power Dynamic in the Mandara Mountains

Melchisedek Chetima

Introduction

In many historical contexts, the perception of witchcraft is that of a person possessing supernatural powers enabling him to leave his body, physically and spiritually, to reach his victim to torment him (Ernest-Samuel 2015). This intentional and specifically antisocial act of nuisance would have as its preferred space the close environment, (especially Adinkrah 2015; Gerrie 2007; Geest 2002) that relate to the intimate environment (e.g., Geschiere 2013; Bastian 2002; Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Douglas 1970), with a particular focus on older women (e.g., Atata 2019; Eboiyehi 2017; Apter 2013). In contrast, few authors have examined the use of witchcraft in gendered power dynamics enacted within the domestic sphere. Yet, while individuals of both sexes can call upon sorcerous power, they are treated differently depending on whether they are a woman or a man (see, e.g., Lyons 1996; Apter 1993). Also, women's recourse to witchcraft is seen as personal, anti-social, perverse, and destructive (see Gottlieb 1989), whereas it is, in some circumstances, perceived as acceptable, even desirable, for men (Austen 1993).

The gender-differentiated view of witchcraft structures social relations in the Mandara Mountains, a region populated since the sixteenth century by those seeking refuge from slavery on the edges consolidating Islamic states in Africa's western Sahel. There, beliefs around witchcraft tend to reproduce the dual perception of women as potentially anti-social beings and intimate strangers within the domestic space. The aim of this paper is to show how this dual picture is used by patrilineal societies in the Mandara Mountains as a strategy to restrict women's access to what the Montagnards consider fundamental resources, notably the home, the land and the ancestors. At the same time, these negative portrayals are also used by wives as a resistance strategy which, without really preventing men's abuse of authority, manages to free them from it by activating the divorce option. My study is consistent with work examining the relationship between gender and the construction of power through domestic sphere (see Ranade 2007; Pink 2004; Miller 2001; Lyons 1998; Hodder 1994; Massey 1994). Indeed, the dual portrayal of women as intimate strangers and potential disrupters of the social order is embodied in and through domestic spaces and material culture associated with them (Lyons 1992). In fact, domestic sphere is constantly used to represent wives as mobile elements of the family unit (Vincent 1972) and a disrupter of the social

order, and women freely objectify these clichés projected on them to limit men's abuse of power and to promote their personal autonomy within the household.

Most of the data presented in this paper come from several research trips to the Mandara Mountains carried out between 2012 and 2017. Located on the border between Nigeria and Cameroon, Mandara Mountains form a complex and diverse ethnic and cultural mosaic (David 2012; MacEachern 2012). More than twenty ethnic groups live in this area of just over two thousand square kilometers. Fieldwork was mainly conducted among two ethnic groups (Mura and Podokwo) occupying the northern slope of the mountains. In each group, I chose one community as an observation and interview site: Dume among the Mura and Udjila among the Podokwo. I led over fifty interviews with thirty-two people on domestic space and the impact of the dual perception of women as potentially witches and mobile human beings on the power dynamics at work within the household. I included informants with different social statuses (men, women, youth, and elders). I also used participant observation of domestic spaces to understand and analyze social interactions that occurred during ritual burials of materials in the entrance of the compound intended to protect men against evil from within. I likewise attended several meetings of men and women which gave me a better understanding of how social hierarchies between men and women are expressed in material culture.

Space, Power and Gender Relations

Ethnic groups inhabiting the Mandara Mountains are assumed to have segmented structures, which is why ethnographic literature labels them as egalitarian societies (see, e.g., Hallaire 1991:45, Juillerat 1971:75-8). Yet the configuration of the architectural landscape reveals a very different reality, bringing certain hidden social phenomena to the surface. Montagnards have developed significant metaphors through which the top and the bottom appear as the material inscription of social relations (Chétima 2019b; Goonewardena et al. 2008). Indeed, they prefer higher landscapes to the lower ones insofar as higher altitudes are seen as beneficial to life, while lower places, seen as unfit for life, appear as metaphors for witchcraft, pollution, and death. Elevated sites are linked to purity, blessing, and virility while plains and valleys represent uninhabited, frightening and inherently dangerous spaces (Chétima 2019b). The highest sites are places where the beneficial power of ancestors is displayed whereas the lowest altitudes are rooms where witchcrafts deploy their evil actions. At the top, sacrifices are made to the lineage's ancestors whilst at the bottom, death entrepreneurs are at work to undermine the balance of society.

The closer one gets to the summit, the more intense the relationship between individuals and clan deities. This is why trees and rocks which are the object of a particular cult multiply as one approaches the summit of a mountain. The interior valleys, plains, and plateaus, in contrast, represent a different world, a place where

witchcraft practices abound (Hallaire 1991). Indeed, plain in local languages implies the idea of peril, risk, and danger. It is a place devoid of men, populated by strangers and enemies of the Montagnards. In many situations, I have learned through interviews and participant observation that the top is considered more valuable than the bottom. This discrepancy between the top and the bottom has left an indelible imprint on the architectural landscape: it governs the hierarchies between clans and lineages and it structures relations between individuals inside and outside the household. The focus will be solely on social relations within the domestic sphere.

Inside the house, the relationship between the top and the bottom actively orients social relations amongst members of the same household, particularly between the husband and his wives. During my fieldwork, I observed that the compound was always structured into two domains (or quarters, according to local terminology): the man's and the wives' domains. While the man's quarter slopes upwards, wives' domains tend to slope downwards (Chétima 2019b). A terrace separates the two quarters so that the man's domain spatially dominates that of the wives. The wives' domain is entered via a stone staircase, once the man's quarter has been crossed. It's rare to find women in the upper structures, just as it's unusual to find men inside the women's area. When I met women in the upper part of the compound, they were less willing to talk to me. On the other hand, when the interview took place in the inner courtyard of the compound, few of them refused to be interviewed. The reason for this is that the inside of the compound, that is, its lower part, is labelled as a space dedicated to them. All the interviews with the men took place mainly at the entrance, which is also the highest part of the compound. When I expressed the need to visit the interior of houses, most of my male informants recommended me to their wives who then served as my guides. These gender relations expressed through architectural landscapes give meaning to daily practices and interactions. The men carry out most of their day-to-day activities in the upper part or under the outdoor shed at the entrance to the compound. Their presence indoors remains limited to the upper part, notably in areas like the vestibule, stables, and pens, where they can watch over the livestock. The upper part is also where they sleep, have sex with their wives, and eat and drink beer with their male guests. The wives, for their part, sleep and eat with their young children, prepare food, brew millet beer, make pottery, weave rope, eat and drink in the inner courtyard of the household, each in her own exclusive domain. Even outside the compound, men literally lead their activities in topographical positions superior to those occupied by women, thus reproducing the perception of their social superiority. Interestingly, the same spatial order is implemented by women in their assemblies. The most upstream positions are occupied by senior women, while the youngest and infertile women are further down.

Furthermore, throughout their life cycle, men and women move differently in the domestic space, still producing an association between the man with the top and the woman with the bottom (see Lyons 1992). For instance, all children, male

and female, are conceived in the upper part of the compound, but they are born and grow up in the lower part, where they sleep and eat with their respective mothers. However, around the age of ten or so, male children move to the upper part to join their fathers and other sons who have already reached puberty. Once moved to the upper part, their presence in the courtyard becomes strictly limited. Even the married, male son continues to live with his wife in the upper part of his father's house. When his first child is born, the son is required to leave his father's compound to build his own home, often not far from the family property. There, he reproduces the same spatial and social practices, that is, he settles in the upper part where he carries out his main activities and receives his male guests. Conversely, his wives occupy the lower part, where they carry out their main tasks. By contrast, the life cycle of girls is quite different. Indeed, like boys, they are conceived in the upper part, and are born, live and eat with their mothers in the courtyard. However, unlike boys, they remain in the lower part until they marry (Lyons 1992). From then on, they move to their respective husbands' compounds where they continue to live at the bottom of the compound, namely, in its lower part.

While the interior relates to wives, it is the man who controls the entire compound and is its external representative. What's more, a man's status is only validated when he builds his own compound in which he can materialize his superior topographical position in relation to his wives. Even in the households of men with lower social status, the inhouse order always reproduces their dominant position over their husbands permanently, they must either remarry or return to their parents' compound, where they live in separate huts located at the bottom. It is therefore remarkable that the dialectic between the husband and the wives' quarters mirrors precisely the opposition between the top and the bottom. These interactions prevail even during ritual ceremonies (child baptism, annual sacrifice to the ancestors, funerals, etc.) which bring together members of the household, with the men always seated in the upper part and the women gathering in the lower part.

In death, too, the heads of families are laid to rest in tombs placed at the entrance to their compound, that is, at its highest point. Indeed, for the Montagnards, a man who has lived well enjoys the privilege of joining the ancestors upon his death, where he will have pre-eminence over the living. However, the tombs of even honourable women are far from the mountain's living space as they are situated on the inner plateaus. This same fortune is reserved for what the Montagnards identify as 'bad dead', that is, stillborn, children and young people who died before their time, namely, without leaving a descendant. Individuals with lower status and those punished by the ordeal for disgraceful acts (theft, adultery, or witchcraft) are also buried in the plains and inner plateaus. This shows that, in the Mandara Mountains, gender and age hierarchies, although conceptually separate, range from difficult to unconnected in daily life practices. Indeed, gender relations are often part of a more inclusive system of inequalities marked by the predominance of elders over younger men as well as women (see also Collier 1988).

Intimate Strangers and Witches in the Belly of the House

Let us, however, highlight one exception which blurs this dialectic of the top and the bottom, namely, the presence of the central attic, a masculine element, in the lower part of the house, that is, in the area reserved for wives. Very often, informants interpret the presence of this male element in the female portion of the household by resorting to the symbolism of the man's virile power. Among the Mura, for instance, the discourse on male virility is articulated during the annual sacrifices intended for the ancestors via the ancestral pots (*gerda lay*) stacked under the central attic. It is in fact in the *gerda lay* that the closest ancestors sit and who, through their virility, fertilize wives and crops (Chétima 2016; see also Blier 1987), and intervene directly in the management of the household's day-to-day affairs (MacEachern, 2002; Vincent 1976). Considered the head and central pole of the house, the central attic stands in the middle of two other male attics representing the testicles of the house (see Chétima 2016). The construction of these three male granaries is the first step in setting up a dwelling. Just as the children come from the male virile power, the other structures composing the house come from this central pole and from the virility of the *gerda lay* placed under the men's attics. The extension of the belly of the house, which forms the first sign of the householder's honourability within society, depends on the virile power of the man and of the ancestors.

Moreover, the Montagnards have developed several metaphors of the belly, the most common of which is linked to female fertility. Unlike the male womb whose importance derives from its ability to produce knowledge, the importance of the woman's womb derives from its ability to give life. Just as a man without knowledge is perceived as empty vessel, so, too, is a childless woman, discredited within society (Vincent 1972). Irrespective of her age, an infertile woman is perceived as a ceaseless adolescent. The reason is that an empty female womb is a blemish that undermines the genealogical continuousness of the household and the family. Just like the human womb, the belly of the house is also a place of life and is able to make the householder more or less prestigious. This is where his wives and his children live and form the most precious source of prestige a man can earn (Vincent 1991). The many structures rising from the belly of the house, visible from the outside through the millet-stem roofs, offer an insight into the householder's marital life. They also underline his prestige to the extent that polygamy is synonymous with abundance and wealth (Vincent 1991).

While the belly carries within it the symbols of fertility and life, it can also produce death: 'the death of a child begins in its womb,' states a Podokwo proverb. In this avenue, child protection rituals are centred around his belly to protect him throughout its physical growth. Among the Mura people, in particular, children are given protective amulets around their waists which is even more necessary as young children, both boys and girls, live with their mothers in the belly of the

house. The death of a child and female infertility are almost attributed to the antisocial activities of a jealous wife seeking to harm her rivals. Similarly, the husband's impotence is often blamed on co-wives in response to his mistreatment and abuse. This spiral of accusations makes the belly of the house, just like the human belly stands in local imaginary, a place of fertility and life as well as an arena for witchcraft and death.

Moreover, witchcraft, as indicated above, functions as a social practice that reproduces the perception of wives as intimate and potentially harmful strangers within the household. Such a perception in turn echoes another that tends to legitimize men as permanent members of the household and labels women as impermanent, thereby disqualifying them from inheriting properties that belong to the patrilineal lineage (house and land, in particular). Although it operates more at the level of individual households (see Lyons 1998), the perception of men as permanent residents and women as temporary members of the household seems to be an institutionalized practice that begins at marriage. Recall that in the Mandara Mountains, marriage is unconditionally virilocal with the bride leaving her parents' home and village on her first marriage, or that of her previous husbands on any subsequent marriage (Chétima 2019a; Beek 2012; Hallaire 1991; Lyons 1998). The man, on the other hand, remains in his father's compound and patrilineal lineage after his first marriage, and will later build his own compound, just at the bottom of his father's house.

Labelled temporary residents within the household, the decision regarding divorce is unsurprisingly a right reserved for wives, who over the course of their life cycle, accumulate on average three to four divorces and remarriages (Vincent 1972). Even in the absence of divorce, women as wives seem to be subject to constant to-ing and fro-ing between their marital homes and their patrilineal groups of origin (Vincent 1991). This constant movement is at work especially during ritual ceremonials that occur within the household and relate to ancestors, millet and offspring. During these rituals, wives are required to move from the households to return to their fathers' or brothers' compounds. As a result, the women's ties with their patrilineal group of origin are quasi-periodic in the sense that they must leave the marital home for each important ritual occurring within the household. At the same time, their relationship with their husbands' households is constantly disrupted and may even be short-lived as it can end at any time, thus accentuating her ambiguous position as an intimate stranger. As Lyons (1998) demonstrates, the Montagnards have a distrustful attitude towards any stranger, seeing him at first sight as someone likely to harm the community.

In any case, wives' status as intimate strangers within the household seems to benefit the male gender insofar as it tends to legitimize the barring of wives from any resources transmitted via a patrilineal line. For instance, all male sons inherit the land belonging to their father which they share equally upon his death. As for the house, it is inherited by the second male son (among the Podokwo) or by the

youngest male (among the Mura). Male sons who have not inherited the house still have the right to build their own compounds on their father's land, usually a few steps from the paternal plot. Also, only men were allowed to build a house; women had to live under the roof of their parents or husbands. All these social practices highlight the importance of men in the genealogical line and give them legitimate rights to the land and the house. A significant proportion of the resources displayed by men come from inheritance received via their patrilineal lineages of which they consider themselves permanent members. Women, in contrast, have access to other kinds of resources, including beans, various vegetables, or pot production, but these are socially less valued and are usually self-generated.

Healing Evil from Within

Another source of supernatural power in opposition to that of witchcraft are the ancestors. While witchcraft is the source of poverty, misery, and death, ancestors, on the contrary, watch over the patrilineal lineage and members of the household. Witchcraft is a medium used by spiteful individuals to harm life and to break down the societal equilibrium (Lyons 1992: 137-138); the power from the ancestors, by contrast, is a collective act generated by the householder or by other eldest member of the lineage, with the intention of guaranteeing the continuity of the household and of the clan. Only men have access to the ancestors; women have only to benefit from the protection afforded by the mediation of their parents or husbands. As householders, men have the exclusive honour of imploring the arbitration of the ancestors to ensure the genealogical continuity of the patrilineal lineage by neutralizing harmful forces operating within the compound. Indeed, the ancestors are considered permanent members of the household, and sacred pots containing their souls are given regular libations (Chétima 2016). Offering them sacrifices is a function that engages the private responsibility of householder or of the head of lineage. If he fails in this responsibility, the ancestors may punish him by denying him access to the community of ancestors in the afterlife on the day of his death. As for future descendants, they may refuse to offer him post-mortem worship. Wives, in contrast, are strictly prohibited from approaching ancestral pots under the penalty of being affected by evils such as sterility and diseases. Furthermore, they are systematically excluded from any rites and celebrations related to the land, ancestors, and house.

As for witchcraft, the second source of supernatural power, the Montagnards believe that men and women can have access to it without distinction. However, in the practice of daily life, witchcraft acts are generally attributed to women. The supposed control they exercise over materials through which witches may attack their victims (e.g., food, drink, and bodily fluids) mean that they are easily targeted as being responsible for the death of a co-wife or that of her son, the infertility of

her rivals or even the impotence of the husband. To prevent such tragedies, the householder usually takes preventive measures consisting of the burial of magical objects, in particular amulets, to which is attributed the power to neutralize any esoteric effects of witches. The burial of these medicines usually takes place at the annual festival – *Bakashidgwe* in the Mura language – during which only men remain at home; the wives for their parts must return to their respective clans and lineages. There, they performed songs during the *Bakashidgwe* through which they warn their fathers and brothers against any harmful initiative undertaken by their wives. In other words, if the wives are indexed as potential witches within the marital home, it is a completely different status that they display once back in their patrilineal groups. Once the *Bakashidgwe* party is over – it lasts about eight days – they return to their marital homes and must necessarily step over the materials buried in the ground at the entrance to the compound. By doing so, any magical substances in their bodies that may harm the householder, or his sons and belongings, are neutralized. These magical objects are generally made by specialists at the request of the lineage head (Lyons 1998), and must be decorated in red. In fact, the efficiency of an object in the offsetting of the evil power depends on the colour used for the coating, and in this sense, red is always used as it is perceived as containing an opposition force. The Montagnards believe that by crossing over or trampling on such objects, the wives who return home from the *Bakashidgwe* would fall under the control of the householder. The red used to embellish buried materials comes from the same substance as the red ochre used to coat the human body and the facades of granaries and kitchens. The choice of red earth as building materials for the wives' huts may also have to do with the meaning that the Montagnards attribute to the colour red, especially as they house young children. In addition, the latter are regularly anointed with red ochre over a large part of their body to guarantee them maximum safety. As the colour of counter-power, red thus offers protection not only through the decoration of buried objects likely to nullify evil forces, but also through the coating of the bodies of those considered the most vulnerable (see Lyons, 1998: 344-362). Thus, the weaker the person is, the more exposed to witchcraft he is, and the more he will need the red colour to ensure his well-being.

In addition, the almost endemic rivalry between co-wives from the belly of the house and the scarcity of resources at their disposal create a context of generalized competition and generates an atmosphere of mutual complaints. To minimize interactions between co-wives, each has her own respective domain within the household. However, unlike men, wives do not bury objects to protect themselves against witchcraft; rather, they must repeatedly demonstrate that they pose no threat to the householder or the other occupants of the household. For instance, if they have an empty jar, it must be pierced and decorated in red as it is believed that it may be used by witches to conceal harmful substances (see also David, Sterner and Gavua 1988). Wives who do not comply with such requirements may be accused of being witches, hiding harmful medicines inside the pot. Similarly,

materials associated with childbirth could be fatal to the householder, and therefore, must be pierced. The placenta is also seen as dangerous and is buried by wives in their intimate space to prevent its use for hurtful purposes by a co-wife. Once buried, the placenta is covered with an overturned and pierced pot so that the harmful substance linked to its presence may be released.

Polygamy, Divorce and Women's Agency

The perception of the wives as intimate strangers within the domestic sphere is also noticeable in the building materials and in the gendered configuration of the compound. In fact, the house is interpreted as a microcosm of time in seasons, namely a dry season which is seen as male and a rainy season which is perceived as female. For the Montagnard, it is the crossing of these two periods of time that produces agricultural crops. Similarly, the domestic sphere is organized into two main areas: a male quarter built of stones symbolizing the dryness of men, and a female quarter built from clay kneaded in water representing the humidity of women. Dry stone also embodies the idea of permanence while clay is interpreted as an indication of the provisional and the temporary, thus reinforcing the status of the wife as a non-permanent member of the household. As Juillerat has pointed out, women are considered in mountain communities as mobile human beings in society (1971: 133). As such, a wife-to-be enters her husband's home with her own household objects (kitchen utensils, water jars, bedding, jewellery, etc.) as his stay there could only be temporary. When the divorce occurs, she definitively leaves the marital home, taking all her personal possessions mean the wives' quarters are relentlessly demolished and rebuilt.

The reasons most frequently given to justify women's divorce are, among other explanations, the husband's abuse of power, his inability to adequately provide for the wives' needs, and the fear of attacks from co-wives. Each divorce usually leads to several others as co-wives believe their ex-rival may have left behind items that she could use as a means of controlling them while she is away. However, every divorce affects the growth of the house throughout its normal life cycle and thereby slows down the social advancement of the householder. Elsewhere, I have shown that a man's social status is inherently linked to having a significant number of wives and to his ability to support them and keep them in the house (Chétima 2023). In this avenue, a large house, that is, a house which contains more than four women's quarters, is considered the result of the man's ability to take care of his wives and of his ability to protect them against evils. In this sense, the high tendency of wives to divorce (see Vincent 1991; Juillerat 1971) and the high rate of infant mortality (Hallaire 1991) almost attributed to the jealousy of witches from within constitute two major barriers on the path to men's social success. We will illustrate this by considering two individuals with different life paths.

Kwona married his first wife when he was only twenty years old and while he was still living at his father's house. The year his wife conceived their first son, Kwona moved out of his father's house to build his own compound, initially consisting of two wives' quarters. At this point, the Montagnards consider the house to be in its first period of life. Still in his twenties, Kwona wedded an additional wife to occupy the second quarter. Entering his thirties, he brought home another bride and built its quarter comprising a hut, a kitchen and an attic. Kwona thus became the owner of a three-quarter house with many other male structures, including granaries, vestibules, cattle pens and a hut housing his first son, already pubescent. This phase of the house's growth is that of a well-established man, but one who does not yet enjoy an outstanding social status. In her 40s, Kwona's first wife divorced him to protest the arrival of a fourth co-wife and she left behind her three children who continued to occupy her domain. However, he married again and built additional quarter for his new bride. His house had now four women quarters, and according to my informants, this type of compound distinguishes its owner as famous and who, through his house, has gained social recognition within the village. Now, a big gap has arisen between Kwona and most the men of his age: 'Kwona has a house full of wives and children. His descendants will not disappear, because the wombs of his spouses are fertile' speculates one of my informants. The reputation he has acquired allows Kwona to assess any matter occurring in the village: 'he always speaks last when everyone has given their opinion. After him, no one else can speak. Who can speak good words after Kwona?' wonders another informant. When I went back to Dume in 2015, Kwona was entering his seventies and was therefore at the peak of his biological strength. His married wives and children had already begun to leave him. Indeed, from this age, the Montagnards believe that the individual has entered his last years of being and that his vigour has begun to weaken, hence the choice of Kwona's wives, much younger than him, to remarry within other communities and lineages. It should be noted that informants did not blame Kwona's wives' divorce option; on the contrary, they tried to justify it by Kwona's advanced age. Thus, in the overall movement which links the house to its owner, wives play a critical role: on the one hand, they guarantee the social ascension of the householder as well as the growth of the house, and, on the other hand, they bring about the end of the life cycle of the house by divorcing their husband.

Like Kwona, Dawsha married before entering his twenties. When his first child was born, he moved from his father's house to his own two quarters' compound. There, he wedded a second wife but unfortunately, the first one divorced, accusing him of having embarked early on the spiral of polygamy. This split led Dawsha to wed another bride to replace the divorcee. He now has two wives, each occupying her own separate quarter within the household. As he aspired to expand his compound in his thirties, Dawsha shared with his wives his wish to bring two more brides into the household in the same year. Not only did they fiercely disapprove

of their husband's wish, but they also criticized his penchant for alcohol and his inability to take proper care of his household. Faced with Dawsha's determination to wed, they moved out of the house, taking with them all their personal effects. Thus, despite Dawsha's efforts to climb the social ladder through marriages, his compound remained stuck in phase two of the normal life cycle of a house. In his forties, he attempted to catch up with his peers by marrying an additional bride, but his compound did not grow so far, as each new wedding brought a new divorce. In his fifties, it was quite impossible for him to fulfil his dream of a successful polygamous life because of his social reputation that had been tarnished by these divorces.

We can clearly see that women seem aware of the role they play in the social rise or in the eclipse of their husbands; and they willingly benefit from their status as mobile human beings to challenge, among other things, the arrival of a co-wife, the husband's abuse of authority, his irresponsibility and his inability to take care of them. The choice to divorce is all the easier to make insofar as women experience no struggle in remarrying given their roles in these resolutely polygamous societies, and within which men's economic status also depends on their agricultural work. Moreover, if polygamy benefits from a positive judgment on the part of the Montagnards, it is partly because women hold an importance in the enlargement of the house, and therefore in the social hierarchy of the owner (Chétima 2016). The more numerous and fertile the wives are, the larger the belly of the house will be, and the more evident the prestige of the occupant will become. A compound that houses more than four women's quarters is considered to be the result of man's ability to take care of his household. It should be noted that divorce not only slows down a man in his struggle for social status through the house; it is also a means for women to objectify to their advantage their status as impermanent and as intimate strangers within the household. Any divorce unavoidably leads to remarriage as much as the woman's biological age allows, which gives her the chance of having connections that cross clan and even ethnic boundaries (Chétima 2019c). As Diane Lyons (1998) posits, remarriages have other benefits for women since they may leave children in several patrilineal lines with varied social and economic situations. The prospect of having a child with an enviable social status will therefore be great, which represents a certain privilege insofar as children have the responsibility of taking care of their elderly parents.

Conclusion

Our study demonstrates the extent to which men use houses to express, to their advantage, the power dynamic that occurs within the domestic sphere. They do so by embodying their unending links to ancestors which give them rights over land and inheritance. However, although they are portrayed as intimate strangers

and witches within the household, women play no less of a role in their husbands' social ascension or decline. On the one hand, their fecundity coupled with society's inclination towards polygamy are the basis of men's social and economic success, highlighted by the constant growth of the belly of the house. On the other hand, divorce forms the most significant threat to the husband's rise in social engineering. In most cases, wives activate the option of divorcing to confront their husband's sadistic use of power and to challenge his inability to adequately provide for their needs. By objectifying their status as intimate strangers, women tackle, through their divorce, many aspects of social life ranging from contesting the patriarchal organization of mountain societies to expressing their discontent and anger regarding the husband's polygamic life. However, the status of women as a mobile element of society (Juillerat 1971) functions as a means of restricting their access to what is considered the lineage's patrilineal properties. In the same way, the belief that wives are potentially disruptive and anti-social deprives them of the opportunity to commune with the ancestors – a privilege that is singularly kept for men. Unexpectedly, this same belief generates disquiet and anxiousness in men who must constantly protect themselves by burying medicines in the floor of the house to cancel out the evil force that may be used from within. It is not uncommon for the wives to exemplify their portrayal as witches with the goal of restricting their husband's abusive authority.

Finally, data presented in this chapter go against the grain of studies carried out by Moore and Sanders (2001), Rowlands and Warnier (1988), and Geschiere (2000) which highlight the role of witchcraft as levelling mechanism used to counter social inequalities and to maintain the balance of wealth. However, what is at work here is not the prevention of social and economic disparities between men's and women's access to resources, but rather the accentuation of these inequities. Indeed, the perception of women as intimate strangers and as disruptors of social order endorses and sanctions unequal access to key resources based on gender, including land, house, and ancestors. For instance, only men can access and benefit from the generous power of ancestors, which likely can render ineffective witches' influence. Various sacred pots painted in black that are found in men's quarters are used as a channel for communing ancestors. Unlike the red whose role is to nullify the harmful effects of witches, black is linked instead to the ancestors. As a result, pots intended for communion with the ancestors are decorated in black, and they can only be used by permanent members of the lineage, that is, men. In this avenue, the vessels in which men take their daily meal are decorated in black, as the meal is also a moment of intimacy with the closest ancestors of the group. The *gerda lay*, the pots containing the spirits of deceased ancestors, are similarly tinted in black. These practices at work within the household reassert the spatial and temporal continuity of men with the ancestors and highlight the status of wives as non-permanent tenants in the marital home, thus placing them in a fragile position.

However, we should not conclude that women are devoid of power and agency. Unquestionably, power and agency can be described as someone's ability to acquire, control and regulate access to resources, be they material, social, or spiritual (see, e.g., Giddens 1984; 1982). In the Mandara Mountains' communities, men possess and inherit resources that is socially considered valuable, even though women as producers of goods and reproducers of people underlie the male success generated through these resources. At the same time, and as Giddens (1984) has convincingly demonstrated, there is always a dialectic relationship between individuals who hold power and those over whom it is exerted. In this avenue, a person in a marginal position is not completely powerless as he is often able to convert available resources into 'some degree of control over conditions of reproduction of the system' (Giddens 1982: 32). As discussed above, female divorce constitutes the key element on which power dynamic and negotiations are based. In fact, women seem to be aware of their statuses and roles, and they actively manipulate them to limit male dominance and to ensure their own personal autonomy within the domestic sphereInsofar as society granted them the right to divorce, they do so regularly and specifically when they cannot tolerate the coming of a co-wife in the household. Thus, if men control and regulate access to resources, women actively participate in the objectification of negative perceptions projected on them to promote their personal interests.

CHAPTER 4.2

The Language of Syphilis in Colonial Uganda

Neil Kodesh

Introduction

On 20 January 1903, a man named Tebasoboke was admitted for treatment to Mengo Hospital in the Uganda Protectorate. According to the notes detailing his case, Tebasoboke had four weeks earlier suffered from a sore on his glans, followed by a suppurating bubo in his left groin. One week later a rash spread over his body. By the time he arrived at Mengo Hospital, Tebasoboke was 'covered with a scaly rash', condylomata had surfaced in both of his armpits, a 'fungating mass the size of a small walnut' appeared in his left groin, and he had a phagedenic ulcer of the prepuce.[1] After providing the history of his present condition and undergoing a physical examination, Tebasoboke was diagnosed with secondary syphilis. He was circumcised that afternoon and a fungating mass in his left arm was scraped and swabbed with pure carbolic acid under anesthesia. Over the next several weeks, the nurses dressed his ulcers daily with Iodoform and smeared diluted mercurial ointment on his body. On 16 February, Tebasoboke was discharged nearly a month after being admitted to Mengo Hospital. The final lines of his patient record noted: 'Rash practically gone. Looks a new man. Professes to be converted.'[2]

The staff at Mengo Hospital had been treating patients for nearly six years when Tebasoboke was admitted in early 1903. Founded in 1897 by the medical missionary Dr. Albert Cook, who would eventually emerge as one of the leading figures in Anglophone colonial medical circles, Mengo Hospital was located on the outskirts of present-day Kampala on the slope of Namirembe Hill, the headquarters of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in the Uganda Protectorate. By 1908, Dr. Albert Cook, his brother Dr. Jack Cook, five European nurses, and their African assistants were treating 1,500 in-patients and over 80,000 out-patients a year at Mengo Hospital.[3]

The Cook brothers and their staff treated a wide variety of illnesses and ailments during Mengo Hospital's first five years of operation (Foster 1970: 45-60).[4] The medical problem that would ultimately exercise the Cook brothers more than any other, however, was syphilis. Albert Cook was the first member of the medical establishment to draw attention to the problem of syphilis in early colonial Uganda. Beginning in 1903, the year in which Tebasoboke was treated at Mengo Hospital, syphilis began to emerge as a common diagnosis, accounting for 10% of inpatient cases according to Albert Cook's notes. This figure rose to nearly 14% in 1904, which far exceeded the less than 2% of patients diagnosed with gonorrhea during the same year, and the total number of patients diagnosed with syphilis

at Mengo Hospital and its five branch dispensaries continued to escalate over the next two years (Cook 1907).

The high incidence of syphilis first recorded by Albert Cook proved sufficiently alarming to colonial officials that Governor Hesketh Bell appealed for assistance to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1906. The following year, Colonel F.J. Lambkin, an expert venereologist of the Royal Army Medical Corps, was commissioned to study the situation. Lambkin's final report corroborated Cook's view that syphilis was a serious problem in Uganda, particularly in Buganda. In the years following the publication of Lambkin's report, efforts to combat the syphilis epidemic became the cornerstone of the CMS's broader medical mission and dominated health-related endeavours in Uganda from 1907 to the mid-1920s. These efforts culminated in a joint campaign between the CMS and colonial officials to combat venereal disease throughout the Protectorate in the postwar period.

Beginning in the late 1920s, however, medical officers began to express doubts about the widespread diagnosis of syphilis, and particularly the difficulty of distinguishing syphilis from yaws, a related treponemal disease prevalent in the tropics. Albert Cook himself admitted some uncertainty on the question of diagnosis in the early 1930s, conceding that 'further experience' had made him 'more cautious' about the prevalence of syphilis, particularly among Baganda mothers.[5] A little more than two decades later, J.N.P. Davies, a Professor of Pathology at Makerere College Medical School who had previously practised as a doctor in Uganda, concluded that the disease observed by Cook and Lambkin at the turn of the century was mostly the endemic, non-venereal form of syphilis. 'It is no disrespect to the memory of this fine and able physician,' wrote Davies about Cook, 'to suggest that he was mistaken, that there was no real epidemic of syphilis, and that in so far as there was an "epidemic" he himself was the origin…' (Davies 1956: 1050).

The anti-venereal disease campaign in colonial Uganda has been the subject of a relatively large body of excellent scholarship (Vaughan 1991; Summers 1991; Lyons 1994; White 1995; Tuck 2001; Kuhanen 2005). Much of this scholarship has flowed from the revelation, based on subsequent scientific advances, a re-examination of medical records, and other sources, that there was not in fact an epidemic of venereal syphilis during this period. This scholarship has supported Davies' assertion that early medical missionaries and colonial officials largely misdiagnosed cases of venereal syphilis in early twentieth-century Uganda, although disagreements have persisted about whether the epidemic that medical missionaries and colonial officials recorded was endemic syphilis or yaws (Kuhanen 2005: 300-305). In a related debate, scholars have advanced differing arguments about when and how venereal syphilis first appeared in Uganda, and the factors behind its eventual spread during the first half of the twentieth century. (Tuck 1997: 66-68). Building on this medical detective work initiated in the 1920s and taken up by Davies and subsequent scholars, historians have examined the social construction of syphilis in early colonial Uganda. They have employed the case of the perceived syphilis

epidemic to excavate the 'official mind', to study the 'imperial production of reproduction', and to explore 'the politics of perception' surrounding African female sexuality (Musisi 2002; Summers 1991; Vaughan 1991). Their scholarship has offered some enduring insights into the broader relationship between medicine, colonial rule, and imperialism.

This essay shifts the analytical orientation of scholarship on syphilis in colonial Uganda. The paper examines the language of syphilis in Buganda and colonial Uganda more broadly, the terms and phrases in African languages that medical missionaries, colonial officials, and Africans employed for the 'scaly rash', the 'fungating mass', and the 'phagedenic ulcer of the prepuce' found on Tebasoboke's body in 1903, and the constellation of these terms into a diagnosis of 'secondary syphilis'. Like the practice of power more broadly, processes of translation and the establishment of meaning at the centre of so many undertakings in colonial Africa were textured, involving the weaving together of various layers of actors, ideas, practices, and pasts. While European missionaries and colonial officials undoubtedly played an important role in these processes, one of the perhaps obvious points of this essay is that we cannot uncritically accept the translations for diseases and treatments provided by medical missionaries and colonial medical officers, even in cases, like Albert Cook's, when these individuals had acquired fluency in African languages.[6] Such an analytical move results in the presentation of a view of clinical reality shared by medical professionals and others operating within a particular medical framework, but not necessarily by African patients and practitioners.

Language, Power, and Periodization

As in other parts of Africa, the imposition of colonialism in Buganda accorded specific categories of actors – both European and African – the power to shape perceptions that informed the character of colonial rule itself. Indirect rule required colonizers to know how political power and authority worked, and for guidance and assistance regarding the Great Lakes kingdoms, colonial administrators turned to an obvious and familiar source of control, the royal courts. When it came to medical matters, however, colonial officials could not imagine consulting and working with healers and other knowledgeable individuals in the region. As a result, colonial administrators often turned to European medical missionaries as their primary interlocutors with respect to undertakings in the medical realm.

Like elsewhere, medical missionaries played a significant role in determining the character of colonial rule and, by extension, the practice of power in Buganda. Their ability to do so hinged in many respects on the power to diagnose diseases and then employ those diagnoses to help shape major medical, social, and moral campaigns in the region during the first two decades of the twentieth century. These diagnoses often occurred in clinical settings and involved conversations

between missionary doctors and patients, the outcome of which involved the identification and in some cases creation of specific diseases and their symptoms in African languages. In this respect, the process of translation – and the power to produce translations – was an important component of power in colonial Buganda.

Far from a value-free exercise, however, translation often involves acts of interpretation that have consequences not only for determining the nature of power, but also for the power of scholars to interpret the past. For the purposes of the current discussion, the significance of pointing to the importance of translation is that it forces us to focus attention on how and why certain words in African languages, presumably selected from a range of options, were employed for specific biologically defined diseases, and what we might learn if we question and rethink the translation of those words. One of the most striking yet overlooked aspects of the supposed syphilis epidemic in early colonial Buganda is the remarkably rich vocabulary in Luganda – the most widely spoken language in the region – for syphilis and its associated ailments and elements. The way this vocabulary surfaces in missionary and colonial documentary records for the first two decades of the twentieth century clearly indicates that CMS medical missionaries and colonial medical personnel employed most of these terms in reference to venereal syphilis. The creation of this vocabulary, much of which appears in the dictionaries produced in the early part of the twentieth century, demands examination, particularly considering subsequent revelations of rampant misdiagnosis of venereal syphilis during this period.

The most obvious explanation for the existence of this vocabulary in dictionaries produced by missionaries is that it constituted part of a broader colonial fantasy, the linguistic component of a formula that linked increased freedom for women, the spread of venereal syphilis and other STDs, and depopulation in early colonial Buganda. As Derek Peterson has demonstrated in his work on Gikuyu translation in colonial Kenya, however, the creation of dictionaries resulted from conversations between African interlocutors and missionaries rather than simply emanating from 'the genius of creative missionaries'. Peterson's approach allows for fruitful examinations of the ways in which African interlocutors 'shaped and crafted the language created in the dictionaries', permitting us to see the debates within African communities that lay at the heart of this creative process (Peterson 1999: 38-39). In some respects, however, Peterson's insights render even more puzzling the rich Luganda vocabulary surrounding syphilis. How are we to make sense of the inclusion of this detailed vocabulary in early Luganda dictionaries? Does its existence suggest the participation of Baganda interlocutors in the creation of a colonial fantasy and the acceptance of venereal syphilis as a disease entity in Ganda communities? Or is there some other explanation?

In this essay I consider the creation and development of Luganda terms with meanings related to syphilis. The approach I take necessarily involves adopting and adapting some of the methods employed by historians of early Africa to examine the

twentieth century. As is well known at this point, scholars of early Africa in regions like the Great Lakes confront the challenge posed by the dearth and sometimes absence of a documentary record by drawing upon a variety of sources and disciplines. Historians compose narratives for the distant African past based on evidence gleaned from oral traditions, historical linguistics, archaeology, comparative ethnography, and more. Despite this sometimes-dizzying array of evidence and methods, however, it is the use of comparative historical linguistics that serves for many historians of Africa as the foundation of the multilayered methodology they employ.

A detailed discussion of comparative historical linguistics or the ways in which historians of Africa employ this method to write about the distant past falls beyond the scope of this essay.[7] Rather, the point I wish to make here is that because the use of comparative historical linguistics to write early African history necessarily requires specialized training not ordinarily undertaken by historians working at more recent time depths, the methods and sources employed by historians of early Africa often seem entirely divorced from those employed by historians of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This difference in training and orientation leads to some missed opportunities for thinking through how we might employ elements of comparative historical linguistics to open new analytical avenues – and novel approaches to exploring the 'textures of power' – for the early twentieth century. This essay offers one example of how we might bridge this methodological divide, a task that necessarily involves toggling back and forth between the 'precolonial' and 'colonial'.

The Language of Syphilis in Colonial Buganda

In a short article published nearly fifty years ago, Jan Vansina noted that '[d]espite their uninviting aspect, dictionaries make for engrossing historical reading' (Vansina 1974). A perusal of Luganda dictionaries confirms Vansina's point, although perhaps not in the manner he intended. Historians of Buganda are perhaps more fortunate than those working elsewhere in the region and beyond, in that there exists a relatively rich set of Luganda wordlists and dictionaries produced over the course of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The fact that these works were produced at different intervals means that comparative analysis yields insights into the development of ideas and practices during this period. Rather than the more conventional approach employed by scholars of early Africa who use comparative historical linguistics to move further back in time, this exercise affords insights into continuity and change over the course of the better part of the twentieth century. The comparative analysis of syphilis-related vocabulary in Luganda wordlists and dictionaries also lays the groundwork for broader comparative analysis with related Bantu languages in the region, a topic to which I turn later in the essay.

A close reading of nine Luganda wordlists and dictionaries published between 1882 and 1972 reveals no fewer than twenty terms with meanings related to syphilis (Wilson 1882; Pilkington 1892; Crabtree 1902; Cook 1903; Le Veux 1917; Crabtree 1921; Kitching 1925; Snoxall 1967; Murphy 1972.). The scope, quality, and content of these works varies, ranging from the approximately 1000 words included in the Reverend C.T. Wilson's *An Outline of the Luganda Language* to the over 1000-pages in the White Father R.P. Le Veux's magisterial *Premier essai de vocabulaire luganda-français*. The authors of the wordlists and dictionaries were motivated by a variety of factors and worked in sometimes dramatically different contexts. All were men and more than half were missionaries, with later authors often building upon the best of the works produced by their predecessors. Despite these limitations, the comparative analysis of vocabulary related to syphilis in these dictionaries offers some tantalizing insights into the chronology, development, and transformation of ideas about the disease in twentieth-century Buganda. This analysis also opens the door to further avenues of interpretation that move beyond the interpretive framework embedded in the dictionaries themselves.

Of the twenty Luganda terms considered in this essay, only one – *kàbootongo* – appears in each of the nine wordlists and dictionaries with a meaning related to syphilis. Beginning with the Reverend C.T. Wilson's *An Outline of the Luganda Language*, which was published in 1882, this term turns up with the meaning 'syphilis' in all the subsequent works. Perhaps not surprisingly, most Luganda terms related to syphilis – 13 of 20 – surface for the first time in Albert Cook's 1903 *A Medical Vocabulary and Phrasebook in Luganda*. Cook firmly believed that missionaries should master local languages and took much pride in his knowledge of Luganda. He published this fascinating work to assist both other medical missionaries and African 'native assistants' in their dealings with African patients at Mengo Hospital and its satellite centres. Cook completed the medical dictionary and phrasebook in 1901, but publication of the work was delayed until 1903.

A few points about the fate of these terms in subsequent dictionaries deserve mention. First, several of these terms received additional meanings in subsequent dictionaries. For instance, *kàberebenje*, which Cook defined as 'syphilitic skin rash', received the additional meaning 'yaws' in A.L. Kitching's 1925 *A Luganda-English and English-Luganda Dictionary*, and the term retained both meanings R.A. Snoxall's masterful 1967 *Luganda-English Dictionary*. Similarly, *kàbootongo wa kàcuucuùke*, which Cook translated in his medical vocabulary as 'secondary syphilis', took on the additional meaning 'yaws' in Mulira and Ndawula's 1952 revision of Kitching's dictionary as well as in Snoxall's dictionary.[8] Second, Cook's term for 'primary venereal sore', *èmbetèza*, does not appear in either Snoxall or Murphy, the two most recent – and two of the most comprehensive – dictionaries considered here. Finally, two terms from Cook's medical vocabulary – *ènnungù* ('syphilitic rhagades') and *èkikîndu* ('syphilitic rupia; primary sore on glans') – retain meanings connected to syphilis in subsequent dictionaries but then appear in Murphy's 1972 dictionary with no mention of syphilis.[9]

While the majority of the twenty Luganda terms related to syphilis initially appeared in Cook's medical vocabulary, six of these terms surfaced elsewhere for the first time with meanings related to syphilis. Interestingly, each of these six terms featured in Cook's work but with meanings not explicitly connected to syphilis. Four of these terms – *ènkana*, *àmàga*, *èmpindù*, *ènsalîka* – appeared for the first time with meanings related to syphilis in Le Veux's dictionary, which was published fourteen years after Cook's medical vocabulary. The last two terms – *kìwuukirizi* and *òlùkonvubâ* – turn up for the first time in connection with syphilis in Kitching's 1925 dictionary.

This comparative analysis of Luganda vocabulary reveals several noteworthy points about the development and transformation of ideas about 'syphilis' in twentieth-century Buganda. The fact that the same Luganda term appears with the meaning 'syphilis' in the three wordlists and dictionaries published prior to Albert Cook's medical vocabulary demonstrates that despite his role in calling attention to the problem in the early twentieth century, Albert Cook was neither the first European to note the presence of syphilis in Buganda nor the first to record an equivalent term in Luganda. As illustrated by the thirteen syphilis-related terms that appear for the first time in his medical vocabulary, however, Cook did play a critical role in the development of medical terminology surrounding syphilis and the emergence of syphilis as a disease entity in early twentieth-century Buganda, at least in the eyes of European missionaries and colonial officials. The presence of four new syphilis-related terms in Le Veux's dictionary (1917) and another two in Kitching's (1925) reflects the further elaboration and extension of Cook's ideas in the second decade of the twentieth century.

Kitching's and subsequent dictionaries also reveal the emergence of diagnostic doubt, as evinced by the addition of meanings to terms that Cook had defined in relation to syphilis or the disappearance of these terms entirely. In total, half of the syphilis-related terms that had apparently been established by 1925 were either no longer in circulation or carried non-syphilis-related meanings by 1972. This observation points to the cultural and ideological dimensions of translation and raises questions about how we might re-translate these terms to better reflect their meanings in the early twentieth century, a topic that I take up below.

Beyond Buganda and Beyond Colonialism

The previous section focused mostly on the historical trajectory of vocabulary related to syphilis in twentieth-century Buganda. Any effort to analyze the pre-twentieth-century semantic histories of this vocabulary, or to explore alternative meanings for these terms at the time of their incorporation into dictionaries, presents the historian with a dilemma. Many of these terms could not possibly have carried for Baganda the meanings provided in the early wordlists and dictionaries.

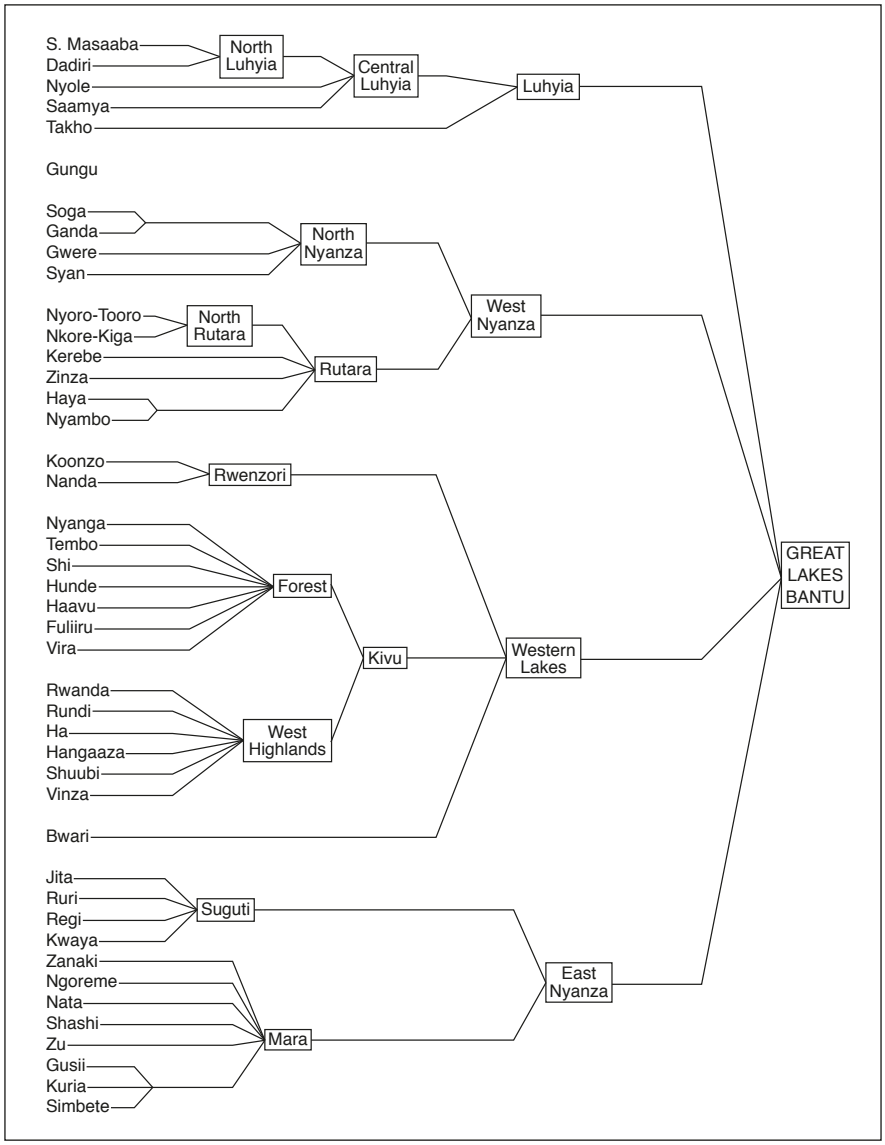

Figure 1: Great Lakes Bantu linguistic classification (After Schoenbrun 1989: 89).

It is difficult to imagine, for instance, that *ènnungù*, which Cook defined as 'syphilitic rhagades', bore that meaning for Baganda in the early twentieth century. One of the principal ways that historians of early Africa tackle the challenge of getting beyond colonial-era dictionary definitions is through the careful comparative analysis of the distribution of terms and their meanings – as revealed in dictionaries, ethnographies, oral traditions, and other sources – in related languages.[10] These sorts of analyses, which vary in terms of the number of languages involved

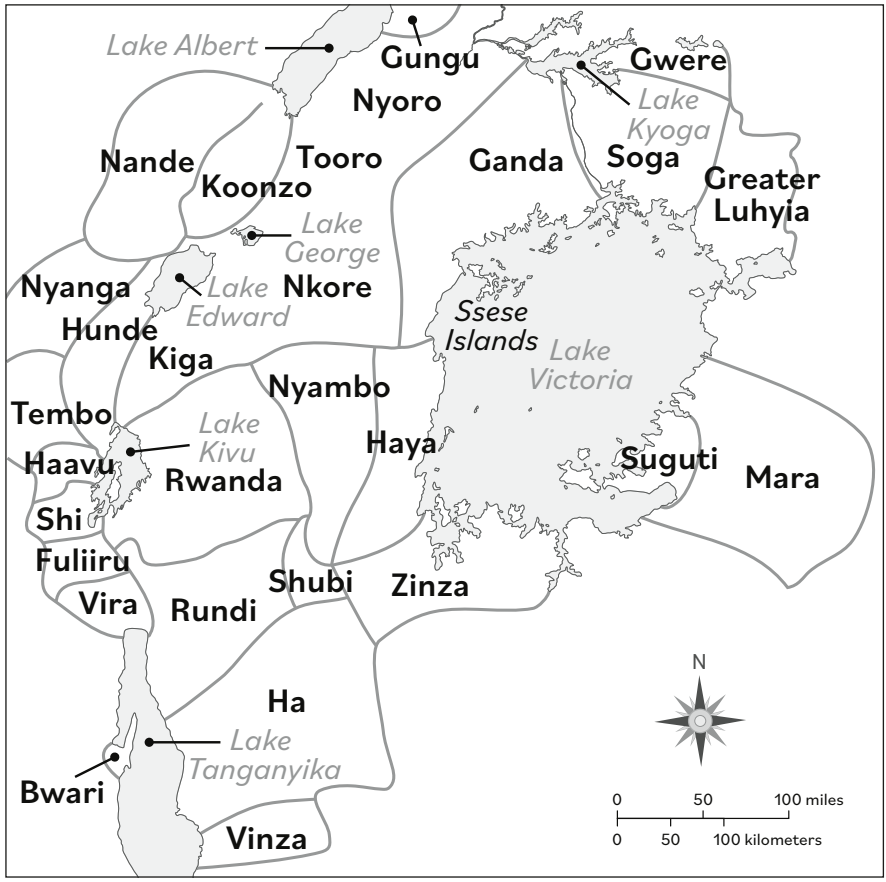

Figure 2: Linguistic Geography of the Great Lakes region classification (After Schoenbrun 1989: 23).

and geographic scope, reveal semantic continuities and transformations and constitute the *modus operandi* for historians of early Africa who employ comparative historical linguistics. As illustrated below, they can also lay the groundwork for an examination of further semantic changes in the colonial period.[11]

We will begin with a basic comparative analysis of the distribution of the Luganda vocabulary for syphilis in related Bantu languages spoken in the region (see fig. 1-2 for a classification and geographical distribution of these languages).[12] Three broad observations emerge from this comparative exercise. First, seven of the twenty terms – *kàbootongo*, *nnungu*, *kìwuukirizi*, *èmbetèza*, *lùkonvubâ*, *ènsalîka*, *kàbootongo ow'amàbwa* – appear only in Luganda and do not surface in any form in the related Bantu languages spoken in the southern half of Uganda.[13] Second, eight of the twenty terms in Luganda – *bikāta*, *èkikîndu*, *ènkana*, *àmàga*, *àmàkajja*, *èmpindù*, *òmunnyo*, *ebìkwêrai* – have attestations in other Bantu languages spoken in Uganda but with meanings not related to syphilis. Finally, of the remaining five

terms, four – *kàcuucuùke, kàbaata, kàberebenje, àmawenànge* – also appear in one other language (Lunyoro) in connection to syphilis and one – *èmbalukâ* – appears in two other languages (Lunyoro and Runyankore) with meanings related to syphilis.

This basic comparative analysis allows for further analysis of and insights into the development of the Luganda vocabulary related to syphilis in early colonial Buganda. In the case of the eight Luganda terms that appear in related languages with meanings not connected to syphilis, we can proceed with further, more detailed comparative analysis to reveal derivations and etymologies. For the remaining twelve terms – those that appear only in Luganda and those that appear in other northern Great Lakes Bantu languages with meanings related to syphilis – we must turn to a blunter examination of semantic continuities and transformations. The combination of these approaches allows us to tackle the challenge of moving beyond dictionary definitions for vocabulary related to syphilis and to lift, even if slightly, the ideological, moral, and cultural curtains hanging over this vocabulary.

The Luganda terms that carry the meanings 'syphilis', 'secondary syphilis', and 'tertiary syphilis' in wordlists and dictionaries serve as an appropriate starting point for this linguistic detective work. As mentioned earlier, the term *kàbootongo* appears in all nine wordlists and dictionaries as 'syphilis'. The fact that the term does not appear in any other languages in the region rules out conventional comparative analysis, and we must therefore explore its derivation for initial clues about the ideas, practices, or observations that may have informed its creation. The most likely derivation for *kàbootongo* is the verb *-boota* – 'be flabby, soft to the touch' – with the addition of the habitual suffix *–nga* and subsequent vowel assimilation.[14] Building on *kàbootongo* as 'syphilis', all the Luganda dictionaries beginning with Cook's medical vocabulary include *kàbootongo wa kàcuucuùke* with the meaning 'secondary syphilis' to create the term for the second stage in the disease progression.[15] Like *kàbootongo*, *kàcuucuùke* derives from a verb, *-cucùka*, which is widely distributed in northern Great Lakes Bantu languages with the meaning 'fade, lose colour, become rough'. Finally, Cook was the first to include *kàbootongo ow'amàbwa* as 'tertiary syphilis,' a meaning reproduced in all the subsequent dictionaries in which the term appears. *Kàbootongo ow'amàbwa* combines *kàbootongo* with the term for sores (*mabwa*). Discarding the notion of *kàbootongo* as syphilis but maintaining, at least for the moment, the sense of disease progression embedded in the English translations of *kàbootongo*, *kàbootongo wa kàcuucuùke*, and *kàbootongo ow'amàbwa*, these derivations suggest an understanding of a disease characterized by flabby skin that then loses colour, becomes rough, and ultimately develops sores.

Turning to other terms related to syphilis in Luganda, most of which refer to symptoms, we see a variety of etymologies, semantic extensions, and semantic narrowings, some predictable and others less so. With respect to the terms that appear only in Luganda, many derive either from much older verbs with clear semantic connections ('scratch', 'burst open', 'cut', 'shine', 'be thin, emaciated',

'mature or swell') or from much older nouns that underwent an obvious semantic extension in Luganda. For instance, the term for 'syphilitic chancre' (*èmbalukâ*) derives from the Proto-Bantu root for 'to split, burst open'. Some of these terms, however, bear less predictable derivations. For example, the term for 'cracked skin on feet and hands from syphilis' (*nnungu*) likely derives from the Great Lakes Bantu verb 'season, spice' (*-dùng), which took on the additional meaning 'fill a pipe with tobacco' in Luganda.

For the terms that appear in related northern Great Lakes Bantu languages with meanings not connected with syphilis, most underwent a slight semantic shift in the Luganda dictionaries by which 'syphilis' was grafted onto an older meaning shared by Luganda and the other languages in which these terms occur. In this manner, for example, 'scratch, scale, hard skin' becomes 'scaly syphilitic rash, on palms and soles of feet'; 'ganglion' becomes 'syphilitic swelling on limb, gumma,'; and 'roughness of the skin' becomes 'scaly rash in syphilis'. Two of these terms, however, reveal slightly different semantic innovations: the Luganda term for 'syphilitic sore' appears in several other northern Great Lakes languages with the meaning 'palm tree'; and the Luganda term for 'syphilitic swelling on knee or elbow' occurs in wide distribution with the meaning 'dewlap (esp. cows)'.

Taken together, the distribution and etymologies for terms related to syphilis in northern Great Lakes Bantu languages suggest that Luganda speakers understood the disease that medical missionaries and colonial officials called 'syphilis' in ways quite different from the speakers of related Bantu languages in Uganda: fifteen of the twenty terms related to syphilis in Luganda either do not appear in other languages in any form, or appear in other languages with meanings not related to syphilis. With respect to the five terms that do appear in some of the related Bantu languages spoken in Uganda, the linguistic evidence does not allow us to know whether the meanings of these terms as they appear in dictionaries were borrowed at some point during the colonial period or were arrived at independently. For the purposes of this discussion, however, this knowledge is less important than the relatively small number of these terms. This number is particularly surprising given that the anti-venereal disease campaigns initiated in Buganda and implemented in other parts of the Uganda Protectorate in the 1920s included the use of propaganda materials in Luganda. Moreover, the fact that seven of the syphilis-related terms in Luganda appear in other languages but with meanings not connected to syphilis suggests that Africans who spoke these languages *could* have potentially drawn upon these terms in their discussions about 'syphilis' with medical missionaries and colonial medical personnel, many of whom had spent time in Buganda and studied Luganda. The absence of a connection with syphilis for these terms hints at the role of African interlocutors in the selection of terms from African languages that eventually appeared with meanings related to syphilis in dictionaries produced by European missionaries, colonial administrators, and scholars. A cursory review of the terminology for syphilis in Uganda's Bantu languages other than

Luganda reveals multiple, different sets of terminologies for 'syphilis'. The lack of more extensive overlap suggests the influence of existing ideas and practices that were subsumed, at least partially, under the English label 'syphilis'. Any effort to excavate these earlier ideas and practices, however, requires that we supplement the linguistic record with other kinds and sources of evidence, a brief example of which I offer in the following section.

Back to Kàbootongo

We will now return to *kàbootongo*. As detailed above, *kàbootongo* is the only term with a meaning related to syphilis that turns up in each of the nine Luganda wordlists and dictionaries considered in this essay beginning with the Reverend C.T. Wilson's 1882 *An Outline of the Luganda Language*. Missionaries and colonial officials, including the authors of the first wordlists and dictionaries, clearly employed the term to refer to venereal syphilis in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the period when Europeans began to worry about the problem of venereal diseases in Buganda. As mentioned above, however, beginning in the late 1920s and continuing with the work of J.N.P. Davies in the 1950s, missionaries, colonial medical officers, and others began to wonder whether the panic over venereal syphilis in the first part of the twentieth century was misguided and based on rampant misdiagnosis.

Several scholars since Davies have weighed in on the issue of whether what the early missionaries and colonial medical personnel called *kàbootongo* was in fact endemic syphilis, yaws, or some combination of the two with an admixture of the more recently introduced sexually transmitted disease (Orley and Bennett 1973: 65-66; Vaughan 1992: 136; Lyons 1994; Tuck 1997: 40; Kuhanen 2005: 300-301).[16] While valuable in many respects, this approach inevitably pulls us into a perhaps overly narrow biomedical framework. The challenge lies in developing a different approach to the question of what was *kàbootongo*, an approach that complements rather than necessarily replaces the strictly biomedical one. Linguistic evidence takes us only so far in this endeavour. We need to combine linguistic evidence with other sources to produce a more textured picture of *kàbootongo* and its relationship to what missionaries and colonial medical officers called syphilis.

The Reverend C.T. Wilson and R.W. Felkin, two of the pioneering CMS missionaries in the region, were the first Europeans to call attention to the problem of syphilis in Buganda. Wilson was the first CMS missionary to reach Buganda, arriving at the court of King Muteesa in July 1877. In an account of his experiences published in 1882, he wrote that '[s]yphilis is extremely common [in Buganda], especially among the men, in all its forms, and is a frequent complication in other diseases' (Wilson and Felkin 1882). Wilson also included the term *kabalongo* with the meaning 'syphilis' in the Luganda-English vocabulary at the end of his outline

of Luganda grammar published in 1882 (Wilson 1882: 84). Meanwhile, R.W. Felkin, a medical student who arrived in Buganda in February 1879 as part of a CMS expedition sent to aid Wilson, provided a more detailed description of the disease. After commenting on the widespread existence of venereal diseases in Buganda, Felkin offered the following:

> Here, as in other Central African tribes, one meets with individuals having small white patches due to the absence of pigment. The natives attribute these patches to syphilis (kabalongo) [sic.], and they say that the amount of whiteness shows the extent of the disease. Europeans, they say, must be in a shocking state (Felkin 1886: 708).

Felkin's description echoed an earlier observation made by Wilson, who remarked on the frequency with which he encountered people with 'white patches on their hands, faces, and legs…' (Wilson and Felkin 1882: 184).

Kàbootongo also appears in the works of the earliest Ganda writers. In his book on Ganda customs published in 1918, Apolo Kagwa, the preeminent Ganda politician of his generation and Prime Minister of Buganda, wrote that *kàbootongo* was introduced into Buganda during the reign of Kabaka Mawanda, who ruled in the early eighteenth century. According to Kagwa, Mawanda's soldiers acquired *kàbootongo* during wars with neighbouring polities. When Mawanda noticed that *kàbootongo* caused soldiers' hands to become white, he ordered his musicians to play the following song:

> *Kabotongo kyava atukuza engalo kiki?*
> *Kabotongo kyava atukuza engalo bukambwe;*
> *Kabotongo kyava atukuza engalo buswandi.* (Kagwa 1918: 264)
>
> Why is it that kabotongo whitens hands?
> Kabotongo whitens hands because of its cruelty.
> Kabotongo whitens hands because of its fierceness.[17]

A remarkable collection of Luganda proverbs and proverbial expressions written by Henry Dwight Duta, an early Ganda convert to Christianity, and published in 1902 also included a proverb about *kàbootongo* and the whitening of hands.[18]

A further examination of Luganda proverbs from first few decades of the twentieth century provides additional clues about the language of *kàbootongo* and various other aspects of the disease. One proverb declares:

> *Avaawo asigira: kabootongo asigira ennungu n'ebikaata*
>
> 'He who leaves his place (or: He who passes away) puts in his representative (heir): kabootongo puts in (is replaced by) nnungu and bikaata' (Walser 1984: 61).

Nnungu is the term I mentioned earlier that Cook and others translated as 'cracked skin on feet and hands from syphilis' and derives from the Great Lakes Bantu verb 'season, spice' (*-dùng), which took on the additional meaning 'fill a pipe with tobacco' in Luganda. The reference to *kàbootongo* affecting the lips in several proverbs, along with this derivation, suggests the smoking of a communal pipe as a possible mode of transmission.[19] The word *nnungu* is also a play on the Luganda word for porcupine (*nnamunnungu*), a reference which turns up in the Luganda proverb:

> *Omubootongo nnamunnungu: w'atuula w'aleka amaggwa.*
>
> 'A person with kabootongo is like a porcupine: wherever it sits down, it leaves its spines.' (Walser 1984: 364)[20]

The second symptom of *kàbootongo* mentioned in the proverb above is *bikaata*. *Bikaata* appears in Cook's dictionary with the meaning 'tertiary syphilitic scaly rash on hands and feet' and in other Luganda dictionaries as the similar 'scaly syphilitic rash, on palms and soles of feet'. The term most likely derives from an ancient Bantu word meaning 'to scratch,' and reflexes of *bikaata* appear in other northern Great Lakes Bantu languages with the meaning 'scale, scab, or hard skin'. Combining the early travellers' descriptions, proverbs, and derivations, we see a progression from *kàbootongo* – a disease characterized by loss of pigment in the skin that can lead to *nnungu* (cracks on feet and palms) – to *kacuucuke* – in which the skin continues to fade or lose lustre – to *bikaata* – when it hardens and develops scabs.

After the descriptions provided by early missionaries and references to *kàbootongo* in some of the works of the first generation of literate Baganda, most of the missionaries and colonial medical officers working in the first two or three decades of the twentieth century treated *kàbootongo* as syphilis. The first sustained description of *kàbootongo* outside of the biomedical framework, or at least one that questions the association with syphilis, is in the work of John Orley (Orley 1973). Trained in both psychiatry and social anthropology, Orley possessed a high degree of fluency in Luganda and lived in rural Buganda for an extended period of time in the mid-1960s. While most known for his work on mental illness, he also carried out studies of concepts of infectious diseases amongst rural Baganda, including on *kàbootongo*.

Orley's inquiries about *kàbootongo* revealed several noteworthy points about the ways Baganda conceived the disease in rural areas in the 1960s. With respect to the origins of the disease, there was no concept of *kàbootongo* as a foreign disease. Baganda living in the villages in which Orley worked considered *kàbootongo* an indigenous (*kiganda*) illness that had been present in the region for a long time. This lack of foreign attribution provided a contrast to the often-repeated line among Baganda elites, beginning in the early colonial period, that syphilis was

imported into Buganda by either Arabs or Europeans. Perhaps more significantly, Orley's informants did not regard *kàbootongo* as specifically venereal, and they attached little stigma to the disease. Orley's informants, however, did regard some forms of *kàbootongo* as infectious, particularly the form that manifested as a rash of body sores. The infectious forms of *kàbootongo* could spread through touching an infected person or an object that an infected person had touched. An infected person's sweat or the warmth left by an infected person on a stool were regarded as possible vectors. When asked about how they acquired *kàbootongo*, however, the most common response from Orley's informants was that they inherited the disease from their parents. Interestingly, Martin Southwold recorded a similar conception several years before Orley's research. When Southwold asked a girl's mother about the cause of a tropical ulcer on her daughter's leg, the mother replied, 'It's her father's *kabootongo*', an answer with which the father agreed (Southwold 1959: 45).

In addition to these broad points about conceptions of *kàbootongo* in rural Buganda, and perhaps most importantly for our purposes, Orley also provided the Luganda terms for the symptoms or manifestations of *kàbootongo* and offered descriptions of these. Of the eleven terms mentioned by Orley with a connection to *kàbootongo*, all except one show up in the Luganda wordlists and dictionaries examined in this essay. More tellingly, other than the term *kàbootongo*, which appears in the earliest wordlist, five appear for the first time in Cook's 1903 medical vocabulary and four turn up for the first time in Le Veux's 1917 dictionary. Moreover, the descriptions that Orley provides for the varieties of *kàbootongo* and the various symptoms match the descriptions in these dictionaries minus the adjective 'syphilitic'. This indicates that the terms Orley provided in his published work in the early 1970s, what these terms described, and the ideas embedded in them were in circulation in the early twentieth century and perhaps even earlier.

At the end of his study, Orley stated: 'It is not clear whether a disease is called syphilitic in the dictionary because the Baganda think of it as a manifestation of kabootongo or because the doctors advising the compilers thought it a manifestation of syphilis.' We might reframe this by asking why it is that particular words wound up in Luganda dictionaries with meanings connected to syphilis. One way of approaching this issue is to consider alternatives. Even a cursory analysis of the wider vocabulary for skin ailments reveals that Luganda speakers and speakers of other Great Lakes Bantu languages had a very rich vocabulary for skin diseases. The history of these terms also reveals a variety of ideas about the origins, causes, spread, and treatment of skin ailments. At times the terms for skin ailments derive from terms that previously referred to something that bore a physical resemblance to the way the skin looked in particular ailments: 'bark of a tree', 'dry flesh scraped from a hide', 'to shine', 'to boil', and so forth. Speakers of various Great Lakes Bantu languages also recognized skin diseases that resulted from the violation of taboo. Some terms for skin diseases also derive from the Proto-Bantu term for what is usually translated as 'witchcraft'.

The point here is that there were a variety of ideas about skin diseases in circulation in the region when Europeans arrived in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. And therefore, there were a variety of choices available for the terms that eventually appeared as syphilis and its symptoms in Luganda dictionaries. Two additional points follow from this point. First, we can only view these choices if we delve into the pre-twentieth century, toggling back and forth between the 'precolonial' and 'colonial' periods. And second, at least in the case of *kàbootongo*, it was Ugandans who were making these choices based on knowledge of diseases that preceded the arrival of medical missionaries. This explains why particular terms and not others cluster around *kàbootongo* and 'syphilis' in Luganda dictionaries.

Conclusion

The considerable literature on medicine, disease, and healing in colonial Africa would benefit from a deeper and broader historical context in which to situate the undertakings of the earliest European representatives of biomedicine. This deeper context allows us to better perceive the multilayered 'textures of power' at play in clinical settings and beyond during the first half of the twentieth century. By providing insights into the range of ideas about diseases and therapeutic options in circulation prior to the twentieth century, this deeper history affords the possibility of contemplating the choices African patients and practitioners made – and, more importantly, the consequences of those choices – from a range of options when deciding how to engage with their European counterparts. Baganda interlocutors clearly played a role in the development of the vocabulary for syphilis in Luganda dictionaries. Their role, however, lay more in the realm of the selection of Luganda terms than in developing their English translations, at least as they appear in dictionaries.

The task of unearthing this selection process and overcoming the challenges posed by dictionary translations involves the combination of linguistic spadework and a close reading of ethnographic and other evidence – in other words, the creative adaptation of methodologies ordinarily employed by historians of early Africa to the study of the early colonial period. Such an approach has the potential to yield a more textured, layered, and complex understanding of the power at the heart of translation, both literal and figurative. In the case of the syphilis epidemic in colonial Buganda, this approach allows us to move beyond analyses of the relationship between moral-medical discourse and colonial power, which dominate the scholarship on this much-studied topic, and toward an understanding of the correlations, convergences, and divergences between Africans' and Europeans' conceptions of diseases and medical practices.

Notes

1 Condylomata are wart like growths on the skin or mucous membrane. They usually appear around the anus or external genitalia and are generally regarded as symptoms of the secondary phase of syphilis. The case notes indicate, however, that Tebasoboke did not exhibit any of these lesions around his anus.

2 'Mengo Hospital Case Notes' (Makerere University College of Health Sciences), vols. 1, 1903, Albert Cook Library Archives.

3 For an overview of the early phases of the CMS medical mission in Uganda, see Foster, W.D. (1968) 'Doctor Albert Cook and the Early Days of the Church Missionary Society's Medical Mission to Uganda', *Medical History* 12, 4 (4): 325-43.

4 While both Cook brothers treated patients, Jack devoted much of his attention to the administration of the hospital and surgical cases, leaving Albert to act as the primary physician.

5 Uganda Protectorate, *Annual Medical and Sanitary Report for 1932:* Appendix: Report of the Lady Coryndon Maternity Training School, p.49. Cited in Vaughan, M (1992) Syphilis in colonial East and Central Africa: the social construction of an epidemic' in T.O. Ranger and P. Sack (eds), *Epidemics and Ideas: Essays on the Historical Perception of Pestilence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

6 For a similar approach, see Kalusa. W.T. (2007), 'Language, Medical Auxiliaries, and the Re-Interpretation of Missionary Medicine in Colonial Mwinilunga, Zambia, 1922-511', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 1 (1): 57-78..

7 For a discussion of the method and examples of historians of Africa who employ the method, see, among others, Schoenbrun, D. L. (1998) *A Green Place, A Good Place: Agrarian Change and Social Identity in the Great Lakes Region to the 15th Century*. Portsmouth: Heinemann; De Luna, K. M. (2016) *Collecting Food, Cultivating People: Subsistence and Society in Central Africa*. New Haven CT: Yale University Press; Stephens, R. (2013) *A History of African Motherhood: The Case of Uganda*. New York: Cambridge University Press; Vansina, J.(1990) *Paths in the Rainforest: Towards a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

8 *Kàbootongo wa kàcuucuùke* appears in Kitching's original version only with the meaning 'secondary syphilis.' Both E.M.K. Mulira and E.G.M. Ndawula received linguistic scholarships from the Colonial Office in 1947 to study at the School of Oriental and African Studies. They revised Kitching's dictionary with the support of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

9 *Ènnungù* appears in Murphy's dictionary as simply 'cracked skin on the feet' and *èkikîndu* as 'small palm tree.'

10 Among many examples, see Scheonbrun, D. L. (1998) *A Green Place, A Good Place: Agrarian Change and Social Identity in the Great Lakes Region to the 15th Century*. Portsmouth: Heinemann; De Luna, K. M. (2016) *Collecting Food, Cultivating People: Subsistence and Society in Central Africa*. New Haven CT: Yale University Press; Stephens, R. (2013) *A History of African Motherhood: The Case of Uganda*. New York: Cambridge University Press; Vansina, J.(1990) *Paths in the Rainforest: Towards a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press; Saidi, C. (2010) *Women's Authority and Society in Early East-Central Africa*. Rochester NY: University of Rochester Press

11 For a provocative example that combines elements of both approaches, see Landau, P. S. (2010) *Popular Politics in the History of South Africa*, 1400-1948. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See also Schoenbrun, D. L. (2006) 'Conjuring the moder in Africa: durability and rupture in histories of public healing between the great lakes of East Africa' *American Historical Review* 111 (5): 1403-39.

12 For the purposes of this comparison, I limited my analysis to languages included in the North Nyanza and Rutara branches of Great Lakes Bantu. The languages included in these two branches, which together constitute the larger West Nyanza branch, are Luganda, Lusoga, Lugwere, Rusyan, Runyoro, Rutooro, Runyankore, Rukiga, Ruhaya, Runyambo, Kikerebe, and Luzinza. I did not have access to a dictionary or wordlist in Rusyan or an adequate dictionary or wordlist in Kikerebe, and I therefore could not check distributions in these languages.

[13] *Kàbootongo* does appear in a recently published Lusoga dictionary with the meaning 'syphilis,' but this is most likely a loan from Luganda. I included Ruhaya, a member of the Rutara family that is spoken along the south and southwest coast of Lake Victoria in present-day Tanzania, in my analysis.

[14] As I discuss in the following section, descriptions of *kàbootongo* in early missionary accounts and ethnographies lend credibility to this derivation.

[15] As I discussed in the previous section, *kàbootongo wa kàcuucuùke* appears with the additional meaning 'yaws' beginning with Kitching's 1925 dictionary.

[16] For those who point to endemic syphilis, a related debate is how the prevalence of venereal syphilis gradually overtook that of endemic syphilis.

[17] English translation comes from Kagwa, Sir Apolo (1918) *Ekitabo Kye Mpisa Za Baganda:(The Customs of the Baganda in the Luganda language).* Kampala: Uganda Printing and Publishing Company Limitied. The translator of Kagwa's book, Ernest Kalibala, employed the term 'syphilis' for *kabotongo*. For reasons that I hope should be clear, I have chosen to retain *kabotongo*.

[18] These examples of the connection between *kàbootongo* and the loss in skin pigment (hypopigmentation) further reinforces the proposed derivation of *kàbootongo wa kàcuucuùke*, which Cook and others translated as 'secondary syphilis,' from the verb (*–cucuka*) meaning 'to fade, lose lustre.'

[19] E.g., *Atudde entitibbwa: kabootongo z'atuula mu mumwa*: He sits immovably: as syphilis sits on the lips (i.e. a long time, without healing up); *Kabootongo z'aloga omuluvu esavu asa ku mumwa*: Syphilis puts fat (pus) on his lips and he can't eat it (Walser 1984: 59, 73).

[20] This proverb also hints at the notion of the casual transmission of *kàbootongo*. It's interesting to note in this respect, as Mike Tuck has done, that none of the 15 or so proverbs mention any connection between *kàbootongo* and sexual activity, or anything other than casual transmission.

CHAPTER 4.3

Homosexuality, Queer Politics, and the Texture of Power in Cameroon

Basile Ndjio

Focus

Since Cameroon gained independence in 1960, homosexual 'orgiasm' (Maffesoli 1985: 5) has emerged as the unconscious of an 'Other' whose presence in the country's public sphere has never been desired. More importantly, it has appeared as a major source of haunting for both the regimes of Ahmadou Ahidjo (1960-82) and Paul Biya (1982-present). This haunting is even more obsessive because the rise of the homosexual spectre impeded and continues even today to impede the ambitions of both regimes to create an exclusive and essentially heterosexual Cameroonian nation (see Ndjio 2012: 609-31 and 2016). Since the 1960s, the post-colonial Cameroonian State has attempted, through a variety of strategies, to eradicate homosexuality. Furthermore, to chase the homosexual phantom, it has set out to politically *problematize* it.

Michel Foucault first introduced the concept of *problematization,* which refers to a set of discursive or non-discursive practices that involve the enquiry of something in terms of truth and falsity and constitute it as an object for thought (see Foucault 1994). Drawing on his analysis of madness, prison, sexuality, and punishment, we use this notion of 'problematization' to illustrate the intricate and occasionally contradictory deployments, articulations, and manifestations of the texture of power regarding homosexuality in different periods of postcolonial Cameroon's sexual history, starting from the early 1960s. This term is also used to highlight the dynamic perceptions of same-sex sexuality, the different hues it has taken, and the multiple meanings it has been given by the postcolonial State over the past 60 years.

The problematization of homosexuality implies above all its (negative) politicization (see Fumanti 2017; Awondo 2010: 315-28; Currier 2018). This means that the Cameroonian authorities are keen to consider same-sex acts a disturbing social and political problem that not only necessitates the State's intervention, but also requires appropriate political responses. More specifically, this politicization of homosexuality entails that it is politically perceived as a sexual behaviour that negatively impacts public order, social cohesion, and especially undermines the national (heterosexual) citizenship that the State power has been promoting since the early 1960s.

