DEATH AND THE INVISIBLE POWERS

The World of Kongo Belief

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I dedicate this book to
the Spirits, my daily guardians

II

THE COMMUNAL RESPONSE TO DEATH AND MISFORTUNE

Death by Natural Causes

Death is the great disrupter of communal harmony. The Manianga community deals with it in two general ways, depending on whether it is natural, that is, the result of old age or other inevitable factors, or whether it is an untimely interruption that can be attributed to kindoki, the exercise of invisible powers.

Death due to age is gladly accepted as natural, for it is initiated by Nzambi Mpungu Tulendo—God. BaManianga hold God responsible for initiating and introducing death. He not only creates; he takes away what he creates. As they say, "God, it was good to fashion us but it was wrong to give us death" (Nzambi bubote wasa mukutuvanga ka mwanki bubi buwatutudila lufwa).[1] To understand this, we must turn to the people's mythical exegesis of death.

BaManianga believe that the first man God created was called Mahungu, from the verb *hunga,* "to carry away." He was a bisexual being, able to procreate by himself. He was *muntu walunga*—a complete being to whom God entrusted the management of the whole creation. He was more powerful than the ancestors, for God's will was to make him *alter sui*—"another himself."[2] Unfortunately, Mahungu would never keep his place. He was so talkative that he began to reveal God's secrets to other creatures, chiefly the animals, saying, "Here is what God intends to do tomorrow" (Lutala Nzambi makana vanga mbazi). And since it was not God's plan to reveal his secrets to creatures other than Mahungu himself, he began to make new plans. Man at that time

lived with God; God provided him with everything he needed to survive. He did not have to work; every day he slept or sat around the fire thinking that God must have nothing else to do than to take care of him. Constantly annoyed, God became angry and decided to terminate his friendship with man, since man was unable to hold in confidence what God told him.

So God withdrew and no longer intervened directly in human affairs. As might be expected, his departure was too much for Mahungu, who became helpless. To save him from misery, God introduced a new element to the creation, namely, death. BaManianga, then, interpret death due to natural causes as salvation, because through it man again becomes God's partner. When a man worn out with old age dies, God is the cause; therefore, nobody weeps. God has called him, for his days in this very painful world have been completed. This death is usually peaceful.

Nevertheless, one encounters a difficulty in determining at what time a person becomes aged. Owing to heavy manual labor, some younger adults in their thirties and forties look twenty or thirty years older; on the other hand, there are elders in their seventies or eighties who still flourish with the freshness of youth. In contrast to the Westerners' efficient system of recording age, Africans generally record neither birthday nor birthplace. Most villagers know their approximate age. But it is improper to ask someone, "How old are you?" for he does not know what you are talking about. As a result, everyone's "happy birthday" is celebrated communally on the first of January, as if everyone were born on this date. Even those who were born in a hospital sometimes encounter the same lack of an official individual birthday when the hospital fails to give them a birth certificate. Because of this impreciseness in determining age, an individual is accepted as old enough for death only when he is completely worn out and has no strength left. A strong old man's death is never attributed to God.

Among other Kongo groups, a somewhat different myth explains the origin of death. In this version, God sent the first man into the world bearing a tiny green leaf of *kimbanzia,* a sacred plant that is used to heal and to save life. Then he sent a second man bearing a dead leaf, a symbol of death. The human race

chose the dead leaf, or death, because it was afraid of immortality. It was better to exist for a while and then join God than to live forever, not knowing how one would be able to cope with advanced old age.

Yet another version is reported by Thomas Louis Vincent:

> God created man to live forever. No death. He wanted to see if men were wise. He came with two packages that he put before them, asking: "Do you want the package of death or the package of eternal life?" Men chose the package of death because they were afraid to become too old and to support the infirmity of old age. God after observing their choice withdrew, angry.[3]

In all these stories, responsibility for initiating death is divided between human beings and God. God created death, but human beings either chose it or brought it on themselves.

