Gesture and Power

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May 22, 2005. Today I am going with my host Professor Mahaniah and several other people to one of the independent ngunza churches for service, specifically the DMNA church (Dibundu dia Mpeve Nlongo mu Afelika, or Church of the Holy Spirit in Africa) in Luozi. When we arrive, we can hear the music from outside. The church itself is a small, one-room, white-washed building with a cement floor. We walk to the open door, with the music having stopped by then, and one of the pastors comes to welcome us and invite us in. We remove our shoes at the door, and the pastor motions for the women to enter through one door and the men through another. He then leads us to what seems like “honored guests” seats at the front of the small church, facing everyone else and next to the raised platform of the pastor. I notice one thing immediately as I look at the congregation. The women and men are separated. All the women and girls are seated to the right of the pastor on low benches, while the men and boys are seated to the left on benches or at desks, on the same side where the drums are located.

The pastors and other church leaders are wearing all white soutans, with white hats (kepis). I am able to count about seven men who are not
only dressed in all white, but who also take major roles in the service. Most of the women have their heads covered in white scarves, and if the scarves are not white, their heads are still covered. Several women are dressed in all-white dresses, and white scarves, and they seem to lead the other women. I count at one time around sixty-five people, including children, in the church. Without a doubt however, women outnumber the men. The pastors and main spiritual leaders were all men.

The entire church dances quite a lot, in accompaniment to the inspired hymns sung by the congregation.\(^2\) The music and singing are so loud that they overwhelm the senses, making it difficult to hear the words. After the sermon, there is an offering, and then a healing session. Four men in white robes line up in front of the sick. The music begins, coming from three small, double-faced drums (*bibandi*) hit with batons, along with two long, thin bamboo trunks (*bikualakala*) hit with sticks and hand-held rattles (*nsakala*) vigorously shaken by the women. Loud call-and-response singing from the men and women accompanies the music. Each healer has a white towel they wave over their patients in order to facilitate the healing process. The healers begin to shake and tremble vigorously, laying their hands on the sick, shouting, massaging, and touching different parts of their bodies; first their heads, then their abdomens and backs simultaneously, then their legs and arms. The healers keep on trembling, and simultaneously the drums are playing loudly and everyone is singing and dancing again (see figure 3.1).

This description from my field notes reveals my impressions of my first encounter with the DMNA church in Luozi. The prophet Masamba Esaie founded this church. He was one of many bangunza who emerged in the Lower Congo (specifically in Luozi territory) after Simon Kimbangu was tried and incarcerated. Esaie was first arrested in 1933, and he was arrested for the third time in 1952, when he was sent to a penal labor camp in Belingo, Bandundu province (Mahaniah 1988, 77). Esaie founded the DMNA church in 1961, after he was released from prison. Many of the gestures used in the context of worship in this church, such as spiritual trembling (zakama), cupped clapping (bula makonko), and others have reappeared over and over again in our discussion of embodied cultural performances both before and during the prophetic movements of the colonial period. The DMNA church is one of many independent churches emerging directly from the Kongo prophetic movements, endeavoring to forge a different path from the mission-led churches. What form then, did Kongo prophetism (kingunza) take after Kimbangu? What relationship did kingunza have to nationalist movements
and sentiments? What particular politics of the body emerged after Kimban-gu’s arrest?

The Kikongo proverb that opened this chapter is often used in Kongo culture to remind people that when they find themselves in a different situation or place, they should also change their comportment to match their circumstances. This proverb captures the focus of this chapter: examining the shifting nature of the uses and meanings of Kongo embodied practices in the context of the many sociocultural transformations that defined the colonial era. In writing this chapter I am not trying to give a complete ethnohistorical account of the kingunza movement. Other texts provide much more of the history than I am giving here (Andersson 1958; W. MacGaffey 1983, 1986b; Sinda 1972). Rather, I will explore several key historical moments when religion, nationalism, and body politics collide in relation to the kingunza movement during the colonial period. Geographically, much of my focus in this chapter is on events and happenings in Luozi territory specifically (from 1913 to 1949 known as Manianga territory, Mahaniah 1989, 17), although there were other prophetic activities in other parts of Bas-Congo, the country, and even in neighboring French Congo. Limiting my geographic scope in this way helps to provide a baseline for understanding other types of performative encounters in Luozi that I examine in later chapters of the book. This chapter investigates the politics of performative encounters in Luozi in two time

Figure 3.1. Lines of men and women singing and dancing in worship, DMNA church, Luozi, 2006. Photo by Yolanda Covington-Ward.
periods: 1934–36, and in the mid to late 1950s, just before independence. This chapter demonstrates the importance of the body not just as a tool of resistance, but also as a method of oppression. While chapter 2 highlighted the performative encounters associated with spirit-induced trembling, this chapter helps to make the case that performative encounters are not just “weapons of the weak.”4 Examining the role of secular dances and the redefinition of bodily practices associated with kingunza elucidates the interplay between secular and sacred embodiment and larger political struggles to control prophetism.

The Politics of Dance in the Belgian Congo
To understand the function of secular dances in the Congo state’s attempts to control prophetism, I first examine Belgian colonial approaches to indigenous dances. In colonial contexts, the dominating power altered embodied practices such as dance in much the same way that the economy, social and political structures, language, and ways of dress of indigenous populations were subject to change. As Susan Reed notes: “The suppression, prohibition and regulation of indigenous dances under colonial rule is an index of the significance of dance as a site of considerable political and moral anxiety. Colonial administrations often perceived indigenous dance practices as both a political and moral threat to colonial regimes. Local dances were often viewed as excessively erotic, and colonial agents and missionaries encouraged and sometimes enforced the ban or reform of dance practices” (1998, 506).

This section of the chapter considers Kongo makinu, or dances, as embodied cultural performances that had varied meanings and uses by colonial agents, missionaries, and Kongo people themselves throughout the colonial period. Efforts by Europeans to control these dances as practiced by the indigenous population, often couched in terms of policing immorality, revealed the role that influence over the conduct of others played in the ongoing confirmation of European political and religious authority in the Belgian Congo. Moreover, in the context of the prophetic movements in the Lower Congo, some colonial administrators eventually saw a political use for makinu, using them in the service of combating kingunza. The control of mundane bodily practices such as secular dances became a means of undermining the threat sustained from embodiment in the sacred realm.

Following sociologist Christian Smith, I am using the term *morality* to describe shared social understandings about what is good or bad, right or wrong, worthy or unworthy, just or unjust, based not on our own desires or preferences but rather on understandings believed to exist apart from them, providing standards by which our own decisions, actions, and desires
can be judged (2003, 8–10). Rules of conduct, expectations, and obligations that make up the shared morals in various groups may differ from society to society, across time and space. In colonial-era Belgian Congo, many moral orders came into conflict as European administrators, traders, and missionaries interacted with local populations, who also had their own ways of understanding right and wrong in their world. Many forms of Kongo dance and other types of embodiment were targeted as violations of particular European understanding of proper conduct and behavior. Specifically, Belgian administrators and Western missionaries generally associated many of the dances with sexuality.