The Cameroonian government's aggressive policy towards individuals identified as homosexual has been extensively documented (see Gueboguo 2009; Gueboguo & Epprecht 2010; ADEFHO et al. 2010). Similarly, much has been written about the sometimes virulent homo-intolerance that the problematic politicization

of homosexuality has induced in Cameroon (see Ndjio 2016 and 2012: 609-31; Awondo 2010: 315-28). However, there are very few works about the evolving characteristic of the queer politics of the two regimes that have ruled the country since 1960. Therefore, this essay's goal is to close this epistemological and heuristic gap.

This study relies on an exploration of both academic and popular literature on political homophobia in Cameroon, as well as on field research conducted in the country over the past fifteen years. It aims to provide insights into the development of queer politics of the Cameroonian State, particularly the changes in the ideas and knowledge that both Ahidjo's and Biya's regimes have produced not only to invalidate non-conforming sexual practices, but also to define, identify, name, or singularize homosexual persons since 1960. The essay also examines the various mutations in the official discursive orders that have been employed to address the issue of nonconventional sexual practices in Cameroon.

From a theoretical perspective, the essay posits that both Ahidjo's and Biya's regimes have employed complex and variegated textures of power which combine biopolitical[1] strategies with necropolitical[2] mechanisms to deal with the so-called homosexuality threat. More precisely, both regimes have invented a distinctive and problematic homosexual 'Other' whose presence must be spectralized or invisibilized through violent methods to sustain the myths about the non-existence of homosexuality within the imagined heterosexual Cameroon nation. These two technologies of power operate through four rationales that have been used over the past sixty years to politically problematize homosexual eroticism[3] in this country. These include: the spectralization, ethicization, judicialization, and culturalization of homosexuality. These are essential components of the queer politics of the Cameroonian State power and, above all, they are manifestations of a particular texture of power that ambivalently problematizes non-heterosexual expressions and practices.

Invisibilizing Homosexuality

In an article on the rise of sexual minorities in the public sphere in Africa, Christophe Broqua enthusiastically notes that homosexual persons have become more visible in this continent over the past ten years (cf. Broqua 2012: 5-24). However, what the French anthropologist failed to underline is that the visibilization of LGBTQIA+ individuals occurred within an African context that has, for so long, been characterised by the invisibilization of sexual minorities, as noted by Signe Arnfred (2004). In Africa as a whole, homosexual persons were long compelled to live as spectres by oppressive regimes. In fact, the African post-colonial political order has created two completely different types of citizenship since the post-independence era: the first is a citizenship that is visible and the second is a form of citizenship that can best be described as 'invisible', 'ghostly' or 'spectral', because it is obscured or concealed.

The first one denotes the citizen whose right to appear or to manifest themself in public is guaranteed by their sexual conformity, and particularly by their adherence to the heterosexual norms upheld by the post-colonial State. It is also a subject that is acknowledged as having the right to openly express their sexual orientation or display their gender and sexual identity. The State's endorsed *visibilis politicus,* which promotes heteronormativity, has largely benefited heterosexual subjects,[4] who are viewed administratively and legally as the model of the ideal civic and law-abiding sexual citizen.[5]

The second type of citizenship pertains to individuals whose non-conformist sexual conduct violates the laws of gender and sex promoted by the African post-colonial political system. This is the situation for a segment of the population identified as homosexuals, who are often denied the right to visibility due to their unconventional gender and sexual orientation. In fact, homosexual subjects have long been emblematic figures of the invisible or spectral citizens that many African powers have attempted to keep in the social and political closet – a term known as 'nkouta'[6] in Cameroonian popular discourse – (see Gueboguo 2009 and 2006). In other words, homosexual persons have long been subjected to a policy of invisibility, which validates Pierre Bourdieu's argument that one aspect of sexual oppression is the occultation of sexual minorities in public (see Bourdieu 2001).

Most analyses of the State power's anti-homosexual politics in Africa tend to overlook the fact that a specific biopolitics, which could be characterized as *invisibilis politicus*, guided the initial political action against sexual dissidents under Ahidjo's rule. This policy of invisibilization of persons with homosexual inclinations has generally aimed to foster or uphold 'the invisible presence of homosexuality' (cf. Philips 2004) in a so-called heterosexual Cameroonian society. In many respects, one of the earliest instances of the politicization of homosexual identities in Cameroon in the early 1960s was the invisibilization of homosexual subjects. More significantly, the prohibition of the expression of homosexual identities in public spaces was one of the first ways the conservative regime of Ahidjo expressed political homophobia towards homosexual 'Others'.

In other words, a normalized and civic heterosexual subject – what we had previously referred to as a 'Muntu'[7] (lit. human being; plural= bantu) – was gradually fostered through the steady construction of occulted, invisibilized, or spectralized homosexual ontology (see Ndjio 2013: 120-43). Furthermore, homosexual people were faced with a difficult choice during a period when a sort of *pax sexualis* still existed between the post-colonial State power and sexual dissidents: if they wanted to live a normal life, they were advised to be discrete and self-effaced in the public sphere.[8] Additionally, homosexual subjects could only ensure their survival by hiding their true sexual identity, dressing in heterosexual disguises, and keeping a hypocritical silence about their unconventional sexual orientations.

Indeed, to avoid enduring different types of harassment from law enforcement officers, individuals who identified as homosexuals were compelled to conceal their

non-conventional sexual and gender identities. Some of them were forced to live in the closet. Remarks made by one LGBTQIA+ activist, whom I interviewed in Douala in 2008, hints at the invisibilization of homosexual people, and especially their transformation into a 'silent ghost' (Derrida 1994). According the 27-year-old man, 'the main reason why homosexuals were never seen in public, as is the case in most Western societies, was due to the fact that for so long Cameroonian homosexuals lived in a *nkouta* (closet), which effectively rendered them invisible'. He further explained: 'We were there, but people couldn't see us because we were invisible. In fact, it was solely at nightfall that we could reappear like ghosts (*fantômes*).'[9]

The Cameroon's police chief has also acknowledged that the fact that the 'invisible' and discreet homosexual is less likely to face police harassment and legal persecution than the one who is more open about his homosexuality. For example, during a meeting with members of some international human rights organizations in October 2012, Martin Mbarga Nguélé revealed that Cameroon's anti-homosexuality law 'only applies to those who engage in same-sex conduct publicly'. He further stated: 'We're not going to arrest people in their room. It's when they're doing something publicly that poses a threat to our society' (cf. HRW 2013: 18).

This *invisibilis politicus* deployed against homosexual individuals had several political significations. First, it could be assumed that the invisibilization of homosexual subjects contributed to the development of sexual hypocrisies as well as the perpetuation of societal myths about an essentially heterosexual Africa (see Epprecht 2008). It also helped foster the widely held belief that homosexuality was non-existent in Africa or, at most, a very rare occurrence affecting only a small number of corrupted, acculturated Africans who agreed to be the 'wives' of Western perverts in exchange for some sort of material or financial rewards.[10] Second, the invisibilization of homosexual subjects was motivated by the governing order's fear of facing the emergence of a homosexual militancy or activism akin to that which has happened in the West (see Broqua 2012: 5-24). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the Ahidjo regime's policy of invisibilizing homosexuality served to suppress homosexual subjects' ability to publicly express their sexual orientation, affirm their right to sexual difference, and cultivate a new visible homosexual citizenship.

Ethicizing Homosexual Desire

Over the past fifteen years or more, the public sexual sphere in Cameroon has witnessed the development of normalizing discourses that have, in some instances, bordered on moralizing rhetoric about same-sex desire. What these moralistic discourses have in common is that they seek to legitimize a specific understanding of homosexual hedonism, as an immoral sexual practice that transgresses the dominant sexual morality and norms. Like many ordinary Cameroonians who often

consider homosexuality as the *sexualité du diable* (evil sexuality), the post-colonial State power has endorsed this moralistic perception of same-sex sexuality, which often resonates in the public pronouncements of some prominent members of the current Biya regime (see ADEFHO *et al.* 2010; *Terroirs* 2007).

For instance, in 2009, the Cameroon government issued a communiqué in response to the UN Human Rights Council's request to decriminalize same-sex practices. The communiqué explicitly stated the government's position in the following terms: 'As it stands, homosexuality is not widely accepted in Cameroonian society and is generally viewed as a morally objectionable activity that should be suppressed[…] Those who engage in homosexual practices and are apprehended and found guilty in accordance with legal provisions are typically arrested and convicted when these acts occur in public spaces or on public thoroughfares, thereby violating standards of decency and public morality' (our translation).[11]

The rendering of same-sex sexuality immoral explains in part the spread of violent political and social homophobic hysteria that has rocked the country over the past decade (see Ndjio 2012: 609-31; Ladǒ 2011: 921-44). This has resulted in the medical marginalization of declared or suspected homosexual patients who have become new pariahs in most public hospitals, which have been turned into places of medical discrimination and exclusion of patients with unconventional sexual identities (Ndjio 2013: 120-43 and 2016). However, this negative moralization of homosexuality is by no means a new practice in the sexual politics of Cameroon's post-colonial State. Indeed, long before the enactment of laws outlawing same-sex relations in the second half of the 1960s, the making of same-sex sexuality amoral was fundamental to Ahidjo's queer politics. It was even one of the first tactics that his regime employed to politicize homosexual hedonism or to politically problematize it.[12]

In an article published in 1970, Jean-Francois Bayart outlines the shift towards moralistic policies by Ahidjo's regime following the country's independence in 1960. As he writes: 'The puritanism and moralizing of the regime were reminiscent of totalitarianism. Prostitutes were hunted down in Yaoundé (the country's political capital); Kirdi populations were forcibly clothed; local authorities did not hesitate to use torture; and "public indecency" was increasingly repressed'[13] (Bayart 1970: 712). It was an epoch where everything was politicized or became part of the regime's 'hegemonic quest' (*recherche hegemonique*), in his own words. This included not only women empowerment, youth problems, health issues, alcohol, banditry, work, clothing, music, sports, but also sexual practices (see Bayart 1979).

To have a better understanding of this process it is necessary to underline that the administration of Cameroon's first president attempted to regulate the sexual behaviour of the masses by endorsing moralising discourses on sexual decency and continence, which subsequently led Ahidjo's regime to the legal penalization of practices such as prostitution,[14] abortion,[15] pornography,[16] and homosexuality all considered indecent offenses and immoral sexual [mis]conducts.[17] For instance,

Article 347bis of Cameroon's Penal Code criminalizing same-sex acts is in Chapter V, which addresses 'offences against public morality'. These crimes include forced marriage of minors, prostitution, sexual vagrancy, rape, alcoholism, homosexuality, and zoophilia. Likewise, Article 295 of the Penal Code, with the title 'Public Indecency' (*outrage public à la pudeur*), states as follows: '(1) Whoever in any place, notwithstanding that it may not be open to the public, commits an indecent act in the presence of any person of either sex and without his consent shall be punished with imprisonment for from fifteen days to two years or with fine of from ten thousand to one hundred thousand francs, or with both such imprisonment and fine. (2) The punishment shall be doubled where the offence is accompanied by assault.'[18]

Additionally, the inclusion of the concept of *bonnes moeurs* or 'public morality' in Cameroon's first Penal Code enacted in 1965 suggested the endorsement of a moralistic approach towards nonconventional sexual conducts by the Cameroonian legislator (see Ndjio 2012: 609-31 and 2016). It also indicated that the State's control of homosexuality was mainly governed almost by a certain moral order.

The hallmark of Ahidjo's moralizing sexual inversion policy was that it placed a higher value on morality than other considerations when it came to forging sexual citizenship, structuring sexual identities, and above all, alienating non-heterosexual identities. In addition, the rejection of homoeroticism as well as the stigmatization of those identified as homosexual was sometimes greatly influenced by moral concerns. More specifically, the regime's endorsement of a politics of sexual virtue partly explained why during Ahidjo's rule same-sex acts were generally linked to immoralism.[19] During the time when Ahidjo's regime was increasingly fixated on sexual prudery and decency, homosexual hedonism was viewed as an example of an *immoderata carnis petulantia*, or the immoderate petulance of the flesh. It was especially perceived as an immoral and indecent sexuality that offended public morality. This is to say that homosexual hedonism was then viewed as the sexuality of the disgusting, which raised ethical concerns. It was, above all, the greatest sin of lust, or *the peccata contra naturam*. For example, one retired magistrate, a former judge at the Littoral Court of Appeal, whom I interviewed in 2009 justified the adoption of anti-homosexuality laws in 1965 by stating that 'the government of that epoch did not want the Cameroonian society to sink into immorality and sexual depravity'. He also added that this legislation 'aimed above all at preventing Cameroonians from indulging in sexual vices that were already thriving at that time because of the growing sexual intimacies of some Cameroonians with pervert (sic) white expatriates'.[20]

In general, the immoralization of homosexuality by Ahidjo's regime is indicative of the significance of the 'politics of virtue' in defining the politics of sex and regulating sexuality during the early stages of country's independence. More significantly, Ahidjo's politics of (sexual) ethics entwisted sexuality into a dualistic understanding, resulting in an ideological division between permissible and impermissible sexual behaviour. Moreover, his regime's sexual politics created

two kinds of sexual stereotypes because of this moralization of sexuality: a positive or approved one symbolized by heterosexuality and a negative or disapproved one represented by homoeroticism. The latter was viewed as immoral, unhealthy by the postcolonial political order, which rejected it in favour of the former regarded as 'normal' or 'natural'.

It is important to emphasize that the official discourses on sexual (im)morality during Ahidjo's regime were primarily concerned with preserving sexual activity within the narrow confines of intimate and private life, rather than imposing a set of restrictions on the general public's sexuality. Put simply, the homosexual individuals who were deemed acceptable or tolerated by society and the State power were those who kept their sexual behaviour hidden and made a special effort to remain in the secluded nkouta.

Homosexuality: Criminalizing the Illicit Sex

Like most African countries, Cameroon has implemented anti-homosexual laws that criminalize consensual same-sex acts with unforgiving severity. For example, Article 347b of the first penal code adopted on 12 November 1965[21] and revised successively on 12 June 1967[22] and on 28 September 1972[23] punishes with 'a prison sentence of 6 (six) months to 5 (five) years and a fine of 20,000 to 200,000 FCFA (approximately US$40-$400) [for] any person who has sexual relations with a person of his or her own sex.' The new anti-homosexual law promulgated by the Cameroonian National Assembly on 12 July 2016 provides for more draconian penalties in

> the event that the offense provided for in paragraph 1 above invoked is committed on a minor of sixteen (16) to twenty-one (21) years. In fact, the penalty would be imprisonment of one (1) to eight (8) years and a fine of fifty (50,000) to four hundred thousand (400,000) FCFA. If the offence provided for in paragraph 1 above is committed against a minor of 16 years of age, the penalty would be ten (10) to fifteen (15) years' imprisonment and a fine of one hundred thousand (100,000) to one million (1,000,000) CFA francs, doubled if one of the partners is a minor.[24]

All these legal frameworks are part of the process that embodies the judicialization or penalization of homosexuality. The regimes of Ahmadou Ahidjo and Paul Biya incorporated sexual inversion within a particular legal framework. This legislation prohibited homosexual desire while establishing legal standards for acceptable bodily and sexual conduct. In other ways, the outlawing of homosexual identities represented the historical turning point in Cameroonian sexual politics when African religious and cultural norms were superseded by established legal techno-structure. More accurately, the inclusion of homosexuality in legal discourses materialized a particular period during which informal or non-codified customary

laws gradually gave way to modern legislation regarding the ordering of sexualities and the regulation of bodies and desires. During that period, Cameroon's post-colonial State established the foundation for a significant legal principle that still stands today: the homosexual subjects are held accountable for their exual transgressions not to a divine or ancestral power, but to the post-colonial State power, whose justice system has evolved into a secular tool in the fight against so-called homosexual disorder.

From now on, the legal system handled the vice of homosexuality. Consequently, the problems of sexual misconduct were no longer addressed in religious institutions or traditional juridical institutions (see Ombolo 2000), as individuals were now being prosecuted in public courts where the post-colonial juridical power demonstrated its public force. Historically, individuals prosecuted for homosexual offenses would frequently confess their sexual impropriety to the pastor or parish priest. However, due to the State's increasing judicialization of homosexual offences, individuals accused of sexual misconduct were now obligated to provide an explanation for their wrongdoings in the presence of a judge to whom one now ought to account for any sexual transgressions. This new actor represented the newly established post-colonial judicial power responsible for upholding sexual order and morality. Indeed, the new anti-homosexuality law made both magistrate and vice police experts on homosexual crimes and granted them the legal or administrative power to arrest and prosecute homosexual offenders and determine the appropriate penalties for them. All this indicates that the secular confession established by the post-colonial judicial order gradually replaced the canonical confession and what Michel Foucault would have called the 'Christian pastoral' which he defined as 'fundamental duty, the task of bringing everything related to sex to the endless mill of speech'(cf. Foucault 1978).

More importantly, a new legal-administrative rhetoric backing the State's new representation of sexual inversion emerged along with the criminalization of homosexual practices. In fact, homosexuality was now judicially redefined as a criminal offence that would be dealt with by the various State disciplinary and repressive apparatuses, replacing its previous definition as 'unnatural intercourse', 'indecent sexual behaviour', or 'gross indecency', which allegedly offended morals and decency. Furthermore, a new criminal law perception of homosexuality from being viewed as a transgression against God and, to a lesser extent, African ancestors, to being considered a breach of republican laws, and ultimately, a disruption of societal order.

Moreover, the conviction that homosexuality constituted a sexually harmful conduct for Cameroonian society as a whole led to the perception that individuals engaging in homosexual acts should be held accountable on behalf of the people for whom justice was served. Likewise, there were legal restrictions and societal disapproval against expressing affection towards someone of the same gender or participating in same-sex relations.

In addition, the criminalization of sexual inversion gave rise to the character of the 'homosexual criminal', which came to symbolize the irresponsible and unkind citizen in the late 1960s. In addition, the very term 'homosexual' came to denote a criminal with an unusual sexual orientation connected to sexual misbehaviour. The post-colonial legal-administrative discourse of the time also typically defined those who were caught performing same-sex acts as 'sexual offenders', 'carnal knowledge violators', and perpetrators of sexual acts 'against the laws of nature' (see ADEFHO et al. 2010; Tchoumbia Tomtom 2016: 121-128). Moreover, the 'homosexual' was anyone who violated the post-colonial State's sexual conformism or perpetrated sexual offenses by their non-confirming sexual behaviour and conduct. In many respects, like the 'immoralization' of same-sex desires, the legal persecution of people with homosexual proclivities aimed at reinforcing or maintaining the invisibilization of homosexual identities from the post-colonial public sphere.

Homosexuality and New Cultural Discourses

Previously, moralizing discourses were commonly employed to stigmatize homosexuals and justify the anti-homosexual laws enforced by the Cameroonian post-colonial State since 1965. Nevertheless, the State power currently utilizes novel methods to maintain the suppression of homoeroticism and the defamation of individuals identified as homosexual. Frequently, the concept of 'African culture', as portrayed by certain local politicians and intellectuals, contributes to the creation of insurmountable boundaries between heteronormativity and homonormativity within Cameroon's prevailing political and intellectual framework. Moreover, the so-called 'African traditional culture' has assumed a significant role in the sexual politics of the Cameroonian government.

The Biya regime has played a significant role in advancing this dominant political agenda, which aims to culturalize the sexuality of the general population. This project has been in progress for the past fifteen years. The current regime has shifted its anti-gay discourse towards cultural exceptionalism. In contrast, Ahidjo's rule heavily relied on Christian and Muslim ethical principles to establish laws that prohibited same-sex sexual activity.

Since the early 2000s, with the increased visibility of homosexual identities in public life, a portion of the local intellectual elites, political leaders, and civil society members have embraced pseudo-traditionalist ideologies, which all share a commonality: they advocate for a sexuality that is seen as traditional and genuinely African. Some analysts readily make parallels between this and the alleged Western *ars erotica*, often portrayed as deviant and morally corrupt (see Terroirs 2007). Moreover, since the launching of the government's anti-homosexual campaigns in around June 2006, unconventional sexual behaviours are increasingly met with

widespread hostility for the sake of upholding what is commonly regarded as the core principles of traditional African sexual morals. In addition, individuals whose 'heretic' sexuality deviates from officially recognized sexual norms are subjected to persecution or social exclusion in the guise of African culture.

On the basic of a biased interpretation of an African culture that has been (re)invented, homosexuality is de-culturalized or de-Africanized by political and social actors whose highly Westernized lifestyles demonstrate their lack of cultural authenticity.[25] As a result of the increasing heterosexualization of African cultural identity, individuals considered heterosexual are regarded as 'real' or 'authentic' Africans; while self-identified or suspected homosexuals are labelled as 'traitors', 'renegades', 'sellouts', or collaborators of the purported new Western imperialist order.

Let us use an example to elucidate our arguments. In a 2009 correspondence addressed to the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), which had previously denounced the wave of arrests of suspected homosexual by Cameroonian law enforcement, Amadou Ali, the then-Deputy Prime Minister in charge of Justice and Law Enforcement, stated that 'homosexuality was a rejection of African cultural values' and it therefore 'did not align with positive African cultural principles'. He defended the government's persecution of LGBTQIA+ people by citing the imperative to 'safeguard African cultural norms […]' and the fact that 'homosexuality was not an accepted value in Cameroonian society by virtue of African culture' (see ADEFHO et al. 2010).

The noteworthy aspect of the current political order in Cameroon is how it uses nativist discourses on African cultural values to support Biya's regime in its attempt to maintain a conservative sexual order. This order is the legacy of foreign 'modernities', particularly Islamic-Arab and Western influences that have shaped Africa since the fifteenth century (see Epprecht 2008). Additionally, upon considering the aforementioned statement, it is logical to question to which specific African cultural or traditional aspects the Cameroonian official is referring. Is Mr Ali alluding to the conservative interpretation of gender and sexuality imposed on African peoples by Islam and Judeo-Christian morality, which often diverges significantly from the traditional African perspectives on the human body and sexuality? Is he referencing the African culture that colonial discourses frequently portrayed as permissive and unrestrained due to its acceptance of sexual diversity, gender plurality, and certain sexual practices deemed abnormal (see Epprecht 2008; Nyeck and Epprecht 2013; Tamale 2011)?

Furthermore, the aforementioned case demonstrates the transition that occurred in the early 2000s from what Jarrett Zigon would refer to as a 'moment of ethics' (Zigon 2008: 165) to what can be characterized as a *moment of culture*. This moment marked the growing influence of nativist and culturalist ideologies in the way that homosexuality is problematized in present-day Cameroon. In this country, the moralistic problematization of sexual inversion has been replaced by

its cultural questioning by political and intellectual elites who are self-identified as 'culturalists' and 'neo-traditionalists'. The new post-colonial culturalist ideology views homosexuality as an alien sexual aberration that would be hard for 'authentic' and 'true' African cultures to accommodate. In this process, an invented African culture plays a crucial role in othering or alienating people profiled as homosexual.

The term 'culturalization of sexuality' has been used elsewhere (see Ndjio 2016) to describe the new political constructions of sexuality that Cameroon's government has put into effect since the year 2000. The concept of 'culturalization of sexuality' refers to a new expression of 'biopolitics' where sexuality is used as a defining attribute of racial and ethnic identities. It serves as a means to categorize individuals and construct racial or ethnic typologies. Additionally, it is an ethno-nationalist ideology that establishes a significant connection between the way one should use, express, experience, or engage in sexuality and a specific culture. Furthermore, it places a strong emphasis on the purported national or local culture when it comes to forging sexual policies, building sexual citizenship, establishing national sexual identities, expressing sexual desire, and shaping national character, among other things. The ruling classes strategically exploit commonly shared cultural values to carry out a specific politics of sex and sexual identity that supports the upkeep or reproduction of a dominant social and political order.

One manifestation of contemporary sexual nationalism is the politics of sexual autochthony or belonging, which has occasionally been employed because of the regime's culturalist understanding of sexuality. It stands for the government's hetero-Pan-Africanist project to build local sexual enclaves, Africanize the population's sexuality, and, most importantly, enclose the so-called 'African sex' within the confines of localism and cultural nativism. Moreover, the growing process of culturalization of sexuality has taken the form of an exuberant return to a more indigenous and racialized form of sexuality, the mandatory adoption of heteronormativity, the essentialization of so-called autochthon populations' sexuality, the idealization of 'traditional' sexual experiences and imaginations, and above all, a disastrous and deplorable vision of homoeroticism (see Ndjio 2016).

Conclusion

Since the early 1960s, the sexual politics of the two regimes that have ruled Cameroon have undergone numerous shifts and modifications, particularly as regards the political management of same-sex relationships. Most studies on homosexuality in this country tend to ignore or obscure this reality. This essay, which offered a historical and dynamic reading of the queer politics of the Cameroonian government – which has long conducted a policy of hostility and brutality towards homosexuals generally perceived as a radical otherness of the officially promoted

heterosexual subjects – was made relevant in part by the attempt to close this epistemological gap. In other words, the goal of the paper was to illuminate the ways in which the regimes of Ahidjo and Biya have reflected, rationalized, and/or problematized homosexuality since the early 1960s. It also examined the various orders of truth and knowledge about homosexual hedonism and homosexual individuals that have been produced by the post-colonial State power since the 1960s.

Essentially, the essay showed how the four pivotal moments and historical developments in the political problematization as well as problematic politicization of same-sex sexuality by both Ahidjo's and Biya's regimes were embodied in the invisibilization, moralization, criminalization, and culturalization of homosexuality. These various technologies of power had several implications that should be considered when discussing the texture of power in Cameroon with respect to the political management of homoeroticism. Indeed, the invisibilization of same-sex sexuality contributed to the spectralization of homosexual persons from the post-colonial public sphere, which helped reinforce the widely held beliefs at the time about the absence of homosexuality in the imagined heterosexual Cameroon nation. The ethicization of same-sex desires induced the political invention of an immoral and perverse sexual subject. Its judicialization subsequently led to the creation of a sexual offender or criminal to be prosecuted. Its culturalization instead produced the social and political invention of 'deracinated' and 'uprooted' homosexuals.

All of this pointed to an aggressive sexual politics that aimed at promoting the Muntu, or the idealized African heterosexual subject, at the expense of homosexual 'Other'. This is another way of saying that the government's negative problematization of non-traditional sexual and gender identities as well as its anti-homosexual politics are inextricably linked to the political goal of creating an imagined heterosexual nation or community in Cameroon that has always guided both the Ahidjo and Biya regimes.

Notes

[1] This term denotes here the political management of bodies and sexuality of people profiled as homosexual by the State power. On the concept of 'biopolitics', see Foucault (1978)

[2] In this essay, the term 'necropolitics' is employed to denote a (sexual) politics characterized by animosity and hostility towards individuals identified as homosexual. It represents a coercive approach by the Cameroonian government to control and regulate same-sex sexuality. On necropolitics see Mbembe(2019)

[3] In general, the terms 'homoeroticism' and 'homosexuality' pertain to same-sex attraction or desire, though one emphasizes the emotional and physical manifestation of desire, whereas the other focuses on sexual orientation and identity. However, in this essay these notions are used interchangeably due to the absence of such distinction in Cameroon's penal code as well as the popular representation of same-sex sexuality.

[4] This excludes some social groups like prostitutes who are often characterized as dangerous social categories (see Ndjio 2016)

5 The concept of 'sexual citizenship' emphasizes the relationship between individuals' sexual rights, identities, and their place within a broader social and political context. It blends ideas from citizenship theory with concerns about sexuality, underlining how access to rights, recognition, and participation in society can be shaped by sexual orientation, gender identity, and norms about sexuality. At its core, sexual citizenship addresses issues of inclusion, equality, and agency, particularly for marginalized sexual and gender minorities.

6 Although historically associated with a large sack used by rural women in the forest region of Cameroon to transport or store their provisions, this term has gradually evolved into a representation of the closet, and especially the seclusion facing most homosexual persons. On this notion of 'nkouta', see Gueboguo (2009).

7 The Muntu refers to the African subject whose presumed innate and biological heterosexual inclination was constructed by Western colonial discourses in the late nineteenth century and later redefined by postcolonial Africanism in the late 1950s and early 1960s (see Ndjio 2012: 609-631).

8 E.g., in an interview with the French magazine *Le Monde Afrique*, Barrister Alice Nkom, a renowned Cameroonian lawyer and LGBTIQ activist emphasized the peril of revealing one's homosexuality in Cameroon. She further detailed the advice she gave to her young homosexual friends who visited her in her residence during their stay in Cameroon: 'I warned them against living their sexuality in the open. I told them about the risks of blackmail and persecution. They left my house overwhelmed. I told myself I had to do something' (In *Le Monde Afrique* 23 March 2003).

9 Personal communication, Douala, 23 March 2008.

10 Numerous ethnographic studies on same-sex sexualities in Cameroon and other African regions have contested these myths. These works indicate a more tolerant and acceptable attitude towards non-conventional sexual and gender identities in various traditional African societies before the introduction of repressive anti-colonial legislations by Western colonial authorities (see Gueboguo 2006; Arnfred, 2004; Epprecht 2004; Nyeck and Epprecht 2013; Ombolo 2000).

11 See Human Rights Council (2009)

12 On the politicization of sexuality in Africa, see Fumanti (2017); Awondo (2010: 315-328); Currier (2018)

13 Our translation

14 Cf. Articles 294 and 343 of the Cameroon Penal Code provide for six (6) months to five(5) years' imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 to 500,000 CFA francs (€30.40 to €760/US$33 to US$825), any person of either sex who habitually engages, for remuneration, in sexual acts with another.

15 Cf; Article no 337 of the 1965 Cameroon's penal code which criminalizes abortion

16 Cf Article 346 of Cameroon's Penal Code which criminalizes pornography and exposure of indecent images

17 See, e.g., articles 295, 296, or 347 and 347 bis of Cameroon's Penal Code that deal with 'indecent offense'

18 This is evidenced by the existence in Cameroon's Penal Code of a numbers of laws that deal with sexual indecency.

19 Immoralizing homosexual hedonism meant putting it on a list of things that the public found morally reprehensible or associating same-sex partnerships with anything repulsive or disgusting.

20 Personal communication, Yaoundé, 23 May 2009.

21 Cf. Law N°65-LF-24 of 12 November 1965

22 Cf Law N° 67-LF-1 of 12 June 1967

23 Cf. Presidential Ordinance N° 72/16 of 28 September 1972

24 Cf. Law no 2016/007, 12 July 2016

25 For a critique of culturalization of homosexuality by both nativist and Afrocentric discourses see Epprecht (2008); Hoad (2007); Ndjio (2016).

CHAPTER 4.4

Congolese Regimes and Lumumba's Politics of Life

Emery Kalema[1]

Introduction

On 30 June 1960, Patrice Lumumba, who served as the Prime Minister of the newly independent Democratic Republic of the Congo, delivered a speech to the Congolese Parliament. This occasion marked a pivotal moment in the history of Congo, which had just achieved independence from Belgium. Lumumba's address unfolded in the presence of King Baudouin I and bore significant political and symbolic weight. At that time, Congo was emerging from a long period of Belgian colonial rule, which had exploited its vast resources since 1908. The decolonization process was fraught with tensions and challenges, and Lumumba's speech mirrored the intricate realities of that moment.

In this address, which stands as the 'birth certificate' of 'modern' Congo and one of the key moments that propelled the African continent onto the international stage, Lumumba expressed the deep-seated joy and collective pride of the Congolese people. Their hard-won independence, achieved after decades of colonial subjugation, was a testament to their resilience and aspirations. Lumumba's speech also underscored the imperative of unity among Congo's diverse ethnic and regional groups, framing it as essential for national reconciliation and the construction of a cohesive, independent state.

Yet, Lumumba's rhetoric was not devoid of critique. He confronted the painful legacy of colonial exploitation and the profound inequalities it had engendered. With unflinching candor, he denounced the Belgian colonial authorities for their systematic plundering of Congolese wealth and their failure to provide adequate education and opportunities for the people of this vast African country. In a succinct and powerful minute and forty seconds, Lumumba distilled the essence of eighty years of Belgian colonial rule[2] He portrayed the colonial regime both as a system of governance and as a complex apparatus intertwined with an underlying ideology that can be described as *the politics of death*. Within this framework, the primary objective and ultimate consequence of the colonial system were deeply embedded in the acts of seizing and extinguishing the lives of Congolese people. This grim reality was manifest in various forms. It included direct acts of violence, such as shootings, as well as a more insidious mechanism: the systematic deprivation of essential goods and services, which constituted a slow and pervasive form of harm.[3]

Taking or disposing of lives, whether through the immediate brutality of violence or the gradual erosion resulting from the denial of basic necessities,

represented the very essence of sovereign power within the colonial framework. Lumumba understood that this *politics of death* was not only morally indefensible, but also deeply flawed as a form of governance. Beginning in 1958, when he attended the Pan-African Conference in Accra (Van Lierde 1963: 12-17), he sought to replace this destructive approach with a more humane alternative: a concept of power that can be framed as *the politics of life*, a perspective that scholars of Lumumba have not taken seriously (see, e.g., Jewiesiecki 1999; De Witte 2001; Omasombo and Verhaegen 2005; Mutamba Makombo 2005; Dikizeko and Ramondy 2023). Lumumba envisioned a political system that, once realized, would bring 'peace, prosperity, and grandeur' to Congo and its people. In this vision, he wanted to transcend the oppressive and destructive practices of the colonial regime by creating a model that would prioritize the well-being, dignity, and flourishing of the Congolese population:

> All of this, my brothers, we deeply suffered. But all of this … is now over. The Republic of Congo has been proclaimed, and our country is now in the hands of its own children. Together, my brothers and sisters, we will embark on a new struggle, a sublime struggle that will lead our country to peace, prosperity, and greatness. Together, we will establish social justice and ensure that everyone receives fair compensation for their work. … We will ensure that the lands of our homeland truly benefit its children. We will review all the old laws and create new ones that are just and noble. We will put an end to the oppression of free thought and ensure that all citizens fully enjoy the fundamental freedoms outlined in the Declaration of Human Rights. We will effectively eliminate all forms of discrimination and give everyone their rightful place, based on their human dignity, work, and dedication to the country. We will establish not the peace of guns and bayonets, but the peace of hearts and goodwill.[4]

Unfortunately, Lumumba did not survive to witness the unfolding of the vision he so passionately articulated. On 17 January 1961, his life was extinguished in an act of political assassination, an execution engineered through the complicity of Belgian authorities, the CIA, and Congolese political elites. Yet, the violence did not end with his death. His body, dissolved in acid, was deprived even of the dignity of decay, as if the erasure of his physical form might erase the memory of his struggle. But such violence, in all its grotesque finality, could not annihilate the force of Lumumba's political imagination. His legacy endures. It transcends the narrow temporality of his mortal existence. It resides in the *politics of life* he sought to inscribe, an ethics of collective emancipation that stands in defiant contrast to the 'necropolitical' logics that sought to silence him.

To insist on Lumumba's *politics of life* as a philosophy that prioritizes collective emancipation, dignity, freedom, equality, and the protection of life is not to reduce Lumumba to the figure of a moral idealist. Lumumba's vision, far from being a

mere ethical stance, was also a practice, deeply embedded in the struggles and contradictions of his time. His politics was not, as Immanuel Kant (1991) might propose, a reflection of moral principles applied universally by a rational state. Rather, Lumumba's politics recognized the necessity of engaging with the real, with the conflict, with competing interests, and with the force relations that shape human existence. Lumumba's praxis was not the abstract rationality of Katian ethics but the embodied and contingent struggle to secure life amid the constant threat of death.

It is precisely in this tension between life and death, between existence and annihilation, that Lumumba's political vision must be located. His was not a politics that sought to distance itself from the messy realities of power. Instead, it was a politics forged in the heat of colonial domination, a politics that understood the brutality of imperial power and its relentless drive to dehumanize and annihilate Congolese bodies. His approach was rooted in the understanding that freedom is not an abstract ideal but a lived experience, one that can only be realized through the collective mobilization of the oppressed, through their reclamation of the right to live, to be free, to exist on their own terms.

In contrast to Michel Foucault's biopolitics, which explores the intricate mechanisms through which political power operates at the level of populations and life itself (Foucault 2004), and unlike Didier Fassin (2006), who conceptualizes the *politics of life* as an endeavour 'to understand how' life 'embeds itself in complex, uncertain, and ambiguous ways at the heart of our systems of values and actions, our moral and political economies' (*Ibid.,* 45), Lumumba pursued a different approach. His *politics of life* sought to embody a profoundly affirmative stance. It focused on the use of political power to enhance and protect life. His ideology, in this regard, encapsulates a vision of power as a force intended to administer, secure, develop, and nurture life, rather than destroy it.

But this nurturing of life, this affirmation of existence, was always articulated within the broader horizon of African liberation. It was a politics that, while recognizing the primacy of life, also acknowledged that life was constantly under siege. To defend it required more than appeals to rationality of morality; it required action, struggle, and, at times, a confrontation with death itself. Lumumba's *politics of life,* therefore, was not a passive preservation of life for its own sake, but a proactive engagement with the forces that threatened it, an unrelenting commitment to securing a future where life could thrive.

In this sense, Lumumba's politics was a politics of survival, but survival with a purpose. It was about more than simply enduring the violence of colonialism; it was about transforming the conditions under which life itself had been subordinated, and in doing so, creating the possibility for a new African humanity. This is not the life of Foucault's biopolitics, where power is exercised through the management of bodies and populations. Nor is it the life that Fassin so carefully unpacks, caught in the webs of moral and political economies. Lumumba's *politics of life* was, above all, a politics of becoming, a becoming in which the Congolese

subject would not only survive but flourish, reclaiming the right to define and determine their own existence.

In this chapter, I seek to unravel the ways in which successive regimes in Kinshasa, from the 1960s onward, have contended with, and ultimately, distorted Lumumba's vision of power. At the crux of my argument is the assertion that the primary objective of Congolese politicians in the aftermath of independence has not been the creation of a *politics of life,* a politics that would rejuvenate, nourish, and expand the potentialities of the people. Instead, their rule has been marked by a relentless pursuit of self-preservation, a consolidation of power whose sole aim is to perpetuate itself, often to the detriment of the very lives they claim to govern.

Rather than confronting the conditions of subordination that colonialism entrenched, the conditions that suffocate the capacity for a new Congolese humanity to emerge, these regimes have, with a tragic regularity, embraced a form of governance rooted in enmity. This enmity is both a vestige of colonialism and a perpetuation of its logics. It manifests as a politics that sees life not as something to be nurtured, but as a threat to be managed, controlled, and in many cases, extinguished. Lumumba's radical imagination of a sovereign, dignified, and self-actualizing Congolese people has been reduced to a hallow invocation, called upon by these politicians only when external forces, whether Western powers or regional pressures, demand a rhetorical fidelity to his ideals.

The tragedy of this mode of governance is not simply its betrayal of Lumumba's legacy. It is the recurrent sacrifice of life itself. Under regimes such as that of Joseph-Désiré Mobutu, the exercise of power became synonymous with the production of death, an endless deferral of the possibilities of life. It is here, with Mobutu, that I begin my analysis.

Mobutu's Political Machinations

Two significant facets illuminate the complexity of the Mobutu regime. First, the relationship between Mobutu, the second president of Congo, and Lumumba is marked by a profound ambiguity that cuts to the heart of Congo's post-colonial destiny. This ambiguity stems, most notably, from Mobutu's pivotal role in Lumumba's tragic demise. Lumumba, whose nationalist ambitions sought to affirm Congo's sovereignty amid the fracturing dynamics of the Cold War, became a target for both Western and anti-Western forces. Mobutu, then a prominent military figure, played a decisive role in Lumumba's ousting, arrest, and eventual assassination. Collaborating with Belgian and Katangese authorities, Mobutu oversaw Lumumba's transfer to Katanga, where, in January 1961, the hope for a sovereign Congo met its brutal end.

Yet, in a paradoxical move, Mobutu would later appropriate Lumumba's legacy for his own regime. In 1966, five years after Lumumba's death, Mobutu officially

bestowed upon him the posthumous title of 'national hero.' This act, accompanied by the renaming of Boulevard Leopold II in Kinshasa to honor Lumumba, and the announcement of a monument in his memory at the now-known *Echangeur de Limete* (Limete Interchange), served as a calculated effort to rehabilitate the image of a regime that faced growing criticism both within and beyond Congo's borders. In a striking declaration, Mobutu proclaimed: 'it is because he had spoken about economic independence that [Lumumba] was killed. [That is why] we want to rehabilitate his memory.'[5] In this deft act of political theater, Mobutu positioned himself as both the usurper of Lumumba's vision and its custodian, invoking Lumumba's name when it served to legitimize his rule.

The second facet emerges in the way in which Mobutu came to power. On 24 November 1965, following a coup, Mobutu assumed control of Congolese state. The following morning, a *communiqué* was broadcast across national radio, wherein Mobutu delivered a stinging critique of Congolese politicians, accusing them of failing to resolve differences and lacking any real 'consideration for the well-being' of the population. The *communiqué*'s opening lines underscored the need for 'political stability,' which it framed as the cornerstone of the nation's future. In doing so, it set forth a vision of what constitutes an 'authentic' politician in a country such as Congo. According to the statement, a 'genuine' politician is someone who tirelessly works for the 'well-being' of the population, carrying the dreams and aspirations of millions. In this definition, the true politician is a figure of sacrifice. It is someone willing to lay down his life in service to others, much like a soldier in defence of his compatriots.

Yet, this rhetoric of sacrifice was soon undermined by the Army's own critique of politicians' failures since independence. The High Command's *communiqué* lamented the lack of empathy shown by Congolese politicians toward the suffering of the people. In a scathing indictment, it accused them of indulging in power struggles while neglecting the basic needs of the population. As Congolese politicians tuned into the radio in Leopoldville, they could hear themselves being castigated for their complicity in the nation's misery.[6]

After admonishing politicians, the Army, positioning itself as the nation's saviour, unveiled the central decision at the heart of its action: by ousting the politicians, the military claimed it was acting out of benevolent concern for the future of the Congolese people (CRISP 1967:412). Drawing on an evocative metaphor, the High Command likened its seizure of power to the devotion a groom has for his bride, asserting that its intervention would lead to a 'joyous' and 'prosperous' life for the Congolese people, a future that politicians had long deprived them of (*Ibid.)*. This imagery of care and protection sought to cloak the military coup in the language of paternalistic guardianship, presenting the seizure of power as an act of love rather than coercion. As the relentless pursuit of power among politician threatened to once again plunge the Congo into chaos and bloodshed, the Army's High Command made their decisive move:

> [A]ll Congolese National Army leaders, gathered on 24 November 1964 around their Commander-in-chief, have taken, in view of the foregoing, the following serious decisions: First, Mr. Joseph Kasa-Vubu is dismissed from his position as President of the Republic. Second, Mr. Evariste Kimba, member of parliament, is relieved of his duties of *formateur* of government. Third, Lieutenant-General Joseph-Désiré Mobutu will assume the constitutional prerogatives of the Head of State. … Colonel Léonard Mulamba will assume the duties of Prime Minister (CRISP 1967:411-12).

With these unilaterally made 'decisions' by the Army's High Command's, the fate of the Congolese was sealed, inaugurating a new chapter in their history reminiscent of the foreign occupation from 1885 to 1960. However, the announcement of the ousting of politicians and the assumption of power by a new leadership did not signify the culmination of the unfolding events. As with all military coups, where the rhetoric of care mobilized by military overlords when violently seizing power often masks the reality (see Ciovalella and Fresia 2009: 5-23), the Army's High Command was acutely aware of the reactions such a seizure of power would provoke. To pre-empt any resistance, it assured the Congolese people of the soundness of the new path. Africa, the world, and history would bear witness to the promises that the military made to the Congolese people (CRISP 1967: 412). In a reassuring tone, the man delivering the statement on national radio declared:

> The democratic institutions of the Republic provided under the Constitution of 1 August 1964 shall continue to function and sit in accordance with their prerogatives. This is particularly the case for the Chamber of deputies, the Senate, and provincial institutions. … The rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution of 1 August 1964, as provided for in Articles 21, 25, 26, 27 and 28, shall be respected. This applies in particular to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, expression, the press, meeting, and association (*Ibid.*).

After spending considerable time reassuring the Congolese people that their rights, freedoms, and institutions were both inherent and inviolable, the Army's High Command emphasized repeatedly that their actions were not intended to establish a military dictatorship. It urged the Congolese people to trust in the Army's benevolent intentions (*Ibid.*). Before concluding the statement, the Army's High Command reminded the people once again of the reasons for seizing power from the politicians: 'Sole the love of the country and a sense of responsibility toward the Congolese nation guided the' Army's High Command to take these measures' (*Ibid.*).

But how would Mobutu proceed now that he had unilaterally decided to capture power with history, Africa, and the world as witnesses? How would he guide an entire nation toward a 'joyous' and 'prosperous life,' a right he claimed to have been denied to Congolese by politicians for generations? It should be noted from the outset that, in pursuit of his project to lead the Congolese to prosperity, Mobutu

drew inspiration from Niccolò Machiavelli's writings, particularly *The Prince*.[7] Yet, this sixteenth-century treatise, upon which he based his political philosophy, does not provide guidance on lifting a population out of poverty and guiding it toward a prosperous life. Instead, Machiavelli's treatise is a grammar of political power, at the heart of which lies a set of rules that a leader should follow to conquer and, most importantly, retain power for as long as possible, if not indefinitely.

It is this Machiavellian grammar of power that Mobutu meticulously implemented. Internalizing Machiavelli's belief that a leader should not hesitate to break promises made to the people, Mobutu began to backtrack on his commitments.[8] Knowing from the outset that his ultimate goal, after seizing power, was to tightly grip it, Mobutu displayed mental acuity and ruthlessness in pursuit of this objective. He built his entire regime 'on a cohesive principle' that would enable him to achieve this goal.[9] As a result, the promise to return power to civilians after five years faded into obscurity, and Mobutu ended up ruling Congo-Zaire for thirty-two years. In addition to spending many years in power, the democratic institutions he had pledged to safeguard were all dissolved. Political pluralism, tolerance, and openness, once hallmarks of the Congolese public sphere, swiftly vanished as if from a work of fiction. A single-party regime was established, with Mobutu's Popular Movement of the Revolution (MPR), created in 1967, becoming the sole authorized faction in this one-party system (Ndaywel è Nziem 1998: 667-74). The military dictatorship he had vowed not to establish now held authority over Congolese (Langlier 2017:131-41).

Fiction, Revenge, and Negative Representation in Congo-Zaire

How would Mobutu maintain, strengthen, and nurture this dictatorship for an extended period, especially after reneging on all his promises? How would he sustain his rule over Congo-Zaire for a consecutive thirty-two years? A thorough examination of this lengthy period, with its multiplicity of comings and goings, reveals that Mobutu successfully extended his control over the Congolese populace through a deliberate articulation and implementation of a political strategy starkly divergent from Lumumba's *politics of life*. This approach, which can be called *the politics of enmity*,[10] represents a profound reconfiguration of political power.

Mobutu's *politics of enmity*, at its core, embodies a dualistic framework of governance and ideology. It is both a philosophy and a method of rule, predicated on the principles of neutralization and annihilation. This mode of politics is characterized by a number of features. First, it involves *the capacity to manufacture a fiction,* a deliberate construction of reality that aligned with the central tenets of Mobutu's rule. Recognizing that political relations are fundamentally relations of enmity, Mobutu understood that to realize his ambitions of becoming the sole and uncontested sovereign of Congo, it was necessary to negate and obliterate those

he perceived as 'enemies.' This is why he resorted to a *fiction,* that of *the ultimate truth*. This fiction bore a resemblance to the fiction of *the One* (*that is,* God), which, as historians of religion have demonstrated, is typical of monotheistic religions. Much like monotheism, Mobutu's fiction was indissociable from the utmost and the endmost rule of things. It was not only that which happens at the end of a process, it was the *ultimate* (see Mbembe 2001: 215).

But what could the *ultimate* mean in Mobutu's world if not another way of thinking and speaking about truth? In *On the Postcolony*, Achille Mbembe contends that 'in fact, there is no' fiction 'except in relation to producing a truth that not only determines the foundations and goals of the world but provides the origin of all meanings' (*Ibid.*). Following this line of reasoning, it should be argued that Mobutu's fiction of the ultimate truth was nothing more than a 'way of formulating knowledge about final ends,' that is, *death* (*Ibid.*). By refusing to acknowledge that there exists no absolute truth, only truths believed by a particular individual or culture, Mobutu posited 'the existence of a universe with a single meaning' (*Ibid.*). In such a universe, as Mbembe reminds us, 'the space left for dissent is, in theory, very small. Imaginable conflicts cannot concern either the ultimate meaning, or the ways in which this meaning is constituted, since, like this meaning, the modalities of its constitution belong to a system of truths assumed unchallengeable' (*Ibid.*).

Convinced that the fiction of the ultimate truth was an exceptionally effective tool of governance, Mobutu leaned on it to manufacture a number of theories. He compelled his enemies to accept these theories as their own truths, despite the fact that they had not broken any laws. The first to suffer the consequences of Mobutu's fiction of the ultimate truth were Evariste Kimba, Jérôme Anany, Alexandre Mahamba, and Emmanuel Bamba, all former ministers between 1960 and 1965.[11] In May 1966, he accused them of conspiring against his regime. Employing the criminal judicial system as a default fix-all tool, he ordered an investigation into these individuals (Gérard-Libois et al. 1966: 431-32). Following an expedited trial, Mobutu disposed of them in front of a visibly terrified crowd. In a column published on 2 June 1966, the press described the unfolding execution as a significant event and documented the varied emotions among those summoned to witness it (*Ibid.*, 442-43).

Panic, anger, screams, sadness, and fear, these were the reactions incited by the fiction of the ultimate truth among the crowd, following the construction of various theories that ultimately led to the demise of the four politicians. Intriguing is the journalist's adept use of dramatic language in narrating the scene – and punctuating the text with stark contrasts, such as dark clothing, juxtaposed with white robes and coffins, and the serene demeanor of the executioner opposed to the panic of the crowd. This vivid depiction, along with the theatricality of the violent event itself, as well as the journalist's portrayal of its various moments, all contribute to the myth-making of the state, with the imposing figure of an all-powerful Mobutu at its core.

Moreover, the journalist's description underscores that, although Mobutu played a prominent role in orchestrating these events, he was not acting alone. The bureaucracy, the military, and other government entities were all integral to a systematic and well-organized configuration designed to propagate this 'regime of truth' (Foucault 1975:30). Most significantly, by gathering the crowd around the execution, and thereby creating a *community* bound by shared *emotions*, Mobutu wanted to demonstrate that he was both the master and the ruler of these events.[12] He could seize his enemies and shake them until they were weakened.[13] He could force them to surrender to death because he embodied a visible manifestation of a spirit of violence.[14] As Isidore Ndaywel noted in 1998, 'the so-called "Pentecost plot,"' secretly incited by Mobutu, 'and resulting in the public hanging of four politicians … less than seven months after the coup d'état, was an illustration of the strength (*puissance*, in French) of this strong power, while also offering a glimpse into its potential excesses' (Ndaywel è Nziem 1998: 647).

Mobutu's *politics of enmity*, in its second manifestation, found expression in *the president's deep penchant for revenge* – a revenge not merely for real or imagined slights but for the sheer act of defiance that challenged his perceived mastery. Mobutu envisioned himself as the center of the world, not bound by geography or allegiance, a sovereign both transcendent and immanent. He existed within the nation and beyond it, his will impervious to external checks. This self-conception materialized in the grandiose public ceremonies that punctuated his rule, each one meticulously choreographed to enshrine his image as the unrivaled master. His elaborate spectacles, marked by massive rallies, parades, and symbols of power, were not simply displays of political dominance. They were ritual enactments of his boundless authority, both in Zaire and on a global stage. Donning his iconic leopard-skin hat and military regalia, Mobutu elevated his persona to one that existed beyond the confines of national identity, fashioning himself as a figure of universal consequence.

In these excessive affirmations of the president's self, the very essence of politics as envisioned by liberal tradition, what Jean-Jacques Rousseau might have called the restoration of freedom to all by reconciling our essential nature with our collective life,[15] was obliterated. Politics, under Mobutu, became a tool not for life, but for death, humiliation, hatred, and revenge. In his world, politics was the continuation of enmity by other means. In his quest to preserve his authority, Mobutu transformed governance into a theater of violence, where the pursuit of power eclipsed the possibility of life itself.

To understand Mobutu's desire for revenge, let us turn to the relationship between revenge and hatred. Although these affects are often entangled, they are not the same. As Jean-Luc Nancy observes, 'hatred proceeds […] from [a] concern for one's self,' a concern that manifests as action, driven by 'a more active excess' and a relentless 'pursuit' of its object (Nancy 2013:5-6). Hatred, Nancy argues, contains within it 'the idea of pursuit, even hunting: one' actively follows 'the other,

the hated person,' seeking 'to reach […] and potentially eliminate them' (*Ibid.*, 6). In this pursuit, hatred aligns itself with revenge, yet revenge, unlike hatred, has a specific motive. It seeks retribution for a 'serious wrong inflicted upon oneself or one's group.' Revenge seeks justice, even if distorted by violence, while hatred demands annihilation simply for the existence of the other (*Ibid.*).

Mobutu politics of revenge thus emerges from this distinction. His execution of Pierre Mulele in 1968 was both an act of state violence and an attempt to give political form to what he framed as a 'legitimate' vengeance. Mulele, a former ally of Lumumba, had led a rebellion in Kwilu province from 1963 onward, challenging Mobutu's newly consolidated power. By 1968, Mobutu captured and brutally executed Mulele, claiming this as retribution for the rebellion. Yet, as Nancy might suggest, Mobutu's act was less about avenging a specific wrong than about asserting his dominance over the mere possibility of resistance. The violence visited upon Mulele was an expression of Mobutu's hatred, a hatred that did not require an actual offense, but rather a negation of any threat to his sovereignty.

This was made clear in 1975 when the Italian filmmaker Giuseppe Ferrara reconstructed Mulele's assassination in *Faccia di spia* (CIA Secret Story), exposing the depth of Mobutu's brutality. In this spectacle of revenge, Mobutu demonstrated his ability to reach across time and geography, exacting vengeance not merely for Mulele's rebellion, but for the symbolic challenge his existence posed to the absolute authority of the sovereign. Revenge, for Mobutu, was not confined to acts of defiance. It was a politics that aimed to erase any trace of opposition, preemptively and without limit.

In *Faccia di spia*, the brutality of Mobutu's politics of revenge is meticulously rendered through a series of vivid and grotesque images. A soldier clad in khaki and wearing a green beret adorned with three stars, walks purposefully down a corridor, gripping a red axe. He enters a dimly lit room, where two other soldiers restrain a man near a table. The man's arms are outstretched, and his forehead is pressed against the cold surface. It is evident that this man has already endured monstrous torture, as indicated by the bloodstains on the wall.

The soldier hands the axe to his comrade. The gruesome act of 'giving death' begins. An axe strike on the right arm, followed by another, severs the limb, as blood pours forth, thick and dark, filling the air with the victim's agonized screams. This act, unfolding in the shadows of the night, underscores the execution's symbolic power, an assertion of Mobutu's dominion not just over the body of the rebel, but over time and space. As the soldier moves to the left arm, the rhythm of the axe intensifies. Each strike is a reaffirmation of Mobutu's omnipotence, reducing the rebel to mere flesh to be dismembered at will.

In a macabre juxtaposition, the film shifts to Mobutu, hosting foreign dignitaries, his gestures smooth and rehearsed, a veneer of statesmanship masking the violence. The return to the 'death room' reveals the final act of brutality. The soldier, using a bayonet, gouges out the man's left eye. Blood gushes, and the victim, still

alive, is further mutilated. This explicit portrayal powerfully illustrates Mobutu's mastery over life and death, a calculated performance of revenge, broadcast to reinforce his regime's unrelenting control.

On 10 October 1968, just seven days after Mulele's assassination, Mobutu addressed the public, framing the killing not as an act of hatred, but as a legitimate and necessary form of revenge. This speech was delivered despite Mobutu's promise to grant Mulele amnesty.

> Mulele, [Mobutu declared], was subject to the laws of his country's jurisdiction, and his case became, therefore, a purely domestic matter. The fact that the rebel Mulele was dealt with [according to] the full extent of Congolese law does not put the Congolese government at odds with itself. Because the government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo never stopped asserting, through its leader [Mobutu], that under no circumstances could [there] be amnesty for rebel leaders, murderers, and serious common-law criminals. Thus, after the President of the Republic had rejected criminal Pierre Mulele's appeal for clemency, [Mulele] was executed yesterday [9 October] in the morning, at 5:30.[16]

After rationalizing the necessity of Mulele's execution – and unilaterally manipulating the facts by changing the date of Mulele's death from October 3 to October 9[17] – Mobutu asserted his dominance over history itself. He became the master of chronology, bending time to his will, just as he bent life and death to his political ends. Mobutu instructed that the slogan 'presidential revenge and strength' become the rallying cry for the Congolese people. They should know that he could not tolerate any defiance. They should know that his political approach was, first and foremost, one of *retribution*.

To cement this message, the Governor of Bandundu orchestrated a public march on 11 October 1968 to 'celebrate' Mulele's death.[18] The aim of this 'celebration' was to convey to the world that to be defeated by the president in Congo-Zaire meant to be subjected to humiliation. The march, like so many other spectacles under Mobutu, was a performative display of power, a space where the identity of the defeated subject was dismantled for the president's pleasure. Between 14-16 October 1968, Congolese journalists documented the event, describing how the entire city of Kikwit participated in the procession, while simultaneously highlighting the president's triumphalism:

> Last Friday was declared a holiday throughout Bandundu province. This was Governor Muhoma's decision in an effort to ensure the participation of all segments of the population. The Governor was accompanied by Mr. Ngoma, Provincial Commissioner of Bandundu and first Regional Vice-President of the MPR, Mr. [?], second Regional Vice-President of the MPR. Provincial directors, administrators, teachers, students, MPR activists, in short, the whole city of Kikwit was there. The

> procession had to walk a distance of some 8 km to the rhythm of the national police band. [One] … could easily … read through the signs: 'Mulele paid his bill,' 'Mulele finished. Mulele: finish!' … It was these placards that were waved from Gizenga Boulevard to the Central Official School where the Governor gave a speech.[19]

> [The slogans] were followed by songs in support of General Mobutu such as: 'Kiki dongo…nani atiaki tembe na Mobutu' (Who doubted the strength of Mobutu [?] … Mulele doubted the strength of Mobutu).[20]

> After this great popular march, … all the militants were invited to enjoy refreshments in three important bars of Kikwit. … For the occasion, [these bars] were exceptionally supplied with electricity by the Regideso. (In Kikwit, bars usually remain closed at 5 p.m. on weekdays because of the lack of electricity, except on Saturdays and Sundays). That evening [was exceptional!] … The head of the provincial administration of Bandundu even decided … to visit the pubs where the 'Kikwitois' were quenching their thirst. I was also walking in the city, more precisely in front of the bar 'Petit-à-Petit'. … As if by magic, many … [people] were present, performing folk dances.[21]

These fragments reveal the spectacle of emerging power, demonstrating the intricate strategies deployed by an authoritarian state to solidify its dominance and impose its political agenda on the population. In this instance, it epitomizes the concept of 'necropolitics' (Mbembe 2019) for three reasons. First, as previously mentioned, the event was entirely orchestrated as a grotesque celebration of the death of Mulele. This macabre revelry, parading Mulele's demise as a form of 'festivity,' exposes the way in which power, in Congo-Zaire, could instrumentalize life and death as tools of governance. Mobutu's rule exemplified necropolitics, where sovereignty is affirmed through the capacity to dictate the terms of both life and death. In this necropolitical framework, the state asserts its omnipotence by deciding who is to live with dignity and who is condemned to death with shame. By transforming death into a spectacle of power, the regime made clear that opposition not only led to physical eradication but also entailed profound humiliation, a visible marker of the state's ability to degrade life itself. This theatrical display of death stood in stark contrast to Lumumba's vision of power, as discussed earlier, which sought to affirm life rather than extinguish it.

Second, the procession, marked by slogans and ritualistic chanting, reveals the state's totalitarian grip over speech and representation. The repetitive incantations of phrases like 'Mulele paid debt' and 'Mulele: finish' were both expressions of state propaganda and an attempt to consolidate the official narrative and erase any contesting histories. Necropoltics, here, functions as a machine of erasure, one that seeks to eliminate plurality, to crush alternative voices under the weight of a singular, hegemonic narrative.

Third, the exceptional provision of material rewards, such as the opening of bars and the sudden availability of electricity exposes Mobutu's use of scarcity as a tool of control. In a context where basic services like electricity were otherwise withheld, their selective availability during this orchestrated event revealed how even the most fundamental necessities of life were transformed into instruments of sovereign power. The dispensing of electricity on this occasion was not an act of governance in the service of public welfare but an affirmation of the state's capriciousness. The population's access to basic amenities became a matter of favor, a demonstration of the regime's triumph over their needs. This strategy echoed the deeper logic of Mobutu's rule, where scarcity was both an economic condition and a political weapon, wielded to create dependence, enforce obedience, and magnify the regime's triumphalism.

It was this triumphalism, *this excessive exultation of the president's pleasure*, that Jeannette Mulele, Pierre Mulele's daughter, would later describe as shattering her very being. In her recounting, the profound humiliation her family endured became a lifelong wound, as their very identity remained constantly under siege. As a child, she bore the weight of her father's legacy, hearing classmates sing songs mocking him, branding him a 'rebel,' a 'traitor.' Her sense of self – what Martin Heidegger (1962: 26) would call her 'Dasein,' her *being-in-the world* – was torn apart, reduced to a symbol of shame in the face of the state's revenge. In a desperate attempt to escape this perpetual scorn, she would change her last name, but the wounds inflicted by Mobutu's vengeance were not so easily erased, forever etched in her existence.

> 'Papa, [she recounted with palpable sorrow], it was a terrible and painful experience. How many times did I suffer scorn because of my father?' One morning, as you put up on your [school] uniform and head to school, you … hear people singing in front of the flag: '*Pipi dongo, nani atiaki tembe na Mobutu? Mulele atiaki tembe na Mobutu, lelo asuki!* [*Pipi dongo*, who defied Mobutu? Mulele defied Mobutu, today he has been defeated!]' … Can you imagine [the anguish of hearing] … a song [that] … insulted my father … while I, a young girl with Mulele's name, stood before the flag? … You needed nerves of steel to endure such humiliation, … but unfortunately, it was not always the case.[22]

In Mobutu's Congo-Zaire, this politics of revenge extended beyond the physical destruction of rebels like Mulele. It reached into the intimate spaces of their families, aiming to annihilate their legacies and to ensure that even their memory would be a source of shame. It was not enough for Mobutu's necropolitical order to kill; it had to erase, humiliate, and crush all semblance of dignity. By subjecting families like the Mulele's to ridicule and scorn, the regime inscribed its dominance into the very fabric of the social order. This was not merely a *politics of death*, but a politics of obliteration, the total annihilation of any possibility for resistance, a

constant reminder to the populace that dissent would lead not just to death, but to a lingering, relentless suffering. The orchestration of such public rituals of humiliation became a perpetual spectacle of Mobutu's sovereignty, a brutal reminder that the state's power extended into the deepest recesses of everyday life, making resistance synonymous with oblivion.

Yet, Mobutu had *another* way of exacting his own revenge, a mode as insidious as it was calculated, reminiscent of the stealth of a leopard staking its prey. This *alternative* form of revenge was more than about the immediate, spectacular act of 'giving death'. It was a subtler, more drawn-out process of reducing his enemies to mere caricatures of their former selves, transformed into despicable objects, devoid of pride, dignity, or autonomy, but still breathing. It all began with a fabricated charge, a web of lies spun to entrap the supposed enemy of the president. Exile, stripped of their homeland and forced into years of isolation, the enemy's fall from grace was Mobutu's first act of domination.

But Mobutu's cruelty lay not only in exile. After some time, often when the enemy was forgotten by all but a few, a presidential pardon would arrive. It seemed, on the surface, a gesture of magnanimity. The exile could return, now reconciled with the president, and would even be granted positions of high office – governorships, ministerial portfolios, leadership roles that restored them to the corridors of power. And yet, this restoration was nothing but an illusion. It was a carefully laid trap, a charade of grace, designed to set the stage for an even deeper humiliation.

Just when the relationship between the president and his former enemy seemed at its most cordial, Mobutu would strike because he had control over everything: not just the narrative of history but even the depths of forgetfulness, that space where betrayals can be erased and reconciliations celebrated. Then, like a leopard pouncing on its prey, Mobutu would seize his former enemy, reminding him that power – true power – was always in his hands. With both hands, he would mount on the back of his once-exiled enemy, not to destroy him in a single blow, but to hitch him up, subjecting him to humiliation so total, so degrading, that it defied articulation. This was no longer a question of death, but of life without dignity, of living as shell of one's former self.

In these moments, two reactions would emerge. First, there would be the trembling, the uncontrollable shiver that overtakes the victim, the involuntarily physical agitation experienced when one finds oneself, alone and vulnerable, confronted by a group of soldiers in an isolated place, far from prying eyes. It was a trembling born of fear, yet even more of the full realization that one's fate was entirely in the hands of another, that the president had not simply forgiven, but had been toying with them all along, waiting for the perfect moment to reclaim his mastery.

And then there was the laughter. For such humiliation, such degradation, could not go unnoticed. Congolese, or Zairians, who witnessed these scenes or heard of them would burst into laughter – deep, guttural laughter that erupted unexpectedly,

shaking the body with an intensity that matched the trembling of the victim. It was not the laughter of joy, but of disbelief, of recognition of the absurdity of a power so complete that it could reduce once-mighty figures to objects of mockery. This was a laughter that Mobutu both provoked and relished. It was the laughter of submission, of complicity in the spectacle of another's shame.

Among those subjected to this slow, grinding revenge was Cléophas Kamitatu, once the governor of Léopoldville province, and a minister in various governments of the First Republic. His rise and fall were emblematic of Mobutu's strategy. After years of exile, Kamitatu was welcomed back into the fold, offered prestigious roles and seemingly restored to the president's good graces. Yet, as with all of Mobutu's enemies-turned-allies, this reconciliation was but a prelude to further degradation. In 1991, Edi Angulu, in *Adieu Mobutu, 'Génie' de Gbadolite*, recounted the humiliations Kamitatu endured, describing in painful detail how a man once respected and feared was reduced to a figure of ridicule, his very existence a testament to Mobutu's ability to destroy without killing. Angulu's words capture the essence of Mobutu's power, a power that thrived both on death and on the meticulous disintegration of those who lived under his rule.

> Accused of participating in the 'Pentecost plot,' which resulted in Kimba being hanged [in 1966], Kamitatu was arrested by Mobutu [and subsequently released in 1968]. … In 1970, as Mobutu was on the verge of officially detaining him, [this time] for a murky NSF [Non-Sufficient Funds] cheque affair, Kamitatu sought refuge in exile in Paris [in France]. In 1971, he published … *La Grande mystification du Congo-Kinshasa* [*The Great Mystification of Congo-Kinshasa*], with the subtitle, '*Les crimes de Mobutu*' ['*Mobutu's Crimes*']. … This book would bring him happiness and an unexpected fortune because the dictator [Mobutu], who cannot stand criticism, instructs his embassy in Paris to make round-ups in the bookstores of a staunchly democratic France, to buy, at any price, a maximum number of copies of the pamphlet in order to remove them from circulation! All purchase items are burned.
>
> … In 1980, Mobutu wants to vividly celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of his 'revolution.' He wants Kamitatu, whose damned book was elevated to the rank of national heroes, to blow out the candles for this 'historic' anniversary. Mobutu offers him to 'return home,' to enjoy his forgiveness. … After a brief period as head of the Institute for Scientific Research, [Kamitatu] is appointed [minister] in the Mobutu government. One evening, while we were watching him take his oath of 'allegiance to the president'… [on television], a journalist [and] friend of mine says with disdain: '[Kamitatu], this is the stupidest day of your life.' … In 1988, the Japanese government donates transport trucks to [Kamitatu's] ministry. Kamitatu is responsible for the distribution [of these trucks] to agricultural traders. One day, Mobutu summons him to his office. Accusing him of having favored one of his personal female friends in obtaining the vehicles, the 'Guide' [Mobutu] forces him, in the presence of guards

> armed to the teeth and amused witnesses, to open his pamphlet (*La Mystification du Congo-Kinshasa*) and … read aloud a passage in which he [Kamitatu] criticized the irrationality that presides over the management of 'Zaire' and the corruption of Mobutu. Dismissed, Kamitatu awaits a further [government] reshuffle while Mobutu is savoring his revenge. And what a revenge! (Angulu 1991: 136-39).

The third and final feature of Mobutu's *politics of enmity* was its *capacity to draw extensively upon the theory of negative representation*, a theory in which representation itself was indistinguishable from disfigurement, a slow and deliberate act of destruction. To represent, in this framework, was not merely to reflect or capture an image but to violently transform something into nothing. It implied a rendering into oblivion, where the represented subject became a shadow of their former self, existing in a realm of ghostly presence, stripped of agency, reduced to remnants of a 'previous order' that once possessed life and meaning (Mbembe 2019: 139). Yet, within Mobutu's paradigm, representation extended beyond mere erasure; it took on a figurative dimension as well, one that never allowed for 'the possibility of mutual recognition.'

In Mobutu's universe, the process of representing an enemy became an exercise in control and domination. And this, for a number of reasons. First, as Mbembe notes, within 'the consciousness of the representing subject,' *that is*, Mobutu himself, 'the represented subject,' the enemy, was 'always' at 'risk of' becoming 'an object,' 'a plaything,' no longer a political actor but a mere puppet on the stage of power (*Ibid.*). Second, 'by allowing' themselves 'to be represented' by Mobutu's gaze, his enemies were stripped of any capacity to construct their own 'self-image, both for' themselves 'and for the world.' They became reflections of Mobutu's desire, condemned to inhabit 'an image that' was not their own, one they had to wrestle with, yet one 'in which' they 'scarcely recognized' themselves. They were no longer what they had once been but were forced to live through the experience of their own 'consciousness as a' profound deficiency (*Ibid.*).

How, then, could the Congolese – or Zairians – willingly allow themselves to be represented by Mobutu, a man who permitted no room for negotiations, where the balance of power titled overwhelmingly in his favor? As Edi Angulu (1991: 137) reminds us, representation under Mobutu was enacted through violence, a form of power without consent, authored solely by the president, the architect of a symbolic fiction that stood as the ultimate truth. Mobutu did not need paper or pen to shape this representation; it existed entirely within the confines of his imagination, where he fashioned enemies, allies, and subjects alike into grotesque figures in his theater of power.

Students, perhaps more than any other group, were subjected to this violent form of representation, distinct from the political sphere yet entangled in Mobutu's network of control. As early as 1961, students within the General Union of Congolese Students (UGEC) began organizing, gathering to imagine a future for

Congo that belonged to its people.[23] By 1966, they had adopted scientific socialism, an ideology that starkly contradicted Mobutu's neoliberalism.[24] By 1967, Mobutu had begun to systematically dismantle UGEC, turning its members into individuals for whom mere existence meant continuous confrontation with death. Delphin Banza and Francois-Xavier Beltchika, former UGEC activists, vividly recalled the suffering of this period.

> The fight was waged on numerous fronts. … Mobutu [and his] regime fervently sought to eradicate UGEC once and for all, employing various strategies. … False accusations were disseminated about UGEC members. They were depicted as dangerous killers with malicious intent. … The JMPR (Jeunesse du Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution) was designated the sole institution entrusted with overseeing [Congolese] students, with Mobutu providing ample resources, funding, and privileges to this group, while UGEC members were subjected to frequent imprisonment. Persecution [of UGEC members] occurred incessantly.[25]

> Not to mention the fact that UGEC leaders found themselves excluded from employment opportunities due to relentless targeting. Nkanza Ndolumingu, who was the president of UGEC, could not work. He was effectively prevented from [pursuing a career] by Mobutu. He spent more time in prisons than out of them. … And I guess you can understand how painful this was for someone to be prevented from working after having spent so many years at school. How could he pay his bills? How could he take care of his loved ones? This was undeniably a [form of] death in itself![26]

In 1968, the crackdown on students intensified. On January 16, André Nkanza Ndolumingo, UGEC's national president, was arrested by state security forces. Mobutu appeared on television shortly after, denouncing the students as communist puppets, enemies of the regime who deserved neither respect nor recognition. In Mobutu's eyes, these students were nothing more than apprentices of chaos, devoid of intellect or humanity, whose fate was a brutal death.[27] As soldiers besieged universities, arresting activists and crushing dissent, *the politics of enmity* unfolded with increasing brutality (Gérard-Libois 1969: 154-156).

In 1969, the situation reached its apex. Students, convinced that the freedoms enshrined in the constitution were inalienable, decided to take to the streets of Kinshasa on June 4.[28] Their demonstration called for the decolonization of the university (Yoka Lye Mudaba 2010: 108) and demanded 'greater democracy for the people' of Congo (Angulu 1991: 68). However, before the rally could fully assemble, the military intervened with live ammunition, turning the streets into scenes of carnage. André Yoka Lye, who participated in the demonstration, remembers these scenes:

> [It was] Wednesday, June 4. … I f[ou]nd myself, along with my roommate and friend Symphorien Mwamba, at the forefront of the rally at Victoire roundabout.

> [Yes,] Victoire roundabout, precisely. [A] harrowing standoff between, on the one hand, [us], the enraged students, and, on the other hand, the soldiers, armed to the teeth, nervous, and seemingly unprepared for these kinds of riots. And [then], the irreparable [just] happened! Following a few warning shots of tear gas, the soldiers resorted to firing live ammunition at close range. [A] stampede. [There were] dead bodies on the sidewalk. Among these deaths, my friend Mwamba! I only had my salvation by miracle (Yoka Lye Mudaba 2010: 109).

Mobutu's theory of negative representation, with its principle of disfigurement and destruction, extended far beyond the students. It became a central tenet of Congolese political life, reverberating through the corridors of power long after Mobutu's fall. Even in 2011, as *Jeune Afrique*, a French-language Pan-African weekly news magazine, drew comparisons between Mobutu and his successor Joseph Kabila, the echoes of Mobutu's politics of destruction were clear.[29] Under Kabila, a similar concentration of power emerged, where the collective well-being of the Congolese people was sidelined in favour of a politics that maintained sovereign power in the hands of a few. 'Assemblies of ghosts,' parallel cabinets, and symbolic prime ministers all perpetuated a regime where life and death decisions were made with impunity.

Kabila's regime, much like Mobutu's, suppressed dissent with violence. Between 2015 and 2019, protests against Kabila's extended tenure were met with brutal repression. Faced with criticisms, Kabila invoked the legacy of Lumumba to shield his actions from scrutiny. Yet, this defence only underscored the continuity of the politics of negative representation, a regime where the sovereign controlled not only life and death, but also the very image of the nation and its people.

Conclusion

Patrice Lumumba's historic address on 30 June 1960 marks a seminal moment in the Congo's journey, coinciding with ifs formal liberation from Belgian colonial rule. Lumumba's speech, often revered as the 'birth certificate' of the contemporary Congo, was an expression of both joy and defiance. It jubilantly proclaimed the end of colonial oppression while unflinchingly confronting the enduring scars of Belgian rule. He exposed the brutalities, exploitation, and profound inequality and suffering inflicted upon the Congolese people, all while calling for unity among the diverse populations of the newly independent nation.

In reflecting on Lumumba's speech and its lasting impact on the Congo's political trajectory, we are drawn into the intricate dynamics of power and governance in postcolonial societies. Lumumba envisioned a postcolonial Congo grounded in a *politics of life*, a politics that emphasized the sanctity of life, human dignity, and collective well-being. His address not only signalled the formal severance from

colonialism but also laid the foundation for an ethical vision of governance that sought to foster unity, development, and prosperity. Yet, this vision was tragically interrupted. Lumumba did not live to see the Congo he dreamed of, meeting a premature and violent end in 1961. Despite his untimely demise, Lumumba's legacy endures as an embodiment of an affirming *politics of life,* one that remains an ethical and moral counterpoint to *the politics of death* that would later dominate the nation.

The Congo's political trajectory under Mobutu, however, bore little resemblance to Lumumba's vision. Mobutu presided over a *politics of enmity*, a regime rooted in the strategic construction of fictions, the instrumentalization of vengeance, and the systemic use of negative representation. In Mobutu's hands, power became an apparatus of suppression, fear, and brutality, extending beyond mere authoritarianism to become a theater of destruction. *The politics of life* was replaced by a politics of disfigurement and disempowerment, where individuals were transformed into shadows of themselves, caught in a vicious cycle of subjugation and death. This departure from Lumumba's positive and human-centric vision would reverberate through successive regimes, including that of Joseph Kabila.

The comparison between Mobutu and Kabila reveals a continuity in the postcolonial exercise of power in Congo. Both regimes, albeit in different forms, concentrated power in the hands of a select few, neglecting policies oriented toward the collective well-being. While Kabila's regime paid lip service to Lumumba's legacy, particularly in its strategic invocation of Lumumba's assassination as a shield against external criticism, the deeper structure of governance remained unchanged. Kabila, like Mobutu before him, employed divisive strategies and authoritarian tactics to consolidate power, perpetuating *the politics of enmity* that had long defined the Congolese state. In this sense, the contemporary conception of power in Congo aligns more closely with Mobutu's legacy than with Lumumba's ethical vision of life-affirming governance.

Mobutu's leadership style, in many ways, was an extension of the colonial apparatus – centralized, authoritarian, and violently exclusionary (see Young 1994). It drew upon the colonial legacy while embedding itself in postcolonial logics of control and domination. Lumumba's politics, by contrast, emerged from an unwavering commitment to the well-being and empowerment of the Congolese people. His vision was not simply political; it was profoundly ethical. He viewed power as a dynamic force meant to nurture, develop, and secure life, to foster dignity, and to protect the vulnerable. In this, his *politics of life* stood as the antithesis to both the colonial *politics of death* and the postcolonial *politics of enmity.*

From a theoretical standpoint, the divergent legacies of Lumumba and Mobutu invite us to reconsider the broader question of power in postcolonial Africa. They challenge us to interrogate the ways in which historical memory, political manipulation, and the enduring impact of colonial legacies shape the trajectory of state like Congo. Moreover, these reflections compel us to ask difficult questions

about the ethical foundations of governance in Central Africa, where the potential for life-affirming, inclusive governance is persistently undermined by the spectre of violence, authoritarianism, and exclusion. As Congo continues to navigate its postcolonial reality, the tension between the *politics of life* and the *politics of death* remains a critical lens through which to understand its past, present, and future.

