Part III

CIVIL RELIGION AND PERFORMED POLITICS IN POSTCOLONIAL CONGO
Happy are the people who sing and dance.
—Mobutu Sese Seko

In the MPR, one surrenders both the body and the soul.
—MPR party motto

**Performance and Politics**

Excitement and anticipation filled the air in the capital city of Kinshasa on the night of October 30, 1974. Along with television networks and reporters from all over the world, an estimated seventy thousand people packed the 20 Mai Stadium when events began at 3:00 AM local time. The West Central African country newly renamed Zaire was at the center of the international spotlight, hosting the sports event of the decade and performing their nation for all to see. The main event was the famed “Rumble in the Jungle” boxing match between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman. However, the prelude and backdrop for the event was that of hundreds of dancers covering the grassy field of the stadium wearing printed pagnes and raffia, and executing different choreographed sequences inspired by “traditional” dances. As one group of dancers rolled their hips in synchrony, they began to sing in Kikongo as they pointed up toward the top of the stadium, where a large billboard of the face of President Mobutu Sese Seko was placed high above the dancing crowds.
This simple song and embodied performance simultaneously venerated President Mobutu Sese Seko while also referencing the united movements of a unified nation through the synchronized gestures. However, what was the purpose of such a crafted, public performance? This performance of animation politique—choreographed and scripted dancing, singing, and other types of artistic expression with nationalist themes drawing on performance traditions from different ethnic groups—was not an exceptional occurrence tied only to the famed boxing event. Political and cultural animation (also referred to as animation politique or simply animation) was widespread and reached into all aspects of everyday life in Zaire, formally emerging in the early 1970s and gradually fading in the late 1980s (White 2008, 73). Such dances, along with marches, rallies, salutes, and other public demonstrations were part and parcel of quotidian nationalist activities in postcolonial Zaire under President Mobutu. Why were such performances so important? What can an examination of animation politique tell us about the relationship between the body, performance, and state power, especially in a state relying on coercion and violence? Moreover, how are such performances related to another realm—that of civil religion?

This chapter emerges from interviews with people who participated in animation politique at different levels of engagement, documents retrieved at the National Archives in Kinshasa, speeches, newspaper articles, pamphlets, and other written propaganda of Mobutu’s regime, along with limited analysis of videos of political animation. I use animation politique to explore the everyday embodied dimensions of performed nationalism in postcolonial Zaire by examining multiple types of everyday performances and how they are used in defining Zaire, Mobutu, and one’s place as a citizen and relationship to the state. From daily performances at schools and businesses to performances for visiting foreign dignitaries, animation politique became enmeshed in everyday life (see figure 4.1). I also expose the coercion, both implicit and explicit, lying beneath performances of animation politique during Mobutu’s era, paying closer attention to the role of force.
and punishment in certain instances of “performing the nation.” My focus on the varied experiences of men and women who experienced animation while living in rural Luozi territory allows me to posit coerced performance as an often overlooked but quite potent governmental technique. As a type of performative encounter which the state imposed on individuals, coerced performances not only sought to shape individual and group subjectivities but also disrupted the socioeconomic and moral order of local communities, belying state discourses promoting order, hard work, and proper conduct in everyday life. Focusing on Luozi territory in Bas-Congo (former Bas-Zaire) also enables me to examine how performed nationalism was realized in even the more rural and marginalized corners of the nation-state. Moreover, post-colonial Congo serves as a case study to interrogate the relationship between civil religion, nationalism, and citizens’ bodies.

Nations, Nationalism, and Performance

Benedict Anderson defines a nation as an “imagined political community . . . both inherently limited and sovereign” (1991, 6). In his study of the emergence of nationalism in Europe, Anderson emphasizes print media and assumed homogeneity in creating nationalism. Such an approach is not as relevant in Zaire or even most of Africa, where illiteracy and many disparate ethnic groups (Zaire was estimated to have about 250, Meditz and Merrill...
(1994, 79) prove a challenge to ideas of a unified “nation.” Moreover, in Anderson's discussion of the development of nationalism in postcolonial countries specifically, he pinpoints mechanisms that clearly privilege the perspective of colonizers (censuses, maps, and museums) that may be seldom used or even neglected by postcolonial governments in Africa. How then are sentiments of nationalism developed in African countries, especially in instances of weak or limited infrastructure? For further insight, I turn to Michel Foucault's oft-cited treatise on governmentality, where he writes that government focuses on men and things, including “men in their relation to . . . customs, habits, ways of acting and thinking, etc.” (1991, 93, emphasis mine). In Foucault's analysis, the population is the primary target of government; the government will act either directly or indirectly through particular techniques to affect individual and group consciousness (1991, 100). Similarly, studies of colonial-era Congo have shown that clothing, hygiene, childbearing, and even schools were government techniques of controlling populations (Hunt 1999). Embodied performances are another way that many postcolonial African governments, such as Guinea, Malawi, and Zaire (Gilman 2009; Straker 2009; White 2008), have tried to transform consciousness through transforming bodies and bodily activities.

A number of studies have examined how, in a wide variety of postcolonial African nations, emerging national identities and ideologies were often expressed through the embodied performances of their citizens, whether by force, a sense of loyalty, or other means. Research on animation in former Zaire fits in with contemporary scholarship on what Straker calls “state-scripted nationalism” (2007, 209). Anthropologists, historians, and other scholars have examined the role of musical performance in Tanzania (Askew 2002), ballets in Senegal (Castaldi 2006), dancing women at political rallies in Malawi (Gilman 2009), popular musicians in former Zaire (White 2008), theater troupes in Tanzania (Edmondson 2007), and “militant theater” in revolutionary Guinea (Straker 2009). While most of these works examine public performances in spaces often set apart from everyday life, my work adds to this literature by exploring the larger implications of animation in local, marginalized communities and examining how state-scripted nationalism in everyday life settings is just as important for creating nationalism and a sense of belonging.

For a relevant study of nationalism in everyday life settings, I turn to Achille Mbembe, who in analyzing state power in postcolonial Cameroon and Togo describes what he calls the “banality of power.” By this he means the repeated actions and gestures, including the obscene and vulgar, that come to define everyday life in relation to the state (1992, 1). Mbembe explains further,
“to account for postcolonial relations is thus to pay attention to the working of power in its minute details. . . . That is, one must examine the orderings of the world it produces; the types of institutions, knowledges, norms, and practices that issue from it; the manner in which these institutions, knowledges, norms and practices structure the *quotidien*” (1992, 4). Mbembe focuses on visual imagery and discourse, such as mischievous wordplay with the words of songs and political slogans and rude jokes, for example. He demonstrates that, in considering subject-state relations in postcolonial Africa, scholars must move away from a strict binary of resistance and domination, and instead investigate the complexity of everyday negotiations that lead to “a promiscuous relationship” such that subjects of a state can publicly enact their loyalty to their leaders and perform rituals that reinforce state authority, while simultaneously making fun of them in covert ways (1992, 5). Similarly, theater scholar Mbala Nkanga's work on the power of “radio-trottoir” or sidewalk news offers an alternate space in everyday life for challenging the hegemony of the Mobutu-led state in Zaire (1992).