The kimbanzia leaf deserves a further comment, for great significance is attached to it. One hears expressions such as these: to chew kimbanzia is to bless, to forgive, to give life; to be tied or bound with kimbanzia is to be forgiven, saved, blessed, protected; to offer kimbanzia is to calm, to appease, to cause anger to die down; to cut kimbanzia is to confirm, to agree, to soften a blow; and to ask for kimbanzia is to seek a remedy. Kimbanzia is heavily used to cure all sorts of diseases and social malaise. For example, when there is a confrontation between different segments of the community and the chief displays his kimbanzia, all must immediately stop fighting and arguing, for this is a sign that he wants to see peace, not death or bloodshed.

The Response to AIDS

An epidemic of deadly disease such as acquired immune deficiency syndrome evokes a response in African societies very different from that in the United States. It reveals a fundamental attitude of the community toward victims of disease and misfortune. In the United States, a person stricken with AIDS often shocks and frightens others. They are revulsed by the illness and want to expel its victims from society, to get rid of them so they

themselves will not be contaminated by their presence. The first question asked is "How did they get it?" Much effort has been spent on trying to trace the origin of the disease and to place responsibility on segments of the population. It is as though public health were a kind of purity that must be maintained by isolating those who pollute it.

In Africa, the response has been exactly the opposite. Instead of "How did they get it?" the question is "How can we help?" It is not a matter of placing blame but of drawing together to cure. I know of a family in Kinshasa, one of whose daughters turned to prostitution and contracted AIDS. No one criticized, accused, or condemned her; no one speculated about how she became infected or felt threatened by her illness. It was not that people were unaware of how AIDS was transmitted; that was secondary to her need for care. It was seen as a misfortune, to be treated compassionately. She received full family and community support and sympathy. For the family does not stick together only in times of happiness: setbacks often serve to strengthen mutual support. The main objective is to save the stricken person if possible. And if that person should die, he or she will die knowing that relatives have done everything they can to help. Illness and death are the concern of all. The sufferer never loses his or her close relationship with the group.

This continual inclusion of the individual in the embrace of the community also means that clinical depression, so common in the United States because of a sense of isolation, is virtually nonexistent in Manianga society. Suicide is unheard of. There are no traditional stories about suicide or even terms for it. Life is sacred, and no one has that kind of control over his own death, which, as we have seen, comes from God. Those who suffer misfortune are not outcast and allowed to become homeless, or abandoned because of old age.

The only true outcasts are those who willfully choose to go outside the traditions, without respect for the communal values that are determined by the ancestors. They are outcasts by their own choice. This must be borne in mind in the following discussion of witchcraft, or kindoki. While support for the victim of misfortune always come first, suspicion can be aroused that some antisocial force is behind the occurrence.

Death Due to Kindoki

Because of limited belief in bacteria, viruses, malnutrition, or uncleanliness as causes of disease, almost any kind of disease or accident can be attributed to unhappy spiritual beings or to human beings endowed with mysterious powers to do harm. If a person is killed by lightning, for example, a factual explanation is never accepted. Concerned kin are suspicious and want to find out why lightning has deliberately struck their relative and not some other individual. In 1958 my distant cousin Nsumbu Aaron was killed by lightning in one of the most ferocious tropical storms in the area that year. Since he was with two elder members of the family, one of them a renowned *ndoki* (practitioner of kindoki), there was no doubt in people's minds that he was killed by that man's kindoki, or invisible power to do harm.

In such cases, inquiries concerning the real cause or causes behind the death are made. The investigative process is to debate questions such as "Why did he go out while it was raining?" "Was he alone?" "Who saw him first?" "Was he killed instantaneously?" Even if a person suspected of being ndoki was in the neighborhood only by chance when the accident took place, he becomes the number one suspect. He is compelled to explain what he knows. If he claims to be innocent he will be made to face *ngang'a ngombo,* the priest-specialist in discovering causes of misfortune. In the pre-Christian era such a suspected ndoki was given a derivative of a poisonous plant to drink. If he prevailed over it, he was immediately acquitted; if it downed him, he was guilty and was to be burned alive the same day with the body of his supposed victim. Because of Christianity, the use of poison was discontinued and ngang'a ngombo took over.