Before European colonization in the nineteenth century, the BisiKongo themselves did not automatically associate nudity or partial nudity with sexuality, as often only the bottom half of the body was covered with cloth (Thornton 1983, 35). They also had more lenient rules for sexual relations, including trial marriages (with sexual contact) before official marriage ceremonies (Laman 1957, 24; Thornton 1983, 31) and fewer restrictions on the sexual lives of unmarried men and women (Laman 1957, 33). Thus, sexual conduct that Belgians and other Westerners might have defined from their own perspective as immoral may not have been perceived in the same way for Kongo people themselves.

To understand what many of the secular makinu in question looked like, I present the following ethnographic memory from my own experiences in the field: August 16, 2005. After a bumpy ride on the uneven, unpaved roads that can only be conquered by motorcycles and vehicles with four-wheel drive, we arrive in the small village of Saka, in Luozi territory. The light of the full moon illuminates the path as we walk toward the large crowd of people haphazardly standing in a circle, laughing, singing, drinking, and dancing. People look at me quizzically as I politely wiggle my way to the front of the circle of onlookers to get a closer look. There are three long, thick drums being played, and the ngoma ngudi (lead or mother drum) has a tar circle (ndimbu) in the middle of its drum head, giving it the deepest sound as it leads the other two drums (ntambu). In the center of the circle of spectators, there are two lines, one of men, and another of women. Two men or boys leave their line and walk with the rhythm across the center of the circle to the other line, and stop in front of two women or girls, thus choosing them as partners. The women then follow them to the center of the circle and begin to dance with them, rotating and shaking their hips and behinds, while the tops of their bodies barely move. The men follow another cross rhythm, shifting from one foot to the other, their own hip movements emphasized by long lengths of cloth hanging vertically from their waists to the ground, making a type of skirt.
The men dance around and jump toward their partners, while the women stay in place, calm and collected, hips moving continuously, with their feet shuffling slightly. At a particular drum signal, the couples stop dancing, genuflect toward each other, and exit the circle, and are replaced by another set of men coming in to start the cycle once again (see figure 3.2).

This ethnographic description provides an image of the most common type of secular dance, which people in Luozi referred to *makinu ya nsi, makinu ma luketo*, or *ndosa* (traditional dance), at the time of my research. The skillful rotation of the hips that characterizes dances that accompany *soukous* or Congolese popular dance music (White 2008) draws on dance traditions such as those described above in Saka. These “dances of the hips” are not unique to Kongo people but exist throughout much of Central Africa, from the Congo to Uganda. And it is these types of dances that became the focus of much anxiety on the part of European colonial agents and missionaries. The following sections consider the question of clashing moralities, reactions of the colonial administration to indigenous secular dancing, and the opinions and efforts of both Catholic and Protestant missionaries to suppress dancing as an activity or pastime. In all these instances, the political and religious authority of the government officials and missionaries respectively is enhanced and
confirmed by their ability to prohibit their Congolese subjects from dancing. However, later in the chapter we look at a territorial administrator from Luozi territory who sought to use makinu to combat kingunza, establishing a policy of forced dancing to distract people from participation in activities associated with the prophetic movements.

**Moral Legislation and Ambivalent Action**

On July 17, 1900, the colonial administration released its first official legislation regarding what they called “indigenous dances.” The act basically regulated public indigenous dance events, limiting them to certain days and locations, at specific times, and under conditions determined by the administrative authority. People who broke these rules were subject to arrest and seven days of penal servitude, and/or a fine of two hundred francs. In the following decades, a debate over indigenous dances emerged in the pages of *The Receuil Mensuel*, a circular of laws, ordinances, and general concerns distributed for the “exclusive use of functionaries and agents of the colony” (Congo Belge, Gouvernement Local 1913). These circulars were couched in general terms without discussing particular cultural or ethnic groups. However, from 1886 to 1929 the capital of the Congo Free State and then the Belgian Congo was Boma (in the Lower Congo), making it likely that some of these laws also referenced the activities of BisiKongo people. Within this context, we can better examine how Belgian colonial administrators viewed indigenous dances.

On January 16, 1912, vice governor-general Louis F. Ghislain wrote an interpretive circular commenting on the above law of indigenous dances of 1900, and focusing on his main issue of concern: “It was brought to my knowledge, that in our posts, customary dances take place of a clearly lascivious or obscene character. On the part of the territorial authorities, charged with being the agents of civilization to the indigenous populations, to tolerate these practices and not to suppress them, could be with just cause considered by them as a sign of approval.” Thus, in this first circular, Ghislain evinces a concern for the morality of the public, by wanting to prohibit traditional dances that he saw as obscene. He also sees the suppression of such dances as a part of the civilizing mission of the colonial agents. However, Ghislain did not forbid all traditional dances wholesale—he left room for traditional dances that were not a threat to public morale, excluding them from being regulated by the 1900 decree (Congo Belge, Gouvernement Local 1912).

The next year, Eugene Henry, another vice governor-general, wrote a circular showing that “obscene” dances were still a problem: “In a number of posts of the colony and in proximity to them dances of a clearly obscene character take place. I remind territorial functionaries of circular no. 14, of
January 16, 1912, prescribing the prohibiting of dances of this type in all the stations of the colony. The first of their duties is combating energetically the practices that constitute a permanent obstacle to all the civilizing efforts and that oppose themselves to the attainment of indigenous populations to an intellectual and moral level to which we have undertaken to raise them.”

In this circular, a similar pattern can be seen. Colonial administrators saw dances they identified as obscene as threats to the civilization that Europeans believed they were bringing to their African colonial subjects. In Henry’s view, such dances undermined the intellectual growth and moral standards to which patronizing colonizers, once again, sought to elevate the colonized. Indigenous dances once again menaced the morality of the public. Eugene Henry continued by writing that if obscene dances were taking place, the functionaries must immediately end them, and “write a report to the chief of moral violations and to defer the guilty to court.” Thus, he demands the persecution of transgressors of the 1900 decree.

In January of 1915, two years later, yet another circular about indigenous dances appeared in the *Receuil Mensuel*. In it, the governor-general Félix Fuchs takes a more tentative approach to the control of indigenous dances, yet at the same time upholds ideas of European superiority and ethnocentrism that were part and parcel of the colonial endeavor:

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

Here Fuchs argues that the purpose of native dances is to provide a necessary form of recreation and exercise for the indigenous population. He warns that excessively prohibiting these dances will lead to legitimate complaints and discontent among the Congolese. Like Ghislain in the circular of 1912, he also believes nonobscene dances should be excluded from regulation. He
justifies a more lax approach to dance regulation by implying that innate Black inferiority leaves dance as the only true African recreational pastime. Moreover, the theme of morality emerges once again, as Fuchs encourages the prohibition of dances that violate “our conceptions of morality,” where “our” can be understood as early twentieth-century Belgian Catholic colonials. In sum, each of these administrators took varied approaches to regulating indigenous secular dances. While none of these circulars discuss specific dances, nor links them to particular ethnic groups, it is clear that the regulation of dancing bodies was a primary concern for the Belgian colonial administration in the Congo.