Notes

[1] I would like to express my gratitude to Florence Bernault, Benoît Henriet, Charlotte Mertens, Stéphanie Perazzone, David Mwambari, along with the two reviewers from Leuven University Press for their valuable feedback on earlier drafts.

[2] 'Discours de Lumumba'<https://dokumen.tips/download/link/discours-de-lumumba.html>, accessed on 24 September 2023.

[3] Here, Lumumba was notably referring to the bloody repression of various riots that dotted the history of Congo, such as the Pende revolt of 1931 or the Leopoldville riots of January 1959, as well as the lack of infrastructural investments in regions of marginal economic or strategic importance.

[4] 'Discours de Lumumba' <https://dokumen.tips/download/link/discours-de-lumumba.html>. Accessed on 24 September 2023. My own translation.

[5] Le monde, 'Le général Mobutu proclame Lumumba "héros national" du Congo,' *Le Monde*, 2 July 1966.

[6] Interview with Daniel Palambwa (83 years old), Kinshasa, 23 September 2013. He was a member of the Kwilu provincial government in the 1960s. See also, CRISP (1967: 411).

[7] On Mobutu and Niccolò Machiavelli, see Willame (1988: 37-49); Devlin (2007: 232); Langlier (2017: 130-31).

[8] On this principle, see Machiavelli (1950: 57).

[9] This is also one of Machiavel's teachings. See Lerner 1950: xliii.

[10] For a much deeper discussion of this concept, read Achille Mbembe (2016).

[11] Evariste Kimba was the former Foreign Minister of Katanga and the *formateur* of the last government of the First Republic. Jérôme Anany was the former Minister of National Defense in the Adoula government. Alexandre Mahamba was the former Minister of Land Affairs in both the Lumumba and Adoula governments. Emmanuel Bamba was the former Finance Minister in the Adoula government and leader in the Church of Jesus Christ on Earth, led by His Special Envoy Simon Kimbangu.

[12] Interview with Ernest Kiangu (59 years old), Kinshasa, 23 March 2015. On the concept of *community of emotions*, see Virilio (2012: 30).

[13] Interview with Jacques Kuma Kuma (66 years old), Kikwit Sacre Coeur, 6 August 2015.

[14] Interviews with Cyril Mukelenge (73 years old), Idiofa, 23 December 2013 and Mukidi Mbongo (68 years old), Gungu, 13 January 2014. See also Stannard (2006: 42-43).

[15] Friend, C. 'Social Theory', https://www.iep.utm.edu/soc-cont/. Accessed on 24 September 2023.

[16] Anonymous, 'Un conseil extraordinaire des ministres et bureau politique du M.P.R. révèle: Pierre Mulele préparait une nouvelle rébellion à partir de l'ambassade de cuba à Brazzaville'. *Le Courrier d'Afrique*, 39th year, 2nd series, no. 2108, Kinshasa, Thursday, 10 october 1968, 5.

[17] Mulele was killed on 3 October 1968, not on 9 October 1968 as Mobutu claimed in his address.

[18] Anonymous, 'Grande marche populaire pour "fêter" la mort de Pierre Mulele. Le gouverneur Muhoma: "La situation est calme dans toute la province"'. *Le Courrier d'Afrique*, 39th year, 2nd series, no. 2111, Monday, 14 octobre 1968, 1.

[19] Anonymous, 'Grande marche populaire', 1.

[20] Anonymous, 'A la mission catholique de Kikombo (Bandundu) "le nom de Mulele me fait du mal…" nous dit un jeune orphelin de 17 ans'. *Le Courrier d'Afrique*, 39th year, 2nd series, no. 2112, Tuesday, 15 octobre 1968, 1.

[21] Anonymous, 'Impression d'un voyage éclair à Kikwit'. *Le Courrier d'Afrique*, 39th year, 2nd series, no. 2113, Wednesday, 16 octobre 1968, 5.

[22] Interview with Jeannette Mulele (57 years old), Kinshasa, 16 September 2013.

[23] Henri Takizala, 'Discours prononcé devant le congrès par le président général de l'U.G.E.C.', 1-3 (Jean-Marie Mutamba papers, private collection, Kinshasa). See also, interview with François-Xavier Beltchika (72 years old), Kinshasa, 1 Feb. 2011. A former member of UGEC-Belgium from 1962 to 1968 and a former close collaborator of Congolese historical opposition figure Etienne Tshisekedi, Beltchika is the president and founder of Congress of Democrats for Social Progress (CDPS), a political party created in 2011.

[24] Comité Exécutif National, 'Note sur le troisième congrès', 1965, 1-5 (Jean-Marie Mutamba papers, private collection, Kinshasa). See also interviews with Delphin Banza (70 years old), Kinshasa, 9 January 2011 and with Albert Mulomba (66 years old), Kinshasa, 26 December 2010. Banza and Mulomba were both members of UGEC-Léopoldville, respectively from 1963-1968 and 1967-1968.

[25] Delphin Banza (70 years old), Kinshasa, 9 January 2011.

[26] François-Xavier Beltchika (72 years old), Kinshasa, 1 February 2011.

[27] Delphin Banza (70 years old), Kinshasa, 9 January 2011. Banza was also a close associate of Nkaza during those years.

[28] See Gambembo Fumu wa Utadi (2006: 69-72); and Mobe (1998: 33).

[29] Francois Soudan, 'RDC: Joseph Kabila, Mobutu Light?', *Jeune Afrique*, 8 February 2011, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/192849/politique/rdc-joseph-kabila-mobutu-light/>. Accessed on 30 November 2023.

PART 5

The Other Side: Mystical and Nocturnal Power

CHAPTER 5.1

Witchcraft as an Archive: Aquatic Murders, Metamorphosis Forces, and Historical Narratives in the Central African Republic

Andrea Ceriana Mayneri

Introduction

In the Central African Republic of today, the word 'witchcraft' refers to a set of representations of evil, its causes and its ramifications, which dictates the type of reaction considered proportionate to the threat it is designed to oppose. In the country, the terms *sorcellerie* in French and *likundu* in the national language Sango, are used to designate the 'force' possessed by certain individuals operating at the heart of the community that denounces their malevolent, anti-social power. Our inspiration for this way of distinguishing 'force' from 'power' is drawn from the work of Hannah Arendt (1969), who defined 'force' as an *individual* property, whereas 'power' belongs to a *group*, even when it gives a particular individual the right to act in its name. Central Africans do not generally regard this 'force' as inherently negative; rather, it is akin to a zero signifier whose meaning can only be determined on a case-by-case basis, depending on the conflicts involved and the suspicions they raise. Thus, the harmful nature of the force ascribed to a 'witch-persecutor' is always determined collectively, beginnings within the family circle. In a sort of inverse projection, the power of the group that feels threatened consists in defining the negative aspects of this force and accuses it of complying with the aberrant aims of a society of witches. In other words, it is the power to draw a line separating 'us' from 'them'. Contrary to the world of ordinary sociality, a witchcraft society is described as a spectral 'counter-society', in which the principles underlying 'diurnal' solidarity are not only transgressed but also, like witchcraft force, aligned with the interests of the *zô ti bi* ('night people' according to another definition in the Sango language). A person can therefore be accused and even punished (sometimes with death) for rumoured participation in a meeting or a brotherhood engaging in deadly clandestine activities within the community. This secret, collective, and associative dimension is a recurrent theme in popular descriptions; it also highlighted in police inquests and court proceedings pertaining to witchcraft trials in the Central African Republic.

Our goal here is to capture the imaginary of the evil witches' meeting considering the pressures exerted on closed associations by the colonial administration and missionary congregations in the former Ubangi-Chari (now the CAR). In the twentieth century, the disappearance of these associations – at least the ones we studied during fieldwork and in archives[1] – was accompanied by widespread rumours about the

scope of witches' meetings and their secret activities. We will examine, in particular, the recent descriptions of the *Talimbi* association composed of homonymous aquatic witches, who are blamed for deaths occurring in or near bodies of water. The imaginary of *talimbi* ('crocodile men') seems to have emerged around the 1950s in the South-Eastern region along the Ubangi River and gradually spread to the rest of the country. In the current descriptions of the activities of these aquatic witches, notably the emphasis put on their underwater 'judicial' process, we find a trace of the changes that began with the colonial definition and persecution of 'secret societies'.

We will then expand our analysis to include certain symbolic aspects of *urukuzu* 'metamorphosis', another dreaded witchcraft force reputed to have been less harmful in the past than it is in the present. We intend to show how the imaginary of *talimbi*, *urukuzu* and other figures involved in witchcraft attacks and deaths in the Central African Republic today grew out of a profoundly felt experience of a temporal divide, which has ultimately led to the popular perception that some of the earlier potentialities have been lost, or worse, irreparably perverted. Through these representations of witchcraft today, which have their own historicity, a particular view of history is also expressed, whose amoral and malevolent character is strongly emphasized. Hence, the figures that populate this imaginary have taken on the burden of the doubts and fears felt in large swathes of Central African Republic – as well as in other Equatorial territories – as to the causes and the expansion of this deadly historical trajectory.

By conceptualizing the historical experience known as 'witchcraft' in this way, we can understand how it functions as an *archive*. To be clear, we are not associating witchcraft with a bygone era, a world of beliefs or traditions presumed to have partly disappeared, while another has obstinately continued through time only to resurface today. Thinking about witchcraft as an archive means conceiving of it as an epistemic space shaped by history, which constantly produces its own historical narrative, organizing certain events of the past according to a plan that we must open and decrypt. Building on the concept developed by Cornelius Castoriadis, Achille Mbembe (2002: 21) writes that the power of the archive as an 'instituting imaginary' flows from the trade it establishes with a 'dead time (the past)', in other words, with death. The archive is the 'sepulchre' in which we bury the elements of 'this life that could not be destroyed purely and simply'. Its potential lies in the 'illusion of totality and continuity', which it institutes 'through the ability to craft links between the beginning and the end'. But who, or what, carries out this archival function in establishing this 'trade with death' in a country like the Central African Republic, where the archives and museums seem essentially to undermine their institutional roles by neglecting the ordinary requirements of conservation, transmission, and cultural heritage recognition (Ceriana Mayneri 2022)? Beyond its material aspects, the archive is achieved in the history it makes possible, which is precisely what is accomplished by the witchcraft imaginary and the multiple figures that inhabit it. The particularity of these figures, including *talimbi* and

urukuzu, is that by starting in the present where they deploy their evil force, they help to institute a history dominated by themes of loss and weakening – in a word, what we call in our work *dispossession* (Ceriana Mayneri 2014a).

Just as the texts and reports produced by colonial administrations continue to generate a documentary 'surfeit' (Stoler 2009), when we enter this other 'archive' of Central African witchcraft, in the broad (but not figurative) sense of the term, we can try to identify certain surfeits by allowing them to guide us through the encrypted history they express *sotto voce*. Those 'surfeits' are nothing but layers of meaning superimposed over time upon witchcraft figures already active in Central African social spaces, where they have been manipulating superhuman forces for a long time to serve their evil purposes.

The 'Archive' of Central African Witchcraft

Beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Europeans that gradually penetrated Ubangian territory encountered social mechanisms designed to define, punish, and remedy evil within communities. Certain terms began to appear in the documents of Catholic missions and the colonial administration: at first, 'fetishes' and 'fetishism' and later, 'witches' and 'witchcraft'. These terms, loaded with derogatory connotations due to their Western origin, spread throughout the colonial Ubangian space, coinciding with a moment of decisive transformations in the representations and socio-cultural practices concerned. Not that these societies had remained immutable up until then, as colonial and missionary propaganda readily claimed at the time. On the contrary, for decades they had already been subjected to slave raids coming from Sudanese and Chadian regions in the North-East and profound cultural reconfigurations had taken place, particularly in the decentralized societies of the Central and Eastern regions of Ubangi-Shari, such as the Mandja and the Banda, which are often mentioned in these pages.

The intensity and the characteristics of these precolonial reconfigurations, about which our knowledge remains fragmentary, were no doubt proportionate to the vast migratory flows and desert population engendered by the passages of slave caravans. Yet, although this slave economy based on human extraction caused devastation throughout the nineteenth century, it did not directly attack political and religious structures to achieve its objectives. Thanks to Dennis Cordell's fundamental research on the slave trade and its decline in the area surrounding Dar el-Kuti (to the North of the current Central African Republic), we know that the slave traders occasionally relied on such Ubangian social practices as blood partnership, marriage alliances, offerings to the shrines of spirits associated with certain sites or to agricultural rites to incorporate communities into the economy of *zaribas* (small fortresses) or consolidate their patronage networks across the territory. Similarly, the local Banda chiefs used blood partnerships to integrate themselves symbolically into the surrounding

Muslim commercial networks: 'The pacts fostered cooperation between Muslim traders and non-Muslim leaders. The goods of long-distance commerce also brought wealth whose distribution extended the patronage of power in the self-governing lineage societies of northern Equatorial Africa.' (Cordell 1979: 385, 388)

The penetration of Europeans and the installation of the colonial regime were governed by a completely different political and military logic, directly aimed at attacking the structure of the local powers and their symbols. Prior to the First World War, alliances and accommodations within the centralized aristocracies of the Nzakara and the Azande along the Ubangi gave rise to 'shared sovereignty' between sultans and Westerners (Arzel 2019). However, in the segmented societies further North, the situation was different: There was no clear distinction between the political and religious spheres in the small, scattered Banda villages, which were organized into intra-clan networks. Authority was distributed among certain figures recognized for their special, sometimes super-human qualities, which could be consecrated by manipulating certain objects or participating in closed associations. Those meetings and those objects were still associated with 'spirits' that were addressed through offerings or initiatory cults. The *Ngakola* spirit, associated with the bush in colonial literature, and the *Badagi* spirit associated with water were especially important; their attributes and skills sometimes overlapped, like those of the *Ngakola ongu*, that is, the *Ngakola* that lived in waterways (*ongu*).

In these non-centralized societies, functions such as the organization of village defence, the transmission of customary rules and principles, and the resolution of ordinary conflicts, as well as the aetiology of evil and how to prevent or offset it, were assigned to the holders of these objects and the members initiated into these associations. The Ngakola initiates were gathered in a rigidly hierarchical association known as the *Semali*, which administered a form of justice. Punishments might even include death, which was administered away from human habitation by initiates, who marked the cadaver with signs that unmistakeably identified it as a *Ngakola* victim, particularly gashes like those left by wildcats.

The *Semali* association within the Banda (also found among the Mandja) aligned with a widespread model in these Equatorial regions, but as regard its 'judicial' function and penalty enforcement, the *Semali* showed a particularly striking resemblance to the *Ngil* society of the Beti people in Cameroon. Philippe Laburthe-Tolra has underscored this society's ambivalence: Along with genuine 'criminal investigations' and 'inquisitions' that exercised deadly power, the *Ngil* nevertheless offered its initiates protection from accidents, diseases and the ravages of witchcraft. In his description of the decline of the *Mwiri* association in Gabon, Christopher Gray analyses this sort of 'terrorist' shift as a 'final desperate attempt of the violent segments of *Mwiri*-type initiation societies to regain control over the people who represented wealth in the precolonial equatorial tradition' (Gray 2002: 202).

Regional comparisons can help to reconstitute the main characteristics of the *Semali* among the Banda, even though the few descriptions available to us come

from either colonial or missionary literature, which introduced specific biases into their analyses. In the 1970s, the priest Wiel Eggen authored a rich, dense monograph in French about the Banda. In the chapters devoted to *Ngakola* initiates, he emphasized the degraded quality of the information he obtained from his interlocutors, whose memory of those bygone institutions seemed to be so 'deformed' that 'it becomes difficult to distinguish the fanciful aspects from what [in the past] actually took place in everyday life' (Eggen 1976: 48). While the author's words reveal the 'pastoral' bias of his reflections, the question of the transformations (and not 'deformations') that the memory of these former associations had undergone is wholly relevant: The combined actions of missionaries and colonial administrators had a direct impact, first on the authority and functions attached to these associations, and then, after their demise, on their popular image and memory, traces of which have survived to the present day.

The colonial lexicon soon included two new terms: 'sect' and 'secret society'. As Douglas Johnson writes, 'In colonial Africa, the institutions of alien power (church and state) have provided both the definition of secrecy and the evidence for subversion' (1991: 130), but the relationships of these foreign actors with African institutions were driven by two distinct agendas.

According to writings of early Spiritan missionaries in Ubangi-Shari, the 'anarchy' of leaderless Banda communities was the key factor enabling those known as 'fetish doctors' (*féticheurs*) to maintain a firm hold over the subjugated populations. By conceptually extracting an autonomized religious sphere and divorcing it from the more political dimensions of collective life (which, in contrast, were denigrated for their inconsistency), it became possible to create the figure of the 'fetish doctor', associated with cults ('false beliefs') and 'fetish' objects.[2]

The complexity of these missionary descriptions depended on whether the writings were ethnographic and scientific or merely propaganda. Overall, however, the 'fetish doctor' – whose Ngakola initiate soon became a paradigmatic figure – turned into an alter-ego of the missionary, who engaged in a confrontation that took place entirely within the hypostasized sphere of religion. While these narratives of the evangelizing experience simplify and caricature this encounter at every opportunity, they could not always obliterate the sometimes-fatal outcome of their efforts to reform local societies. In a 1914 propaganda publication, the Spiritan priest Pierre Cotel tells of having welcomed to the mission station a dying man who had been expelled from his community out of fear he was a 'menace' of sleeping sickness. In the story, the sick man reveals he supports the priest's cause when he refuses to see the manifestation of an evil spirit in the traces of a wild animal prowling around the mission. Readers then understand that the traces refer to the vengeance of *Semali* initiates when the sick man, now close to death, asks to be baptized so he will not 'go into the fire' under the influence of 'Nakola' (sic) the 'evil devil'.[3] In another passage from a notebook of handwritten memories from the 1910s, a colleague of Cotel, Father Joseph Daigre – who was the first person

to systematize ethnographic observations pertaining to the Banda – explains that he once took four bags of 'fetishes' from a 'witch' (*maître sorcier*), which he then sent on to France for a 'missionary exhibition'. After demanding in vain the return of the bags, and furthermore helplessly witnessing the death of his wives – which Daigre implies would have been interpreted by the Banda as a sign of the superior power of the French missionary – the 'witch' had to abandon his village and seek refuge in the Belgian Congo.[4] This latter story furthermore attests to the fact that the semantic spectre of witchcraft was superimposed onto that of the fetish. The term 'witchcraft' insinuated itself into missionary documents, drawing from the popular Western conceptions that missionaries carried with them across the African continent and from contact with local conceptions of *likundu* force (*ondro* in Banda) that one missionary defined, in a handwritten lexicon of the time, as 'witchcraft in the African sense of the term'.[5]

The process leading from the 'fetish doctor' cult to 'witchcraft' and the demonized figure of the cult initiate (to *Ngakola*, in this case) played on the intrinsic ambivalence of these meetings, erasing or underestimating the impact of apotropaic intentions and gestures (and obscuring the consequences of their eradication) to exaggerate their punitive or even terrorising dimension. It was this last aspect that, in the same years, the French colonial administration emphasized when it stressed the disturbing nature of the cult meetings it aimed to dissolve. Thus, as time went by, 'witches' and 'secret associations' came to be viewed as an issue of law and order, policing, and judicial repression.

During the 1910s, rebellions were increasingly quashed throughout Ubangi-Shari. Whenever the French administration expanded its control (and did not delegate it to concessionary companies), it tried to find or, if need be, create an organization like a chiefdom, appointing chiefs, who were often 'personalities that appeared when contact was made, even with the white power, due to sometimes contradictory attitudes (collaboration or opposition)' (Benoît 1989: 7). Aware of the inconsistency of these new chiefs, the administration was even more haunted by the impression that it knew little about the mysterious, esoteric dimensions of the local power, which it saw – sometimes correctly – as a vague threat. Study missions were therefore launched, like the one concerning 'sects and secret societies' assigned to a certain Coopman in 1917,[6] which were regularly renewed, in other forms, depending on the appearance of anticolonial movements, or those perceived as such. Much later, on the eve of Independence, a secret circular was sent by Paul Bordier, Chief of the Territory of Ubangi-Shari, to all district chiefs, summing up in a few lines a long history of political coercion and lexical transformations:

> Several times during the last ten years, we have drawn your attention to the need to follow very closely any events and apparent or secret activities of mystical Sects. They may resemble certain Western churches or religious communities or merely bear witness to fetishism possibly linked to witchcraft practices.[7]

In these instructions, the 'secret societies' appear to be meetings of potential conspirators whom the administration feared might stir up the populations against it. While 'fetishism' and 'witchcraft' seem to have been relegated to religious beliefs of another age, the adjective 'mystical' clearly points to movements or 'sects' in French Equatorial Africa, the Belgian Congo, and elsewhere that were openly opposed to white authority and privileges (the same circular mentions the example of the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya).

Although there are important differences, which we cannot analyse here, over the decades repressive colonial action seems to have been even more 'nervous' (Hunt 2016), if not 'neurotic', as the vitality of local initiatives always seemed to be one step ahead compared with the administrative categories developed to control them. Even in the mid-1950s, when the power of initiates into associations like the *Semali* was fading, the figure of the 'witch' manipulating gestures, objects, and esoteric symbols continued to be perceived by administrators as the incarnation of an anti-power opposed to the white police and judiciary. In Ubangi-Shari, administrators were still being asked to draw up lists of the names of 'witches' grouped together by locality, indicating, in addition to their place of habitation, their degree of 'influence' within their communities.[8]

The decline of the *Semali* and other similar associations accelerated as Independence drew closer at the end of the 1950s as well as in the period immediately following, during a long process of erosion that eventually put an end to longstanding relationships of seniority and authority and transformed their symbols. Even beforehand, between the 1930s and the 1940s, 'prophetic' figures with millenarian overtones had cyclically appeared on the border between Congolese and Ubangian territories, prompting the worried colonial administration in Congo and Ubangi-Shari to multiply its investigations, prosecutions, and sanctions. These figures (about whom very little is known on the 'Ubangian' side) continued to call for the 'old utopia' of freeing people from witchcraft (De Dampierre 1967: 567), but their message was now grafted onto an ostensible rejection of traditional authority and the resumption of missionary typologies.

'Fetishes' and evil 'witchcraft', once opposed to each other, increasingly merged together and the abolition of traditional remedies became a prerequisite for achieving a renewed world in which power relations with the whites would be reversed once and for all. This general trend enjoyed its most feverish expression among the Banda people further to the North: In the mid-1960s, the iconoclastic effervescence of a local 'prophet' led to the destruction by fire of the Ngakola sites and cult objects that had not already been removed from the country – so much so that no trace of them appears to remain in Central Africa today (Ceriana Mayneri 2014b).

We are inclined to support C. Gray's hypothesis concerning the decline of the *Mwiri* association in Gabon, according to which the former powers remained active due to the proliferation of healers and ritual experts called *nganga* and, more generally, in the extension of the invisible sphere.[9] Yet, in our view, the point

here is not to measure this extension – the reference to the invisible and witchcraft permeates every stratum of Central African society – but rather to specify the role and meaning of these older elements within it: in other words, to specify the role of the past in the present.

The Role of the Past in the Present

The main trace of the upheavals brought on by the colonial ban on closed associations and the abolition of their functions can be found today in the image of *talimbi* witches, who are suspected of causing deaths and accidents in the country's waterways. The origin of the *talimbi* image remains obscure, even from a linguistic point of view. The name may refer to the 'pot' (*ta* in Sango) that the crocodile-man holds upside-down on his head (*li*), which allows him to breathe underwater. As *mbi* is the Sango word for the personal pronouns I/me, *talimbi* would mean 'I [carry] a pot on my head'. In other contexts, for example in colonial Gabon, the French word *marmite* (meaning 'pot') was used to describe the supposed activities of the associations of 'tiger-men', an image that was later replaced in the lexicon of 'secret societies' (Bernault 2019: 172-173). Today, the 'nocturnal pot', the recipient of objects and forces that can affect or kill someone remotely, is a frequent image of witchcraft attacks in Equatorial Africa (Hagenbucher-Sacripanti 2002: 192). Another hypothesis is said to be based on the term *li,* used by the riparian Ngbandi populations of Ubangi: According to an acceptation close to the *mangu* organic witchcraft of the Azande (Evans-Pritchard 1937), *li* designated an animal or substance in the bellies of 'witches', who acted either 'on their own initiative or because they were paid and sent out by others seeking vengeance' (Tanghe 1935).

In these Central African regions, forces linked to water appear to have been attached to the witchcraft imaginary *sensu lato*, prompted by such motives as greed or jealousy and a form of anthropophagy aimed at enrichment within a highly symbolic social framework. Against this backdrop of recurring images, the 'collective' dimension and then the 'punitive' dimension expanded one after the other: It was the early 1950s and there were increasing rumours, at first on the banks of the Ubangi River and later in the urban environment of the Bangui capital, that 'aquatic murders' were being carried out by associations of crocodile-men (Grootaers 1996: 240). Today, rumours pertaining to these activities emphasize above all the theme of a criminal association operating like a genuine judicial institution organized into a strict hierarchy. The *talimbi* are said to meet underwater in an 'occult tribunal', 'in a world apart, a subsea world'[10] where they take their captives. There, the individuals are punished for faults or deviations from social norms, according to the assessment of their wrongdoing either by the *talimbi* or by others said to use their services to avenge themselves (Cimprič 2011: 882). The memory of former closed associations – and as we have seen, the *Semali* were the

archetype of such gatherings – is thus activated in the description of the tribunal, where powerful, opaque figures meet far from the gaze of the community and proceed to kidnap and punish, sometimes with death, in a space totally removed from humans. In Banda, there is also talk of 'outdoor *talimbi*' who, instead of going underwater, take their victims into the bush where they are judged and executed, according to descriptions of the *Semali* that have come down to us.[11] Here, the memory of former institutions, which may have turned towards 'terrorizing' communities when they were under great pressure, telescopes the trace of colonial condemnation of 'secret societies', which were denied any socializing function in favour of the exercise of despotic, corrupt power.

Yet, between the colonial descriptions of *Semali* tribunals and the contemporary ones of *talimbi* judges, we find more than just similarities or differences in the symbols and narratives. The structural position of victims and witnesses in each 'case' has changed over time: The gap has widened between the little we know about how these associations functioned in the past and what is said about crocodile-men today. Nowadays, when a drowned cadaver is found, it is the sign of an earlier deadly intervention and no mediation by the *nganga*, or by witnesses, or by those familiar with the victim can do anything about it. By abolishing the mediation represented by the figure of the ritual expert in the chain leading from the diagnosis of a witchcraft attack to the acts prescribed to repair it, the *talimbi* tribunal can only take action at a level where the punishment comes very close to pure witchcraft malevolence, similar to the descriptions by missionaries during the colonial period, and therefore excludes any possibility of reparation.[12] It is at this level that a structural difference takes place, compared to what we know about the functioning of past associations like the *Semali*. In the past, it was indeed possible for the *Ngakola* to offer mediation to remedy individual or family afflictions through initiates, whose interventions were sometimes solicited and remunerated. Today, the image of a *Talimbi* meeting has been amputated of any anti-witchcraft or apotropaic function, of anything involving initiation as a healing or 'shielding' ('*blindage*') process. It no longer evokes anything but an 'occult' instrument, uncontrollable, in the service of the same vindictiveness and jealousy underlying the most common witchcraft cases. The moral condemnation and legal punishment that influenced local meetings during the colonial period, and then through various prophetic and iconoclastic episodes, have produced the image of underwater tribunals in which any ambivalence, any even remotely structuring function is erased, whereas public opinion is quick to endow the aquatic judges with increasingly convoluted skills.[13]

This reappearance of past phenomena or institutions, reinterpreted as devoted to witchcraft, is quite explicit. One eloquent example, that we discussed elsewhere (Ceriana Mayneri 2018), comes from a scene photographed in 2011 by researchers in a city in the middle of Banda ethno-linguistic territory. Magistrates and court clerks from the local tribunal are seen looking at an object exposed on the ground,

an object that was used as evidence to convict a person accused of being a *talimbi*. Described by these same magistrates as a 'diving suit' enabling the crocodile-man to breathe underwater, the object is likely a recent reproduction of a traditional basketwork helmet topped by wooden spikes. The helmets were once worn by adult initiates when they were publicly released after a period of confinement outside the village.[14] Due to their spectacular appearance, reproductions of these initiatory helmets were donned during productions organized throughout the colonial period and even afterwards to entertain Western visitors in these regions, where initiation rituals had become obsolete. Today, the initiatory object is not so much 'derived from memories' (Martinelli 2012) but, on the contrary, perfectly anchored in what we would call the 'witchcraft remembrance of the recent past'. Such objects, some of which lie sleeping in the reserves of Western museums,[15] now function for Central African magistrates as *talimbi* helmets and witches' instruments.

The anxious look, scrutinizing an artefact linked to the past for signs of contemporary witchcraft, corresponds today to a reflex of many people in Central Africa who are seeking, in a reconstituted past, a landmark that situates the origin of the country's present vulnerabilities. For example, while some people emphasize above all the judicial role assumed by the *talimbi*, for others, the crocodile-men are believed to practise in the main 'metamorphosis', another force typical of the Central African inventory of witchcraft categories. Like the skills of the *talimbi*, those attributed to metamorphosizers (*métamorphoseurs*) are based on recovering past elements that are reinterpreted through the prism of witchcraft evil.

An *urukuzu* metamorphosizer – from Banda words, which then passed into Sango, *uru* (breath/breathe) and *kuzu* (death) – is a witch who, when moved by jealousy, resentment, or the lure of money, approaches his victim and causes the individual to fall ill by imperceptibly breathing over the victim's body. The diagnosis of metamorphosis is delivered by a *nganga* or another figure reputed to be skilful at confronting this type of affliction, who then observes the extreme prostration that has stricken the person, thereby triggering the search for explanations and the machinery of suspicion. Meanwhile, as the body agonises, the metamorphosizer, who has seized his victim's life breath,[16] takes it away and 'turns' it into an animal that he attaches to a tree or puts to work in the fields or sells or slaughters. The animal's work, slaughter, and consumption correspond to the gradual phases of the body-victim's exhaustion until it dies. Thus, in 2003, in a preliminary enquiry carried out by the judicial police in the centre of the country against a man accused of metamorphosis, it was said by way of proof that on the day a woman had refused his advances, she suddenly died, and the man 'slaughtered a gazelle that he brought back, the fruit of metamorphosis'.[17]

So here is this ailing body, dissociated from the very principle of its humanity, exposed to the eyes of a community that sees its own vulnerability in the signs of bodily suffering. Such experiences of human predation, exhaustion, and the

annihilation of vital principles, which have been repeated constantly in these regions for more than a century, converge in a 'servile labour scheme' (Yengo 2016: 81) that governs the Central African *urukuzu* and other manifestations of witchcraft attacks. Since the colonial era, the widespread process of exploiting and *commodifying* human lives has translated into rumours about vampirism and mystical anthropophagy in various regions of Central Africa (White 2000). However, there are differences between the rumours linked to slave or colonial human extraction and Central African *urukuzu*. The latter resemble the Gabonese witchcraft figures described by F. Bernault, where there is no mention of 'predators' coming for Europe or, more generally, from outside the community: 'Although soaked in colonial legacy, [these figures] talk about the complex transformations of African mystical agency' (2019: 184). When writing about a closed society said to carry out *aquatic murders* in Ubangi, J.L. Grootaers underscored the fact that foreigners were not concerned by these attacks, and one of his interlocutors went so far as to specify: 'This is how we manage our affairs among ourselves.' (Grootaers 1996: 241)

The *urukuzu* is also perceived as an 'internal' threat to the community, emanating, so to speak, from the very bowels of its history. The capacity to 'turn' a person into an animal is considered an old force, possessed by people also capable of transforming themselves: They can flee from danger and remove a wound (the verb 'turn' is used here as well) from their own body and place it outside, for example, onto a tree trunk. This ability is commonly defined, in addition to the verb 'to turn', by the word *kifi*, which has passed into common parlance from the *Gbaya* language, where it means 'turn', 'transform', and in its intransitive form, 'change oneself': Thus in *gbaya, wankifi* designates a witch capable of transforming into a wildcat. There would seem to be a strong connection between present-day representations of evil witchcraft and now long-gone initiate associations. For example, in an unpublished work by a French soldier in Ubangi-Shari named Antonin Vergiat we find the following observations about the verb 'to turn': The members of a 'sect of leopard-men in Banda can metamorphosize into wildcats […], *in other words "turn leopard" as the indigenous people say.*' (1997: 481) Henceforth disconnected from the associative, initiatory, and political-religious context that once gave it meaning, and having failed to resist the colonial persecution of 'secret societies'[18] and the destruction caused by 'cultures of iconoclasm' (Strother 2016-2017), this ancient power itself 'turned' into a force, which is remembered today, with a certain uneasiness, only for its deleterious, bewitching side.

Contemporary metamophosizers and crocodile-men can therefore be described as the result of a long, uninterrupted 'syncretic work'. The rationale behind this work is radically different from that of the foundation of a palimpsest, in which symbolic elements or a system of meaning (e.g., the missionary one) is superimposed on top of another layer that remains hidden. On the contrary, as André Mary (1999) points out, the elements implied in syncretic work continue to be marked

by their former uses. The 'marking' that interests us here is the *ambivalence* of old forces, that is, the fact that initiates were able to put them to use in various and sometimes terrorizing ways, while at the same time fostering social reproduction. The collapse of these former associations and the abolition of their system of meaning did not end up erasing or completely forgetting this ambivalence, but rather gradually turning it into troubling *ambiguity*. This ambiguity continually gives rise to doubts shared by wide swaths of Central African society, namely, the suspicion that *talimbi* and *urukuzu*, among other witches, are the sole depositories of forces that no group, no human community feels capable of mastering constructively.

We therefore view metamorphosis (or crocodile-men) not only as the outcome of a historical process of alienation, still present in the submerged traces of *urukuzu* (servile dependence and labour, self-alienation), but first and foremost as a metonymy of a historical process whose troubling, and bewitching content is revealed in these figures. The witchcraft imaginary, to which *urukuzu* and *talimbi* belong, can be understood as an expression of how the World becomes a world of witchcraft. This imaginary articulates an idea of the present, with its witchcraft threats, by measuring the remoteness of a past whose irreducible distance it simultaneously establishes. In this Central African way of conceptualising the fracture separating past and present, the gravest dangers are fixed on a temporal axis, making the upheavals that affected the social order in the past a trajectory of perversion and *disempowerment*, a form of *dispossession*, of deprivation of forces from which we once – or *imagine* we once – benefited.

Conclusion

We would like to return now to discuss some of the issues raised by our approach. The idea of a fracture separating the present from the past is probably a universal human experience, at once individual and collective. At the same time, in certain African contexts and elsewhere, it seems to incorporate intense anxieties, which feed witchcraft repertoires especially (Geschiere 2016). To be sure, neo-Pentecostal movements owe much of their success to an ability to manipulate these temporal categories by ostensibly rejecting the 'traditional' past in favour of new, anti-nostalgic subjectivities, resolutely oriented towards a reformed future (van Dijk 1998). This question would certainly deserve to be seriously explored starting from the Central African terrain as well. However, for the purposes of this analysis, we will limit ourselves to the following observation: According to a 'circularity' that has frequently been emphasized, the return of evil witches, suffering, and violence – of which witchcraft is a metonymy – continually calls into question the proposed 'remedies' and reopens the wounds of a historical experience of dispossession that have never been treated and exceeds the frameworks in which attempts were made to contain it.

Drawing on A. Stoler's observations regarding colonial archives, we have used the word 'surfeit' to define the result of this syncretic effort that converges in the recent figures of the metamorphosizer or of the underwater judge. From deadly breath to an 'aqualung', from one form of witchcraft attack to the next, this surfeit is always a supplement as well: Witchcraft figures refer to the past, and in so doing, are already something else: something *more than* the past. We needn't bother Derrida here; we would simply say as regards this 'supplement': The challenge in this approach is *not only* to grasp what a closed association like the *Semali* may have been in the past, for the echoes heard today in the descriptions of witchcraft meetings already tell us something more. They evoke an obviously unattainable past, whose constructive forms have been poorly, insufficiently, or not at all transmitted. In this respect as well – due to the breaks it leaves open and the compulsive measuring, for want of mastery, of different temporalities – what we call 'witchcraft' shares many characteristics with a form of 'the writing of history' (De Certeau 1992).

This feeling of rupture, around which part of the Central African witchcraft imaginary is organized, echoes experiences of '*puissance*' and 'impotence' described by other authors (Bernault 2019; Henriet 2021). Admittedly, these latter terms have the advantage of being rooted (in the case of '*puissance*') in a language practice recurrent in Central Africa. But, by relying on the notion of 'dispossession' – with its distant Marxian resonances – we wanted above all to highlight the sense of 'expropriation', pain, and sometimes even panic and vindictive rage, that is felt in relation to the effects of a historical experience of deprivation that each case of witchcraft re-enacts.

Ultimately, these Central African dynamics invite us to re-examine the meaning of the forces and powers that are deployed every day in the invisible sphere. This sphere, like the world of dreams (Mbembe 1996), remains of course a space of subjectification, of individual and collective affirmation, in which resistances, disputes, and interstitial stories are anchored. It is in this sphere that people, including those in Central Africa, have found ways to express and explain various forms of deprivation experienced in the course of their history.

Some authors have questioned the role of witchcraft repertoires as vectors of social change in times of significant upheaval. Thus, according to David Graeber (2004: 32-34), in Madagascar, immediately after the French conquest, the characteristics of the spectral world of witches would have been a valuable resource and a 'reservoir' that could be quickly used to redefine oppressive experiences as illegitimate and 'non-Malagasy'. It is precisely by dialoguing with these theories that one might well question whether the *agency* encapsulated in the Central African figures of the *urukuzu* and *talimbi* has not itself been enclosed for a long time in a neurotic reflex. As a result, its potential for subjectification is invariably turned into criticism of the same community belly from which the witches emerge. Moreover, this withdrawal into the community hides one of the reasons why witchcraft is so influential in the public and private spaces of Central Africa.

To speak of a historical experience of dispossession and its translation into witchcraft or, in the broad sense, of a form of historical writing also inevitably evokes a long process of generating collective identities. Other societies that underwent colonization and its trauma are also marked by this experience of a strong generational rupture. Ramon Sarró (2022) noted, for instance, that among the Baga people of Guinea, the 'secret' attached to ancient initiations and abandoned since then, continues to 'perform', to operate in the present by 'mythologizing' a past to which the young generations are still attached. In this respect as well, the case of the CAR seems to be different: Like all secrets, the one that once surrounded *semali* initiates was probably valued more as a sign of belonging and a 'mechanism of bonding' than for its content, but its most recent variant, embodied by the figures of witches gathering in association, suggests a murkier social dynamic. In the anguished commentaries about the perversion of forces henceforth 'turned' towards evil, the loss of initiatory 'secrets', and the failure of current remedies against witchcraft, the fundamental question is this: What are the requirements for transmitting – and above all for *not* transmitting – a shared social experience? If the work of remembering is still driven, as in Guinea, by the dialectic between the secret and its abolition (during the colonial period or later on), it nevertheless seems to be crafted not so much as a principle structuring the sharing of reimagined experiences, but rather as a principle of exclusion, shifting to recriminations that could readily coalesce into accusations between generations, persons, or communities. Indeed, all these dynamics continue to haunt the present-day Central African Republic and its populations.

Notes

[1] The ideas expressed in these pages are based on our research since 2005 in the Central African Republic and colonial administration and missionary archives. The English translation of the text was carried out thanks to support from the *Institut des mondes africains* (IMAF-CNRS).

[2] See Bernault (2009) for a discussion of this dynamic and its effects on the scientific comprehension of witchcraft in Africa. We differ from his analysis insofar as the Spiritan documents concerning Ubangi-Shari reveal their authors (who adopted both the terms 'fetish' and 'witchcraft' in a wide variety of ways) had resorted early on to frequent use of the figure of the 'devil' and its lexicon – even though this was primarily the case in writings without any ethnographic pretensions.

[3] Pierre Cotel, 'Joseph Mazunga', *Le messager du Saint-Esprit*, January 1914, Holy Ghost Fathers' Archives (*Archives générales de la Congrégation du Saint-Esprit*), Chevilly-Larue (France), SF-243.8.

[4] Joseph Daigre, hand-written notebook 'Anecdotes congolaises', Holy Ghost Fathers' Archives, Chevilly-Larue (France), 2D16.2.

[5] 'Lexique Français-Banda, copie du dictionnaire du R.P. Daigre', Holy Ghost Fathers' Archives, Chevilly-Larue (France), 2D16.2.

[6] Hand-written letter addressed to Monsieur De Glos 23 February 1917, Bangui, Présidence de la République, Management of the National Archives, colonial collection, 'Basse Kotto Prefecture – M1'.

[7] 'Le Chef du Territoire de l'Oubangui-Chari à Messieurs les Chefs de Région, les Chefs de District autonome, les Chefs de District', 07 July 1958, Bangui, Présidence de la République, Management of the National Archives, colonial collection, 'Lobaye – MB6.

[8] ‘Activités sectes secrètes et églises non-reconnues’ (undated document mentioning 1955 events), Bangui, Présidence de la République, Management of the National Archives, colonial collection, ‘Lobaye – MB6’.

[9] With one important difference, namely, that there has never been a cult in the Central African Republic comparable to the *Bwiti* in Gabon and its historical trajectory.

[10] The terms in quotation marks were used in discussions with police officers who intervene at the scene of witchcraft cases (Bangui, 01 July 2016).

[11] Interview, Ippy (Ouaka Prefecture), 5 March 2006.

[12] [12] In his PhD dissertation on trade along the Ubangi River, Daniel Zigba (1995: 232) noted that in the 1990s, several *talimbi* had been burned alive by the populations of the eastern Central African Republic, who were exasperated by the failure of the local tribunal to find convincing evidence against witches.

[13] Thus, in 2016 in Bangui, we heard explanations according to which the *talimbi* are henceforth leaving the waterways to swim up pipes and attack their victims when they come out of the tap.

[14] The helmet photographed in 2011 must have been a reconstitution of the ones worn by traditional dance groups that perform at public festivities.

[15] In France, the Musée du quay Branly-Jacques Chirac in Paris and the Musée des Confluences in Lyon.

[16] My expression. In Central Africa, the French word ‘*âme*’ is sometimes used to designate the part of the human being that, once dissociated from the body, continues to live on in slavery while the body passes away. A *nganga* in Ippy, in the centre of the country, uses the Sango words *kota yingo*, the ‘great breath’ or the ‘main breath’ or, again, ‘the main soul’ (Interview, 13 May 2006).

[17] ‘Minutes of preliminary enquiry’, October 2003: I have chosen to make anonymous this type of document. It should be noted that in court, following the statement of a *nganga* authorized to provide ordalian evidence with eggs, the judge opted to acquit the accused.

[18] Among other aspects, we would note that Catholic missions were able to exercise strong control over the country’s educational system until the 1960s. The first President of the Central African Republic, Barthélémy Boganda (1910-1959), was a Catholic priest before leaving the Church to devote himself to political activity (Kinata 2008; Ceriana Mayneri 2019).

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CHAPTER 5.2

When 'Slaves' are Kept in a Bundle: Reliquary Art, Power and Slavery in Southwestern Gabon and the Republic of Congo

Maxime de Formanoir

Introduction[1]

In Gabon and the Republic of Congo, slave trade and witchcraft have been – and still are – interlaced[2] even after the slave trade's abolition and the prohibition of domestic slavery. This 'kinship' (Rosny 1996 [1981]: 93, my transl.) or 'connection' (Shaw 1997: 862, 864; Thornton 2003: 281; Gershman 2020: 1) is a widespread phenomenon throughout Africa, as recalled by Julien Bonhomme (2012: 198-9)[3]. It is well documented in Cameroon, where Father de Rosny[4] noted that 'wealthy people are suspected of keeping slaves who work for them on invisible plantations' (1996 [1981]: 92, my transl.).[5] In his doctoral dissertation on the *Bwete Misoko* initiation society of south-central Gabon, Bonhomme reports in the same vein the existence of 'countless stories of idle old chiefs who make their ghosts toil on the plantations to prepare their palm wine' (2003: 228, my transl.). Beyond raising questions about 'the impact of […] the slave trade […] on beliefs' (Rosny 1996 [1981]: 93), such accounts have changed the perception of witchcraft, as indicated by Rosalind Shaw: 'While pernicious images of African witchcraft have long been integral to Western "inventions of Africa" (Mudimbe 1988), witchcraft is not only thoroughly "modern" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993),[6] but in some areas may also be, I shall argue, a product of the history of the Atlantic slave trade.' (1997: 856) According to the author, 'the experience of the slave trade seems not only to have become assimilated to pre-existing understanding of witchcraft. It also appears to have shaped ideas of witchcraft themselves' (2002: 206). It should thus be borne in mind that discourses and practices relating, up to now, to enslaved people can express social relations stemming back to slavery and the slave trade as well as their 'transposition into the imaginary' (Warnier 1989: 26, see also 28) or 'into the invisible world' (Bonhomme 2003: 228).[7]

Through this prism, I will try to reinterpret a type of object still used within the framework of *Mboyo*, a male initiation society from the Loango coast (Gabon and Republic of Congo).[8] As summarized by Annie Merlet, *Mboyo* has been chiefly 'responsible for maintaining order… and making women obey' (1991: 121, my transl.). It is 'quite similar', in this sense, to *Mwiri* (*ibid.*),[9] a more widespread brotherhood (see Vansina 1991 [1990]: 208, map 5.7). Its so-called 'fetish', also known as *mboyo*,[10] was commissioned by a 'chief' (i.e. a *fumu* or 'free man')[11] to a '*nganga*' (Archives cssp, 3J1.3a10, 2°: 2, my transl.). It would have been composed of a skull kept in a

bark box with some other relics. One or more metal-plated figures (*simbondo*, sg. *mbondo*[12] in Civili) to which a bundle was attached (fig. 1-3) were then created by the *nganga* (Archives cssp, 3J1.3a10, 2°: 3, my transl.).

In the far-south of Gabon, where I have been able to meet some *Mboyo* followers, these objects seem to bear witness to slavery and the slave trade[13] with which *Mboyo*, and other forms of '*Mwiri*-type initiation societies',[14] was inextricably linked.[15] Unlike those of an 'illustrious chief' or 'influential' individual that would be preserved in the bark box and that would constitute the *mboyo* itself, the skull and certain bones of a so-called slave would have been 'pressed' before being placed in the bundle at the base of each *mbondo* figure, as described at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (*ibid.*: 2-3, my transl. See Formanoir 2018: 577).

Before I started my investigations on *Mboyo* relics, there had been little mention of such 'slave' remains in the literature on reliquary art from western equatorial Africa (see Perrois 1979: 298; 1997: 97-9; Laburthe-Tolra 1992: 475, quoted below). I will try here to reveal various connotations of the word 'slave' in the context of a brotherhood like *Mboyo*, which likely range from the 'accompanying dead' (Testart 2004, quoted below) to the 'invisible and monstrous auxiliary of the witch [...], the diviner and the healer' (Hagenbucher-Sacripanti 1983: 203, my transl.). This is how I will attempt to reveal what Florence Bernault, following Pierre Bourdieu (1994: 185 *sqq.*), has called a 'symbolic work', which 'consists in masking and "enchanting" social relations (particularly relations of power and oppression)' (Bernault 2009b: 109, my transl.).

Figure 1: 'Missions des Pères du St-Esprit. Congo Français. Fétiches de la société secrète du Mboyo aux environs de Loango'. Postcard based on a photograph of R.P. Patron; the author's collection.

Figure 2: *Mboyo* figures (*simbondo*, sg. *mbondo*) kept by chief ‘B.’ (Vili), village M. (Gabon, Nyanga Province), April 2017. © Maxime de Formanoir

Figure 3: *Mboyo* dance with *simbondo* figures performed for the author, under the direction of chief ‘B.’, village M. (Gabon, Nyanga Province), July 2017. © Maxime de Formanoir

Mboyo 'Accompanying Dead'

The most obvious interpretation of the manipulations undergone by the human remains that would have been concealed at the base of the *Mboyo* effigies (or *simbondo*) is to 'see [in them] the continuation, the perpetuation of a dual and unchanging relationship: the relationship between master and servant that existed during life continues unchanged in death' (Testart 2004: 31, my transl.).

Early observations recorded by the Fathers of the Holy Ghost were corroborated on this point by ethnomusicologist Pierre Sallée. One of his informants explicitly drew a distinction between the honours bestowed on the skull kept in the *Mboyo* bark box and the treatment reserved for the skull hidden in the bag bound to the *mbondo*.[16] He confirmed that the latter was that of a 'slave', previously 'crushed'.[17] This is also what the late Panzou Bongo Désiré (then mayor of Ndindi, Haute-Banio) told me on two occasions (Ndindi, 5 April and 25 July 2017). It should be pointed out in this respect that one of the few bags still affixed to a figure attributable, in my opinion, to *Mboyo* (Fondation Dapper, inv. no. 0628. Former Félix Fénéon collection) would contain a 'crushed skull, split in two', in addition to other remains (Fondation Dapper 1986: 62, no. 13b, my transl. See Formanoir 2018: 582).

It seems legitimate to interpret the preparation of the *Mboyo* relics as a variation of the 'phenomenon' known as 'accompanying dead' (Testart 2004: 6), which is attested throughout Central Africa (*ibid.*: 95-8).[18] Olfert Dapper, for example, evoked a 'custom' in the ancient kingdom of Kongo which provided that during the king's funeral, 'twelve young virgins bur[ied] themselves alive with him, to serve him in the other world' (1686: 353, my transl.).[19] He mentioned comparable practices in the kingdom of Loango (*ibid.*: 333)[20]. Figures 'representing those who served [the king of Loango] on earth' were placed in his tomb (*ibid.*, my transl.).

Field data that I have gathered in Southern Gabon (Nyanga Province) suggest that the *mbondo* effigy 'accompanying'[21] the *mboyo*, along with its own bag (fig. 2-3), also represents an enslaved person. In the words of Panzou Bongo Desiré, the role of the *simbondo* would be to 'clean' (*sukula*, in Civili)[22] the village or 'maintain' it (Ndindi, 25 July 2017). In addition to this function, the *simbondo* are considered 'guardians' of the *mboyo* itself, on either side of which they are said to be placed, following the example of the 'President [of the Republic]' flanked by 'his bodyguards'.[23] The *mbondo* would therefore be treated, at first sight, as an enslaved person of the type 'who comes from elsewhere' or 'who comes from afar' and 'who cleans'.[24] According to my interviewee, the term for these dependents in Civili would be *ndongo* (pl. *bandongo*)[25], which we know to apply to 'a commercial slave […] who is foreign and exploitable' (Hagenbucher-Sacripanti 1973: 55, my transl.).[26] Panzou Bongo Désiré expressly distinguished the *ndongo* from the *'nvika* (Ndindi, 25 July 2017), who corresponds to another category of dependents (*cf.* Hagenbucher-Sacripanti 1973: 55). Like the *muviga* among Punu-, Tsaangi-, Kunyi-, and Nzebi-speakers, the *'nvika*, who is their equivalent in Civili,

could join the lineage of his 'master': as summarized by Panzou Bongo Désiré (Ndindi, 25 July 2017),[27] he was 'given a name' and a 'family' (*cf.* Rey 1969: 418; 1971: 86, quoted by Mayer [1992: 95]; Dupré 1972: 631).

The 'fate' of the *ndongo* was closer to that of the 'slave […] transferable at will' referred to by Rey as the *mutere* (pl. *batere*) (1971: 85-6) and for whom he lists 'various ostentatious uses' (*ibid.*: 85):

> these slaves […] can be destroyed ostentatiously, in the same way and on the same occasions as other prestige goods […]; among the Tsangui, the Punu and the Kuni Nzanda, we were told many times that the great chiefs were buried over the body of one or two slaves sacrificed for the occasion. (*ibid.*, my transl. Quoted in part by Mayer 1992: 94)

'Witches' and Their 'Slaves'

Besides its literal meaning,[28] the word 'slaves' – once 'transposed into the invisible world' (*cf.* Bonhomme 2003: 228, my transl.) – also designates those providing a 'workforce that [a witch] exploits for his own profit' (*ibid.*). This occult conception of slavery probably emerged because of what Bernault describes as an 'enchantment of the balance of power [which] prevents the oppressed from understanding the reality of their exploitation', a phenomenon which in turn reflects a form of 'symbolic violence', as she explains in Bourdieu's words (see Bourdieu 1994, quoted by Bernault 2009: 116, note 66, my transl.).

It is worth recalling here that witchcraft has long constituted a 'hidden dimension' of art history in western equatorial Africa (Siroto 1979: 287).[29] Despite Leon Siroto's efforts (*ibid.*: 262 *sqq.*), witchcraft has barely been referred to up to now in the literature on the so-called 'Kota' reliquary 'guardians', with which metal-plated figures used within the framework of *Mboyo* have been confused (see Perrois 1997: 97-9; 2012: 152, pl. 56). Like other forms of reliquary art from western equatorial Africa, these objects are still almost exclusively investigated through the prism of ancestor cult[30] on which most scholars have stressed (on this subject, see Siroto 1976;[31] 1979).

In the north-western Kongo linguistic area, Dunja Hersak has highlighted the fact that ancestors receive less attention than the 'spirits and forces of nature' (2001: 622. See also 615). One should more generally consider the various ways of accessing 'occult' powers in this region (see again Hersak 2001) or elsewhere in Africa. As summarized by James Kiernan, 'Human harnessing and manipulation of occult forces can be done either openly, as in religious and ritual observances directed to ancestors, or covertly, as when witches practice bi-location and employ animal familiars to victimize or enslave others.' (2006: 12) Throughout the western equatorial part of the continent, most of these 'covert' activities occupy an important place in initiation societies, even though some of them, such as *Bwiti* (or

Bwete), are supposed to be opposed to witchcraft (*cf.* Bonhomme 2003: 365). Their followers – particularly those admitted to the highest ranks – actually 'wield the same weapons' as 'witches' (*ibid.*: 374, my transl.). This is what Julien Bonhomme noticed in the *Misoko* branch of *Bwete*, notwithstanding its 'therapeutic vocation' (*ibid.*: 10, 365-6, 368-9, 374, 378-81; 2012: 199-203).

Even if the witch and the *nganga* should not be confused,[32] it is worth stressing that a similar 'capacity […] to penetrate the invisible' (Laburthe-Tolra 1985: 139, my transl.) is attributed to both,[33] which explains why the *nganga* remains 'a highly ambivalent figure' (Geschiere 2000: 28, my transl.). This 'force' (Hagenbucher-Sacripanti 1973: 143, my transl.) is considered an unsurpassable provider 'of every form of power within human reach,' including 'prestige, wealth and political power' (*ibid.*)[34]. As recalled by Hersak, it is said to originate from a specific 'organ' (2001: 628)[35], whose synonym, in the French spoken in western equatorial Africa, is the word '*vampire*' (Bonhomme 2003: 365 *sqq.*; 2005: 260; 2012: 193, 200)[36]. Reputed 'to surge as a vampire' – in Bernault's words for the local French *sortir en vampire* (2019: 183)[37] – the 'witch' would 'swoop… down upon his victim' (Bonhomme 2005: 261, my transl.; 2012: 193).[38] Yet the 'vampire', and its type of 'predation' (Bonhomme 2005: 264), is 'not a prerogative of [the] witch[…]', as the *nganga* would act accordingly (*cf.* Bonhomme 2012: 192, 200).[39]

The question of who the victims of these practices are clearly attests to an 'articulation between slave trade, witchcraft and kinship' such as the one described by Jean-Pierre Warnier in Western Cameroon (1989: 26, my transl.). In the southwestern part of the Republic of Congo corresponding to the former kingdom of Loango, it is said, indeed, that the targets of a 'witch' would be '"preferably" chosen […] within the limits of his matrilineal kinship' (Hagenbucher-Sacripanti 1983: 204, my transl.).[40] This is how he would build up a stock of captives 'grouped in [a] village of the dead' (*ibid.*: 206, my. transl.),[41] where they would 'remain […] at [his] service' (Hersak 2001: 629)[42]. As stressed by Hersak, these 'spirit entit[ies]' would then constitute 'the main and indispensable source of empowerment of magical objects' (*ibid.*)[43]. In a passage from Father Jean-Lucien Dembele-Kombila's thesis transcribed by LaGamma, we learn that they 'are deprived of their freedom and are absolutely dependent on a living being for whom they are like slaves' (Dembele-Kombila 1988: 33, *apud* LaGamma 1995: 130, note 15; 2000: 153 and note 6, my transl.[44]). Hagenbucher-Sacripanti also mentions 'livid slaves grouped in the village of the dead' (1996: 45, my transl.), while Bonhomme presents those sacrificed by their uncles and placed under their yoke as 'servile ghosts' (2003: 229, my transl.). Interestingly, Bonhomme no longer opposes this 'family witchcraft' – metaphorically described as a form of 'endocannibalism' – to the 'exocannibalism' supposedly associated with the slave trade (2012: 198-9, my transl.). He prefers to uncover, at the very heart of the slave trade, a telling 'tension between exocannibalism and endocannibalism' (*ibid.*), which could have contributed to the polysemy of the word 'slave' as it is still used today within the framework of *Mboyo*.

'Hybrid slaves'

In addition to seizing the 'double or spirit' of an individual (Hersak 2001: 628), therefore conceived as 'enslaved' (*ibid.*: 629-32; 2022: 27, 32, fig. 11a, 33, fig. 13, 34), 'witches' – or at least some of them (Hagenbucher-Sacripanti 1983: 206; 1996: 45) – would be able to turn him into a specific 'auxiliary' (Hagenbucher-Sacripanti 1973: 151-2; Hersak 2001: 629) or 'deputy' (Hagenbucher-Sacripanti 1983: 213, my transl.).[45] As stressed by Ralph Austen, it is possible, here again, to catch a resonance of the Atlantic slave trade (1993: 92, quoted among others by Shaw [1997: 859; 2002: 206]). Hagenbucher-Sacripanti himself has described this being as an 'invisible' or 'nocturnal slave', or as a 'hybrid slave' (1983: 206-7 and 215; 1992: 35, my transl.) to underline its 'animal features' (1983: 203, 207; 1996: 45-6, my transl.). Known in Civili as *binkoko* (sg. *tchinkoko*) (Hagenbucher-Sacripanti 1983: 203 and note 2),[46] most of these entities would indeed be the result of a 'phantasmatic surgery', whereby the 'human head' of a witch's 'victim', as well as his spirit, is implanted into the trunk of an animal.[47] *Binkoko* are therefore often depicted as 'nocturnal animals' (Hagenbucher-Sacripanti 1983: 203, my transl.) or as 'animal auxiliaries' (*ibid.* 1992: 35, my transl.)[48]. Other characterizations have emerged from the field: *binkoko* are euphemized as 'guardian angels' *[anges protecteurs]*[49] (Biyela 2018: 82) under the influence of Christianism. Fred Biyela also noted in Pointe-Noire (Republic of the Congo) that one of his interviewees, a Zéphirin Church's minister and former choirmaster, seemingly described his own *binkoko* as 'soldiers'[50] or 'invisible bodyguards' (*ibid.* See also 2022: 70). Consequently, the so-called 'slaves' whose remains would have been placed at the base of the *simbondo* metal-plated figures used within the framework of *Mboyo* should be understood as some sort of *binkoko* too – and not only as mere 'accompanying dead' – as they were also presented to me on the field as 'bodyguards' (see above)[51].

Biyela recently recalled that '*binkoko* serve both the witch and the one who fight him.' (2022: 68, my transl.) The principle was previously explained by Hagenbucher-Sacripanti: 'a therapist can […] cure the disorders caused by one of [these entities] only by involving an animal identical to the one which caused the illness' (1992: 39, my transl.).[52] Diviners-healers, or *singanga* in Civili,[53] would therefore have their own 'auxiliaries' (*cf.* Hagenbucher-Sacripanti 1983: 203, quoted above;[54] Bonhomme 2012: 201, *sqq.*). As is the case with other 'non-witch[es]', they are supposed to 'use [them] wisely' (NGuimbi Mabiala 1994: 48, my transl. See also Biyela 2022: 68). Yet the possession – and not only the 'creation' – of such 'auxiliaries' would require sacrifices: 'the death of others is necessary for [their] development and [their] nourishment. Insufficiently fed or honoured, [they] attack [their] own master.' (Hagenbucher-Sacripanti 1983: 204)[55] Hagenbucher-Sacripanti has rightly observed that they correspond throughout Central Africa to beings referred to by terms equivalent to the Civili *tchinkoko* (1992: 35-6).[56] It seems that *mokuku* (pl. *mikuku*) is one of them: in his doctoral dissertation on *Bwiti* (or *Bwete*) *Misoko*,

Bonhomme describes *mokuku*, among Tsogo-speakers of south-central Gabon, as a 'tutelary ally, possibly with a specific name' who 'preferably manifests himself in animal form' (2003: 353-4, my transl.)[57] and with whom the make-up wearing initiate ends up mixing (*ibid.* and 466)[58].

When I attended *Bwiti Disumba* nocturnal ceremonies performed in the Nyanga Province or in Libreville, I was able to observe a 'sequence' like the one described by Bonhomme within the framework of *Bwiti Misoko* (*ibid.*: 132-5, 343[59]-4, 353-4) during which the followers dressed in their liturgical clothes and accessories and applied their make-up (*mipiku*, sg. *mupiku*). In such circumstance, high initiates apparently give shape to 'auxiliary animal[s]' (*ibid.*: 353-4)[60], or '*totems*'.[61] Each would be recognizable by a 'specific make-up' (*cf.* Bonhomme 2003: 465, my transl.),[62] designed on the same principle as the *mipiku* worn by the *Bwiti Disumba* reliquary figures that I was able to photograph in the field (*cf.* Formanoir 2022b: 5 and note 39).

As noted by Hagenbucher-Sacripanti, *binkoko* would also have counterparts in the northern part of western equatorial Africa (1992: 35). He refers to 'entities' known as *minkuk* (sg. *nkuk*) among the Evuzok of southern Cameroon (*cf.* Mallart Guimera 1981: 129 *sqq.*, quoted by Hagenbucher-Sacripanti 1992: 35[63]) and conceived as 'auxiliary agents' (Mallart Guimera 1981: 129, my transl.). In his monograph on Beti religion, Philippe Laburthe-Tolra hypothesized that 'most of the major So, Ngi, Melan and Tsó rituals' would have served, among others, 'to give initiates control over' beings of this type (1985: 154, my transl.). Laburthe-Tolra's study of the *Ngi* initiation society reveals the objective pursued by those who dug up human remains as part of this brotherhood: 'the aim [was] to transform the dead into genies (*minkug*) at the service of the living', in other words, to 'enslave the dead' to make them 'watchdogs of the living against witchcraft' (*ibid.*: 355, my. transl.).[64]

Laburthe-Tolra later interpreted through the same lens the fact that teeth are kept either in the orbits of some so-called 'Fang' reliquary figures (1992: 474, fig. A),[65] or within these statuettes (*ibid.*: 475, fig. B).[66] He drew a parallel between this practice and the killing of a dog, one tooth of which would be buried at the entrance to dwellings, so that the animal – which 'is said to have become a spirit-servant (*nkuk*)' – guards it against 'invisible witches' (*ibid.*: 475, my transl.). As with the remains that were 'pressed' before being placed at the base of the *Mboyo* figures, Laburthe-Tolra suggested that there could have been a link between the protection provided by this entity and the sacrifice of dependents:

> […]the tooth included in the reliquary figurines has the very clear purpose of defending the relics themselves, and the village they protect, against invisible (or visible) attacks from enemies, thieves or potential witches. […] It is even not impossible to think that the human tooth may have belonged to a man sacrificed for the express purpose of serving as a *nkuk*, a protective spirit. Slaves were sacrificed for funerals or alliance pacts. Therefore, these statues would not be primarily representations of ancestors, but rather of human spirits placed at their service and that of their living

> descendants. I say 'primarily' because symbolic thought and religious thought in general are not exclusive of various levels of interpretation. But in any case, this discovery gives a new dimension to the hermeneutics of these great works (*ibid.*, my transl.).[67]

The central idea that 'reliquary guardians […], although said to represent ancestors,[68] can just as convincingly be argued to have been representations of non-ancestral spirits' had been proposed earlier by Siroto (1976: 10). According to him, it would not only be relevant for reliquary figures known as 'Fang', but also for those from the eastern part of western equatorial Africa labelled as 'Kota', as Frédéric Cloth has more recently contended. Referring to Siroto,[69] Cloth suggests that it could explain a 'desire to individualize objects', adding that 'in this area, custom requires that an *nganga* […] draws his power from a particular spirit to which he alone would be devoted' (2015: 38-41). Cloth failed however to recognize that some artefacts of the so-called 'kota corpus' on which he worked (*ibid.*: 40, fig. 32) were attributable to the *Mboyo* initiation society of the Loango Coast (see Formanoir 2018: 577 *sqq.*, fig. 2), as corroborated, among other information, by field data collected by Sallée (1985:136-7, first unnumbered ill. See Formanoir 2018: 579 *sqq.*, fig. 3). Besides, Cloth wrongfully describes the bundle at the base of these objects as a 'basket of ancestral relics' (2015: 41).

Mboyo and *buti*

Departing from a literal definition of slavery, we have gained a better understanding of the notion of 'hybrid slave' and of its servitude either to a so-called 'witch', to a *nganga*, to a prophetic church minister – as recently stressed by Biyela (2018: 82; 2022: 69-70) – or more generally to prominent individuals, like the ones whose skulls were purportedly preserved in *Mboyo* bark boxes and the ones who commissioned these reliquaries. This entity was never explicitly mentioned as a *tchinkoko* by my interviewees. Yet it must be related to another word – *buti* – which first emerged from my fieldwork as a possible designation of the *mboyo* 'fetish' itself.[70] The late mayor of Ndindi translated it to me as '*talisman*' in French.[71] As already suggested by Hagenbucher-Sacripanti, it appears that such a talisman – or *buti* (pl. *mati*)[72] – also refers to what I have described above as supernatural forms of 'slavery', involving 'hybrid' entities. Hagenbucher-Sacripanti has observed, indeed, that the 'term *buti*' is a 'synonym' of *tchinkoko* in Civili or *ikogo* in Lumbu, both of which refer to the 'invisible and monstrous auxiliary of the witch' (1983: 203-4.[73] See also 1973: 151;[74] 1992: 35).

The name of *Bwiti* initiation society itself could be linked with this type of entity (Hagenbucher-Sacripanti 1983: 203).[75] As proof of an 'obvious connection […] between *bwiti* secret society' and *buti* – at least in the part of the Congolese department of Kouilou bordering Gabon – Hagenbucher-Sacripanti evokes a 'dance of

buti' (*ibid.*)[76], during which 'individuals with particularly potent nocturnal animals […] reveal them to each other.' (*ibid.*, my transl.)[77] According to data gathered by linguist Jean-Noël NGuimbi Mabiala in the south-west of Congo-Brazzaville, where the term *kínkókù* (pl. *bínkókù*) is used among Yombe-speakers, there is nevertheless a distinction between this concept and that of *b*^{w}*îtì*, the latter would only apply to those *bínkókù* – or 'totems' – that are 'acquired by initiation' (1994: 48, my transl.).

In the field, my interviewees were not keen to talk about this notion, a situation already experienced by Hagenbucher-Sacripanti (1973: 151-2). As he explains: 'In the creation, preservation and use of a *buti*, reside the most secret and unacknowledged behaviours.' (*ibid.*: 151, quoted by Grand-Dufay [2016: 164], my transl.) This makes the slightest hint of the word *buti* in the primary sources on *Mboyo* initiation society even more noteworthy.

The word already appears in Eduard Pechuël-Loesche's travel diary, which is the oldest Western testimony about *Mboyo* (spelt *'Bogo'*), that I have been able to identify to date (2011 [1876]: 387). Pechuël-Loesche reported that *Mboyo* 'servants' [*diener*], that is, its lowest-ranked followers, were called *'Bana babuti'* (*ibid.*).

He also described *Mboyo* as a *'Mhissy'* (*ibid.*), a word which evokes the 'nature spirits' known as *bayisi* (sg. *muyisi*) in Lumbu[78] or as *bakisi* (sg. *nkisi*) in Civili and Yombe.[79] This could seem at odds with any attempt to connect *Mboyo* with the notion of *buti*, as nature spirits do not belong to the same 'sphere' as *mati* (Hersak 2001: 622-3). In the southwestern part of Congo-Brazzaville, it has been stressed, for example, that *bakisi basi* (sg. *nkisi si*[80]), a notable 'category' of nature spirits (Hersak 2001: 618, 621-4), were publicly 'honoured in a sanctuary' by a 'priest' (Hagenbucher-Sacripanti 1973: 31 my transl.; 1992: 22-4[81], 42), contrary to 'animal familiars' which 'are synonymous with the invisible […] and the night' (Hersak 2001: 622-3 and 627-9).[82] It is nevertheless true, as Hagenbucher-Sacripanti admits, that the notion of *nkisi* itself 'interferes to a greater or lesser extent with the semantic universe of witchcraft' (1992: 42)[83] and therefore of *mati*, or their *binkoko* equivalents (*ibid.*: 43, 45-7, 52, 58).[84] Hagenbucher-Sacripanti even refers to a form of 'involvement of the "*kinkonko*" *[tchinkoko]* in the action and in the very nature of the *nkisi*', previously highlighted by Laman (1962: 74, 211, 214, *apud* Hagenbucher-Sacripanti 1992: 46).[85]

Pechuël-Loesche was not the only early Western observer of *Mboyo* to be confronted with the notion of *buti*. The same was true of the author of the unpublished manuscript on Mayumba 'fetishes' kept in the Holy Ghost Fathers' Archives (Archives cssp, 3J1.3a10, 2°). Without himself realizing the significance of the term, he stated about *Mboyo* that novices were called *'bana ba Bouti'* and added that '*Bouti* is one of the names of *Mboio'* (*ibid.*: 3). He also indicated that they would have been able to invoke various 'names' at the end of their initiation into *'Mboio'*, including that of *'Bouti'* (*ibid.*: 8).

Besides these scattered yet revealing references, one should consider the very composition[86] of *mboyo* 'fetishes' as the most convincing evidence of a probable interrelatedness between *Mboyo* and the notion of *buti.* I have already pointed out

that in north-western equatorial Africa Laburthe-Tolra had interpreted various initiation practices as ways of taking 'control over certain *minkúg*' (1985: 154, my transl. See *supra*). Reference to *buti* within the framework of *Mboyo* suggests that obtaining the 'fetish' served the same purpose. According to one of my best-informed interviewees, the creation of a *mboyo* 'fetish', which he called '*yumbi*', ended, after nine days of dancing, with the supernatural appearance on the *mboyo* skull of a white centipede and of a shell called *lisefi*[87] or *lìsèfù* (pl. *màsèfù*)[88] in Civili. Panzou Bongo Désiré assured me that these two 'ingredients' were necessary to produce a rainbow (*ntchiama*).[89] This is important information, as this rainbow is one of the most famous 'animal auxiliaries' – or *mati* – inventoried among the populations of the ancient kingdom of Loango (Hagenbucher-Sacripanti 1973: 157). It is said to be 'represented' by various snakes (*ibid.*: 113, my transl., 157. See also 1983: 213; 1992: 52,[90] 136, 212; 2002: 69, note 122, 70, and note 123, 181; Hersak 2001: 625-6).[91] This *buti* would be useful for fishing (Hagenbucher-Sacripanti 1973: 157; Nguinguiri and Doumenge 1992: 81), which is precisely one of the benefits attributed to the possession of a *mboyo*.[92]

A *tchinkoko* (and therefore a *buti*) could not be used without sacrifices, a practice evoked within the framework of *Mboyo* (see Garnier 1896: 45). It is noteworthy here that the nine days required to carry out '*yumbi*' could correspond to the nine sacrifices which would be committed, among the Punu-speakers interviewed by LaGamma, to bring forth from a 'rainbow' (*muyama*) a 'mystical serpent' (1995: 105; 2000: 146). Panzou Bongo Désiré made no secret of the sacrifice required of a *mboyo* recipient and gave me its justification: 'You have to invigorate the spirit [of the *mboyo*] that you went looking for, otherwise it can't stand up.' (Ndindi, 25 July 2017) He also explained to me that a family member of a *mboyo* recipient would have died within the six months following the creation of the *buti* (*ibid.*). It would have targeted one of the uterine nephews or nieces of the beneficiary of the 'fetish' or one of his brothers and sisters of the same mother as his (*ibid.*)[93] and could result, in some cases, in a miscarriage (*ibid.*).[94]

Conclusion

Focusing on *Mboyo* relics and reliquary figures, this study has explored the power relations that would have involved those considered 'free men' and those described as enslaved in the context of this male initiation association. The latter do not only 'accompany' high rank individuals in death. It seems that they are also conceived as beings that have been magically captured to act as an 'invisible workforce' (Bonhomme 2003: 228, my transl., see above), and even to be transformed into 'hybrid' entities. Like other scholars,[95] I have done justice to Hagenbucher-Sacripanti for his awareness of the 'cultural originality and cosmological importance' of this type of being (1983: 203).

Categories of enslaved people like *ndongo* or *'nvika* have lost much of their relevance since the prohibition of the slave trade, and then of domestic slavery.[96] It should be added that processes such as the colonial-driven replacement of the slave trade by the 'concessions system' (*cf*. Dupré 1972: 617) 'witnessed the collapse of *mwiri* societies' (Gray 2002: 197) through which clan and lineage elders of southwestern Gabon had been invested with power (Gaulme 1979: 63 and 74; Gray 2002: 196-7 and 200-3). This context would, however, have favoured a 'turn to the esoteric', which is how Gray interpreted the adoption of *Bwiti* initiation society by these same individuals (2002: 217. See also 202-3).[97] It could explain how an 'imaginary slave trade', as Warnier expresses it (1989: 28), has persisted to date.[98]

This chapter has also given an idea of the extent to which the *Mboyo* figures known as *simbondo* have been misunderstood since they entered Western collections, where these objects are no longer associated with *Mboyo*, with either slavery or the slave trade, that 'disease whose existence is to be forgotten' (Sallée 1985: 119, my transl.).[99] Wrongfully labelled as 'Kota' and/or 'Sango'/'Sangu', they have been reinterpreted as banners of these identities through a patrimonialization process (see Formanoir 2021), which has invisibilized[100] *Mboyo* 'invisible' or 'hybrid slaves' – as well as those to whom *Mboyo* relics and artifacts in fact belonged – and which has almost completely bypassed the issue of witchcraft[101].

Siroto was one of the first to be aware of what is at stake here:

> As ancestor worship, a manifestation of filial piety, was understandable and agreeable to the Western mind, it became established as the most important way in which Africans attempted to interact with the spirit world. A vast area of belief in spirits was thereby obscured, even though it was of the higher import to the understanding of African imagery. (1976: 6)

He further highlighted that 'traditional African religious sculpture ha[d] only infrequently been considered in relation to witchcraft belief' (1979: 245).[102] As exemplified by Laburthe-Tolra's analysis of some so-called 'Fang' reliquary figures (1992, quoted above), it seems more than necessary to reexamine western equatorial African reliquary art from this angle, a task which exceeds the limits of this chapter.

Notes

[1] I would like to thank Zainabu Jallo for her careful reading and suggestions.

[2] See among others Gaulme (1981: 215); Sallée (1985: 119-21); Bonhomme (2012: 197-9).

[3] See, among others, MacGaffey (1986, quoted below); Austen (1993, quoted below); Shaw (1997; 2002, quoted, among others, by Bonhomme [2012: 199]). For a more comprehensive bibliography on this subject, see Gershman (2020).

4 See also Warnier (1989: 26-8, quoted, among others, by Bonhomme [2012: 199]); Geschiere (2017 [1995]: 173 *sqq.*, [esp. 200-2], quoted, among others, by Bonhomme [2003: 228, note 14]; 2000: 23).

5 Quoted, among others, by Geschiere (2000: 21-3; 2017 [1995]: 200-1). For similar 'narratives' in South-Africa, see Niehaus (2005: 192 and 196-7, quoted by Somda [2014: 1]).

6 See also Shaw (2002: 201), who refers, among else, to the 1997 English version of Geschiere (2017 [1995]).

7 See also Niehaus about 'constructs that shift the contexts of domination from the everyday world of common sense to the occult world of witchcraft' (2005: 196).

8 For further information on *Mboyo*, see Formanoir (2018).

9 *Mboyo* has been rightly identified as a 'variant' or 'equivalent' of *Mwiri* by other authors. See Mavoungou (2008: 261); Perrois and Grand-Dufay (2008: 45); Mavoungou and Plumel (2010: 390); Grand-Dufay (2016: 27).

10 I use the same convention as Bonhomme (2003: 382, note 1), which is to capitalize the name of an initiation society and lowercase the name of its 'genie' (as well as of its 'fetish').

11 *Cf.* Rey (1969: 418, note 1).

12 See Archives cssp, 3J1.3a10, 2°: 2-3, 6-7; Sallée (1985: 136-7, first unnumbered ill.); Formanoir (2018). It seems that it was known as '*ngendo*' in the region of Sette-Cama (*cf.* Le Scao 1908: 90).

13 I explored this theme in a presentation made at the international symposium *7e Rencontres atlantiques. Musées, mémoires et collections. Les sémiophores des traites et des esclavages,* organized in may 2019 by the Musée d'Aquitaine, Bordeaux, in partnership with the Centre international de Recherches sur les Esclavages et les Post-Esclavages (CIRESC) (Formanoir 2019). It was also part of my doctoral dissertation (Formanoir 2022a: 188-261).

14 I borrow this expression from Gray (2002: 84).

15 See Gray (2002: 84 *sqq.*). On '*Ombwiri/Mwiri* as a Tool of the Atlantic Trade', see also Klieman (2007: 54-6).

16 Pierre Sallée, unpublished audio-recorded interview with Mutoto Paul in Malembe, Gabon, 13 May 1966 (CNRSMH_I_2007_005_025_04: 16:07-16:52, my transl.). See Formanoir (2018: 580-81).

17 *Ibid.*

18 Other African examples are given by Randles (1968: 62 and note 5, 63 and notes 1-2, quoted by Testart [2004: 96]). See also Mayer (1992: 93-4).

19 Quoted by Randles (1968: 63, apud Testart [2004: 95]).

20 According to Raoul Lethur, this type of funeral rite concerned not only the *Ma Loango*, or king, but also 'great chiefs': 'women and slaves were buried alive to accompany [them] in the afterlife' (2014 [1952]: 24, my transl. See also Testart 2004: 96).