But invisible spirits, rather than living individuals, are most often credited as the causes of illness or death when they seem complex and unidentifiable. However, since it is difficult if not impossible to identify positively which ones are at work, to avoid vexing the suspected spirit, who might not be the cause, the case quickly draws to an inconclusive end. The spirits are responsible, and yet they cannot be impeached. The more complicated the disaster, the more suspected they are.

Present-Day Belief in Kindoki

The belief in other causes of death does not lessen the belief in kindoki. Even among highly educated BaManianga, belief in the possibility of such influences continues to exist. I prefer to use the term *kindoki* rather than the English word *witchcraft* because BaManianga make no distinction between who is a witch and who is a sorcerer. Some are born ndoki, noticed by everyone even in childhood, and others, potentially as harmful, become ndoki only later on.

Evans-Pritchard says that the Azande make a distinction between witchcraft and sorcery:

> A witch performs no rite, utters no spell, and possesses no medicines. An act of witchcraft is a psychic act. They [the Azande] believe also that sorcerers may do them ill by performing magic rites with bad medicines. Azande distinguish clearly between witches and sorcerers.[4]

BaManianga make no such distinction between those who use psychic power and those who use medicines and spells. They have only one term, *kindoki.* To translate this as "witchcraft," "sorcery," or both would obscure the true meaning of kindoki, given the acceptance by many people of the differentiation of the terms. Kindoki is simply the art of exercising unusual powers.

Belief in kindoki provides for the expression of fear, peace, security, anxiety, insecurity, failure and success. No one can claim to understand Manianga society while being ignorant of this phenomenon. To ascertain whether the belief in kindoki is stronger or weaker today, I interviewed many BaManianga and wrote to many others whom I could not reach personally. The question I asked was "Do you believe in kindoki?" All respondents living in villages replied that they did; among those living in cities, a few disbelieved.

From these interviews, letters, and interpretation of my field notes, it is appropriate to conclude that among BaManianga living in villages, whether Christian or not, everybody believes in kindoki; in cities and abroad, while most of the old men said that they believed in kindoki, most of the young men said that they did not.

Eighty percent of the old men in the cities were either born in villages or go there from time to time. On the other hand, most of the young men (though by no means all) who are born in cities often are ignorant about kindoki. They become acquainted with its existence during important events, such as death and periods of mourning and illness, or when they are on vacation visiting their relatives in the village. When city dwellers come to visit, *bandoki* (plural of *ndoki*) do not waste any time welcoming them. For example, in 1955 my half-brother Philemon's three children living in Kinshasa accompanied their mother on vacation to the village. The eldest child, who was about ten years old, could not sleep. Whenever it was time for bed he began to cry, for he was so frightened by bandoki who were trying to catch him. He grew thin and was rushed back to his father in Kinshasa. Since then he has never dared to return to the village. The second child, who was about five years old, became deaf and dumb. His deafness and dumbness are attributed to kindoki. His parents claim that before going to the village he was talking; after returning to Kinshasa he could neither talk nor hear. Their father, a charismatic Kongo prophet who has devoted his life to living according to God's expectations, has ever since then denounced kindoki for his children's sufferings.

I also compared Christians with non-Christians. All non-Christians unhesitatingly affirmed their belief in kindoki; a good portion of the Christians (mostly those serving the church) were perplexed by the nature of the question and simply said that they did not believe in kindoki. In this group, the impression which struck me most strongly was the cowardice among certain Christian leaders who publicly reject kindoki as nonsense but privately acknowledge its effects. With the exception of Pastor Bahelele, a retired minister of the Evangelical Church of Manianga, who sees no conflict between being Christian and believing in our traditional heritage, all pastors with whom I talked gave me the impression of not saying what they really thought. For example, I know a childless pastor (whom I shall not name here, out of respect), who after many years of expectation that God would honor his prayers, began to seek help from a nganga, or traditional healer. He then took a second wife and successfully fathered several children. He became inactive in the church because of his