Protestant and Catholic Reactions to Kongo Makinu
The colonial administration’s overall hostility and general disdain toward indigenous dances was even more pronounced in the European-led missions. Moral debates concerning dance have a very long history in Christianity. From opposition to dancing in medieval summas to the use of liturgical dances in some modern day churches, there has not been a fixed consensus of opinion over time in Christian churches in regards to dance. Many of the arguments that European missionaries and some colonial administrators in the Congo used against dancing have their antecedents in discussions and debates that took place in Europe, especially during the sixteenth century in the age of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, when the culture of the post–Middle Ages Renaissance period emphasized dance in court culture and comportment (Arcangeli 1994, 127). The different branches of Christianity were varied in their conceptions of the value or danger of dance. Within Protestantism, Calvinists prohibited dance while the Lutherans were more tolerant. Similarly, some Catholic churches were more open to dance (for example, Society of Jesus) while others were more proscriptive. However, in the debates that occurred about dance, some common themes emerged for both sides, revealing the frame of assessment that many Western Christians had toward dance. These included seeing dance as an amusement, an expression of joy, a physical exercise, an occasion for encounters (often with the opposite sex), a traditional habit or custom, a pagan rite in worship of the devil, and associated with the sexual act, madness, and/or drunkenness (Arcangeli 1994, 138–47). European missionaries and colonial administrators applied many of the same ideas in their evaluation of Kongo dances.

In Protestant churches in colonial-era Belgian Congo, dancing in general was discouraged. For instance, since the early establishment of SMF (Swedish Mission Covenant Church) missions, dancing was strictly forbidden. At an SMF missionary conference in 1894, a resolution was passed that “old customs,
habits and conceptions, such as dance, all forms of idolater feasts, hair cutting feasts, funeral feasts, gun-salutes and wailing for the deceased, together with the drinking of palm-wine at such feasts, and at palavers, should be vigorously opposed and exterminated” (Axelson 1970, 285). This policy and intolerance for dance persisted in later years as well, as influential Swedish missionaries such as Karl Laman articulated a policy for conversion where individuals had to stop drinking alcohol and dancing, and should have only one wife, or else risk expulsion from the church (Mahaniah 1975, 162–63).

In 1907, the prohibition of “dance . . . [and] drumming at palm wine feasts” was added to the SMF constitution (Axelson 1970, 288). In 1941 eight Congolese teachers from the SMF mission at Kingoyi wrote a letter to the colonial administration protesting the physical abuses inflicted by Swedish missionary Reverend Karl Aldén, which included whipping a group of young school girls for dancing. This incident demonstrates the hard line that Swedish missionaries took against dancing. While the SMF missionaries dominated the Protestant presence in Luozi territory, other missions, both Catholic and Protestant, enacted similar rules of conduct throughout the Lower Congo and the rest of the colony.

Several detailed studies of “BaKongo dances” written in 1937, 1938, and 1939 by three Belgian priests reveal BisiKongo dances had become a major point of concern for Catholic missions in the Lower Congo. These studies detail the dances that were alluded to in the administrative circulars and demonstrate that certain dances were also a concern for the clergy, who saw the dances as immoral practices unfit for true Christians, and sought methods to actively combat them.

In 1937 Jesuit Catholic priest Joseph Van Wing published the article “Les Danses Bakongo,” in Congo, an academic review of the Belgian colony. He begins the article with a stereotypical assessment of the genetic ability of people of African descent in regards to dance: “If there is an art in which blacks excel, it is the dance. . . . It is innate to them” (1937, 121). Later in the article, he describes the most common form of BaKongo dances:

When the drums are ready they are put in the middle of the space, and the dancers come to arrange themselves in front of them: one side of men, the chest bare, . . . the other side of women, covered in a small cloth of dance. The main drum gives the first measures. . . . The mvudi-toko (dance master) places himself at the head of the two lines and strikes up the song. . . . The choir picks up the song, and the dance begins. It consists of a shaking, to make wriggle in a certain way the luketo [hips], that is to say the lower stomach, in the same rhythmical movement; the
speed and the intensity of movement is regulated by the rhythm of the drums. . . . Two male dancers move themselves forward in front of two female dancers . . . and the two couples dance, watched by the crowd, who mark the tempo of hands and feet. At the signal of the *mvudi-toko*, the two couples withdraw themselves, and two others come forward and do the same, and so on for all the couples. Then . . . [the female dancers] move forward near the men, and each of them grabs hold of a partner, and the two embrace chest to chest, and remain like this, stuck [together], all while shaking the hips, until the *mvudi-ntoko* gives the signal of separation. . . . There is the ordinary dance of eastern BaKongo. (Van Wing 1937, 127–28)

Similar descriptions of Kongo dances can be found for almost all parts of the Lower Congo, some dating to even before the colonial period. Moreover, another dance called *maringa* had become popular by the 1930s. The maringa dance was a partnered dance performed to the accompaniment of European instruments, which displayed a lot of hip movement and was said to imitate certain dances of Europe and the Caribbean (P. Martin 1995, 131). Van Wing wrote of the maringa: “Since some time the *maringa* has spread itself, imitating the whites, and takes place not in the public space but in the interior of huts of palm branches to the sound of an accordion. The couples embrace and wriggle in so disorderly a fashion that nothing remains in regards to the aesthetic. It all turns into shamelessness and obscenity” (1937, 128).

After his descriptions of popular Kongo dances, Van Wing laments, “There is the brutal fact . . . our people have lost the sense of honest dancing” (1937, 128). He then explores various reactions to Kongo dances, from traditional chiefs who have both regulated and allowed dances, to the colonial administration, which in Van Wing’s view “hardly has intervened. Faced with certain excesses of public obscenities, it applies sanctions” (1937, 129). He sees similarities between the reactions of the Christian missions, both Catholic and Protestant, and those of the leader of the kingunza movement, Simon Kimbangu: “At the Protestant missions the dancer of ngoma was excluded from the Holy Communion. At the Catholic missions he was deprived of the sacraments and must do a required penance, if he wanted to return to the Christian practice. Kibangu [sic] came in 1921. With one word, he did away with the ngoma. Throughout all the country they were broken and burned” (1937, 129).