Mbembe’s concept of the banality of power is highly applicable to postcolonial Zaire under President Mobutu. While during the colonial era, the Belgian colonial state operated through “impersonal, institutionalized, and unchallengeable force” (Young and Turner 1985, 397) as its basis, in postcolonial Zaire a system evolved merging bureaucracy with a highly personalized state. Under Mobutu, the state had a dual nature: “formally institutionalized, in party and administration, but informally patrimonial and personal. Mobutu from the outset used the analogy of chief and followers, joined in a quite personal bond of rulership” (Young and Turner 1985, 397). As a result, the nature of the relationship between citizen and state changed dramatically under Mobutu, and this chapter explores several types of performative encounters in everyday life that enabled this transformation to take place.

Throughout this chapter, I discuss Zaire as a coercive state. I use the term *coercion* in the sense of one person or group of people using physical force, threats, or sanctions to control the behavior of another person/group such that they act in a manner that they would not have without the coercion. Political philosopher Michael Bayles outlines two major types of coercion: “In one type physical force is directly applied to cause behavior in another person. . . . Such “occurrent” coercion takes place infrequently. . . . In a second variety, dispositional coercion, one man (the agent) threatens another (the victim) with a sanction if the latter fails to act as requested. This type of coercion occurs more frequently than the other” ([1972] 2009, 17). Here, one could see both types of coercion as uses of force: “one immediate, one latent. In both cases, the principal effect is to constrain possibilities for action, either
immediately or in the future” (S. Anderson 2008, 21). In using this definition of coercion, I depart from more narrow definitions in political theory that define coercion based only on threats and largely focus on rational choice (Gorr 1986; Leiser 2008). Privileging the everyday lived experiences of people in postcolonial Zaire, where soldiers and police arrested, beat, raped, and even murdered citizens of Zaire with impunity, even in small towns and villages (Schatzberg 1988), allows us to take a different perspective. In the eyes of the average citizen of Zaire there was likely not much difference between threats of force and actual use of force; because actual use of force was so common, threats of force were not seen as a different category unto themselves.

Not only am I placing myself in conversation with Africanist scholars of performed nationalisms, but I am also interested in helping to chronicle a very important chapter in Congolese history. While animation was pervasive throughout Zaire under Mobutu, there are only a few past studies of political and cultural animation. The only full monograph and most extensive study is *Les spectacles d’animation politique en Republique du Zaire* by Gazungil Sang’Amin Kapalanga (1989), which provides an overview of the history, goals, and structure of animation politique, and an analysis of both its theatrical and nontheatrical aspects. Bob White’s ethnography *Rumba Rules* (2008) considers the impact of animation politique on musicians in Kinshasa in one chapter, while he has further explored Mobutu’s ideology of authenticity and its effect on animation politique in an article (2006). While these and other works have aided in recuperating the history of animation politique, very few studies consider the firsthand experiences and sentiments of people who were ordinary citizens forced to perform. Furthermore, an analysis of animation politique also enables an examination of how civil religion and nationalism came together, operating in tandem, in postcolonial Congo.

**Postcolonial Congo**

After a major uprising (which Belgians called a riot) in January 1959 in the capital of Leopoldville (Covington-Ward 2012), the Belgian Congo was hastily transitioned toward independence with few preparations. The Congo state underwent major sociocultural and political transformations after gaining independence from Belgium in 1960. The first republic was named the Republic of Congo and was under the leadership of President Joseph Kasa-Vubu and Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba. Between 1960 and 1965, a number of crises tore the nascent nation-state apart, including a mutiny of the armed forces, the assassination of Patrice Lumumba in 1961, the attempted succession of two mineral-rich regions (Katanga and Kasai), and the intervention
of international peacekeepers. On November 24, 1965, General Joseph-Désiré Mobutu seized power of the country through a mainly bloodless coup d'état. He became the most influential political figure in Congo postindependence, and, over his thirty-two-year reign (1965–97), became a fervent dictator. Between 1965 and 1967 the multiparty system was prohibited, a new constitution was adopted, and a single national party was created, the Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution (the People’s Revolutionary Movement, also known as mpr) (Kannyo 1979, 58–60; C. Young 1983, 329).

The mpr was the party of the state, and all Congolese citizens were members of the party automatically according to the national constitution (Kannyo 1979, 60). One's membership was not a matter of choice, which was clearly articulated by one of the slogans popular during the time: “O linga, O linga te, O zali kaka mpr.” In Lingala,9 this basically translates to: “If you want to, or if you don't want to, you are in mpr” (a slogan repeated by many people in interviews and conversations). Over the course of Mobutu’s thirty-two-year regime, the ideology of the mpr was rebranded several times but remained essentially the same. Thus, according to political scientist Edward Kannyo:

The ideological assertions of the Mobutu regime have been termed nationalism, authentic Zairian nationalism, authenticity, and Mobutuism at various periods. Whatever the terminological variations, the core of the ideology is essentially conservative anti-colonial nationalism. The aims of this orientation involve the “indigenization” of the political and economic structures of Zaire without altering them to provide for a more egalitarian and democratic socioeconomic system. . . . Authenticity has also been invoked to justify the authoritarian political system. . . . Another important dimension [is] . . . cultural nationalism and nativism. In this aspect, authenticity seeks to combat the sense of cultural inferiority that was inculcated by colonial domination. (Kannyo 1979, 61)

These interconnected ideas of authenticity were realized on the ground in many ways. The prime example was in 1971, when, going along with his ideological shift to promote authenticity and reject the influences of Belgian colonialism, Mobutu changed the name of the country, major river system, and currency to Zaire. The national hymn was rewritten, African styles of clothing were privileged, and citizens were prohibited from using their Christian names. Mobutu himself went from Joseph-Désiré Mobutu to Mobutu Sese Seko Nkuku Ngbendu Wa za bangsa.10 All these changes demonstrate the importance of a return to an authentic precolonial past through an erasure of practices explicitly tied to colonialism and the reinvention of significant
symbols. Moreover, the development of the arts was to aid the shedding of a colonial identity and the embracing of a new national identity privileging African artistic expression, and also demonstrating loyalty to the one-party state and its leader. The Mobutu-led regime enacted a number of policies and propaganda strategies attempting to make the worship of Mobutu and his ideas as a type of religion unto itself—a civil religion.

**Civil Religion and Nationalism Embodied, or How Mobutu Became a God**

During Mobutu’s presidency, a key strategy his administration pursued was to create a type of personality cult around the president. Through strategic propaganda efforts, Mobutu became omnipresent in the lives of average citizens in many ways. These ideological attempts were especially pronounced after his diplomatic visits to China in January 1973, and to both China and North Korea in December 1974 (*Salongo*). Both Mao Zedong and Kim Il-Sung were well known for arranging public performances of nationalism, and for having their citizens perform their worship of their leaders on a quotidian basis (Kim 2010; Leese 2011). Writing about North Korea, Suk-Young Kim observes that, “aiming at social control by forcing people to participate in state ritual is North Korea’s most efficient governing strategy” (2010, 17). Thus, it is very likely that Mobutu was influenced by the approaches of these leaders, especially as significant changes in policy were enacted immediately after he returned from these trips (especially the December 1974 trip, which was followed by a shift to an ideology of “radicalization” [see January 1975 issues of *Salongo*]). As Bob White has observed, political dancing and singing in the Congo existed well before Mobutu’s trips to Asia (2008, 75). However, the massive mobilization of propaganda that took place in the 1970s with the goal of elevating Mobutu and his ideas was vastly different than anything that had existed in the Congo in the past.