21 *Cf.* Archives cssp, 3J1.3a10, 2°: 6, my transl.

22 See also Marichelle (1902: 178).

23 Interview with Panzou Bongo Désiré, Ndindi, 5 April 2017.

24 *Ibid.*, 25 July 2017.

25 *Ibid.* See Marichelle (1902: 129).

26 While 'the old concept of *#-vika*' remained 'the most common word for 'slave' and 'captive' across West Congo Coast' (2020: 264), Marcos Abreu Leitão de Almeida observes how 'the term [*#-dongo*] shifted its meaning to become a generic word for 'slave' among West Kongo slave traders, especially traders from Loango.' (*ibid.*: 267) He nevertheless notes that 'Vili-speaking communities made the new term *#-dongo* and the old term *#-vika* highly interchangeable' (*ibid.*: 270). I am grateful to Florence Bernault for providing me with this reference.

27 On the 'concepts' of '#-tere' and '#-ßiɣa' among Punu-speakers, see also Abreu Leitão de Almeida (2020: 270).

28 The unpublished 'Histoire des principaux fétiches, chez les indigènes qui dépendent de la station de Mayumba' initialed by Father Joseph Le Mintier de la Motte Basse indicates that a 'slave' was normally included in the purchase price of the 'fetish' (Archives cssp, 3J1.3a10, 2°: 3. See MacGaffey [2000: 67], as a comparison). The manuscript points out that the individual who was asked to make a 'fetish' could himself be enslaved: 'The chief who wishes to possess this treasure goes directly to the person who

knows how to make these two objects, and who is called Nganga Mboio, if the latter is himself a free man or a chief; if he is a slave, his chief is approached' (Archives cssp, 3J1.3a10, 2°: 2, my transl.). It even describes how a slaveholder was remunerated for the work of an enslaved *nganga*: 'When the Nganga who made Mboio is a slave, it is his master who gets the price.' (*ibid.*: 3, my transl.)

[29] On this reference, see Hackett (1996: 128-30).

[30] Even Sallée considered *Mboyo* – at least at first sight – as a form of 'ancestor cult' (1985: 136, my transl.), but he further conceded that 'we would be mistaken if we stuck to the only socially approved use that can be made of human relics' (*ibid.*: 139, my transl.).

[31] Quoted by Hackett (1996: 13 and 77, note 5) and Cloth (2015: 38).

[32] *Cf.* Bernault, about the disjunction to be made 'between specialists dedicated to the ritual and beneficial manipulation of the sacred (Kikongo: *banganga*, sing. *nganga*), and criminal individuals capable of moving these forces within the kinship for their own benefit, by silently dispossessing their victims of their vital force (Kikongo: *bandoki*, sing. *ndoki*)' (2009a: 756, my transl.).

[33] See Hersak (2001: 632-3); Bonhomme (2003: 374; 2005: 266; 2012: 200); Plancke (2014: 338).

[34] See also Hersak (2001: 628); Bonhomme (2003: 367-8; 2012: 200).

[35] See also, among others, Andersson (1953: 156 and note 4); Siroto (1979: 248); Hagenbucher-Sacripanti (1983: 205; 1992: 209 and 214); Vansina (1991 [1990]: 370, no. 125); Bonhomme (2003: 365; 2005: 260; 2012: 193, 200); Bernault (2006: 213-14 and note 20; 2019: 103 and 246, note 34); Mavoungou (2008: 263).

[36] See also, among others, Raponda-Walker and Sillans (1962: 34, 82 and 116); Hagenbucher-Sacripanti (1973: 144); Mavoungou (2008: 263); Mavoungou and Plumel (2010: 144); Bernault (2019: 183 *sqq.*).

[37] *Adde* Bonhomme (2003: 366; 2005: 260; 2012: 193). The expression *'se dédoubler'* is also used: see among others Mallart Guimera (1981: 150 *sqq.*); Hagenbucher-Sacripanti (1983: 205; 1994: 13; 1996: 45); Mary (1983: 285); Merlet (1991: 50); Hersak (2001: 628, 633); Bonhomme (2005: 260; 2008: 139); Mavoungou and Plumel (2010: 604); Plancke (2014: 65, 338); Biyela (2022: 68). A similar 'notion' exists in Maka context (Cameroon), as noted by Peter Geschiere (2017 [1995]: 57).

[38] See also Hersak (2001: 628).

[39] An interesting example is provided by LaGamma's analysis of *Kosi*, a divinatory practice whose 'exterior representation', also known as *kosi*, 'may take the form of a sculptural representation' (2000: 147). As explained by LaGamma, 'Activating a *kosi* requires that the *nganga* capture the dynamic energies of an individual and appropriate its image. These are translated into the artifact [...] These creative efforts constitute a sacrificial exchange that is also predatory in nature' (*ibid.* See also 1995: 121).

[40] The same is true 'in other matrilineal societies' of western equatorial Africa, as noted by Bonhomme, who refers to a form of 'avuncular witchcraft', namely among Tsogo-speakers of south-central Gabon (2012: 196-7, my transl. See also 2003: 363). On 'witchcraft and kinship', see also Geschiere (2017 [1995]: 216-7).

[41] See also Hagenbucher-Sacripanti (1992: 30 *sqq.*; 1994: 17). *Adde* Hersak (2001: 623 and 629).

[42] *Cf.* Mavoungou: 'The master of a village of ghosts uses the spirits of the people that he/she has killed to achieve a high social position [...] These spirits are also used as bodyguards and killers.' (2002: 207. *Adde* Mavoungou and Plumel 2010: 268). About this 'village', see also Rey (1971: 204-6) and LaGamma (1995: 103; 2000: 146).

[43] See also MacGaffey (1986: 162, quoted by Shaw [1997: 858; 2002: 206]). *Adde* LaGamma (2000: 147, quoted above, note 38).

[44] See also LaGamma (1995: 103; 2000: 146).

[45] See also Bonhomme (2003: 227-9).

[46] See also Hersak (2001: 622 and note 3, 629; 2022: 32 and 35, note 4). The word ('*Kikokoo*') appears in a passage from Dapper (1686: 337. See Hagenbucher-Sacripanti 1992: 46). According to Janzen, the fact this passage mentions the 'work' that the dead would have been obliged to do by night for the benefit of witches would attest to, among other things, the already destabilizing effect of 'trade, including the

slave trade' on the kingdom of Loango at that time (Janzen 1982: 54). About Janzen's description of this 'progressive weakening', see Hersak (2001: 620-1).

47 Hagenbucher-Sacripanti (1973: 151 *sqq*., esp. 152, quoted by Grand-Dufay [2016: 164-5 and note 9, 258 and note 65] and by Hersak [2022: 32]). See also Hagenbucher-Sacripanti (1973: 160; 1983: 203 and 206-7, quoted by Hersak [2001: 630; 2022: 32]). *Adde* Hagenbucher-Sacripanti (1992: 37-9, 228; 1994: 17-8; 2002: 69, note 121).

48 See also Bonhomme (2012: 200-1).

49 These words are strikingly similar to the ones used by Sallée's informant, Mutoto Paul, who evoked 'nocturnal angels' *[anges nocturnes]*. *Cf.* Pierre Sallée, unpublished audio-recorded interview with Mutoto Paul in Malembe, Gabon, 13 May 1966 (CNRSMH_I_2007_005_025_04: 23:59-24:08, my transl.).

50 *Cf.* 'the 'soldier' *(soldat)* of his witch master' evoked by Wyatt MacGaffey (1986: 162, quoted by Shaw 1997: 858; 2002: 206).

51 Interview with Panzou Bongo Désiré, Ndindi, 5 April 2017.

52 See also Bonhomme (2012: 201).

53 Hagenbucher-Sacripanti (1996: 46, note 1).

54 See also Hersak (2001: 633; 2022: 32, ill. 11b, 33, ill. 12, 34-5); Bonhomme (2012: 200 *sqq*.); Biyela (2022: 68).

55 See also Hersak (2001: 629-30; 2022: 33). *Adde* Mavoungou (2002: 207); Bonhomme (2003: 227-9); Mavoungou and Plumel (2010: 268).

56 See also Hersak (2022: 33).

57 See also Bonhomme (2014: 95 and 106-7).

58 See also Bonhomme (*ibid.*: 106-7).

59 Quoted by Aterianus-Owanga (2015: 311).

60 See also Bonhomme (2003: 133, 466; 2012: 201; 2014: 106-7). *Adde* Aterianus-Owanga (2015: 311).

61 *Cf.* Laman (1962: 211, quoted by Hagenbucher-Sacripanti [1992: 36, 91] and by Hersak [2001: 629; 2022: 32 and 35, note 5]). See also Hagenbucher-Sacripanti (1992: 36; 2002: 89-90, note 163); NGuimbi Mabiala (1994: 48); Grand-Dufay (2016: 252); Biyela (2022: 68). *Adde* Aterianus-Owanga (2015: 311). Here, we are not talking about the 'totemic animal' (Dupré 1972: 628, my transl.) that the members of a given clan exclude from their diet and which is called *mvila* in Civili. Indeed, Hagenbucher-Sacripanti observes that 'the 'totem' frequently mentioned in French, in conversations about witchcraft, generally designates a *cinko:ko* in the minds of the speakers, i.e., the 'mystical' agent or instrument of an *ndoci*, rather than the *mvila*' (1992: 36, my transl. Quoted by Hersak [2001: 629; 2022: 35, note 5]).

62 See also Bonhomme (2003: 133-4, 354; 2012: 201; 2014: 106-7). *Adde* Aterianus-Owanga (2015: 311).

63 Also quoted by Laburthe-Tolra (1985: 54-5) and by Sallée (1985: 166).

64 An informant quoted by Laburthe-Tolra described this process in terms that can be compared with the disinterment of 'slaves' reported in the context of *Mboyo*: 'Every time we bury a person, we prick the ground with a spear […] The earth opens up and we remove his head: it is this head that we called 'slave' […] We also went to where a famous person had been buried to remove his femurs.' (Laburthe-Tolra 1985: 355, my transl.).

65 *Cf.* Perrois (1997: 99); LaGamma (2007a: 102 and 2007b: 128-39, no. 4-9; 142-3, no. 11 and 145, no. 13). Both Perrois and LaGamma point out that other remains could also be hidden within effigies.

66 Quoted by Darkowska-Nidzgorski and Nidzgorski (1998: 38 and 195, note 130).

67 *Ibid.*

68 At the exhibition *Les forêts natales* (MQB-JC, Paris), objects attributable in my view to *Mboyo* among those labelled as 'Kota, Sangu' were still described as 'ancestor figures' (Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac 2017: 362-3, no. 154-5, 158 and 161), while Perrois, the scientific advisor of the exhibition, suggested another interpretation in his own contribution to the catalogue (2017: 110).

69 On Siroto, see also Hackett (1996: 129).

70 Interviews with Panzou Bongo Désiré, Ndindi, 5 April 2017 and 25 July 2017. As mentioned by my interviewee, the word appears in the title given to the high initiate ('*tat' buti*' or '*tat' bwit*') who keeps the bark box containing the *mboyo* relics.

[71] Interviews with Panzou Bongo Désiré, Ndindi, 5 April 2017 and 25 July 2017. See also Hagenbucher-Sacripanti (1973: 151); Nguinguiri and Doumenge (1992: 82).

[72] Hagenbucher (1973: 151).

[73] Quoted by Hersak (2022: 35, note 4).

[74] Quoted by Sallée (1985: 129, note 1).

[75] Quoted by Hersak (2022: 35, note 4).

[76] *Ibid.*

[77] *Cf.* Bonhomme (2003: 344, quoted above).

[78] See Mavoungou and Plumel (2010: 493-4).

[79] See Hersak (2001: 618, 620). This word was later transcribed '*Mkíssi*' by Pechuël-Loesche (1907: 378) in a published account of the German expedition to the Loango coast quoted by Janzen (1979: 320-21, ref. [38]; 1982: *passim*, esp. 54-5, 337), explains why *Mboyo* has also been identified by this anthropologist with various '*min'kisi*' associated 'with adjudicatory and retaliatory functions' (1982: 55, quoted by Hersak [2001: 621]. See also Janzen [1979: 320]). Hersak observes, however, that 'among Chivili and Kiyombe-speakers of Congo-Brazzaville, magical power objects, whether figurative or non-figurative, are never referred to today as *nkisi*, or as *minkisi* in the plural form' (2001: 618). She also stresses that '*nkisi* as well as *nkisi si* are always pluralized as *bakisi* (with the noun prefix *ba* for people and spirits) and both are designations of nature spirits.' (*ibid.*)

[80] See Hersak (2001: 618-20; 2022: 35, note 1).

[81] Quoted by Hersak (2001: 623, 626). See also 624.

[82] The author refers to Hagenbucher-Sacripanti (1992: 23-4, 29). See also Hagenbucher-Sacripanti (1973: 151).

[83] See also Hagenbucher-Sacripanti (1992: 24, 47, 52 *sqq.*, 278, note 79); Hersak (2001: 627); Plancke (2014: 337-8).

[84] *Adde* Hersak (2001: 633-4; 2022: 34-5).

[85] An example of this phenomenon has been documented in the estuaries of Noumbi and Conkouati lagoon, located in Congo-Brazzaville, near Gabon border (see Nguinguiri and Doumenge 1992: 81).

[86] As noted by Bernault, 'Among scholars of Equatorial Africa, the verb 'compose' [...] defines how ritual experts bring together composite ingredients in a charm to charge it with efficacy and power.' (2019: 213, note 59)

[87] As transcribed by Hagenbucher-Sacripanti who mentions this 'seashell' among ingredients used by *nganga Nsasi* (1973: 129 and 131).

[88] As transcribed by Catherine Sabinot (2009: 72 and Annexe 6). It is a bivalve of the Cardiidae family (*Cardium costatum*, L.) (*ibid.*).

[89] Interview with Panzou Bongo Désiré, Tchibanga, 6 June 2018. A strikingly comparable process, involving a white worm emerging from a corpse and 'transform[ing] itself in an animal' – such as a 'rainbow serpent' – was described by Andersson in his *Contribution à l'ethnographie des Kuta* (1974: 96, 107 and 108, note 1; 1991: 53 *sqq.*). On *ntchiama*, see Hersak (2001: 625).

[90] Quoted by Hersak (2001: 625, note 4).

[91] Cloth – who ignores *Mboyo* – paradoxically mentions an entity which is both a 'python' and a 'rainbow' (*cf.* Raponda-Walker and Sillans [1962: 85, 213], quoted by Cloth [2017: 149 and 154, notes 3-5]) in connection with reliquary figures labelled by this author as 'Sango' (Cloth 2017: 149 and 153-155, ill.) but attributable to *Mboyo*.

[92] Interviews with Panzou Bongo Désiré, Ndindi, 5 April and 25 July 2017.

[93] *Cf.* Hagenbucher-Sacripanti (1992: 228); Hersak (2001: 630).

[94] On miscarriages and 'witchcraft suspicions', see Bonhomme (2012: 195).

[95] See especially Hersak (2001: 630; 2022: 32 and 35, note 4). See also, among others, Sallée (1985: 129, note 1 and 134); Grand-Dufay (2016: 164-5 and note 9, 258 and note 65, quoted above); Biyela (2018: 82).

[96] This is already what Rey observed with the terms *mutere* (pl. *batere*) and *muviga* (pl. *baviga*) (1969: 418; 1971: 85. See also Mayer 1992: 95).

[97] *Adde* Fernandez (1974 [1972]: 221-2); Fernandez and Fernandez (2006: 1957).

[98] Interestingly, Pierre Bonnafé evoked a similar situation among Kukuya- or Kukwa-speakers. In a context where, in pre-colonial times, ‘the major relationships […] [had been] slavery and tributary dependence’ (1987: 53, my transl.), the notion of *buti* (pl. *mati*) would even be part of a form of ‘social unconscious’ (*ibid.* and 63). According to Bonnafé, ‘… it is the social relations of exploitation or autonomy that determine the alienation specific to magic or witchcraft. So we immediately posit as ‘forgotten’ in the field of mati, a fourth denial (after that of reality, death and omnipotence), that of women’s surplus labor and, in the past, that of dependents.’ (*ibid.*: 57, my transl.). The parallel between Hagenbucher-Sacripanti’s work on the notion of *buti* (pl. *mati*) in the Vili linguistic sphere and Bonnafé’s work on its counterpart among Kukuya- or Kukwa-speakers has been established by Steve-Régis Kovo N’Sondé (2014: 58-9).

[99] This point was more specifically addressed in my presentation at the *7e Rencontres atlantiques* (Formanoir 2019) as well as in my doctoral dissertation (Formanoir 2022a: 188-261).

[100] See, as a comparison, Roque (2023: 169-70).

[101] Except brief mentions in Perrois (1997: 97-9; 2012: 152, pl. 56, quoted above). See also Perrois and Grand-Dufay (2008: 35).

[102] *Cf.* Hackett (1996: 128-9).

CHAPTER 5.3

Dark Capital and the Power of Containers

Florence Bernault

Introduction

In 2015, Joseph Tonda brought new intelligibility to late capitalist mechanisms of power and value with the powerful concept of *éblouissements* (dazzlements). A form of deception that works through screens, images, and digital technologies, *éblouissements* spectacularize people and things to a new extreme, creating original forms of worth and desirability (Tonda 2015). In this economy of desire, for instance, young *influenceuses* or *tiktokeuses* exacerbate their 'beauty' or 'sexual capital' online to generate income through followers' viewing and advertisement (Pype this volume; Holliday, Jones & Bell 2019: 41; Illouz and Kaplan 2023). Considerable violence characterizes the process. For Tonda, *éblouissements* reduce social agents to a small part of themselves, their body, their sex, their money, their looks, and so forth. In turn, viewers are caught up in alienating fantasies and powerful consumerist urges. They dream about becoming like their idols, and living 'elsewhere', in rich countries and luxurious environments (Pype, this volume).

In this chapter, I use *containers*, the humble and often overseen devices that helped Central Africans compose and circulate various forms of capital, to offer a deep genealogy of *éblouissements*, and to craft a new concept to understand the making of riches in the region. Container's apparent triviality encourages turning a blind eye to their transformative importance.[1] Yet their role in hiding, exhibiting and circulating different forms of capital, I argue, was essential to the creation of wealth and power, both in the West and in Central Africa.[2] In this latter region, early visual and containerizing regimes of valuation were based on *composing* various forms of capital by carefully assembling various, potent elements in vessels (Guyer and Eno Belinga 1995). After discussing these composing tactics in the first part of the chapter, I turn to the ways in which today's *éblouissements* tend to create wealth through the visual *accumulation* of large quantities of similar, undifferentiated valuables, a strategy parallel to capitalist and industrial production (Tonda, 2024). In Central Africa, such unproductive accumulation seems to have emerged from the sixteenth century onwards, when people managed to get access to considerable amount of foreign riches through the intensification of the Atlantic trade. The coming of new containerizing techniques was instrumental in bringing about the transition from compositional strategies to accumulative procedures.

The second section of the chapter looks at the arrival, after the fifteenth century, of wood and metal linear containers. A mark of wealth and link to the Atlantic, then a symbol of colonialism, these devices were slowly democratized in African

usage. Today, despite their ubiquity and familiarity, and the fact that they are often produced in Central Africa itself, an aura of mortiferous power remains attached to them. Their foreign origin, the accumulated commodities that they carried, and their role as a measure of value for trading slaves, continued to haunt the use of linear containers. To understand this permanence, I use Edward Said's idea of 'cultural archive' (1993: 52-53) and Ann Stoler's notion of 'imperial débris' (Stoler 2008).[3] For Said, the cultural and affective economies of empire remain embedded in specific repositories of memories (material objects, texts, images, stereotypes, and other cultural formations) able to inform high politics and common-sense knowledge. In the 2000s, Ann Stoler furthered the analysis of the durability of imperial duress. She showed how imperial formations persist in 'residues' and 'débris' that continue to lay waste to certain people and places, relations, and things (Stoler 2008: 196). Their power of 'ruination', she argues, relies on the fact that, beyond a simple material presence, imperial débris work as active processes embedded in social relations.

Linear containers, I argue, do constitute one of the repositories of imperial labour in contemporary Central Africa. Haunted by the memories of the slave trade and colonial trauma, entrenched in silent and inarticulate material presence, large crates, suitcases, safes, and metal trunks display a potent aura of wealth mixed with death, although we have been slow to note their dark history and potential. Moreover, the meaning of angular containers as cultural archives and imperial ruins is not exhausted by a stubborn presence. As Stoler argues, débris do not work simply as isolated remnants of imperial disasters. They are part and parcel of social and economic networks and processes, bringing together containing devices, the capital they carry, and the people who put them in motion. Indeed, the imperial labour of modern containers deploys through their enduring ability to *conceal*, *exhibit*, *transform* and *circulate* capital and power. To this important scholarship, I add the concept of *transactional machines*, a notion that I forged to describe the political and spiritual capacity of the Memorial to Savorgnan de Brazza erected in Congo-Brazzaville in 2006 (Bernault 2010). Entrenched in political conflicts between Congo and France, empowered by Brazza's corpse buried in its crypt, the Memorial worked as a device enabling new transactions in money and memories, negotiating anew (post)colonial memories and transnational power hierarchies. Albeit in more modest and ubiquitous fashion, linear containers, I argue, remain a central device for transacting value and power in Central Africa and beyond. As *machines*, their capacious and repetitive mechanism produces recurring and predictable effects, among them the transformation of the value of the *things* that they preserve and carry.

In the third and final section of the chapter, I propose to call *dark capital* the new forms of wealth and power introduced partly thanks to the inconspicuous, yet potent, work of modern linear containers.[4] Born of the new regimes of valuation and containment introduced in the sixteenth century and brought to new paroxysm by the diffusion of angular containers during colonial rule, dark capital defines the nefarious and frightening riches that circulate in contemporary Central Africa in

the forms of human remains or illicitly earned money. The illegal concealing of such capital in containers, and its obscene exhibiting in the occasional episode of police investigations, continue to confound public opinions.

Early Regimes of Containment

From the human body envisioned as a magical, procreating container, to composing ritual charms, containment tactics long infused the engineering of power and value in Central Africa. Prior to the coming of Westerners in the region, people mostly made containers from organic substances, in round and pliable shapes.[5] Far from inert vessels, these bags, nets and baskets contributed to compose, circulate, and expose sacred power, both in material and immaterial form. They also served to hoard, preserve, and carry ordinary and commodity goods.[6]

Large and small, organically made and scaled to human size baskets, earthen and metal pots, gourds and nets supported domestic and economic life until late in the nineteenth century. As documented by explorer Paul du Chaillu (1868: 240-41) in Southern Gabon:

> The riches of the Mitsogo, at least those that a man can keep in his hut, consist in many wicker baskets, plates and dishes hanging from the ceiling, and in several calabashes used to hold water, oil, or palm wine. Baskets and plates are woven with reeds, or with the bark of a wild tree cut in narrow strips. […] A great quantity of bags made from cotton *(mokondo),* along with utensils, are also hanged or preserved nearby.

Likewise, a variety of containers, canoes made of wood, and vessels made of tree bark, wicker, pottery, gourds, and fibres, carried commodities over short and long-distance routes, animating the markets and commercial networks.

Meanwhile, long-standing imaginaries of fertility, healing, and social relations also resonated with containing metaphors and practices. People viewed the human body as a magical, procreating container. While *marmites* (caldron; iPunu: *ikéngu*) processed the food necessary to life, female wombs were often described as able to 'cook' new persons. Clans also could be figured as wombs (Kikongo: *moyo*, *kundu*) able to generate new members, and absorb rival groups. The repertoire of *eating* (Mpongwe: *nya*), full of rich social and mystical meanings, worked along that of the womb to represent power as the ability of a person to 'eat' valuables and qualities (again in the spiritual and social sense of the term) before regurgitating them in transformed fashion for the benefit of the community (Yengo 2016, Bernault 2019). A spectacular example, the repertoire of the *pot-king* in the Grassfield communities of Cameroon, expressed how sacred kingship, as the receptacle of creative forces, activated the mystical and economic fluxes essential to the prosperity of the community (Warnier 2007).

In the realm of spiritual and therapeutic labour, a significant portion of Central African charms functioned as containers that could be assembled and disassembled. To create them, specialists placed sacred ingredients inside hollow vessels (horns, pots, and baskets), before awakening them through special words and rituals. The logic of composition, assembling diverse, carefully chosen components, directed the work of ritual experts (Guyer & Eno Belinga 1995):

> *Minkisi* [...] take the form of a container, whether a bag, a wooden figure, a pot or some other hollow thing, to which are added tightly packed 'medicines' on the inside and, often, a vast number of attachments on the outside: cords, rags, figurines, feathers, seeds, and pieces of iron (MacGaffey 2001: 145)

The decorations mentioned by MacGaffey suggest that techniques of accumulation also presided over the making of charms. Yet, attaching adornments to charms differed from capitalist accretion. Characterized by extremely diverse forms and functions, these attachments were meant to 'abduct' and display the terrifying agency of the *minkisi*, for instance on the famous wooden figures that have dozens of nails inserted on their surface (MacGaffey 2001: 145). In fact, the resulting 'visual effect of surabondance' both hid and signalled the secretness of the *minkisi*'s invisible forces contained in it (MacGaffey 2001: 145, Nooter 1993: 51-52).

Finally, intricate rites of concealment and display served to activate charms during collective ceremonies. During initiation, for instance, elders opened the reliquary boxes that contained the bones of ancestors to unveil them to young men and women (Bonhomme 2006, Duarte de Almeida 2020). The spectacle and physical contact with the sacred content of genealogical reliquaries completed the education of the initiates. In contemporary Gabon, the exposure of magical agency remains a central mechanism of healing. In the therapeutic cult of Bwete Misoko, for instance, experts 'make the Bwete sit' (activate it) by bringing containers – terracotta pots, imported suitcases, wicker baskets – and displaying them on a mat, exposing the potent charms that they hold inside.[7]

Early regimes of composition in Central Africa took place in a rich texture of ritual actions, words, and social meanings regulated by experts. Although they convoked hiding and exhibiting the capacious content of ritual containers, these technologies did not separate or cut ritual experts from the rest of the community. Instead, they created fundamental social and political links within and across local social groups.

Linear Containers and Atlantic Riches

The Atlantic commerce had a considerable impact on local containerizing techniques. Some of the crates and boxes introduced to Central Africa by the Portuguese, and later the Dutch, the Swedes, the Danish, the French, the British,

and the German, were made of unknown materials and exhibited original forms. Most of the new rounded objects – wooden kegs and barrels, glass bottles, mugs and pitchers in porcelain and ceramic – were quickly absorbed in local culture for domestic usage, funerary offerings, and commercial purposes (Farris Thompson 1981). However, a different fate fell on angular crates and linear boxes built in wooden planks and metal, sometimes sealed with locks. Their unusual shape and sharp angles, and the materials in which they were assembled, seemed to have disproportionately affected local imaginaries and practices.

Because of their strangeness and desirability, linear containers became a marker of status for people able to access Atlantic riches. Some were ostensibly displayed in the public sphere, others served as troves for material possessions in the houses of wealthy people. At the end of the nineteenth century, for instance, men in the Gabon Estuary liked to display ornate sets of keys on their clothes, and to walk in public with heavy crates and boxes carried by porters (Compiègne 1876: 349). In the early 1880s, the Baptist minister John Weeks saw several trunks placed next to the wall of the reception room of King Dom Pedro V at the capital San Salvador, 'undoubtedly filled with trade cloth and other treasures' (Weeks 1914: 34).

Moreover, the aura of power and extraordinary quality attached to the imported commodities carried in containers had huge consequences on local regimes of valuation. Arriving in Africa as finished products, Western commodities were entirely detached from their sites of production, and devoid of social links. Although some served to create political alliances, the possession and accumulation of such items progressively became a marker of power. The alien value of imported commodities, it seems, contaminated that of the containers that carried them. Contrary to the local creation of riches, the packing of foreign merchandise relied on accumulative strategies. Shipping crates and trunks gathered large quantities of identical products: bolts and rolls of textile, piles of copper plates, bags of pearls, bars of soap, cans of food, and boxes of gunpowder. Industrial standardization and cheap quality prompted traders to import this merchandise in large quantities. Concealed in bulky boxes, they embodied a form of wealth symmetrically opposed to the intricate composing of valuables in central Africa, and their socially productive circulation among social agents. Yet foreign imports achieved considerable vernacular value, increasing people's dependence on the monies and products demanded by foreign agents. To illustrate the desire of local societies, an elderly informant in the 1970s told how his people, the Mitsogho of Central Gabon, did not hesitate to sell slaves among their kin for commodities: 'Ndinga [a Punu trader] said, 'We, the Bapunu, we prefer to get slaves.' The Mitsogho answered: 'We, too, are hungry for merchandise' […] Among the Mitsogho, there is nothing but slaves to exchange, so, you, the Bapinzi, if you have some merchandise, give it to me.'[8]

In the second half of the nineteenth century, linear crates and imports spread inland in new and unprecedent ways, thanks to foreign expeditions and explorations. In his 1887 guide for explorers and travelers, Jerome Becker carefully described

Figure 1: Departing from Booué, Gabon. Mrs. Larrant and Dr. Pasérieux chatting with A.R. Photographer unknown, date unknown (1950s?).

the equipment for a caravan of 200 men, including the size and aspect of the multiple boxes necessary for the expedition (Becker 1887: 461). He warned that porters tended to carry crates upside down, signaling their uneven familiarity with linear containers. As agents consumed their provisions and exchanged merchandise with local leaders, empty containers remained onsite, quickly monopolized by the rich and the powerful. Sources show that they had made their way in the sphere of social monies exchanged for fines, alliances, and political ostentation. A French administrative text in Gabon reported, for instance, how the bride payment for a Punu chief's daughter included, in addition to metal caldrons, marmites, and many other goods, thirty-three *mallettes* (small valises, or briefcases) and six *coffres de traite* (commercial coffers).[9]

The presence and impact of linear containers increased again in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In the 1870s, foreign agents hired by British, German, and French commercial firms rapidly displaced networks of local merchants. Pushing commodities inland with steamboats and canoes, they brough huge quantities of imports, crates, and boxes in regions previously untouched by industrial products (Bernault 2019: 40). They founded new trading posts (factories), lining them with hundreds of linear containers full of textiles, gunpowder, metal ware, pearls, and perfume. Only the locals who procured the rubber, palm oil, timber, and ivory demanded by the traders were able to buy these desirable riches.[10]

In the 1920s and 1930s, linear containers were rapidly democratized. Such diffusion was based less on people's lust for their contents than on the popular use of containers for furnishing households. Imported *malles* (wooden or cardboard

Figure 2: Young women leaving a summer camp and carrying suitcases, 'Camp des grandes, départ', photographer Erica Brucker (1956-03-29/1956-04-05).

trunks*)* and *cantines* (metal trunks) became available for purchase in local factories and urban stores.[11] Despite, or because, such items symbolized foreign domination, they became a mark of standing in middle-class African households.[12] In 1929, Joseph Sidi Sissoko, a man employed by a timber firm near Lambaréné, died, leaving an estate that included two wooden *malles* and three metal *cantines*, along with one suitcase made of fabric.[13] Fifteen years later, in northern Gabon, a violent incident upset the small city of Mekambo: a group of men led by Catholic priest Thomas Ossima threatened a 53-year-old man who belonged to a Protestant congregation. After forcing their way into the man's house, the raiders threw out and broke all his furniture, including several *malles*.[14] From the 1950s to the 1970s, it was common for plantation workers in northern Congo, living in special barracks on the estate, to return home with *cantines* full of gifts for their relatives, preferably sets of China, forks, spoons, knifes, and plates[15]

Despite this new ubiquity, suitcases and *malles* remained a powerful symbol of colonialism. Coming to Central Africa or leaving it by boat, rail, or plane, Europeans carried them everywhere, including during journeys to the interior of the colony (fig. 1).

Africans had also started to use trunks and linear containers to engage with new forms of travel. The desirability of imported luggage was partly constrained by the new colonial infrastructures, trains, buses, and cars, a more common occurrence in the 1930s.[16] Suitcases became a fashionable item, marking people's modern identity

and higher social status. They circulated in many families and among young people. In the 1950s, photographs from Protestant missions in Cameroon showed how pupils carried suitcases and trunks with them, even when journeying on foot (fig. 2).[17]

At that time, linear containers were no longer all imported from abroad. People recycled commercial boxes to be used as seats and tabletops, and they could also buy new furniture, luggage, and coffins at the workshops of local carpenters and woodworkers.

Yet, the increasing presence of linear containers and their domestication by African customers did not erase their ambiguous aura. Their enduring foreignness derived from the history of their coming to the region, and the fact that the riches they contained often remained detached from local social relations. A nefarious meaning continued to linger around crates and trunks, reminiscent of the riches that they carried and were exchanged for human cargo. As imperial débris, their role as ancient vessels for the trade in human wealth transferred, now scarcely legible yet enduringly haunting, into the modern era. In the paraphernalia of domestic interiors and public landscapes of contemporary Central Africa, I believe that their stubborn presence silently embodies the ghostly nightmare of the slave trade.

Dark Capital and Life Value

It took me a very long time to realise that the very thing I was researching – stowage trunks and suitcases – were no longer in frequent use in Gabon. Even international travellers rarely chose them to pack their belongings; instead, they preferred large rectangular bags made of polyester fabric. The ominous connotation of modern luggage was made clear to me in February 2023, after I landed in Libreville for a three-month research visit. Waiting at the luggage carousel, I started chatting with a fellow traveller, a Gabonese lady, commenting on the large size of the black bags that crowded the conveyor belt. 'They seem to be the fashion of the day' I told her. 'Yes', she replied, 'here we call them *cerceuils*' (coffins).

Later, I realized that *malles* and *trunks* had virtually disappeared from household furnishing. Clothes, linen, small electronics, and other goods are stored in large round plastic baskets that often allow people to see the contents.[18] The ambivalent aura of linear containers became more vivid in my mind during a visit to Mayindou Berre, *oga* (king) of the Louis district in Libreville. Berre explained to me how he kept the regalia associated with his function near his traditional throne, exposed in the front room of his house. Wrapped in raffia and cotton cloth, the sacred objects were placed in pots to prevent people from accidentally touching them and being afflicted by their power. Then, the *oga* pointed at an elegant travel trunk dating from the 1940s, made of beautiful wood and lying on a platform behind the throne. Before his election as *oga*, when the house was still a restaurant, Berre explained, he had placed the trunk there as decoration, next to

the dining tables. But most customers refused to sit near it, for fear that it might conceal evil 'things' (in French, *des choses*, meaning powerful charms).[19]

The story is indicative of the broader rumours and urban legends known in Gabon as ritual crimes, a killing based on the conversion of organic life into sacred power. Notorious in Gabon, these murders occur after a powerful person commissions killers to steal a victim's organs (called body parts, or *pièces détachées* in French). Kept in innocuous-looking suitcases or secret caches, the organs are later used to compose a charm to protect the client's economic and political power. Modern money and appliances animate these transactions. In 2002, a very popular anecdote in Libreville told of the wife of a prominent local politician who had gone mad after looking into her brand-new freezer, imported from abroad. Lifting the lid of the freezer to fetch food, her eyes had fallen on the presence of human organs, she testified that her husband participated in the trafficking of *pièces détachées*, or body parts (Bernault 2019: 168).

Another anecdote, this time at the University of Libreville, depicts the sacred power of linear containers in a more positive way. After I was invited to present my research at the Department of Sociology in the Spring of 2023, anthropologist Emmanuelle Nguema Minko told me the story of her grandfather, Minko Mi Nguema, born in 1914. Minko Mi Nguema, she said, worked in coffee plantations in northern Gabon until he fell ill, around the year 1932-33. He then returned to his village, Moukoméba, between the cities of Bitam and Oyem. During his convalescence, he had a dream in which a white lady visited him, bringing with her a magical trunk (*cantine*). When she opened the luggage, Minko Mi Nguema saw that it was full of black and white babies. The lady announced that he now 'had the power to put children in the womb of women,' that is, to cure infertile persons. Keeping the trunk in the invisible, Minko Mi Nguema tended to the numerous patients who came to him, attracted by his reputation as a powerful healer. In this case, the healer's magic *cantine* related to life not as a threat of sacrifice and annihilation, but instead, as a procreating machine.

How do we make sense of these stories? What do the nickname of 'coffin' for modern luggage, the hoarding of stolen organs in freezers, and the procreating *cantine* of healer Minko Mi Nguema have in common?

I argue that these narratives articulate a powerful popular belief about the new value of human life (or *life-value*), based on a nefarious equivalence between the social or physical existence of a person and material riches. From the beginning of the slave trade in the sixteenth century to enforcing colonial prices for wage labour and the judicial device of 'blood-money' (compensatory damages for injuries), destroying social wealth and sacrificing life continues to haunt possessing and stashing away inordinate amounts of money.[20] As such, privilege remains the stuff of nefarious elites, money cannot dissociate itself from the disastrous economic and human extractions of the last three centuries. Colonialism added specific traits to this experience. Tightening control over transportable and storable bulk wealth,

white rulers almost entirely deprived Africans of the possibility of accumulating mobile capital and liquid assets. As colonial cash replaced local monies and was forced out of local communities through taxes and fines, it remained a rare and hardly accessible luxury until at least the late 1930s. The techniques used by the authorities to replenish administrative treasuries in interior posts reinforced the sinister aura of the new currencies. Coins, paper banknotes, and bonds were stuffed in cotton bags, then sealed in wooden crates and carried by porters to the posts. Once the crates arrived, local administrators kept the money in metal safes protected by a combination lock and sometimes guarded by a special member of the militia.[21]

Throughout these long and overlapping historical periods, the work of containers appeared essential to the silent, secret, and potentially criminal conversion of social riches into monopolized, secret, and unproductive accumulation of capital. I provisionally call such riches *dark capital*. 'Dark' indicates how such forms of capital remain camouflaged in containers for a while, alienated from social ties and local economies. The adjective also expresses that the origins of such riches are potentially tainted by the sacred, and the destruction of life. In their procreating capacity, however, containers can also create life and healing by protecting the mysterious labour of spiritual forces, with which they remained entangled. Their presence thus embodies and signals the extraordinary, ambivalent value of the capital they preserve and transact away from the reach of ordinary people. To capture the complexity of the positive and negative capacity of 'dark capital', I define it as riches that are: a) accumulated, transported, and hoarded in secret, and generally envisioned by the popular imagination as lying in containers and caches; b) detached from clear origins, moral norms, and social relations; c) animated by life-value, either born out of the sacrifice of a human being, or procreated by spiritual forces; d) hanging at the threshold of social and material wealth.[22]

In the following paragraphs, I expose four historical threads and stories of dark capital in Central Africa. These narratives help to weave together a genealogical mapping of such riches and illustrate the role of containers as transactional machines able to carry and convert their value. The first narrative concerns the role of *caisses de voyage* (travel crates or slave-bundles) also called *coffres de traite* (trade coffers) in the trading of slaves.[23] From the sixteenth century onwards, slave traders prepared wooden boxes that held commodities equivalent to the price of a slave, a person objectified as a thing. Explorer Paul du Chaillu described this price in 1863: one gun, one *neptune* (large copper plate), sixty meters of cotton fabric, two mirrors, two iron bars, two locks, one barrel of gunpowder, a few pearls, and a bundle of tobacco (Du Chaillu 1863: 48-49). *Coffres de traite* thus entered Central Africa as ready-made, portable machines able to put into motion occult transfers between human and material value, and between commodities and social death. They remain visible today as cultural archives, embodied in modern luggage, appliances, and metal safes. People shuddering at the view of large, rectangular, imported luggage in airports are, in part, recalling the violent transactions that

objectified the life of Africans during the slave-trade and colonialism. Despite being separated by a considerable time, *coffres de traite* and today's luggage are different avatars of a similar *dispositif*: a portable machine that converts life in foreign riches, an imperial ruin that put people, riches and containers together in a process of destructive accumulation.

The second story illuminates the special aura of linear containers, and the desirable, accumulated commodities that could be exchanged for human beings. In an analysis of what Larkin later called the 'colonial sublime' (Larkin 2008), Johannes Fabian (2000) has shown how foreigners negotiated their way in the African interior by staging elaborate displays of scientific objects (phonographs, electric dynamos, magnets, and cameras). Travelling to Africa in special crates, these contraptions were exhibited to local communities in a ritualized spectacle that Larkin calls the 'colonial sublime'. The extraordinary properties and immense value of the machines were meant to 'dazzle the natives', demonstrating the superior power of white people (Larkin 2008). Europeans almost never accepted to part with their fancy impediments. After the show, they carefully packed the precious objects and locked them back in their crates, hiding them from the sight of onlookers. As an early form of *éblouissements*, the colonial sublime thus went hand in hand with the concealing and monopolizing of capital, bolstering its value to new heights. Breaking the usual flux of commerce and exchanges, their un-exchangeability and unreachability made them stand as extraordinary, invaluable fetishes.

Central Africans had already been exposed to this brand of white sacred power as early as early as the sixteenth century. The third story of dark capital concerns the evangelizing initiatives of Portuguese and Italian missionaries in the Kongo kingdom, and their bringing with them portable altars carried in trunks. To perform the Mass in areas devoid of consecrated churches, the priests unfolded these portable altars in front of the faithful, carefully exhibiting the Christian sacra and the Gospels they contained (fig. 3-4).

The packing techniques of early white missionaries in Central Africa presented ample affinities with the containing/unveiling tactics of local ritual experts and the charms that they composed. The similarity might explain why linear containers penetrated the vernacular sphere of sacred value and agency. I did not find early sources of such appropriation, but later archives indicate that ritual specialists did use crates, coffers, and boxes, sometimes of foreign making, to compose charms during the colonial period. In 1944, for instance, near Libreville in Gabon, in the village of Okala, colonial agents searched the house of a man named Ndong Mba. In his bedroom, under the bed and wrapped in a white cloth, they found a basket (Fr. *panier*) containing human bones and crania. But the shape and nature of the container was not clear. In her testimony, Ndong Mba's spouse described the basket as secured with a lock. Another witness declared that the relics had been found outside the house, in two small *caissettes* (crates) concealed between the trunk of two banana trees.[24] In contemporary Gabon, as described above about

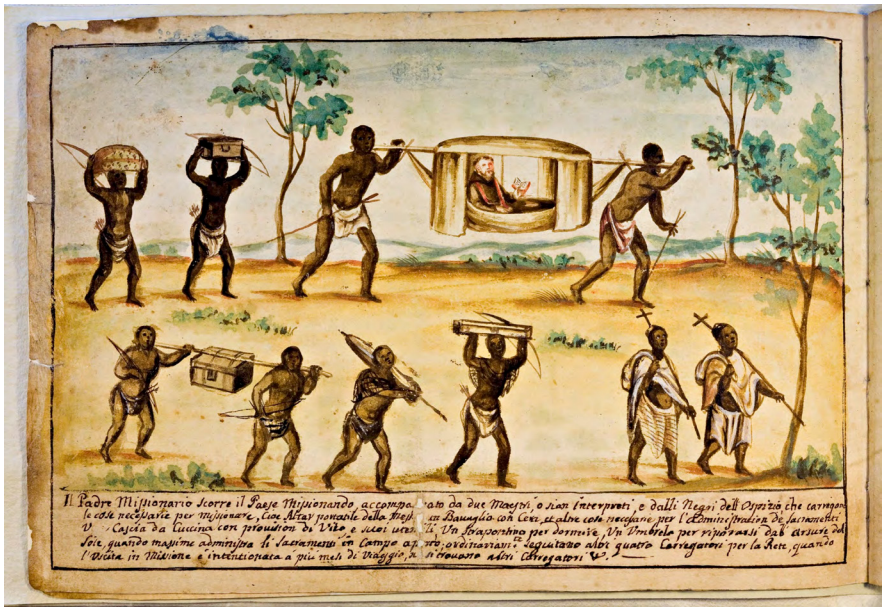

Figure 3: 'The missionary Father travels in the country […] with Negroes from the hospice carrying all necessary things, such as a portable altar for the Mass […].

Figure 4: 'The missionary exposes the altar for the Mass'. Guattani & Carli, 17th c. Original watercolors preserved at the Municipal Library of Turin (*Biblioteche civiche torinesi*).

Figure 5: Picture of Bwete ceremony in Gabon, with modern suitcases serving as ritual vessels, 2015.

the Bwete cult, suitcases, *mallettes* (briefcases), and metal *cantines* coexist with rounded containers made from wicker, raffia fibres, pottery, and fabric (fig. 5). Each of these vessels is named according to what it contains, and needs to be cleaned regularly, unless it becomes contaminated by the power of its contents.[25] None of these activities distinguishes between suitcases bought in local furniture stores and locally made vessels.

The fourth and final story suggests how the occult power of linear containers also dispersed in Central Africa through funerary practices. Starting in 1881, the French forced the colonized to use coffins by passing a series of funerary decrees, but the fashion seemed to have been borrowed by local societies earlier than this.[26] In Gabon in 1873, after the death of King Nkombé, near Lambaréné, a local factory furnished the mourners with a large shipping crate. The community placed the King's body in the ready-made coffin and placed precious objects next to his corpse:

> The factory had donated a huge crate. People filled half of it with the richest clothes of the deceased, laying him on this precious bed. After that, the mourners continued to place more objects in the coffin, some given by the factory, and some belonging to N'Combé, such as his top hat, the one decorated with a golden sun, his canes, his umbrellas, his goblets, his flasks of lavender lotion, and all sorts of fabrics. Then they poured the content of four bottles of gin on everything, and the factory carpenter closed the coffin with huge nails (Compiègne 1875: 63).[27]

The juxtaposition of a potent ruler's body with foreign commodities given by the factory, the strange performance of long-standing rituals (like pouring gin over the deceased) along with placing the dead body in a coffin (unusual in the region) paint a vivid picture of the cultural transactions and transitions at work in the region. As a funerary vessel, the factory box that enclosed King Nkombé turned it into both a potent ritual body and a 'thing' with ambiguous value, not unlike the processed trinkets that kept him company. In the enclosed and obscure space of the container, the rectangular coffin conflated social and human power with commodity value.

A Provisional Conclusion

Many other historical episodes can be convoked to expose the opaque labour of containers in Central Africa, and their capacious ability to conceal, convert, and expose the specific sort of capital that this article coined as 'dark'. I will conclude with a recent and spectacular story, taking place in Libreville, Gabon, on 31 August 2023. Only a few hours after general Oligui organized a successful coup against President Ali Bongo, the police forced its way into the headquarters of Valentin Noureddin, the son of the fallen head of state. Agents took videos of the search, exposing a dozen travel bags, trunks and suitcases filled to the brim with wads of banknotes. A safe was also opened, exhibiting piles of money. At the end of the operation, policemen carried the containers and opened them in front of the building for all to see. Pictures and videos of the revelation went viral.[28] Hiding banknotes in suitcases and stashing them away in safes is common around the world, and certainly not an African or a Gabonese peculiarity. Yet in Libreville, the public discussion and rumours around the discovery of Noureddin's treasure presented some uncanny elements, suggesting feelings not unsimilar to those experienced during the uncovering of ritual crimes evidence. In both cases, the fascination and horror brought about by showing indecent amounts of money, the physical remains of the victims, and the caches used for the crime (valises, boxes and freezers), revive the aura of dark capital.

As I suggested above, a powerful embodiment of dark capital, and historically associated with colonial domination, modern money remains unattached to clear social origins and functions. Its aura of alienness and inaccessibility, its criminal accumulation in the hands of rulers, and its fundamental unproductivity (Tonda 2021:75) continue, long after the end of colonialism, to taint its usage. Noureddin's valises became the topic of immense speculation, bringing to the fore explicit connections between money and the sacrifice of life. People asserted that the four to seven billion CFA francs hoarded in the containers came from extractions performed on Gabonese citizens and their labour by the Bongo regime. The rumours underline a straight equivalence between the life of ordinary citizens

and the wealth of the regime's cronies. Lamenting the lack of funds for hospitals and social services, many commentators also connected Noureddin' treasure to the dismantling of public health.[29] Stories like these convoke, I believe, the long history of dark capital in the region.

The history of early techniques of valuation in Central Africa and the recovering of the complex, secret forms taken by modern capital since the sixteenth century is a useful complement to Tonda's critique of contemporary *éblouissements* (2015). As ubiquitous transactional machines producing value through dialectics of concealment and exposure, linear containers were essential to birthing dark capital, a sinister sort of wealth based on accumulation, containerization, and opaqueness. Combining with local composition tactics while profoundly unsettling them, linear containers remain today a disturbing débris of imperial work and social destruction in contemporary Central Africa. Their labour of ruination continues to combine social agents, peculiar objects, and specific techniques of containerization.

Rooted in Central Africa, this history encourages us to become aware of the multiple, paradoxical forms assumed by modern capitalism. In studying the latter, we tend to become fascinated by its latest avatars, the dazzling, spectacularized riches of the twenty-first century, or the fluid, enormous financial assets that can be traded online at the speed of light. Yet, it is also a character of late modern capitalism to exist, at least momentarily, in concrete and weighty arrangements, that – often – need to circulate and be stored in containers of various shapes and sizes (Levinson 2008). Perhaps the liquid forms of modern capital cannot exist without some of it being immobilized and hoarded in more viscous states. As a result, in people's imagination around the world, containers continue to symbolize – and make possible – the labour of wealth in its densest and most occult existence.

Illustration Credits

Figure 1: Photographer unknown, picture preserved at the Archives Défap (Société des Missions évangéliques) in Paris, collection Gabon, by permission.

Figure 2: Photographer Erica Brucker (1956-03-29/1956-04-05), Archives of the Société des Missions évangéliques in Paris, 'Cameroun jeunesse' collection, by permission.

Figure 3-4: Dionigi Carli, Michelangelo Guattini, *La mission au Kongo des pères Michelangelo Guattini et Dionigi de' Carli (1668)*, Paris, Editions Chandeigne, 2006, p. 230 and 231, by permission.

Figure 5: Photograph by Filipa Duarte de Almeida, by permission.

Notes

1 Historians started to investigate the role of containers only recently. See Emily Osborn's pioneer work (2017); Mavungha, Cuvelier and Pype (2016), and the special issue on 'Containers. A Forum,' in *History and Anthropology* (2019) directed by Andrew Shryock and David L. Smail.

2 Indeed, the strategy of hiding and obscuring, central in containerization, has been analyzed by Tonda (2015: 108) as a crucial aspect *éblouissements*. For him, *éblouissements* generate effects of darkness, both by concealing things behind extreme spectacle, and by blinding onlookers' vision and critical mind.

3 I thank Emery Kalema for encouraging me to better research the causes of the continued effect of containers.

4 Dark capital works along Tonda's notions of *capital sorcier* (witch capital) and *capital de Dieu* (God's capital) (Tonda 2002, 2015) but attempts a more general and systematic qualification of people's perception of such riches.

5 Emily Lynn Osborn, 'Containers and mobility in West Africa', *History and Anthropology*, 2018, 29:1, 22.

6 In this section, I prefer to use 'containment tactics' instead of Marc Levinson's concept of 'containerization', which mostly applies to modern economic transfers (Levinson 2008).

7 Interview with Filipa Duarte de Almeida and HC, Libreville, 10 May 2023.

8 Otto Gollnhofer and Roger Sillans, *La mémoire d'un peuple. Ethno-histoire des Mitsogho, ethnie du Gabon central.* Paris: Présence africaine, 1997, 207.

9 Jacques Hubert, 'Esquisse de la coutume bapounou et généralités sur la dégradation des coutumes au Gabon,' n.d. [no date], Fonds Pouchet, Archives missionnaires du St Esprit, Chevilly-la-Rue, Dossier 271-B III. 8.

10 Another option was to steal the content of the boxes, a strategy frequently lamented in explorers' writings. In 1866, in Gabon, 'Akeli' people came at night and opened all the boxes (*boîtes*) of Walker's expedition to steal their content (Walker 1870: 66). See also Du Chaillu, *L'Afrique sauvage* (1868: 138).

11 This hypothesis is based on the reading of succession dossiers of white men who died in Lambaréné from the 1920s to the 1950s. Archives nationales du Gabon (ANG) Fonds présidentiel (FP) 2Dc (I) 16.10.

12 A list of basic needs for a European household in 1935 included a *cantine* (valued at 1,500 to 3,995 ff). *Note sur le coût de la vie et budgets dans le territoire du Gabon*, 1935-59. ANG FP 221.

13 *Dossier de succession de Joseph Sidi Sissoko*, Lambaréné, 1929. ANG FP 2Dc (I) 16.10.

14 *Procès-verbal d'enregistrement de plainte*, affaire Ossima, 1944. ANG FP 572.

15 Joseph Tonda, interview in Libreville, 12 March 2023.

16 I thank Benoît Henriet for this insight.

17 See also Photograph of the dormitory at the Libamba middle school, unknown photographer (1940/1960). Archives Defap (Société des Missions évangéliques) in Paris, collection 'Cameroun scolaire'.

18 In middle class households, people also use wardrobes and built-in cabinets.

19 Interview of *ogekaza* Mayindo Berre, Libreville, April 5, 2023. The trunk belonged to his mother.

20 Bernault, *Colonial Transactions*, chapter 4.

21 *Rapport d'inspection de M. Muller, Impfondo, au chef de la mission d'inspection M. Picanon*, 27 February 1918. Archives nationales d'outre mer, Aix-en-Provence, FEA 3D4.

22 Dark capital is also inspired by Dark Web, e.g., the largest, yet invisible and often illegal part of internet. Dark Web lies beneath Surface Web and Deep Web and largely escapes international regulations. With Deep Web, it represents about 95% of all internet sites and activities. I thank Colleen Dunlavy for educating me on this.

23 Du Chaillu details the meaning of the expression in *A Journey to Ashangoland and Further Penetration into Equatorial Africa* (1867: 159): 'The slave-bundle is a parcel of goods amounting to the value of a slave, which the headmen carried on the march, to buy slaves with, on their own account'. In the French version (L›Afrique sauvage, 1868: 136), he names the bundle 'coffer' (*coffre de traite*), suggesting the goods were carried in a crate.

[24] Procès-verbal, Affaire Ndong Mba, 1941. ANG FP 835

[25] The sacred language of Bwete has generic appellations for containers, such as *mbèlè*: flat basket, and *pengué*: bag, small valise. Interview with Filipa Duarte de Almeida and HC, Libreville, 10 May 2023.

[26] The governors of French Equatorial Africa adopted a series of decrees in 1881, 1887, 1900, and 1903, based on a French law passed in 1881.

[27] See also a description in Du Chaillu (1868: 36) on how the Mpongwe rulers of the Gabon Estuary were buried in wooden coffins.

[28] E.g., 'Coup d'État au Gabon: des valises de billets filmées chez des proches d'Ali et Sylvia Bongo.' Radio France Internationale, available on: https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20230901-coup-d-%C3%A9tat-au-gabon-des-valises-de-billets-film%C3%A9s-chez-des-proches-d-ali-et-sylvia-bongo

[29] I never heard, for instance, that banknotes might simply have been printed anew by cash machines.

CHAPTER 5.4

Beyond Syncretism: The History of Tangled Powers in Congo-Brazzaville

Fred O. Biyela

Introduction

The problem of the State in Africa reveals a complexity of interactions between different institutions: reciprocal intrusions of State and religious structures, matrimonial and political alliance strategies, State regulation of lineage conflicts, Christian reappropriation of Marxist-Leninist slogans, military interventions in places of worship following accusations of witchcraft.[1] Using these facts, this chapter sets out to examine the textures of power through the interweaving of lineage, politics, and religion in Congo-Brazzaville.

Starting with the Church of Zéphirin, which has not been the subject of in-depth study for a long time, I will show how the criteria of religious and lineage legitimacy can be founded on the public policy of the state, on the margins of constitutional secularism. The aim will also be to understand 'witchcraft' as a 'political language' (Geschiere 1995: 8, 16) and a language of kinship (Yengo 2016: 18). By taking a step away from the issue of religious syncretism, the political and lineage approach allows us here to contextualize the social dimension of the witchcraft mechanism, which goes beyond the epidemiological nature of 'evil' (Yengo 2017: 141). Admittedly, the discourse of the actors tends to reserve the category of 'witchcraft' for evil powers. But the situational approach shows how political figures, and even the Christian faithful, 'adhere to networks of actions that are part of the witchcraft modality' (Biyela 2018a: 80).

To highlight the historicity of the textures of power in Congo-Brazzaville, we shall see, first, how prophetic charisma can give rise to both tactical alliances and sorcerous rumours liable to lead to state repression. Second, I will show that mystical struggles in a political context are equivocal and not exclusive, since the rationality of the Marxist-Leninist period (1963-1991) can be reactivated in a pluralist context, as illustrated by the prophetic succession conflicts underway in the Church of Zéphirin. By way othese reproductions of political and lineage society lead me to address the question of the historicity of lifstyles as a way of understanding the state and power 'from below'.

Prophetism as a Vehicle for Entangled Power

The prophetic tradition to which the Church of Zéphirin belongs originated in the Kongo kingdom, following the first evangelization by European Catholic missionaries who arrived in 1490, shortly after the Portuguese navigator Diego Cão had successfully crossed the mouth of the Congo River in 1483. The Crusades and the Counter-Reformation – which repressed 'heretics' and outlawed local traditions deemed 'fetishistic' – gave rise to the first messianic manifestations, the most illustrative of which was that of the prophetess Kimpa Vita. Towards the end of the 19th century, the second evangelization triggered the appearance of the ngunza, prophets who emerged in the new political and religious circumstances of the Belgian, French, and Portuguese colonizations.

It is in these local reconfigurations that André Matswa was produced as a prophet after his death in 1942. His 'political struggle […] is nearly overshadowed by a mystique of liberation, a veritable cult devoted to the messiah Matswa' (Gondola 2021: 11). The former protestant catechist Simon Kimbangu is also one of the most important contemporary prophetic figures in the ancient Kongo kingdom. It was Kimbangu who inspired the Ngunzist movement from which the Church of Zéphirin sprang. When Simon Zéphirin Lassy went into exile in the Belgian Congo in 1920 as a teenager, he wanted to escape the requisitions associated with the construction of the Congo Ocean Railway, a period of 'violence and abuse' when the French colonial state gave way to 'large concessionary companies' (ibid.: 20). Even in exile, where Kimbangu was arrested in 1921, Lassy experienced colonial repression at close quarters, in particular the deportation of 126 Kimbanguists 'bound in chains […] and isolated in relegation centres' (Asch 1983: 2728).

Against this backdrop, it is possible to understand Lassy's anti-colonial tendencies, which contradict his extensive migratory experience, since he travelled as a sailor throughout Europe between 1921 and 1946. During the same period, Lassy joined the Belgian navy, before being mobilized as a soldier in the Ethiopian War around 1935, and then as a sailor on various Allied ships during the Second World War. Regardless, this path Lassy followed reflects both his personal story and that of the construction of Congo-Brazzaville as a nation-state in the aftermath of the Second World War.

The State, a Space for Tactical Alliances and Religious Legitimacy

Lassy and his followers are known to have held an enormous influence over the political careers of the Congolese rulers of the 1950s and 1960s, the rulers who subsequently legitimized the Prophetic Church. Indeed, this was the case for Jean Félix-Tchicaya, the first parliamentarian for the Congo and Gabon. Thanks to Lassy, Félix-Tchicaya's party (Parti progressiste congolais) won all the elections until 1956, when the Prophet reoriented the political life of the first Congolese

leaders. He went on to support a young dissident of the latter, Stéphane Tchitchellé who became the first Congolese mayor of Pointe-Noire in 1956, and so ended Félix Tchicaya's political monopoly. This close ally of Abbé Président Fulbert Youlou played roles in the very first governments of the Republic of Congo, notably as Minister of the Interior from 1958 to 1961. In concrete terms, Lassy and his new ally Tchitchellé had concluded an agreement that allowed the political leader to use the emblem of the Church of Zéphirin on his ballot papers in the 1956 municipal elections. Therefore, it was thanks to this procedure that Stéphane Tchitchellé won the election. Florence Bernault (1996: 274) explains that the Lassy faithful opposed to Tchitchellé were liable to excommunication. According to the same sources cited by Florence Bernault, the European supporters of Abbé Fulbert Youlou provided material aid to the Prophet who, from 1958, extended his influence beyond the Pointe-Noire region (ibid.).

Grateful, the deputy mayor, Stéphane Tchitchellé, asked the Prophet to give him a son as a candidate on his electoral list. As his sons were young, Lassy proposed his son-in-law Samuel Tchicamboud, whom he had consecrated as a pastor. This friend of the Prophet became deputy and quaestor of the National Assembly. In fact, the textures of power can express strategies of political alliances through which a religious leader promotes his relatives by placing them at the disposal of State power.

These tactical alliances are not limited to electoral issues, as they can also be matrimonial in nature, that is, between the relatives of a religious leader and a head of state. Just as a uterine niece of the Prophet Lassy had a child with President Ngouabi, so the Prophet's second wife was the President's mother-in-law. This is no doubt why Prophet Lassy called President Ngouabi 'Papa'.[2]

The alliances extended to Lassy's descendants, one of whose daughters had an affair with Colonel François-Xavier Katali, who was Minister of the Interior from 1977 to 1984.[3] The people I spoke to referred to the Prophet's daughter as the statesman's 'second office'. This phenomenon, which emerged in the 1980s, placed the status of the second office 'between that of the mistress and [that of the] legitimate wife' (Bazenguissa-Ganga 1997:182). For his part, B. Jewsiewicki-Koss (2012: 135) explains that in the Belgian Congo, 'many young women, often students, engaged in an "office" relationship, form of concubinage with politicians and economic players'. In his opinion, the 'second office' corresponds to a 'concubine, modelled on the mistress of the colonial era, who lives in town and accompanies the man on his "modern" outings, and whose number is more indicative of the man's political importance and economic power than of his libido.' (*ibid.*: 24)[4]

It is evident that the matrimonial unions of the prophetic lineage with the statesmen had protected the prophetic Church from communist censorship. However, these alliances could not prevent political repression that sometimes followed accusations of witchcraft.

Rumours and Witchcraft Register at the Heart of Political Repression

Several studies show how rumours of witchcraft spread well beyond the usual family circles, extending to state institutions (Geschiere 1995; de Rosny 2005; Bouju and Martinelli 2012; Fancello and Bonhomme 2018). What is more, witchcraft rumours within a Church can reveal historically attested political facts, while at the same time clarifying lineage beliefs and individuals' relationship to the world. Three facts will enable us to make the link between witchcraft rumours and supposed or proven military actions.

First, the death of the Prophet led to rumours of witchcraft, when he was found lying lifeless on the stairs in his home at dawn on the 24 March 1974. Some suggested a stroke, while most of the people we spoke to put forward two hypotheses. According to the first hypothesis, President Marien Ngouabi was threatened by the death wish of an opponent he had had eliminated. The instigator of a failed putsch against President Ngouabi, Minister Ange Diawara and his companions were executed in April 1973, less than a year before Lassy's death. Their bodies were exhibited at the Revolution stadium.[4][65] Since then, Ngouabi is said to have been haunted by Diawara's spirit of death. The President then confided in the Prophet, his ally and spiritual protector. Lassy is said to have captured Diawara's mukuyu (spirit of death), tamed it and imprisoned it in the prophetic residence at the request of the President of the Republic. Revolted, the spirit of the deceased opponent is said to have struck down the Prophet. According to the cosmology of the actors involved, only the action of a nganga (diviner-healer) or sorcerer can mobilize a mukuyu. Moreover, anyone from outside the lineage or clan who is murdered can threaten their killers. It is in this sense that foreign mikuyu (plural of mukuyu) 'are usually imprisoned by the sorcerer in an invisible house (mphindi), specially adapted for this purpose and where various witchcraft accessories are also stored' (Hagenbucher-Sacripanti 1973: 57). The Head of State would therefore have been sensitive to this belief, to the point of confiding in the Prophet Lassy.

However, this rumour is qualified by the hypothesis of a shooting death, according to which an armed individual fired at Lassy.[5] The fact remains, however, that a matrilateral cousin of the prophet had been named as the culprit: 'People are said to have bribed Pastor Mangofo to release Diawara's imprisoned *mukuyu* [the spirit of death].'[6] These suspicions have taken over liturgical chants. At the very heart of the hymns, the soloist asked: 'Na m'vo Profete [who killed the Prophet]?'. Everyone answered at once: '*Mangofo!*' to the beat of the drums. The faithful of the Prophetic Church qualify this 'leafleting' process, a device from the Marxist-Leninist period whose aim was to discredit the enemies of the revolution. The 'tract' sung during services would therefore have the effect of warding off and weakening this formidable contender for the succession.

After Lassy, rumours of witchcraft spread around the death of President Ngouabi. His assassination on 18 March 1977 led to that of the archbishop of

Brazzaville, Cardinal Émile Biayenda, on 22 March 1977. Some members of Ngouabi's entourage accused the archbishop of 'stripping the president of the protective, mystical shell he possessed as a leader.'. Otherwise, the bullets from the guns would have had no effect on the Immortal' (Lopes 2018: 434). The same context of the putsch against Ngouabi led to the arrest and subsequent assassination of the previous President, Alphonse Massamba-Débat, who was accused of plotting.[7] The hearings of the 'revolution trial' following this political violence were broadcast nationwide on radio and television from 3 January to 6 February 1978. These proceedings gave rise to rumours about 'apparitions' of Massamba-Débat, rumours that led to immediate state legislation on sects (Bazenguissa-Ganga, 2012: 57): 'That's where the Stalinist proceedings intersect with the legal mechanisms on witchcraft, and where the postcolonial state absorbs them all. (Yengo 2016: 253). By successive decrees up to the religious pluralism of the 1990s, the Zéphirin church was a member of the seven well-known 'religious associations'. Joseph Tonda (2002:290) believes that this church 'differs little from that which is commonly known as a 'sect' in Congo, and yet it is the only one of this nature to be officially recognised'.[8] This recognition was assuredly based on the political role played by a Church that resembled a 'state religion' (Moukoko 1999: 186), well suited to the revolutionary regime.

In addition to the circumstantial violence and legislation of the 1970s, political repression may be a response to alleged witchcraft attack when a member of the government of the Republic claims to have been mystically attacked. This was, moreover, the punishment that a regal minister imposed on the Prophet's immediate successor. The Minister of the Interior had interfered in a dispute between relatives of Lassy to support a section of the faithful opposed to Pastor Louis-Gaspard Sakala, whom the Prophet had designated as his successor. Lassy's patrilinear nephew thus became a target of the statesman who imposed elections on 13 March 1983 on the premises of the Ministry of the Interior to designate a new head of the Church. Pastor Sakala and his followers boycotted the ballot, at the end of which Pastor André (the Prophet's oldest son) was declared the winner. André Lassy was a member of the presidium of the single party's international body and had obvious political support, including Minister Katali, his brother-in-law.[9]

In addition to these political considerations, the Minister of the Interior made witchcraft accusations against Sakala, who was ordered to leave the Prophet's residence in favour of André. The statesman had accused the church leader of having bewitched him when he narrowly escaped death during a forced landing at Pointe-Noire airport:

> Arriving in Pointe-Noire at around 11 PM, we learned that the minister had nearly accidentally died. Caused by whom? Sakala Louis-Gaspard. People told the minister that it was Sakala who was going to kill him. And the Minister got angry and said: 'Tell Sakala that the Minister doesn't want to see him again'. He [the minister] organised

> 380 soldiers with tanks and lots of heavy weapons to come and attack the poor civilian followers who were praying to their God. It was on Tuesday 31 January 1984 that the army appeared in front of the religious mass, bayonets fixed.[10]

The police took immediate action, leaving seven people dead. Warned by an army officer, Sakala had himself exfiltrated from the prophetic residence, before being imprisoned with 39 other followers. A month later, the President of the Republic, Denis Sassou Nguesso, asked for their release.[11]

Prophetism as Reproduction of Linage and Political Society

We have seen how the division in the early 1980s led to conflicts between two agnatic descendants of the prophet, who died in 1984 and 2001 respectively. The various tendencies of the Prophetic Church were then led by pastors from outside the Prophet's family, with the support of state institutions.[12] However, the succession crises resurfaced in the context of the fortieth anniversary of the Prophet's death, in 2014. The new tensions are caused by a messianic process that supports the idea of lineage succession against a backdrop of local representations.

Lineage Inheritance of Power: Governmentality by the Cinkoko

The ongoing messianic process intertwines the Old Testament and representations of the *cinkoko*. In the Kongo populations, this notion expresses a transferable power in the context of inheritance. It is mostly an 'instrument of social strategy used to challenge and to strengthen power' (Hagenbucher-Sacripanti 1983: 5). When they apply these representations to their own Church, all those loyal to Zéphirin would avoid the pejorative notion of *cinkoko*, but spoke of a 'thing' whose only heirs could be the descendants of the Prophet. From this perspective, the return of the Congo of Antoine Lassy – another of the Prophet's sons – provides material for the construction of a messianic process.

Awarded a Congolese government scholarship in 1972, Antoine went on to pursue higher education in the USSR, then in France, where he lived for forty years before returning to Pointe-Noire for good. A letter sent to the Minister of Justice describes Antoine's 'elevation' to the head of the Church as a 'promise by the founding president, his father, the Prophet'.[13] Hence his recent designation as *mwana ya lukanu* (son of the promise)', a biblical expression reminiscent of 'patriarchal traditions of promise' (Smyth 1997: 52).

However, this messianic process was controversial, as Antoine did not meet unanimous approval despite his investiture as leader. Parental logic is met with resistance, leading some religious leaders to seek mediation from the State. The head of one of the networks said he was ready to refer to 'the President of the

Republic and the Minister of the Interior' to regulate ecclesiastical governance, for which the 'Congolese State has set the terms and contours'.[14] One of the arguments against lineage succession was that Simon Zéphirin Lassy was not born a prophet, and as such the church he founded was not a family property.[15] However, Pastor Antoine's followers argued vigorously that a church leader not related to the Prophet was merely a 'usurper', so much so that an official document addressed to the Minister of the Interior accused Judge Tchiyoko of 'usurping power'.[16] However, lineage beliefs maintain that any spoliation of property leads to the death of the usurper, as this pastor states:

> You will see, before the end of this year, this usurper will die. These are not things to joke about. Who is he to claim something that has not been given to him? Did the Prophet say that anyone could take it? You must be careful with other people's things. If it's not meant for you, you'll die.[17]

The conviction of certain death contrasts with the ambiguity of the notion of 'someone else's thing', a literal translation of Kongo language *kima ya ngana*. The owner of this 'thing' can only be a member of the Prophet's biological family. The 'it' that cannot be taken without inheritance signifies the thing that cannot be named and the representations that surround it in people's collective unconscious. In the face of growing opposition, the Prophet's descendants are more clearly expressing the exclusivity of the lineage of succession. One of his grandsons recently named the thing in question:

> If it's your father's or your mother's church, take it, use it, kill us. But if it's Lassy Simon Zéphirin's church, which has brought whole families together, zero [...] We've grown up. It's over, the children have grown up. The Prophet had said that after 40 years his Church would rise again.[18]

This agnatic nephew of Antoine stirs up the faithful by challenging the opponents of the messianic process. He uses the vocabulary of kinship, which alludes to his status as the grandson of the Prophet whose surname he bears. When it is not named, the thing (or the id) indicates the representations that the actors have of *cinkoko*, a hereditary power. In other words, the prophetic Church is perceived as a family *cinkoko*.[19] Sensitive because of the degrading image it could give of the religious institution, this subject cannot easily be verbalized. However, the downgrading of *cinkoko* depends on the missionary demonization of powers hastily described as witchcraft (Geschiere 1995: 21). Indeed, 'who will be surprised to see Africans confuse witchcraft with the devil? Didn't the preachers teach them that?' (de Heusch 2007: 173). Yet, the plasticity of invisible powers sheds light on the criteria of legitimacy, according to which *cinkolo* implies both inheritance and lineage anointment (kulubuk' in the Vili language). This anointing is considered a prerequisite for any

exercise of religious or political power. As a result, casting a spell is not about the powers themselves, but rather about their inappropriate and socially reprehensible use. In other words, lineage powers – which the term 'witchcraft' cannot adequately express – are malleable. They are evoked or claimed through allusive discourse, periphrases, metaphors, and non-verbal practices. It is in this sense that the art of governing by *cinkoko* expresses the representations of actors attached to the pre-eminence of kinship, 'in socially approved practices' (Hersak 2001: 632).

Given the entanglement of powers, the transmission/usurpation dialectic raises questions about the role of local beliefs on a national scale, well beyond the prophetic Church alone. These imaginaries can influence behaviour in the face of a national political order marked by the influence of kinship in public management. To a certain extent, representations of *cinkoko* can condition Congolese actors, who are subject to a hereditary succession of statesmen who are seconded and then replaced by their respective sons as leaders of their political parties. These same descendants potentially become members of successive governments over several decades. Without being deterministic, patrimonial representations guarantee political succession in the same way that *cinkoko* is transmitted to a previously designated relative (Biyela 2022: 200).

It goes without saying that lineage practices can influence the actions of political leaders. However, some churches operate 'on the model of the state, which is then presented as the primordial identity referent' (Tonda 2001: 148). They 'mimic a bureaucratic structure' (Tonda 2002: 110), to the point of perpetuating the ideological legacy of the socialist revolution.

Marxist-Leninist Recycling as an Extension of Revolutionary Governmentality

Like the Russian revolution, which focused on young people (Gorsuch 2000), the 1963 socialist revolution in the Congo relied heavily on young people. Radio broadcasts were devoted to them with a view to the ideological education of citizens trained in a 'new political language' (Bonnafé 1968: 359). From the time of his *coup d'état* in 1968, Marien Ngouabi stepped up the political media coverage of young people, who 'enjoyed prime-time airtime on *La Voix de la Révolution congolaise*' (Lopes 2018: 328). They denounced disloyal political leaders by reading 'the "telex of youth", a virulent chronicle that daily called on militants to accelerate the pace of the Revolution' *(ibid.).*

Marked by this history, the choristers of the Church of Zéphirin gradually became autonomous when they created a categorical space called the 'département de la jeunesse' ('youth department'), regardless of age. These facts date to the division in the 1980s, when most of the choristers sided with Pastor Sakala, who had been dismissed by the Minister of the Interior. The leader of the choristers (whom we call Boussiala), imprisoned with the head of the Church, was a fervent militant of the Socialist Youth. He helped write the articles of the '*Mouvement*

national des pionniers' (National Pioneer Movement), which were used in civics lessons (known as '*Morale*') taught in all schools in the *People's Republic of Congo*. His closest colleague (whom we call Hubert) had been co-opted by the Party's youth movement as a propagandist as soon as he had finished primary school. Hubert became an influential political activist in the early 1980s and was appointed first secretary of the *Cercle d'encadrement des jeunes* in his district. Nostalgic for the disciplinary training he received in the Party's youth movement, he now regrets the misuse of socialist ideology by those involved:

> People had turned the *Mouvement National des Pionniers* and the *Union de la Jeunesse Socialiste Congolaise* into movements for the bourgeoisie. It was this elite that killed the country. People became gentrified. They have abandoned the working masses who support the state. They pretend to condemn capitalism and imperialism, but they do worse than neo-colonialism.[20]

Trained as Party youth, the leaders of the Prophetic Church choirs opposed the hierarchical authority of the pastors, who maintained that changing the choir into a 'youth department' was an outgrowth of the Marxist-Leninist era: 'You behave like militants of a political party. You have changed the temples into Party huts.'[21]

Trained to denounce less than exemplary pastors and to challenge the priestly hierarchy, the young people of Zéphirin were thus marked by political awareness and ideological mobilization. Marxist teaching programmes, the media, the press, internships: all these mechanisms for learning about political commitment were once relayed in the scathing publications of the socialist youth newspaper Dipanda (Independence). Marxist-Leninist slogans hammered out words of struggle against the reactionary or imperialist enemy: 'Set to psalmody and music, these words were also perniciously inserted into school textbooks, eventually became lessons and courses' (Mianzoukouta 2012: 188).

The same Marxist-Leninist influences go a long way towards explaining why the priestly hierarchy today rejects the change in youth: 'You're only choristers; stop saying you're young people.'[22] As actors in the socialist revolution, Zéphirin's young men recall their militant past in the Party's youth wing, while most of the choristers are quick to point out the power of youth to bring down those in power. In fact, the analogy between political youth and ecclesiastical youth is clear. This is confirmed by the head of the Church:

> The *Union de la Jeunesse Socialiste Congolaise* is the nursery of the Parti Congolais du Travail. This is where the party's leaders are drawn from. These young people receive training there, but they are powerful and capable of bringing down leaders. At some point, they join the Party's Central Committee. If the members of the Central Committee are not morally exemplary, the young people do everything they can to destabilise them. There are many examples of this in the history of our country. And it's

> the same in the Church. If the ministers of religion are no longer in line with doctrine, if they no longer respect term limits, the young people [in the Church] will do the same [as the young people in the Party]. The situation has become more serious since the appointment of a Secretary for Youth. No, he's not a young person; he's a chorister.[23]

Prophetic youth, which I consider to be an 'avatar of socialist youth' (Biyela 2022: 263-68), reproduces political society. It reappropriated state names in the attributions of choir leaders. Called the 'first youth' or 'youth secretary', the hierarchical authority of the choirs of the Prophetic Church embodies, on a denominational scale, the power of the highest personality in youth politics. All these reappropriations may come as a surprise insofar as the materialism of the political regime concerned is opposed to religious idealism. In fact, this indifference of space reflects a 'zone of uncertainty' (Tonda 1988: 74) where apparently incompatible 'ideologies' coexist; a troubled space which seems to contain the conflict between the religious denominations and the party-state.

In addition to the mechanisms of organization and operation, the confessional reproductions of political society can be seen in the discursive practices that reactivate Marxism-Leninism. President Marien Ngouabi, who was under threat of a putsch, greatly encouraged these linguistic performances. He used animal metaphors to castigate the 'henchmen of imperialism'. His speech on 23 February 1973 and the meeting on 23 November of the same year condemned 'those who play the tortoise […] on one side the shell, on the other the carapace' (Ngouabi 1975: 281, 307). Within the Church of Zéphirin, the expression 'double-shelled turtles' is often used at youth gatherings, which warn against any betrayal: 'There are chameleons and double-shelled turtles among us. On the one hand, they have the shell; on the other, they have the carapace. They'll be found out in the end.'