Finally, Van Wing’s opinion and disdain for Kongo dances clearly emerges toward the end of the article: “It is evident that the people need distractions and diversions. . . . But it is also evident that no people need stupid diver-
sions. Now the dance of the *ngoma* is only a direct preparation, public and collective, for the sexual act. . . . It destroys the physical vigor, and the sense of morality” (1937, 130). He suggests that the BaKongo either return to performing other moral traditional dances, or adopt appropriate dances from other Bantu groups around them. Notably, he even conjectures that ngoma dances can become fertile ground for other “kibanguisms” [*sic*] or prophetic movements. Overall, he does not see Kongo dances as diversions, strictly traditional, or vital, and thus asserts that the BaKongo are not being deprived if the dances are prohibited. He closes the article with the following: “If someone wants to participate in the life of Christ, he must refrain from immoral dances. And thus it is no longer a question of indigenous politics. . . . It is an essential principle of Christian morality that coincides with morality and nothing else” (1937, 131).

Thus, in his article, Van Wing pleads for the prohibition of modern dances of the BaKongo, almost all of which he views as immoral. His targeted audience is likely colonial administrators in particular based on his statements about the dances destroying the physical vigor of the people and also being a possible threat to the security of the colony. In endeavoring to police the conduct of all BisiKongo in the colony, Van Wing seeks to exercise more than his religious authority as a Catholic missionary by entering the realm of political authority, legislation, and enforcement. Once again, the question of morality drives the prevailing justification for the prohibition of these dances. Van Wing sees them as violating a sense of Christian morality—really, as overtly sexual dances.

The next year, at a seminar for Catholic priests held in Louvain, Belgium, the dances of the BaKongo once again became the primary focus of discussion. P. DeCapmaker, a priest in the Matadi area of Bas-Congo, gave a presentation on the topic. He starts by explaining the position of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome—that it was not recommended to alter practices that were not positively against religion or morality. Moreover, he explains that the missionaries were not condemning all dances indiscriminately, since to do so would cause many problems (1938, 40). He goes on to say that theological morals make it possible to distinguish three types of dances:

1. The honest dances, inspired by absolutely honest motives. . . . In this category we can place all the BaKongo dances that are not mixed.15 They are rather games of dexterity. . . . 2. The dangerous dances: that in themselves are not improper, but often end up in licentiousness, as a result of the circumstances that ordinarily accompany them: songs, excessive
drinking, unhealthy exaltation produced by the frenetic repetition of the same rhythm, perverse tendencies of dancers, drums, darkness. . . .

These dangerous dances are condemned by morality because they constitute occasions close to sin. . . . 3. The obscene dances: are those in which the gestures, the movements, the touching are shameless, licentious, and against morality. (DeCapmaker 1938, 41–44)

He then discusses these so-called dangerous and obscene dances in Matadi among the BaKongo, quoting the descriptions and opinions of missionaries from the seventeenth century to the 1930s, as well as descriptions of colonial agents, many of which correspond to those already given by Van Wing. Discouraging acts of violence in the suppression of native dances (forcibly breaking drums, and so on), he instead suggests the use of missionary influence to pressure native chiefs to prevent obscene dances, as well as the intentional creation of “honest” diversions such as sports or drama. He ends his presentation with the following conviction: “We are convinced that it is above all by—and at—the occasions of dances that Satan takes his revenge on our savior Jesus Christ and his missionaries” (DeCapmaker 1938, 58). This comment is noteworthy because it reveals that in his opinion, many BaKongo dances were the work of the devil himself, and can thus be seen, by extension, as the enemy of the Christian civilizing mission. Again, sexuality is lurking here, as he describes the dances as “licentious” and “close to sin.”

After DeCapmaker’s presentation, the Catholic priests present at the seminar had a vigorous debate on the topic. The discussion considered whether Europeans introduced corrupting dances, if games and scout groups should be promoted instead to combat immoral dances, if all dances should be the target of surveillance, and if encouraging a return to more ancient dances would invite a return of other traditional customs. Then, a remarkable exchange took place when one priest, Father Van Hoof, was asked his point of view:

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

Father Secretary: Then all the dances are bad?

Father Van Hoof: Certainly all those with the “ngoma,” and all those with whatever instrument which are mixed [in sex]. (DeCapmaker 1938, 61)
Here, these Catholic missionaries saw Kongo dances as a direct threat to not only a Belgian conception of morality, but also the ideology of Christianity in particular. Tellingly, Catholic missionaries presuppose immoral sexual activities in any dances including both men and women. The focus on the ngoma as the main instrument associated with immoral dances has an effect to this day on the types of instruments allowed in different churches (Catholic, Protestant, and others) in the Lower Congo.

Kongo dances bothered Catholic priests so much that Monsignor Jean Cuvelier, Redemptorist missionary and bishop of Matadi, conducted an investigation of all Kongo dances throughout the Lower Congo. He sent a list of questions to all the Catholic mission stations in the area and compiled and analyzed the responses. He also used some of the material that he collected to write the last article of interest, “Les Missions Catholiques en face des danses des Bakongo,” published in Rome in 1939. In this article, Cuvelier presents historical and current descriptions of dances, distinguishes between different types of dances, and even discusses the dances of banganga, which he describes as dances where “all the devils of hell dance alongside them” (1939, 155). He sees these dances of the banganga, along with funerary dances and dances of mixed sex with hip movements, as essentially bad dances that should be prohibited. He ends the article by highlighting concerns for morality: “There’s a lot left to do. The improvement of moral and civil life will allow the hope of better and lasting results” (Cuvelier 1939, 170).

Interviews and written texts illuminate some of the actual actions undertaken by Catholic missionaries in regards to Kongo dances. For example, in a document explaining the conduct and regulations necessary for the operation of a Redemptorist mission in the Congo, Catholic catechists are told they must be “model Christians,” and some of their principal functions include “to prudently prevent evil, above all fetishism and obscene dances” (Kratz 1970, 351). In an interview near Mayidi in Lower Congo, Tata Tuzolana, a traditional drummer, recounted an incident when Father Masamba, a Congolese Jesuit priest, broke the skin of his drum to prevent him from playing (July 22, 2005). Similarly, Tata Mbumba, a MuKongo Catholic, recalled that as a student he was threatened with expulsion from a Catholic mission school when he was caught dancing a secular dance (July 21, 2005). These are just a few of many examples of Catholic intolerance toward dancing during the colonial era.

Overall, there was a fundamental conflict of cultural beliefs between European colonizers and missionaries and BisiKongo dancers in the Belgian Congo. The use of overt hip movements in dance, the touching of pelvises in a thrusting gesture that occasioned dancing in a couple, the playing of the ngoma, and many other elements common in Kongo secular performances
were not a part of the cultural milieu of Europeans. As a result, many colonial administrators and missionaries were overtly opposed to the majority of the makinu of the BisiKongo, seeking to reform them, replace them with other pastimes, or to outright eliminate them altogether. Their efforts to control the conduct of Kongo people demonstrate the prohibition of dances was one way that their political and religious authority was reestablished and confirmed on a very intimate level for the average Kongo person.