Zaire under Mobutu is just one example of the creation of what can be termed a civil religion. Writing about the particular case of myths, imagery, and even speeches in politics in the United States, sociologist Robert Bellah first defined civil religion as a “public religious dimension [that] is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals” (1967, 4). Since Bellah’s groundbreaking article, there have been a number of scholarly approaches to civil religion, which can be grouped into five different definitions of the concept. The first is civil religion as folk religion, where shared ideas and values emerge out of the history of a society. The second is civil religion as transcendent universal religion, where there are shared symbols and ethical principles by which the
nation is judged. The third is civil religion as religious nationalism, where the state is legitimized through religion. The fourth is civil religion as democratic faith, based on particular concepts such as equality, freedom, and justice. The fifth is civil religion as Protestant civic piety, which is based on Protestant values of individualism, work ethic, and missionizing (Jones and Richey 1990, 14–18). Most of these studies of civil religion have focused on the United States, examining how songs, speeches, myths of founding fathers, holidays, and concepts such as manifest destiny have played a role in shaping the collective identity of the country and legitimizing certain actions (Angrosino 2002; Bellah 1967; Coleman 1970; Jones and Richey 1990). Studies of civil religion in other nations, however, have revealed a diverse array of forms this phenomenon can take (Agadjanian 2001; Markoff and Regan 1981), supporting Cristi’s assertion (2001) that historical circumstances and social contexts play a defining role in the expressions of civil religion in different societies.

To fully contextualize how I am using civil religion here, I take a Durkheimian approach to religion, understanding religion as a social project based on a set of shared representations and rites. “Religious representations are collective representations which express collective realities; the rites are a manner of acting which take rise in the midst of the assembled groups and which are destined to excite, maintain, or recreate certain mental states in these groups” (Durkheim [1915] 1964, 10). From media programming, to forced meetings and marches, to collective dancing, to public adulation of Mobutu (organized by his government), a strong argument can be made for the existence of a civil religion in Zaire. One argument against seeing the case of Zaire as a civil religion is that before colonialism, traditional chiefs and other leaders were often praised through song and dance. Thus, Mobutu was simply continuing precolonial practices. However, there are three major differences between precolonial practices and postcolonial Zaire. First, the level of scale is much different. In the precolonial era, leaders ruled over much smaller, more homogenous groups of people; even kingdoms were not at the same level of scale as a massive country with tens of millions of people. These millions of people come from different ethnic groups and clans, and thus much more must be done to get them to share collective representations and practices. Second, coercion and the threat of violence became key motivators in the aspect of Mobutu’s civil religion devoted to political animation. On the contrary, ritual adoration of chiefs in the precolonial era was more often based on will and obligation rather than force, with some exceptions. Third, civil religion under Mobutu was based on a reimagining and recreating of a number of different cultural practices from all around the country, all
changed in some way to accommodate the Mobutu narrative, while precolonial ritual was more limited and particular to the region or ethnic group where it was based. In addition, some scholars even see precolonial Congo as having evidence of civil religion in many ways, based on many leaders exhibiting interwoven dimensions of religious and political power (Booth 1976). What, then, can a case study of postcolonial Congo (renamed Zaire) add to the ongoing discussion about civil religion?

An analysis of civil religion in Zaire provides a better understanding of the relationship between civil religion, nationalism, and bodies/embodied action. One underexamined area of focus is the relationship between civil religion and nationalism. “The link between civil religion and nationalism,” writes Marcela Cristi, “seems to me not a ‘tangential issue’ . . . but rather a question of utmost importance—one that seems not to have attracted the attention it deserves” (2001, 200). She rightly points out that both civil religion and nationalism operate in similar ways, promoting a sense of collective identity and greater meaning for people within a country (2001, 198). But how do we define the relationship between them? Are they mutually exclusive? Does one lead to the other? Or do they exist in continual dialogue with one another?

This and the next chapter allow us to use the case of postcolonial Zaire to bring another perspective to the study of civil religion. First, in Zaire civil religion and nationalism were interrelated and interacting. Mobutu was heralded both as a sacred and as a political figure: savior and president of the nation. The relationship that all citizens were supposed to have with him was one of the common threads bringing the nation together. However, this shift to creating a cult of personality happened several years after he took over the country, after he was already trying to create a sense of nationalism in the fragmented polity. This suggests that nationalism can in fact precede civil religion. Second, much of the literature on civil religion in the United States examines common myths, symbols, and values that have been developed over the course of two hundred years, since the American Revolutionary War. The case of Congo, however, is another matter. What symbols are shared when people in a country don’t have much in common besides the experience of Belgian colonization? The particular form that civil religion takes in a society is informed by its history; this suggests that a lack of shared symbols shaped the form of civil religion that came to predominate in Zaire—that of religious nationalism. Markoff and Regan suggest that in a context of pluralism “when the gap that separates local and national is most acute,” civil religion can serve to bring these separate identities together (1981, 343). Third, an examination of postcolonial Zaire reveals the importance of embodied action for both civil religion and nationalism in the country. Much of the research on civil religion
in general has focused on texts and concepts, and much less so on the role of the body in everyday experiences of civil religion. The focus on political animation in this and the following chapter suggest that coerced performances were at the center of a state strategy to inculcate both nationalist sentiment and the embodiment of civil religion in Zaire.

The leadership in Mobutu’s government actively promoted Mobutu, the MPR, and Mobutu’s ideas in ways that encouraged worship and adoration, creating a civil religion with Mobutu at the top. Analysis of speeches and state owned newspapers during Mobutu’s era demonstrates multiple ways in which this was achieved. For example, in a 1974 speech at the Institute Makanda Kabobi, the ideological institute of the MPR, Mobutu used the language of religion to describe the role of the MPR’s leaders in spreading his ideas to the masses:

When one speaks of Christianity, one understands by it the thought, the teachings, and the action of its founder Jesus of Nazareth. . . . An idea such as thus could not endure and be developed if it wasn’t conceived within an organization and a solid structure. This structure, for Christianity, is the church, and for “Mobutuism” it is the Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution. . . . In the church, the leaders are the transmission relays of the thoughts of Christ to all the faithful. In the same way, the leaders of the Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution relay the thoughts of the President-Founder to the popular masses. . . . The role of political commissioners, in the context of “Mobutuism” can be compared to that of theologians. (Mobutu 1975, 527)

Here, Mobutu uses the language, institutions, and roles associated with organized Christianity to define and explain similar structures within the MPR. He also likens the relationship that Christians have with the church and its leaders to the relationship they should have with the MPR and Mobutu. This shows that Mobutu and his administration were very explicitly trying to get people to think about the MPR and the nation’s president in a religious manner.