resort to polygamy to solve his problem. If all BaManianga could be honest with themselves, it would not be misleading to say that regardless of their religious beliefs or social status, all believe in kindoki. They may behave in a fearful fashion and deny their belief because Westerners have taught them that to believe in their African tradition is to say no to social evolution and progress; that is, to remain *musenzi,* a worthless individual. In the eyes of Westerners, to be regarded as musenzi is worse than being regarded as a monkey. Consequently, an *évolué* who is proud of being the "European" or "North American" of Africa is not ready to compromise his or her status by openly supporting traditional beliefs.

Kindoki: The Unique Power to Do Good or Evil

Buakasa, who studied the BaNdibu, another Kongo group, defines *kindoki* thusly:

> *Kindoki* signifies power or force. The usual meaning denotes this power as evil. But it is susceptible to being exercised in any sense, in a good sense as well as evil. It is a question of an ambivalent, ambiguous power, which arouses fear; of a dangerous and good power, capable of harming but also protecting.[5]

Generally, any member of the community with unique qualities may be considered ndoki, possessing this power. Whoever succeeds in his or her daily routine becomes ndoki. In this way, a successful farmer is ndoki, a responsible leader is ndoki, a good wine-maker is ndoki, a lovable individual is ndoki, a good trader is ndoki, a good driver is ndoki, a good politician is ndoki, a famous judge is ndoki. Hence, kindoki can be termed a quality which makes a particular human being different from the average or ordinary person. This quality overshadows his or her many failures, and he or she becomes the community's symbol, for any outstanding success must be due to the exercise of some kind of unique power. "Good" kindoki, unlike its harmful counterpart, has no need of secret organizations or rites, for it flourishes in the daylight world of normal society. It expresses the best and most admired aspects of the community.

It is traditionally believed that a man whose special quality is not in the field in which he is engaged, but lies elsewhere, will only encounter failure. The following case is an illustration.

Maboto[6] was a dull student. He could learn nothing and could not pass the first grade. Each year his status remained the same: First-grader. After so many years of failure, he finally became the "dean" of the school, as far as age was concerned. Being the oldest pupil, he was not only continually out of step; he became the butt of jokes and mockery. Even his teacher scoffed at his dull intellect.

To puzzle him, the teacher asked him easy questions everyone was supposed to know. Each day his dullness was the talk of the school. But as everything has an end, he finally took thought of himself and felt deeply embarrassed. He cried, "Enough! Enough! This is D [decision] day in my life, my family and future. I am leaving school right now." Everybody at school, claiming to be stunned, was nevertheless relieved to get rid of his burdensome presence. In his own village, no one cared; he was an accomplished failure. He was the symbol of disgrace to his kin.

Surprisingly, he took heart and refused to give up. Day and night he pondered how he could prove his ability to society. One day at random he accompanied other youths to the market. Roaming around, he by chance met a Portuguese merchant who was desperately looking for a "boy" (helper, servant) to work for him. A good "boy" was expected to be illiterate so he would not be able to cheat his boss. Maboto, however, was semi-literate. His prime duties included cooking, washing and ironing clothes, mopping the house, and gardening. He thanked his ancestors not only for not letting him completely down but also for helping him be associated with a European. In those days people had a high regard for any person associated with whites, who at that time were Africans' exemplars.

Consequently, being associated with a Portuguese, yesterday's wretched Maboto suddenly rose to the rank of a man of note. His lack of success at school did not obstruct his progress as a "boy" at all. He put his heart completely into his job, for he wanted to prove to the whole society that school was not everything. The Portuguese was so delighted by his devotion, punctuality, hard work, and honesty that in a few months he was promoted to the

rank of storeroom assistant. This took place in the turbulent year of 1959. A year later Zaire, then the Belgian Congo, became politically free. Frightened by the violence that accompanied adjustment to independence, most whites elected to leave the country; Maboto's boss was no exception. Immediately an unforeseen event materialized: Maboto took over the business. And in less than no time, yesterday's failure found himself a wealthy person. He had money, stores, cars, and trucks—which, understandably, he could not drive. In the meantime he organized his affairs, hired employees and an outstanding accountant to manage finances. His accidental meeting with the Portuguese merchant brought about a complete turnaround in his life. He became a famous person throughout the area.