**Kongo Reactions to Dance Prohibitions**

While European efforts to regulate dances are one side of the story, how did Kongo people react to rules prohibiting dance? To start, we must understand that before widespread European colonization, dance was a part of everyday life for BisiKongo people, used on a variety of occasions, from games, to funerals, to the capture of prisoners of war, to successful hunts (Laman 1968, 72). Thus, dancing, whether in secular or nonsecular contexts, was morally acceptable and appropriate. This moral order shifted dramatically with the arrival of large numbers of missionaries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One source that provides insight on this shift is *Au Pays des Palmiers*, a compilation of the recollections of Kongo instructors in the Protestant churches of SMF mission, originally published in 1928. In some cases, BisiKongo who were loyal members of the Protestant church upheld the rules and may have internalized the point of view of the missionaries. For instance, Yoane Nlamba, a teacher at Mukimbungu mission, describes some of the older traditions of the area when he writes, “dance was extremely appreciated by the ancestors. One would dance in all the villages, each village had their own drums. The dance took place during the evening and the night . . . and it was accompanied by immoral orgies” (Ahman [1928] 2003, 59). Similarly, Lebeka Kiniongono, a teacher at Kingoyi mission writes, “The women of long ago really loved dancing. But certain dances were very much shameful” (Ahman [1928] 2003, 92). In both of these descriptions of Kongo dances, the moral interpretation of these embodied practices is very negative.18

Similarly, more than seven decades later, in several interviews during my research, people stated that they considered some Kongo dances to be immoral.19 When pressed for specific reasons, one interviewee, Mama Nsafu, a prominent leader in the CEC Protestant church in Luozi, explained: “There is perhaps a dance of the man and the woman where they approach each other very, very, closely, or there is perhaps excitement. . . . One can qualify that directly, that it is immoral, that, it is not for the church. . . . If it is a dance that shows an odd manner, one where the people can be described as bad, one must not continue, and . . . we don’t permit that” (September 20, 2005).
However, not all Kongo people saw Kongo dances as immoral. Ne Nkamu Luyindula, recounting the story of his grandmother’s appreciation for Kongo dances, explained that someone asked her, “Ma Batikita, were you baptized? She said, ‘Baptized? Why become baptized? To whom will I leave the dancing? That’s to say, me, I don’t accept to be baptized at the Protestant mission. If I do, I will leave behind my dancing,’ and she was baptized really very late [in life], very late” (September 20, 2005). Ma Batikita’s story demonstrates that despite the power and influence of Christian missions, some people resisted the rules and policies by continuing to dance. For her, to stop dancing was a public sign of the embracing of a Protestant identity and the acceptance of the religious authority of the Protestant missions. The fact that she became baptized only when she was too old to dance testifies to the importance of makinu as embodied practice to some BisiKongo. Yet another interviewee presented a positive assessment of makinu when he said, “dances of the BaKongo are a part of the process of education. . . . Dance is also for correcting behavior. . . . I don’t think that they [dances] were immoral. . . . The adults, the people dance without a lot of negative ideas” (Tata Malanda, October 28, 2005). The next sections of the chapter examine the fate of kingunza after Kimbangu more generally and consider two specific time periods when secular and sacred embodiment (makinu and zakama) clashed in the context of religion and nationalism in the Belgian Congo.

Post-Kimbangu Kingunza in the 1920s

After Kimbangu’s imprisonment in late 1921, the movement continued without him as other prophets continued to emerge, and tragically, were prosecuted. Membership dropped in both Catholic and Protestant missions. As the following 1924 interrogation of a woman being accused of being an ngunza in Kunda-Tumba, Bas-Congo demonstrates, many of Kimbangu’s followers felt betrayed by these churches, and sought more independence:

D: Since the missionaries are the agents of the God to whom you pray, why are you fleeing them?21

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

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

R: Listen, white man. If your child has grown big, must you always serve
him food? Can’t he get it himself? . . . Now the missionaries want that we return to them to sing and pray. . . . We don’t want to go anymore, but we want to pray and sing [to] God without their intervention.22

This exchange reveals a burgeoning desire for independence in Christian worship, away from the guidance and eyes of European missionaries, who clearly saw the threat the prophetic movements posed to their religious domination and hegemony. In this regard, the meetings and groups that were formed by Kongo people seeking to take control of their own Christian worship, defining it on their own terms, reflected a growing adherence to a religious authority that came not from European missionaries, but rather from a number of Kongo prophets who were inspired by God through visions, dreams, and possession. This desire for religious independence reflects and in many ways drives growing nationalist sentiment in the Lower Congo.

In the decade following Kimbangu’s imprisonment, the Belgian colonial government vacillated in its treatment of kingunza when it saw imprisonment and exile were not sufficient deterrents. On January 1, 1924, two hundred Congolese gathered outside of the Catholic mission in Tumba, singing banned songs and demanding religious freedom. The district commissioner told the crowd that he agreed to allow them to freely practice their religion, and they dispersed. As a result, the Congolese quickly began to build some kingunza/Kimbanguist churches and schools. The district commissioner sent a letter to the governor of the entire province, saying he didn’t see the kingunza movement as seditious (Geuns 1974, 201; Joset 1968, 107). However, the territorial administrator of the Southern Cataracts disagreed and, in his own letter, urged the governor to repress the movement (Geuns 1974, 202; Joset 1968, 108). The matter was complicated further by reports and newspaper articles released by Catholic priests speaking against the movement, such as a 1924 report by Father Dufonteny claiming that the movement was inspired by Protestant missions and sought to unseat the white colonial administration. After further investigation,23 the Belgian colonial government switched course and sent military troops throughout Bas-Congo, officially forbidding any involvement with the movement on February 6, 1925. All Kimbanguist institutions were closed, people were arrested, and all religious meetings outside of those directed by missionaries “of the white race” were prohibited (Centre de Recherche et d’Information Socio-politiques 1960, 7; Joset 1968, 108). In a circular that same year, the governor asked the Catholic and Protestant missions to help suppress the movement (M. Martin 1975, 81). The last battalion of troops didn’t leave until June 1925 (Joset 1968, 108). After such severe repression of the movement, from 1925 to 1930 there were only
sporadic public manifestations of kingunza (Centre de Recherche et d’Informa-
tion Socio-politiques 1960, 8) although undoubtedly, people continued
to worship in secret. This was to change, however, in the 1930s, especially in
what is now Luozi territory in the Lower Congo.

Makinu and Kingunza as Performative Encounters in 1930s Luozi

The kingunza movement reappeared openly in January 1931 with public
meetings of bangunza in the Boko area of French Congo. This demon-
strates the porous borders between Kongo people in either colony, as their
religious activities were mutually influential. Additional evidence of their
connections across borders can be seen in confiscated letters written from
Yoane Mvubi (John the Baptist) in the Belgian Congo to bangunza in Boko,
French Congo. One of the letters spoke of “‘vita dia ntotila ye makesa,’ the
war that Ntotila and makesa (the heroes) are to wage in order to liberate
the Kongo” (Andersson 1958, 98). Andersson interprets “Ntotila” as referring
to Simon Kimbangu. Moreover, the letters prohibited contact with colonial
officials or missionaries and proclaimed a pending great battle in which the
kingdom of the Whites would be overthrown (Andersson 1958, 98–99). All
of this leads Andersson to conclude that “the movement had undergone a
considerable change. From a movement in which spiritual revival was the
central feature . . . it has developed into a movement almost entirely hostile
to foreigners and with obviously national or even revolutionary aims” (An-
dersson 1958, 100). The homes of suspected bangunza Samuel Matuba and
Philippe Nkunku in Boko were raided in January 1931, and many people were
deported, bringing an end to public manifestations of the movement in Boko
for some time.