References to Mobutu in the state newspaper Salongo also reveal attempts to elevate Mobutu to the status of a God in many ways. While in previous issues of the paper in 1972 and early 1973, Mobutu is referred to as the “Head of State,” “Founder-President,” “Citoyen Mobutu,” or “General de corps d’Armée” (March 6, 1972; April 26, 1972; October 14, 1972; November 23–26, 1972, among others), after his January 1973 visit to China, there is a shift in language such that he is referenced as “The Guide,” throughout the 1970s (Salongo January 24, 1973; January 30, 1973; February 2, 1973; October 14, 1975,
among others). He is also often called the “Father of the Nation” (Salongo November 5, 1973; November 12, 1973; December 1 and 2, 1973; November 9, 1976, among others). There are more explicit religious references as well. In multiple issues of Salongo, President Mobutu was called “the savior” of the people of Zaire (November 27, 1972; November 27, 1973; January 1, 1975; May 20, 1976, and others) and was even called a prophet or prophetic (November 23, 24, 25, 1973; December 6, 1973 and others). The editors of the newspaper freely used religious language and metaphors to describe the place of Mobutu and the mpr in the lives of the citizens of Zaire. For example, in a special issue, November 24 (the date of Mobutu’s takeover of the government) was heralded as “the day of our miraculous resurrection” (Salongo November 24, 1974, page 3). In another article entitled, “MPR Applies the Message of the Gospel,” Mobutu is quoted as saying in the context of a speech, “All that God demands, we do it in the mpr. We preach respect and love... We put an end to the boy and monsieur relationship, we made pygmies full Zairian citizens and ended feudalism in Kivu, both situations that missionaries knew about and left as is” (Salongo, November 5, 1973). Here, the mpr is being presented as not only a surrogate for Christianity, but also as a better and more moral option, as the essay highlights the mistakes of Christian missionaries in ignoring societal injustices. This suggests that the author of the article is attempting to actively undermine the power and authority of institutionalized religions (especially the Catholic Church).

In 1975 Mobutu’s interior minister, Léon Engulu Baanga Mpongo, captured the idea of the worship of Mobutu as a religion when he wrote, “In all religions, and at all times, there are prophets. Why not today? God has sent a great prophet, our prestigious Guide Mobutu—this prophet is our liberator, our Messiah. Our Church is the mpr. Its chief is Mobutu, we respect him like one respects a Pope. Our gospel is Mobutism. This is why the crucifixes must be replaced by the image of our Messiah” (quoted in Young and Turner 1985, 169). All these speeches, articles, and essays show that the national government of Zaire had the goal of deifying Mobutu.

However, the civil religion revolving around Mobutu was not just in text; it was also presented visually and made real physically through animation and other everyday performances of nationalism. One visual manner was through television. Before every news broadcast, there was a short video of Mobutu’s face emerging from drifting clouds (Ne Tatu, October 10, 2005). Clad in his trademark leopard-print hat and dark-rimmed glasses, his stern face hovers in the heavens as drums beat in the background and a group sings his praises. This propaganda symbolically demonstrates how Mobutu was
visually presented as god-like, above the rest of the population and nation. Similarly, in movie houses/theaters, before every film there was a ten-minute movie reel about Mobutu’s activities the previous week (Callaghy 1984, 450). Loyalty and adherence to Mobutu were part and parcel of the MPR ideology, placing him at the head of this national party as not only its guide, but also its “prophet” (Adelman 1975, 103). Reflecting on their everyday experiences during Mobutu’s regime, several interviewees in Luozi suggested that Mobutu was presented and viewed by some a type of god: “The era of Mobutu, it is then that we had songs that invoked Mobutu like a king, invoked Mobutu like a god. . . . It is especially during the era of Mobutu, they elevated Mobutu like a god. They were blind. . . . Many came to think that Mobutu wasn’t going to die. He did whatever he wanted. . . . People no longer knew the living God, they only knew the god that was Mobutu” (Pastor Kasambi, November 12, 2005).

Here, the interviewee expresses sentiments shared across the nation about Mobutu as not just a man or a politician, but as a deity in many ways. Nationalism in Zaire then was not just about an abstract nation and sense of belonging; nationalism was also defined by the worship of Mobutu as the nation’s president and leader. Glorifying Mobutu is a concrete way of displaying nationalism, and indeed Mobutu himself is a symbol of the nation. In this instance, nationalism and civil religion are interrelated and intertwined.

The civil religion that came to define Zaire was also reflected in everyday performances of animation. Mobutu saw animation as a way of using performance to promote national unity and the adulation of the nation’s leader. According to Adelman (1975), the difficulty in Zaire was that while Mobutu wanted to encourage unity and respect for Congolese cultures through the concept of authenticity, most people’s alliances were local (for example, clan affiliation) and ethnic. “An ingenious solution to this contradiction was found in animation, described by the state press as ‘the national consecration of our vital force and our arrival at the national spirit’” (1975, 135). Animation would be the actual means of arriving at a national identity, one that did not exist before. Through moving bodies and shared daily performances, a new, shared national consciousness was created, uniting a fragmented nation under a common leader and a supposedly shared philosophy of authenticity. Mobutu’s ideologies, policies, and coercive authority then had a significant effect on the meanings and uses of citizens’ bodies under his regime. The new national identity was enacted and embodied through the scripted performances of animation politique, performed not only at political events but also in mundane settings such as businesses and schools, all with the purpose of spreading the ideas of the Mobutu-led government.
Politics of Performance: Dancing a New Nation

Mobutu himself, in an interview with French journalist Jean-Louis Remilleux, defined animation as: “At the same time a dance performance, a procession, a choreographed parade and a lesson in political education. Practically, we don’t have an anniversary, congress, or popular assembly without animation, and each region, each village even, distinguishes itself competing in presenting its own animation” (Remilleux and Sese Seko 1989, 155–56). Animation drew on many different genres of performance, from dance, to poetry, to theater and song, all with the intent of spreading the message and ideology of the party and its leader to the masses. It was also present in many areas of everyday life, from nationalist songs intoned by everyone from earnest school children to private business owners early in the morning in front of the Zairian flag, to average people, regardless of status, who were compelled to clap and cheer lining the streets as Mobutu’s motorcade passed by, to annual animation festivals and frequent rallies, to nationalist songs on the radio and television. While conducting research in the National Archives in Kinshasa in 2005, I accessed several cartons of government deposited material about political animation. Several documents detailed the songs and slogans used by groups from each region of Zaire during the national animation festival in 1973. Among them was the following song included in the “shock repertoire” of the region of “Bas-Zaïre.”