These recycled political allegories reclaim a history marked by treachery and unpredictable coups d'état. To test the loyalty of the pastors they choose as leaders, young people do not hesitate to use verbal threats, as was the case when the new communal pastor of Pointe-Noire was appointed: 'We have chosen you. If you go forward, we will follow you. If you stop, we'll point at you. If you back down, we'll shoot you.'[24] Ritualized in the diatribe of an ecclesiastical youth leader, the injunction to fidelity recalls the warnings issued by socialist youth to Ngouabi: 'Comrade President: if you go forward, we will follow you; if you stop, we will point at you; if you go backward, we will shoot you' (Mianzoukouta 2012: 187)

Soldier-like metaphors, indicative of political militarization, flood the discourse, including in official documents. Young protesters, for example, are referred to as 'rebels', and pastors as 'generals' or 'chiefs of staff'. Military language was also used to refer to the 'troops who foiled night-time coups d'état carried out by enemy stables with a view to controlling the temples '485. These verbal practices show how sorcery discourse amalgamates the implicit with an internalized political history. Over and above these spontaneous verbalizations, certain procedures

from the revolutionary period consisted of mutual and perilous denunciations, when opposing tendencies set themselves against each other by summoning a State reputed to be repressive. This was the case of a pastor imprisoned for having been falsely accused of being associated with the Front for the Liberation of the State of Cabinda. This was also the case for choristers described as 'gangsters' associated with 'groups of young people from the Mvoumvou neighbourhood known to be hostile to the President of the Republic' (Biyela 2018b: 61). The result is 'police interventions [that] take place, weapons in hand, in places of worship', while 'the presumed rebels are regularly held in police custody' (ibid.). In fact, the reactivation of socialist governance is producing new 'troublemakers' in the form of reprisals. By recycling Marxist-Leninist excesses, the Church of Zéphirin thus illustrates 'the order of transgression' (Yengo 2018: 2).

Conclusion: Understanding Power in the Historical Context of Lifestyles

At the end of these factual and analytical developments, one thing is clear: the historicity of the intertwining of powers in Congo-Brazzaville sheds light on political action at different levels. The post-colonial Congolese state, which took shape through Christian actors who were among the fathers of political independence, was imbued with lineage, political, and religious logics. Prophet Lassy and his spiritual heirs inscribed the three registers in the same locus of power: prophetic charisma capable of promoting or destroying a political career, lineage-based logics for seizing power, and the production of a repressive Nganga state.

Beyond the religious syncretisms often understood as 'a mixture of Christianity and pagan superstitions',[25] the prophetic churches instead widen their field of action when they update the political fabric and history of citizens. They illustrate the way in which the State conditioned individuals capable of regenerating practices of ideological materialism and political militarization. In fact, the 'bottom-up' approach to power shows how 'the historicity of politics is the historicity of lifestyles, which interested Max Weber and Michel Foucault' (Bayart 2022: 69).

Lifestyles may be embodied in a protocol designed to limit the researcher's freedom, in the light of the surveillance methods of the Marxist-Leninist regime and the lineage rules of submission (Biyela 2020:19). The paradoxical injunctions of Congolese prophecies, whose members tame and instrumentalize the authoritarian state, reveal this same historicity of lifestyles. It is in this sense that we can see the emergence of new figures of the political and the religious, figures who produce religion as a theatre of political and lineage actions.[26] The textures of power in Central Africa ultimately reveal the dynamics of the Christian churches, which appear as particular modulations of the post-colonial state.

Notes

1 This chapter is based on data collected between 2013 and 2023 in Congo-Brazzaville, in the Church of Zéphirin (or Prophetic Christianity in Africa, abbreviated as CPA), in particular,. This prophetic church was founded in 1948 by Simon Zéphirin Lassy, who was a Pointe-Noire native. I also rely on the Congregation Archives of Saint-Esprit in the Paris region. Some of the survey data has already been analyzed and published in the work *Politique du prophétisme au Congo-Brazzaville* (Biyela 2022).

2 Interview with the children of Prophet Lassy, Pointe-Noire August 2017.

3 Katali, who died in 1986, was one of the eleven members of the Party's Military Committee, the military junta that took power immediately after the assassination of President Ngouabi.

4 Below I will show the political repercussions of the unofficial matrimonial alliance between the Minister of the Interior and one of Lassy's daughters, as regards the prophetic succession crisis.

5 Interview with the patriarch J.-B. Moutou, Pointe-Noire, October 2015.

6 Interview with Alphonse, Pointe-Noire, April 2014.

7 Massamba-Débat was deposed by Ngouabi in 1968.

8 Abraham Okoko-Esseau (1995: 149) considers the Church of Zéphirin to be 'a national prophetic sect'.

9 As mentioned above, a daughter of the Prophet was the 'second office' of the Minister of the Interior. Dated 4 April 1983, the official document declaring Pastor André the winner is entitled: 'Procès-verbal relatif aux élections organisées par le ministère de l'Intérieur pour le choix du président de l'Église du Christianisme prophétique en Afrique' (Zéphirin Church archives).

10 L.-G. Sakala, CPA archives. The expression 'religious mass' is socialist phraseology'.

11 Although he was expelled from the prophetic residence, Pastor Sakala was rehabilitated by the State as leader of his movement from 1986 until his death in 2001. This period of two state-recognized tendencies was officially called 'peaceful coexistence', in reference to the two political blocs of the Cold War.

12 Amongst these church leaders is the high magistrate Joseph Tchiyoko, who was invested in 2009 in the presence of a representative of the wife of the President of the Republic and other political figures. A bailiff made the investiture official.

13 Archive document, letter from the CPA to the Minister of Justice, 25 February 2015.

14 CPA Archives, letter dated 13 October 2014.

15 Pasteur J. Tchiyoko, letter addressed to the representative of the Prophet's relatives and children Brazzaville, 13 October 2014 (CPA archives). In addition to replying to the prophets relatives, J. Tchiyoko had to explain himself to the Minister of Justice, his professional guardian: 'The high office you hold in our country unfortunately obliges you to sometimes receive letters from ill-intentioned people who clog up your office…' (CPA archives, letter from J. Tchiyoko to the Minister of Justice, Brazzaville, 5 February 2015).

16 Pasteur J.-B. Moutou, *Fiche à la très haute attention de monsieur le ministre de l'Intérieur*, Pointe-Noire, 25 February 2015 (CPA archives).

17 Interview with Pasteur Pouabou, Pointe-Noire, October 2015.

18 Comments of Pasteur Y. Lassy, the Prophet, Tchintanzi, July 2017.

19 Interview with Pastor Ambroise, Pointe-Noire, October 2015.

20 Interview with Hubert, Pointe-Noire, September 2015.

21 Pasteur Antoine, meeting with young people described as 'rebellious', Pointe-Noire, October 2014.

22 *Ibid.*

23 Interview with Pasteur Antoine, Pointe-Noire, August 2017.

24 Comments from chorister Fridolin to Pasteur Makaya, Pointe-Noire, August 2010.

25 Adrien Olsthoorn, Archives of the Congrégation du Saint-Esprit, *Vicariat apostolique de Pointe-Noire. Chronique de la station, Pointe-Noire, 1er juillet 1948 au 30 juin 1949*, file 3J1.17b 4, box no. 386 – B, p. 125.

[26] See Biyela 2022: 271-308 for a discussion of the emergence of new political and religious figures as part of the 'sponsor-state syndrome'. See also Jean-François Bayart's analysis and commentary on the Church of Zéphirin, which is 'at the intersection of prophetic charisma, its lineage-based reproduction in the invisible, and the public policy of the State, which the religious authorities often solicit themselves to settle their differences'.' (Bayart 2021: 144; 2022: 31).

CHAPTER 5.5

The Fabric of Conspiracy Narratives: Freemasonry as *Anusocratie*, Cameroon

Rogers Orock, Peter Geschiere

Introduction

Decolonizing has become an urgent necessity in all walks of life, and certainly in academia. However, for academics one important challenge is to avoid the binary tendency inherent to the notion: colonial versus what is seen as authentic to a certain context. For activists, the first necessity may be to peel off colonial layers. But for academics the challenge becomes rather to disentangle the complex articulations that have developed in everyday life between colonial and local forms.[1] The notion of texture – evoking processes of weaving different threads into a solid fabric – is particularly helpful for this. In their recent book *Tisser le temps politique au Maroc* (2020) Béatrice Hibou and Mohamed Tozy show how the notion of weaving can help to overcome the seduction of binary readings. For them the ease with which neo-liberalism was adopted in Morocco is related to its resonance with certain elements from the Cherifian empire. Yet their notion of 'weaving' is not about two successive modes of governing in Moroccan history, an imperial one and the subsequent nation-state. It is rather about the contemporaneity of the two modes, in precarious mutual articulations into a tight but constantly shifting fabric. For them it is this osmosis of different *référentiels* that works toward a naturalization of present-day modes of government – not in the sense of a status quo but rather as an *Einverständnis* (common understanding) à la Weber. Their fine-grained analysis in terms of weaving can help to understand how things are becoming plausible, appearing as 'natural'.

Their last point is inspiring for this article, since we propose to offer a brief analysis of a popular conspiracy narrative hidden behind the moral panic in Cameroon after 2005 over a supposed proliferation of homosexuality. Why did this become abruptly such a public issue precisely in this country? Strikingly, the initiative came from society, not from the government; moreover, as in neighbouring Gabon, it manifested itself as an attack on the state elite – in stark contrast to developments elsewhere in the continent.

The wider relevance of our theme may be clear. All over the world conspiracy theories seem to be booming, becoming a major factor in people's reactions to inequalities and changes, and thus adding new challenges to studying power. The explosion of social media is clearly an important factor in this. Thus, conspiracy studies have become an equally booming field in academia. But over the last decades, with the *hausse* in 'alternative facts' and 'fake data' there is an interesting

switch in this field, reflecting academics' struggle of how to deal with this tsunami of plot-thinking. In the Cold War context – when conspiracy studies emerged as a separate field (Hofstedter 1964) – the main question seemed to concern issues of truth. Unmasking such theories as false was supposed to help to debunk them. But recently the central question seems to have become why do people accept these often quite wild ideas as self-evident? The first step should be listening and trying to understand these alternative views instead of debunking them (see, e.g., Harambam 2020 and 2021). A central theme in the conspiracy theory on homosexuality in Cameroon is that the national elite, deeply into Freemasonry, submits young men to anal intercourse as a condition for getting a job, thus ruining the nation. This may seem a wild rumour but it is as difficult to debunk as rumours, equally wild, in the West about QAnon or Pizzagate. Clearly, demonstrating that such rumours are not true, does not make people stop believing them. To what extent then can an approach in terms of 'weaving' or 'textures of power' help to arrive at a more open understanding? The kind of power generated by popular conspiracy narratives has become a major challenge for academics, especially if questions of truth and false are not the crux.[2] Our challenge is rather to develop a closer understanding of how processes of 'naturalization' work. How can conspiracy theories acquire an allure of being natural and self-evident explanations? Studying these stories as historical assemblages of widely different elements might offer a solution.

A Moral Panic – Cameroonian Perspectives on Homosexuality[3]

The sudden explosion in Cameroon around 2005/6 of a moral panic about a supposed proliferation of homosexuality seems at first sight the umpteenth example of a general trend throughout postcolonial Africa.[4] Like elsewhere, people on the ground tend to explain this proliferation as the fruit of a colonial conspiracy, imposing a western vice on a pure continent. However, in Cameroon and Gabon the national elite is supposed to have played a key role through their affiliation with Freemasonry. The crux in this linking is the association – quite common in Francophone contexts – of the brotherhood with same-sex rituals during the initiation of its freshmen, elite persons supposedly imposing such rituals on young men eager to get a job. Thus, people speak of the elites as *les pédés de la République* (the faggots of the Republic) and complain that the country is run by an *anusocratie* (rule of the anus).[5] In a wider perspective this view does correspond to the current idea in present-day Africa of homosexuality as a colonial imposition – after all, Freemasonry was implanted in the continent under colonialism. Yet, the vision of national Freemasons as some sort of mediators had important practical consequences in Cameroon and Gabon – notably that homophobia automatically means denouncing the national elite. It can be seen as an attack from society on

the state – in contrast to other countries where the regime is rather riding the wave. Interestingly the Cameroonian elite seems to be at a loss how to defend themselves. After initial hesitations, the regime of President Biya chose to increase harassment of 'homosexuals' – that is, those who did not have the money or the contacts to avoid arrest during intensified police razzias.

Much has been written recently about the sudden explosion of homophobia and its distinctive trajectory in Cameroon (see, e.g., Awondo 2012; 2019; Awondo et al. 2012; Nyeck 2013; Machikou 2018; Geschiere & Orock 2020). From as early as 2000 there were signs that the authorities were taking the criminalization of same-sex practices more seriously than before.[6] But the Christmas sermon of Archbishop Tonye Bakot in 2005 is generally seen as a turning point. His Excellency attacked the elite – many of whom (including the president of Cameroon, Paul Biya, and several of his ministers) were present at the mass – for sodomizing young men. This immediately drew considerable attention in the press (see, e.g., Mbembe 2020a). Within two months, this was followed by the so-called *affaire des listes*, with several newspapers publishing lists of 'suspected' or even 'prominent' homosexuals, targeting leading figures in government and other areas of public life (including in the arts and sport).

The events that followed *Monseigneur* Bakot's audacious Christmas sermon showed also how self-evident it had become to many Cameroonians to associate 'homosexuality' with Freemasonry as the secret behind the elite's power and spectacular enrichment. A quick example:

> In 2009 one of us (Geschiere) participated in a well-attended conference in Yaoundé at the prestigious Catholic University of Central Africa. The topic was medical pluralism and the paper was on witchcraft and healing. But in the discussion, homosexuality turned up as a major question, and in a striking configuration. After Geschiere's presentation, people from the audience circulated questions on a small pad of paper. The first one that Geschiere opened asked 'When will you Europeans stop exporting your forms of *sorcellerie* to Africa: Freemasonry, Rosicrucianism and homosexuality?

In a very different context but equally striking were the reactions in Cameroon to a documentary, broadcasted on 24 January on French television channel *France* 24 on the rise of homophobia in Cameroon.[7] Reactions in Cameroon were furious. Journalists challenged the authorities to mount a robust resistance to 'homosexual lobbies all over the world' seeking to 'impose' upon Cameroon the 'odious act' of same-sex practice.[8] Especially striking was the reaction of Zacharie Biloa Ayissi, a retired police superintendent, who later became active as a journalist with the newspaper *Nouvelle Afrique* that also published various lists of homosexuals in the country. When asked if he thought that the *France 24* TV documentary was part

of a broader conspiracy to prepare Cameroonians' minds towards accepting the decriminalization of homosexuality in the country, Ayissi answered:

> It is not a composition but an intentional policy! You do not know what kind of ravage homosexuality has caused in our country. Initially, the devolution of power in Cameroon was arranged through the anal canal since it was Aujoulat who was the real boss here. This gentleman has done a lot of evil among our leading political class from yesterday and now. Everyone who said 'No' when Aujoulat had asked to sodomize him was quickly locked out from the circuits of power.[9]

Apparently, Ayissi sees a French conspiracy and it is telling that he places Dr Louis Paul Aujoulat at the centre of this. Over the last decades, this medical doctor cum politician from the end of the colonial period (1940s and 1950s) made a spectacular return in the public debate in Cameroon on homosexuality. In the 1950's and – more behind the screens – still in the 1960s this Aujoulat played a crucial role in the painful decolonization of Cameroun under French control. Towards the end of the last century, he seemed to have been almost forgotten. However, this changed dramatically after 2000 when Aujoulat re-emerged but now as a 'homo-masonic figure' (Nyeck 2013, Nken 2014).

More recently the association of high-class 'homosexuals' with Freemasonry and other 'sects' was most dramatically denounced by Charles Ateba Eyene's 2012 book that created quite a stir in the country and not only because of its ominous title: *Le Cameroun sous la dictature des loges, des sectes, du magico-anal et des réseaux mafieux* (Cameroon under the dictatorship of the masonic lodges, the sects, the magico-anal, and the mafia networks).[10] The book triggered an excited discussion in the media (newspapers, blogs, etc.). Headlines like 'Ateba Eyene: Paul Biya is guilty of ritual crimes' suggested that finally someone who was roughly an insider was telling the truth about the secrets behind national politics. Two years later–and one year after a second edition of the book was published–the sudden death of the author (only 42 years old) again triggered all sorts of speculation.

The content of the book is in line with the rumours discussed above. The first chapters on Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry are followed by a chapter titled '*L'Homosexualité ou la dimension satanique des loges*' (Homosexuality or the satanic dimension of the lodges), which in no uncertain terms elaborates upon the somewhat enigmatic term *magico-anal* from the book's title. The author argues that President Biya was first a member of the Freemasons but switched later to Rosicrucianism and asserts a link between Freemasonry, Rosicrucianism, and homosexuality (*pédé)* with the comment that 'the devil has entered the lodges'. A recurring argument is – again – that homosexual practices have become crucial for gaining access to higher positions throughout Cameroon: even in the army 'non-homosexual military men are marginalized' (Ateba Eyene 2012: 73).

This conspiracy narrative – which we conceptualize in our 2024 book as 'a triangle' comprising homosexuality, Freemasonry, and illicit enrichment, with 'witchcraft' in the middle – can be studied as a historical assemblage going through all sorts of changes. The kaleidoscopic character of this triangle relates elements from various backgrounds – colonial, 'traditional', and post-colonial; yet it is presented by its followers as tightly hanging together and therefore utterly convincing. All the more important to emphasize that this apparently self-evident discourse emerged only recently as the product of important historical shifts.

The Return of Louis-Paul Aujoulat[11]

In the quote above from Biloa Ayissi about the transfer of power in Cameroon having passed through the 'anal canal' he is referring to another recurrent theme in the recent debate on homosexuality, that of a 'homosexual pact' between Aujoulat, France's strategist of the decolonization of Cameroon and Ahmadou Ahidjo, the country's first President, to whom France gave power at the time of independence in 1960. This pact is supposed to explain Ahidjo's extreme fidelity towards his patron throughout his political career. Parallel rumours circulate concerning Ahidjo's successor, Paul Biya, the current president of Cameroon, who is supposed to have been in a similar pact with both Ahidjo and Aujoulat.[12] This is cited as an explanation of Ahidjo's enigmatic choice of Biya as his successor in 1982. Aujoulat would have forced Ahidjo to take Biya as his close collaborator. In turn, Ahidjo would have selected Biya as his successor only after concluding another 'homosexual pact' that would ensure the latter's loyalty (Kuoh 1991:116). In these images, Freemasonry is added as some sort of inevitable afterthought, often directly associated to the occult. This idea of a pact has become a recurrent motif in the public opinion, sometimes referred to as '*fidélisation*' (bondage) and '*faire partie de l'orchestre*' or '*de la mutuelle*' (literally 'being part of the orchestra' or 'the association'). As S.N. Nyeck (2016) remarks, the popularization of rumours about Aujoulat constitute 'a political narrative' intended to underline that homosexuality is of European provenance and therefore 'un-African'. Thus, the Aujoulat figure made an unexpected comeback after 2005 when he became a lynch-pin in the emerging conspiracy rumour linking Freemasonry, homosexuality, and illicit enrichment.

Who was Louis-Paul Aujoulat? And how could he be attributed such a crucial role? Aujoulat first visited Cameroon in 1936 when – as a young Catholic in his early twenties and recently married – he had finished his medical studies and founded the *Association des Laics Universitaires et Chrétiens Missionnaires (*AD LUCEM). Once in Cameroon, Aujoulat founded the AD LUCEM hospital in Efok (36km from Yaoundé). He worked in close collaboration with the Catholic Church but always gave priority to local needs. After 1946, he embarked on a political career, becoming deputy for Cameroon in the French National Assembly. Moreover, he

held the position of secretary of state for France's *Outre-Mer* (Overseas) Territories and other ministerial positions in various French cabinets between 1949 and 1955. Between 1946 and 1956, he was also elected member and then chair of the Cameroonian Representative Assembly (*Assemblée représentative du Cameroun*, ARCAM). However, in 1954, he was outvoted as ATCAM chair and replaced by a Cameroonian politician, Soppo Priso. The final blow to his formal political career came in 1956, when he was beaten in the elections for the Cameroonian seat in the French National Assembly. He then retired from parliamentary politics, still holding various positions at the World Health Organization until his death in 1973 and remaining a highly influential person through his close links among the emerging Cameroonian elite, both during their study days in France and after their return to Cameroon (Lachenal and Taithe 2009).

Despite general appreciation in Cameroon for his medical work, Aujoulat was the subject of fierce criticisms because of his untiring efforts to shape what he called a 'responsible' elite willing to work with the French towards increasing autonomy for the colonies – independence remained a forbidden word for him till far into the 1950s. His views were deeply influenced by the vision General De Gaulle articulated at the 1944 Brazzaville conference. During the preceding war years, the Central African colonies had played a crucial role in the consolidation of De Gaulle's *La France Libre*. For the General this meant a deep attachment to France's African colonies, making it a priority to identify 'moderate' elites with whom the French could work towards safeguarding *la Françafrique* as the *pré carré* (a well-protected sphere of influence) for the metropolis in a global context in which some form of decolonization seemed to have become inevitable.[13] Retaining a special link with the African colonies, which was seen as vital for maintaining France's status as a world power, was to mark the French version of decolonization for decades to come.

In Cameroon, however, this proved to be a particularly difficult project. At the end of the Second World War, a radically nationalist movement, the UPC (*Union des Populations du Cameroun)* started to claim immediate and full independence, appealing to the UN to terminate the French mandate over the territory. The colonial government reacted by branding the movement as 'communist'. Yet Ruben Um Nyobe, the charismatic UPC leader succeeded in quickly mobilizing considerable support both inside the country and internationally. When increasing harassment failed to contain the movement, the French officially dissolved it in 1955. Excluded from elections, Um Nyobe saw no other possibility than to start a guerrilla army in the densely forested area between Douala and Yaoundé in 1956.

The marginalization of the UPC created a void for setting up some kind of Cameroonian political autonomy under French control. By stepping in to fill this void, Louis-Paul Aujoulat's political role was to become crucial. In 1951, he founded his own party, the *Bloc démocratique Cameroonais* (BDC), mainly based in the region around Yaoundé where he had been active as a medical doctor. He then

spread his net wider, acting as a patron for Cameroonian students of diverse origin in France. As their mentor, he held them to a very strict program: they should *work* and not dabble in politics. It was in this context that Aujoulat became the patron of future leaders like Ahmadou Ahidjo and Paul Biya. Opponents, especially UPC protagonists, saw Aujoulat, even after his departure from Cameroon in 1956 (after his unexpected defeat in this year's elections) as the main architect behind the strenuous French effort to eliminate their movement and promote more 'moderate' allies who were willing to work towards the idea of a *Françafrique*.[14]

To understand the fierce hatred that many Cameroonians (particularly UPC supporters) nowadays still express in their attacks on Aujoulat, it is important to consider the struggle in the fifties and the sixties of the colonial and the postcolonial governments against the UPC.[15] Um Nyobe launched his guerilla movement a little over a year after Dien Bien Phu, the 1954 French debacle in Vietnam that seemed to spell the end of its colonial empire. In the years that followed, the shocking harshness of the struggle in Algeria garnered ever more attention. This wider context is crucial in understanding to what lengths the French military, but also the politicians (socialists as much as *Gaullistes*) were prepared to go to prevent another debacle. A recent study of the UPC war by Thomas Deltombe, Manuel Domergue and Jacob Tatsitsa (2011) – shows in full detail the enormous investment military leaders were prepared to make to quench this relatively small-scale conflict. Calling it a 'revolutionary war', the French launched a mix of military and psychological violence, separating the UPC fighters, interning the rest of the population in camps, and brainwashing them.[16] Um Nyobe's guerilla movement in the forest of the *Sanaga Maritime* was smothered in two years, but this required an amazing military effort in view of the relatively small, poorly armed group of fighters in the bush.[17] On 13 September 1958, Um Nyobe was surprised by some soldiers when he was fleeing – his *maquis* (hiding place) having been betrayed – and he was shot on the spot. A parallel UPC guerilla movement in the West Province in the land of the Bamiléké, who had acquired an ambiguous reputation in the rest of the country because of their economic dynamism and migratory success[18]– resisted much longer. Their last military leader, Ernest Ouandié, was captured and executed only in 1970.

Little wonder, then, that Aujoulat became a favourite target for ideological attacks by all those who saw with increasing indignation that, in Cameroon, the French scenario for excluding the 'real' nationalists from the process of independence seemed to succeed against all odds. Aujoulat played a crucial role in raising a collaborative Cameroonian elite, first openly and, after 1956, behind the scenes. His often-mentioned hospitality for African students in his big house in Paris was ridiculed as the place where he 'held court'. Opponents were convinced that he singlehandedly decided how scholarships for Cameroonians – who would get one and whose would be withdrawn. The despised cooperative elites were called *les Aujoulatistes* or even *les femmes des colons* (the colonials' wives), and the BDC, Aujoulat's party was nicknamed *La Bande des Cons* (The Band of Simpletons).[19]

The tone of such attacks became even more bitter after independence when Ahidjo, against all expectations, succeeded in maintaining himself in power. In the first years after independence, the stubborn UPC guerilla movement in the West Province constituted a serious challenge to the emerging independent state. The rebellion was supported by a vociferous UPC leadership in exile, and by Bamileke migrants in other parts of the country. Due to heavy military support by the French, the guerilla movement was gradually contained. After 1962 Ahidjo maintained the UPC as an omnipresent spectre to build an authoritarian one-party state. Qualifying any form of opposition as 'subversion' that had to be forcefully suppressed, the regime used the past divisiveness as a pretext to justify the unity of the Cameroonian nation behind the President.[20] For the UPC this situation created a stalemate. The party was completely silenced inside the country, but its supporters outside became even more vocal. launching attack after attack in pamphlets, articles, radio talks, and books.

The fierce attacks on Ahidjo in the first decades after independence, however, lacked any reference to homosexuality, or to a homosexual pact between him and Aujoulat. Although Aujoulat was depicted as the evil genius in the background, there was no mention of shameful intimacies. A good example lies in Mongo Beti's attack on the Ahidjo regime in his 1972 book novel *Main-basse sur le Cameroun* ('The Plundering of Cameroon'). Written in exile and in reaction to the execution in 1970 of Ernest Ouandié, the last guerrilla leader still active inside Cameroon, the book reads as an explosion of the author's pent-up rage about what independence under French tutorship had brought his fatherland. Its publication was initially blocked in France by Jacques Foccart himself (de Gaulle's *Monsieur Afrique* then still in function under President Georges Pompidou), a clear sign of how damaging the attack was supposed to be for the Ahidjo regime. Beti emphasizes that, in the 1950s, Aujoulat became almighty in politics due to his combined positions as deputy in Cameroon and Minister in France (Beti 1972:41). According to Beti, Ahidjo's sudden rise to power was not a result of the latter's own merit, but only of Aujoulat's unfailing support. Although Beti emphasizes how Ahidjo belonged to 'the inner core of Aujoulat's followers' (ibid. p.42), further personal details are clearly seen as politically irrelevant by the author of *Main-basse sur le Cameroun*.

Twelve years later, a similar portrait of Ahidjo and his dependence on Aujoulat and the French was published by Abel Eyinga, then Professor of Law in Algiers (Eyinga 1984). As a politician himself Eyinga (1923-2014) had developed sympathies as Beti had for the UPC. However, he followed a different trajectory. In the 1950s, he belonged to Aujoulat's *écurie* (fr.: stable (of horses), in the sense of a team) in Paris and after independence he was appointed to an important position in Ahidjo's government. Yet he soon exhibited 'subversive' tendencies – as this was called in Ahidjo's days – and had to leave the country in 1961. As a former *Aujoulatiste,* Eyinga was able to fill in Beti's portrait of Ahidjo with many more details from their life in Paris. Like Beti, he insisted that Ahidjo owed his rise to Aujoulat rather

than to his own merits. Although Eyinga goes into personal details, mentioning that during their time in Paris, Ahidjo (1953-57) was generally considered to be 'the youngest and the laziest parliamentarian' and characterized him as *un satellite indigène de l'occupant colonial* (a native satellite of the colonial occupant (Eyinga 1984: 120, 129, and 153)), he does not make any reference to homosexuality, or homosexual alliance.

Strong denunciations against Ahidjo and Aujoulat can be found in Ngouo Woungly-Massaga's writings of the same period.[21] Woungly-Massaga, alias Commander Kissamba (1936-2020), was a UPC-*iste* of the first hour who retained his formal links with the movement, throughout many splits and reconciliations. In his earlier writings, Woungly-Massaga depicts both Ahidjo and Biya as products of Aujoulat's team (Woungly-Massga 1984:14). Yet he does not make any reference to a homosexual pact that would secretly link these three men. In his case, this is striking, since in a subsequent publication of 2004 (a long series of interviews with the Cameroonian historian Daniel Abwa) Woungly-Massaga became very explicit on this point. In the book,[22] the word homosexuality appears only twice, but quite bluntly and with considerable emphasis, adding a new aspect to Aujoulat's central role among Cameroonians in Paris:

> … We recognized these *aujoulatistes* (and they were quite numerous) as fellow Cameroonians who were ready to do anything to have money or to be promised a post or a degree, included and notably this homosexuality. We called them the colonials' wives.

On the same page Woungly-Massaga states that it was still Aujoulat who imposed Biya on Ahidjo as his closest collaborator and successor. In a later passage, the author makes a link with Freemasonry to explain why he himself was always kept at bay by the regime:

> Who am I? A mystic Christian, like my father. I was never a member of a philosophical, religious or whatsoever sect. And if you add that I am not homosexual, you will understand the lively hostility of the political class of this neo-colonial power against commander Kissamba (Abwa 2004: 47 and 215).

It is important to underline that Woungly-Massaga launched this new version of the Aujoulat rumour at a time when 'homosexuality' was emerging as a major political issue in Cameroon. The same applied to Freemasonry which Woungly-Massaga smuggles in here as intrinsically related ('I was never a member of … whatsoever sect… and not a homosexual'). This element has an equally tortuous history in Cameron. Introduced, as elsewhere in Francophone Africa during the colonial period, it played at first a prominent role under colonial rule, to the chagrin of Catholic missionaries. However, the fierce persecution of the brotherhood

under the Vichy regime by Maréchal Pétain, who bore it a personal grudge, made the major French lodges reluctant after the War to assume as prominent a political role as they had played under the Third Republic. It was only with the 1981 socialist electoral victory of Mitterand – who owed this victory in part to the support of the Grand Orient, the major French lodge – that the Masonic network became again omnipresent in the politics of France-Afrique.[23]

Striking in the rumour mongering around Aujoulat is its historicity – new elements are added and old ones fade depending on the historical context. The cohesiveness of the elements of the conspiracy narrative emerging after 2005, linking Freemasonry, homosexuality and illicit enrichment, maybe self-evident to its adherents – 'of course' the three go together – but the above shows that historically their close articulation in popular thinking seems to be quite recent, as a product of quite accidental convergences.

Analysis: Texture, Weaving and the 'Click' of Conspiracy Thinking.

Concepts of weaving and texture relate strongly to the foregoing historicizing (compare also Geschiere and Orock 2020; Orock and Geschiere forthcoming) of the conspiracy narrative about homosexuality and Freemasonry that erupted so abruptly in Cameroon after 2005. Such historicizing required a patient unravelling of a complex genealogy branching off in all directions – elements woven together in changing configurations. Many other leads could be followed (the impact of general access to internet, the close association people in Africa make between same-sex intercourse and illicit enrichment).[24] But the above may already have indicated that this conspiracy theory – like others – can be studied as kaleidoscopic bringing together a broad range of elements from very different backgrounds.[25] The explanation of Cameroon's crisis as due to a moral corruption can be read as a fabric formed by weaving all sorts of threads into a tight texture.[26] The advantage of such an approach to power is that it brings out its heterogeneous character: it encourages the study of the historical articulation of different elements, and runs counter to monocausal explanations.

But one element in the above might be more difficult to accommodate in metaphors of weaving and texture, Historically, the power of conspiracy theories seems to rest on what can be called a 'click', the sudden bringing together of elements that before seemed to be unrelated. This element of surprise – revealing a link that was hidden before – seems to be vital for an 'of course' feeling among followers. As said, to its adherents such theories certainly appear to be a tight fabric: 'of course' Freemasons spread homosexuality, just as it is self-evident that a lobby of paedophiles – feeding on innocent children's blood – rules in the US Capitol. The fact that Obama and his clique often ordered cheese sandwiches when meetings went on into the night seemed to be harmless, until it was revealed that cheese sandwiches

stood for child-victims whose blood was to be used for making 'adrenochrome' which these paedophiles need to restore their energy. Such revelations – offering access to links that remain secret to the many – give the initiated a feeling of belonging. This also explains the quick rise and fall of conspiracy theories. Just as Aujoulat's metamorphosis from the evil genius robbing Cameroon's nationalists of independence into a homo-masonic figure, abruptly took place 30 years after his death. Such conspiracy theories may present themselves as a tight fabric but, in historical perspective, they turn out to be precarious and constantly shifting assemblages.

Notes

1 See also Bernault 2019.

2 See Luise White's pioneering 2000 study

3 This section and the following contain re-written fragments from our earlier articles (Orock and Geschiere 2021 and Geschiere and Orock 2020)

4 The emergence of homosexuality as an urgent public issue came somewhat earlier (1990s) in southern Africa, notably in Zimbabwe and Namibia. Especially after 2005 the unrest about this issue spread throughout the continent

5 See Ndjio (2012).

6 See also Gueboguo (2006) and Corey-Boulet (2019). In Cameroon, such criminalization was only effected after independence (1960). As in all French ex-colonies, same-sex intercourse was not mentioned as a criminal offence in the laws the new state inherited from its former metropolis. It was only in 1972 that 'homosexuality' was criminalized by a presidential decree (Ordinance 347 signed by Ahmadou Ahidjo). In 2010, this ordinance was replaced by a special law passed by Cameroon's National Assembly (law no. 2010/012 of 12 December 2010).

7 *France 24*, 'Cameroun, le calvaire des homosexuels,' 24 January 2014 <https://www.france24.com/fr/20140117-reporters-cameroun-homosexuels-prison-gay-asile-justice> 20 January 2015).

8 Such as Sismondi Barlev Bidjocka (journalist and leader of a youth anti-gay vigilante in Yaoundé) and Jean-Pierre Amougou Belinga (the controversial publisher of *l'Anecdote* newspaper that also published a list of homosexuals.

9 See Francis Bajeck, 'Affaire du documentaire de *France 24* sur l'homosexualité: Issa Tchiroma Bakary donne la position du gouvernement,' *AfricaPresse.com*, 24 January 2014<http://www.africapresse.com/affaire-du-documentaire-de-france-24-sur-lhomosexualite-issa-tchiroma-bakary-donne-la-position-du-gouvernement/> (10 February 2015). The interview gained wide circulation through *Cameroon-Info.Net*, an online platform for information for Cameroonians. The web link to this interview on *Cameroon-Info.Net* is not working anymore. But the interview can still be accessed through other Cameroon online information sources such as *Camernews.com*, 'Zacharie Biloa Ayissi (Journaliste et ancien commissaire de police),' 9 February 2014 <https://www.camernews.com/zacharie-biloa-ayissi-journaliste-et-ancien-commissaire-de-police-idriss-deby-itno-eu-loutrecuidance-de-traiter-vertement-le-president-biya-en-france-meme-si-cela-na-pas-ete-rendu-public/ (10 June 2017).

10 Charles Ateba Eyene, *Le Cameroun sous la dictature des loges, des sectes, du magico-anal et des réseaux mafieux* (Saint-Paul, Yaounde, 2012).

11 Elements from the following section were earlier published in African Affairs (Orock and Geschiere 2021)

[12] On Biya see, e.g., Ndzana Seme, a former bank director and journalist at *L'Effort camerounais* <https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=841020169384225&id=755520261267550> (20 January 2019); see also Ebale Angounou (on Internet invariably introduced as 'le petit ami de Biya' in his confessional pamphlet *Sang pour sang: le vrai visage de Paul Biya, la mort de Jeanne-Irène, le pacte avec Ahidjo* (2007), <https://www.lc-doc.com/document/le-vrai-visage-de-paul-biya-la-mort-de-jeanne-irene-le-pacte-avec-ahidjo/5253 > (10 June 2017).

[13] See Richard Joseph (1978) and Achille Mbembe (2020b)). The term *pré carré* was launched in the 17th century by Sébastien Le Prestre de Vauban, the fortification expert of Louis XIV.

[14] See Lachenal and Taithe 2009; Nken 2014. Also Mongo Beti 1972: p. 42; Abel Eyinga1984; Woungly-Massaga 2004.

[15] Thomas Deltombe, Manuel Domergue and Jacob Tatsitsa 2011. See also Thomas Deltombe, Manuel Domergue and Jacob Tatsitsa 2016; Richard A. Joseph 1977; and Achille Mbembe, 1996. Furthermore the discussion in *Politique Africaine* (126, 2012/2 pp 185-205) of Deltombe *et al., Kamerun !* which gives a succinct summary of different views of the war and its meaning for French colonial policies.

[16] Deltombe and others 2011: p. 250. This concept of a *guerre révolutionnaire* was developed by French military for Algeria in 1957 and applied in Cameroon.

[17] Deltombe *et al Kamerun !* 2011, ch. 15 and 16, notably p. 296.

[18] See Jean-Louis Dongmo 1981.

[19] Woungly-Massaga 2004; Mongo Beti 1972: 42; Abel Eyinga 1984; Nyeck 2013; Deltombe *et al.*, 2011: 189.

[20] See Mark W. De Lancey 1989: 37-41; Deltombe *et al, Kamerun !* 2011, ch. 26.

[21] See NgouoWoungly-Massaga 1971 and 1984.

[22] Daniel Abwa, *Ngouo Woungly Massaga alias Commandant Kissamba: "Cameroon, ma part de vérité" (Editions* Minsi DS, Yaoundé, 2004). See also interview, Rogers Orock with Daniel Abwa, Presbyterian University of Yaoundé, Cameroon, 25 November 2019.

[23] See further Orock and Geschiere, 2024, ch. 2; also Odo 2017.

[24] Cf. Orock and Geschiere forthcoming, ch. 3 and 5.

[25] Cf. QAnon: the name refers to the discourse of intelligence services; but, e.g., a follower like the QAnon shaman who played such a prominent role during the Capitol invasion evokes also rituals of America's first people and magic in general (see also BBC documentary 2021 on QAnon).

[26] Cf. Bayart (2022) and his plea for a *sociologie historique et comparative du politique.*

PART 6

Connectivities of Power

CHAPTER 6.1

The Musical Afterlives of the Kongo Kingdom: Music and Power Between Cuba and Central Africa in the Twentieth Century

Charlotte Grabli

Introduction

The music and cultural practices of the Kongo Kingdom are known for having widely spread and evolved across the Atlantic during and after the slave trade. They especially developed in Cuba, where an important part of the population originated from this region (Sublette 2007: 175-89, Thompson 1983).[1] In the early twentieth century, Cuban music had, in turn, a transformative influence on the former territory of the Kongo Kingdom, then divided between three empires: it encompassed northern Angola, Lower Congo (in the Belgian Congo, now called the Democratic Republic of Congo), and neighbouring territories in modern Cabinda and Congo-Brazzaville. The 'return' of this music occurred in the context of the cultural revolution engendered by the advent of the 78 rpm record (Denning 2015). In the early 1930s, the HMV's (His Master's Voice) GV (Gramaphone and Victor) series of Cuban *son* (a musical genre mistakenly called 'rumba' by US recording companies) provided an aesthetic shock to listeners from Central and West Africa who recognized the African origins of this music.[2] Cuban *son* – and later mambo, and cha-cha-cha – had a profound influence on popular dance, guitar playing, instrumentation, and the two-part structure of the songs that became a distinct feature of Congolese modern music, also called Congolese rumba or Congo sound (Mukuna 1998, Roberts 1986, White 2002). This chapter examines the musical afterlives of the Kongo Kingdom to understand how the power of music, recording technology, and musicians' mobility intersected with decolonization in West Central Africa.

A wealth of anthropological and historical studies has analyzed the close, and often ambivalent, relationships between Congolese dance music and power, especially in Kinshasa during the 1940s and 1950s (Bemba 1984, Biaya 1996, Braun 2019, Gondola 2014 and 1997, Grabli 2019 and 2023, Lonoh 1973, Monaville 2021) and during the last decades of Mobutu's regime (Covington-Ward 2018, Trapido 2016, White 2008). These studies demonstrate how music, dance, musicians' performance, and listeners' behaviour became sites of power struggles. Whether they challenged or supported authority, these struggles often alternated between resistance and 'an agonistic dance with power' (White 2008: 16). In this essay, I will address another dimension of the relationship between power and music—one that relates less to the (post)colonial state, institutions, and access to resources, than to mobility and motion, real or imaginary (Hunt 2016, Grabli 2023). The aim is to understand how

music enabled a specific kind of cross-border mobility across Angola and the two Congos, and how this mobility in turn fueled visions of worldmaking that envisioned decolonization beyond national borders (Getachew 2019, Wilder 2015). I argue that popular musicians – who, as part of the non-elite, have long been imagined as disconnected from global systems (Seigel 2009) – developed Pan-African visions that intersected with actual cross-border practices and solidarities, in ways that were not disconnected but distinct from political and intellectual circles.

This geographical framing makes visible the contribution of northern Angolan artists (musicians and photographers) to Congolese artistic worlds. It has received very little attention, except for Angolan Jean Depara's photographs of Kinshasa's popular culture (2011). At the same time, the study will shed light on understudied cross-border communities and solidarities between Angola and Congo.[3] Indeed, the rich literature on the association-turned-political party ABAKO has paradoxically been studied within the borders of the Belgian Congo state, despite its claims for the restoration of the Kongo Kingdom.[4] John Marcum's pioneer book on early bakongo political and religious movements in northern Angola and Congo remains the most detailed account (1969).[5] In this chapter, I will build upon these studies not only by retracing trans-imperial music networks, but also by showing how popular musicians actively challenged and blurred ethnic readings conveyed by 1950s Congolese nationalists and inspired by Belgian Jesuits' views on Kongo identity formulated in the 1920s (Tödt 2021: 135, 315).

The study is divided in two sections that encompass a double, trans-imperial and transatlantic movement. First, I will read 78 rpm discs together with a few archives from the Belgian colonial administration to contextualize the migration of Bakongo musicians from northern Angola to Congo and analyze their music and political visions. Second, I will examine the two decades following the independence of the two Congos. My analysis will draw on both a few lyric songs and archives from the Congo-Brazzaville government that came to power after the insurrection in August 1963. I will also use monographies about the Orquesta Aragón's tours to Africa in the 1970s and interviews that I collected in Cuba in August 2023. The music exchanges between 1970s Cuba and the Congo-Brazzaville reveal how socialism and the tricontinental ideology added new dimensions to the afterlives of the Kongo kingdom.[6]

Cross-Border Musical Networks

The circulation of popular music between Angola and the two Congos emerged in a context of intense migration. Forced labour and difficult social conditions in Portuguese Angola resulted in a massive flight to neighbouring Congo, especially in the 1940s when the North of Angola became a major area of coffee cultivation (Keese 2012). The exodus was only tempered by the tendency of the Belgians to

expel some of the unemployed refugees and the members of the messianic movements that they feared and repressed until the independence.

Along the coast, the shared use of varying dialects of the same language, Kikongo, facilitated cross-border religious, political, and economic activities despite colonial control. As Christine Messiant argued about the Angolan-born Bakongo who moved to the Belgian Congo, their trajectories were never a form of exile, but instead 'an opportunity to develop among communities of fellow Angolans' in a neighbouring territory (2006: 394). Decades after the formal end of the kingdom and its integration to Portuguese Angola in 1912, Bakongo population flowing back and forth across imperial borders continued to constitute a community with fellow Bakongo ruled by either the Belgians or the French.

As a result, Bakongo from Angola had a multi-faceted identity that shifted as they travelled from one colony to another. Significantly, Congolese journalists did not designate them as Angolan in the press published in 1950s Leopoldville. Unlike West Africans who went by nicknames like Popo or Coastmen, they were not perceived as foreigners. We could qualify this by referring to the Zombo, a Kongo sub-group who is often mentioned in the songs, as we shall see below. Beyond this recognition by rumba musicians, we do not know much about how they were perceived in Congo and Kinshasa in the late colonial era and first decades of independent Congo. What seems to distinguish them from other Kongo groups in Angola, or from Angolans as a whole, is their association with cross-border trade, boosted by the flight from forced labour in Angola.[7]

The fact remains that in colonial time, the administration seemed to be the only one to use the national identity of Angolan in reports on immigration and demography. The abundant documentation monitoring cross-border movements is essential to understand how bureaucracy affected the collective identity of Bakongo from Angola (Nativel 2019), although many documents do not mention whether these immigrants came from this region or other parts of Angola. For instance, the 1945 population census shows that Angolans formed communities living mainly in certain parts of Leopoldville,[8] and that they made up a majority of immigrants – near East-Leo, community(ies) from Angola are much larger (14,145) than the ones from Equatorial French Africa (2,803), Senegal (268), and the Gold Coast (Ghana, 129)[9]. In the Belgian colonial archives, exit passports (delivered for a maximum duration of 6 months), requests for permanent residency by immigrants, and expulsion requests by the administration offer additional and crucial insight into the life and sociability of this heterogeneous population, including women.[10] It helps to imagine the discontinuous pathways of musicians and their community.

The analysis of cross-border music circulations requires reading this corpus of archives together with other fragmentary and heterogeneous materials. Among them, the 78 rpm (rounds per minute) recorded by Bakongo musicians certainly represent the most essential source. This music was recorded in Leopoldville where most of the regional music infrastructures had been located since the mid-1940s: independent

music labels and studios, radio stations, and the giant press factory of MACODIS.[11] The information written on the disc (name of bands and musicians, languages, and title of the songs) is useful for analyzing struggles for power, cross-border movements, and the emergence and musical circulation of new pan-African visions.[12] Although I have not been able to consult all these records – many of which have been lost – and to translate the songs I have yet, I am able to make a few observations from the early catalogue of the music label Ngoma, founded in 1948. It demonstrates the early predominance of bakongo musicians, along with other pioneering musicians originating from Equateur like Wendo Kolosoy and Henri Bowane, the Orientale province (Stanleyville/Kisangani), and to a lesser extent Katanga (Elisabethville/Lubumbashi). Their influence is evidenced by the significant number of songs recorded in Kikongo, and not in Lingala, Leopoldville's lingua franca that would become the main language of Congolese rumba in the mid-1950s. Significantly, songs in Kikongo were sung by musicians from the three colonies. Early examples include double-sided records by singer and guitarist De Saio from the Lower Congo (Ngoma 8-12); the Chorale St-François d'Assise de Brazzaville (105-109); and by Georges Edouard and Manuel d'Oliveira from Angola (Ngoma 110-119.) This catalogue also bears witness to an attachment to the region with song titles frequently naming such towns as Sao Salvador and the main ports on the Angolan border, Matadi, and Boma.[13]

These frontier ports are essential for understanding the musical dynamics in the region. Recent research allows us to question how colonial ports network shaped cultural and political imaginaries in various ports of colonial empires (see, e.g., Tödt 2019). Located on the Congo River, Matadi deserves particular attention. This city shared many features with the colonial ports described by Michael Denning (2015) in his book on the music revolution engendered by the advent of music recordings in the late 1920s. Matadi was less developed than big city ports like Singapore, but it was nevertheless a place where musicians from different migrant worlds met, created new music, and could make a living in bars and dancehalls. It seems to have offered opportunities for aspiring artists from both sides of the border. While some of them started music in the brass bands of Catholic missions; most of them received training from Kru guitarists, originally from Liberia. Kru sailors were the most widely employed African mariners in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They were known for their influence on guitar playing in Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and Ghana, where they spread palm-wine music and intermingled with other Africans, Caribbeans, and African Americans (Schmidt 2008: 120).

A recent interview with Manuel d'Oliveira's daughter, Lágrima D'Oliveira (Cattaert 2023: 35) suggests the importance of Matadi in the itinerary of pioneer musicians:

> My father was born on October 10, 1915, in São Salvador. He went to school, but at some point, he started working as a carpenter [in Matadi, Belgian Congo]. Matadi at that time was more or less considered Angola and there were waves of people who

> came to settle there to work. Matadi was a gateway city where boats docked and there my father met some Kru boys who played the guitar. He learned to play and master this instrument in this city, just for his pleasure and together with his cousin Georges Edouard who was also there…
> He was very popular in Matadi, but his brother asked him to come to Leopoldville [to join the music label Ngoma].

Manuel d'Oliveira, along with his brother and cousin, were among the first to open the music circuit between São Salvador, Matadi and the capital of Belgian Congo. Together with Henri Freitas and Bila, D'Oliveira created the band San Salvador in 1944, before moving to Kinshasa in 1948.[14] The name of the band is significant because São Salvador (also known as Mbanza Kongo in Kikongo) was the capital of the former Kongo Kingdom. The reference to São Salvador by bakongo established in the Congo was not exclusive to the music world. Yolanda Covington-Ward similarly observed that kinguza movement's prophetic narratives centered on São Salvador pointed to attempts to recreate shared connections with the former Kongo Kingdom.' (2018: 105) As music records reveal, Leopoldville has two other bands called 'Equipe San Salvador' (French for 'Team San Salvador') working with music labels Loningisa and Opika in the early 1950s. Their use of the French term *équipe* instead of 'orchestra' or 'band' may be a reference to sport and football teams that was immensely popular at the time (Martin 1995: 99-126). But it also suggests a strong relationship between musicians from Angola and their collective will to associate the emerging Congolese music scene with the former capital of the Kongo Kingdom.

Figure 1: Manuel d'Oliveira, Georges Edouard and the band San Salvador, booklet of the label Ngoma, c. 1949.

Figure 2: Record by Sébastien Rancho, Rodrigues Alvaro and the 3rd San Salvador team, label Opika, c. 1954.

Angolan musicians also seemed to have been at the vanguard of the (re) Africanization of Cuban music, especially the G.V. series of Cuban *son* records commercialized in Africa by the label RCA Victor from 1933 to 1958. Matadi was the country's main entry for overseas music

records, that were sold or exchanged around the ports (White 2002: 671-673). The experience of this city port's musical life – and probably of Angolan cities like São Salvador – shaped Bakongo musicians' cosmopolitanism. They were adept at interpreting multiple languages and cultural codes, like musicians who usually pioneered music popular style on the continent (Waterman 1990: 9). Among the many songs that mixed words of Spanish, Portuguese, Kikongo or Lingala, and were inspired by Cuban *son*, polka piquée, and tango, the influence of the G.V. series is audible in 'Marie Tchebo' by Manuel D'Oliveira and Georges Edouard Dula (na baninga na bango). This title is inspired by Don Azpiazu and his Havana orchestra 'El Manisero,' the 1930 successful record that prompted RCA victor to distribute Cuban music throughout Central and West Africa. In 1948, it became one of the first hits of the Ngoma label (Cattaert 2023).

Regarding the relationship between music and power central to this essay, it is relevant to ask to what extent the musical afterlives of the Kongo Kingdom intersected with bakongo political movements that consolidated trans-imperial strategies at the same time as the musicians. According to Marcum (1969: 77-79), religious (and not political) figures used music to spread their ideas across the border. For instance, Simão Gonçalves Toco travelled with his successful Protestant Choir of Quibocolo across the border in the 1920s and occasionally competed with the São Salvadoran choir led by a Protestant figure, Barros Necaca.

Adhesion to Kongo political movements is perceptible in the names of the cities most frequently cited in songs: São Salvador and Maquela do Zombo. According to Marcum (1969: 51), these towns were the cradle of the two main streams of political movements in the north of the Portuguese colony. The movement in the São Salvador area resulted from the resistance to Portuguese and claims for the restoration of the local kingship; while the movement based in Maquela was shaped by the political practices of the Zombo people. The latter were not interested in the restoration of a traditionalist authority. Instead, they organized religious protests and mutual-aid associations along both sides of the border from Maquela to Matadi. Besides affinities to distinct communities, these songs bring to light an imagination of political struggles inseparable from trans-imperial activities and solidarities.

Another parallel can be found in the early and radical anticolonial position of musicians and political figures from Angola. Brutal arrestations and extraditions that forced immigrants living in Congo to move back to Angola greatly contributed to spread political discontent and ideas picked up in the Belgian colony (Marcum 1969: 71). At the same time, a particular radicalism was emerging among Angolan musicians, like Paul Mwanga, who knew different systems of colonial domination. A pioneer of Congolese rumba, Mwanga migrated from Angola to Kwilu-Ngongo in the Lower Congo, before settling in Kinshasa in 1941. He worked as a singer with several vocal formations, before joining the new orchestras created later in the 1950s. Unlike most popular musicians, however, Mwanga did not support

Patrice Lumumba. He sang for his opponent Joseph Kasa-Vubu, and his party, the ABAKO.[15] In a 2014 interview, Mwanga described himself as the ‘right-hand man of Kasa-Vubu’, explaining that they were both Kongo from the Nanga group.[16] When Kasa-Vubu became the first president of Congo in 1960, the singer recorded ‘Mambu Ku Ntuala’ as a tribute.[17] But unlike Kasa-Vubu, who stopped pushing the idea of a reunified Kongo kingdom, Mwanga did not lose interest in Angola after the independence. In ‘Mambu Ngolo Mena’ (1961), he expressed a radicality that departs from the rumba repertoire and returned to an anticolonialism shaped by trans-imperial experience:

> In Angola, the situation is difficult
> To go to Zombo (Maquela do Zombo)
> You have to carry your identity card with you
> If you don’t have it
> You will be arrested and thrown in a car
> Where your neck will be cut off
>
> In Angola, the independence is difficult
> To go to Zombo (Maquela do Zombo)
> You have to carry your identity card with you
> If you don’t have it
> You will be arrested and thrown in a car
> Where your neck will be cut off[18]

Mwanga describes the old Kongo as both a space of mobility and extreme violence. We cannot be sure whether he composed this song before the independence and recorded it after the end of colonial censorship; or if he referred to a specific event that just happened in Angola where the liberation struggle was about to start. What is more certain is that Mwanda’s lyrics are reminiscent of earlier songs like Antoine Mundanda’s ‘Nzela ya Ndolo’ (1954) that took the form of a warning to denounce colonial injustice and the challenge of mobility. As the line ‘In Angola, the independence is difficult’ suggests, Mwanga used this form of denunciation while reminding listeners that the real independence of the two Congos would remain unfinished until Angola also became independent.

Although Angolan musicians remained at the forefront of the rumba scene well into the 1960s and 1970s, their references to Kongo became more diffuse after the independence of Congo. A good example is ‘El cha cha del Zombo’ composed by Brazzos, a guitarist from Angola who was part of the famous band Franco and the OK Jazz in the late 1950s. The title refers to Zombo people, but the joyful lyrics and rhythm mainly evoke the Congolese taste for Afro-Latin dance and Cuban music through Spanish expressions like ‘Mambo, mi corazón’. The song ‘Basi Na Angola,’ written by Manuel D’Oliveira and recorded by Ry-Co Jazz during their stay in

Martinique, similarly echoed the Kongo, even if this reference and the cross-border stories it alludes to were probably difficult to decipher by the different Caribbean publics. These records illustrate how musicians used the vibrant economy of Congolese rumba – unique to Africa in the late colonial era – to shape the afterlives of the Kongo Kingdom in a supra-ethnic and Pan-African way. In Leopoldville's studios, and later in other parts of the world, bakongo musicians made audible a vision of Pan-Africanism in which the old Kongo was never lost, but mixed with diasporic sounds in a way that always seems to push back imperial boundaries.

The Kongo Afterlives and Cuba in 1960s and 1970s

The independence of the two Congos reconfigured the circulation of people, ideas, and music in the Kongo region and across the Atlantic. On the one hand, Kinshasa and Brazzaville emerged as key centres in the coordination of the Angolan liberation war (André and Kiriakou 2020, Grassi 2015). Congolese radio stations broadcast the shows of the Angolan liberation movements exiled in the capitals as well as rumba songs that ignited Angolans' nationalist spirit (Moorman 2008 and 2019). On the other hand, new political, military, and musical exchanges developed between Cuba and Africa. As a result, the relationship between music and power became more complex. As new music circuits opened, the possibility of carrying Pan-Africanism through popular dance music and to other regions of the world increased. But at the same time musicians' mobility was more controlled and fashioned by nationalist logics and political regimes.

During decolonization and the cold war, revolutionary regimes (socialist and anti-socialist like the Congo-Kinshasa[19]) all sought to capture the power of music and its Pan-African imagination through local and international initiatives. In the 1950s and 1960s, Cuba and the US developed music diplomacy as a tool to intervene in African decolonization and spread their ideological model. During the Congo crisis that followed independence in 1960, Leopoldville welcomed Louis Armstrong and the All-Stars. The US involvement in the crisis, which culminated with the assassination of the Pan-Africanist leader Patrice Lumumba in 1961, made Armstrong's jazz slip into the dystopian register (Eschen 2009). A few years after the revolution, Cuba started to develop various forms of music exchanges with West Africa. Cuba, in particular, signed a cultural convention in Mali and welcomed ten Malian students for conservatory training in 1964. Malian students benefited from massive Cuban investment into local artistic and music practices (Moore 2006). They formed the band Las Maravillas de Mali (The Mali Marvels) and recorded their first album at Havana's Egrem Studios in 1965 (Djebarri 2015, Skinner 2012.)

Elsewhere in Africa, Cuba followed the US model and primarily relied on the tours of the internationally renowned Orquesta Aragón. To contribute to the friendship and mutual understanding with newly independent countries, the

revolutionary regime re-shaped the 1950s craze for Cuban music and famed bands touring the world prior to the revolution. The first Cuban musician to perform in Africa was Patato Valdes, a conga drummer who travel with Herbie Mann's band during a tour sponsored by the US State Department. Starting in 1971, Aragón's performances in Africa – but also in Asia, the Americas, the Middle East, and Europe – connected audiences to the distant Cuban revolution. On the continent, these tours established a unique relationship between Afro-Cuban dance music, socialism, and Cuban military interventions – Cuba intervened in 1961 in Algeria, then in the two Congos, Guinea-Bissau, and Angola after the end of the liberation war in 1975. When Orquesta Aragón arrived in Congo-Brazzaville, Cuba had a strong military presence in the capital. After the visit of Che Guevara in 1965 and his attempt to support Lumumbist movements in Congo-Kinshasa, Brazzaville had welcomed many liberation groups from Central Africa. While the Cuban presence reinforced Massamba-Débat's government, the experience of Brazzaville revolution helped Cuba develop internationalist policies in Africa (André and Kiriakou 2020).

However, Brazzaville's post-colonial musical life was affected more by the anti-socialist politics of Mobutu Sese Seko in the neighbouring Congo. Following Prime Minister Tshombe's decision to expel all African aliens, musicians originally from Brazzaville and socialist groups like the Angolan MPLA left Leopoldville in 1964. Regional conflicts reconfigured and divided the Congolese rumba scene. Aragón only performed in Brazzaville in 1972 and 1977, as the Cuban band could not tour Congo-Kinshasa. However, with the growing number of festivals in independent African countries, alternative encounters happened on the continent. At the National Festival of Culture led by Sékou Touré in 1973, Aragón met famed Kinshasa dance band, Franco and the OK Jazz, as well as the National artistic ensemble of Tanzania, the exiled South African trumpeter Hugh Masekela, and the singer Miriam Makeba who was exiled in Guinea (Hashachar 2018; Marrero 2008). Guinea positioned itself at the crossroad of socialist circulations: it invited both Tanzanian ambassadors who developed artistic exchanges with China (Askew 191-193: 2002), and countries like Congo that sustained the older transatlantic dialogue with Cuba.

From the perspective of Brazzaville's political elite, any exchanges with socialist Cuba drew on their share history and memory. In 1963, Congolese officials from the new revolutionary government emphasized the Kongo heritage of a significant portion of Cuban population. The records did not explicitly mention captives from the Kongo kingdom; but they explained that Cuba's 'African vocation' was a result of the important population who descended from slaves. The document describes Cuba as a black island where the white minority continues to decrease and that the island nation would soon become like Haiti. This emphasis on blackness was linked to a discourse – common during the cold war – about Cubans and Africans' shared sensibility. As regards the training of African students that was no longer assumed by Moscow, the official adds, 'there is no doubt that black students feel more comfortable in Havana than in Moscow. Cubans might be more successful

than Russians in the advancement of the communist ideology among Africans.'[20] At the time, many comments about shared affective bonds of culture and communication indicated a suggestion of fertile ground for socialist projects. In a 1962 discourse, Algeria's prime minister Ahmed Ben Bella insisted that in Cuba, unlike in the US, he found the warmth of human companionship, 'that is, for us Algerians, an essential element of life, without which we cannot breathe'. Ben Bella added that although he knew only a little Spanish and Cubans did not speak Arabic, 'the communication proved to be immediate and deep' (Gleijeses 2011: 32). This shared sensibility was also the topic of worried comments by opponents to the Cuban regime. In 1966, French officials observing Brazzaville's everyday life worried about the Congolese and Cuban soldiers' love for music and dance. They warned that Cubans' 'Latin temperament' made 'them more influential and therefore more dangerous than the Chinese' (Gleijeses 2011: 165).

In Congo this global sense of mutual identification was rooted in the long history of music exchanges evoked in the first part of this chapter. As a musician from Orquesta Aragón recalls about their tour to Brazzaville:

> President Marien Ngouabi arrived and told us that he had admired the orchestra since he was a student, that he was born a year after the band was formed and that we had the opportunity to observe how much Congolese people loved Cuban music (Marrero 2008: 131).[21]

In the memories of singer and dancer Felo Bacallo, another member of Aragón, the Cubans could feel this deep sense of sameness across all African culture:

> You know that our folklore has African roots. You meet a girl in Africa, you take her out to dance and the steps are exactly the same as those of Cubans […] They have a fantastic rhythmic power. They play a *son* similar to ours…
> Gentlemen, what a seasoning! The only difference with them is that their food is a little spicy…
> When you wake up in the morning, you look outside, and it seems like you are in Cuba. The vegetation is very, very green. The fruits that grow there are similar to ours. Sometimes you think you are in Oriente, sometimes in Pinar del Rio.

Interviews published in books about Orquesta Aragón offer an important sensorial and musical cartography of the decolonization that unfolded through Cuban music diplomacy. However, these memories rarely mention encounters with local bands. They do not reveal the distinct or common visions of power carried by Congolese and Cuban orchestras, beyond their mutual identification. In his personal diary, the leader of Aragón, Rafael Lay, only evokes a collaboration with Orchestre Poly-Rythmo de Cotonou in Benin.[22] Lay did not mention the main musical encounter that took place in Brazzaville with the Pan-Africanist and socialist singer Franklin

Boukaka. This is striking given that Boukaka's song 'Antoinette Mwanga' is the only African cover by Aragón Orquesta at the time. According to Rafael Lay's son who now leads the band, his father also kept the music sheet of 'Le Bûcheron,' one of Boukaka's songs about independence and liberty, but never adapted it for the Cuban formation and instrumentation.[23] On the disc, Boukaka is credited like any other composer of Aragón's songs.

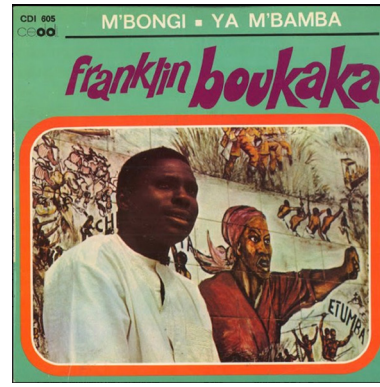

Figure 3: Record sleeve of Franklin Boukaka – *Ya M'Bamba / M'Bongi,* CEDDI (Paris), c. 1970.

Like Aragón's musicians, Boukaka supported the socialist revolution through his music and as a member of youth organizations, at a time when many of his fellow artists went into exile. Born in 1940 and of Kongo origin, Boukaka sang a Pan-Africanism rooted in the struggle against imperialist and capitalist powers. Especially after the independence of the Congo-Brazzaville, as musician and painter Guy-Léon Fylla recalled, 'he was no longer satisfied to sing about love' (Stewart 2001: 210). 'Pont sur le Congo' (Bridge on the Congo), for instance, celebrates the memory of Pan-Africanist Patrice Lumumba, assassinated in 1961, while suggesting that the two Congos should be put back together. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Boukaka was a major ambassador for the Brazzaville's regime. It appears on Boukaka's records cover produced in Paris – on the album *Ya M'Bamba / M'Bongi* (fig. 3), the musician poses in front of the arch of the 'African fresco' that traces the country's history from the pre-colonial period to the advent of scientific socialism (Greani 2017: 387). Boukaka was also highly visible and audible in such socialist countries as Algeria. As an ambassador of the Congo-Brazzaville, he offered a memorable performance with a band of sanza players (hand-piano popular in Central Africa) at the 1969 Pan-African festival of Alger (Stewart 2001: 212, Yengo 2006: 35). The following year, Boukaka recorded five songs with Guinean band Keletigui et ses Tambourinis Guinea, learning to sing in the local language Susu for the occasion (Syliphone–SYL 251, 252 et 253, Conakry, 1970) (Hashachar 2018). However, despite his contribution to the revolution, Boukaka's criticism of the abuse of some elites and political figures was frowned upon by the regime. Close to the leftist members of the Parti Congolais du Travail (PCT), he was assassinated following a failed coup d'état against Marien Nguabi on 22 February 1972.

Colonialisme akomi
Capitalisme akomi
Impérialisme akomi

Afica, Asia, America latine fongola miso
Yelengenge batata
Yelengenge bamama
Yelengenge niata bango

Colonialism is here
Capitalism is here
Imperialism is here
Africa, Asia, Latin America open your eyes
Yelengenge les pères
Yelengenge les mères
Yelengenge écrasez-les[24]

References to Cuba can be heard on his last album *Franklin Boukaka in Paris* (1970), arranged and accompanied by Cameroonian saxophonist Manu Dibango. His rumba and bolero songs, and his lyrics naming Che Guevera, were part of the artists' global effort to sustain the Tricontinental movement's political momentum, as a formal international revolutionary organization remained absent (Young 2018: 544). Importantly regarding the theme of music, power, and mobility, Boukaka's song 'Etumba' linked anti-imperialist aspirations to local anticolonial visions. Indirectly referring to the Kongo region, the lyrics mention the yelengenge, a plant used by bakongo groups in exorcism ceremony, as a potential political resource.[25] The song describes the ecology of Equatorial Africa as synonymous with power and stability in a form of eco-poetics typical of the era of independence.

Conclusion

In conclusion, from the early 1930s onwards, music exchanges between Cuba and West Central Africa, and across the colonial borders of Angola, and the two Congos, produced a distinct Pan-Africanism. I have raised many questions about the ways musicians shaped the afterlives of the Kongo Kingdom through this double movement, while valuing mobility, the practice of crossing borders, and the transnational and ecological knowledge that escaped from colonialism. The power of musicians and their specific engagement with anticolonialism can thus only be understood if one looks beyond the sole realm of discourses and lyrical songs that openly contested colonialism. It requires thinking of Pan-African visions that emerged from both the global circulation of diasporic music and the extraordinary mobility of musicians through which trans-imperial economy and network was forged.

This study also demonstrates that popular musicians referred to the old Kongo to contribute to various struggles against colonial, imperial, and capitalist powers. These songs associate the people inhabiting Angola, the two Congos, and Cuba, in

their vision of the future, even in the 1960s and 1970s when political sovereignty was more exclusively imagined within national borders. During the 1970s this vision of unity appeared in different contexts, as the production of Congolese rumba became multi-polar. In Paris, many Congolese musical projects at odds with post-colonial regimes recreated the links between Cuba and Kongo. It was the case of Franklin Boukaka but also of Joseph Kabasele, the leader of the African Jazz, who had been in trouble with the authorities of the Congo-Kinshasa since the assassination of Patrice Lumumba. On the album of L'African Team (1970), Kabasele stages his encounter with the Cuban flutist Don Gonzalo Fernandez in a Parisian recording studio. At the same time, but from a different political perspective, Brazzaville offered Sara Maldoror a set for her film *Sambizanga* on the Angolan liberation struggle, showing that cross-border solidarities, and real and imagined mobility, remained essential in the struggle against colonial power.

Notes

1 In Cuba, slavery was abolished in 1886 though the trade really ended in the 1870s. Captives from the Kongo were dominant in the early days of slavery and continued to arrive until the end of the trade. This demographic predominance is reflected by the fact that all captives from the Bantu area were called *congo*.

2 On the GV series, see Shain (2002) and Janet Topp Fargion's liner notes in *Out of Cuba: Latin American music takes Africa by storm*. London: Topic Records, 2004. Afro-Cuban dance steps, sounds, and languages quickly became associated with a new sense of cultural sovereignty and cosmopolitanism (Grabli 2020, White 2002, Shain 2018).

3 The scarcity of studies on the afterlives of the Kongo Kingdom contrasts with the current renewed interest for its visual cultures and art history (see, e.g., Fromont 2014). On the trans-imperial history of Congo-Kinshasa and Angola, see two major exceptions: Larmer et al. (2021) on the Copperbelt, and Maxwell (2019) on the return of Christianized former Luba slaves from Angola to their province of origin, Katanga, in the 1910s. On the dynamics of old and new borders in the region, see also Vellut (1972), Grassi (2015), and De Boeck (2000).

4 ABAKO (Association des Bakongo) was founded in Leopoldville in 1950 to contribute to the preservation of the Kongo culture and language in the capital. It later turned into a political party that won the first municipal election in Leopoldville before its leader, Joseph Kasa-Vubu, became the first president of independent Congo. See Covington-Ward (2012) and Verhaegen (2003).

5 See also Grenfell (1998) on the Tocoist church of Angolan prophet Simão Toko, who travelled back and forth between Northern Angola and Leopoldville in the 1940s.

6 This project has been funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Sklodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 101032001.

7 From 1956 onwards, the Zombos organized themselves into Assomizo, the Mutual Association of Zombo Nationals. In his thesis, Jose Carlos Oliveira (2008) cites several Portuguese authors who mention the Zombo migration to Congo and their importance in Kinshasa between 1940 and 1960 (see p. 346-7 and p. 360.)

8 Large communities of Angolan immigrants lived in the neighborhoods called Quartier II (4,666) and Quartier V (2,746).

9 'Recensement par origine des habitants des 7 quartiers de Leo-Est,' East-Leopolville, 22 September 1945. African Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Brussels (MAE).

10 They can be found respectively in the folders GG16323 'Carnet passeport de sortie Indigènes Angola'; GG 5793; and AIMO1602 (9117). MAE.

11 According to Stewart (2001), MACODIS (Manufacture Congolaise du Disque) could produce two million records a year and was Africa's second largest record production facility after South Africa.

12 See the catalogues reproduced by music journalist and archivist Flemming Harrev on the website Afrodisc.com.

13 See, e.g., records titled 'Nzuka Ngombe Matadi' (Ngoma 13-15) and the name of the band Camille Mokoko na baninga ya San Salvador 5 guitars (Ngoma 120-122). On the label Olympia, records from the late 1940s indicate 'Angolan musicians' and specified the group 'Bazombo' who migrated from the region of Maquela do Zombo in Northern Angola. See 'Musiciens Angola (Bazombo) – Chanteurs et soliste: Desoto' (Olympia 127).

14 The band named itself 'San Salvador,' translating into Spanish the Portuguese name of the city 'São Salvador.' This choice suggests the early influence of Cuban music and Afro-Latin imaginaries that broke away from Portuguese colonialism.

15 The collaboration between the ABAKO and the Congolese rumba scene was certainly limited given the ABAKO initial mission to protect Kikongo language (Covington-Ward 2012). Most popular singers used Lingala, and increasingly a Spanish sabir instead of Kikongo, in the late 1950s.

16 Interview with Paul Mwanga by the author, Kinshasa, 2014. Unlike other musicians I met at the time, like Roitelet, Petit Pierre, Brazzos, Mwanga, and Maître Taureau, Mwanga was the only one who could not speak French fluently (he spoke Lingala during the interview). He was also in a more precarious economic situation, which suggests that the social condition of artists who originated from Angola was more difficult after the independence of Congo, and especially during their retirement.

17 'Mambu Ku Ntuala' by Paul Mwanga is available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OKbd-gUEsuiM

18 Translated from Kikongo into English by Mike Solo Mbumba.

19 The name of Leopoldville was changed to Kinshasa in 1966 under Mobutu Sese Seko's rule. I will use 'Congo-Leopoldville' or 'Congo-Kinshasa' to distinguish it from 'Congo-Brazzaville,' instead of its subsequent name 'Republic of Zaire' (1971).

20 'Cuba, 1963', 29 mars 1963. Archives nationales du Congo-Brazzaville, Affaires étrangères PR4-PR5.

21 All translations from Spanish into English are the author's own.

22 Rafael Lay's personal diary. Private archives of his daughter, Mercedes Lay.

23 Interview by the author with Rafael Lay Junior. Habana, 20 August 2023.

24 Franklin Boukaka, 'Etumba,' *Franklin Boukaka in Paris,* Sonafric, France, c. 1970.

25 The powers of the herbs and ecology is also common in Cuban songs produced by the Kongo religion of palo monte in the context of slavery (Sublette 2007: 180).

CHAPTER 6.2

‘Changwe Yetu’: Theatre as a Site of Encounters of Power on the Congolese Copperbelt

Enid Guene

Introduction[1]

The interplay between theatrical performance and power is a recurring theme in literature focused on theatre in Africa (e.g., Amka 2003; Boon and Plastow 1998; Gainor 1995; Geigner and Young 2021; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o 1998; Plastow 1996). The dual nature of the performing arts, their potential to challenge established power structures or to be co-opted by them, has garnered particular attention. Studies, spanning various African countries, have examined instances where these arts were used by power-seeking institutions to bolster their authority, as well as instances where they served as platforms for grassroots-led protest (e.g., Askew 2002; Chinyowa 2009; Davis and Fuchs 1998; Kruger 2020; Obafemi 1982; Odera Outa 2009; Peterson 2021; Zenenga 2011). In what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Yolanda Covington Ward (2016), for example, highlights how ‘embodied’ performance played a central role in Simon Kimbangu’s ‘subversive’ prophetic movement in the 1920s, and in President Mobutu Sese Seko’s leadership after independence. The latter mandated citizens to engage in daily dancing and singing of nationalist songs, a practice known as ‘animation politique’, to assert his authority (also see Braun 2019; Sang’Amin 1989; Kadima-Nzuji 2001; White 2006).

In terms of these considerations, the Copperbelt provides a distinctive case study. This copper mining region, situated on the border between Katanga (DR Congo’s southernmost region) and Zambia, has been both a hotspot for theatre in Congo and the site of complex, overlapping, and often conflicting, forms of power. At the epicentre of these dynamics is the mining company Gécamines, formerly known as the *Union minière du Haut-Katanga*. This company, which contributed to approximately 90% of Congo’s economic output at the time of independence, was often likened to ‘a state within a state’. It was also known for its extensive efforts to regulate the lives of its employees, aiming to maintain a stable workforce by providing benefits like free education, healthcare, and housing, as well as recreational facilities like theatre halls. This latter element, coupled with Gécamines’ growing support for theatrical performance to strengthen its paternalistic corporate culture, established this company as a major sponsor for theatre in the region. However, it did not provide local theatre artists with an operating environment devoid of constraints or political pressures. Nevertheless, as this chapter will argue, this did not prevent actors and audiences from being active participants in the creation of performances.

In fact, examining how theatre was commissioned, produced, and consumed within the company's confines, spanning the period from independence when the copper mining industry was at its height to the 1990s when the company collapsed, unveils intricate 'textures of power'. By probing into the recollections of those who participated in theatre performances, both as audience members and performers,[2] the chapter posits 'performance' less as as a tool for conveying top-down narratives than as the site of a 'dialogue' that became increasingly 'anxious' as the company's grip on power weakened. Drawing upon a concept articulated by Sarah Nuttall (2009) and Ruth Sacks (2023), the chapter also portrays the process of theatrical creation arising from this 'dialogue' as one of 'entanglement' – a dynamic process of *de facto* collaborative creation, often shaped by necessity and involving a range of actors at varying levels of power.

The Entanglements of 'Popular Theatre' with Institutional Power in Haut-Katanga

The term 'popular' has frequently been associated with theatre in Africa. This form of theatrical expression, loosely characterized by accessibility, the addressing of concerns of relevance to local communities, and incorporation of 'traditional' music, dance, and oral storytelling (Kerr 1995), has attracted attention from historians and anthropologists keen to explore perspectives from 'below' (Barber, Collins, and Ricard 1997; Fabian 1998). In Katanga, 'popular theatre' has been particularly associated with forms of performances that emerged in the bustling 'cités indigènes' outside *Union Minière* (e.g., Kamalondo, Kenya and Katuba in Lubumbashi). By the 1950s, notable figures included Odilon Kyembe Kaswili, alias 'Mufwankolo wa Lesa', whose Swahili comedic sketches inspired by real life situations rose to great popularity from the 1960s onwards, and Adolphe Kisimba who played a key role in organizing the *Spectacles populaires* ('popular shows') also known as 'Changwe Yetu' ('Our Festivity'), a 1957 show blending traditional dances, cabaret acts, and theatre, including Mufwankolo's sketches (Le Lay 2014: 226; Le Lay 2015: 37-38; Le Lay and Kunda 2009: 20). Regardless of the 'popular' label, the relationship between theatre and power structures in Katanga has been complex and often ambiguous. Both Mufwankolo and Kisimba first made their names in the cafés and bars of Katanga's urban centres. However, state institutions early on utilized their initiatives. Backed by Union Minière and colonial authorities, Kisimba, Mufwankolo, and other members of the *Spectacles populaires* toured Congo and Belgium, most notably performing at the 1958 Brussels World Fair under the title *mu kongo – mu belgique* ('In Congo-In Belgium') (Fabien 1990: 49-50; Le Lay 2014: 186-187, 208, 225-226). Billed as the 'outcome of a genuine collaboration between Europeans and Africans',[3] the show embodied the vision of colonial figures such as Léon Pétillon, who, with independence on the horizon, sought to promote the

concept of a 'Belgo-Congolese community' (Brassine de la Buissière and Dumond 2010). Mufwankolo's sketch *Le chasseur et le blanc* ('The Hunter and the White Man'), for instance, gently satirized colonial society, humourously depicting a European man's clumsiness repeatedly sabotaging an African hunter's attempts to catch prey.[4] In turn, in the mid-1970s, another local initiative, 'Mwondo Theatre', toured across Congo and abroad with financial backing from Mobutu Sese Seko's state, because it specialized in shows inspired by legends and traditional rituals, thus aligning with Mobutu's contemporary cultural policy of emphasizing African 'Authenticity'.[5] In addition to such state co-option, a striking aspect of Haut-Katanga's theatre in the twentieth century is the extent to which it has been associated with institutions, notably the Catholic Church which quickly understood the value of embracing indigenous performance for conveying Christian teachings and promoting 'civilizing' values (Sang'Amin 1989). Kisimba, an alumnus of Lubumbashi's Saint-Boniface – the largest school in Katanga run by Benedictine missionaries – often visited the church's social centers, which he credited as a significant source of inspiration for organizing shows of 'traditional' dances.[6] In fact, Johannes Fabian (1990) identified both the Catholic Church and the *Union Minière* as central to the fast development of new theatre troupes from the 1930s onwards, because both established cultural movements and infrastructure to meet the leisure needs of a growing youth population. He described how senior officials at the *Union Minière* labour office began encouraging African employees to organize cultural and social activities, mainly in the form of scout clubs, sporting events and 'traditional' shows from the mid-1920s, and noted an acceleration of these activities in the 1950s with the approach of independence. This is in accord with the memories of informants, all of whom were born between the 1930s and 1950s and who recalled their first experience of theatre as having been at missionary-led schools and youth clubs or *Union Minière* social centres.