Just across the border in the Belgian Congo, there was a resurgence of
kingunza several years later in 1934–35 in Kingoyi, the northernmost Swedish
mission outpost. Secret meetings in the forest became common, as evange-
lists commissioned by the mission and others (some unaffiliated with the
mission) came together to worship away from the eyes of the missionaries.
A prophet named Sebuloni Nsonde led this particular movement. Reverend
Karl Aldén, a Swedish missionary at Kingoyi, wrote about this particular time
period in a diary and described sneaking up on a secret forest meeting in
November of 1934. “The partakers in this fête nocturne, men, women, chil-
dren . . . performed the most grotesque motions: running in and out of the
crowd . . . jumping high in the air . . . shaking the head and the body as a dog
jumping out of the water. This wild ‘witch-dance’—same as the old dances in
the time of sorcery—was accompanied by two rattles with an intensely exci-
ting sound (Aldén 1936, 350). Aldén even describes an ordeal by fire where
man after man jumped into the fire. This array of ecstatic embodiment that Aldén witnessed in the *pendele*, including seeing the entire crowd speaking in tongues, demonstrates that the manifestation of the Holy Spirit was becoming more and more important, especially in comparison to the use of the Bible in worship services, which was becoming less significant in kingunza practices. Bangunza then, whether prophets or followers, were drawing on their bodies to become closer to God, through means that negated the need for the guidance or interpretation of White missionaries. This independent sentiment led to severe reprisals on behalf of the colonial government, including military patrols of the territory and the arrest and exile of at least one hundred people in 1934 (Joset 1968, 109).

As the kingunza movement in Manianga territory continued even after the massive arrests, resurging again in 1935, the colonial administration began to seek other solutions for the prophetism “problem,” resulting in a change in attitude toward secular makinu. Foreshadowing this later shift in policy, in 1924, an administrator wrote a letter to the governor concerning the prophetic movements and the possibility of secular dances as a distraction: “The natives who practice the Protestant religion can’t drink palm wine, or dance. It is true that dances are also prohibited by the Catholic missionaries. Why prohibit to man the distractions that entertain the spirit and the senses?” This type of thinking reappeared in response to the kingunza movement in Manianga territory. In 1936, J. Maillet, the territorial administrator of Luozi, called many of the chiefs of the area together for a meeting in the village of Kimbulu:

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

Moreover, Maillet wanted to make dancing obligatory in the villages between four and five o’clock. He also ordered that when he stopped in a village for the night, he should be welcomed by people dancing. What motivated this shift in policy from a largely negative view and an ambivalent approach of earlier colonial policies regarding traditional dances, to policies forcing performances on the Kongo people? During the annual meeting of
the territorial administrators of Lower Congo in February of 1936, the administrators had discussed the aforementioned incidents of prophetism requiring military occupation in Luozi territory, along with other outbreaks of prophetism. In the minutes of this meeting, there were several suggested means of preventing outbreaks of prophetic movements, including the reorganization of villages, creation of more mission schools, and the creation of organized distractions such as dance: “In the regions contaminated by prophetism the native doesn't drink palm wine anymore; dances are abolished. . . . Dances constitute a public repudiation of the doctrine of prophetism. A propaganda for the encouragement of dances must be made by the members of the territorial service.”

J. Maillet in particular asked for the state to provide funding for organized dances in Luozi, and two hundred francs were allocated to him for this purpose. Thus, Maillet thought to use secular, traditional makinu to distract people from prophetism. The opinion of missionaries to this implemented policy was very disapproving, as shown in a letter written in 1936 from Belgian Catholic missionary Father Joseph Dosogne to Monseigneur Jean Cuvelier: “Prophetism is a political-religious movement, which . . . interests and profoundly agitates the indigenous soul. It would be the most naïve illusion and the most dangerous one to think that one will impede it seriously and that one will stop it, by this attempt of returning to paganism that is the official introduction of ngoma and of dances” (quoted in Gotink 1995, 157).

In this situation, although they had the same goal of eliminating the movement, the colonial administrator and the Protestant and Catholic missionaries disagreed about this particular method of suppressing prophetism. This case of using traditional secular dances to combat prophetism is clearly one where the ostensible collaboration between the missions, both Catholic and Protestant, and the Belgian colonial administration was disrupted. Because of the supposedly “immoral” influence ngoma dances would have on Christian villagers, the missionaries saw the return to this particular form of traditional practice as a step backward in their civilizing mission. However, Maillet, the colonial administrator, prioritizes the issue of state security over concerns about the proliferation of “immoral” dances. Thus, the case of Luozi territory in 1936 can be seen as one where missionaries and colonial authorities bumped heads in the face of the competing authority that the prophetic movements represented, where Maillet prioritized preserving the political authority of the state over maintaining the religious authority of the missionaries. Van Wing's article noted this approach of the administration as well, when he wrote that the administration had reversed its position so that
“the highest authority in the province encourages and makes his subordinates encourage the dances of the *ngoma*; because they say, the people need relaxation, and the *ngoma* is an excellent means of combating Kibanguism [*sic*]” (Van Wing 1937, 130).

But how did Kongo people themselves interpret this intentional use of their secular dances to combat kingunza? Born in 1934, Tata Mukiese described his experiences of colonial-era regulation of secular dances: “The colonizer never prohibited dancing. On the other hand, they wished that people continue to take a lot of leisure time. Because that gave them the possibility moreover of keeping them [the colonized] in a state where they didn't want to bother them [colonizers]... It wasn't with the popular dances that the people were having revelations but rather with the kingunza... The colonizers weren't against the dances; they encouraged them; he [the colonized] could dance like he wanted without a problem. That doesn't bother him [the colonizer]. The thing that bothers him is the kingunza” (January 30, 2006).