Tulanda Tata Mobutu (Kikongo)
Eh landa ah a landa ah a
Ta Mobutu ikuenda landa
Kina ye wonga ko eh e e
Eh landa ah a landa landa eh
Ulembi landa Mobutu, ngeyi nani?
Uzoba, dianene
Eh muana eh eee muana eh e\textsuperscript{14}

Suivons le Guide Mobutu (French)
Suivez à jamais le Guide
C’est Tata Mobutu, le guide qui je suis [sic]
Je n’ai pas peur
Suivez, suivez le Guide
Si vous cessez de suivre le Guide Mobutu, qui êtes-vous?
Vous êtes un idiot, un grand imbécile
Une pauvre enfant qui pleure
We follow the Guide Mobutu
Follow the guide forever
It's Father Mobutu the guide who I follow
I am not scared
Follow, follow the guide
If you stop following the guide Mobutu, who are you?
You are an idiot, a big imbecile
A poor infant that cries
—National Archives, Kinshasa 1973

This song is the quintessential example of animation as civil religion, demonstrating dedication and loyalty to Mobutu. It berates those who do not follow Mobutu by insulting their intelligence, and overall stands as a performed praise of “Mobutu the Guide.” The last line (Eh muana eh eee, or a poor enfant that cries), interestingly enough, is often used in a call-and-response pattern during the performance of traditional Kongo dances (makinu) that I witnessed in Luozi and Kinshasa. Such a practice was very common during Mobutu’s rule; traditional songs, dances, and even gestures were often appropriated for the purpose of MPR and given new meaning, in line with the ideology of the party and its leader.15

While song texts and government documents were important for my study of animation, the most important sources for this chapter are open-ended interviews with ordinary people of the Kongo ethnic group who experienced animation in all its mundane forms. For the research on animation I used personal contacts and references from friends and colleagues in Kinshasa and Luozi and interviewed numerous people in their mid-thirties or older who would have personally experienced animation politique at its height in the 1970s and 1980s. My interviews with teachers, civil servants, and business owners about their experiences with animation highlighted its omnipresence in people’s lives during Mobutu’s regime. According to George Matadi, a MuKongo promoter of cultural arts in Kinshasa who is hailed as one of the founding fathers of animation politique, it became so popular that “even in the house the children sang it. Animation politique. It was in the streets, in the market. They became the songs of everyday. Everyday songs. Animation had, they say, intoxicated the streets. . . . At the end, we had become like robots of song. Your servant, for example, he can, while working, whistle a party song because they were beautiful songs . . . even if you didn’t like Mobutu but [liked] the melody” (July 16, 2005).

This statement demonstrates the effectiveness of political performances
such as patriotic and reverential songs for inculcating the ideologies of Mobutu’s state into the minds and bodies of its citizens. In a number of instances during my interviews in both Kinshasa and Luozi, people would break into song (with others who were present joining in), sometimes spontaneously and other times because I asked about them—songs that heralded Mobutu, his policies, and ideologies, songs that performed the nation that was Mobutu’s Zaire even after it has ceased to exist. These and other examples demonstrate the songs had become second nature, with words spilling from people’s mouths almost involuntarily even as some of them had roundly criticized animation politique. Like elementary school songs in the United States that act as mnemonic tools for remembering the date of Columbus’s transatlantic voyage, the songs of political animation in Zaire referenced and continue to reference the political authority and dictatorial power of Mobutu Sese Seko.

If political animation had such an impact and presence in people’s lives, where did the idea for such a practice originate? Different opinions have been given for the origins of political animation. Kapalanga sees the practice as evolving from the establishment of the first political parties in the Congo, between 1958 and 1959, when these parties (whose membership was usually based on ethnic groupings) established youth groups to excite the general population and ridicule rival parties (1989, 122–24). He also suggests the secondary influence of other African countries, specifically Guinea and Ghana, which had similar practices of political dancing and singing (1989, 128). George Matadi believed the origin of the practice of political animation lay with a group of dynamic young singers of the Red Cross Church and movement in Kintambo, a neighborhood in Kinshasa, who sang for Mobutu repeatedly on official occasions (July 16, 2005). Regardless of their differing opinions on the antecedents of political animation, Kapalanga, Matadi, and anthropologist Bob White (2008, 74–75) agree that the first consistent presentations of political animation associated with Mobutu’s regime were through the Corps de Volontaires de la République (CVR) (Voluntary Corps of the Republic). The groups within CVR that performed at rallies and other public functions were known as “Groupes Choc d’Animation” (shock animation groups) (George Matadi, July 16, 2005). The CVR disappeared with the birth of the MPR (which was created in 1967) which continued the traditions of the CVR. Political animation became much more organized, involved dance choreography and rehearsals, and expanded even further, particularly in 1970 (Kapalanga 1989, 134–36).

According to an MPR ideological glossary, within MPR there were two
types of animators, or people who animate: political animators, who transmit the party’s ideas through conferences, popular meetings, and other sessions, and cultural animators, who transmit the same messages through slogans and songs, and uphold the cultural values of the nation through dance and choreography, and the general movements of the ensemble (FORCAD 1986, 79). Animation ballets (ballets d’animation) were groups of people who danced and sang for MPR meetings and events. Both of these types of animation (political and cultural) seemed to have worked hand in hand in practice in Zaire, hence the common phrase bringing the two together as one. What political and cultural animation had in common as their foundation was that both were ways of transmitting the ideas of the MPR party and its founder, Mobutu. In fact, the ultimate goal of animation in general, as stated in a party document from the 1980s, was “to reach and to win all the masses, their soul, their conscience and their participatory actions thanks to a sophisticated process of songs, dances, gestures, speeches, and movement with the intention of their massive adhesion to the message of Mobutisme and of the Zairian revolution (National Archives, Kinshasa, n.d.).

Through various types of performance (music, dance, song, theater, speeches, and so on) party leaders wanted to impress on the citizens of the country its ideology and its leader, who in fact hadn’t been voted in democratically. Thus, political and cultural animation played a very important role in legitimizing both the new leadership in postindependence Congo, and its associated ideologies and agendas. Politics were clearly implicated in the performances that people took part in, and were in fact the main cause for the performances taking place.

The Organization of Political and Cultural Animation

Types of Performers

Kapalanga discusses four types of performers who danced and sang in animation troupes: animators by vocation, meaning artists, dancers, and others who already were professional performers; animators by obligation, or people who were forced by local leaders or officials to become members of a troupe; animators for profit, people who became active in animation only with the intention of gaining social mobility or wealth; and animators by conviction, or people who sincerely wanted to thank and honor Mobutu and his government through performance (1989, 141–43). Outside of performing troupes, ordinary citizens were also obligated to “perform” in many different ways that shall be addressed later on in the chapter. These categories that Kapalanga proposes were thus not mutually exclusive.
In the interview quotation cited previously, where Mobutu defined animation, he also intimated the types of occasions where one could see political and cultural animation. In her dissertation, Huckstep provided even more detail:

Official professional and semi-professional (those who danced but had other professions) performers were called *animateurs* and *animatrices*. According to all the interviewees, *animateurs* and *animatrices* performed at every official public gathering large or small, and before every public social/entertainment event. Additionally, people could observe political animation on television; animation occurred at the beginning of the broadcast day and before news and newsreel-type broadcasts. Moreover, every day, almost everyone danced animating the political vision of the nation promoted by the Mobutu government each morning while the flag was being raised at schools and universities, institutions, government buildings, businesses, or in villages. (Huckstep 2005, 130)

There were also huge annual festivals of political animation, bringing together many different groups from all the different regions, subregions, and so on to perform in a huge stadium for Mobutu. The first such festival was held on November 24 and 25, 1973. Political animation also played a huge role at events in which citizens “performed the nation” not only for themselves and Mobutu, but for the benefit of others watching outside of Zaire. A case in point is the Muhammad Ali–George Foreman fight, the infamous “Rumble in the Jungle,” where a number of political animation troupes were required to perform (George Matadi, July 16, 2005; Group members of Groupe Traditionelle Manianga, December 17, 2005). The wide variety of venues and media for political animation and its omnipresence in the quotidian lives of average citizens of Zaire illuminate its strategic importance to the authenticity project of Mobutu. Thus, during his regime, there was a particular administrative structure created and put in place specifically for the organization of political animation.