As expected, his wealth now attracts everybody; brothers, sisters, nephews, and nieces moved to his house to enjoy it. His father, a former farmer, is now a successful itinerant merchant. With no ill feeling, Maboto gladly assists whoever is in need. In 1970 he built for his former school one of the most beautiful buildings in the area. Out of a despised life, he became successful for one reason: he discovered his quality, his kindoki. This is the kind of kindoki every community wishes its members to have.

Speaking of kindoki therefore does not necessarily refer to evil. It is inaccurate (at least in Manianga understanding) to define it solely as harmful. An evildoer is ndoki, a benefactor is ndoki as well. They are both ndoki in their undertakings and approach to the community. They are ndoki for what they do; that is, their particular specialty cannot be handled by any other member of the society. They are ndoki both by their acts and by their uniqueness, which can only be explained by their having the gift of unusual powers.

Harmful Kindoki

Kindoki comes from the Kikongo verb *loka,* "to bewitch"; as Masamba writes,

> The verb *loka* in Kikongo is the only one used to designate the action of bewitching, by an unknown person, some destructive

> power upon a person. When a parent pronounces publicly some malediction against a member of the clan, the verb *siba* is used. One who is suffering from *kindoki* or *nsibu* is cured by the same acts of reconciliation. . . .[7]

Masamba seems to be saying that the verb *loka* is used solely to designate hurtful acts by an undetected ndoki. This is not the case in other parts of Manianga, where *loka* is also used to designate the action of a father who curses his son or daughter.

Although the verb *loka* is the root of *kindoki,* it is not always used among BaManianga in talking about harmful kindoki. Instead, the verb *dia,* "to eat," may be used to describe ndoki's actions. It is believed that ndoki mystically eats his victims.

Harmful kindoki, unlike good kindoki, does not operate openly. It is a half-hidden institution within the community into which its adherents are initiated before birth or in early childhood when their reasoning powers are undeveloped. The practitioners of that power, those who are ndoki, form a kind of shadow community, echoing the pattern of the true or "good" community, but in reverse. They are dedicated to doing harm instead of helping and protecting the group. This secret community is not fully known or understood. It is hidden and mysterious, known completely only to ndoki themselves. Occasionally ndoki's secrets are revealed to outsiders under special circumstances, as we shall see; but to know fully how they operate, one would have to be an initiated member, pledged to secrecy.

In the following account of how the community handles harmful kindoki in its midst, it should be kept in mind that evil tendencies are considered an inescapable part of human nature, not something that can be completely eradicated. Such tendencies can only be integrated into the community and kept under control. Christian missionaries have been quite unsuccessful in their attempt to destroy belief in kindoki because the people do not have the idea of purity as a goal, or of warfare against sin, requiring evil to be cast out. All human beings, it is understood, are a mixture of good and bad to varying degrees. No one can attain perfection in this life. That is possible only to ancestors in the after-death world. Since everyone has both a good and a bad side, the goal is to keep the bad side under control, not to let it

become worse than need be. The community in order to prosper must be in harmony with its own evil side, just as the individual must strike a successful balance between strengths and weaknesses. Harmful kindoki is allowed a well-defined place in the community so it can be subjected to the checks and balances that keep the group unified and thriving.

BaManianga clearly distinguish between *kindoki kia dia* (literally, "eating kindoki") and *kindoki kia lunda* ("protecting kindoki"). When it is used to do harm, they fear and denounce it. Any ndoki suspected of harming others is disliked or hated at the time he is harming. But when he is at peace, that is, when no one is sick, dying, or experiencing misfortune, the community more or less forgets his wrongdoing and welcomes him into the family like any other member. Like any other nonevil ndoki, he is to be loved and cared for as if he had a clean record.