Tata Mukiese clearly articulates the knowledge that Kongo people were aware of how much kingunza threatened the colonial government and also saw the strategic manipulations of secular dances for what they were—distractions and deterrents. While I am not focusing here on one specific incident, I see Maillet's makinu intervention in 1936 as a performative encounter that sought to transform the relationship between Congolese subjects and their Belgian colonizers. By forcing people in areas affected by the prophet movement to stop their work and activities to dance at designated times in a manner prohibited by Kongo prophets, Maillet was using people's bodies, against their will, as a tool to combat prophetism. Perhaps Maillet hoped that people in the area would regain an appreciation for makinu, one that had been largely repressed owing to kingunza prohibitions. The music, the dancing, the palm wine that usually accompanied the festivities—makinu as community events were surely enjoyable under normal circumstances. By capturing their bodies, his goal was to capture their minds, encouraging them to reject the prophetic movement for denying them such embodied pleasure. Yet, there is another layer to this performative encounter. Each time these forced dances were held at the designated time, the dancers and musicians, whether overtly or not, were forced to recognize the power of the colonial government. This was even more evident when Maillet or another administrator was present and the dances were to be performed in his honor. Through embodied performance then, Kongo colonial subjects experienced an intrudingly intimate relationship with the colonial state, one that reinforced their domination in an embodied manner.
Kingunza and Nsikumusu in the 1950s

The prophetic movements continued unabated in many different forms from the arrest of Kimbangu until independence, regardless of the violence, arrests, and punishments meted out by the colonial authorities. Some major movements included the arrival of Salvation Army missionaries in 1936, which led to the development of an independent, ngunzist salvation army. This was followed by the establishment of Mpadism, or the Black Mission/Khaki Church. Simon Mpadi was a former lieutenant in the Salvation Army and formed his own autonomous church and movement in 1939 in the territory of Thysville in Bas-Congo. After escaping prison four separate times, he was eventually caught again and sent into exile (Geuns 1974; Ryckmans 1970, 14). His Khaki Church continued on, privileging many kingunza embodied practices such as spirit-induced trembling (Andersson 1958, 154). Other important religious movements grouped under prophetic activity in colonial Bas-Congo include Tonsi, the Matswa movement, and Tokoism in the 1940s, and Dieudonné and organized Kimbanguism in the 1950s, among others (Geuns 1974). Through the colonial period, Belgian administrators continued to call a number of diverse religious activities kingunza or Kimbanguist. For example, in 1944 in Manianga territory in the Mbanza Mona sector, a local chief imprisoned a sergeant in the Force Publique for organizing a “kibanguist” [sic] cell.” Similarly, in Mayumbe territory, the 1947 annual report noted “a regain of prophetic activity . . . in the ‘Eastern’ region of the territory near the frontier of A.E.F . . . . Two catechists . . . (had) the view of carrying out proselytizing in favor of the Mission of the Blacks. This movement was quickly put down.” In 1947 in Manianga territory a “cell” of ngunzists was discovered in Mbanza Ngoyo sector, and authorities imprisoned its leader in Luozi. The annual report notes that “this territory was repeatedly the theater of violent prophetic surges of a more or less subversive character.” In 1950, authorities uncovered a “cell” of the Salvation Army and imprisoned sixty-five people in Luozi territory. The language used to describe these groups of bangunza, calling them cells, even implies a sense of political terrorism, as they were seen as such a threat to Belgian political authority and order.

During the resurgence of prophetic movements in the Lower Congo, both Catholic and Protestant missions faced declining membership. Many members of their churches were disappointed in what they saw as the collaboration of European-led missions with the colonial administration in the persecution of the prophetic movements and their leaders. Ironically enough, this reaction led to a major transformation of practices in the Protestant church. According to Tata Mukiese, an older, long-standing member of the kilombo
at the CEC Protestant church in Luozi, traditional instruments were allowed at one time. However, starting in the late 1930s, all traditional instruments were prohibited in Protestant churches owing to their association with worship in the prophetic movements (January 30, 2006). One could sing only in a classical manner, using European instruments. He recounted the story of a conflict in the town of Kingoyi in Luozi territory over the use of traditional Kongo instruments in the SMF mission church. Swedish missionary Reverend Karl Aldén banned the use of traditional instruments in his church in 1934. Kalebi Muzita, a Kongo leader in the church, disagreed and challenged Aldén’s policy. Kongo catechists, teachers, and pastors divided into two groups, some siding with Aldén and others with Muzita. As a result of the standoff, Kalebi and his group decided to leave the church. He reportedly told Aldén, “Since you have prohibited playing these instruments, you will see what will happen.” According to Tata Mukiese, Aldén and his followers became sick after this proclamation and were healed only when Kalebi returned and prayed for them.

Now, Tata Mukiese was born the same year this incident supposedly took place. While it is clear that he was not a direct witness to the events, the narrative that he tells provides an intriguing perspective on Kongo ideas about the role of their own cultural practices in missionary-established churches. Kalebi Muzita’s perceived ability to both cause and heal the illness of Aldén and others blends the spiritual powers of banganga and bangunza. Such an ability suggests that the spiritual power of prophets can successfully compete with that of European missionaries. Moreover, more significant in this narrative is both the conflict over embodied practices in the use of traditional instruments, and the importance for certain Kongo people of including such practices in worship, even to the point of revoking one’s membership in a particular church. Karl Aldén’s fervent attacks on bangunza in his own mission church have been chronicled in several bangunza songs from Kingoyi that disparage his actions and his negative attitude toward the prophetic movements (Andersson 1958, 279–80, 283). Muzita himself, according to a colonial document, was a member of the prophet movement and by 1941 had been sent into exile to Sankuru in the eastern district of Congo-Kasai. The use of traditional Kongo instruments in worship was clearly part of a larger battle between Kongo-centered and European-centered Christianity and thus was important to large segments of the population in Kingoyi as well as other parts of the Lower Congo.

As more and more people left their churches for the various prophetic movements, Swedish missionaries in the territory of Luozi finally decided on a plan of action. This plan was addressed in the 1956 annual governmental
report for Luozi territory: “Since the month of June a new wave of mysticism colored by ngunzism has again swept a big part of the territory. This movement was provoked by a circular sent by the Protestant missionaries of Sundi-Lutete and Kinkenge, inviting their adepts to a moral and spiritual reawakening. Unfortunately, the text of this circular was ambiguous for the natives and was misinterpreted by them. The old ngunzist leaders took up again their subversive activity justifying it by the context of the circular. At a given moment the rumor spread that ngunzism was no longer prohibited by the government. Four big ngunzist manifestations took place in the territory.”

The Protestant SMF churches used the Kikongo term nsikumusu (revival or awakening) to describe the spiritual movement they were trying to create. In this effort to bring people back to the SMF missions, church leaders appropriated many of the practices of the prophetic movements. For example, traditional instruments could be played in the church once again, and trembling and speaking in tongues were no longer strictly prohibited. While the SMF missions sponsored this spiritual revival, they did not in fact have a monopoly on the discourse that surrounded nsikumusu. First, there had been yet another outbreak of kingunza in Luozi territory in the early months of 1956, before the announcement of the SMF church revival. Second, in and around Matadi and in the areas north of the Congo River (Luozi and adjoining territories), rumors circulated about the possible return of the prophet Simon Kimbangu (long since deceased in 1951) that were explicitly tied to this spiritual reawakening. Monseigneur Van den Bosch, a Belgian Catholic missionary, warned the colonial administration of two Protestant catechists spreading such rumors: “They repeated in the villages that Simon [Kimbangu] was on his way and that he would be preceded by many prophets, who must ‘awaken’ the country” (Etambala 2004, 118). The great spiritual revival sweeping Luozi territory and other parts of the Lower Congo in the mid 1950s then, for Kongo people, was more related to millennialism and a desire for the return of the prophet Simon Kimbangu than to the efforts of the SMF churches. Indeed, the language and activities of the SMF churches were used to reinforce the idea of Kimbangu’s impending return.