The administrative structure Mobutu’s government established to oversee the spread of its propaganda was called MOPAP (Mobilisation Propaganda et Animation Politique) (Mobilization Propaganda and Political Animation). According to Huckstep, “its central office was in the capital, Kinshasa, and official offices were maintained within each provincial government. MOPAP also had an extensive network of ‘unofficial’ offices that allowed a presence in almost all aspects of Zairian life” (Huckstep 2005, 133). Kapalanga adds
that offices were maintained on a national level and on each step of the scale descending down to towns (1989, 141).

In the following section of the chapter, by including information from interviews with people representing all categories of performers, from those who were already professional artists and dancers, to ordinary people who were forced to participate, women and men, from farmers to teachers, I hope to provide a more location-specific, detailed account by focusing on the impact of political and cultural animation on Kongo people, especially in Luozi territory. Animation had salience for every citizen of the nation, in multiple areas of their daily lives.

**All Citizens, to the Streets!**

Political animation was not limited to performance stages in huge stadiums and festivals, or animation groups brought into towns and cities to sing and dance for visiting authorities. It was a part of the everyday lives of Zairois and impacted almost all sectors of society, as the following exchange from an interview in Luozi demonstrates:

Y.C.-W: How was political animation visible in daily life for the average citizen?

K: Here in Luozi, for example, when you learn that there is a leader who is going to come, then, they mobilize everyone. Then, rather than going to work, everyone must stay in order to wait for the leader . . . all along the route, from the beach all the way to the market here, from the market to the air strip.

Y.C.-W: And the people must do what?

K: The people must remain there in order to sing a little and to watch a group of dancers, so, there are men and women who come into the sector, who come to meet the superior authority figure. . . . When the group [of the authority figure] arrives, group after group passes in front of them to show what they have prepared.

(Tata Kimfumu, September 29, 2005)

This description creates a surreal visual image; people lining the route from the beach where the ferry lands all the way to the unofficial airport runway, a distance of several miles, leaving jobs and other obligations just to sing and welcome the arrival of one or another dignitary of Mobutu’s government. Apparently, this happened all over the country, as other interviewees have talked about having to stand on the side of the road in Kinshasa and clap and sing as Mobutu’s motorcade sped by. Moreover, in this particular Luozi example cited above, citizens were also expected to actively watch groups
of political animation that were performing. This adds a twist to the phrase “captive audience,” as citizens of Luozi were expected not only to perform their own nationalism through singing and lining the road, but also to watch others perform their nationalism in groups of political animation dancing for the pleasure of the visiting authority figure(s). The remainder of this section explores how political animation was experienced and lived in three types of local spaces: schools, businesses, and churches.

Schools

The political authority of the Mobutu state was imposed in other ways on the everyday lives of citizens not in performing political animation troupes. One such area was the primary and secondary schools of the nation, including Luozi territory. Although secondary level students were expected to play a more active role in MPR activities than primary school students, all students had to participate in morning animation sessions, and all students were automatically members of JMPR (Jeunesse de Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution, or Youth of the People’s Revolutionary Movement). It was the youth wing of MPR, “designed to integrate and control all youth political groups and act as the vigilance committee for the party” (Callaghy 1984, 172). Tata Nkuku, a retired primary school teacher who had worked in both Mbanza-Mona and Mbanza-Mwembe sectors in Luozi territory, summarized the way animation worked in people’s everyday lives at schools: “It was an obligation. Before beginning work, it is necessary to go to salute the flag. When you go to salute the flag one must sing, one must dance . . . before going to work or else before entering the classroom. It was first of all, the first task” (September 29, 2005). Tata Kimfumu, the director of a primary school, provided more detail about political animation in the schools:

In the Mobutu era, the objectives [of political animation] were to honor, to recognize, the chief. . . . At the school specifically, it was saluting the flag, each morning, we must first sing the national hymn, after which we follow political animation, singing political songs . . . and dances also. . . . We began from seven o’clock. . . . To seven thirty, it is animation. At eight o’clock we begin the courses. . . . The arrival of a territorial head, the arrival of an inspector, the arrival of a head of state, the arrival of a governor, thus, all the authorities, when they arrive at the school, we must greet them with animation, for some minutes. (September 29, 2005)

Teachers and school administrators were expected both to take part in political animation, and to lead it. Schatzberg discusses the role of primary school teachers in political animation when he writes, “at the primary level,
the students themselves are involved in the organization of the JMPR only in the most cursory and passive way. . . . Each class is a JMPR cell, and the teacher is the cell chief. . . . At the primary level then . . . party activities are generally confined to learning chants and slogans by rote” (1978, 421).

Here, one sees how the party ideology was actively taught to young children, who had to memorize, repeat, and perform the songs and slogans. The important role of teachers as leaders of animation was also confirmed in interviews: “Each teacher must train their children then, each teacher must also show how they [the children] must dance” (Tata Kimfumu, September 29, 2005). Tata Kimfumu also added that the teachers themselves composed the songs the children sang.

Like other interviewees who expressed their opinions about political animation in other parts of this chapter, teachers I interviewed had two major issues with animation in the schools: first, it was coerced, and second, the students could be exposed to potentially immoral situations. When asked whether he felt pressure to participate in political animation, Tata Kimfumu frankly explained, “Well, as it was an order, one couldn’t refuse.” Moreover, when asked his opinion about political animation in the schools, he had this to say: “It was not good because we must not habituate the children to dancing. It was not good. . . . They could misbehave. It is that which one invited” (interview, September 29, 2005).

Animation in schools transformed the relationship between students and the postcolonial state. Throughout the vast majority of the colonial history of Congo, both under King Leopold (1885–1908) and Belgium (1908–60), Christian missionaries, especially Catholics, ran the colony’s education system and institutions. “Except for military institutions run by the Forces Publique,” writes political scientist Patrick Boyle, “secular education was practically inaccessible to the Congolese before 1954” (1995, 459). Even postindependence, the majority of the nation’s schools were religious in nature. Mobutu saw the need to change this system to match the goals of his revolution. Speaking to the National Legislative Council on November 30, 1973, he stressed the importance of moving away from a colonial system: “We must also conquer certain prejudices inculcated in us by colonization. The educational system, that which was created by our colonizers, does not hold the monopoly on training or on education. . . . We must train ourselves and educate ourselves in the context of our authentically Zairian society” (1975, 403). Mobutu wanted to reform the educational system in a way that was anticolonial and amenable to his ideology of authenticity and African pride. Many changes occurred during his regime that highlight increasing conflict between the state and the church (especially the Catholic Church) in regards
to education and the growing influence of the state in the daily lives of students at all educational levels. In 1971, Catholic and Protestant universities in Kinshasa and Kisangani were nationalized (Callaghy 1984, 304). Sections of the JMPR were to be placed in all Catholic seminaries starting in 1972, or they would be closed (Salongo, March 8, 1972); all schools were to be operated by the state starting in 1974 (Boyle 1995, 467), and in 1975, Mobutu’s government decreed that religious education in the nation’s schools was to be replaced by civic education; moreover, local sections of the JMPR were to be placed in all the nation’s schools (Gondola 2002, 143; Schatzberg 1978, 420). All the schools, from primary to university level, were nationalized.