Besides their differing aims and methods, a major difference between "eating" kindoki and "protecting" kindoki is that while the latter operates openly and in broad daylight, the former is secretly conducted at night behind closed doors while everyone sleeps. It is perceived as *ngangu*—intellect and force. Any individual can possess natural intellect and force through will and personal dedication, without threatening the fate of the community; but these "night intellects and forces" are in disharmony with positive forces because they are the property of the night. They are possessed only by night ndoki. In other words, night kindoki is dark as the night, whereas day kindoki is bright and clear as the day.

The adherents of night kindoki, being the failures or upstarts of the community, are viewed as merciless toward their victims, whom, in actuality, they are afraid of. Since they fear them, they are impelled to send them death or incurable disease. At night, ndoki has no heart, that is, he does not know how to forgive another. The Manianga belief is that this type of kindoki is carried out by both human beings and bad spirits. As to the question of how they operate, BaManianga seem somewhat inconsistent. First, there is the belief that ndoki destroys his victims by eating them; he invisibly attracts their psyche, their inner source of life and vitality. And yet the belief in life after death is never doubted. Then how can we relate these two contradictory beliefs? Masamba replies:

The verb *loka* is not popularly used in talking about the activities of *ndoki.* The verb *dia,* to eat, is used when, in a mystical way, a *ndoki* has bewitched a human being. These expressions are common: *Wamana diwanga kala* (he has already been eaten); *Bila nki badilanga bantu kimoyo?* (Why do they eat people but still keep them alive?) *Ndoki kadianga wangani ko* (*Ndoki* never eats a stranger). *Dia* means to kill, to attack metaphysically; it does not always represent an anthropophagia mania as some anthropologists have tended to think.

Here are two reasons that seem to be at the root of the use of the verb *dia.* First, *vonda* (to kill) and *loka* (to give poison) are physical acts, which could be performed only by using violence. They represent expressions of hatred, representing a slow process of being killed by one who is your own, yet hates you. As *dia* enters into the realm of psycho-metaphysical "eating-up," the patient can react to it by a process of counter-reactions.

Secondly, to exchange food among members of the same clan was the order of traditional clanic living.[8]

What Masamba claims here is that at night ndoki is one who eats metaphysically, without, however, explaining what is eaten or even how it is eaten.

To me the question is very deep because when people in the village talk about kindoki kia dia they do not think metaphysically. I have interviewed many villagers to ascertain if it is possible for a ndoki to eat his victims in a society where anthropophagy has never been practiced or detected. Surprisingly and unexpectedly, one respondent told me: "Out of ignorance you do not know that night ndoki and non-night ndoki do not belong to the same world. They live in two unassociated worlds. What the society forbids is not ipso facto forbidden in the world of the night ndoki."[9] He then invited me to attend a ritual ceremony at which an alleged responsible ndoki was to be denounced. The case took place while I was touring through Manianga to do research on my thesis in the summer of 1972.

As usual, when a family is impaired by disease, death, or inexplicable misfortune, the shortest road to peace is to consult nganga, or priest. In this particular case an important member was very sick. To save him the concerned family members were urgently convened. After unsuccessfully attempting to ferret out

the cause or causes, they called in a charismatic diviner named Dieudonné (literally, "given by God"). He considers himself a prophet sent by God to save Manianga in the way Old Testament prophets were sent to Israel. He is chiefly a diviner. He displays neither wonders nor miracles. His foremost task is to denounce ndoki and to foresee any unfortunate event to come.

Before his arrival, the family leader gathered his people in the house. Everyone else in the village was also compelled to attend, and, as expected, everyone was there. As he was coming into the house, Dieudonné asked to have a pail of water placed in the middle of the room. Everyone in the family was to stand in front of that clean water and say whatever he knew about the patient. As required by tradition, the leader was first to take the stand. Invoking the family ancestors as witnesses, he addressed the patient: "If it is I who am bewitching you, get well immediately, otherwise let me die instead of you. Let all of you be my witnesses." The manner in which he spoke gave two impressions: that he could be the alleged ndoki but was not aware of it and that the invocation was purely a formality to emphasize his innocence.