For Gécamines, theatre served various beneficial purposes, all aimed at enhancing productivity and maintaining a stable workforce. Theatre provided an effective means to entertain both youth and employees during their off hours, offering what several informants described as 'wholesome leisure pursuits' as alternatives to bars and drinking. Furthermore, it was a cost-effective solution; all that was needed was to provide spaces where people could meet to rehearse, form their own theatre clubs, and enjoy performances.[7] The performing arts were also a convenient tool for promoting such ideas and values as that of 'changa-changa' – from the Swahili verb *kuchanga*, 'to mix' (Dibwe 2001: 81). Gécamines' workforce was highly cosmopolitan, some of the workers hailing from as far away as Ruanda-Urundi or Kasaï in central Congo. The company promoted peaceful co-habitation through various means, including organizing dance and music competitions where each community could showcase its culture, a practice that dates to the colonial period.[8] In the late 1960s, they also hired the Mufwankolo troupe to tour Gécamines' *cités*, presenting shows with messages promoting *vivre-ensemble*

('living together').[9] In other words, Gécamines had become fully aware of theatre's usefulness and it happily let homegrown initiatives develop in its social centres. By the 1970s, as Adolphe Kisimba recalled in a media interview, each of Gécamines' fifteen centres was equipped with at least one Swahili and one French troupe.[10] Unsurprisingly, therefore, many Katangese playwrights who emerged in subsequent decades, like Katende Katsh M'Bika, Cheik Fita Dibwe, Pie Tshibanda, Kiluba Mwika Mulanda, and Ivon Mwanza Kibawa, either worked for Gécamines, came from Gécamines families, or both. Moreover, every informant involved in theatre between the 1950s and the 1990s emphasized emphatically that Gécamines was by far the largest employer of theatre troupes in Katanga. While other institutions like city councils, missions, and corporations like the railway company SNCZ (*Société nationale des chemins de fer du Zaire*) also hired and sponsored theatre troupes, no troupe could hope to sustain themselves without performing in Gécamines' many venues. A Gécamines 'gig' meant being well-paid, transported to all Gécamines' centres with the company bus, housed in a Gécamines hotel, and provided with meals in Gécamines canteens. Fabien Kabeya, who was involved in overseeing the statal institution *Fédération nationale du Théâtre* (FENAT) in Katanga in the 1980s recounted how they

> did not have any state funding. If we had to travel […] we would go to Gécamines. We would say 'we have to go to Kolwezi, but we need to meet with your troupes too, so can you put us up?' [laughs] This is what kept culture alive. Everyone was doing it.[11]

The fact that this company represented such a large part of the market meant that it also had influence on the shape and content of the plays performed within its compound.

Informants recalled that all plays performed at Gécamines' first had to be submitted to the attention of its *service social* and greenlighted by it. Theatre artists were aware of a particular format and themes that were more likely to be well-received. As Zadain Kasongo expressed, 'it had to be didactic …'

> Young people needed to be trained and supervized to prevent them from turning into thieves and bandits. That is the kind of plays that Gécamines wanted. […]. The mothers had to be looked after too. Even the workers […] we put on shows to push them to act as responsible heads of family.[12]

Playwright Pie Tshibanda concurred, noting that:

> They often presented shows featuring a couple where things are going well, juxtaposed with the consequences when one of them starts to drink. This was a way to caution people: do not descend into negative behaviours.[13]

This emphasis on responsibility and family values mirrored the messaging deployed by Gécamines through other channels, including its company magazine, *Mwana Shaba*, and was consistent with other initiatives. Jérôme Kipili, who served as *chef de cité* for Gécamines in Likasi, described a process where if a wife lodged a complaint against her husband for neglecting his home and family, the estate manager would 'immediately summon the worker in question, whatever his job' because stability and peace at home were seen as 'promoting peace in the workplace'.[14] The theme of men mismanaging the family income – often due to drunkenness – and facing the potential transfer of their earnings to their wives was a recurring comedic motif in plays performed at Gécamines, subtly providing both genders with insights into their rights and responsibilities. Mufwankolo similarly explained that the plays he and his fellow actors crafted for Gécamines and the SNCZ primarily centred on domestic life, aiming to sensitize the audience about the importance of not squandering their wages in bars and then feigning financial hardship to their wives[15] (see also Schicho and Mbayabo Ndala 1981). His semi-improvised theatrical sketch format, inspired by daily life, proved particularly effective in conveying these messages. As Kasong' Mbaz emphasized

> Mufwankolo […] took everything that could happen in society and turned it into a show. This allowed people to laugh at their own actions. It became ridiculous, amusing. In the end, he would say to them: 'That is no way to behave. Do this instead.'[16]

In essence, such shows were characterized by a form of instrumentalized moralistic didacticism. Informants described attending plays with the expectation that they would 'learn something',[17] some comparing the role of plays to that of religious sermons.[18] One woman recalled how Mufwankolo plays could be invoked in real-life situations, such as reasoning with a husband who refused to share his money. In this way, theatre helped to support Gécamines' overall paternalistic approach.

In this context, theatre in Katanga arguably held a distinct position compared to other forms of popular arts associated with the urban centres of Katanga, like 'Katanga Popular Painting'. The somewhat politically charged content of popular painting has been interpreted as reflecting the emergence of a new political consciousness during the Mobutu era (Fabian 1996; Fabian and Szombati-Fabian 1976; Jewsiewicki 1992, 2013). While popular painting indirectly depended on the societal framework created by the mining industry in Haut-Katanga, including the presence of an urban population with the means and inclination to purchase artwork, theatre in Katanga was arguably more intricately connected to local structures of power and more dependent on them. It relied more heavily on such structures, especially Gécamines, to provide them venues, logistical support, and perhaps even an income. This interconnectedness also has an influence on the question of how Katangese theatre should be approached as a historical source. 'Popular theatre' elsewhere has often been approached as material with the potential to

shed light on such as elements as the tensions and transformations of colonial and post-colonial society or the politicized expression of disappointed aspirations of independence (Barber, Collins, and Ricard 1997). Conversely, as emphasized by Maëline Le Lay (2014: 210-211), Katangese theatre has commonly faced criticism for being overly didactic and lacking in subversion. Neither, Le Lay argued, has it been able to free itself entirely from the influence of the institutions hiring its services, whether political bodies, religious institutions, or non-governmental organizations (Ibid: 439). The often-didactic nature of Katangese theatre complicates attempts to interpret it as a reflection of rebellious political consciousness. However, it is crucial to note that, while Gécamines instrumentalized theatre, a level of co-dependency existed. Theatre artists heavily relied on Gécamines for their survival, and Gécamines, in turn, depended on them to provide entertainment for the workers, deliver messages, and help micro-manage their workers' lives. Gécamines did have a clear brand of propaganda, focused on hard work and virtuous family life, designed to maintain a stable and productive workforce. Playwrights and actors were aware that, for their plays to be performed on Gécamines premises, they had to adhere to a certain form of didacticism. Yet, this remained rather vaguely defined. As Pie Tshibanda commented, 'you did have to present them with something that was "saleable"' but that included anything that could be said to be "intellectually instructive for the youth."'[19] Much could fall into this category. This flexibility allowed artists some leeway to explore a wide range of theatre types and topics, including plays with a degree of critical content, going far beyond the strict tenets of paternalistic propaganda.

Gécamines' Paternalism: A Negotiated Co-Production

Several factors undermine the notion that Gécamines' paternalistic screening was rigid enough to permit only a single play format and suggest instead that artists and the audience participated in these choices. One key factor is the notable diversity observed among the plays performed at Gécamines. Given the numerous centres operated by Gécamines and the limited availability of entertainment troupes to cater to all of them, if a show could be argued to be 'wholesome', it stood a good chance of being accepted. According to Kateng' Mayal's recollection, Mwondo Theatre never encountered difficulties in having their shows chosen by Gécamines: 'for us, Gécamines took everything'.[20] Informants noted a diverse array of plays in Gécamines' venues over time, encompassing 'classical' French plays like Corneille's *Le Cid* or Molière's *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*, occasionally translated into Swahili. The repertoire included shows focusing on traditions, legends, and rituals, along with historical plays, for example centred on Shaka Zulu. By the early 1970s, 'social plays', initially by West African authors – e.g., Guillaume Oyônô-Mbia's *Trois prétendants, un mari*, Guy Menga's *La marmite de Koka-Mbala*,

Wole Soyinka's French translation of *The Lion and the Jewel* – covered themes like 'traditional' marriage practices, generational conflicts, and the tension between 'tradition' and 'modernism'. From the mid-1970s onwards, a growing number of such plays were authored by local playwrights, e.g., Cheik Fita's *Conscience en déroute?* (1976) or Katende Katsh M'Bika's *L'arbre tombe du côté où il penche* (1978), a family drama which delves into the question of children's education and the clash between 'tradition and modernity' (Katsh M'Bika 1978: 2). In the 1980s, awareness-raising plays addressed malnutrition and diseases, e.g., Katende Katsh M'Bika's *Demain, un autre jour*, which aimed to educate 'ordinary people' about AIDS (Katsh M'Bika 1985: 3), reflecting the broader trend of 'theatre for development' in southern Africa (see Kamlongera 1989; Kerr 2014). Le Lay (2014: 205) also noted the existence of plays by one Valérien Mutombo Diba N'Funi in the late 1960s that focused on Katangese history, including tales of King Msiri or the Lunda Empire (also see Cornevin 1970: 255-56). In other words, plays staged at Gécamines covered the entire spectrum recognized by John Conteh-Morgan (2004: 125) as common in Francophone Africa in the decades that followed independence: 'historical, social, and political'. Various types of theatre, in French, Swahili, and other languages, coexisted and, according to informants, were performed at both regular workers' social centres and those meant for executives. The primary distinction between the two types of facilities, as people recalled, lay in equipment quality, beer cost, and the level of 'seriousness'. As Kasong' Mbaz recounted, a workers' audience felt much freer to intervene or comment during the performance.[21] French plays, for their part, were often embellished with scenes for a broader audience, such as dances or re-enactments of rituals if they were relevant to the story,[22] blurring 'classical' and 'popular' theatre boundaries.

Another significant factor influencing the creation of plays performed in Gécamines, among other places, was the need to resonate with the audience's interests and concerns. Strikingly, the plays that stood out in the memories of informants or achieved the most success were those addressing the real-life experiences of the local population. One such play was Cheik Fita's play, *Moins homme ou la guerre de 6 jours* (1978) which recounts the events of 'Shaba II' when 6,500 rebels from a Katangese separatist militia crossed the border from Angola, capturing Kolwezi. The play, which depicted these events through the eyes of one family, was performed on-site more than a hundred times. Le Lay (2014: 214) described it as having provided 'catharsis for the population of Kolwezi'. Cheik Fita recalled how Gécamines approached him to express interest in his play. They wanted it to tour all their *cités* to help their workers. As he noted, 'after the war, people were traumatized, and many things had been broken down. There was virtually no entertainment'.[23] Pie Tshibanda's own 'Shaba II' play, *Retour macabre* (1979), also gained popularity, because it focused not on the war itself but on its social consequences. It narrates the story of a woman taken by rebels who returns pregnant, struggling to be re-accepted into society due to the shame.

Unsurprisingly, Mufwankolo performances hold a prominent place among the plays that audiences best recalled. One particularly well remembered sketch depicted a man inadvertently dropping his wallet in a toilet trying to conceal his money from his wife.[24] Other sketches included Mufwankolo portraying a husband upset about his wife not cooking *milonge* (smoked fish) even though he never provided her with the funds to buy it[25] or portraying a man whose overconfidence in his Gécamines cheques led him to take on debts, and whose ruse to swindle money from others the audience found very amusing.[26] While these themes were in line with Gécamines' objectives, they were also drawn from real-life situations. Some ideas were proposed by actors or directly requested by the audience, while others were gathered by Mufwankolo himself during reconnaissance trips. Kasong' Mbaz recalled an instance when he approached Gécamines authorities to suggest handling a specific topic differently based on his observations in the field.[27] This interplay makes the audience an integral part of the creation process. It is a delicate balance: playwrights wield a measure of creative freedom, but with a keen awareness of the type of content that is more likely to find acceptance from both the employer and the audience, adapting to the needs and demands of both.

A third notable factor is that Gécamines seemingly permitted plays containing thinly veiled critiques of the company to be performed in its venues. An illustrative instance is Mwondo Theatre's production, *Tafisula* (meaning 'not enough'), performances of which were witnessed by Jill McDougal in the 1970s. The play, performed between 1975 and 1977, was developed based on testimonials collected by members of Mwondo Theatre's members from Gécamines workers in Kipushi, Kolwezi, and Likasi, later reinforced by the reactions and input provided by the audience during performances. Although most interviewees had expressed pride in working for the mining company and having relatively well-paid jobs, they had also half boasted, half complained about daily dangers they faced (MacDougall 2002: 96-97). The play itself juxtaposed scenes of nature and village life with those of the industrialized world. It opened with a scene featuring the death of a worker at a Gécamines location and an impatient boss urging fellow workers to speed up their mourning process with the phrase 'Time is money'. The narrative then transitioned to a rural setting where a young orphan in search of fish encounters Mami Wata, a mermaid symbolizing the dangers of greed and falling for the false lure of materialistic wealth, often used in popular painting as a metaphor for colonialism and capitalism. The young orphan is promised wealth and transforms into a typical industry 'boss' who only speaks French and repeats over and over that 'we need to produce more, more and as quickly as possible' (MacDougall 2002: 107). According to Kanteng Mayal, *Tafisula* was meant to be critical of Gécamines and the way it was 'crushing workers':

> We were talking about industry oppressing society. Because EVERYTHING depended on Gécamines. You cannot avoid talking about Gécamines. And Gécamines used paternalism to support its growth. We tried to critique that.[28]

As noted by MacDougall (2002: 113), the critique in Tafisula took on an abstract form, presenting a wider critique of capitalism and neo-colonial industrial 'development'. Nevertheless, this critique was not an abstract one for the audience, as it resonated with their socio-economic reality. This led certain observers, particularly European intellectuals, to perceive the play as radical and audacious, raising questions about why Gécamines sponsored the production. McDougal argued that this perspective overlooked a common Congolese practice, wherein leaders are often poked symbolically in public performance (Ibid, also see Mbembe 2001). Primarily, however, this underscores the idea that theatre at Gécamines served as a locus of discussion and communication, rather than a mere passive conveyer of a specific agenda. Such plays may even have been seen by Gécamines authorities as a means through which to gain insights into their workers' concerns.

These various considerations lead to two key observations. First, the consumption patterns of performing arts within Gécamines serve as a tangible expression of Gécamines' ambiguous status as 'a state within a state', simultaneously complying with Kinshasa's demands while managing its own internal dynamics. In the 1970s and 1980s, two competing forces vied for the attention of Gécamines workers. On one hand, there was Mobutu's *animation politique*, which by the mid-1980s had become mandatory for all organizations in the country, including private-sector businesses (White 2006: 55-56). Former employees recalled mandatory morning dances and praise songs for Mobutu as the national flag was raised, with potential dismissal for non-compliance or criticism. On the other hand, there was Gécamines' own brand of internal didactic propaganda, conveyed through various means, including theatrical performances. Pie Tshibanda emphasized the need to differentiate between the upper echelons of Gécamines' leadership, who were directly accountable to Mobutu, and the lower-level workers, whose primary obligation was to fulfil their job responsibilities.[29] Theatre primarily targeted the latter group aiming to enhance their productivity by providing effective entertainment. The *service social* generally prioritized selecting performances based on their popularity among workers and adherence to its paternalistic criteria.[30] Overall, between these two kinds of performance-enacted strands of propaganda, Gécamines' prevailed. Whereas people reacted to *animation politique* with dislike, the concept of a 'Gécamines Culture' seems to have firmly established itself. Jérôme Kipili, *chef de cité* (housing district manager) for Gécamines in Likasi, stressed that:

> At the time, all the *chefs de cité* were considered MPR [Mobutu's party] representatives first. But, by some miracle, we were aware that it was 'Gécamines first, MPR second'. Because the MPR benefitted from Gécamines, not the other way round. […]. That was the difference between us and the 'Bourgmestres' [municipality mayors].[31]

This is why, as Kipili further emphasized 'we did everything to protect the Gécamines culture first of all, because we were convinced that the party would

pass and that Gécamines would remain'.[32] While the remoteness of Kinshasa was certainly a significant factor, another important one was that its brand of corporate paternalism was partly shaped through an internal collaborative process involving Gécamines' *service social*, the audience, and theatre artists. *Animation politique*, by contrast, was merely externally imposed. Consequently, another key observation is that Gécamines had to engage in negotiations with its workers, with the 'Gécamines Culture' emerging at least partly from this co-production process. The relationship between theatre and Gécamines therefore go beyond a story of subversion or co-option, complicating the use of this theatre as a source into the lifeworld of Gécamines' workers. However, it offers a valuable position from which to discuss Gécamines. In certain instances, particularly during later years marked by worsening economic conditions, theatre even emerged as an engaged participant in historical processes.

Theatre in a Situation of Collapse of Power

Playwrights active in Katanga in the 1970s and 1980s occupied a peculiar and liminal position when it comes to power. They encountered a dual form of censorship – from Gécamines and from the Mobutu State. While there were no accounts of Gécamines authorities forcibly suppressing a play, it could refuse topics and some were explicitly avoided by playwrights and performers, with ethnic tensions in Katanga being cited as a sensitive area.[33] It is a contrasted situation, as Pie Tshibanda commented:

> We had the freedom to produce the plays we wanted, but the challenge was whether [Gécamines] would select us. Not everyone received that opportunity. If your play leaned slightly towards MPR militantism – without being too overt – it could work in your favour. However, those wishing to create plays that were somewhat critical could also do so, though they had to be careful.[34]

Conversely, encounters with state authorities resulted in instances of direct repression. Notably, both Mufwankolo and Cheik Fita were arrested because of their plays. In 1972, Mufwankolo faced arrest for *Tuchunge mali ya société* ('Let's protect society's wealth'), which commented on policies of 'Zaireanization' such as compelling expatriates to surrender their businesses, and their adverse effects on the country's economy. In 1981, Cheik Fita was arrested for allegedly inciting a strike in his play *Le héros* ('The Hero'), because the play happened to feature one. Mufwankolo altered his play's content to align with the regime's stance, prompting descriptions of him becoming a mouthpiece for Mobutian ideology (Dibwe 2005: 287). Cheik Fita was released, but his play was never performed again.[35] There are also examples of plays offering oblique criticism of state power. Johannes Fabian observed the

Mufwankolo troupe preparing a play titled *Le pouvoir se mange entier* ('Power is eaten whole') in 1986, noting how the actors collectively 'unpacked' the meanings of a proverb about power. This, he emphasized, was far from a neutral act in Mobutu's Zaire. In a different vein, Cheik Fita recounted being tasked with writing a play in honour of Mobutu in 1984, during the presidential election year. Cheik Fita penned a play titled *Il était une fois un chef* ('Once upon a time there was a leader'), avoiding direct mention of Mobutu but focusing on a village chief facing conflicts. Censors, according to Cheik Fita, paid little attention to the content. He added,

> It was enough that there was a show. The title is a bit evocative: 'Once upon a time there was a leader…'. For them, the leader was Mobutu. [But the main character] was not a head of state; he was a village chief, dressed as a villager in a loincloth [laughs].[36]

Katangese playwrights also mirrored techniques observed in other African contexts (Crehan 1990: 300). They employed strategies like setting the action in a pre-colonial era, as did Likasi playwright Kiluba Mwika Mulanda in his 1989 *La chute de l'empire Luba* ('The fall of the Luba Empire'), in which the fictional leader is berated for being 'insanely proud and despotic' (Mwika Mulanga 1991: 18). They also created the appearance of criticizing other subjects. Cheik Fita used this second technique in *Morte avant terme* ('Dead Before Term', 1976), critiquing Zaireanization while ostensibly addressing the 'nouveaux-riches' attitudes of those who inherited businesses confiscated from expatriates, as well their lack of morals in using their new-found money to 'buy the honesty of poor people as well as their reason' (Cheik Fita 2021: 38). Similarly, in *Moins homme* (1978), Fita avoided commenting on the charged topic of Shaba II by framing his play around the inequalities exacerbated by crisis situations, for example between a French man and his Congolese wife or with their domestic (Cheik Fita 2013).

In some respects, therefore, the entanglements of Katangese theatre with power, at least vis-à-vis the Mobutu state, exhibit some of the patterns of co-option and resistance akin to those depicted in literature focusing on popular theatre. Anyone who ventured to express criticism did so through metaphors and circumlocution. As regards Gécamines, however, the situation was different. More revealing than any political metaphor were the shifts in the patterns of demands and consumption of theatre within Gécamines in the late 1980s. This was a time when the general economic situation in the country was fast deteriorating after years of mismanagement and low copper prices, Gécamines suffering a particularly severe blow when the collapse of the Kamoto mine near Kolwezi led to a 90% drop in its total production between 1989 and 1993. As observed in other Gécamines-sanctioned forms of popular art, such as the comics published in its youth magazine *Mwana Shaba Junior* (see Guene 2021), plays during this period increasingly made direct references to the worsening economic situation and other dislocating events. For

instance, Cheik Fita's last play before leaving Katanga for Kinshasa, *Projuve* (1987), tackled the issue of unemployment among highly educated youth. Another play, Katende Katsh M'Bika's *Mon prochain est un miroir* ('My fellow man is a mirror'), written in 1988 but first performed in 1991 at an SNCZ venue in Likasi, depicted four characters finding themselves trapped underground after a mine landslide. Initially quarrelling and blaming each other for the accident, they eventually transcend their selfishness, resentment, and xenophobic prejudices (Le Lay 2014: 222). This play may have been performed in a highly charged political context, as the fall of 1991 marked the beginning of violent attacks against the Kasaian population of Katanga, resulting in their mass expulsion from the province. Equally enlightening is the directive given to Ivon Kibawa, founder of the Gécamines-based troupe Rubil Africa in 1984, by the director of social action. Kibawa was tasked with creating social intervention plays tailored to address prevalent issues within Gécamines society, such as theft, tribalism, and corruption. In 1987, for example, *Rubil Africa* staged a play titled *Protégeons l'outil de travail* ('Let's protect our work tools'), cautioning workers about the perils of stealing company property (Le Lay 2014: 234; Le Lay and Kunda 2009: 24). These plays can be interpreted with a dual perspective. For Gécamines, they served as calls to action, urging employees to be diligent, promoting calm and solidarity, and attempting to revive loyalty to the company. Simultaneously, they laid bare Gécamines' shortcomings in addressing these challenges and its failure to adequately support its workforce and fulfil its end of the social contract. By the late 1980s, despite Gécamines scaling back its expenses related to theatre – the last Gécamines-organized theatre competition recalled by Fabien Kabeya occurred in 1986[37] – theatre was increasingly made use of as a crisis management tool. In the final decade of the twentieth century, Gécamines seemed to intensify its instrumentalization of theatre groups to navigate the escalating crisis, adopting an increasingly interventionist stance.

From the late 1980s, as per the accounts of those interviewed, Gécamines began to use theatre groups to act as a direct communication line with the workers to convey very direct and practical messages. As Fabien Kabeya commented, 'Gécamines was starting to go bankrupt, but people were not yet aware of that.'[38] Consequently, theatre troupes were tasked with encouraging the audience to cease behaviours like taking excessive time off or engaging in fuel theft. Theft, he recalled, was a major theme which Gécamines asked to be covered in this period:

> People were starting to loot and steal at all levels, and my theatre company was able to help sound the alarm. Because people thought that Gécamines could never go bankrupt. They said to themselves, 'No, no, it does not matter. Gécamines will continue to produce copper even if you steal'. We had to change that mentality.[39]

Additionally, Fabien Kabeya noted another purpose for which theatre troupes were consistently employed – to prepare people for impending job cuts. They

were instructed to convey the message that individuals should be ready, assured of receiving severance money, and advised to handle that money carefully. The messaging therefore adopted a more forceful tone. While in the 1970s, theatre was utilized to communicate the significance of work and discipline, foster a sense of corporate *esprit de corps*, and discourage excessive drinking, by the late 1980s, it transformed into a tool for alerting workers about imminent layoffs and salary reductions, aiming to mitigate potential anger. The Mufwankolo troupe was also enlisted for such purposes, particularly during the period of the 'Opération Départ volontaire' (ODV) in the early 2000s. This operation, endorsed by the World Bank, resulted in the dismissal of 10,655 Gécamines workers from August 2003 to February 2004, with compensation offered for job losses. However, many workers resisted compliance. Even trade unionists failed to persuade them. As a result, theatre companies were brought in to assist, marking one of the rare occasions when the Mufwankolo troupe encountered a significantly negative reception from the audience.[40] Kasong' Mbaz recounted:

> We received threats here [Lubumbashi]. In Kolwezi too. As for Luena, they even told us not to go. […] Some were even waiting after the show to beat up the actors. In the end, they preferred to have a debate. Then, the World Bank delegates and the Gécamines representatives also intervened to give concrete answers to those who were asking us questions.[41]

This episode represents the culminating point of the 'anxious dialogue' that unfolded between Gécamines and its workers over decades through theatre. The way in which this ultimate attempt to instrumentalize theatre transformed the theatre room into an arena for contention and protest serves as a potent illustration of Gécamines' loss of control. Ironically, the moment when the company sought to exert its power most directly through theatre was precisely when its power was waning.

The evolution of themes within this more directly interventionist form of theatre thus illustrates a direct attempt, ultimately unsuccessful, of a company formerly described as 'state within a state' to counter imminent collapse. It also bears witness to a highly significant change of power dynamics in Katanga. In fact, subsequent changes in theatre sponsorship patterns and the themes explored in plays, both by the Mufwankolo troupe and others, during the 1990s following the effective collapse of Gécamines, are revealing of these shifts in power. For one thing, theatre troupes found themselves compelled to seek sponsorship from other institutions, particularly the numerous non-governmental organizations active in Katanga during the 2000s, which had an interest in commissioning theatre productions to 'raise awareness' about specific issues (Le Lay 2014: 332). These replaced Gécamines as main sponsors for theatre in Katanga, reflecting a shift to a new type of authority which Didier Fassin (2010) refers to as 'humanitarian government'. For another, the content of plays produced during this period serves

as another illustration of the collapse of power structures in Katanga. Notably, productions in the 1990s and 2000s shed a more intense light on the challenges of life and societal tensions. Examples include Mufwankolo's 2003 *Mambo inanipita* ('I am overwhelmed by problems'), centred around a man facing unemployment and struggling to support his family. Several plays produced in this period focused on the growing issue of street children, including Fabien Kabeya's *Vakkabo* (2001), Yvon Kibawa's *cris d'enfants* (2009) and Kiluba Mwika Mulanda's *Le Wayambard* (1993). The latter recounts the tale of a boy born out of a wealthy man's infidelity who ends up living on the streets, ultimately becoming a 'Wayambards' or 'outcast of society' (Mwika Mulanda 1993: 26). Additionally, Katende Katsh M'Bika's *La joue droite* ('The Right Wing') and *Premier carré* ('First Square'), written in 1996 and 1998 respectively but first performed in Lubumbashi in the 2000s, tackle the expulsion of the Kasaian population. *Premier carré* explicitly references Gécamines: a family sent back to Kasai receives a fake letter claiming that Gécamines had decided to rehire the workers sent away. The revelation of the letter's falsity sparks outrage, concluding with an appeal for solidarity and a turn to NGOs for support (Le Lay 2014: 222-225). This stands as a poignant example of Gécamines' decline as a significant force in people's lives. It also signifies a dispersion of power. Power is now less centralized, more diffuse, no longer concentrated around the state or a single company. In a similar vein, Mufwankolo's 2008 plays *Tukinge mazingira!* ('Let's protect the environment!'), which is focused on the hazards of artisanal mining, and *Haki ya watoto* ('Children's rights') dramatize the new uncertainty as to who wields power. In these plays, dispossession is often blamed on 'foreigners', a category only vaguely defined. This inability to define who has power and who is to blame underscores the uncertainty surrounding the identity of those regulating mining activity (Le Lay 2015: 44, 48). By the 2000s, therefore, with both Gécamines' and Mobutian filters removed, plays produced by the same troupes and playwrights that were active in Katanga in previous decades now portrayed more candid depictions of the consequences of collapse and the loss of any form of structuralizing authority.

Conclusion

Katangese theatre, in the shape it has developed in the twentieth century, is recognized for its didactic nature, a quality partly attributed to its connection with and partial reliance on formal institutions, notably Gécamines (Le Lay 2014). Gécamines instrumentalized theatrical performance for various purposes: to give further substance to its paternalistic ideology, to educate, to help with trauma, to raise awareness about topical issues, to handle crises, or simply to entertain. Nevertheless, it is crucial to underscore that the artists themselves, along with the audience, played pivotal roles in shaping Gécamines' culture of entertainment

and, to some extent, its paternalistic principles. An analysis of how this medium was employed within a single institution over several decades reveals patterns in which stakeholders, commissioners and artists alike, responded to market dynamics while also exercising their creativity within these constraints. Consequently, late twentieth century Katangese theatre, performed in Gécamines' venues, defies easy classification as either co-opted or serving as an 'instrument of liberation', to borrow Mukala Kadima-Nzuji's phrase (1984: 101). It reveals more 'entangled' histories of power that extend beyond patterns of subversion and coercion. Valuable insights can be gleaned by examining why and how theatre was created and consumed. Discussing Katangese didactic theatre in the 2000s, Le Lay (2015: 36) argued that such theatre can transcend its initial didactic intention and evolve into an opportunity for constructive dialogue between public authorities and target communities. Similarly, Gécamines utilized theatre as a means of communication, and over time, it increasingly served as a medium through which direct action was enacted. This, for one thing, positions theatre performed at Gécamines not merely as a mirror reflecting a historical moment but rather as an engaged participant. For another, analyzing the patterns of theatre use and consumption over time can offer insights into the power dynamics within Gécamines' confines and how these dynamics were negotiated over time. It also provides a visual representation of a nuanced, multifaceted, and contrasting power landscape within a postcolonial setting. Firstly, it demonstrates that Mobutian propaganda, despite its seemingly pervasive quality, did not uniformly extend its influence on every corner of the country, as if it were a massive steamroller. Instead, it reveals its defeat in an informal propaganda war in a distant and troublesome province. Secondly, it illustrates that Gécamines' form of paternalism did not solely arise through passive indoctrination from the top-down; rather, it was also, at least partially, subject to negotiation. It highlights the fragile, contested, and negotiated nature of power relations between such as stakeholders as colonial/postcolonial states, large companies, and the populations reliant on them. In fact, the manner in which theatre was commissioned, produced, and consumed within Gécamines reveals vulnerabilities and overlapping layers of power dynamics. It unveils power relations in postcolonial contexts as multifaceted and dependent on an ambivalent, sometimes fragile, 'social contract', even within entities routinely depicted as 'all-powerful', such as Gécamines.

Illustration Credits

Figure 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vXXw4vl73I

Figure 2: https://www.discogs.com/es/artist/2767102-San-Salvador/image/SW1hZ2U6NTQ2MDk5Nzk=

Figure 3: https://www.discogs.com/fr/master/1030092-Franklin-Boukaka-Ya-MBamba-MBongi/image/SW1hZ2U6MTgzNDIoNTE=

Notes

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[2] Unless otherwise stated, these interviews were carried out by the author.

[3] 'Mu kungo – mu belgique: un spectacle du Congo d'aujourd'hui', February 1959, AfricaMuseum, HA.01.0456.1, Jeanne Walschot Personal Papers.

[4] Interview with Mufwankolo, Lubumbashi, 9 July 2018.

[5] Interview with Kanteng Mayal, Lubumbashi, 19 July 2018.

[6] Recorded interview with Adolphe Kisimba 'Senior', Lubumbashi shared with the author by Adolphe Kisimba Junior.

[7] Interviews with Zadain Kasongo, Brussels, 25 August 2023; Pie Tshibanda, Wavres, 23 August 2023; Jean-Jacques Biaya, Likasi, 10 August 2019.

[8] Interview with Pie Tshibanda, Wavres, 23 August 2023.

[9] Interview with Kasong' Mbaz 'Maisha', Lubumbashi, 17 July 2018.

[10] Recorded interview with Adolphe Kisimba 'Senior', Lubumbashi shared with the author by Adolphe Kisimba Junior.

[11] Interview with Fabien Kabeya, Lubumbashi, 30 June 2018.

[12] Interview with Zadain Kasongo, Brussels, 25 August 2023.

[13] Interview with Pie Tshibanda, Wavres, 23 August 2023.

[14] Interview with Jérôme Kipili, Likasi, 26 June 2018 (by Benoît Henriet and Iva Peša).

[15] Interview with Mufwankolo, Lubumbashi, 09 July 2018.

[16] Interview with Kasong' Mbaz 'Maisha', Lubumbashi, 17 July 2018.

[17] Interviews with Jacques Kibombo, Likasi, 11 June 2018 – Thérèse Kyola, Likasi, 25 June 2018 – Ngoie Valérienne Mudimbi, Likasi, 20 June 2018 (by Benoît Henriet and Iva Peša).

[18] Interview with Jérôme Kipili, Likasi, 26 June 2018 (by Benoît Henriet and Iva Peša).

[19] Interview with Pie Tshibanda, Wavres, 23 August 2023.

[20] Interview with Kanteng Mayal, Lubumbashi, 19 July 2018.

[21] Interview with Kasong' Mbaz 'Maisha', Lubumbashi, 17 July 2018.

[22] Interview with Pie Tshibanda, Wavres, 23 August 2023.

[23] Interview with Fita Dibwe, Brussels, 24 August 2023.

[24] Interviews with Pauline Kingombe, Likasi, 20 June 2018 – Ngoie Valérienne Mudimbi, Likasi, 20 June 2018 (by Benoît Henriet and Iva Peša).

[25] Georgette Ntumba, Likasi, 28 June 2018 (by Benoît Henriet and Iva Peša).

[26] Interview with Kasong' Mbaz 'Maisha', Lubumbashi, 17 July 2018.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Interview with Kanteng Mayal, Lubumbashi, 19 July 2018.

[29] Interview with Pie Tshibanda, Wavres, 27 September 2024.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Interview with Jérôme Kipili, Likasi, 26 June 2018 (by Benoît Henriet and Iva Peša).

[32] Ibid.

[33] Interview with Zadain Kasongo, Brussels, 25 August 2023.

[34] Interview with Pie Tshibanda, Wavres, 27 September 2024.

[35] Interview with Fita Dibwe, Brussels, 24 August 2023.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Interview with Fabien Kabeya, Lubumbashi, 30 June 2018.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Interviews with Kasong’ Mbaz ‘Maisha’, Lubumbashi, 17 July 2018; Mufwankolo, Lubumbashi, 9 July 2018.

[41] Interview with Kasong’ Mbaz ‘Maisha’, Lubumbashi, 17 July 2018.

CHAPTER 6.3

Radio and Dictatorship in Idi Amin's Uganda

Derek R. Peterson

Introduction

The archives of Radio Uganda are stored in an airless room at the Uganda Broadcasting Corporation's headquarters in Nile Avenue in Kampala. There are hundreds of 5-inch, 7 ½-inch and 10-inch magnetic reels, carefully placed in boxes, labelled, and lined up by date. Many of the reels in the UBC's archive feature the voice of Idi Amin, President of Uganda between 1971 and 1979. Radio journalists constantly attended President Amin, recording his public addresses with paranoid care. On the back of one 10-inch reel – a recording of Amin's speech at a conference of religious leaders – there is a handwritten note penned by an anxious technician. 'There is a slight break in recording the President's speech,' he nervously wrote, for

> one of the adapters to hold the spool was trying to come off and the tape had to be stopped to put the adapter back in its rightful place. Am sorry for this inevitable technical fault and any inconvenience caused due to this is regretted.[1]

For radio technicians it was important to get every word on record.

At the time of Uganda's independence in 1962 the new administration of Milton Obote faced a host of media-savvy antagonists who challenged the authority of central government. For Obote, as for his British predecessors, government-run radio was a means of sidelining the African editors whose widely read newspapers were setting the pace of public life (Peterson and Hunter 2016). By 1965 Ugandans owned 112,698 shortwave radio receiving sets, distributed among a population of about six million people.[2] A survey conducted that year found that eight of every ten Ugandans over the age of 16 years listened regularly to Radio Uganda.[3] In 1968 the government of President Milton Obote signed a contract with a British firm, and construction began on four 100 kilowatt transmitting towers.[4]

The radio expansion project was nearing completion when, on 25 January 1971, General Amin overthrew Obote's government and ushered in the Second Republic of Uganda. The first of the powerful new transmitters began broadcasting in November 1971, ten months after Amin came to power. Through an historical accident Amin inherited one of the most powerful radio broadcasting services in Africa. It allowed him to project his voice to the most remote parts of the country. In Amin's Uganda radio became a vehicle of public address, a loudhailer by which officials in Kampala could impose themselves on an apparently attentive public. It

made everyone – regardless of their circumstances or their location – answerable to the president's directives.

In two recent books the anthropologist Harri Englund has brought the social life of radio listening into focus, allowing us to see how creative broadcasters cultivate intimacy with their audiences (Englund 2011; Englund 2018). In the popular Chichewa program broadcast by Malawi's public radio station as in the genial talk shows of Radio Zambia's grandfatherly announcer, broadcasters enable expansive and meaningful debates about public life, using a lexicon that speaks to ordinary listeners. Other recent works of scholarship similarly treat radio as a platform for civic engagement. The South African listeners of whom Tanja Bosch writes are active participants in community radio (Bosch 2017). They find identity in the programs to which they listen, calling in with their opinions and discussing the program with friends and co-travelers. In post-apartheid South Africa radio, argues Bosch, broadcasts democracy.

In Idi Amin's Radio Uganda, by contrast, there was no time for discussion, dialogue, or meaningful exchange. Radio put Idi Amin at the center of every question. Over the radio airwaves Amin could summon constituencies that were otherwise hard to define: the 'women', 'students' and many others. Over the radio Amin could impose obligations on specific people and oblige them to act (Peterson and Taylor 2013). The radio schedule structured Ugandans' time, imposing itself on their private lives and compelling them to listen. It consolidated the president's authority, sidelining bureaucrats, experts, local authorities, and other intermediaries. By making government directives urgent and unanswerable, by obliging people to respond on short notice, radio helped to make Uganda into a dictatorship (see Moorman 2019).

In fact the reach of radio was constrained, and reception was always uncertain. The authorities in Kampala saw radio as an inescapable medium, but in Uganda – as in the Nigerian context about which anthropologist Brian Larkin writes – the reality was 'one of frequent breakdown and disrepair' (Larkin 2008: 61). Broadcasting equipment was fragile, requiring constant superintendence from over-burdened engineers. Interference from wind and weather limited Ugandans' ability to receive the signal. People had to know how to handle the equipment in order to make the radio work. But radio never gives evidence of the limits of its listenership. There are no lists of individuals who do not, or cannot, receive the radio signal. That is how broadcast media works. There is no means of determining the limits of the audience.

In places where the signal decayed, in weather where interference made it impossible to listen, at times when other voices or other timetables intruded, listeners found it impossible to tune in. That is how some people fell afoul of Amin's edicts: by inattention, bad timing, or lack of proximity to a receiver. With its extraordinary reach Radio Uganda made everyone biddable, but in its incomprehensibility radio could also make people – all at once – into delinquents.

The Power of Radio

The opening of Radio Uganda's new broadcasting towers in 1971 and 1972 made the station's signal audible across a greatly enlarged terrain. For the station's new audiences, the broadcasts were a source of fascination and pleasure. In the paper archives of Radio Uganda there are files full of letters from listeners. Writing from southwestern Uganda, a listener named Raphael Kangye told the Chief Engineer that – even in his remote locality – he could listen to Radio Uganda and 'enjoy your good music.' 'Last Tuesday you made me very happy,' he wrote, and 'perhaps if you could have been nearer to me I could get you something to drink.'[5] Another listener – a young woman named Lucy Apaco – was delighted by the music. Writing from Gulu town, she reported that the morning hours were full of boredom, for Radio Uganda was off the air and she was obliged to help her parents labour in the farm fields. But 'I do enjoy the afternoons and evenings very much,' she reported. 'You know, I'm fond of records, and in addition to the records you have got a nice volume which reaches us nicely.'[6]

The expansion of Radio Uganda was a government initiative, driven by the authorities' self-interest. It was also driven by listeners' excitement, enthusiasm, and eager involvement in the perfection of the technology. Listeners filled the manager's postbox with letters reporting on the strength of the signal, on the fluctuations in its reception, and on the content of the programs. From a small town in Ethiopia a listener reported that he had heard Radio Uganda's broadcast of Jim Reeves' music, and found 'the reception was very good and clear,' with no distortion of any kind.[7] From western Uganda, a listener reported that the signal could be 'heard loud and clear' on his Sierra three-band radio, far outstripping the clarity of Radio Rwanda or the Voice of South Africa.[8] From the north-west, a schoolboy named James Uyana sent in a report on the variations of the Radio Uganda signal. On 13 May the broadcast had become inaudible within minutes, covered up by a rattling noise. On 17 May the 6:15 p.m. broadcast was unclear, while the late-night broadcast was inaudible up to 11:40 p.m. Uyana volunteered to send in daily reports on the reception of the radio.[9] He and other listeners had a proprietary view of Radio Uganda. They saw it as a public good.

Listeners from Asia, Europe and America were likewise tracking the signal of Radio Uganda. After the erection of the new 100 kW transmitters the Ugandan signal could be heard with clarity in far distant places. A 15-year-old German named Roland Dilmetz decorated a letter to Radio Uganda's manager with hand-drawn illustrations depicting a man jumping aloft in excitement, radio in hand. He reported that the signal from Kampala could be heard in Berlin, though there was occasional interference from Radio Yaoundé, which broadcast on a nearby frequency.[10] From Sweden a correspondent wrote to report on his reception of Radio Uganda's broadcast. He was 47 years old, a warehouse worker, and a long-time radio enthusiast.[11] Another man wrote from Champaign, Illinois, saying that

he had received the Ugandan signal on his home-built Hallicrafters S-85 radio.[12] For listeners in Berlin and Illinois as for listeners in Gulu or Ethiopia, Radio Uganda was a fascinating new technology. Unlike newspapers, which relied on the transport infrastructure to reach readers, and unlike a letter, which took weeks to reach its addressee through the post, the radio signal could traverse vast distances in an instant, apparently unhindered by geography. It was a marvel.

Like many other people, Idi Amin was fascinated by radio's power to traverse geography and engage listeners in distant places. Within a few months of his coming to power Amin's cabinet had taken the decision to establish an external broadcasting service. In cabinet ministers' view it was the 'most important decision taken by the Government of the Second Republic of Uganda.'[13] The Minister of Information and Broadcasting was given a vast new mandate: it was his ministry's role to 'create a vivid, alert and outward-looking society.'[14] In February 1974 government signed a contract with a Swiss firm for the construction of two 250 kW transmitters, together with an array of antennas that would direct the signal to distant places.[15] President Amin could not wait for the legal formalities. On 19 January 1974, several weeks before the contract was signed, he laid the foundation stone for the building housing the powerful transmitters. There was a new four-story office block to house 53 new members of staff; and thirteen new studios were to be constructed for the recording of external programs.[16]

The external broadcasting service went on the air in 1975. In his introduction to the printed programing guide, President Amin claimed that Radio Uganda would 'effectively fight colonialism, neo-colonialism, capitalism and racism even better especially when we shall be reaching right into the enemy's camp' (Uganda Press Trust n.d.). The signal was beamed toward South Africa in the late afternoon hours, then to western Africa, and then to northern Africa. Listeners were treated to a program featuring 'Presidential Quotations with Musical Bridges,' accompanied by a series of talks on subjects such as 'African Solidarity,' 'Liberation and the Liberators,' 'Economic Emancipation in Africa,' and 'Uganda's Economic War.' 'Whatever we broadcast will be monitored, recorded and analyzed by foreign countries and news agencies,' President Amin told a crowd. 'We shall therefore be judged by the quality and contents of our broadcasts.'[17]

Radio was meant to make Uganda exemplary. There was no time for idiosyncrasy, for comedy, or for independent voices. The authorities in Kampala instructed local government officers to channel all communications with the press through the government's Ministry of Information.[18] Journalists should 'write the gospel of truth,' urged a government minister in a seminar with Ugandan newspapermen. Their role was to 'unite Uganda as one country.'[19] In Amin's first year in power cabinet rejected a proposal to establish privately-run radio stations in Uganda. Everyone in the cabinet agreed that 'the radio service was, in the present circumstances, the most powerful communications medium between the Government and the public.' If private broadcasting stations were set up, cabinet members

feared that they 'might be used by enemies of the Government to broadcast subversive propaganda to the Nation.'[20]

Solid State Electronics?

The apparatus of official media was designed to give President Amin the final word on public affairs. But from the start the range and audibility of Radio Uganda's broadcasts were constrained. The technology was fragile and always needed repairs. Electronics in Uganda were never in a solid state. It required human initiative – creativity, attention, energy, dedication – to keep Radio Uganda on the air (Park 2017).

In the archives of the Uganda Broadcasting Corporation there are dozens of logbooks, bound with hard cardboard, which contain the handwritten notes of Radio Uganda's engineers. They testify to the constant need for human intervention in the operation of radio equipment. On one occasion Radio Uganda was off the air for several minutes because a technician pressed a button labeled S1A, jamming the signal from the broadcasting studio. He was meant to have pressed button S1.[21] On another occasion the news in Karimojong was delayed for several minutes because someone had mistakenly turned a knob that regulated the impedance of the signal from the broadcast studio, making it impossible for the program to be transmitted.[22] On a third occasion the station sent engineers to a Kampala nightclub to record a live program of dance music. The signal they transmitted to the broadcast studio was exceedingly faint, and there was a loud hum. It took an hour for the engineers to sort out the fault and get the dance music on the air.[23]

All this placed stern demands on Radio Uganda's engineers. They had to work long hours. There was little time for human convenience. At 2:00 p.m. one afternoon in 1971 a peckish engineer named Waliggo wrote as follows:

> With the assumption that I was a human being or at least a living creature I took permission from the [Engineer in Charge] to go to canteen and feed as it is an obligation of all creatures if they are to live.[24]

By 2:07 he had returned to his post. 'Back in this damn enclave,' he wrote in the logbook. He was on duty that day up to 5:00 p.m. He and other engineers lobbied management for amenities that would make their work easier. 'Important: it is considered as a high degree of consideration to supply the [Central Control Room] with soft comfortable chairs to make life relatively easy here, especially for the night shift,' wrote an uncomfortable engineer in the logbook.[25] A few weeks later another engineer wrote to complain that the air conditioning in the studios was not functioning. 'I think no one is bothered about mental strain imposed on us due to the stuffiness caused by inadequate circulation of fresh air,' he wrote in

the logbook.[26] These and other complaints reflect the claustrophobic pressure that those who worked in the service of technology must have felt.

The shortages and upsets of Idi Amin's Uganda made it evermore difficult for engineers to manage the pressures that technology imposed on them. Living in dangerous and insecure times, many staff members found it impossible to do their jobs. On evening in May 1971 thieves broke into the house of a Radio Uganda engineer. The engineer awoke and pursued the burglars, and in the fracas that ensued he cut his foot badly. He was unable to work for several days.[27] For some time in 1975 the Arabic news program could not be broadcast because the newsreader was in prison.[28] In 1978 the Director of Broadcasting prepared a document entitled 'Some of the Failures in Transmission Emanating from Unreliable Transport at UBC.'[29] The vehicle tasked to deliver staff members from their homes to Broadcasting House had a puncture, and for several days the staff was obliged to walk to the studio. The Director of Broadcasting called this and other difficulties 'demoralizing'.

Like the engineers, the journalists who created reports for Radio Uganda's programs had to contend with shortfalls in equipment and material. Shortly after Idi Amin came to power the government posted 'information officers' to each of Uganda's districts.[30] Their task was to compose news reports on local affairs, which they relayed to Broadcasting House in Kampala over telephone or telex machines. The information officer in Jinja, the capital of eastern Uganda, had no office furniture, and there was no money even to pay for the cutting of grass. 'We cannot overemphasize the perponderous role being played by the Mass Media in the development of a nation,' wrote one officer,

> without being flung by emotion to wonder over the ordeal of an Information Officer without transport, whose usefulness is thought of only when his pen and paper are required. Their condition of service leaves a lot to be desired.[31]

Information officers in the provinces had to struggle to ensure that news from their districts got on the air. The information officer in Lira district, in Uganda's north, was a man named Obwona. Upon his appointment he had no office, and neither did he have a telephone line.[32] When he had a story to file, he had to walk into town and use the Post Office call box. The telephone line from Lira to Kampala was full of static, especially during daylight hours. Mr. Obwona was obliged to spend a great many evenings at the Post Office, filing reports with the newsroom in Kampala.[33] Even when the line was operational, the newsmen in Kampala were often rude. As Mr. Obwona reported:

> Some of the headquarters staff treat we up country officers as their house boys who they can afford to do anything to. Sometimes when we get through to Kampala it is ridiculous that it should take a person receiving the story five to ten minutes to

> get a pen and some papers. Some of them direct us to ring later and just bang the receiver down.[34]

There were language problems, too. Mr. Obwona reported that headquarters staff had 'fallen into the habit of showing off that they know every English word in the whole vocabulary.' When an upcountry information officer used an unfamiliar term, the man in Kampala would unctuously correct him, saying that 'such and such a word does not exist when in fact it is him who doesn't know the meaning.'[35]

It was a struggle to keep Radio Uganda on the air. Listeners likewise had to struggle to make Radio Uganda work. For many Ugandans the signal was irregular and hard to pick up. In the early 1970s – when the powerful new transmitters were installed – engineers shifted the station's signal from the short wave to the medium wave frequencies. The medium wave transmissions could travel over a vast terrain, but rainy weather or cloud cover could interrupt transmission. Throughout the 1970s Radio Uganda's morning broadcasts were inaudible to many Ugandans, for medium wave signals are constrained by sunlight. One listener – a student in northern Uganda – spent several days tuning his radio to Radio Uganda's frequencies. It was only during the evening hours, from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m., that he could hear clearly.[36] Another listener, writing from West Nile, reported that he had to take great care about the position of his radio receiver: if it faced northwards or southwards the signal dissipated.[37] In 1974 the Ministry of Information sent three senior bureaucrats on a tour to assess the reception of radio and television broadcasting in the provinces. Everywhere the men from Kampala were confronted by frustrated listeners. In Busoga, in Uganda's east, a district councilor complained that 'for two years his radio has not been serving him properly: at times the radio generates awkward noises which makes it difficult to receive radio programmes properly.'[38] Why, wondered another councilor, could he receive the Voice of Kenya or Radio Rwanda more clearly than Radio Uganda? In reply, the Kampala officials explained that the soil in Busoga was unsuitable for medium-wave broadcasting, making it hard for the signal to propagate. Moreover, local people's shortwave radios were unsuitable for the new, medium wave broadcasts.

The shift to medium-wave broadcasting created new inequalitiesrs of access. Owners of shortwave radio sets – which were smaller and cheaper than medium-wave receivers – found themselves shut out of the airwaves. Writing from Lango District, a student named William Ocen noted that the new signal was 'very good and clear and loud and we all like it very much indeed,' but he and other students who owned shortwave radio receivers found it impossible to tune in.[39] He asked for a return to shortwave broadcasting, so that 'we poor people owning small radios with one band should enjoy the new transmission together with the people who are better off.' Poverty likewise made it difficult for people to purchase the dry cell batteries that powered radio receivers. In the latter months of 1972 dry cell batteries were in short supply in Uganda's provincial towns.[40] By 1975

the price of batteries had increased dramatically. It enraged many people. In a letter to President Amin a critic complained that 'We buy one torch dry cell at Shgs 7 each and you tell the world that we are very well off in Uganda. Maybe you are very happy because you have many cars.'[41] By the later 1970s dry cell batteries were unavailable for purchase in Uganda's leading eastern town, and local officials lamented that 'the public are unable to listen to government policies on their radios.'[42] They had to commandeer cartons of batteries for distribution to anxious citizens.

The trade language of the media business makes it seem as though the creators of radio programs always have the initiative. Radio stations 'broadcast,' as if the program were effortlessly sent out into the wind. Listening is always a passive act, as if it took no work at all. The quality of the signal is called 'reception.' Listeners are called an 'audience,' as if the ear was all that was needed to receive a radio signal. In Idi Amin's Uganda, though, receiving official media was an active undertaking. The channels of distribution were never clear of interference. The path of the radio signal from transmitter to receiver was impeded by the weather, by landscape, by soil types, by the financial wherewithal of the listener, and by the listener's access to the technology of reception. There was a constant need to adjust the tuning and search for the signal. Listeners had to be aware of the changing patterns of wind and weather. They had to anticipate the advancing hours of darkness. They had to have batteries and medium-band receivers, at a time when such equipment was expensive and hard to find. Receiving the broadcast required creativity, connections, and constant attention.

Government by Radio Announcement

The men who governed Idi Amin's Uganda could not acknowledge any of the work that was required to broadcast or receive the signal. Standing at the edge of a new era in the history of communication, officials in Kampala acted as though the distribution of radio broadcasts was undifferentiated and universal. At a 1973 seminar a longtime Ugandan journalist heralded the 'transistor revolution.' The 'mass media,' he said, 'can reach enormous audiences. The radio does it regardless of climatic hazards, regardless of inappropriate communications through jungles, swamps or even storms at sea.'[43] At the same seminar another speaker proclaimed radio to be a means of 'reaching, simultaneously, millions of people of all classes in a matter of moments.'[44]

Amin and his men presumed that listeners were available, attentive, hanging on every word. There was a dramatic shortening of the time between decree and implementation. At a briefing in Kampala one morning in 1973, President Amin directed two students from each of Uganda's universities and colleges to meet him at State House at 8:30 pm the following day to discuss the prospect of a national

language for Uganda.[45] There were no students physically present when Amin issued his directive. Neither was there a procedure by which students could select their representatives. But Amin was confident that, through the broadcast media, a specific constituency – the 'students' – could be summoned. At a time when paper was in short supply, when the postal system was increasingly inoperative and petroleum was prohibitively expensive, radio was the means by which government authorities in Kampala communicated with people in the provinces. Amin's speeches were full of directions for specific groups and constituencies. During the same broadcast during which he instructed students to attend an evening meeting regarding the choice of a national language, Amin also told government authorities to install a water supply in Arua; instructed the Minister of Commerce and Industry to build a cement factory on the road from Moyo to Arua; directed the Yugoslav contractors building the Arua airport terminal to transfer their attention to the building of a hotel; directed the Minister of Works and Housing to repair the bridge over the Wangi River; condemned waiters for demanding tips from their customers; and suggested that people living in overpopulated areas of southern Uganda should move to fertile unpopulated areas in the north.

Diplomats called it 'government by radio announcement' (Gwyn 1971, 71). Local authorities had to budget their time to be present when broadcasts were on the air. Listeners in northern Uganda had to stay up late, past 11:00 p.m., to hear the local news, which was broadcast after President Amin's long and winding speeches had ended. It was difficult to find time for sleep.[46] Local government authorities – and a great many private citizens – took notes and learned about new policies, rules, and directives from Radio Uganda's broadcasts. On 29 August 1972, for instance, President Amin made an address at the International Conference Centre in Kampala that was broadcast on the radio. Amin announced the creation of nine new provinces in Uganda and banned teenagers' dances, reasoning that they have 'sapped the energy of our young people and … encouraged drunkenness, laziness, disobedience to parents and other vices.' He also announced new opening hours for bars and nightclubs.[47] Away in the provinces, the administrator in Kigezi District was listening carefully. The next day he typed up a summary of the speech for district officials.[48] He highlighted the presidential directive to 'speed up services' and mentioned the new opening hours for bars. His transcription of the key points furnished local authorities with the guidelines they needed to get in line with the president's speech.

Radio was the medium of record in Idi Amin's Uganda. People listened to it rigorously and attentively, expecting to find their obligations laid out on the airwaves. Their reputations, and their future, depended on the care with which they sifted through the broadcast. In June 1971, a few months after the coup that brought President Amin to power, broadcasters on Radio Uganda read out an announcement saying that a schoolteacher in southern Uganda named David Kabunga had been employed by Obote's maligned General Service Unit to spy on Idi Amin.

Kabunga, alarmed about his safety, made haste to write to the information officer in Kabale, his hometown. He asked that a correction be broadcast immediately since, he maintained, 'I have never worked for the GSU.'[49] Kabunga's nervousness reflects the urgency of his situation. Radio could not be ignored.

Inattentive people could – quite suddenly – find new obligations thrust upon them. In a radio address on 4 February 1974, for example, Amin's government announced a summary ban on the wearing of wigs.[50] They made 'our women look unAfrican and artificial,' the president said. Besides, the wigs were fabricated by 'the callous imperialists from human hair mainly collected from the unfortunate victims of the miserable Vietnam war.' Amin's decree came as a surprise. A woman named C. Kakembo listened to the news broadcast on Radio Uganda at 8 p.m. that night. No mention was made of the directive, and she blithely went out for an evening drink. It was only during the 10 p.m. broadcast that the directive was announced. Ms. Kakembo reported that 'those who heard the announcement and happened to be in public places had to pull off the wigs immediately to avoid being bullied, touched and embarrassed.'[51] The announcement demanded the rapid revision women's attire. Ms. Kakembo and many other women were obliged to find ribbons and cloths to tie over their heads to 'look respectable enough in public' (Kembabazi 2020, Decker 2014: Ch. 3).

The inconvenience and irritation that Ms. Kakembo felt must have been shared by many Ugandans, who found themselves – unexpectedly – compelled to conform to government decrees. There was no time for discussion or deliberation. On 14 May 1973 President Amin announced on radio that Ugandans should hold country-wide meetings about the design of the national flag. Shortly thereafter a county chief in eastern Uganda received a telephone call telling him to summon taxpayers to discuss the issue that very day.[52] The chief hurriedly typed out a missive to his subordinates, instructing them to bring representatives to his headquarters within the hour. The notices were delivered by messengers, and many of them did not reach their destinations until the early afternoon. The discussion had to happen in very great haste. That evening the county chief – who was probably exhausted at all of the activity – typed up a report. His people preferred that the red color be replaced with green in the flag, he wrote, since red 'shows us that Uganda will remain in blood shed' and therefore damaged the country's reputation abroad.[53]

All of this tells a familiar tale about the capriciousness of life under a dictatorial government. The point here is that arbitrariness has an infrastructure. It was possible for government officers to issue rapid-fire directives because they acted as though that whole Ugandan public could be addressed through official media. With the Ugandan public was apparently gathered before them, officials could compress the timescale on which government worked and make everyone act. That is why Ms. Kakembo found herself – unwittingly – exposed to the attention to censorious men and women, who insisted that she would immediately conform to Idi Amin's edict banning wigs. That is why the hapless chief had to hastily organize a meeting

to discuss the national flag's design. That is how many Ugandans unknowingly and unexpectedly came to be named as enemies of state, as whole categories of people were summoned, directed, and made subject to Amin's radio-born directives.

Conclusion

In February 1979 Radio Uganda's employees planned a celebration marking the 25th anniversary of the station.[54] At the center of the festivities was a 'program production competition,' in which teams of announcers were to broadcast, in 15-minute intervals, from the top of Broadcasting House in Kampala. The challenge was to ensure that equipment, microphones, and personnel were all in place and that the broadcast went off smoothly. The engineering staff had a separate competition: they were to design and build a recorder using spare equipment in Radio Uganda's engineering shop. The winner of each of these games was to be awarded 50,000 shillings. The organizing committee developed an extensive guest list.[55] Former ministers of information were to be invited. So were retired staff members, including the British engineers who had founded Radio Uganda in 1954. All of President Amin's ministers and permanent secretaries were to be invited.

The members of the committee never celebrated Radio Uganda's 25th anniversary, for even as they worked out their plans, an invading army from Tanzania was marching north, driving Amin's men before them. The Amin regime was ousted in April 1979, before the festivities could take place. But the earnestness with which Radio Uganda's employees laid in plans to celebrate the jubilee reflected their investment in the technical work of radio. During the most tumultuous months of Uganda's history, they looked for ways to honour their vocation. The technology oriented their loyalties and clarified their duties.

Ugandan listeners likewise found themselves bound up in the timetable of radio broadcasting. Coming to power at the outset of a new era in the history of technology, Idi Amin found in radio a vehicle by which to address the whole of Uganda's disparate people, all at once. Radio furnished the Amin government with a prosthetic infrastructure for government communication. It transformed the relationship between rulers and ruled, sidelining local authorities and making everyone act in accordance with the president's directives. It pre-empted Ugandans' disparate timetables, obliging everyone to act on short notice. There was no time for representation, for deliberative democracy. Neither was there a means to hold authorities in Kampala accountable. The texture of power could be heard in the president's unanswerable voice.

Notes

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3 'Improve our Radio,' *Uganda Argus* 5229 (18 October 1971).
4 UBC 'Old Files, 1966-1970' box, unnumbered file: Humphreys, 'Project no. 13-15-03: Links to Medium Wave Transmitters,' n.d. (but 1969).
5 UBC '1972-1973' box, file 10: Raphael Kangye to Chief Engineer, 19 April 1972.
6 UBC '1972-1973' box, file 10: Lucy Apaco to Chief Engineer, n.d. (but April 1972).
7 UBC '1972-1973' box, file 10: Abraham Michael to Chief Engineer, 7 April 1972.
8 UBC '1972-1973' box, file 10: Cyril Ondebo to Chief Engineer, 30 May 1972.
9 UBC '1972-1973' box, file 10: James Uyana, St. Edward's Bukooli, to Chief Engineer, 18 May 1972.
10 UBC '1972-1973' box, file 10: Roland Dilmetz to Chief Engineer, 21 June 1972.
11 UBC '1972-1973' box, file 10: G. Johansen to Chief Engineer, 2 July 1972.
12 UBC '1972-1973' box, file 17: Ralph Perry to Radio Uganda, 11 December 1971.
13 Cabinet paper on 'Radio Uganda,' enclosed in British National Archives (hereafter BNA) FCO 31/1062: High Commission to East Africa Department, 28 Sept. 1971.
14 Uganda National Archives (hereafter UNA) MBL 15/2: 'Contribution of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting,' 5 November 1973.
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16 UBC '1972-1973' box, file 5: Katende to Director of Engineering, 9 Jan. 1974.
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18 Kabale District Archives NW/CM 11, 'Newspaper and Press Relations' file: Henry Kyemba to all District Commissioners, 24 May 1971.
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20 UNA OP 9/1: Minutes of the 37th meeting of the Cabinet, 9 November 1971.
21 UBC Central Control Room logbook, 12 Jan. to 26 Feb. 1966, entry for 14 Feb. 1966.
22 UBC Daily log book, Central Control Room, 29 Jan. to 1 April 1967, entry for 8 Feb. 1967.
23 UBC Central Control Room logbook, 13 April 1971-, entry for 12 June 1971.
24 UBC Logbook, 13 April 1971-, entry for 9 June 1971.
25 UBC Logbook, 13 April 1971-, entry for 19 April 1971.
26 UBC Logbook, 13 April 1971-, entry for 18 May 1971.
27 UBC Logbook, 13 April 1971-, entry for 10 May 1971.
28 UBC '1974-1989' box, file 9: Assistant Controller of Programmes to Controller of Programmes, 8 August 1975.
29 UBC '1974-1989' box, file 39: Cosmas Warugaba, 'Some of the Failures in Transmission Emanating from Unreliable Transport at U.B.C.,' 21 May 1978.
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31 Kabarole District Archives box 59, 'Information services, broadcasting and publications and newspapers, 1974' file: Provincial Information Officer, Western, to P.S. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 12 March 1975.
32 Lira District Archives (hereafter LDA) box 517, file with no cover: G. Obwona, report for April 1971, 5 May 1971.
33 LDA box 517, file with no cover: G. Obwona, report for December 1971, 10 Jan. 1972.
34 LDA box 517, file with no cover: G. Obwona, report for March 1973, 6 April 1973.
35 LDA box 517, file with no cover: G. Obwona, report for April 1973, 7 May 1973.
36 UBC '1972-73' box, file 10: E. Ssemambo to Chief Engineer, 7 April 1872.

37 UBC '1972-73' box, file 10: Lawrence Obonyo-Pata to Chief Engineer, 18 April 1972.
38 Kabarole District Archives 271/1: Address of the Three Directors to Members of the District Team and Planning Committee, North Busoga, 6 June 1974.
39 UBC '1972-73' box, file 10: William Ocen to Chief Engineer, n.d. (but 1972).
40 UNA Moroto District Archives 14/S/INT 8: Security committee meeting, 18 Sept. 1972.
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49 Kabale District Archives ADM 1, 'Kigezi: General Complaints' file: David Kabunga to Information Officer, Kabale, 14 June 1971.
50 'Decree Bans Women's Wigs and Trousers,' *Voice of Uganda* 1 (365), 5 Feb. 1974.
51 Editorial letter, C. Kakembo, *Voice of Uganda* 1 (384), 27 Feb. 1974.
52 JDA ADM ALG 1/12: County chief Butembe to all gombolola chiefs, 17 May 1973.
53 JDA ADM ALG 1/12: County chief Butembe to D.C. Busoga, 17 May 1973.
54 UBC '1974-1989' box, file 22: Minutes of a meeting for the Radio Uganda jubilee, 9 Feb. 1979.
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CHAPTER 6.4

The Timbre of Power in Burundi

Aidan Russell

Introduction

Amid political crisis in 2015, protests and counter-protests in Bujumbura duelled in song. Celebrating the release of the imprisoned journalist Bob Rugurika, opponents of the ruling CNDD-FDD party sang '*urabaza abo ba DD iyo ukuri kwaroye*', 'ask the CNDD-FDD members where the truth has gone' (Nizigiyimana 2020). The song transformed into a political slogan, contesting the president's attempt to prolong his power into a third term in office. Soon after, supporters of the government assembled outside Rugurika's radio headquarters with a song of their own: *Abagumyabanga twese turi umwe, ntakizodutandukanya*, 'as the secret keepers, we are one and nothing will separate us.'

Music as a tool of power is prevalent across Burundi's history. Songs in the street in 2015 unified and divided, motivated and intimidated. In the 1990s, Rwandan gospel songs flooded the airwaves to drown out thoughts of the descent to civil war (Ntahomvukiye 2020); popular music has lent power to exiles for retaining their hope of return (Ntahomvukiye 2021) and exhorted the moral powers of peace after extraordinary violence (Russell 2019a: 269). When the monarchy was overthrown in 1966, traditional royalist words were adapted in song to legitimate the new military authority, with children singing '*Ganza sabwa, Prezida wa mbere, yohoo! Muvyeyi w'Abarundi bose*', 'reign and rule, oh First President! Parent of all the Barundi'; soon after, the great Congolese artist Joseph Kabasele was invited to write two new songs in Kirundi and Lingala to laud the ruling party and the president himself (Baransananikiye 2014: 30-33). Long before such modern struggles, yet continuing today, praise-singing has expressed a subject's love for and dependence on a 'parental' superior (Rodegem 1973; Desrosiers & Russell 2020), drums incarnate both sovereign power and collective well-being, and particular rhythms and timbres of musical technique open the door to powerful spirits.

This chapter departs from this musical premise to ask what textures of power might be heard in Burundi if we listen for them with a musical sensibility – considering words, expressions, and representations of power through musical metaphors, in place of the more familiar visual or tactile ones. As metaphor, thinking of power with a musical sensibility may alert to creativity and complexity, to genre convention and situated innovation, to performance, individual skill, and the aural effect of how power is *heard* as much as it is expressed – a sensory dimension beyond the visual, and a perspective on words of power that exceeds the logocentric. The brief survey here adopts a handful of aspects of musical practice in Burundi as an oblique

means of reimagining questions of how power has been claimed, performed and challenged in the country's history, towards a sense of sound texture – of timbre – that intimate what lies beneath the surface of powerful words.

Speaking of Power

To begin with such words, the Kirundi language affords several possible starting points. As *ububasha*, linked to *kubasha* 'to be able', power is most simply the ability to act. But it is also *ubukuru*, denoting seniority, primacy, authority and dignity as much as power, speaking of hierarchy and structure in its possession. As *ubugabo*, power is gendered as 'manliness' (the abstract quality of *umugabo* 'man'), as virility, force, and sovereignty. And such sovereign power is also a drum, *ingoma*, both the power of the (royal) sovereign and the instrument that incarnated this power.

The recurrence of hierarchy and sovereignty in these words endorses something of the common academic presumption of the former as the definition of power in Burundi, reflected in abundant studies of royalty, presidential or state power, social and ethnic stratification, clientship and obedience (e.g., Botte et al. 1969; Mworoha 1977; Chrétien 1993; Laely 1997; Russell 2015). Power in these understandings is conventionally political and felt through structure and domination. But even within these political frames there is more texture in the conception of power to be discerned. The occurrence of gender and generation in Kirundi terms for power, or of subtler themes of moral quality in the dignity of *ubukuru*, intimate the interpenetration of social and political powers, mingling their assessments of value. *Ubuvyeyi*, parenthood, constitutes one of the most charged terms of affective power in political discourse, whether in this genderless form or in the attribution of kings and presidents as the 'father' of their people, *Sebarundi* – all underpinned by sentiments of what a good parent ought to do for their children, and therefore on what terms neglect may be indicted (Desrosiers and Russell 2020: 963-966). These are not eternal, abstract principles. Political interventions in the nature of the family itself, such as colonial projects of domesticity targeted especially at women (Hunt 1990), transformed the social resonances by which such political invocations have been heard through history. Specific historical circumstances expose the grain of textural variation.

Crucially, power is not solely the structural possession of the dominant. The word for drum and sovereign power, *ingoma*, is lexically linked to a word for revolt, *kugoma* (Schoenbrun 1998: 106; Rodegem 1970a). Nor is it simply a matter of domination and resistance. Parenthood and spirituality provide words or means for sharing and shaping political power, not just for consolidating or defying it. From royal authority and discourses of parenthood to agricultural, medicinal and spiritual practice, the power of fertility, powers to care for and to heal exceed power conceived solely as the ability to act.

Via historical linguistics, David Schoenbrun proposed thinking about the deep history of power practices across the Great Lakes in terms of 'instrumental' and 'creative' powers. The 'dispersed and contradictory notions of the texture of power', he argued (1998: 4), could be felt in the 'words, pauses, and gestures that healers and political orators use to make people well and to sway opinion' (that is, *creative* power), as much as in the 'exchange of gifts to build patron-client relationships or in the power of military threat to cause social change' (*instrumental* power) (1998: 13). Fundamentally entwined, these two facets may be felt to work through three further dimensions. First, there is the power of speech: whether in the sophisticated eloquence of the educated aristocrat, the strategic fumbling of the intelligent peasant, or the binding speech of healers, words are central to both instrumental and creative uses of power (Schoenbrun 1998: 111; Albert 1964). Second, there is the transactional nature of power: through the exchange of gifts, goods and gestures, but also through the speech transaction – in declamation, audition, and conversation – power is formed in the relationship *between* (Desrosiers & Russell 2020; cf. Bernault 2019). And finally, there is the temporal nature of power, a matter of differential trajectories of consolidation and disintegration, balance, alignment, and new creation: the 'mercurial' phenomenology of power, Schoenbrun argued, was felt in a 'fundamental conundrum of living: over long spans of time it is not possible to concentrate power inside a single locus' (1998: 13-14). No singular story can narrate the historical experience of the complexities of power, as power is not something fixed within or located outside of time, but something to be felt in motion through differing trajectories within and across time (Desrosiers & Russell 2020).

Adopting musical sensibilities as a heuristic device cuts across any possible boundaries by which power might be delineated in Burundi. This requires some linguistic effort to pursue, which may vary in its success. English-language academic writing tends to privilege visual metaphors (the things we can 'see' in a gesture of power), or those related to speech (what an act of power 'tells us'). Thinking with music means making a conscious effort to shift such naturalized metaphors, in the hope that this may encourage us to hear things differently. The focus here is on expressions and representations of power, and while music may encompass the values of skilful speech, it encourages us to defy logocentric attention to the meaning of words alone. Rhythms, melodies and voices can provide models by which to conceive the intermingling of creative and instrumental powers, the complexities of different trajectories, and complex transactions that are all experienced at the same time. Fundamentally creative, music is instrumentally deployed to create an effect in others, its success or failure consisting in a performative transaction, in the relationship between player and audience. Departing from three archetypal aspects of Kirundi musical practice in the twentieth century – the rhythm of the drum, the polyphony of song, and the timbre of the *inanga* harp – the rest of this chapter therefore considers the effect of expressions of power in Burundi as, in a sense, a *musical* effect.

Rhythms of Power

It is above all the drum that makes music and power synonymous in Burundi. Until the abolition of the monarchy in 1966, the co-identification of the instrument, the kingdom, and royal power was so strong that the word *ingoma* covered all three. Marshalled as a cultural symbol of nationalism, the drum remains critical whether as an exertion of 'soft', cultural power in its inscription in the UNESCO lists of intangible heritage, or as an index of more acute dynamics of threat and domination – like protests against the supposed 'theft' of Kirundi drumming arts by rival Rwanda in 2019 (Chrétien 2019), or the passing of oppressive legal restrictions against women participating in 'traditional' drumming performances in 2017 (Mbonyingingo and Ntiranyibagira 2020).

The textures of power evoked by the music of the drum might be felt in rhythm and movement, consolidation and disintegration, time and place. The complexities of Kirundi drum rhythms are widely renowned, the interchange between different rhythms leading to swelling and driving shifts in a performance that build to overwhelm its audience. Even in the most basic schematic form, the drum orchestra lends itself to metaphorical deconstructions of leadership, direction, and contestation, as drums categorized by size and tone take on specific roles in instigating the music, regulating the orchestra or breaking out in a new beat.[1] Who initiates, who leads, who binds, who deviates, who drives: such questions of power, when imagined through music, become as much about rhythm and temporality as about structure, sounding the trajectories along which powers accelerate and decelerate through variable intonations and intermittent alignments.

The drum and its rhythms therefore help us feel textures of power both in their placement within history and through their sensibilities. Prior to colonial conquest, the construction and playing of drums were strictly controlled by royal authority. The intonation of specific drums at specific times marked out temporal cycles of power and its renewal, such as at the investiture of a new king, the *mwami* (Ndayishinguje 1977). This was a creative moment of change: the total transformation that comes with the shift to a new tempo, the introduction of a new rhythmic motif that comes to overhaul and dominate the music. Historical legends spoke of rebel kings who would overthrow and re-found the kingdom (Vansina 1972; Ndoricimpa 1984); through the electoral campaign of the beloved Prince Rwagasore, such creative royal revolutions were passionately invoked in the struggle for independence in 1960 and 1961 (Russell 2019a; Deslaurier and Nizigiyimana 2012).

But a longer temporal cycle also revolved in a king's accession, one which instrumentally reconfirmed the *static* element of kingship. The change from one mwami to the next brought a change of behaviour, expectations and interests, but the rhythms through which kingship itself moved across time rendered these changes stable. A cycle of king's names repeated across the centuries. Ntare the

Lion waged war and expanded territory, succeeded by his son Mwezi the Moon and grandson Mutaga the Day, before Mwambutsa the One Who Causes to Cross Over died outside his kingdom. The cycle then renewed again with a new Lion until it was permanently disrupted by a new military tattoo in 1966. Within this deep royal ostinato the rapid repetition of smaller motions substantiated stable sovereignty or shifted the creative power of change through the act of *gusasa*, the subject moving towards a recognized sovereign: travelling to perform submission and adoration rendered authority to the recipient, but this act needed to be repeated over time for the gift of authority to be sustained (Mworoha and Ndayishinguje 1981; Russell 2019b).

The rhythms that accumulated around royal power, however, also accrued the temporalities of other powers that moved in separate motion. The fullest expression of these rhythms came with the annual festival of fecundity, *umuganuro*, a moment of rebirth that was suppressed under missionary pressure by the Belgians in 1929 (Gahama 1984; Rugomana and Rodegem 1971).[2] Until its colonial abolition, *umuganuro* reconstituted and reconfirmed an assemblage of concordant powers through the rhythm of repetition, their interrelationships brought briefly into synchrony: rhythms of the spirit world, rhythms of the earth, and rhythms of human life beyond royalty. Time and motion were the critical modes by which these various expressions of power were brought together, their dependencies performed, and their place in society acted out: the physical movement of people, agricultural produce, cattle, and ritual objects from various locations across the kingdom towards the central site of festival, the choreographed movements of the ceremony itself, and the cyclical temporalities that reconciled in this moment.

At the centre of this synchrony was the dynastic drum, Karyenda, only ever brought out of its palace and beaten in such highly charged moments. The festival struck out time and motion to reconfirm the relationships that structured kingship and the kingdom itself, while marking and celebrating new life, assuring further fecundity of land and people, and reconciling the diverging tempos of lunar and solar years around a complex agricultural calendar. The king was said to 'eat the year' at *umuganuro* around December through consumption of sorghum, while common families 'ate the year' together around April, through celebratory meals of finger millet (Chrétien 1979). Such counterrhythms marked the distinction of the 'year of the king' from the 'year of Hutu and Tutsi', separating sovereign power from quotidian life; yet each rhythm was equally heard in a chorus of fertilities, the festivities of both marked by rituals of human and environmental fecundity as fundamentally bound together and renewed in synchronizations of different tempos. Power – whether royal, spiritual, familial, reproductive – was evoked in temporal conversion, differential trajectories coming together in concert before propelling ritual participants off in new directions. Rhythmically intoned and regulated, these powers were briefly brought under measured control but always moved through tempos that defied any singular beat.