Animation came to be performed at the start of each school day, and school children became intimately involved in performing the nation. Each session of animation was a performative encounter redefining students’ relationship to the state. While Mobutu was not physically present in each classroom, the flag, images of the president, and other people representing the government to whom performances were directed made the president seem omnipresent in many ways. These all serve as the audience to whom the performances were aimed. The slogans and songs were intended to inculcate the ideology of Mobutu in the minds of the students and the dancing served to physically remind them of their role in performing the nation. Animation in schools served as a daily performative encounter transforming social relationships by elevating Mobutu further in relation to the average citizen of Zaire, and by creating a seemingly more intimate bond between each citizen and their president for whom they sang praises each day. Herein also lies the importance of civil religion, as singing the praises of the president was how the student population understood and embodied nationalism.

Although the intended purpose of animation in schools is clear, how effective were such tactics of inculcating students with party ideology? In his assessment of animation and the JMPR in primary and secondary schools in Lisala, Zaire in 1974–75, Michael Schatzberg notes that “the J.M.P.R. has been largely unsuccessful both in implanting Mobutisme and in mobilising the student population of Lisala. . . . On a superficial level, one can see that the students have learned the party chants, songs, and slogans, but their enthusiasm . . . is strictly limited. . . . Were there not elements of coercion involved, participation in such manifestations would be minimal” (1978, 429–30). Schatzberg’s observations suggest that animation was only superficially successful in shaping the minds, sentiments, and consciousness of the students. Nevertheless, the purposeful intent of the government in using everyday performance to shape young, impressionable minds shows that they believed it was an effective tool for garnering support for their policies, ideologies, and practices.
Businesses
Like the schools, political animation affected all businesses in Luozi territory, even those privately owned. Ne Mosi remembers the routine he took part in as a worker on a cattle farm: “Each morning before beginning work they made the workers dance. . . . Each morning . . . for thirty minutes, one must dance, to glorify the Guide.” He also noted that the owners of the businesses had to take the lead in these performances. “You the head, you must make your workers sing also, they must dance. . . . You are first of all the animator. . . . It is you that calls out the animation shouts.” In the case of an official of the state or party visiting the business “it was necessary to mobilize the workers. When they gave the schedule that they were coming to your business, if you didn’t do it, you have problems” (October 10, 2005).

On a larger scale, enterprises played major roles in political animation, especially after Zairianization began in 1973, during which the businesses of foreigners were confiscated and given to citizens of Zaire. While on the surface the removal of foreigners from the economic sector was a bid for economic independence, those who received the confiscated enterprises (called acquéreurs by the general population) most often were friends and allies of Mobutu (Dr. Mbala Nkanga, July 19, 2007). For example, the interior minister, Léon Engulu Baanga Mpongo, reportedly received thirty-five plantations while a regional commissioner in Shaba grossed $100,000 per month from his businesses (Young and Turner 1985, 338). The CEOs of the major companies thus had great self-interest in seeing that they kept their newly acquired businesses, which the state reserved the right to take back if they were not run properly. As a result, many of these companies that were nationalized sponsored animation ballet groups to sing the praises of Mobutu, using the groups’ performances as “an expression of loyalty” and gratitude to Mobutu, who had appointed them to their positions. Major companies sponsoring animation groups included snel (Société Nationale d’Electricité, or National Electrical Company), ozacaf (Office Zairoise du Café or Zairian Coffee Bureau), and Regideso (Régie de Distribution d’Eau, or State Water Distribution Company), among others, who not only had their groups perform at major festivals but also paid the national television station to air performances of their groups (informal, Dr. Mbala Nkanga, July 19, 2007). All in all, political animation was not only an obligation, but also how the heads of major nationalized companies ensured they would be able to keep their jobs and standard of living, and remain in good favor with Mobutu. According to Bob White, by the mid- to late eighties and in the midst of a growing financial crisis, the state was gradually shifting the responsibility and finan-
cial burden for propaganda supporting the state (including animation) to the private sector (2008, 77).

Animation in businesses (both private and nationalized) also served as a daily performative encounter with President Mobutu Sese Seko. Through daily animation performances and the sponsoring of animation troupes, business owners reaffirmed their allegiance to Mobutu while simultaneously venerating him and his ideas. The relationship between the business sector and the state was also greatly transformed as the state, like in schools, came to have a more intimate role in the daily lives of workers in many types of industries through animation.

**Oh, That Mobutu May Be with You! Churches and Mobutu's Religious Authority**

During Mobutu's regime, especially after his turn to an ideology of authenticity, a tension developed concerning the role of religion and churches in Zaire, and the expansion of the power and ideology of the one party state. As mentioned previously, in many ways the MPR had become a sort of civil religion seeking to replace other religions in people's lives, taking on many of the roles that churches served. As American diplomat Kenneth Adelman writes: “In addition to presenting authenticity as a secular theology, the party attempts to fulfill functions and meet needs ordinarily accomplished by religion. It prescribes social conduct; . . . instills identity by stressing that every Zairean is a party militant; . . . uses symbols; . . . celebrates its own holidays; . . . provides its own rituals in the form of party chants, dances, and songs; emphasizes its historical heritage; . . . and places itself as the guiding light or unifying force in the life of its members. . . . The party thus serves as a religious surrogate, an attempt to satisfy the personal need for meaning, identity, and values which are normally filled by a religion” (1975, 103).

Moreover, Christian language was appropriated in everyday settings as, according to Adelman, party halls were called “temples,” Catholic hymns were converted into party chants, and even common religious phrases were transformed, so that “May God be with you” became “Oh, that Mobutu may be with you!” (1975, 103; 1976, 54). All the measures discussed earlier in the chapter demonstrate that MPR sought to impose itself not only as a political authority, but also as a religious authority. This usurpation of the power and ideology of the church by the Mobutu-led state resulted in a number of conflicts in the struggle for religious authority.