This resurgence of prophetism had a great impact in other areas of the Lower Congo as well, including Thysville. In his 1957 annual report, BMS missionary Charles Couldridge reported: “Our church membership figures are down, our followers classes are also down . . . and our annual income in church gifts have fallen. . . . Here at Thysville we are compelled to take the resurgence of the prophet movement seriously. We have been hit hard in
some districts where up to 75% of our church members have gone out ‘en bloc.’ . . . The drop . . . can only be accounted for by the large number of our people who have gone over to ‘Kimbanguisme.’”

The colonial administration wrote a disapproving report of the nsikumusu movement the following year, capturing the embodiment they viewed as the greatest threat—trembling: “The movement nsikumusu or spiritual awakening, launched by the Svenska Missions Förbundet of Sundi-Lutete in 1956 didn’t have much success at the beginning. The propaganda of opposition made by the territory against trembling made the Reverend Missionaries think, who finished by admitting that in the territory of Luozi these phenomena are a characteristic expression of ngunzism.”

Therefore, the spiritual awakening of nsikumusu presents another case where missionaries (this time Protestant SMF missionaries in particular), and colonial administrators, disagreed on the meaning and usefulness of Kongo embodied practices. Both groups had the same interest of curbing the kingunza movement; however, colonial administrators did not approve of the SMF churches’ method of tolerating some of the same practices, such as trembling, which typified the prophetic movement and were persecuted by the state. Although the motive of the SMF churches was to attract people back into their churches, the colonial administration saw the appropriation of such practices as encouraging the prophetic movements and thus increasing the threat to state security.

The performative encounters taking place in this instance are both within and outside of SMF churches. By appropriating the embodied practices of the prophetic movement, the missionaries of the SMF were trying to stage a performative encounter of their own. Incorporating the instruments, speaking in tongues, and especially the trembling (before state intervention) would lead to a redefinition of these practices as “Christian” instead of pagan in the eyes of the missionaries and their staunch supporters. The end result would be a reclaiming of spiritual authority by the missionaries in face of the opposition from the bangunza. The nsikumusu revival in the 1950s and its incorporation of certain traditional instruments and creation and collection of revival songs was in fact the origins of the large kilombo choirs found today in Protestant churches throughout the Lower Congo and even in Congo-Brazzaville (Tata Mukiese, January 30, 2006) (see figure 3.3).

The kingunza movement expanded during this time, outside of the SMF churches, taking even more members away from mission oversight. Bangunza privileged embodied practices such as trembling, thus continuing to demonstrate their calling to become spiritual leaders in a manner that
missionaries were not. This in fact augmented their spiritual authority and earned them a greater following, especially when coupled with the rumors of Kimbangu’s return.

**Kingunza and Kimbanguism**

From 1921 to 1956, the terms *kingunza* and *Kimbanguism* were often used interchangeably to describe Kongo prophetic phenomena. In 1956, however, Simon Kimbangu’s middle son, Joseph Diangienda, led the founding of the Église de Jésus-Christ sur la terre par le prophète Simon Kimbangu (The Church of Jesus-Christ on Earth through the Prophet Simon Kimbangu) (Martin 1975, 104). Kimbanguism went from being a movement to becoming an organized denomination, initially based largely in urban areas like Kinshasa and appealing to the more educated classes of Congolese. The Kimbanguist Church was neither Catholic nor Protestant, eschewed politics, and minimized trembling caused by the Holy Spirit. They also sought to distinguish themselves from “Ngunza” groups who also prayed in the name of Simon Kimbangu but continued to privilege zakama. After a rash of arrests of Kimbanguists in June of 1957 in Leopoldville, the Kimbanguist congregation staged a protest and released several documents to explain their religion, advocate for religious freedom, and increase their profile internationally. In December of 1957, Léon Pétillon, the governor-general of the colony, released
a letter allowing for tolerance of the Kimbanguist religion (Geuns 1974, 215; M. Martin 1976, 105–6). Eventually, in December of 1959, the Kimbanguist church was officially recognized by the colonial government, with full rights to exercise their religion.

In these last two chapters most of the discussion of nationalism in regards to Kongo prophetism has focused on calls for autonomy and freedom of worship away from European supervision. However, the question that must be asked is what role did Kongo prophetism play, if any, in the movement for political independence from Belgian colonialism? Joseph Kasa-Vubu, a MuKongo from the Mayombe area in Bas-Congo, led ABAKO (Association des BaKongo), the organization turned political party that drove the movement for political independence in the Congo in the 1950s (Covington-Ward 2012). There is not enough evidence to firmly conclude that ABAKO leaders worked extensively with Kimbanguist or leaders of other prophetic movements. Indeed, in 1956 Kasa-Vubu pronounced that ABAKO members were “neither Kimbanguists, nor xenophobes” (Etambala 2004, 134). While there are few proven connections between ABAKO and prophetism, in the heady days of the late 1950s, especially after ABAKO’s call for immediate independence and the January 1959 uprising (called riots by the Belgians) in Leopoldville, the desire for immediate social change was present in multiple arenas of social life, both religious and secular. This is why scores of people left mission churches once again for the prophet movement in 1959 and 1960, hoping for the spiritual guidance to prepare them for the changes to come. Like during the time of Simon Kimbangu, many people had millennial hopes that deceased ancestors would return and the world and the existing structures of power would be completely transformed. Following anthropologist Wyatt MacGaffey, I agree that Kongo prophetism, “though never organized in the coordinated political form that the Belgians feared, nevertheless prepared the ground for ABAKO” (1992, 339).

Conclusion

An examination of bodily practices in both religious and secular contexts in colonial-era Belgian Congo reveals the shifting meanings and uses of embodied practices so aptly captured in the proverb Nsinsa wa ngoma wusobele, soba makinu maku. This chapter explored the complicated uses of Kongo embodied cultural performances in the Belgian Congo in the establishment and maintenance of religious and political authority. The performative encounters examined here demonstrate that the politics of the body is multidirectional—the bodies of Kongo people could be placed at the service of insurgent Kongo prophets as well as crafty colonial administrators, desper-
ate Swedish missionaries, or even disparate individuals trying to define their embodiment on their own terms. All of this reinforces the notion that performances of the body and their meanings are effective means of impacting individual and group consciousness. Moreover, the debates about sexuality and morality in regards to secular Kongo dances demonstrate the clash of cultural perceptions about moving bodies and their potential impact on individuals and society more broadly. The next chapter explores the connection between everyday performances and nationalism in postcolonial Congo under the dictator Mobutu Sese Seko.