Such beats may be heard beyond the ceremonies of a bygone kingdom. Cyclical rhythms of power stretch out across renditions of Burundi's history, most especially in popular and scholarly explanations of postcolonial violence: the cycle, the chain, the date-list of recurrent crises. Attempts to explain, to encode, to regulate according to a particular subjective experience or way of knowing, to predict or break the recurrence of such cycles – these rhythms of history are both echoes of power and exertions of it.

Paying attention to the rhythmic cycles by which power is narrated encourages an open attitude towards a phenomenological sense of alignment or arrhythmia between these cycles of history. Historical readings of republican governments from the 1970s to the 1990s find their heartbeat in echoes of royal cycles (Lemarchand 1996): the declaration of new life at the announcement of a coup d'état, the waning of popular or elite support as authoritarian governments each reached various forms of stagnation, before a new declaration of renewal and rebirth – or of total collapse into civil war, from which torment the cycle itself must begin again. On shorter timescales, today democratic elections in Burundi witness cyclical rhythms moving at differential speeds – the ritual of renewal through campaign and ballot box, but also the lengthier cycle of a president whose power marks an arc that is only syncopated, not contained, by these electoral rituals. The 'crisis' of 2015, in this light, was the failed resolution of temporalities out of time with each other: a president declaring that his power moved anticipated renewal. Within these struggles, dormant echoes of dynastic kingship reasserted themselves, as President Nkurunziza was hailed as 'father of the Barundi', 'the eternal guide', or resented for such intimations of royal eternity (Desrosiers & Russell 2020: 963). With no means to resolve the divergent rhythms in synchrony, force alone remained to instil a singular beat.

Hearing expressions of power in rhythm means being sensitive to the complexities of these timescales, the efflorescence of off-beats and counter-rhythms, and the unanticipated return of driving motifs. A rhythmic texture of power expresses stability, repetition, divergence, alternation, and transformation: temporalities of cyclic reconfirmation and of revolution.

Polyphonies of Power

Yet power might also be heard as song – in particular, as a polyphonic chorus, the combination of multiple voices and instruments that each carry their own unique quality but are to be heard as parts of a musical whole (Arom 1991; Pariot 2021). Listening in such terms means attention to the undertones and overtones of the words that are used to express and contest power, and the specific combination of their broader fields of reference beyond their literal meaning. Kirundi speech, it is often noted, is suspended in a tangled web of knowledge: one must know what

to say, what not to say, how to say it, and how to hear the words of others to either express, conceal, or discern a truth (Albert 1964; Russell 2019a). This makes the spoken or written word a primary stage, expression, and tool of power. But this inescapable importance is also a logocentric trap. The word is heard as more than language alone.

Listening to a political speech with polyphony in mind, therefore, may tune the ear to layering, juxtaposition and, at times, discordancy of reference and intimation – that is, the direct and indirect invocations of many different forms of power used to exert an instrumental purpose. Instead of hearing power in one of these lexical fields at a time – say in references to national unity, ethnic division, parental or divine authority, proverbial wisdom or folkloric storytelling – polyphony expresses the choice of whether to say or not to say, to mix and move between these words and fields of powerful ideas, and to compose something that may exceed the limitations of any singular invocation. Here the transactions between these variable fields of reference prevail, and most especially the transactions between a speaker and the audience to whom such a song of power is delivered.

For such transactions, specific examples serve us better than the grand terms of rhythmic temporalities. In the political turmoil of the 1960s, for instance, an array of uncertainties in the order of power overwhelmed newly independent Burundi: factions of royalists and republicans, democratic populists and a praetorian army, Cold War allegiances, and bubbling anxieties of rival ethnic supremacies. Through such a fearful moment no singular conception of power dominated political expression. Instead, polyphonic interleaving of many possible invocations attempted to consolidate forms of power that seemed to be splitting apart.

In these terms, a pair of speeches given by Minister of the Interior Pierre Mpozenzi in 1964 sounded like a desperate song of many voices. Intending to warn against the dangers of ethnic politics, Mpozenzi exemplified the most forceful polyphonies of powerful speech through rapid shifts between symbolic registers (Russell 2019a: 141-145). He vested his authority explicitly in the legal-bureaucratic modernity of the state (*Leta*) and cited its constitution. But he also stressed the more politically meaningful, emotive register of royalty, casting himself as speaking on behalf of the king. The words he presented were '*impanuro za kivyeyi*', 'paternal counsels' from his mwami, Mpozenzi claimed.[3] Warning the population against people who spread rumours of ethnic strife, he rattled through motifs of spiritual malevolence and animal symbolism, casting rumourmongers as 'workers of wicked deeds' who were hiding in darkness like *abarozi* 'witches'[4] or like 'hyenas', 'hunting sheep in the night'.[5] He exhorted his audience to invest in ancestral virtues against such powers of the night: to keep the peace, *amahoro*, as the 'duty/secret [*ibanga*] we inherited from our grandfathers'.[6] Such virtues were elsewhere contemplated through Christian moral theology (Kayoya 1968), and here as elsewhere supported through the liberal deployment of proverbs – appeals to the power of wisdom and intelligence as much as to tradition or truth.

Not simply calling for unity or exerting the authority of the state, Mpozenzi layered his speeches as a polyphony of harmonic references to alternative forms of power, both creative and instrumental in tone. His central message – of state and royal authority opposing ethnic division – was delivered through textural allusions to as many cognate forms of power as he could squeeze in, his exertion of state power inseparable from the harmonies he created with these further tonal references.

Mpozenzi's composed allusions in his pre-prepared speeches, of course, depended on the fields of power he wove together being well-established and familiar to all – that is why he invoked them, when seeking to counter a new and uncertain threat of ethnic divisionism. But listening to more antiphonal exchanges between two competing voices brings out a different polyphonic resonance in aural techniques of power: when hierarchy itself is under question, the most effective composition of registers may be something to be worked out through call-and-response, felt in the shifting melody and in discordant failure, rather than constituting a set of values known from the start.

In 1970, four years after the military took power yet when it was still beset by anxiety over its position, a lowly *Commissaire d'arrondissement* engaged the local Catholic Church through a string of letters. He was calling on Church leaders to tackle *Nangayivuza*, a syncretic and secretive cult that had been born under the Belgians and treated by successive authorities as a reflection of socio-politico-spiritual malaise (Rodegem 1970b; Lemarchand 1996: 149; Russell 2019a). Commissaire Ntahobaje enjoined them to suppress *Nangayivuza* 'by all means': 'in the *réunions d'information*, in Church sermons, you ought to lean on this anti-national problem. It is against the custom of a Murundi deserving of the name.'[7] In a few terse lines he wove phonic tones of nationalist modernity and identarian tradition, of administrative and spiritual authority, to bring the Church to do his bidding.

Yet the polyphonic element in this wheedling invocation went beyond the singular letter. The day before, Ntahobaje had sent another note that took a rather different tone: a startling warning to Church officials that 'ALL MEETINGS whatever they may be must be brought to the attention of the authorities,' with an agenda submitted in advance, minutes submitted afterwards, and a representative of the state present throughout.[8] 'Do not be at all surprised,' Ntahobaje intoned, 'because "THE ADMINISTRATION HAS NO LIMITS."' The textures of power in this transaction were layered, from moral, customary and religious duty to an absolute exertion of state domination: their material separation across two letters hinted that the true power to emerge from these invocations lay in the harmonics, in the gaps between.

Power as a polyphonic transaction, here, was a struggle over the uncertainty of hierarchy and the latitudes of agency, and the response to Ntahobaje's call mattered above all. After a meeting in-person that he carefully cited in writing, the local archbishop Stanislas Kaburungu wrote back with skilful poise. He composed two responses, dated to the same day and replying to each of the Commissaire's

letters. To the aggressive declaration of state supremacy, the archbishop exerted intransigent intellectualism, politeness and a certain ironic snark: he noted the breadth of 'meetings' that might involve church members, remarking that the 'agenda' for many of these would be found in the Gospel (he could provide bibliographic references), and the 'minutes' inscribed 'more or less deeply in the consciences of the participants.'[9] He further requested a citation for the apparent quotation that 'the administration has no limits,' querying whether perhaps it had been taken out of context, and whether it was indeed possible to have any powers unlimited by the rights of others.

But in concert with his parallel letter directly on the matter of *Nangayivuza*, the polyphonic effect mounted a crescendo. First, deference: Kaburungu apologized that he had not at first received the letter, but assured that 'my regret with regards to this misunderstanding of the hierarchical order, which is only a procedural error, signifies in no way, on our part, any refusal of collaboration.'[10] Then, an overtly academic tone, interspersed with Latin phrases, that performed cooperation while dissecting the administrator's intellectual errors:

> Allow me, nevertheless, to tell you what are, in my opinion, the two conditions of a methodical and efficacious collaboration: 1) to circumscribe, as far as possible, the nature of the evil; 2) to apply the appropriate remedies to the evil.
>
> *Ad primum*: Do we know enough about the nature of the evil against which we must embark on a crusade? What are its historical origins? How does it manifest today? Is it a political movement, a religious movement, or both at the same time? […]
>
> *Ad secundum*: You ask us to suppress this scourge 'by *all* means'. The problem is, in my opinion: What are the *good* means at *our disposal*? Good they should be, because I assume that all means are not good in order to achieve their goal, even if that goal is good.[11]

The textures of power across this dual exchange were thus to be heard in linguistic skill and the overt exertion of multiple sources of authority at once, from hierarchy, state politics, morality and tradition to etiquette, religion, academic competence, intellectual rigour, and social responsibility – all entwined across parallel letters, the unrecorded face to face meeting, and the gaps and silences between. The terms of polyphony help us hear the textures of such exchanges: composed of many melodies, keys and voices, heard as one song. To reduce all to the contestation of state and ecclesiastical power to a struggle of simple hierarchy – or even to the lexical content of the words alone – would be to mute the complexity through which the possibility of difference emerged.

Timbres of Power and the Sublime Secret

Ultimately, however, there is one move in the song of power that points towards its truest realisation. It is heard in the music of the *inanga*, a stringed instrument played in various forms across the region, but with certain genres particular to Burundi – most remarkably, the genre of 'whispered inanga'. When the Murundi inanga player sang at night, head tilted close to his instrument, and voice dropped to a hoarse whisper, the habituated audience might hear an extraordinary transformation coming out of the dark. A whisper cannot entirely effectuate the full expression of a tonal language like Kirundi, as the whisper flattens the rise and fall of tone, and words differentiated by tone are enunciated almost identically. But with enough skill, in the right moment, and to an audience open to its effect, the strings of the inanga would express the correct rise or fall of tonal speech, become aurally blended with the whispered timbre of the player's voice, and in this moment the voice transferred from the man to his instrument (Fales 1995). To play the inanga in any form is *kuvuza inanga*, 'to cause the inanga to speak', while the whispering 'singer' is said *kuvugira inanga*, 'to speak for the inanga'; in its fullest expression, the whispered timbric effect leads to the perception simply that *inanga ivuga*, the inanga speaks. The timbre of the human voice becomes so entangled with the timbre of the harp that they are heard as a single texture of sound.

This extraordinary musical transformation encapsulates the fundamental goal of many words of power: to layer and manipulate the textures of voice, reference, rhythm and delivery in order to achieve a point of sublimation, no longer *speaking of* or *on behalf of* another source of power but *being heard as* the voice of that power. Another style of inanga music, played in rituals of spirit possession, made this explicit. *Nangayivuza*, the cult that Commissaire Ntahobaje ordered the Church to exterminate, took the music of sublime power as its defining feature: the cult's name translates as the 'the self-playing harp', after stories of its founder, an inanga maestro who held that his harp spoke for itself, and which continued to do so after the maestro's death (Fales 1995; cf. Rodegem 1970b). But this was simply a proprietary invocation of a far older and more widespread conception, today followed only by a minority, but once fundamental to the social and spiritual order of the kingdom: that of Kiranga, the paramount spirit of Kirundi pre-Christian religious practice (Barancira 1990; Chrétien 1981). In *kubandwa* ceremonies the spirit Kiranga enters his initiates to the music of the inanga, its song not whispered but enunciated in a falsetto, 'a stark harmonic that pierces the thick formants of the inanga' (Fales 2002: 84). The most literal expression of power 'speaking through', the arrival of Kiranga is heard when the voice of the inanga is joined by the voice of the spirit himself, out of the mouth of his initiate.

With this aural moment of transformation in mind as the purest expression of power, we can revisit some of the rhythms and polyphonies invoked above. Not only the inanga, but the ingoma too evoke such interpenetrating textures, within

and between each other. Drum orchestras play with instruments of different timbre and pitch, expressing different rhythms that run against one another, yet collapse into a collective voice in driving moments of unity. The rhythms of royalty, it has been argued, ultimately depended on such sublimation: 'kingship capture[d] the king' as a medium for other powers and interests, empowered itself by this intermediary tenor (Chrétien 1977; cf. Newbury 2009). In the shifting rhythms of historical temporalities, the power of the past is most acute when that past is felt to be present, speaking through the current moment. The year 1972, a date of particular horror in national memory, was shouted in panic during ethnic tensions in 1988 (Guichaoua et al. 1989); protesters in 1991 shaved their heads and marched silently towards Bujumbura in mourning for those killed twenty years previously (Lemarchand 1996: 150); explicit recall of the same crisis pushed some to resist new genocidal acts in 1993 (Ndikumana 2024); in 2015, the disappearance of protesters and the movement of trucks, suspected to be disposing of bodies, palpably echoed the same tools of far greater violence in 1972 (Purdeková 2017: 356-357). Less a trajectory or chain of violence, the power of the past is heard in its continual sublimation within the present.

Polyphony too might be heard as an aspiration towards such sublimation: Commissaire Ntahobaje invoking custom and unlimited state authority, seeking to incarnate traditional and state power and be heard as their voice, rather than as the rather lowly administrator he was. But Minister Mpozenzi's speech of danger and unity expressed the aspiration to sublimation most directly. He claimed to be quoting his king, and employed the royal verb *kuvumera*, to 'bellow' or 'low' like cattle (rather than the conventional word *kuvuma*, to 'talk') for reporting royal words. *Kuvumera* is the verb of powerful speech *par excellence*, overtly ringing the sound of sublimation in its alignment and interpenetration of timbres. Before it is the voice of royalty, it is the voice of cattle, the archetypal symbol of wealth, beauty and authority; at the same time as it is the voice of cattle, it is the voice of Kiranga, speaking through his initiates. Invoked by a political representative like Mpozenzi, it expressed the perfect aspiration towards a sublimation of royal, spiritual, and animal powers within the political voice.

These attempts at sublimation finally brings another sense into the musical metaphors explored here: that of sight, or specifically its lack. Through sound one may sense the presence of the unseen. Mpozenzi was able to speak for his king precisely because his king was not in public to speak for himself. It is the unseen spirit that speaks through the initiate in the *kubandwa* ceremony; the lack of sight, when 'whispered inanga' is performed at night, plays a powerful role in achieving its timbric effect. The violence of the past is felt in the present moment, but as an embodied memory, not as the sight before one's eyes. If the drum was the most voluble symbol of royal power, it also trod the line of invisibility and inaudibility; the drum was so strictly controlled by the mwami that German travellers in the 1890s believed the instrument was entirely unknown in the country (Chrétien 1968:

93). Karyenda itself mostly resided unseen in its sacred court (Mworoha 1975), the temporalities of its concealment and revelation compounding the rhythmic nature of its power. Even when it 'spoke', the voice of the drum evoked silent powers within: the 'belly' of the drum, *inda*, contained the most profound secrets, objects and powers that might not be said to be heard in its rhythms, but were felt and known behind its sound. *Hagoye umwami, ingoma n'igiti*, ran one prominent proverb, expressing how power lay beyond the instrument that expressed it: what matters is the king – the drum is only wood.

Here at last we have something of the essence within these expressions of power, behind all their many textures and modes. *Inda* constitutes the innermost part of the person, deeper even than the heart, *umutima* (Ntabona 1993). The most powerful bonds of all lay between these unseen parts of personhood: the secret, *ibanga*, is also the most fundamental duty, a 'radical fidelity to the constitutive ties of the person…to the point of conferring on the person an unfailing interior force' (Ntabona 1985: 287). Whether the assembly of powerful figures around the mwami prior to colonisation – known as the *abanyamabanga*, the 'people of secrets' – or the expression of Christian faith – *ibanga ry'ubukristu* – or the adherents to the CNDD-FDD today – the *abagumyabanga*, 'those who keep the secret', the 'discrete' or 'loyal' ones – power is what is felt behind, within, beyond, that which binds and to which one commits wholly and totally. The trick of power is to make that unseen strength *heard*, while remaining unseen – to sing *through*, and to transform the instrument through which that power sings.

Music, Power, and Wonder

The temporal rhythms of power, the layering of different registers of powerful speech, or the power of the unseen (the sovereign, the spiritual, the secret) can each be heard without pushing the musical metaphor so far. A musical sensibility, however, may help us discern something more than the component threads we see woven in the more familiar visual or tactile metaphors of texture. Thinking of power with terms of music alerts to the creative skill that expressions of power demand: the mastery of different registers, responsiveness to an audience, the flexibility to vary tone and rhythm and reference according to the moment. This space of creativity in a certain musicality of power does not mean the complete freedom of the actor to combine rhythms, melodies, timbres, in any and all combinations; creativity takes place within expectations of genre appropriate to the moment, while the receptivity of the audience is the fundamental mechanism by which the transformation of words to power succeeds or fails.

Expressions of power, much as music, are an imbalanced collaboration between performer and audience, a gesture of transaction in which the capacity to define or impose on behalf of the former, no matter how great, is also ultimately

limited. The success of claims to power and a musical performance are achieved or rejected in how the audience *hears* the delivery: structured by expectations and the setting, certainly, influenced by prior performances and perceptions of the performer, fundamentally shaped by the skill of that performance, and not necessarily felt as a matter of choice when the audience hears what is delivered to them and responds. But the success or failure of words of power and the success or failure of a musical performance each emerges *within* that audience, not in something entirely owned or controlled by the performer.

Thinking of words and practices of power in terms borrowed from music thus demands we put their pieces back together again. The textures of their delivery may be pulled apart and analysed separately as elements like rhythm, polyphony or timbre, but the music itself is heard as all of these at once. It takes great effort to hear *only* the quality of timbre, to *think about* and not just *feel* rhythm, to separate out the strands of polyphony as they are delivered entangled, and when we pull each piece apart the effect of the whole is immediately lost. Expressions of power, much as music, are composed of their constituent elements, techniques, tools and relationships; flaws in one may break the effect and spoil the performance. But both music and power are always heard as more than what they are made of. In their ultimate expression, both aspire to effect an unmeasurable quality of wonder.

Notes

1 Described in most detail in the Rwandan context (Gansemans 1988: 207-211).

2 *Umuganuro* was briefly reinstated as a religiously 'sanitized' national festival in 1959.

3 *Archives nationales du Burundi* (ANB) BH 6.29, Pierre Mpozenzi, 'Barundi mwese', 30 April 1964.

4 Ibid.

5 ANB BI 6.220, Pierre Mpozenzi, 'Ijambo nyakubahwa', 19 June 1964.

6 ANB BH 6.29, Pierre Mpozenzi, 'Barundi mwese', 30 April 1964.

7 ANB BI 6.90, Ntahobaje, letter to curés, 17 February 1970.

8 ANB BI 6.90, Ntahobaje, letter to curés, 16 February 1970.

9 ANB BI 6.90, Mgr Kaburungu, letter to Commissaire, 'Réunions' 24 February 1970.

10 ANB BI 6.90, Mgr Kaburungu, letter to Commissaire, 'Bananga et Baganza', 24 February 1970.

11 Ibid. Emphases in original.

CHAPTER 6.5

Music Technologies of Power in Gabon

Alice Aterianus-Owanga

Introduction

From July to August 2024, the WhatsApp news feeds of many of my contacts and friends in the Gabonese music scene, as well as the conversations I had in Libreville, were filled with references to images of the transitional president, Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema,[1] appearing alongside music artists. During the national inclusive dialogue held in April 2024 as part of the reconstruction of national institutions, he first organized a notable opening ceremony featuring artists from different generations. A singer from the 1970s (André Pépé Nze) reappeared on stage after being forgotten and sidelined for several decades, even receiving a presidential embrace in front of an audience of officials. In this same moment of high political significance, a rapper who had been exiled for several years due to his critical stance (Lord Ekomy Ndong) came to share his odes to the promotion of local cultural heritage. He introduced his performance with an acoustic sequence on the *ngombi* harp, putting this *bwiti*[2] ritual instrument and its melodies at the centre of his message, and was joined on stage by the president who backed up his claims for change.

Later, the President of the Transition confirmed his closeness to and strategic use of artists and musical performances during his republican tour across the nine provinces of the country. After appearing dancing in a *corps de garde* in the north (in his father's home province), he later performed *ndjobi* dance steps during a visit animated by a folkloric group from Haut-Ogooué (his mother's home province). His movements and the wearing of symbolic attributes confirmed his familiarity with the area and with this repertoire rooted in secret society. Finally, in August 2024, during performances held in various locations around the country ahead of the Independence Day, the president once again joined the stage, this time alongside a rapper and *ntcham*[3] artist, performing mechanical urban dance steps with hip-hop undertones.

In the social media where these videos were shared, the president was described as 'the best of presidents', a 'purebred Gaboma', 'a true son of the country,' 'the president of artists', or even the most 'charismatic'. In response or reaction to these online comments, the conversations I participated in during my fieldwork in Libreville in the summer of 2024 revolved as much around the appearances of the new president as around the artists accompanying him, whose relationships with the new authorities were scrutinized. Behind the scenes, these meetings were accompanied by a whole series of (money) transactions and negotiations, weaving a network of exchanges between the new regime and the music artists that make up

Gabonese urban soundscapes. Ultimately, whether through smartphone screens, taxis and minibuses tuned to local radios, or in the nightclubs frequented by city dwellers, the omnipresence of hymns to 'freedom' and musical celebrations of the new independence[4] offered a revealing insight into how power, its ideologies, and its agents manifest in an undeniably sonic texture, resonating through a variety of human and non-human mediums.

These observations echo earlier work on the politics of performance, which called for moving beyond the state-centrism of previous theories and considering the relational and performative dimensions of power. Based on her historical and ethnographic study of Tanzanian music and dance groups, Kelly Askew famously proposed a renewal of debates on power and nationalism by developing a 'theory of the politics of performance', which would make sense of 'how performance is actively employed in the negotiation of power relations' (Askew, 2006: 21).

Drawing on long-term research in Gabon,[5] my paper partly continues this reflection. Yet rather than discussing the construction of the nation state (and its strategic production and negotiation of territories and ethnicity), my aim is more specifically to examine the web of technologies, affects, experiences, and sensory mediums that concretely shape and materialize the presence of music in Gabonese urban life and its intersections with the realm of power relationships. I introduce the idea of 'music technologies of power' as a framework for understanding how sound, sensory, and material mediations contribute to the daily (re)production of local experiences, performances and relationships of power. As this paper will demonstrate, the power of music and the diverse mediations it mobilizes can be defined in this context as a capacity to affect: to evoke emotions of hope, rebellion, or compliance; to stir the imagination and memories; to penetrate people's minds and souls; to enchant or inflict harm; to accuse or praise. It serves as a currency in relationships of interdependency and competition between musicians' and political elites. In this paper, I pay special attention to the transformations of music technologies of power over the recent decades of digitalization, in a context marked by growing mediatization, the proliferation of screens, and the ubiquity of smartphones in urban daily life.

In that sense, this discussion echoes earlier research on the digitization of music (Taylor, 2017) and its global expansion beyond the Western world (Olivier, 2020, 2022; Born, 2021). A significant portion of recent studies on music digitization has drawn, implicitly or explicitly, on the perspectives of Science and Technology Studies (STS) and Actor-Network Theory (ANT) to explore music mediation. The concept of music mediation was notably introduced by Antoine Hennion (a close collaborator of Bruno Latour) in his work on baroque music enthusiasts (Hennion, 2015; 1995 for the French edition). Hennion emphasized the need to move beyond frameworks focused solely on the audience, artists, and musical oeuvres, urging scholars to explore the multiple mediators that animate music and forge the relationships between music, artists, and audiences. In doing so, he aligned with

broader sociological shifts led by scholars at the École des Mines in France, who sought to re-evaluate the significance of objects, technologies, material elements, and natural entities in understanding the social world (Latour, 1996).

Already well-known in France, Hennion's theory of music mediation gained broader attraction internationally, in part through the work of scholars such as Georgina Born (2019), who expanded the concept by introducing the notion of 'assemblage.' Born argued that mediation is an aggregate of music's social, technological, and temporal dimensions, which varies across different contexts and historical periods. In a recent edited volume on music digitization, Born revisits a wide range of previous theories on music technologies, highlighting how research on music mediation and micro-sociological studies of music materiality, often inspired by STS, have frequently overlooked the political dimensions of the phenomena they examine (Born, 2021). Beyond the realm of music, similar critiques have been directed at Bruno Latour's project of a symmetric theory of society, which posits the equivalence of humans, natural entities (such as water, plants, trees), and objects (such as cars, microscopes, and computers) in social analysis. In a recent book, Christine Chivallon (2022) critiques this new materialism, arguing that in its effort to erase the nature/culture and human/non-human dichotomies, it bypasses critical issues related to power, politics, and domination[6].

In contrast to contemporary understandings of technologies and social worlds, often criticized for their depoliticization, the material and embodied nature of power has been famously theorized in previous research on technology in Central Africa (Warnier, 2007). Jean-Pierre Warnier's concept of technologies of power emerged from his study of the Cameroon Kingdom of Mankon and his desire to understand how domination and power relationships are concretely materialized and embodied. Material culture and ordinary bodily practices in the Cameroon Grassfields place significant emphasis on the notions of 'receptacle' and 'pot,' which also underpin the political structure of the kingdom. The analogy between the circulation of bodily substances and hierarchical positions in the social order serves as a metaphor for political authority.

In another work, which is more closely related to the area discussed in this paper, Florence Bernault introduces the notion of 'colonial transactions' to analyze the network of shared imaginaries and struggles that linked Africans and Europeans in Gabon during the colonial period. She argues that this concept of transaction draws attention to the 'things' that mediated exchanges (Bernault, 2019: 9) between Africans and Europeans, highlighting the instrumental role of material and immaterial assets in processes of domination (Bernault, 2019: 10-11). These assets also served to accumulate status, reshape identities, and extract various forms of value and power.

My paper is predicated on the possibility of bridging these apparently distant theoretical traditions – the anthropology of the materiality of power in central African countries and the growing body of research in the anthropology of music

technologies – to explore the significance of music and its mediums as conveyors and negotiators of power relationships in Gabon. My purpose is not to portray power struggles as the ultimate framework for all social relationships or musical experiences. However, as I will demonstrate, music technologies, affects, senses, and imagination wield agency within networks of relationships between humans and non-human entities, which also engage in transactions of power, influence, and control. This occurs not only in the political realm (which is the focus of this paper), but also in other contexts, such as interactions among peers, elders, or between men and women, as I discussed elsewhere (Aterianus-Owanga, 2017).

In the first section, I will outline briefly how the history of political participation in popular music in Gabon has been closely intertwined with the transformation of technological and media infrastructures, focusing on changes observed over the past two decades. I will then use an ethnographic example to examine the convergence of different registers, realms, and dimensions of power relationships as materialized through music. This will lead me to highlight the fusion of political and religious forces in musical mediations, and to stress the relevance of multimodal ethnography as a way to apprehend the multiple ontologies and realms of social, political and religious life mediated through music performances.

Digitization and the Shifting Power Struggles Around Music

As in the example chosen in my introduction, music tracks, musicians, and their analogic or digital mediations have long constituted a pivotal sonic and multisensory texture for political mobilization in Gabon. During the single-party era, the bodies of dancers in political animation groups were part of the spectacle of power, as in other Central African one-party states (Kapalanga Gazungil Sang'Amin 1989; Covington-Ward 2016); they consistently spread images and sounds that materialized the ideologies and influence of Omar Bongo and PDG patrons through TV channels, radio sets and live performances, which filled central African citizens' urban lives with popular music (Gondola 1999; Grabli 2019). From 1968 to 1990, most Gabonese musicians evolved in military orchestras, and few possibilities of music production existed out of the control of PDG (Parti Démocratique Gabonais) infrastructures, whose members also often owned the technologies used for recording and had the means to produce artists abroad (Matsahanga 2002; Aterianus-Owanga 2017). Musicians who transgressed official ideologies did it through veiled messages, irony, double-entendre; the others went in exile, or encountered pressures and censorship.

Several cases of intimidation or persecution of musicians demonstrate how their influence was, at that time, perceived as highly threatening to political elites, particularly male figures, whose success in attracting women came into competition with that of political figures. Numerous stories and rumours circulate in

Libreville regarding conflicts between singers and politicians over competition for women. It is, for instance, said that the singer and military orchestra musician Mackjoss had an affair with Patience Dabany, the first wife of President Omar Bongo Ondimba, which led the president to prevent Mackjoss from advancing to higher ranks in his military career. In the early 2000s, the singer Serge Egniga was allegedly assassinated by a general and police commander to end their rivalry over the same mistress. As these rumours suggest, prestige, fame, and the ability to attract women are consubstantial to the representation of masculine power figures, leading to competition between artists and politicians.

Over the course of this history of competitive and collaborative relationships between musicians and political power, the introduction of certain technologies has exerted an often-decisive importance. In the 1990s, the one-party landscape of explicit control and censorship changed radically around the time of the democratic transition, partly due to constitutional reforms, but also thanks to the emergence of new media and means of music production. In the 1990s, the rise of an autonomous circuit for the production and dissemination of popular music which supported the emergence of hip-hop, was intrinsically linked to the introduction of private home studios and radio stations, as well as to investments of independent entrepreneurs. This development temporarily loosened the grip of political patrons on music production.

However, as hip-hop gradually integrated into the media landscape and listening habits, these technological transformations were progressively recaptured by local ruling elites, renewing the mechanics of cultural patronage. Indeed, from the late 1990s, the unrelenting growth of rap and hip-hop's popularity in the media and urban landscape attracted investments from businessmen, political elites, and intermediaries, who invested in brand new equipment, state-of-the-art recording studios, and expensive music video productions, transforming the standards of the music industry considerably. Because these capital injections were carried out by members of presidential spheres or senior civil servants, part of the rap scene became embedded in a long-standing system of patronage and co-optation. Rappers especially garnered attention from political spheres during the presidential election of 2009, when they became Ali Bongo's preferred intermediaries to gain influence over the youth. After his election, Ali Bongo involved several rappers at official positions, and some rappers' music careers became springboards to interfere with state elites and senior officials.[7] The control on rappers' productions and insidious censorship became omnipresent over the course of Ali Bongo's presidency, particularly after the electoral crisis of 2016, which led several artists to go into exile.

The access to new technologies – be it social medias and smartphones provided by global tech companies or digital cameras and editing applications – once again played a pivotal role in the changes that occurred in the music world under Ali Bongo's regime. As early as 2009, Facebook and online media had become key

tools for circumventing censorship and disseminating rap productions. This helped broadcast transgressive songs that had been censored by official media and facilitated connections between rappers in Libreville and Gabonese youths studying or living abroad, whether for education or in exile. From 2018, a series of initiatives, notably around new forms of digital creation and distribution, emerged as alternatives to official media, unexpectedly transforming the music scene. A salient repercussion of the increased presence of digital tools is the development of a new music and dance genre called *ntcham*. Drawing on an aesthetic of robbers and bandits, as well as of criminal economies, this Afropop genre emerged out of the official music industry and media and was primarily popularized by young men, who recorded themselves with their smartphones and spread their songs via YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook. Sometimes self-identifying as robbers and street hustlers, they borrowed the singing and animation practice that enlivens the routine of prisoners in Libreville's jail to make covers of famous Nigerian and Ghanaian singers such as Shatta Wale,[8] to represent their peers and to generate recognition in their neighbourhood.

The genre then emerged directly from the increased circulation of a broader range of recording technologies and devices, but also progressively escalated its presence in music industries though the patronage of other powerful (male) figures. Indeed, famous *ntcham* artists benefited from regular support from patrons to fund the recording of their songs in studios or the shooting of their video clips. These sponsors whose names are often praised in *ntcham* songs include former prisoners who have made fortunes through drug dealing, digital entrepreneurs who have gained fame by sharing humorous videos, businessmen, and progressively, senior civil servants of Ali Bongo's regime. For instance in 2023, a close collaborator of Noureddin Bongo (Ali Bongo's son) built a highly equipped studio with the latest technologies and signed the most famous *ntcham* artists of that time, such as Eboloko, Fetty Ndoss, E.J., etc. Most of them ended up performing songs and concerts in support of Ali Bongo's campaign in 2023, just weeks before the 30 August coup d'état. The emergence and multiplication of new means of music production, dissemination, and consumption in recent years have thus coincided with the rise of new entrepreneurs, including artists themselves or music entrepreneurs who used digital means to invent new pathways to success and social recognition while inserting themselves into existing state power structures. This dynamic amplified the media presence and popularity of alternative successful and prestigious figures, whether they were artists and musicians themselves or new entrepreneurs collaborating in their promotion and dissemination, which enabled them to access better social positions.

This brief historical overview (which I develop in detail in other publications) highlights how, in the last three decades, irregular cycles of transformation and reconfiguration of music industries occurred in dialogue with the intrusion and commodification of new technologies: at different moments, the diffusion and

commodification of new tools for music recording and dissemination generated a disruption of existing structures of production and a dissociation from patronage structures to whom the ubiquity of music was instrumental. Yet time has betrayed the existence of a reverse and reactional process, which consists of a renewal of elites' hold over music through a form of cannibalization of digital tools within existing structures. This statement should not lead to any teleological representation of an intrinsic and immovable 'culture' of domination that would endlessly reproduce itself and predetermine the course of Gabonese music technologies of power. At the opposite of this vision, the recent emergence of *ntcham* and its entrepreneurs, as well as the coup d'état itself, prove that unpredictable transformations are generated by the complex mix of (local and global) networks, markets, technologies, and specific conjunctures entangled with music dynamics. Still, the Gabonese case demonstrates the vacuity and cul-de-sac of social sciences' academic perspectives on music technologies that evacuates the issue of power relationships from their analysis.

That said, this socio-historical overview of the power relationships at play between popular musicians and elites – and their entanglement with media and technological transformations – might seem quite narrow and insufficient if approached at only the meso-level analysis. The multiple ontologies associated with music technologies can also be understood through an ethnographic lens which observes performance situations, individual biographies, and the social life of music technologies themselves at a lower level. As I will describe below, the ethnographic lens allows a better understanding of the capacities granted to music to affect and transform existing power structures, by making perceptible the pervasion of religious objects and forces into the everyday practices of music consumption and production.

The Multidimensional Power of Music Technologies

In Central Africa, the field of music has long been a place where technologies and material mediations were used to navigate between the worlds of the visible and the invisible, of the living and the dead. Earlier work in Gabonese ethnomusicology has demonstrated the place of music in the ritual domain of *bwiti* and initiation societies (Sallée 1985). In these rituals, the sounds of the *mongongo* bow and the *ngombi* harp convey voices of the ancestors and spirits (Bonhomme 2014). Julien Bonhomme analysed the agency conveyed to musical instruments in *bwiti* rituals by explaining that human actors are not 'responsible' for rituals, but 'just act as animators of actions taken over by artefacts, or more exactly by spirits, ancestors, or mythical characters that they represent in the ritual scene' (Bonhomme 2014, 108, my translation).

These mediating functions attributed to sound and organology are not limited to the realm of traditional music or ritual contexts, and they have been

reconfigured with the development of the music industry, as new technologies made their entrance into religious and non-religious music spheres. On the religious side, music recorded on recorders and downloaded onto mobile phones or USB sticks has been integrated into local rituals of protection and initiation (Jadinon 2017), and into Pentecostal churches which use popular gospel music to convey faith. Outside religious spaces, musical sounds and messages are also given agency in popular artists' relationships with the intermingled domains of power and the occult. There are various ethnographic examples that illustrate the way in which Gabonese hip-hop genres have expanded and reconfigured this well-tuned multidimensional scape of music sounds, experiences and objects over different (visible and invisible) worlds and entangled power relationships. In the course of my research, for instance, I met a rapper who used his métier to condemn the sorcery attacks of his 'witches', elders of his kin who had allegedly sacrificed his maternal family members; he had transformed his use of hip-hop after his own initiation into *bwiti* and the discoveries he had made over the course of his initiation. Another artist who had converted to Pentecostalism recounted how he had used the power of hip-hop instrumentals by 50 cent combined with biblical prayers to ward off the attacks of a devil who attacked him by possessing a close friend and rapper (Aterianus-Owanga 2017).

This agency given to music devices, sonorities and their multiple correlated means of action is also striking when we observe concerts and performances in the public space. Due to their almost unique capacity of gathering a number of citizens from different classes and positions on the political chessboard, concerts are interesting places to observe the sonic and multimodal agency of music in power relations. In August 2023, two weeks before the elections and the consecutive coup d'état, a big concert was organized for the independence celebration. The '*festival de l'indépendance*' is a yearly event (often also called '*Fête de l'indépendance*'), allegedly unaffiliated with political parties, even though organized by the ministry of culture. Its political significance becomes quite noticeable during electoral years, as the independence celebration takes place two weeks before the presidential election and the presence in the show's line-up is perceived as proof of an artist's allegiance or otherwise dissociation from authorities in power. This year, the concert given to the audience was conceived as a broad gathering of different genres representative of the nation, including traditional artists, popular musicians, *ntcham* artists, and rappers such as Rodzeng.

Renowned for his engaged lyrics, Rodzeng rose to fame in the late 2000s with a group called 241 (Gabon's telephone country code) and set himself up as heir to the previous generation of conscious and traditionalist hip-hop. After a period of studies abroad (in South Africa and China), he came back to Gabon and participated with two other rappers in the creation of an online hip-hop contest called 'Bwiti Gang Cipher,' which adapted the hip-hop technique of cypher contests into a filmed format for broadcast on YouTube and Facebook. The project brought together

rappers from Libreville's rap scene, other Gabonese cities, and the diaspora for cypher sessions that were filmed and shared exclusively on YouTube and social networks, to gain independence from radios, TV channels, and producers, who were suspected of being controlled by politicians. Through its name, instrumentals and music video aesthetics, the project incidentally recycled references to *bwiti* ritual instruments and symbols.

It echoes a trend that started in the 1990s and consisted of rappers using *bwiti* as a proof of return to alleged precolonial cultures, of the liberation from western or Christian influences and of the Gabonization of their music. As visible in the project 'Bwiti gang cypher', Rodzeng pursues this trend and presents himself as one of the ardent defenders of local 'traditions,' without wanting to constrain himself to a genre of hip-hop which is evidenced by his recent collaborations with *ntcham* artists. Rodzeng is also representative of an entrepreneurial trend among hip-hop and other popular musicians to try to transform themselves into 'brands' for companies which use them as advertisers, and thereby to emancipate from political patrons and their production structures. Rodzeng has worked as the face of mobile phone brands such as Airtel, and he is regularly called to provide animations in street programmes organized by brands of the national brewers' company, Sobraga. In other words, Rodzeng is a public figure considered to exert influence on the youth, which he does by spreading daily messages and cleverly managing his image on his social media.

On the evening of 15 August 2023, Rodzeng was called – as several other leading figures of the music scene – by officials of the Ministry of culture, to stage a performance which was implicitly expected to consist of dancing tunes and lightweight lyrics, in accordance with the tone of the event. Instead of that, when Rodzeng was announced on stage, the DJ started a soundtrack with bullet noises, dreadful screams and the voice of a radio commentator describing the military subjugation of street riots, all elements taken from the repression that had followed the 2016 election. After the lively and cheerful performances of *ntcham* artists that came before, this introduction froze the atmosphere: summoning up sonic memories of the previous election touched upon a certain taboo in the public media and inevitably alluded to the possibility of a future reiteration of these bloody confrontations in the weeks after. Before Rodzeng's entrance on stage, a *bwitist* initiate came on stage to perform an operation of purification of the stage with burning branches, as used in the ritual of the *bwiti disumba* initiation society. During this short ritual sequence, Rodzeng went on stage all dressed in white, with a red hat and holding a walking stick, again exhibiting symbols highly related to the initiation world.

When he came on stage, Rodzeng briefly explained the ongoing sequence executed by the *bwitist* behind him: 'We clean the country, with the fire of the country.' He then started performing – on a very simple beat and without playback – his song 'le bled est à terme' ('the country is coming to an end'). The song is a crude description of the tragic dimensions of Gabonese lower classes' daily realities: the

banalization of hard drugs consumption, the collapse of school and university structures, ordinary hatred and violence within families, the alleged obligation for men to submit themselves to homosexuality to go up on the ladder of public service and institutions[9], the regular destruction of poor housing during floodings and heavy rains, but also amendments to the constitution and extravagant spending of public funds by the elites. He also recalled the aborted coup that occurred in January 2019, whose authors have been sentenced to 15 years of imprisonment, and suggested that rather than an attack of state security, this attempted coup was an 'alarm call'.

In front of the stage, watching a performance that was unusually critical for this type of event, the audience first remained silent and staggered, before progressively expressing assent, and shouting their approval. Rodzeng punctuated his song by calling for the protection of the ancestors, in keeping with his adherence to *bwiti* ancestors' cult. Yet he surprisingly ended his song by kneeling in front of the audience, policemen in charge of security, cameramen, and other artists or officials from the Ministry of culture backstage, and he started to recite the Our Father prayer. He called for the audience to join him, offering them the microphone. This Christian prayer surprised part of Rodzeng's following and caused his detractors to criticize him, stressing the seeming contradiction with his engagement as a herald of 'traditional' religions and *bwiti* rituals that he appeared to be betraying. He explained his unanticipated performance to me afterwards:

> '[When I come on stage,] I rap '*bled est à terme*'. People go into a trance, shouting 'yes, he's right, that's it!'. At one point I say to myself 'shit, the authorities are here, the ministers[…]'. I don't know if I'm going to get out of here in peace. I tell myself that if you want to get out of here in peace, just say a prayer, and you'll beat them at their own game. That's why I said the Lord's Prayer. Don't you see? I get the whole audience to pray, I get down on my knees, people start praying the Our Father who art in heaven… […] Man, when I finish rapping, people clap'. Interview with Rodzeng, 24 December 2023.

As he explained during our conversations afterwards, Rodzeng had not planned to say this prayer; he was just '*dosé dans l'iboga*' (under the influence of iboga roots consumed during *bwiti* initiation rituals). Rodzeng recites this prayer as a reaction to his sudden fear and perceived threat to his person at this event. The overtly critical tone of his song could lead to his arrest or to reprisals by agents or henchmen of the authorities in the form of direct attacks or aggressions inflicted by mystical weapons. The sequence of the *bwiti* ritual at the start of his performance was partly conceived as a protection from these aggressions. Furthermore, by reciting the 'Our Father', Rodzeng also saught a consensual way to place himself under the protection of Christian references, which have been considered part of the religious doctrine imposed by the authorities and part of the language of the dominant elites since colonization. Putting himself under the umbrella of Christian

prayers – which have been mixed and juxtaposed with initiation societies in many ways – in that sense was a strategy intended to protect himself against reprisals, and 'beating them at their own game'. When he went off stage, Rodzeng was not arrested, but instead congratulated by his peers and by the Ministry's official, although one of them added 'you wanted to mess up my concert!'.

Rodzeng is not the first hip-hop artist to employ ritual sequences on stage and to take it out of the context of the initiation guardrooms to popular concert stages. A few years ago, I attended a similar concert of the duo Movhaizlaine (which includes Lord Ekomy Ndong mentioned in my introduction), who are older than Rodzeng elders and close collaborators in the hip-hop scene. They had carried out a similar purification of the stage prior to their entrance on stage, because they feared to become the victims of attacks and reprisals from the political elites they incriminate in their songs. For both Rodzeng and his predecessors, performing does not only serve the desire to stage a traditionalist 'local' rap style, it also an answer to a need for protection against attacks from the ruling elites, that also happens to occur in the realm of the invisible and the religious world.

This transfer of religious sonorities, artifacts, or outfits from *bwiti* temples to popular music stages, which is ancient in the history of Gabonese popular music, is partly enabled by the structure of bwiti rituals themselves. These rituals contain both a secret/sacred side and a public/profane side, the latter of which is visible to the uninitiated audience, though cryptic. Artists involved in these transfers are often initiated (as is the case with Rodzeng) and aware of this distinction, and they negotiate with the initiation hierarchy to use some religious emblems on stage.

Unlike other instances where musical elements are moved from temples to music stages, resulting in the 'desacralization' of the sounds or artifacts (Feld 2012), we see here that the ritual elements invoked on stage do not unequivocally lose their religious efficacy. On the contrary, they are deliberately called upon to exert agency. Accusatory words, ritual instruments, comforting or invigorating beats, symbolic outfits, fire sticks, and ritual colourings blur the boundaries between stage performance and ritual, as well as between the social relationships of daily life and the symbolic power struggles of the night and the occult realm. All these tangible elements become active agents in a field of power relations, which play out across different interwoven spaces that music and performance help mediate. While witchcraft is often perceived as operating in an invisible, nocturnal realm accessible only to those who have 'seen' the world of the night (Bonhomme 2006) or who are initiated into secret societies, music, sonorities, and musical technologies offer tools for action and forms of mediation between these interconnected universes in Gabonese social life. Contrary to the assumption of a clear distinction between non-religious public spaces and religious private spheres, descriptions like these highlight the porosity of such boundaries in Gabonese urban life, where popular music stages sit at the crossroads of heterodox practices and multidimensional spaces, mediated by acoustic flows and their associated tools and artifacts.

This ethnographic vignette, with its assemblage of seemingly contrapuntal religious references, technologies, sounds, actors, and spaces, unravels the multidimensional texture of power as expressed through music performance, and its ramifications in religion and the so-called area of the 'mystic'. These observations resonate with prior research on sound and power in the Global South (Steingo and Sykes 2020, 23), particularly regarding ways to approach it without reproducing an ideology of 'sound for itself' (or music for itself) that isolates sonic elements from other senses, objects, beliefs, supernatural agents, and technologies that concretely convey the meaning of these sonic systems of organization.

Conclusion

Music is a particularly interesting lens through which to examine the anchoring of power relationships in sensory and material textures that inhabit the lives of Gabonese youngsters, and their entanglement with multidimensional forces. In turn, the concept of 'textures' interestingly captures the unique duality of music, which is both profoundly immaterial (especially in the digital age) and deeply embodied, and is experienced through tangible mediators, senses, and bodily receptors.

I started this paper by recalling the growing interest in STS and ANT theories to make sense of the role of material artefacts and technological mediations in the shaping of music practices and experiences, and I discussed how this issue was connected to a longer tradition of research on performance and the materiality of power. As demonstrated in this case study, social relationships formed in the production and performance of music have been profoundly impacted by the transformation that took place in technological ecosystems, and we are compelled to include the role of these technologies and of material and sensory mediums in our comprehension of social networks of relationships and agents. Yet, the Gabonese music world also proves how the music stage, the sonic textures it generates and the different objects and charged instruments it aggregates can be barely understood without considering the multidimensional and systemic power relationships that predate the introduction of certain tools and partly orient their social life in Gabon.

As famously described by several ethnomusicologists, music is always much 'more than music' (Rouget 1980, Lortat Jacob 1998, Martin, 2021). Drawing on his long-term research on men's choirs in Sardinia, Bernard Lortat Jacob analyzed the ambiguous power of music and its way to be both acted by and acting on social relationships. In Sardinia, imbrications between social and musical practices are 'close and thick' and assume the form of a 'subtle cronyism in which power relationships are at the same time barely visible and omnipresent' (Lortat-Jacob, online). In Gabon as well, the agency of music mediators acts on and makes sense when considered in an existing web of power relationships. These multidimensional relationships of control and competition, which infuse music meanings and

affect agency, relate to generations, social class, gender, kinship or inter-artistic competition, but also, and above all, as described above, to (masculine) links of competition and complicity connecting musicians and political elites. This competition acts on and is acted upon by a multitude of media that cannot be understood, limiting our observation to an anthropology 'without objects' (Latour, 1996). Nonetheless, music cannot be approached as a scene, activity or profession without connecting it to the realm of conflicts and tensions surrounding the access to music textures and technologies, a perspective that might be flattened or shrugged off if the analysis considers human and non-human agents from the same perspective.

Notes

1 On 30 August 2023, Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema, along with the Republican Guard, participated in the coup d'état that overthrew Ali Bongo and the PDG (Parti démocratique gabonais), the party that had been in power since 1968. This overthrow occurred just minutes after the announcement of the presidential election results, which had proclaimed Ali Bongo winner. Following the coup, Oligui Nguema was declared President of the Transition by the Committee for the Transition and Restoration of Institutions (CTRI).

2 *Bwiti* is a local initiation, religious and therapeutic society that I describe in more depth in the second part of this paper.

3 *Ntcham* as a Gabonese music genre is often labelled as afropop, and draws from multiples influences, such as Nigerian afrobeat and Gabonese rap music. Highly related to bandits and robbers' street practices, this genre that I briefly describe in my first part, is characterized by its electronic fast beats and its use of Gabonese slang (the *toli bangando*).

4 The celebration of the summer of 2024 progressively transformed 30 August into a second Independence Day, as a commemoration of the liberation of the country from the previous regime. The original Independence Day which refers to the decolonization proclamation is 17 August.

5 This paper draws on old and recent ethnographic research I conducted in Libreville about popular music scenes. First from 2006 to 2014, I lived and conducted my research in Libreville for PhD research. Then, after I moved out of the country, I undertook shorter fieldwork and kept following the music scenes from abroad. Finally, in 2023, I launched a new team-project on music technologies of power, funded by a grant by the Swiss National Foundation, which led me to undertake ten weeks of fieldwork (in winter 2023 and summer 2024). Even though some sequences of its first section were already discussed in other papers, this paper draws on new and unpublished materials, as well as on recent theoretical reflections.

6 In her book, Chivallon focuses on the dehumanizing process at play through the history of colonialism, or through the neocolonial structures of relationships replayed through the contemporary production of knowledge.

7 Some pieces of the reflection proposed in this first section of my paper are more developed in other recent or older publications (Aterianus-Owanga 2021, forthcoming).

8 See, e.g., this 'remix' of a song of Shatta Wale by a young singer called l'Oiseau Rare, who became in the meantime one of the most famous *ntcham* artists, in Libreville and abroad: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vl6oLo7tipo&ab_channel=EZEBIOL%27intouchableSia (consulted on 28 September 2024).

9 Regarding the political nature of homophobic discourses in Gabon, see Aterianus-Owanga 2012, Tonda Maheba forthcoming.

CHAPTER 6.6

Digital Horizons, Cryptopolitical Agency, and Shifting Elsewheres in the Kinois Imagination in the Early Twenty-First Century

Katrien Pype

Introduction

This chapter engages with the relationships between digital connectivity, mobility, and elsewheres, from a Kinois (<Kinshasa) perspective. Combined, they set in motion aspirations, articulated in a wide variety of scenarios for the future. Crucially, the material counters the assumption of a homogenic image of the West (writ large). Even if the image of 'the West' has always been nuanced, a rather unified image of the West as the space of desire that almost *all* central Africans want to inhabit reigns. As will be shown in this chapter, with the expansion of media texts, screen realities have become more diverse, generating multiple imaginations of 'life in the West'. These have impacted desires to travel and home-diaspora relationships and have eroded the authority of the return migrant. This chapter therefore sits at the intersections of the highly popular areas of both migration studies and media studies (Andersson 2019). In recent years, an exciting field of digital media & migration studies has emerged, very often arguing that digital media are a pull factor towards the West. Such an understanding derives from a Western-centric bias in these studies. Most are carried out in Europe or in the US, or in transit camps with migrants on their way to Europe or the US, or already arrived. Yet, such studies often ignore media consumption in the home communities, the spaces of departure, and hardly include imaginations of 'elsewheres' of those who have remained at home, or of those who have travelled towards other horizons than the West. By presenting a Kinois-focused experience of digital communication, especially their engagements with people far away and with images from 'elsewhere', I try to correct that one-sided understanding of the role of digital media in African migration to Europe and the US.

This chapter thus provides an original perspective on the wide variety of relationships in which power is embedded. These relationships include dialectics between representations (discourses, texts, images) and practices enacted by human and nonhuman actors. One of the less studied non-human actors (or 'actants', as Latour would propose) in central-African societies are those operating in and because of digital infrastructures. I thus continue the focus on 'cryptopolitics' as laid out in Bernal et al. (2023), where we asked for attention on how the play of showing one thing and hiding another thing in the negotiations of power relationships, takes shape in the digital era. We argue that cryptopolitics has gained new

forms when it enters society through digital media, even though much of the digital seems to be premised on the promise of transparency and immediacy (2023: 2).

I examine the historical shifts in desired 'elsewheres' in the imaginaries of Kinois (residents in Kinshasa), how these changes coincided with digitalization, and what this meant in terms of cryptopolitical agency. In twentieth century central Africa, narratives by those who had travelled were recounted orally, and spread via a wide range of such communication technologies as messengers, written or typed letters, the telegraph, CB radio, the telephone, satellites, and mass media like the radio, television, and print journals, and magazines. Throughout the early twenty-first century, digitalization has added cybercafés, the computer screen, the tablet, the smartphone, optical fibre cables, and other digital devices and apparatuses as transmitters of images and narratives about life in 'other places'. Horizons shifted along with the 'connectors' and 'mediators' of images and narratives of life elsewhere. At the same time, with an increasingly narrowing digital divide in urban Africa, the digital world rendered the perceived distance between diaspora communities and those who have remained 'home' smaller, as powerfully coined in the analytic concept of 'co-presence' (Featherstone and Burrows 1995). Presence by proxy, for example, via text messages, remittances, and gifts, is, after all, also presence. This co-presence, facilitated by digital infrastructures, can be coined a 'digital oikoumene', the inhabited digital world, 'a known digital world, constantly in flux, contracting and expanding'.[1]

The conceptual contribution of this chapter is the notion of 'the digital horizon',[2] which builds on phenomenology and anthropology. It combines the phenomenological concepts of 'horizon' as Husserl (1913), defined it, namely, a conscious background of interpretations and meaning-making that informs intentionality; and Schutz's elaboration of the 'lifeworld' for the social sciences (Schutz and Luckmann 1973). For Schutz, lifeworlds consist of subjective forms of knowledge through which social actors make sense of themselves, others, and their realities. Anthropological attention to 'the digital horizon' also incorporates awareness of the digital as an infrastructure with its own politics and poetics (Larkin 2013). Infrastructures in general 'comprise the architecture for circulation, literally providing the undergirding of modern societies, and they generate the ambient environment of everyday life' (2013: 328). The phenomenological anthropologist Jackson (2017: xi) reminds us that lifeworlds evolve as the relationships in which people are entangled, change. When new technologies, such as the digital, enter people's lifeworlds, new relationships to non-human others emerge, and new forms of relating to others come into being. An anthropological study of the 'digital horizon' then integrates an analysis of subjective knowledges, and of the representations on which these knowledges are built, with a study of the role of digital infrastructures as material forms, and as platforms for symbolic representations, in our interlocutors' understandings of their here and now, their past and future, and how they act thereupon. After all, the digital itself is both part of the lifeworld against which interpretations are made, relationships are formed, and which can be mobilized,

becoming spaces of intentionality. Furthermore, digital horizons also set in motion power reconfigurations, which in turn generate new ways of cryptopolitical agency.

While a history of communication technologies and the horizons they generated and continue to set forth in central Africa remains to be written, I attempt to reconstruct the dialectics between digital practices, Kinois lifeworlds, and the imagination of 'elsewheres' as these played out between 2003 and 2024. This period almost falls together with the reign of President Joseph Kabila (2002-2019), and thus documents significant transformations in citizens' lifeworlds in the early twenty-first century, when the Congolese nation (DR Congo, 'Zaire' until 1997) was confronted with political uncertainty, and failed efforts to establish a democratic regime. The material is derived from ethnographic research in Kinshasa's media cultures which started with doctoral research in 2003. Twenty years later, the city has grown exponentially from approximately ten million to an estimated 18 million inhabitants; the local economy and political governance have led to more suffering, straining urban sociality further. This all happened amidst two significant infrastructural and social changes in the urban livelihoods: the gradual democratization of digital media, and the influence of an ever-growing Congolese diaspora on daily life, in the form of remittances, containers (see Bernault infra) and used cars that were shipped to Kinshasa to serve as taxis, and, above all, social media interactions rendering those abroad co-present in the daily life of those who had stayed behind.

The first part of the chapter provides a background to the way in which Kinois understand their lived experience in Kinshasa as 'not normal', and how the screen reality is considered to portray 'normal life'. The following section explores Kinois consumption of media texts portraying life in Europe (*Poto*), and how within two decades, the image of Europe as a desired elsewhere has gradually undergone changes, leading to less mythic interpretations of the West. The third section articulates how the digital has transformed the interactions between those at home, and those abroad. In the final part, I document how Dubai has become a new space of desire, and how in particular the digital world, inhabited by the figure of the *tiktokeuse*, contributed to this. The conclusion connects the various issues presented throughout the chapter to the themes of digitalization, migration, and the imagination of 'elsewhere', by conceptually foregrounding the notion of 'the digital horizon'.

'Just Like in a Film'

La crise, or 'the crisis', is a key word with which Kinois have been assessing their daily reality since the mid-1990s. Two decades later, this comprehension has morphed from a temporal dimension (inherent in the notion of 'crisis') into a more endemic condition, characterized by epistemic and moral precarity. In similar vein, Kinois have described their daily material and social worlds as 'chaotic', *mubulu* (Trefon 2004). This is the outcome of a complex dialectic between lack

(of electricity, of food, of private space) and excess (of other people, of sounds, of problems). Many Kinois experience a gap between what a 'normal life' looks like, and everyday reality. *Eza normal te* (this is not normal), or *ezanga tina* (this does not make any sense), are common expressions Kinois voice when assessing the behavior of politicians, economic partners, one's children, etc. 'Normality' or 'sense', in these expressions, refers to a decent, dignified way of life, without hunger, poverty, or lack, without citizens taking recourse to lies, fraud, and deception to survive. These idioms can also be heard when talking about the urban infrastructures, which often fail to provide the basic services for subsistence, care, and movement. E.g., during the rainy season, motor taxi drivers need to transport passengers through potholes filled with rain, which Kinois jokingly call *lacs* (lakes). Electrocution often occurs during the rainy season due to bare electricity cables lying in the streets, and children or adults accidently touching them. Articulating that these experiences are 'not normal' or 'lack any sense', is a powerful critique of the 'here' and the 'now', not addressed solely to the state and the city's political leaders, but also to ordinary citizens, who are thus held accountable for their 'abnormal' behaviour.

The Kinois imagination in the early twenty-first century locates 'better lives' (*vivre mieux*) 'elsewhere' and in other times. Life abroad, especially in the Global North, means less suffering and hardship, so many Kinois hold. Such assumptions seem to be generalized among the diverse socio-economic and strata of Kinois society, the elite included. For generations, Kinshasa's political, economic, and religious elite have been sending their children to Europe/the US, to grow up, or to enjoy education. Western degrees are given more value in Kinois society than local ones. And those who can afford to, travel to Europe, India, or South Africa for medical treatment. Such practices indicate that also for the elite, health and good education seem to be assured abroad, not in DR Congo. In addition to the geographical location of a 'better life', sometimes one can hear a desire for 'better pasts', especially the late colonial and early Mobutu years, which are frequently portrayed as times of material, social, and moral prosperity. I often heard Kinois affirming with a great deal of conviction, people led a 'normal' life in these past periods. Such apprehensions of the past do not mean that people want to return to colonial times, or to the Mobutu era. Rather, the comparison between the present and the past articulates a critique of contemporary society, and especially a desire for change.

The questions then are: What kind of life do they consider to be 'normal'? Which models are considered exemplary? What kind of change do Kinois aspire to? Vernacular language provides a powerful archive to ponder these questions. The sayings *neti na film*, and *biloko ya Dora* have become popular since the mid-2010s, and both refer to an exemplary 'elsewhere' located in virtual, screen reality. The first, *neti na film*, 'just like in a film', can be heard and read in the following circumstances: when someone's house is remodeled; someone is wearing new clothes; when an economic opportunity has arisen; and so on. The expression is a

sign of appreciation, and ironically suggests, whatever the topic of the conversation, that which is being displayed or described is applaudable because 'it is just like in a film'. The *neti na film* saying thus has a normative stance, and suggests 'that which is depicted in films is how things should be'. In a similar fashion, the idiom *biloko ya Dora* locates the 'real' and the 'normal', in the reality of the screen. It means literally 'things of Dora', referring to the American animation series 'Dora the explorer', which has become popular in Kinois households since the early 2010s, when satellite television like Canal+, and later StarTimes, Easy TV Kinshasa, and others, became available.[3] This adage is the opposite of *biloko ya mbwa* (things of the dog), which refers to things of lower, cheaper quality, sometimes Chinese in origin.[4] I encountered the saying *biloko ya dora* in the late 2010s, but it became a widespread expression in the early 2020s. For example, in November 2023, a Facebook trader reselling clothes and shoes from Turkey in Kinshasa, announced the arrival of a new batch of clothes on his Facebook page by posting a series of pictures of the goods. The overall caption read *Ensemble ya qualité, marque unique, il faut parfois porter biloko ya dora passer vos commandes*, 'high quality clothes; unique brand. Sometimes one has to wear *biloko ya dora*. Order here'. Also, in late 2023, in a short video that circulated on WhatsApp, I observed a group of young Kinois unboxing the Okapi smartphone, designed by the American but Congolese born engineer Jean Bele. They qualified the phone as *biloko ya dora*, 'these are the things that Dora would use'. Those young people did not intend to refer to the cartoon Dora as a smartphone user, rather, as they added *biloka ya dora, eza biloko ya bien,* 'these are good things'. They explained that 'things of Dora' are 'items of high quality'. Both idioms, *neti na film* and *biloko ya dora*, indicate that the 'good life' has a virtual geography, that is, located in the Global North, *and* mediated to Kinshasa via screen realities. It would be wrong to assume, however, that the distinction between 'normal life' versus the 'experienced life' falls together with the distinction between 'digital' and 'analogue'. After all, some Kinois live certain experiences 'as in a film'. Rather, the opposition articulates the experience of a gap between what is understood to be 'normal' and their everyday experience.

Scholars have been studying the uptake of foreign screen realities in daily life and its impact on African subjectivities from various angles. Despite the unprecedented expansion of African media productions (e.g., Nollywood films, local comedy shows), much of the screen content that central Africans are consuming, is of foreign origin. Indian, Turkish and Brazilian telenovelas are regularly aired. Yet, only a decade and a half ago, the Ugandan media scholar Goretti L. Nassanga (2009: 58) wrote that most of the entertainment programs on African media are sourced from the West (US and Europe). These include music, soap operas, and sports broadcasts. Nassanga dramatically qualified televised figures (hosts of TV and radio shows, politicians, celebrities, and fictional characters included) to be 'strangers in the mirror', fully in line with Joseph Tonda's theory of the cultural alienation he developed in *Afrodystopie: La Vie dans le Rêve d'Autrui* (2021, *Dystopia.*

Life in the dream of the Other). Tonda makes a powerful, though very deterministic argument about the influence of western media on the desires, aspirations, and senses of belonging in central African societies. A utopian world is projected, so close, though at the same time out of reach. Such media texts as music video clips, films, and television series, originating from Europe and the United States, instil a thirst for Money, Lust, and Power among central Africans, he argues. Furthermore, these media texts inform how central Africans not only relate to the West, but also to themselves. According to Tonda, these Western screen worlds extend a cultural and even epistemological process that originated during colonial times. If the colonized world had to become like the colonizer's reality, postcolonial central Africans also want to live life as depicted in western images. After all, in the postcolonial era, neoliberalism, global flows of migration, and various cultural texts maintain this utopic vision of a good life in the Global North, while for most central Africans, life can only be called 'dystopic'. Many in central Africa thus strive to 'inhabit the Other's dream', then, whereby 'the Other' is the West, as Tonda masterfully shows. His argument corroborates the *neti na film* discourse insofar as it indicates that Kinois consider the normal, or the real, to be located *in* screen images coming from elsewhere, and depicting 'better lives' abroad.

Tonda's theory is partly in line with the work of scholars of popular culture who have drawn attention to local appropriations of global images (Krings 2015, Weiss 2002, Piot 1999). Fashion and studio photography are two tools through which central Africans can *become* the (western) other. Gondola (1999: 40), for example, described the notorious fashionistas of the two Congos, the *sapeurs* (the well-known fashionistas of the two Congos), as building a 'dreamlike identity' that recalibrated the boundaries between their African identities and the West. Weiss (2002) analyzed how male youth in Tanzanian Arusha dress up like American hip hop stars, also copying haircuts. They mimic what they see in American music video clips and on posters that adorn the barber shops. The elsewhere, in Weiss' words the 'remote horizon', is 'made to *encompass* the here and now of urban life in Arusha' (2002: 94, author's italics). Studio photography is another popular genre of inhabiting the Western dream life, not only in Kinshasa, but also in many other central African cities. Before the arrival of social media, studio photography was highly popular in Kinshasa. Kinois took striking poses in front of huge posters or murals depicting the Eiffel Tower, a modern fancy villa, or a lush garden. For Behrend (2002: 60), who documented similar desires about youth in Mombasa (Kenya), studio photography provided, 'just like in spirit possession, images of a successful transformation into the "desired other"' (2002: 60). Her main interlocutor, Paul, brought Afro-American magazines to the photo studio, and chose styles and poses that he wanted to imitate on the photograph (2002: 49). Photography turned into a 'wish-fulfilling machine', compensating 'for their suffering', Behrend wrote (2002: 59).

In Kinshasa, the streets are adorned with billboards[5] of light-skinned top models advertising bleaching skin cream, and advertising flights to South Africa

and Canada. In the semi-public spaces of living rooms, images of foreign films and soap operas spread through television screen and align with posters of Western-style living rooms and kitchens. In the palm of one's hand, smartphone apps allow people to edit their images into a virtual billboard on Times Square in New York as if they were global superstars. Kinois, like many other central Africans, are prompted to both imagine themselves in material realities *other* than their immediate surroundings, and to visually present themselves 'elsewhere'.

While Krings, Weiss, and Behrend, like so many other anthropologists, are keen to identify the various kinds of agency that Africans mobilize in their engagement with western images, narratives, and ideas, they nevertheless corroborate Tonda's argument that, for their interlocutors, there is no 'other' dream life possible than that determined by Western media.

Confirming the Dream of Poto

Even if anthropologists of media are reluctant to identify 'media effects' (Postill 2024), Kinois themselves attribute a great deal of power to screen realities. Though, they do not identify *Western-made* images as pivotal in the desire for Europe but rather for Congolese media. In emic aetiologies of that longing for the Western elsewhere, Kinois point at the media work by the Belgian-Congolese media producer and now also politician Zacharie Bababaswe. Born in Belgium, but raised in DR Congo (then Zaire), Bababaswe easily travelled back and forth between the two countries after his secondary school studies in DR Congo. Affectionately called *Zacle* or *le grand mullah*, Bababaswe became a household name with TV shows 'Feu Vert' (Green Light) and 'M'Putuville' ('The land of Europe'), aired on Antenne A, a private TV station that broadcast these shows in Kinshasa between 1999 and the early 2000s.[6] In an interview, he explained: 'I had understood that the Kinois were impressed by all things European. The Kinois was interested in all aspects of European life. When I arrived in Brussels, I have exploited this, meaning the sape,[7] food, daily life, public lighting, etc.'[8] When reflecting about his impact on people's ideas of Europe through his TV shows, Bababaswe described an evolution in his representation of Europe: '[I] first present[ed] Europe to Kinois in their language, in a style typical for Kinois with the intention to debunk certain myths, and [then] instil[led] another idea [about Europe] among the Kinois spectatorship than the one shared since years by the *mikilistes*"[9] (Ibid.; translated from French by the author). Despite these intentions, the majority of Bababaswe's images showed *mikilistes* fancy dressed, attending parties in concert venues, and frequenting barbershops and bars in Brussels, Liège, and Paris. Interviewees bragged about how they were living the good life but were hiding the small jobs they were doing or the illegal circuits in which they were active. Bababaswe thus contributed to the *mikilistes'* cryptopolitics, confirming the image of a successful life in Europe. These

TV shows reached a mythical status, insofar as, as I was told by one of my interlocutors, who was living in Boma around that time, that Kinois used the CB radio system to narrate what had been shown in *Feu Vert* to their friends and relatives residing outside of Kinshasa. Various media infrastructures thus collaborated to circulate the dream of Europe beyond the capital city.

Kinois at home did not have many opportunities to rectify that biased representation of migrant life in Europe for various reasons. Until 2010, one-on-one communication between Kinois at home and those in the diaspora was limited due to the high cost of international phone calls and of internet communication. Furthermore, *mikilistes* rarely returned to Kinshasa. For some, the cost was too high; while others did not want to jeopardize their application process for residence permits. The rare migrants that returned from Europe usually travelled for holidays, to participate in family rituals, to set up small businesses in Kinshasa, or to enter local politics after a regime change.[10] Usually, their trips were short. Hardly ever did they resettle in Kinshasa unless they entered politics or business. Anyone else who did, was exposed to mockery and gossip saying that they had been sent back (*refoulé*) from Europe.[11] It is only as from the 2010s that cheaper airfare and a safer political environment in the home country (see Demart 2013: 5) enabled more *mikilistes* to travel back to Kinshasa. Yet, during their visits, the *mikilistes* did not disclose the hardship of fellow migrants in the diaspora due to an unspoken solidarity, nor did they mention their suffering and tribulation in telephone conversations or letters (see also Tshimanga 2003: 492). This conscious selection of what to conceal and what to share about 'real life in the West' continues nowadays.

Such observations are not unique to the Congolese diaspora. Based on her ethnography among Eritrean migrants in Italy, Belloni described practices of deliberate silence (lack of communication) with people at home – while they were frequently in touch with others in Europe. She writes: 'While the frequent calls and internet contacts with his brother and friends in Northern Europe were a constant reminder of the gap between his opportunities and theirs, his failure to communicate with his family in Eritrea merely reinforced the notion that his migration was unfinished business.' (Belloni 2020: 268). Tazanu and Frei (2017: 84) describe how Cameroonians talk about the 'disappearance of migrants' once they have travelled to Europe. They would suddenly become unreachable, change phone numbers, or very rarely pick up phone calls. This led to feelings of abandonment, worries and shock (Ibid.) among many Cameroonians at home, even though they 'believed disappearance is a conscious act' (Ibid.). Tazanu and Frei's interlocutors in Germany and Switzerland told them that 'they would call home if they had money' (2017: 85), and their non-communication was informed by unmet expectations of remittances.

I also often found myself encapsulated in cryptopolitical agency of Congolese emigrants. In various instances, *mikilistes* asked me to visit their parent(s), but before entering the house, over WhatsApp, I was instructed on what to say and what not to disclose about their lives in Europe or the US. Usually, I had to hide

the fact that the men had children out of wedlock; I had to lie about their living conditions, or about the job they were carrying out. These concealments (or straightforward lies sometimes) were very often informed by a similar effect of shame, as Belloni wrote about: 'a shame linked to an inability to meet perceived family expectations in two areas – economic viability and the capacity to reach a stable final destination.' (2020: 267)

Even though many Kinois assume that those in the diaspora hide their real life from their relatives, they accept the possibility of that lie, in a kind of wilful ignorance (Archambault 2017), preserving the dream. This means that for a long time, the dream of Europe remained powerful and scarcely contested.

Even a multimodal media program initiated and funded in 2006 by the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs called *Vanda na mboka* ('Stay in your country') could not change this. Intended to discourage Kinois from initiating illegal migration to Belgium, the campaign included videoed testimonies of Congolese in Belgium describing failures in getting papers, the daily reality in an asylum centre, the risk associated with an illegal status, social duress, and the economic precariousness many Congolese were facing in Belgium. Kinshasa's most influential music bands and television actors were hired to produce songs and TV series, and to perform music concerts and theatre spectacles, spreading the message not to embark on the journey to Belgium.[12] These media efforts did not diminish for many Kinois men and women the desire to travel to Europe. *Mikilistes* have remained a preferred marriage partner for many Kinois women (see Pype 2021). After all, the *Vanda na mboka* campaign could not change the *eza normal te* experience in Kinshasa.

It was another, European made documentary that began to erode the myth of Europe. In 2004, the documentary *The Importance of Being Elegant* (2004 Amponsha and Spender) was released and quickly became the talk of the town. It featured Papa Wemba, one of Congo's leading musicians, in a French prison. He was arrested for human trafficking. The film was aired repeatedly on local television, and eagerly consumed, leading to many Kinois being able to recite lines from the film. Most captivating for the Kinois public was a scene in which Papa Wemba argued that he preferred to wear Versace clothes and used to sleep in satin sheets. Many Kinois understood very well that the luxury lifestyle he talked about in the documentary could only have been made possible thanks to theft, and drug and human trafficking.

Knowing the Truth

Before the democratization of the digital, access to trustworthy information had been a major difference in the relationships between 'those at home' and 'those abroad'. Those who had migrated, were considered to 'know more', and their opinions and instructions voiced to relatives at home had been considered as more

authoritative. The idea of the *mikiliste* being more knowledgeable was built on two features of Congolese migration to Europe (see Tshimanga 2003).

First, for a long time in the twentieth century, Congolese residing in Europe were known to be intellectuals and their degrees from French or Belgian universities gave them a higher status within the global Kinois society. Yet, by the mid-1990s, motivations and modalities to migrate out of DR Congo became more diverse and were not tied to intellectual capital anymore. With migrants moving to Europe/north America for economic or security reasons, the diaspora grew in size and gained another reputation. Since then, vernacular language in Kinshasa has become enriched with new concepts that mocked the diaspora, e.g., 'diassa diassa', 'diaspourrie', 'pomba', 'frappeurs', 'checkuleurs', and 'pizzaiolo'. The neologism 'diassa-diassa' appeared, according to Tshimanga (2003: 519), in 1997 with the return of Congolese migrants after Mobutu's fall in 1997. It expressed the disappointment of the local population in these people who had been granted access to the highest leadership positions in Laurent Kabila's government. In the early 2020s, the new word 'pizzaiolo' emerged, evoking the job of a pizza deliverer. It is a metonym for small, sometimes even illegal, jobs that people in the diaspora often perform, and that in Kinshasa, a society where university degrees are given much value, are mocked. As mentioned above, often, people in the diaspora will not inform their relatives at home that they are taxi drivers, food deliverers, cleaners, and so on. They do so because of the lack of esteem that is given in Kinshasa to these small jobs, as these do not tally with the prestige attributed to someone who has travelled.[13]

Second, Congolese in the diaspora thrive on the fact that 'they know more' because of the sheer fact of being subjected to European rules where a society seems to be regulated, in contrast to the disorder at home. A common thread in conversations about domestic politics I observed among members of the Congolese diaspora is that their life in democratic societies gives them more insight into what 'good politics' means. Often, Congolese in the diaspora assess the *djalelo*, that is, the journalists who flatter those in power, as an example of the fact that those at home 'are asleep', meaning that they do not see how the ruling elite feed on their gullibility. Unsurprisingly, then, a whole range of internet journalists and content producers located in the diasporas, emerged on YouTube and on various social media networks, with the mission not only to inform the scattered Congolese diaspora about domestic politics and culture, but also to provide, what they consider, 'real and trustworthy information', which they hope will reach audiences in DR Congo as well.[14] An example are the digital creation stories regarding Congolese popular music (Pype 2018), which have become instructive genres addressed to people in DR Congo, and are intended to 'reveal' the hidden, 'demonic and immoralizing' intentions of Congolese rumba music. The producers of these media texts skilfully mobilize digital tools to produce digital depth; they refer to Wikipedia and other internet sources as important providers of 'truth'.[15]

As those who had migrated were considered to 'know more', their opinions and instructions voiced to relatives at home, were authoritative. For many Kinois, the fact that a (classificatory) brother, for example, lived in or near Paris, gave him more authority in the household at home, in Kinshasa, than the elderly, unemployed father, who may have been according to 'tradition' the most powerful voice in the family. The telephone became an important medium in the transfer of orders and instructions from afar. The *mikilistes'* influence via electronic media is probably best explained by Nyamnjoh, who compared ICTs with *juju*, that is, 'magical objects' that humans in West and Central Africa mobilize to enhance themselves, and through which 'they can extend themselves in their relationships with fellow humans and with the whims and caprices of natural and supernatural forces/agents' (2019: 280). By receiving (irregular) remittances from France, this elderly man lost his authority; the influence of the far-away son increased in correspondence with the money or goods sent from afar.

As from the 2010s, the image of the 'lying migrant' became more powerful, oftentimes described as being arrogant.[16] Like so many others, one of my main interlocutors over the 20 years of fieldwork in Kinshasa, Flavie, a young, single mother in her mid-thirties, with various 'husbands of Facebook' (Pype 2020), disliked that classical power relationships such as the elderly-junior relationship due to classificatory kinship positions, were easily overhauled by a 'junior's' migrant status. She argued that the diaspora tends to have a depreciative take on those at home, and situate themselves within a higher socio-political position, implying that those at home should 'obey' *mikilistes*. Such critique was triggered and supported by the increased circulation of narratives about the difficult conditions in which many migrants were living in Europe. Kinois at home came to understand that the silence of *mikilistes* or their absence (also monetary absence) during family rituals (e.g., mourning), or irregular sending of remittances, was due to lack of means rather than unwillingness or neglect. Such narratives and images about the failing migrant transformed the image of the West, and impacted on the home-diaspora relationships, particularly the authority of the *mikiliste* at home.

This only compounded with an easier access to internet in Kinshasa, impacting home-diaspora relationships on a micro-level, by turning those who have remained at home more knowledgeable about forms of life, costs, and possibilities in *Poto*, the Global North. So recounted Flavie:

> We say 'thank you', [when we receive gifts from relatives and friends from *Poto,*] and we can also look up online whether a perfume comes from Lidl, or from a high-end shop. We just say 'thank you', and we listen to their orders and nod. Then we go about our own way.