In a law released in December 1971, the Zairian state formally recognized and sanctioned only three religious groups: the Catholic Church, the Kimbanguist Church and the Eglise du Christ au Zaire (a group of Protestant
churches) (Callaghy 1984, 310). All other churches were considered illegal and had to apply or affiliate with one of the sanctioned denominations to remain open. Because the Catholic Church was the largest religious organization in the country, it also became a threat to Mobutu and his government. According to Adelman, the following statement by Mobutu encapsulated the conflict between church and state during this time: “In Zaire, it is the MPR and not the Church that will lead the way” (Adelman 1975, 113). With this statement, Mobutu places himself and MPR as the highest authorities in the nation. A number of conflicts occurred between churches and their leaders (especially the Catholic Church), and Mobutu and his government, which point to Mobutu’s regime’s goals of suppressing the power of churches, quelling opposition, and attempting to supplant religious ideologies and institutions with the MPR. After Cardinal Joseph Albert Malula made several public critiques of Mobutu, he was forced into exile in January of 1972, and his home was turned into a JMPR headquarters building (Callaghy 1984, 304–5). Other issues of conflict both before and after the expulsion included the installation of the JMPR in religious seminaries, the mandatory dropping of Christian and other non-African names to be replaced by authentic African names, and the government ban of religious youth groups, religious television and radio broadcasts, and religious pamphlets and publications (Adelman 1975). Moreover, in 1973 people were prohibited from attending any regional and national religious meetings and were allowed to meet only locally. Large regional and national meetings were reserved for MPR events (Adelman 1975, 110). In late 1974 the government announced that all crucifixes and images of the pope were to be removed from religious institutions and replaced by images of Mobutu (Callaghy 1984, 305). However, one of the ways that religious leaders felt their submission to the political and religious authority of Mobutu most intimately was through forced dancing and singing.

As chapters 2 and 3 demonstrate, in Catholic and Protestant churches in the Lower Congo, secular dances have often been associated with licentiousness and immorality. Thus, one role these churches play is that of policing conduct in regards to dancing, and prohibiting the participation of church members in any dances deemed immoral. Many churches, such as the DMNA church, prohibit any form of dance outside of the church, while others frown on dancing in any context. Under Mobutu’s regime however, neither ordinary congregation members nor church leadership were excluded from performing their adoration of the president. “According to the President, Zairean priests are required by the Constitution to be militants in the MPR. Even the Bishops are supposed to participate in party chants and dances praising the party and President” (Adelman 1975, 104). Imagine the lasting
impression of seeing a man or woman of God dancing basically in praise and worship of Mobutu. This policy, in seeking to reinforce the ideologies and authority of Mobutu through the body, had an impact on not only the people dancing, but also everyone else who witnessed priests and other religious leaders dancing. In these instances, the dancing and singing physically enact the idea that Mobutu and his government are higher in spiritual authority than local church rules, national clerical leaders, or even the pope himself.

Although there was a lot of pressure and threats of arrest, fines, and even death if one didn’t comply with the demands of the government, for some religious communities it was exactly on the question of dance that they sought to take a stand against Mobutu’s regime. The example that I consider is the refusal of members of the DMNA church in Luozi to participate in dancing for Mobutu. Pastor Kasambi explains the history of this protest in the following exchange about political animation:

K: The authorities, when they present themselves in your village, you must search for a beautiful girl that you must give them. That is the MPR, and then people had become very, very, very profane. Religion went away more and more. Even the people who didn’t have a strong faith, [but also] the religious; there were certain pastors and priests who danced in the era of Mobutu.

Y.C.-W: But, do they have a choice? They didn’t have a choice.

K: They didn’t, well, because if you didn’t dance, they are going to kill you. But, among the bangunza in our denomination, there were a large number of arrests, the time from 1970 to 1975. Because they rejected this. Thus, they were against the movement.

Y.C.-W: Against the movement of—

K: Against the movement of MPR. . . . They didn’t want to dance. And so, they forcefully arrested us. Here, in 1970 . . . they arrested people who didn’t want to dance.

Y.C.-W: Here in Luozi?

K: Here in Luozi. And they were freed in 1975 . . . . They took pastors and deacons . . . arrested us over two months, three months, four months, put in the prison. . . . You weren’t in the dungeon but you couldn’t pray. . . . There were arrests where you were tied up like a sausage. . . . They couldn’t function spiritually. It was hard. (November 12, 2005)

With this recollection, Pastor Kasambi singles out the DMNA church as having the courage to stand up to the moral turpitude that was represented by dancing for MPR and Mobutu. He distinguishes his church members as having a stronger sense of faith than other religious leaders who complied
Dance is used in this instance to publicly shame and humiliate DMNA church members. In both the colonial case (persecution by the Belgians) and the postcolonial case (persecution by Mobutu’s government), the bangunza maintained a sense of a higher spiritual authority guiding their principles and conduct, one that challenged European missionaries who condemned their embodied forms of worship, and upheld their belief in secular dancing as contrary to the wishes of a higher God. In the telling of the story of one particular member of the church in Luozi who was arrested, Pastor Kasambi reiterates the courage bangunza showed by sticking to their religious beliefs in the face of arrests and punishment: “If you refused, they arrested you, took you to Mbanza-Ngungu. And if you were taken to Mbanza-Ngungu, where you met hardened people, they kill you. It wasn’t anything. It was like that. But fortunately we didn’t have any people that they killed. But it was hard. . . . I know an ngunza that they arrested here, on the road to Mbanza-Ngungu. His son who had some means, went to release him. . . . They said to him [the arrested ngunza], you can’t pray! He [said], I will pray to my God. Come and dance! I won’t dance” (Pastor Kasambi, November 12, 2005).

In this story of bravery, the arrested ngunza explicitly refuses to accept the imposition of the religious and political authority of the state on his body. By seeking to pray even when prohibited to do so, and refusing to dance even when required to do so, he challenges the impingement of Mobutu’s religious and political authority on the religious authority of the DMNA church, whose tenets, principles, and practices are believed to have been received from God. His and the protests of other bangunza forcefully pushed back against the ability of Mobutu and his government to control their conduct, thus undermining the total political and burgeoning religious authority that Mobutu
sought to have over the citizens of Zaire. With his statements and actions, he is also rejecting the idea of Mobutuism as a civil religion for the nation.

Animation in churches and for church leaders in particular was at the crux of a power struggle between the state and numerous religious groups. The state-scripted dancing and singing had multiple purposes in the context of churches: to venerate Mobutu rather than God or the pope, to spread the message of the regime, but also to show the churches that the government had more power and also to diminish the power and social standing of church leaders, especially in the eyes of their congregations. Politics and religion clearly intertwined in the state's engagements and conflicts with churches throughout the country.

**Conclusion**

In short, political and cultural animation was not limited to animation ballet troupes but was evident in most areas of daily life for citizens of Luozi territory and the nation during Mobutu's reign. The presence of coerced dancing and singing in schools, businesses, churches, and on streets when national leaders and representatives visited local areas demonstrates a form of political and even growing religious authority that Mobutu exercised over the population. Exercising such authority, he also used political and cultural animation to legitimate his rule over and over again on a daily basis. Whether or not people recognized him as the nation's leader, when they were compelled to perform for him and his government, the very actions of singing and dancing demonstrated his authority over them—his ability to influence and control their actions. These embodied cultural performances were crucial to spreading Mobutu's ideology across the nation and consolidating his power and influence in everyday life. Animation politique thus serves as a critical site to examine the intersection of civil religion, nationalism, and bodies.