Gesture and Power

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Published by Duke University Press

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

bakulu: ancestors
bascule: (French) the ceremony where the spirits of the members of the DMNA church are publicly weighed
bikualakuala: long lengths of bamboo laid on or across tables and played with sticks
bimpampa: body gestures
BisiKongo: the term that I am using to describe the ethnic group one finds throughout the Lower Congo, who speak varying dialects of the same language, Kikongo. This group is also known as BaKongo, a term frequently used by colonial administrators. The term Kongo describes the cultural area of this group, which was the basis of the Kongo Kingdom, and covers parts of present-day Congo-Brazzaville, Congo-Kinshasa, and Angola. MwissiKongo is a singular term used to describe an inhabitant of the Kongo Kingdom, while BisiKongo is the plural form. BisiKongo or Kongo people were phrases more often used by interlocutors in describing themselves as members of a larger group, so I am respecting the political choice that some people have made to use BisiKongo rather than BaKongo to describe themselves, although most of the scholarly literature still uses BaKongo.
bula makonko: cupped hand clapping that is used and was used in the past as a gesture of respect; to open and close meetings and prayers; to ask for pardon, forgiveness, and blessings; and also as a form of greeting other people
Bundu dia Kongo: a politico-religious-nationalist movement of Kongo people that seeks to reestablish the Kongo Kingdom, revitalize Kongo culture, and return to certain elements of “tradition” in the face of growing political and economic marginalization in the country
dekama: genuflection
Dibundu dia Mpeve ya Nlongo mu Afelika: Church of the Holy Spirit in Africa
dikisa: to give someone something to ingest. Often used to refer to passing on the
Holy Spirit and the ability to heal to someone else, called dikisa mpeve. Also used to describe giving the nkasa poison to someone to ingest as a test of his or her innocence
dumuka: to jump
dumuna: ritual jumping for a blessing or other purposes
fukama: to kneel
kibandi (pl. bibandi): double-skinned drums that are beaten with batons
kindoki: witchcraft or the use of spiritual powers to harm others
kingunza: word used to describe the prophetic movements throughout the Lower Congo during the colonial period, sparked by the healing of the prophet Simon Kimbangu
koko (pl. moko): hand
luketo: hips
makinu: general term for dances, of which there are many types
malembe: peace
malu: legs
mfumu: chief; king
mpeve: vital principle of every individual; spirit or Holy Spirit; breeze
nganga (pl. banganga): healers, priests, and diviners in the system of Kongo traditional religious beliefs
ngoma: a tall (waist-high), thick wooden drum with one side covered by an animal skin that is tightened by heating it with fire. In many secular makinu, this is the lead drum. The term ngoma is also used to describe the dance event at which ngomas and other drums are being played
ngunza (pl. bangunza): prophet
nitu: body
nkasa: a poisonous drink given to accused parties during the precolonial period to test their innocence. If they vomited the drink, they were considered innocent, but if they died, they were considered guilty
nkisi (pl. minkisi): material object in Kongo traditional religion that has been given spiritual power by traditional priests. Wyatt MacGaffey has referred to them as “charms” (1986b, 137–45), while John Janzen refers to them as consecrated medicines (1982, 4).
nsakala: shakers or rattles that are often made from small calabashes mounted on sticks. They also can be tied to strings and worn on the wrists of drummers to accentuate the playing.
ntambu: another term for drum
ntwadisi: person in the DMNA church who weighs the spirits of members during the bascule
yinama: to bow
zakama: to tremble (spirit-induced)
zikua (pl. mazikua): prayer and research group of Bundu dia Kongo