Flavie's statement about looking up the price of gifts online hides a deep affective participation in the gift economy on which home-diaspora relationships run, and

it shows how mobile connectivity contributes to the transformations therein. She suggests that access to information (being able to check the cost of a gift, for example) is now easily available to those who have stayed at home. They thus can judge the donator's spending. Those 'at home' (in Kinshasa) mobilize the digital world as a response to their distrust towards those abroad, and as a tool to assess the validity of migrants' authority on their personal lives. The *mikilistes'* authority is eroded because of the immediate access to other information. Because of Kinois' increased access to the digital universe, the *mikilistes'* chances of 'influencing and controlling other people, things, events and phenomena' (Nyamnjoh 2019: 290) have been undermined.

It is probably not surprising then, that undergirding the digital horizon in Kinois long-distance relationships and interactions therefore is the sentiment of distrust, from both sides. Many Congolese in the diaspora feel they cannot trust people at home. After all, distance makes it more difficult for *mikilistes* to gain insights into the projects, life conditions, and achievements of those in Kinshasa, rendering it difficult to verify accounts about lack and need.[17] I have heard numerous narratives among the Congolese diaspora about having been duped by their own sibling, or partner in Kinshasa. Obviously, Kinois have their own ways of creatively responding to the 'orders from *Poto'*. For example, they sometimes use the remittances for other services or projects than prescribed by the sender. They nod and go about their own way, as Flavie so accurately described it.

Significant is that within those long-distance relationships, as an outcome of the distrust, those in the diaspora embrace the digital as a tool of surveillance and exposure, as a response to the cryptopolitical agency enacted by Kinois at home. For example, during fieldwork in July-August 2023, I learned that some of my interlocutors had to send photographs or short videos via social media to their relatives abroad as evidence that their remittances had been used as requested. It also led to an innovation in funeral strategies: since the covid pandemic, *mikilistes* hire, from afar, Kinois social media content creators to report on funeral ceremonies in Kinshasa. The aesthetics of their digital reports are informed by the *mikilistes*' distrust about the expenditure insofar as the digital reporters are requested to zoom in on the coffin itself, so that the *mikilistes* can assess whether the money sent for the coffin has been used to purchase a coffin of the requested quality.

In addition, various new websites and mobile applications allow people from the diaspora to pay for food, drugs, or medical costs *directly* to the caretaker or the vendor and thus exclude a relative from the transaction process (Pype 2021). These innovations involve 'short-cutting' sociality in long-distance care practices by replacing an intermediary in Kinshasa by a digital device. One of the tech entrepreneurs that I have been following for several years now, Julien, for example, was working on an app that could help users to pay bills issued by medical institutions (doctor's appointments, drug prescriptions, medical interventions, etc.) from a distance. Born and raised in Lubumbashi, Julien had moved to Kinshasa a

few years earlier when his father had found a job in the Kabila government. He had observed how people in the diaspora were often duped by their relatives in Kinshasa, who requested money to be sent for fake medical problems. With the app Julien designed, it would be more difficult for people in Kinshasa to lie to kin and acquaintances abroad. One of the earliest Kinois-based software inventions was a mobile application through which people in the diaspora could order and pay for groceries purchased at Kinshasa's open-air markets and have them delivered at a designated home address. The app actively addressed Congolese in the diaspora many of whom the designer knew very well regularly send money to their relatives in Kinshasa for such basic needs as food. Here, too, no relative or friend would be needed to collect the money or to purchase the items ordered.

Dubai: The New Eldorado

Amidst a decline in the attraction of Europe as a destination space for Kinois, new desired elsewheres, new 'other spaces' where the good life seems to be located, emerged. This occurred during the early twenty-first century, a period of intense economic and technological transformation in Kinshasa, and was not only due to digitalization, but also to new economic opportunities. Lufu, a provincial town near the Angolan border, Kigali (Pype forthcoming), and Ghuangzou (Braun 2019) have become new Eldorados, new spaces of desire for Kinois economic entrepreneurs. These, however, are not projected as attractive spaces on Kinois media. Rather, social media have emphasized Dubai as a new space to live the good life. This is foremost embodied by female influencers operating on platforms like Instagram and TikTok. Dubai lures more and more Kinois because of its easier access (the visa application process is less cumbersome), the use of English (compared to Chinese in China), and the possibility of living a jet-set lifestyle. Around the 2010s, the economic and cultural masculine elite began to travel back and forth between Kinshasa and Dubai, often accompanied by young Kinoises, who entertained them socially and sexually during the trip.

In the wake of these new mobilities, a new category of young, upwardly mobile young women has emerged: the *tiktokeuse*. A *tiktokeuse* is a contemporary articulation of the 'bad girl' (*mwasi mabe*), or for anglophone Africa 'the good-time girl',[18] which has been documented in studies of urban Africa since the middle of the twentieth century (Bryceson et al. 2013, Okome 2012, Ligaga 2014, Newell 2002). The Kinois *tiktokeuse* uploads images of a jet-set lifestyle in Dubai, very often starting with photographs or short sequences of her entering a private plane, walking around in the lobby of a glittering high-end hotel, sipping a cocktail on a boat or seated on a quad in the desert. *Tiktokeuses* mobilize the discourse of living a dream life. In a recent interview with the Congolese newspaper *Les Dépêches du Bassin du Congo* (Congo-Brazzaville), remediated on the Congolese (RD Congo)

website adiac-congo.com, *tiktokeuse* Mony Mbanzoulou concludes with a message to 'the young Congolese' (Louzani 2023): 'I would love to tell the youth to believe in their dreams, and not to give up on it. Courage, patience, and endurance are three values to work on in order to materialize their craziest dreams.'[19] Mbanzoulou, just like other *tiktokeuses,* confirm that 'the good life' can also be experienced in 'elsewheres' other than Europe. In their digital posts, the good life is confined to consumption, tourism, and fashion. The images uploaded by *tiktokeuses* on social media accounts invariably focus on themselves, as individuals. They film themselves or ask others to film them. They edit the photographs and videos: Their travel companions are obscured, and there are rarely other Congolese in the image. *Tiktokeuses* do not present themselves as sisters, mothers, or aunts. Even if from time to time, they evoke religious language, or film themselves while in prayer, the dominant image is one of a young, trendy, seductive woman enjoying a solitary, luxurious lifestyle. These images garner a lot of fascination online.[20] Yet, that fascination also combines with repulsion, as rumours circulate in Kinshasa's streets, bars, markets, and online about prostitution and fornication – very much like the stories of immorality that have always accompanied the good-time girl. By doubting the morality of these *tiktokeuses*, these narratives claim that access to Dubai is contingent on immoral networks and practices, and thus level the potential influence these young women may have on Kinois society.

Concluding Thoughts: Cryptopolitics, Digital Horizons, and History

In conclusion, I want to return briefly to the two organizing concepts of this chapter: the digital horizon and cryptopolitical agency.

If a lifeworld is the horizon of experiences, or the background against which we interpret our emotions, our material and social environment, others, and their actions, then the digital is certainly part and parcel of our horizon. Digital infrastructures, content, and digital exchanges, inform people's interpretations of the here and there, and not only facilitate, but also shape long-distance interactions. When Kinois began to use digital media, people far away, with whom one only has irregular telephone but more frequent digital interactions, have become very much part of people's everyday life. Those who have travelled became part of the digital horizon of those who had remained at home. I have tried to show that the digital horizon is historically situated and builds further on mass-mediated horizons of experience, meaning-making, and power. Technology itself is at the centre of that history: with new technological devices appearing, new forms of hiding and exposing become available. As mentioned, in the early 2000s, the television shows about the lifeworlds of Kinois migrants in western Europe thrived on a concealment of the 'real' economic lifeworlds, while emphasizing the joys of a hedonistic life. This game of showing and concealing in media texts also structured

predigital and analogue forms of long-distance communication between those abroad and those at home. Digitalization of Kinois society has enabled new forms of cryptopolitical agency. Through access to digitally mediated information, power dynamics between those who have travelled and those who were left behind, have transformed. A digital co-presence transformed the hierarchy between 'those who know' and 'those who do not know' (those who were at home). The digital became a portal to knowledge and information, subverting the binaries between those abroad as those who know; and those at home as who were ignorant. Building on a mood of mutual distrust, the digital allowed Kinois to gather information themselves about European realities, to re-assess the financial and material contributions of their *mikilistes*, and to defy the familiar myth of Europe as an Eldorado. So have new layers of knowing, not knowing, pretending, concealing, and exposing been added to the interactions in transnational relationships. When Flavie said that upon receipt of a gift, 'she would just say "thank you,"' it was clear that Flavie would not confront the *mikiliste* with her information; yet, that new information pushed her to re-assess the influence of the *mikiliste* on her life. We thus see how cryptopolitical agency is enacted by both those who are far away and those who have stayed at home.

The *tiktokeuses* generate a dream vision by carefully curating their digital content, and removing any people, objects, or locations that could lead to direct questioning of their morality. These cryptopolitical practices are no different from the staging enacted by *mikilistes* in Bababaswe's TV shows around the turn of the century. The cryptopolitics is now only played out in a different medium, now social media platforms, and the location is not a European city, but a Middle Eastern desert enclave.

As I documented cryptopolitics in the construction and deconstruction of various 'elsewheres' in and through electronic media in Kinshasa, I have shown how concealment and exposure remain significant axes of long-distance relationships. What is concealed, and who is hiding, changes over time, along with the platforms and aesthetics of divulging and hiding. Cryptopolitical agency thus takes on various forms, yet, most of these practices are inspired by motivations that various generations share (e.g., a concern to protect one's reputation, to safeguard one's authoritative position within a family, or to achieve upward social mobility).

Notes

[1] I wish to thank the anonymous reviewer of this chapter for this generous insight.

[2] The notion of the 'digital horizon' also builds further on Schielke and Graw's theorization about migratory experiences in Africa and the Middle East in the edited volume '*The Global Horizon*' (2012). The volume does not contain any chapters about digital media, though Mbodj-Pouye's fine analysis of writing and literacy in Mali, provides the compelling argument that 'practices and technologies […] mediate imaginations and expectations' regarding migration (2012: 156).

[3] Canal+, available in Kinshasa since 2012, was initially the only player in this segment of the local media market. It only catered to the elite. Subscriptions (20USD/month) and the installation of the satellite dish were too expensive for most of the population. Yet, when as from 2013, the Chinese distributor StarTimes arrived in Kinshasa, a larger population of the city could install satellite dishes and access more than 200 TV stations. 'Bouquets' for satellite television became an additional expenditure for husbands if they wanted their wives to stay at home. Young, married women began to demand a StarTimes or other subscription to avoid boredom. By mid-2023, the cheapest subscriptions were as low as 10USD/month.

[4] The label '*biloko ya chinois*' (Chinese things) is often used in a deprecating manner.

[5] In Kabila's Kinshasa, so De Boeck (2011) has argued, billboards portraying maquettes of to be established infrastructural projects such as La Cité du Fleuve, have remained a mirage, a reality that most Kinois can only dream of.

[6] Nowadays, snippets of these old broadcasts have been uploaded on TikTok, evidencing the importance of this TV show in popular media history.

[7] *La Sape* refers to a fashionista subculture that emerged in the 2nd half of the 20th century in the two Congos. SAPE is an abbreviation of *Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Élégantes*, i.e. 'the society of fun loving and elegant people'. By now, the SAPE is mocked in Kinshasa. Though it remains an attractive characteristic of Congolese urban society for western documentary makers, journalists and photographers, themselves presenting a particular exoticizing 'elsewhere' in their works.

[8] Translated from French by the author. Sourced from http://www.congovision.com/interviews/zacle1.html, last consulted on 18 September 2024.

[9] A *mikiliste* is a Congolese who has migrated to the Global North (Europe or the US). The word is only used for first generation migrants. It derives from '*mikili*', meaning 'world' in Lingala. A synonym is *djika*, deriving from the 2nd and 3rd syllable of the word 'Belgicain', indicating someone who has traveled to Belgium.

[10] For more insights in the engagement of return migrants in domestic politics, see Tshimanga (2003: 512-519).

[11] This was the ultimate insult.

[12] Ironically, Zacharie Bababaswe played a leading role in the strategizing.

[13] Two narratives about former Congolese presidents often used to diminish their high status, illustrate Kinois' depreciation towards so-called *diaspo ya libanga* (diaspora of rocks, meaning 'small jobs'), an umbrella idiom used to indicate the people abroad who do various small jobs, for which usually no university degree is required. A popular story about Joseph Kabila recounts how he worked as a taxi driver in Tanzania, and once drove around the musician Defao. Of Felix Tshisekedi, rumor has it that he was a pizza delivery boy in Leuven and surroundings (Belgium). It is not a coincidence that both narratives deal with mobility and servitude, as immobility is connected to power, just like being served.

[14] Most digital content creators express a high sense of patriotism and solidarity. Very often, they are first generation migrants living in the UK, Belgium or elsewhere, and are either unemployed or have a part-time job, thus giving them ample time to to follow the news in the diaspora and to experiment with digital media. The impact of their broadcasts in Kinshasa remains rather limited though. Mobile data are still expensive, thus seriously limiting people's online activities. Most people cannot watch one-hour online content. Users very often interpret titles and comments published by other social media users to get a sense of the digital content of YouTube videos or other excerpts.

[15] In the era of 'fake news' and disinformation, the idiom of 'knowing more' or 'knowing better' has also gained another dimension. In moments of power cuts, and internet throttling, people in the diaspora are called in to provide additional or alternative information (see Pype and Maluta Makaya 2022).

[16] Tazanu and Frei (2017: 84) also mention how Cameroonians thought that the 'person abroad feels superior'.

[17] Apart from distance, also a culture of indirectness renders it difficult for Congolese in the diaspora to fully understand what goes on in the lives of their relatives in Kinshasa. This is unfortunately beyond the scope of this chapter.

[18] 'Good-time girls' are young, unmarried women in their teens and twenties, who enjoy 'free food, drinks, and gifts of fashionable clothing' (Bryceson et al. 2013: 44) from wealthier men in exchange for social and sexual company. They usually move around in bars, clubs, and other spaces of urban entertainment. Their mobility is freer than that of married women.

[19] https://www.adiac-congo.com/content/interview-mony-mbanzoulou-limagination-est-personnelle-authentique-et-unique-147284 – last accessed on 18 September 2024.

[20] The website www.modash.io published a Top 20 of most followed Instagram *influencers* and *influenceuses* in Kinshasa, as counted on 24 November 2023. Thirteen of these 20 are young women. The top three are Jolie Papilon, with more than 17,000 followers, of which 77.2 identified themselves as hailing from Kinshasa; caméleon with 21,9000 followers, of which 72.9 from Kinshasa; and Gloire Kahungu with 10,4000 followers, of which 72.02 from Kinshasa. https://www.modash.io/find-influencers/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/kinshasa, both webpages last consulted on 18 September 2024.

PART 7

Beyond the Human

CHAPTER 7.1

Weaving the Future: Duiker Hides Trade and the Aka in Colonial Central Africa

Etienne Gontard

Introduction[1]

Since 1988, the Dzanga-Sangha Complex of Protected Areas (DSCPA) has covered roughly 4,380 square kilometers in the southwestern tip of the Central African Republic. Its website promises its visitors 'to go in the forest with the BaAka to experience their traditional way of living, through net-hunting'.[2] This western gaze over supposedly timeless and 'pristine' human populations misses a modern situation produced by the entanglements of intercontinental capitalistic networks and colonial rule. Indeed, the territories that comprise the DSCPA, along with the rest of the Upper-Sangha and the neighbouring Lobaye riverbeds, at the time under French sovereignty as part of *Afrique-Équatoriale Française* (French Equatorial Africa, FEA) between 1920 and 1960, experienced the emergence and decline of an export sector for 'antelope hides', notably blue duikers' (*Philantomba monticola*). The BaAka, or Aka, a commonly accepted denomination for semi-nomadic populations, of which the eponymous language belongs to the Bantu family, provided most of these materials. The former colonial administration referred to the Aka as *pygmies* or *babinga*. In the western Congo Basin, *babinga* is still used by sedentary communities to describe these groups with which they interact (Bahuchet; Robillard 2012). Both societies have been engaging in material and social exchanges for centuries. Sedentary farmers, usually referred to as *villagers*, provided ironware and pottery while the Aka supplied foraged animal and plant products, some of which were part of international trade systems before and during the colonial era, such as ivory or copal (Guillaume 2002). These commodities stayed outside of the monetized economy until they reached middlemen or European outposts, while wildmeat, fruits, mushrooms or honey remained local consumptions.

Colonization and the irruption of exogeneous forms of capitalism (Cooper 2014) in the western Congo Basin spawned an irregular rupture in the complex interactions between humans and their physical surroundings. Referred to as a 'metabolic rift' (Foster 1999; Clark; Foster; York 2010), it set the stage for the introduction of capitalistic production processes in the metropoles. The uneven decay of previous modes of living is intrinsic to the colonial attempts at encoding society and space (Gray 2002). Forced cultivation and labour caused a forced reliance on wild meat as a source of food in the studied regions. Wild animals literally fuelled the engine of colonial production. This growing demand spurred on hunters to use and adopt new technologies. Hunting nets, owned by the villagers, were lent to the Aka in

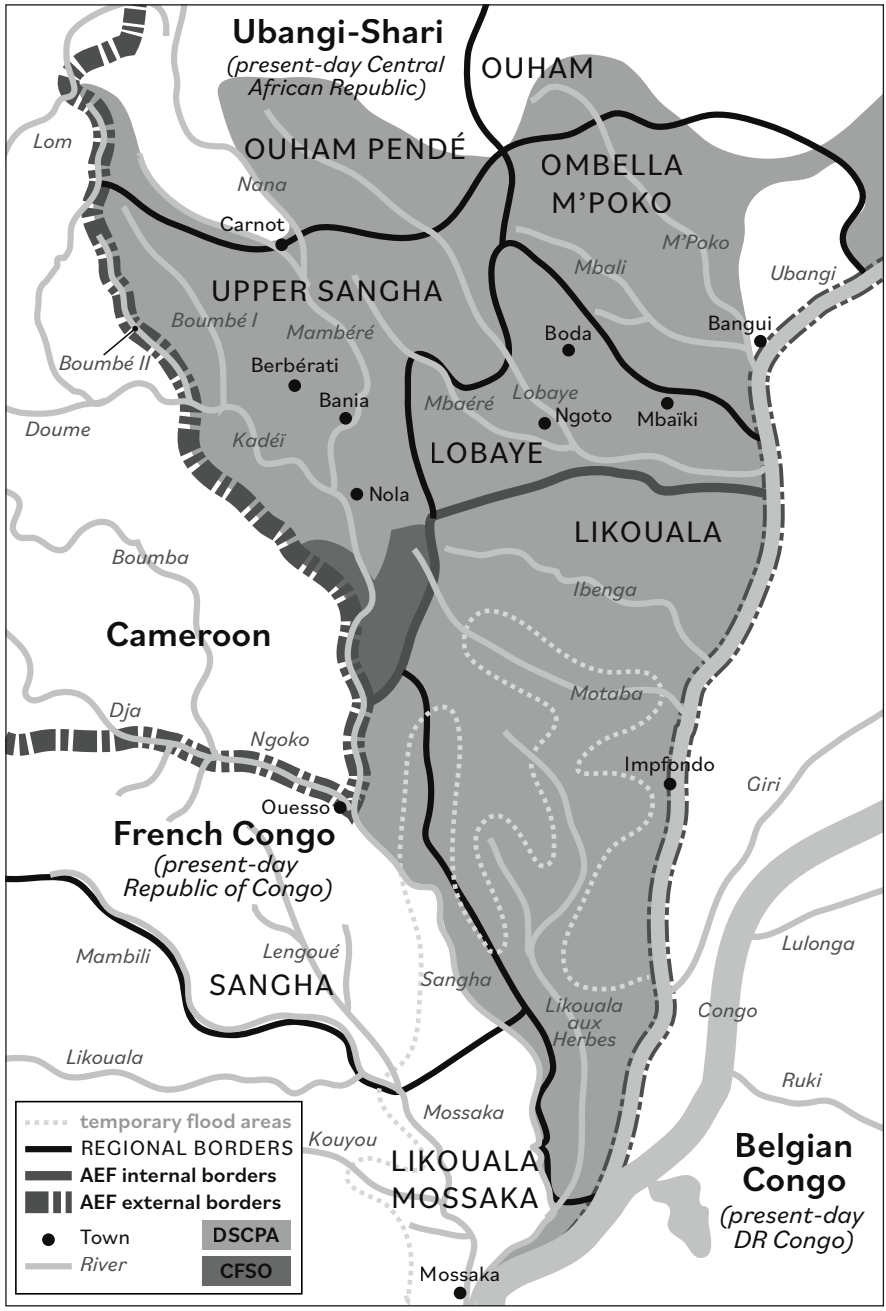

Figure 1: Diachronic map of the studied regions, 1950 political context.

exchange for a portion of the spoils of the hunt. As a new means of production (Bahuchet 1987), these objects triggered social changes both within and around these communities.

The present research explores a blind spot in the environmental history of Central Africa. The duiker hide trade has rarely been studied per se, appearing in a few studies of the Aka (Bahuchet; Guillaume 1979; Bahuchet 1985; 1987; Guillaume 2002), of neighbouring populations (Lewis 2002; Yasuoka 2006), and of conservation policies in the Central African Republic (Fargeot 2013). Administrative archives such as the ones of the *Secrétariat Général* of the *Gouvernement Général* allow us to shed some light on this seemingly inconsequential enterprise and its incorporation in broader indigenous policies in the AEF. Furthermore, anthropological accounts of past social change among the Aka give more substance to a broader section of the continuously rewritten palimpsest of wealth production in Central Africa.

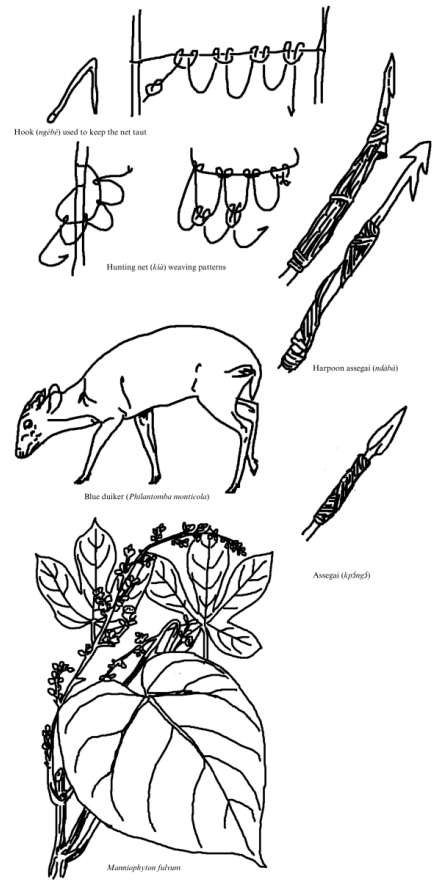

Figure 2: Illustrations (after Bahuchet 1985).

This chapter studies a forgotten commodity and its world from several perspectives. First, we will approach it from the duikers' perspective. Then, we will describe how the bodily envelopes of duikers became a commodity. To complete this description, we will study the entanglement of this process with colonial policies. Finally, we will explore the social implications of the adoption of a new means of production by the Aka and their dynamic relationship with the villagers, or how hunting nets took part in the weaving of the future.

Using the notion of metabolic rift to make sense of some of the changes that occurred during the colonial period in Central Africa, this chapter sketches out the dialectics of capitalism in the web of life (Moore 2015). Furthermore, it discusses the ambiguity and fluidity of colonial power relations (Cooper; Stoler 1997) embedded in a double structure of impotence and ignorance (Mbembe 2010), thus displaying the relative trouble to report and make sense of past socio-economic phenomena in such context, regardless of their visibility.

Dodging

Duikers were not fundamental elements of the colonial structure of zoological knowledge. They avoided domestication attempts and escaped most of the identification imperatives that emerged after the London Convention of 1900, the first inter-imperial effort to regulate fauna on the African continent (Ross 2015). Blue duikers were killed on a disproportionate scale compared to other local species, but were not considered endangered, while the number of elephants killed annually on the whole African continent for their tusks and meat was roughly the same than the number of duikers killed in the Lobaye area alone (Gontard 2021). Even though blue duikers were scientifically described more than thirty years prior to the Maxwell duiker, the two were confused by French law.[3] Commodified, denominations remained unclear; *peaux d'antilope* (antelope skin), *antilope grise* (grey antelope), *antilope cherry*, *t'cherry*, or *boloko*. Remarkably, the word *céphalophe*, duiker in French, never appeared in any records.

Ethological studies allow us to craft a limited animal history of blue duikers. They are diurnal animals, mainly active at dawn and dusk with a rather irregular activity during the day. They spend most of their time in clear undergrowth, where they forage and sleep in an upright position, interspersed with periods of rumination. They roam permanent small territories in family units of a pair and one or two calves but also tend to move into empty areas when the quality of their patch deteriorates (Mockrin 2010). These population dynamics allow them to survive intense predation and environmental change (Van Vliet et al. 2010).

When they notice a potential predator, blue duikers tend to produce a shrill whistle as an alarm call and disappear into the vegetation away from the danger. When in doubt, they adopt a watchful attitude to gather more information (Brosset 1966; Dubost 1978; 1983). These observations from the Makokou research centre in northeastern Gabon are at odds with observations in contemporary southwestern Gabon, where the proximity to humans seems to make them favour watchful observation over immediately taking flight (Croes et al. 2007). Whistling calls often prompt flights, as do alarm calls from other animals, regardless of the emitter, whether congeners, primates or squirrels, as long as it denotes with their acoustic surroundings. It indicates that despite their acute visual abilities, they are more auditory observers. Whistling also has social functions, inducing others to play, or to mate or threaten. Consequently, human hunters whistle. This technic was studied in Makokou, concluding that an insatiable curiosity was what attracted blue duikers, but also crested eagles, leopards and primates, to a wide range of different whistles not mimicking any particular animal (Brosset 1966). Being hunted for duikers implies moving through an ambiguous soundscape of partly shared interspecific semiotics, in which it is difficult to distinguish friendly sounds from predatory ones.

Nowadays in Makokou, whistling is still used, enticing mainly blue duikers, which are frequently encountered regardless of the hunting pressure or the proximity of

human dwellings (Van Vliet et al. 2009). In the Ngoto region, where whistling is not known to be used by non-Aka hunters, a record was used as an experimental tool to attract and count individuals, with the same results, duikers showing no habituation, unlike carnivores (Van Vliet et al. 2009). It should be noted that nowadays, hunters in the Upper-Sangha frequently claim that blue duikers are adopting more nocturnal habits in response to increased diurnal hunting pressure (Jost et al. 2011; Jost et al. 2014). Based on sole hide exports figures, from the 1920s to the 1950s, several thousands of individuals were killed annually in these regions, yet contemporary observers did not document serious depletions (Malbrant, Maclatchy 1949). Potential behavioural changes are difficult to map given the lack of studies on the subject then. However, duikers were said to find refuge in tsetse fly-infested riverine regions[4] during the height of the local sleeping sickness epidemic (Guillaume 2002).

Blue duikers engaged in sustained auditory dialogue with their hunters. Their ethological characteristics made them an easy prey, but their population dynamics allowed them to survive the increased predation. Massively hunted while prolific, they dodged the most dramatic effects of having been drawn into the colonial metabolism, a system that relied on their deaths. Indirectly, their physical and behavioural features, and more decisively the need for a further use of their bodies, triggered social and material changes for their hunters. Feeding the human workforce and fuelling distant production processes, they were relegated to the backdrop, ubiquitous and elusive, yet necessary and valuable.

Crafting

The reasons behind the advent of the trade in duiker hides between 1920 and 1960 are still unclear, as it seems that the French glove-making industry, the main receiver of these products, does not have a clear recollection of such a trend (Fargeot 2013). An exception to that is the luxury house Hermès which seemingly kept up with the race scene vogue of the 1920s by crafting antelope skin gloves for drivers (Kerlau 2016). The First World War's effect on French leather industries could hardly offer an explanation (Le Bot 2007). The trend rather resembles a short and niche appeal for an available exotic leather.

Commodification happened simultaneously in several geographical contexts. In the FEA, the Alima-Léfini and Likouala-Mossaka districts were apparently minor producers, and less documented, compared to the southeastern mandate Territory of Cameroon (Jeannin 1951; Rupp 2011), and at a significantly greater scale in some regions of the *Afrique Occidentale Française* (French West Africa, FWA), which exported tens of thousands of hides yearly (Guillard 2015).

The Upper-Sangha and Lobaye riverbeds and their hinterland were loosely supervised territories, due to their remoteness and some of their geobotanical features, namely swamplands and dense forest cover. Their ecological diversity

caused obstacles for both mobility and land exploitation, whether cultivation or cattle breeding. Their physical characteristics turned these territories into *Afrique inutile* (useless Africa) in the eyes of the colonial administration (Cooper 1996). Furthermore, their socio-political situation earned them a reputation as a 'powder keg' (Copet-Rougier 1998).

In the late nineteenth century, the Adamawa emirate, part of the confederation forming the Sokoto caliphate, expanded powerful capitalistic networks that accessed these regions' resources and enrolled up to several thousands of new captives every year in an enslaved workforce fuelling, inter alia, the Atlantic long-distance trade system. This predatory pressure produced political unrest and migrations, as Brazza encountered as he entered the region in 1892. Over the following decade, a series of events led the French colonial forces to eventually suppress the Fulbé slaver networks in 1896, and in 1899, to establish a concessionary system over these territories. Tumult and armed resistance did not end until 1908 in the Lobaye. The French administration would not put an end to the *chasse à l'homme* (manhunt) that defined the populations' relationship with external capitalistic networks (Lombard 2020), as a capitation tax was imposed from 1897 onwards, payable in kind (commodities or labour) or in cash, and as production was 'organized' by concessionary companies' workers in a brutal manner, primarily to provide the European capitalism with hand-picked rubber (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1972). In 1920, these regions were exploited by the *Compagnie Forestière Sangha-Oubangui* (CFSO), a behemoth resulting from the merger of six contiguous concessionary companies in 1910. When its concession rights expired in 1935, colonial officers, previously in competition with the company, tried to structure cash crop production, mainly palm oil, coffee, and cotton, and circulation, partly through porterage, on the remnants of the chaotic and wasteful context left by the CFSO (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1998). Violence and forced labour did not disappear (O'Toole 1984). These processes did not result in the subsumption of a significant part of the autochthonous social world under capitalistic production relations (Meiksins Wood 1999), even in the last years of the colonial rule. Thus, translations were necessary from non-capitalistic to capitalistic value systems to provide luxury leather ateliers in Paris with antelope hides. It could be argued that intensifying duiker hunting stemmed from the long yet finally achieved 'pacification' of the studied regions, as much as changing material conditions furthering more utilitarian approaches to fauna, as has been observed in colonial Nigeria (Aderinto 2022). The fragmentation of available labour nevertheless framed material conditions and ideals of wealth, in the plantations as well as in the forests (Samarin 1989).

Duiker hides were first bought and exported in 1917 by a handful of *factoreries* (trading posts) of the CFSO.[5] *Factoreries* workers and land tenants were the first to operate translations of value from bartered products to monetarized commodities, at least according to the archives. The hides entered an international trade system

through a form of 'salvage accumulation', a feature of capitalism consisting of 'taking advantage of value without capitalist control' (Tsing 2015). This activity was maintained in remote stations,[6] until a growing demand and a compelling lack of identified exporters caused tanners in Bangui to accumulate 40,000 units ready for export in 1927.[7] Expanding yield over the following decade paved the way for an overproduction crisis in 1938, caused by the indiscriminate killing of tens of thousands of duikers, skinned and exported regardless of demand, the commodity's quality or transportation and storage capacities. This uncontrolled salvage accumulation eventually generated actual mountains of waste. That year, 600,000 duiker hides were awaiting buyers in a warehouse in Antwerp, reportedly in deplorable conditions, causing a British newspaper to denounce the carnage of antelopes in the colony.[8]

Trade subsisted as the FEA joined the Allies' world economy,[9] although wedged by fragmented markets oriented towards the war effort.[10] Consequently, there were still five antelope hides exporters in Brazzaville and three in Bangui in 1945.[11] Structuring this export sector mobilized individuals distributed on both sides of the colour line and citizenship status. Among them were French white traders[12] and contractors for the CFSO who later became independent; French métis, Portuguese, and, significantly, Hausa middlemen and direct sellers[13] subject to the *indigénat* regime, a derogatory and dynamic legal status ruling the autochthonous populations (Merle 2004).

Analogous to ivory traders, these private actors tried to orchestrate the extraction and exportation of a rather constant flow of materials. Both were bound by the very nature of wild animal products, unpredictable in size, quality and yield, seriously limiting the commodification processes that requires turning living entities into controllable fluid units (Cronon 1991). This could explain the bumpy purchase price variations, ranging from 0.5 to 5 francs over one year in the 1930s, to 46 francs right after the war and back to 5 francs in the 1950s (Guillaume 2002). Again, in parallel to ivory traders, these actors relied on Antwerp. Before the completion in 1934 of the Congo-Océan railway connecting Brazzaville to Pointe-Noire and from there to the global ocean, most of the commodities produced east of Brazzaville left the colony via Leopoldville and were brought by train to the port of Matadi, crossing over the non-navigable portion of the Congo westwards of the colonies' capitals (Sautter 1967). Similarly, again, according to the Belgian authorities, significant quantities were smuggled to the other bank of the Congo River.[14] As elephant tusks were eventually fed to the ivory cutting machines of gigantic piano factories in Hamburg (Gontard 2019), duiker hides fueled shammy workshops in Poland,[15] after an uncertain process of salvage accumulation. This narrative, however, should not be used to minimize the role of the French colonial authorities, who were deeply involved in making this circulating wealth from duikers and their hides a realm they could manage, a subject of discourses and a condition of their political success.

Table 1 showcases the evolution of duiker hides exportation from the FEA territories from 1921 and 1954. These very heterogeneous figures, produced by the colonial administration as well as French authors who engaged with the issues of fauna and food production, do not provide precise quantities but allow to grasp the magnitude of the destruction this export sector caused.

Table 1: Duiker hides export numbers from the French Equatorial Africa territories from 1921 to 1954 (in units).

	Afrique Equatoriale Française	Ubangi-Shari	Lobaye	Upper-Sangha	Eastern French Cameroon	Likouala-Mossaka	Alima
1921						7145[16]	
1930					60000[17]		
1931					60000		
1932					60000		
1937	800000[18]		111300[19]			33477[20]	11769[21]
1938			11535[22]			18922[23]	6492[24]
1939			13 224[25]				
1946			68000[26]				
1947			65000				
1948		105000[27]	55450				
1949			35000				
1950		32100[28]	26000	16000[29]			
1951		16905[30]	33000				
1952			19500				
1954		36936[31]					

Enrolling

Peaux d'antilopes became a source of wealth while colonial authorities were struggling to maintain Lobaye regions, half of the human population died between the 1890s and the 1920s, due to sleeping sickness and later Spanish flu. Coerced labour caused stress, flights and disappearances (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1998). The social and economic canvas was unravelling at a disturbing pace. Colonial authorities were haunted by the vision of a measly territory, wrecked by depopulation, famine and economic stagnation (Ricciardi 2022), and so was certainly Joseph-François Reste as he was appointed Gouverneur Général of the FEA in 1936. He had previously been chief of economic affairs in Brazzaville, commissioner for the concessionary

companies and a voluntarist governor of Côte d'Ivoire, which he intended to turn into a world-class coffee and cocoa exporter. He started his mandate by stating before the FEA administrative board that antelope hides would be a priority of his economic policy, as 'a source of substantial income' for regions deprived of livestock, although he thought production should be qualitatively improved.[32]

Blue duikers drew further attention as the Ministry of Colonies sketched a new set of hunting regulations implementing the pledges made during the 1933 London Convention. Reste sought advice from a wide range of local administrators and 'hunting experts'. Among them were Boucher, the Lobaye department chief, and Buhot-Launay, the Gouverneur-Délégué of Ubangi-Shari. Boucher noted that antelopes were not threatened with extinction not 'even from the babingas', as they benefited from large marshy refuges,[33] while Buhot-Launay gave account of myriads of antelope hunting camps he noticed during an administrative tour in the region. Both agreed on a hunting season regulation.[34] An anonymous note from the *Secrétariat Général* commenting on Boucher's concerns about the 'rarefaction of antelopes' concluded that a change of fashion could put an end to their destruction overnight.[35] Reste eventually followed this idea, contradicting his first hopes of improving material conditions with a fashion-reliant commodity.

Among Reste's recommendationsthe traditional hunting of unprotected species eventually made it into the new regulations. In the words of Marius Moutet, then Minister of Colonies, to Reste, 'if the interests of trophy hunters are honourable, the peasants' ones are fairer'.[36] Moutet, a socialist in Leon Blum's first government, was confident in the power of colonial policies to resolve the tensions between economic production, demographic growth, improvement of the material conditions, and socio-racial stability (Ricciardi 2022). He advocated the 'socialist colonialism' fostered by the Front Populaire (Cooper 1996), embodied by minimum wages for public contractors, minimum prices and contractual salaried labour. In the meantime, FEA's authorities were concerned about catching up with the rest of the colonial world in terms of nature policies. In 1929, Ubangi-Shari was described by a colonial physician in Bangui as a tropical hellscape roamed by private armies of poachers shooting antelopes and elephants from Chevrolets to provide public works of the Congo-Océan railway with meat rations.[37] Even though its legal apparatus was not particularly skeletal (Blancou 1948), FEA was a refuge from stricter laws and better organized game wardens in neighbouring colonies.

Before the 1938 overproduction crisis, the Secrétariat Général was informed monthly of the prices and quantities sold in several districts after having launched an inquiry over the suspicion that European traders did not comply to minimum prices on regulated markets for the purchase of 'indigenous products'.[38] These reports revealed that the number of exported hides from the Lobaye dropped by a factor 10 between 1937 and 1938. Colossal unsold stocks, and the serious competition from Yemen calf hides, were identified as a scarcity issue, while they were effectively due to shrinking demand.[39] It triggered a resourcist answer from

the colonial authorities, facing a shrinking demand they understood as a scarcity issue. Reste issued a decree 'to prevent the complete destruction of several species of antelopes, specifically of the species *Guevei maxwelli*'[40], that established 30% ad valorem exit fee to all destinations of any exported antelope skin.[41] Targeting the European exporters, the customs tariffs differed from regulations of other animal product extraction schemes, such as ivory, regulated in accordance with then international standards of nature conservation by minimum weights for export, hunting permits, seasons, and reserves (Gontard 2021; Gissibl 2006).

It was common knowledge among colonial administrators that indigenous populations were hunting,[42] trading[43] and benefiting from the duiker hides trade.[44] The Aka's role was notably recognized by the administration.[45] They were not out of the state's sight and development agenda, as a so-called *politique d'apprivoisement* (taming policy) was conceived. In 1933, the Gouvernement Général mandated district chiefs to carry out a census of the *babinga* populations, monitor their health situation, integrate them into colonial capitalism as much as possible through trade, and thus invite them to settle down along forest roads (Delobeau 1984). They were meant to become sedentary farmers, through genuine persuasion and without constraint, whether through taxation or forced labour, at least during the first five years.

If they ultimately did not settle down or become cassava growers, they joined the local monetized economy (Delobeau 1989). The taming policy also led to imprecise censuses.[46] It was in any case not the first attempt at absorbing the Aka into the better monitored sedentary populations. In 1920, the Kadeï-Sangha district chief contacted a group of Aka, encouraging them to settle in Nola.[47] Other groups followed in nearby villages.[48] The moral imperative to 'free' the *babinga* from their relationship with the villagers, then described as a form of slavery or vassalage[49], was not the impetus behind this experience. The real reason was a stricter control over hunters, particularly regarding firearm circulation and the culling of young elephants.[50] Indeed, antiquated rifles had been circulating in the region since precolonial times and were once traded for ivory and mostly used for elephant hunting (Copet-Rougier 1998). Nothing comparable to the taming policy happened after 1938, the year of the last field report, even though in the following years isolated initiatives were pursued. Mobilizing semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers and tilting the perceived vernacular balance of power in their favour was not as urgent anymore, maybe because mines and plantations supplanted rubber and ivory in the eyes of the colonial administration. After having been brought to the state's sight, what was shown to the white public was still an image of the Aka as 'primitives'. The highlight of the third Brazzaville fair and exhibition of 1938 was a 'pygmy village' with 'its huts made of leaves'.[51]

In 1945, the *Sociétés Indigènes de Prévoyance* (SIP) obtained a monopoly on the purchase of game hides, 'notably of the boloko antelopes'.[52] It was justified by rising prices that threatened 'the future and reserves of animal species, as well as the performance of agricultural work', given the autochthonous populations would

'benefit, directly or indirectly, of this rise'.[53] The SIP were hybrid cooperative-like structures organized at the district level and chaired by the local colonial administrator. They allowed their members to collectively acquire means of production with the sale of the district's yield at a guaranteed price. Conceived to build 'indigenous peasantries', they were permanently in deficit, bailed out by the administration, thus providing indirect subsidies. Reste established the SIP in FEA in 1937, after he saw them in FWA, where they had been operating since 1910, under mandatory registration thus facilitating the control of indigenous agricultural practices (Bonneuil 1999). Less than a year later, the monopoly on the purchase of game hides was cancelled by decree with no further justifications than 'a different economic situation'.[54] It appeared there were other reasons behind this decision, as European traders were rumoured to buy antelope hides at very high prices outside the SIP, thereby nudging the autochthonous into abandoning the fields, while threatening to appeal the monopoly before the *Conseil d'État*.[55] In 1947, the new hunting legislation for the French colonial empire allowed subsistence hunting with antiquated rifles in lawful possession but urged governors to monitor the trade and export of leathers and furs from unprotected animals, including 'small antelopes', to prevent their 'abusive exploitation'.[56] Despite growing exports over the following years, no such regulation was issued. These policies were among numerous cases of the subtle dialectics between fashion and fauna conservation (Cowie 2021).

Colonial authorities failed to reconcile the contradictions of the production process by forcing the forest-dwelling living beings into a high-modernist scheme (Scott 1999). Duiker hides remained at the nexus of tensions between profitability and the future of production. Even though changes occurred over time, and new perspectives in meat production opened up after the war effort (Coghe 2022), colonial authorities still failed to get a grip on materiality. In Ubangi-Shari alone, duikers provided an estimated 800 tons of meat in 1948.[57] Trying to act on a black box without opening it, no policy could have any effect on either the duiker populations or on the Aka's idea of wealth.

Living

Colonial authorities could not directly reform the Aka, but the metabolic rift and its expanding consequences could, prompting adaptation and social change. The Aka originally practiced assegai (*kpɔ́ngɔ́*/*ndàbá*) hunting. Ubiquitous in the oral literature, it was characterized by propitiatory ceremonies before hunting expeditions, egalitarian distribution of meat through the exclusion of the hunter from the spoils, and exceptional access of the women to the smoking camps. It also defined the role of master hunter (*tûmâ*), an experienced individual who already killed at least one elephant, had been initiated in supernatural forces, and was responsible for organizing the hunts (Guillaume 2002).

Despite knowing their crafts and while even providing the villagers with the *Manniophyton fulvum* fibres necessary for their production, the Aka did not use hunting nets (*kìà*). Still, after the 1920s, assegai hunting occurred alongside collective endeavours with hunting nets (*bò.kìà*). They are rather unwieldy objects, each about 20 to 50 meters long, and less than 2 meters wide. Over several weeks during the dry season, a mobile camp (*sàmbà*) of 30 to 40 adults and as many children set 12 to 20 nets in semi-circular or circular patterns. Then a group beat started, with extensive use of whistles and calls, until fleeing animals were caught in the nets and culled in the assegai way. After a break, the nets were hung further within a 20km radius, and another beat started. The hunts were timed between the daily activity peaks of the blue duikers and covered the territories of several groups. In a day's time, 6 hunts mobilizing a dozen hunters would provide on average 10 hides and produce roughly 75kg of meat. Division rules set aside the duiker's head for the culler and the rest for the owner of the net, half if he did not take part in the hunt (Bahuchet 1987). These collective endeavours induced wider cooperation, with women and children participating while they used to only forage and fish. Furthermore, 3 to 5 camps 'linked by consanguinity, most notably by alliances, and through their relationships with identical communities' of villagers would join forces. Over time, *bò.kìà* favoured the diviner-healer (*ngàngà*), who performed propitiatory rituals prior to it, at the expense of the *tûmâ* (Guillaume 2002). Villagers influenced the seasonality of hunts, as they lent the nets during the dry season while they cleared and sowed their villages' surroundings. It could also be because rain damages the fibres (Noss 1995; Bahuchet 1985), or because blue duikers experience a peak of activity around midday during the dry season (Dubost 1983). Furthermore, fertility rituals, collective dances, feasts, and offerings dedicated to the superior forest spirit (*zengi*) shifted from the rainy season do the dry one. These were times for the renewal of matrimonial alliances between camps and involved a high availability of both harvested and exchanged goods, provided by the reinforced exchanges with villagers (Guillaume 2002). Meat played a role in these social dynamics, as the animal parts villagers obtained after the net hunts were crucial to the food system, and by extension to the colonial metabolism.

The Aka and the villagers shared a social organization that can be described as the Equatorial African political tradition (Vansina 1990; Klieman 2003). It comprised the *house* as the basic social unit, several of which were gathered around a *big man*. Members were bound by ties of kinship, clientship or other forms of dependence. Competition and collaboration between big men over followers and access to resources shaped political dynamics. *Houses* among the Aka would rather be called *camps*, and its members referred to as siblings, even if the grounds for membership are unclear (Moïse 2014). Political autonomy among the Aka was praised in oral traditions, but also manifest in their dynamic relationship with the villagers (Klieman 2003). Being their 'subordinate clients', they strategically forged access to resources through barter, while minimizing nuisances and maintaining their semi-nomadic

lifestyle in the forests. The *big man* figure would take various forms in the Aka's rather egalitarian system, as individuals pursuing some sort of mastering of knowledge, creating alliances to access resources, or exploiting historical opportunities by migrating, allying or adopting new productive modes (Moïse 2014).

Because they were the owners of a means of production that had become central, sedentary communities reinforced the dependency of the Aka on them, and vice versa. Communities also experienced institutionalization in their relations. Tutorship over Aka camps became hereditary among villagers, as well as the 'lending', or even 'disposal' of individuals to lineages deprived of tutorship (Guillaume 2002). This relation never reached the apex sometimes described by European observers in terms of slavery. The Aka were able to escape the villagers' control over their bodies, by hiding some of their activity or by disappearing to connect to another patronage, notably during the colonial era (Moïse 2014). Locally however, isolated Aka individuals were abducted by sedentary communities and incorporated into the villagers' social structure through language adoption. Some of the regions where these dynamics went the furthest were actively participating in the duiker hide trade, notably the Mbaïki district and its western margins, even though it could not be the main reason explaining this reinforced proximity (Guillaume 2002). These observations should be considered from the perspective of the demographic weight of the Aka, locally reaching 40% of the population in the 1950s, which contradicted the idea of an 'ethnic minority' living alongside sedentary groups. The social contact was eventually amended as new technologies and practices became established. The nets continued to interweave the Aka's lives with the villagers' social threads, and thus weaving the fabric for the future.

Conclusion

The duiker hide trade is a peripheral story of the metabolic rift. Emptying the forests of their materials and inhabitants was necessary to sustain the production processes in the industrialized metropoles. Fortuitously, duikers could provide both meat and hides without risking extinction. The Aka unevenly settled like other semi-nomadic populations (Leclerc 2012), some even worked in plantations and logging concessions (Guillaume 2002), keeping with French colonial plans. Incidentally, and with barely any power over this part of the tapestry, authorities aspired to weave the fabric of the future. Now at the nexus of the so-called bushmeat crisis and of conservationist attempts at monitoring it, duikers moved from the peripheries to more central areas of the Western 'geopower', with imperial and technocratic environmental interventions (Bonneuil; Fressoz 2016). They are a fraction of the complex equation set by the metabolic rift, persistent under 'extraverted' postcolonial states, bonded by expanding material flows (Bayart 1999). This forgotten commodity and its world shaped what visitors of the DSCPA nowadays

witness[58], transient workplaces (Mavhunga 2014) allowing human communities to survive and strive in the ruins of sedimented capitalistic exploitations and ambiguous power relations.

Illustration Credits

Figure 1: *Afrique Equatoriale Française. Communications, Industries et mines.* Paris, Direction de la documentation française, 1950.

Notes

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[31] Larrat, op cit., p. 1649.

[32] 'Discours d'ouverture prononcé par M. Marchessou, Gouverneur Général par interim de l'Afrique Equatoriale Française' *Journal Officiel de l'Afrique Équatoriale Française*, 1 January 1936, 10.

[33] 'Note pour Monsieur le Gouverneur Secrétaire Général', 1937, GGAEF 7B 163, ANOM.

[34] Ibid.

[35] 'Note sur la raréfaction des antilopes', 3 March 1937, GGAEF 7B 163, ANOM.

[36] 'Lettre n°5.620 Direction des Affaires Économiques, 1er bureau, au Gouverneur Général de l'A.E.F., Règlementation de la chasse', 12 November 1936, GGAEF 7B 163, ANOM.

[37] 'Lettre d'Émile Gromier à Abel Gruvel, 15 octobre 1929', ARCH PC 23, Archives du Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle.

[38] 'Agence Économique – Prix pratiqués par la CFHBC pour achat des produits du cru – Règlement des produits indigènes, 1937', GGAEF 7B 164, ANOM.

[39] 'Marché des produits coloniaux,' *L'Etoile de l'AEF*, 23rd October 1937, p. 5

[40] The former binominal name of the Maxwell's duiker.

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[43] *Rapport économique, District de Nola, 1950, Région de la Haute Sangha*, 4, GGAEF 4D (3) 58, ANOM.

[44] *Rapport économique, District de Berbérati 1950, Région de la Haute Sangha*, GGAEF 4D (3) 58, ANOM.

[45] *Note de l'Inspecteur des Affaires Administratives Buhot-Launay au Secrétaire Général du Gouvernement Général*, 3 August 1936, GGAEF 7B 163, ANOM; *Rapport économique, District de Nola, 1950, Région de la Haute Sangha*, 4, GGAEF 4D (3) 58, ANOM.

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[47] *Rapport Général sur la CFSO pour l'année 1920, Circonscription de la Kadéï-Sangha, Nola*, 15 March 1921, GGAEF 8Q31, ANOM.

[48] Ibid.

[49] *Rapport Général sur la CFSO pour l'année 1917, Territoires occupés du Nouveau-Cameroun, Nola*, 15 January 1918, GGAEF 8Q31, ANOM.

[50] *Rapport Général sur la CFSO pour l'année 1917, Territoires occupés du Nouveau-Cameroun, Nola*, 15 January 1918, GGAEF 8Q31, ANOM.

51 *Agence Économique des Colonies*, 'La 3ème Foire-Exposition de Brazzaville', Dossier 91bis 2b, AGEFOM 357, ANOM.

52 'Arrêté 1.523 réservant aux sociétés indigènes de prévoyance l'exclusivité d'achat aux indigènes des peaux de gibier', *Journal Officiel de l'Afrique Équatoriale Française*, 2 August 1945.

53 Ibid.

54 'Arrêté 1.581 rapportant l'arrêté n°1.523 du 2 août 1945 réservant aux Sociétés indigènes de Prévoyance l'exclusivité d'achat aux indigènes des peaux de gibier', *Journal Officiel de l'Afrique Équatoriale Française*, 22 June 1946.

55 Gascon, André, *Les sociétés indigènes de prévoyance de secours et de prêts mutuels agricoles en Afrique Équatoriale Française: Étude faite par le stagiaire André Gascon affecté à Mossendjo* (*Région du Nairi*) 9 November 1945, 3 ECOL 72.

56 'Décret n° 47-2254, réglementant la chasse dans les territoires africains relevant du Ministère de la France d'outre-mer, arrêté promulgué le 18 novembre 1947', *Journal Officiel de l'Afrique Équatoriale Française*, 1 January 1948, 2.

57 Larrat, op cit., 1649.

58 Duda, Romain, personal correspondence.

CHAPTER 7.2

The Power of Pollution on the Central African Copperbelt

Iva Peša

Introduction[1]

Historians have characterized the mining industry as one of the main sources of power on the Central African Copperbelt in the twentieth century (Larmer, 2021; Rubbers, 2021). The exploitation of large-scale industrial copper mines after 1907 required control over labour, which was achieved through the construction of 'company towns', where the provision of housing, water, electricity, healthcare, education, and leisure services was meant to facilitate the productivity of mineworkers (Peša and Henriet, 2021). Mining companies tried to control the family life of their workers, through women's clubs and children's education, and they influenced colonial/postcolonial government policies both directly and indirectly (Ferguson, 1999; Dibwe dia Mwembu, 2003). Portrayals of mining companies forming 'a state within a state' and company paternalism constituting a 'totalitarian sub-culture' capture the extensive power scholars have attributed to copper mining actors in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia (Fetter, 1973; Radmann, 1978). Yet what happens to this power if we view it not through the prism of the state or capitalism, but through the environmental lens of pollution? This chapter looks at how pollution shapes environments and lifeworlds in intractable and unexpected ways, defying colonial/postcolonial boundaries and shifting attention from particular company regimes (e.g., state-owned or privatized) towards the materiality of extraction.

Environmental humanities scholars have done much to theorize the power of pollution (Müller and Nielsen, 2023). Such approaches have emphasized that pollution can be both disruptive and enabling of power orders and ways of life (Liboiron, Tironi, and Calvillo, 2018). Some scholars stress that pollution works to uphold existing power relations, entrenching forms of environmental inequality and environmental racism, through 'the socially uneven distribution of pollution and resources' (Pulido, 2017: 1). A glaring example of this is spatial planning on the Copperbelt, where for decades low-income Zambian and Congolese communities were purposefully sited in full exposure to toxic smelter fumes, while white managers' houses remained more shielded from sulphur dioxide emissions (Chansa, 2022). Max Liboiron (2021) therefore asserts that 'pollution is colonialism'. Others have taken a different angle and argued that pollution is intractable and has the power to transgress boundaries and upset existing power relations. Because human control over environments remains fragile, pollution tends to escape – or occur at the edges of – power structures (Beinart, 2015). In some cases, pollution can

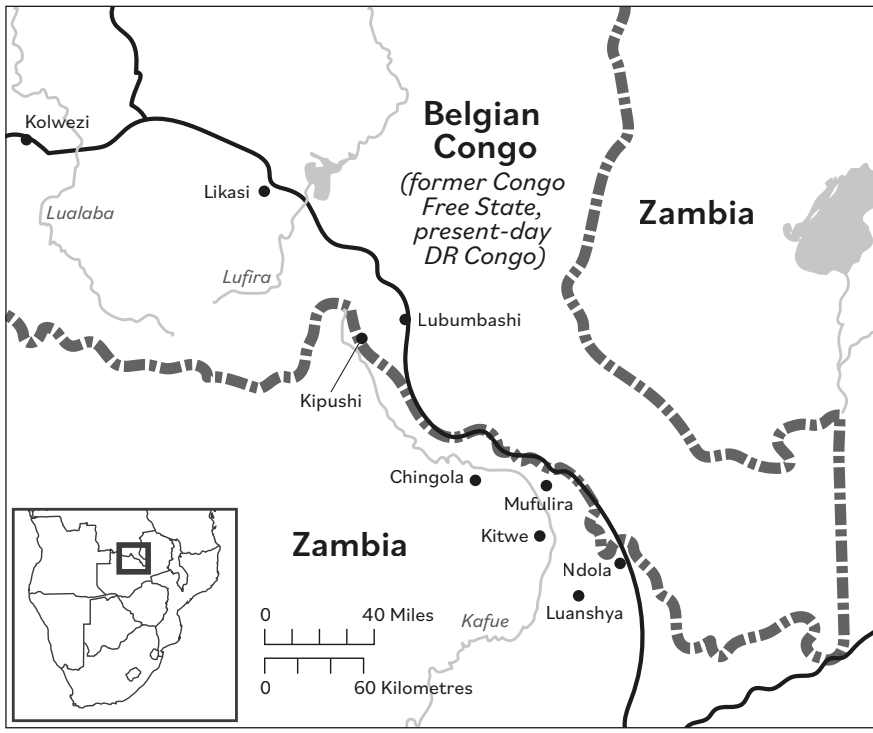

Figure 1: Map of the Copperbelt (by Rachel Taylor).

challenge existing social orders. Nicholas Kawa (2016) reminds us that 'while our technologies have expanded our ability to impact the Earth, a much broader array of lifeforms and forces are constantly thwarting our attempts to wrest control of the world around us'. Multispecies approaches, in particular, tend to question the power of human agency, highlighting how fungi, bacteria, and pollutants can play a crucial role in processes of historical change (Kirksey and Helmreich, 2010; Dooren, Kirksey, and Münster, 2016; Swart, 2021).

This chapter approaches these debates from the perspective of pollution on the Central African Copperbelt.[2] What does a focus on pollution tell us about the power of mining companies on the Copperbelt to control workers and the urban environment? While the first section explores the attempts of mining companies to erect boundaries against pollution, resulting in a differentiated distribution of the harms from pollution along the lines of class and race, the second section shows how these boundaries always remained porous as pollutants proved intractable and impossible to control. Research for this chapter has been ongoing since 2017, involving both archival research (in the archives of the mining companies Union Minière du Haut-Katanga (UMHK), Gécamines, and the Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines (ZCCM)) and oral history interviews in the mining hubs of Likasi, Lubumbashi, Kitwe, and Mufulira.

Erecting Boundaries: Governing Pollutants

Mining companies' policies to control labour on the Central African Copperbelt have received much attention (Daniel, 1979; Larmer, 2017; Rubbers, 2020). Studies of the 'colour bar', in particular, have underlined the centrality of race and class to labour control measures in mining hubs (Burawoy, 1972). Throughout the colonial period, higher-paid jobs in the mines' management or as chief engineer were predominantly reserved for Europeans, while African workers performed lower-paid functions that could nonetheless require great skill and technical abilities (Perrings, 1979; Higginson, 1989). While policies of Zambianization and Zaïrianization attempted to remove racial distinctions, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s (Money, 2019; Henriet, 2022), class remains an important marker on the Copperbelt, even today, for example in the distinction between more precarious sub-contracted labour and higher-paid employees hired directly by the mining companies (Rubbers, 2021). This work and others like it, suggest that mining companies through their labour policies – to a large extent – had the power to erect boundaries of occupational distinction (Rubbers, 2013; Larmer, 2021). One aspect that has not received much attention so far is how mining companies tried to cement these boundaries through the control of pollution. This section explores the policies that mining companies adopted to entrench forms of environmental inequality, showing how pollution, race, and class interacted (Peša, 2023).

Urban studies scholars have argued that colonial policies of racial and ethnic segregation gave rise to cities with stark infrastructural disparities (Myers, 2011). Some have even characterized colonial urban centres as 'dual cities' (Bigon, 2013). Whereas in the 1950s European neighbourhoods on the Copperbelt consisted of brick houses, with reliable running water and electricity supply, Zambian and Congolese mineworkers lived in crowded accommodation, relying on shared standpipes and barely enough electricity to light a bulb (Kazimbaya-Senkwe and Guy, 2007; Boonen and Lagae, 2015). Still, this compared favourably to the 'informal settlements' that sprang up across the Copperbelt, which were largely self-constructed, without formal provisions for water, sanitation, or electricity (Mususa, 2012). This 'dual city' model was further bolstered by hygienic measures, notably the '*cordon sanitaire*', which was meant to protect European neighbourhoods from such fatal diseases as malaria by creating buffer zones (Schumaker, 2008; Ross, 2017). Attempts to govern pollutants further contributed to spatial and residential segregation. Jennifer Chibamba Chansa's (2022) work has incontrovertibly shown that exposure to smelter fumes steered urban planning on the Copperbelt. Armed with scientific knowledge of the toxicity of sulphur dioxide fumes, mining officials and colonial urban planners located African settlements downwind of smelters where exposure was most harmful, while European houses were built in localities deemed at a 'safe' distance from toxic emissions. In other words, different neighbourhoods in a single mining locality were affected very differently by

pollution and toxicity. In the Zambian cities of Kitwe and Mufulira, for example, the Wusakile and Kankoyo neighbourhoods had to deal with toxic dust daily. Particularly in July and August, the dry and windy weather was accompanied by the constant sweeping of dust and resulted in regular bouts of coughing. Residents of the more spacious and affluent Nkana East or Eastleigh neighbourhoods, in contrast, rarely complained about dust or chronic pulmonary diseases (Peša, 2021). This environmental inequality was the result of deliberate spatial planning (see also Allen, 2003).

Environmental inequality was further cemented through the Smoke Damage (Prohibition) Act, which entered into force in Northern Rhodesia in 1934. This act stipulated that no person within a radius of five miles of a copper smelter would be allowed to claim damages or to interfere with smelter operations, no matter how bad the pollution.[3] Effectively, this legislation transformed the areas around smelters into legitimized 'sacrifice zones' where environmental injustice was concentrated and pollution could run rampant (Juskus, 2023). Such legislation illustrates the willingness of the colonial government to protect the copper mining industry against environmental damage claims, thereby propping up the mines' aims of maximizing production and profit. This act was only repealed in 1996, meaning that until this time residents living around smelter sites were not at liberty to sue mining companies over pollution, toxicity, or threats to their health and wellbeing (Peša, 2022). While this legislation was never enforced on the Congolese Copperbelt, spatial planning still contributed to environmental inequality. In 1936, the mining company UMHK started an investigation into the 2,500 tonnes of toxic sulphur dioxide fumes emitted by Lubumbashi's smelters every month. Despite awareness of the negative effects on the health of surrounding residents and the availability of technical means to alleviate smoke, company management decided to 'desulfurize the minerals in a site where … the risks of criticism are less severe [than in Lubumbashi]'. Subsequently, production was moved to the smaller town of Kipushi.[4] This example underscores that, rather than addressing the root causes of pollution and toxicity, government and mining officials resorted to urban planning measures to try to physically distance pollution from strategic population centres. Still, environmental injustice not only manifested itself through urban planning, but was also embodied by the effects that pollution had on individuals' health.

On the level of micropolitics (Rubbers, 2021), these effects of pollution redefined distinctions of gender, class, and race *within* mining localities. Already in the first decades of the twentieth century, mining companies showed an awareness of pollutants and their disruptive effects on surrounding communities, as well as on mineral production itself (Peša, 2022). Industrial policies exposed certain workers to much higher levels of risk than others. The research of Gabrielle Hecht (2012), in particular, has shown that during Apartheid, in South Africa's gold and uranium mines, white foremen would station black workers in 'hot spots' where exposure

to radiation and toxic dust was notably higher and exceeded internationally permissible norms. On the Central African Copperbelt there were similar attempts to regulate exposure to pollutants along lines of race and class. In the chemical plant of Shituru in Likasi, for instance, Congolese workers did not have access to sufficient protective gear. As late as the 1980s, workers handling acid had to beg management to provide them with gloves and aprons, even though managers (during the colonial period only whites, in the postcolonial period they included upper-class Congolese) did have access to these essentials (Peša, 2021). Banza Mutunda, who worked in Shituru for decades, commented that security measures were merely meant to give workers an illusion of safety (Musonda and Pugliese, 2021, show that this is still largely the case).[5] The mining industry crudely made the health of Congolese male 'unskilled' workers subservient to the cause of higher production. The activities of medical practitioners did improve working conditions and worker health, but equally aimed to raise copper output by ensuring that workers would not lose days of work.[6] Gécamines's direction bluntly stated that medical services were designed to 'lead to an improvement in productivity'.[7] Such measures put the heaviest burden of disease and environmental risk on manual labourers, particularly underground workers. Another strategy that mining companies deployed to manage which workers were most affected by pollution was to individualize risk. Throughout the colonial period, 'Katangese legislation' had 'classified all workplaces where there was a risk of contracting pneumoconiosis as eligible for claiming damages'. However, this legislation was revoked in 1969 and subsequently a Gécamines medical inspector was tasked with determining 'whether a workplace put a worker at risk of contracting silicosis'.[8] This gave mine management the power to determine what counted as a 'silicosis zone' and it also enabled them to decide which workers could be put at risk in dusty environments. Health and risk subsequently became the responsibility of individual workers, who were made to follow strict safety procedures (Musonda and Pugliese, 2021). Yet even following these safety procedures to the letter did not eliminate risk, nor did it prevent the mobility of pollution. Underground workers carried dust home to their wives and children on their uniforms. A mundane act of care such as washing contaminated clothes thereby spread environmental injustice across lines of gender and class.

Through spatial planning measures and the individualization of risk onto the bodies of mining communities, mine management regimented environmental inequality on the Copperbelt. Differentiated along lines of gender, class, and race, some Copperbelt residents bore higher risks than others. Yet mining was such a large-scale, transformative, and long-lasting activity that toxicity pervaded boundaries and attempts to govern pollution proved futile. The next section examines how pollution challenged existing power relations between mine management and mining communities, questioning categories of gender, class, and race in the process.

Disrupting Boundaries: Intractable Pollutants

Notwithstanding mine management's attempts to govern pollutants, toxicity proved to be pervasive, mobile, and defiant of boundaries. To show the intractability of pollution on the Copperbelt, I will look at two particularly mobile substances – water and air – as well as at seemingly immobile mining waste dumps. How did the mobility/immobility of water, air, and waste feed into environmental inequality?

The Copperbelt is notorious for its air pollution. Of particular concern are sulphur dioxide fumes, dubbed *senta* in Zambia and *kachoma* in Congo. These toxic emissions can cause pulmonary diseases, skin rashes, and they can make vegetation wilt. While the effects are most pronounced in the neighbourhoods directly adjacent to smelters and production sites, pollution has proven so intense and protracted that it has turned into a generalized and pervasive form of 'slow violence' that has affected the Copperbelt as a whole (Nixon, 2011). Due to their miniscule size, air pollution particles proved particularly mobile and adept at crossing boundaries. In 1972, ZCCM engineers, opportunistically naturalizing the Copperbelt mining industry, still claimed that due to 'favourable climatic and geographical circumstances […] prevailing winds will normally carry the fumes away over open country'.[9] Yet, consistently high sulphur dioxide emissions (in Mufulira alone up to 5,000 tonnes a month in the 1990s) resulted in a generalized 'danger to lives of people and animals' as Zambian newspapers remarked (Times of Zambia, 25 January 1993). Reporters identified the 'unchecked emission of toxic substances' as a 'potentially explosive issue', exactly because it affected population groups indiscriminately (Zambia Daily Mail, 20 April 1995). Cyprien Ramazani, who worked as an engineer for Gécamines for decades, explained how in Likasi the ubiquitous smog made people cough and prevented vegetation from growing:

> Gécamines worked 24 hours a day and there was smoke. It started from the chimney around 8 pm to 9 pm, the windows and doors had to be closed. And the smoke reached everyone […] pollution worried everyone. […] The workers talked about it, the doctors talked about it […] everyone talked about it (Larmer, 2021: 303).

While sulphur dioxide affected most of the plants in the vicinity of smelters, making it difficult for guava trees or leafy vegetables to survive, one plant proved largely resilient. *Ulunsonga* (pencil cactus, *Euphorbia Tirucalli*) grew abundantly in such neighbourhoods as Kankoyo in Mufulira (fig. 2). This plant produces a white sap that can be dangerous when it comes into contact with the eyes or mouth. Serving as a hedge between houses, *ulunsonga* today dominates the streetscape, as the plant has largely crowded out other vegetation. Interviewees mentioned detesting the plant, due to the widespread mocking nickname of Kankoyo as 'the place of *ulunsonga*'.[10] The plant is a visual reminder of the environmental devastation

Figure 2: Mufulira mine infrastructure, *ulunsonga* bush on the right. Picture by Danny Chiyesu..

wrought by the mining industry and its pernicious pollution. Yet one newspaper article (Zambian Observer, 16 April 2022) argued that its resilience is the strength of *ulunsonga*: 'the fact that Lunsonga [*sic*] can grow in difficult conditions is also a symbolic reflection of the resilience of people from Mufulira and their ability to overcome difficult situations'. Such observations interestingly link pervasive pollution to social relationships within mining communities, suggesting that mining companies could never fully control the (unintended) effects of sulphur dioxide smoke.

Other vegetation was not so resilient to toxic mining emissions. In Mufulira in the 1970s, Ana Chilufya's entire vegetable garden wilted due to air pollution, even though she did not live in a mining neighbourhood. This example shows that pollution can transgress occupational and residential boundaries. No member of the Chilufya household worked for the mines and her field was not located on mine land. The pervasiveness of pollution made Ana Chilufya resort to physical distancing as the only viable measure to survive in a thoroughly toxic landscape, thereby devising her own 'arts of living on a damaged planet' (Tsing et al., 2017). In what might be called 'resigned activism' (Lora-Wainwright, 2017), Ana Chilufya reasoned that 'the mine will not stop producing anytime soon, so it is better for me to move my cabbage'.[11] The omnipresence of pollution, thus, defied boundaries of race, class, and gender. In 2013, the asthmatic District Commissioner of Mufulira collapsed and died after inhaling sulphuric acid fumes, providing strong evidence that pollution could affect individuals regardless of their socio-economic and political position (Lusaka Times, 18 October 2013). Notwithstanding the mining

industry's attempts to govern pollution through spatial planning and the individualization of risk, air pollution blurred occupational and residential boundaries.

By highlighting the inherent flow of water, hydrosocial scholarship analyzes the socio-cultural, political, and environmental aspects of water (Krause and Strang, 2016). Corey Ross (2024), for example, shows the crucial role water plays in the making and unmaking of imperial power relations, while underlining that water could never be fully tamed. Water has always been a crucial resource for the Copperbelt mining industry: large quantities of water are needed to process copper, yet at the same time mines need constant dewatering to keep them workable and dry. Because different categories of water are not mutually interchangeable, the mining industry can simultaneously struggle with too much *and* too little water. The water that the mining industry discharges from the underground is toxic to varying degrees. From 1992-1993, ZCCM pumped up 263 million tonnes of water from its mines which it discharged as effluents into the region's streams and waterbodies (Naish, 1992). As early as 1931, the UMHK acknowledged that effluents contained such harmful substances as palm oil, sodium carbonate, and sulphuric acid, which had disruptive effects on fishing, forestry, and agriculture for many kilometres downstream from the processing plants.[12] These reports suggest that knowledge of the lethal mobility of polluted water was already available in the colonial period. Over the decades, water pollution disasters kept reoccurring, demonstrating that water mobility could not be easily confined to predetermined boundaries. In 2016, an acid truck overturned in Likasi, spilling 1,000 m^3 of acid into the Panda and Mura rivers. This destroyed fields and fishponds and made water undrinkable for months afterwards. Water's ability to flow also meant that the disaster could not be contained (Code 243, 22 February 2016). Zambia's Kafue River is a poignant example of what decades-long exposure to toxic effluents can do to aquatic ecosystems. Heightened concentrations of heavy metals and eutrophic conditions have caused fish catches to diminish and water to become undrinkable (Kambole, 2003). This is particularly problematic because agricultural communities located dozens of kilometres from the Copperbelt depend on the Kafue River to irrigate and fertilize their fields. Similarly, fishing has been severely affected by the Copperbelt mining industry (Gordon, 2005). Whereas the demand for dried fish on the Copperbelt encouraged the rise of commercial fishing enterprises in such rural areas as Mweru-Luapula, high levels of mineralization in the water have impeded fish growth and reduced their numbers. This has caused notable changes in fish consumption by Copperbelt residents over time. In the colonial period, small *kapenta* (sardine and sprat) that formed part of the mines' rations were reluctantly consumed by labour migrants, who preferred larger species of fish. Today, however, the joint dynamics of overfishing and pollution mean that the Copperbelt population is increasingly resorting to consuming *kapenta* – although their numbers have equally been declining. The mobility of pollution through waterways, thus, had far-reaching effects.

But even within the Copperbelt, water mobility could be problematic. Mining waste dumps, tailings dams, and the water runoff from these proved a matter of particular concern. Rain caused mine dumps to erode and leach their toxic metals and chemicals into surrounding areas. This water runoff defied boundaries, polluting the entire Copperbelt surface area, irrespective of neighbourhood and class distinctions. Moreover, the effects of water pollution will long outlast mining activities. This is illustrated by the phenomenon of Acid Mine Drainage (AMD) – the seepage of water through mineralized rock that reaches the surface – in the disused gold mines of Johannesburg. The dangers of AMD have been called a 'ticking time bomb' (Hecht, 2023). The dewatering of disused mines is not a responsibility multinational mining companies are willing to bear, and therefore the toxins of mining continue to permeate surrounding communities, decades or even centuries after shafts have closed. The Copperbelt will likely face similar problems once mines eventually close. Water pollution, thus, crosses spatial and temporal boundaries in afflicting its violence.

Whereas water and air pollution spread through inherent mobility, the Copperbelt's waste dumps appear to be relatively immobile. This is, in part, due to their sheer size. Lubumbashi's iconic *terril* (slagheap), containing 14.5 million tonnes of waste material, is a case in point. Gabrielle Hecht (2023) has typified the environmental inequality inherent in waste dump locations as a form of 'residual governance'. Mine residues are predominantly sited in marginalized socio-economic neighbourhoods and, more importantly, the people living there come to be treated as waste themselves. Hecht (2023: 6) therefore argues that 'residual governance is a primary instrument of modern racial capitalism and a major accelerant of the Anthropocene'. Considering these dynamics, it is unsurprising that Kitwe's Wusakile neighbourhood is typified by journalists as 'the home of the infamous black mountain [waste dump] and also a habitat for jerabos, a group of small-scale miners that scavenge for metals in disused dumpsites' (Zambia Daily Mail, 14 February 2020). Beyond portraying Wusakile as a waste site and sacrifice zone, pollution extends to its population who are characterized as petty criminals engaged in illegal activities. But on the Copperbelt, the waste problem is too vast to be confined to particular localities. In fact, waste pervades the Copperbelt and its immobility is merely apparent. Mine dump water runoff percolates into the water of rich households, even if it is more concentrated in the shallow wells that vulnerable urban dwellers rely on. Furthermore, there are long-term temporalities of waste management on the Copperbelt spanning the colonial, postcolonial, and contemporary periods. These continuities of waste governance entrench environmental inequalities and embody harm, while also spreading toxicity throughout the Copperbelt as a whole. Colonial forms of residual governance, with their accompanying rationales of profit maximization and differentiated 'wastelanding', endured long after independence. The privatized mining companies that took over from the state-owned conglomerates in Zambia and Congo in the 1990s submitted

lofty Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) that espoused 'green aspirations'. Nonetheless, environmental inequalities persisted, and the mine dumps are a prime example of how these have played out. These giant 'artificial deposits' that contain several tonnes of toxic waste material (with lead, arsenic, and mercury as some of the major pollutants) are recognized in EIAs as constituting 'a serious environmental problem' (Peša, 2022). Still, the EIA of the Katangese mining industry argued that they could not consider mine dump restoration because this would imply definitively writing off the metals they contain.[13] This reasoning evinces that profit maximization continues to inform the ways in which environmental inequalities on the Copperbelt manifest themselves.

The examples in this section have shown that pollution on the Copperbelt is pervasive. Both through mobility (in the case of air and water pollution) and through much less mobile substances (giant waste dumps), environmental harm spreads to Copperbelt bodies, waterways, soils, and all forms of human and more-than-human life. The mining industry proved unable to control these flows of pollution, if only because pollution is omnipresent. The conclusion further reflects on how pollution interacts with power and inequality.

Concluding Remarks: Pollution, Power, and Inequality

What does a focus on pollution tell us about the power of the mining industry on the Central African Copperbelt? While the first section traced the mechanisms through which mining companies tried to govern pollution, thereby entrenching environmental inequalities along lines of gender, class, and race, the second section focused on the intractable nature of pollution and its ability to blur boundaries. Pollution became embedded in the Copperbelt environment and embodied by its residents, proving itself inherently mobile and permeable. Ultimately, pollution shows the limits of the mining industry's power to control the Copperbelt. As Achille Mbembe (2021) points out, 'a fundamental part of the history of the living escapes human will'. Yet while the mining industry proved unable to enforce a systematic differential of pollution that would protect its managers and engineers from the toxicity of it, at the same time, a focus on pollution shows the overall destructive power of mining on the Copperbelt. Essentially, the mining industry has turned the Copperbelt into one giant 'sacrifice zone' where all forms of human and more-than-human life are affected by the pervasive toxicity of mining pollution. Thus, the destruction resulting from the mining industry is archetypical of the Anthropocene (Peša, 2023).

While the Anthropocene is purportedly 'the age of man', in which techno-scientific fixes will be able to control our environment, critical scholars have called attention to how little power humankind has over ecosystems and planetary forces at large (see Verburgt and de Waal, 2022; Couperus and van de Grift, 2022). Given

this, Julia Adeney Thomas (2022: 51) urges us to highlight 'the many textured, contingent, and small-scale [...] stories' that point towards 'diverse alternative histories within planetary limits'. Such an approach would acknowledge the power of the mining industry, as well as its limitations – illustrated by the example of *ulunsonga*. In the long run, the destructive force of the mining industry risks jeopardizing the viability of mining itself, underlining the limits of the mining industry's ability to control its environment. This is where the power of pollution comes into play, simultaneously upholding and thwarting relationships of human power.

Notes

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[2] This chapter follows a recent trend in Copperbelt scholarship that regards the area as a single mineralized region, spanning the international boundary between Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Larmer *et al.*, 2021).

[3] National Archives of Zambia, Lusaka, SEC3/261, Smelter site, Luanshya, 2 June 1936.

[4] *Union Minière du Haut-Katanga collection, Archives Générales du Royaume 2*, Brussels, File 319, 'Fumées des usines de Lubumbashi, Justification et examen des conséquences du transfert éventuel des opérations de grillage à Kipushi', 19 June 1936.

[5] Interview with Banza Mutunda, Likasi, 12 June 2018.

[6] Gécamines archives Lubumbashi, Annual medical report 1982.

[7] Gécamines archives Lubumbashi, *Délégation générale*, 1 July 1974.

[8] Gécamines archives Lubumbashi, *Réparation de la silicose*, 9 April 1969.

[9] ZCCM Archives, Ndola, 5.14.5B, Box 3, Pollution writings, 12 July 1972.

[10] Interview with Stevania Makasa, Mufulira, 7 March 2024.

[11] Interview with Ana Chilufya, Mufulira, 12 August 2018.

[12] Archives Africaines, Brussels, DG(1753)3, *Étude relative à la pollution des eaux des rivières de l'agglomération de Jadotville par les installations métalliques de l'U.M.H.K.*, 1931.

[13] SNC-Lavalin International, 'Étude sur la restauration des mines de cuivre et de cobalt: République Démocratique du Congo' (Montréal: SNC-Lavalin International, 2003), 180.

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