Afterward he washed his face in holy water. As he was returning to his seat, Dieudonné checked the water to see whether the image of his face could be detected. Whether or not he could see it, he would not say until everyone had had the opportunity to speak. It is uncommon, however, for a ndoki to reveal his own wrongdoing. After everyone had argued his case and washed his face, Dieudonné went to work. He took away the pail in order to examine the water and catch the evil-doer. Later he emerged with the verdict, the accusation of the ndoki responsible. To nobody's surprise the denounced was Nkombo, a famed ndoki. Whether or not she was the one who was bewitching the patient, there was nothing she could do but agree with Dieudonné's findings. Without delay the patient's closest kin began to push her to do something about the recovery of the patient. Helplessly surprised and confused, she remained openmouthed.

The manner in which the enchanter was discovered left me suspicious with regard to Dieudonné's ability. First, the accused was a renowned ndoki. Throughout the area she was known and feared. Nobody would joke with her; her house was isolated, for to hang around her would mean to risk one's life. Dieudonné

knew all these facts. Second, she was a woman out of the common. She had shaky, withered hands which, according to Dieudonné, he had psychically perceived in the very act of bewitching.

After the handing down of the verdict, I did not regard him as "Dieu-donné," but rather as a farce player. Pointing his fist at her, he threatened her, trying to force her to liberate the victim. To everyone's astonishment, Nkombo confessed her bewitching, claiming that the decision of whom to kill was not hers alone but communal. It was unanimously taken at night at the ndoki's meeting place, *Zandu dia bandoki* (literally, "ndoki's market"), where they meet to conduct their business.

"After selecting the innocent victim, I was chosen to carry out the killing," Nkombo flatly explained. "I have been killing him very slowly, for there was no hurry; otherwise he would have been gone the same day." To Dieudonné's command to free the patient, she would not say a word without first consulting the others. Usually when a ndoki catches a victim, the latter is doomed, and that is what happened to Nkombo's supposed victim. He died within months. Nevertheless, his enchanter did not live much longer either. It was believed that she was killed by her associates for fear of being denounced themselves. To display their dissatisfaction, the victim's kin refused to cooperate any longer with Nkombo's clan-segment.

Conflict among clan-segments may, in fact, result in counteraccusations of kindoki. For BaManianga, as for the Chewa of Zambia and Malawi whom M. G. Marwick describes,

> tensions between the two segments which may be expressed in the form of rivalry between groups, or more specifically between their leaders, pass through two phases. So long as the matrilineage remains united, segment leaders compete for its overall control; and accusations of sorcery have the function of discrediting rivals. Once division has started, segment leaders may abandon hope of ever achieving overall control; and the accusations of sorcery then have the function of accelerating and justifying the incipient separation.[10]

Wesley H. Brown similarly observes of BaKongo: "Witchcraft accusation plays a significant role as sanction, and as a symbol of

the extent to which members of a clan-section are linked to one another in times of distress."[11] Any evil ndoki accused of "eating" an indispensable member may be beaten to death if he fails to seek safety in flight from community rage, as in this case from Lower Zaire in 1944, reported by Brown: "In 1944, chief Maya of Kiswemi's natal village, Kiyala, who was accused of 'eating' persons in the village, was beaten and mortally wounded. He finally escaped, staggered some miles away to the railroad station at Bloc 236 and died. . . ."[12] Any individual can be regarded as ndoki in a harmful sense, even if he himself is unconscious of being so, as Evans-Pritchard found when studying the Azande:

> But though many men declare in private that they are not witches and that there must have been a mistake, my experience of Azande when presented with hens' wings has convinced me that some think for a short time at any rate, that perhaps after all they are witches. Tradition about witchcraft is so definite about what cannot normally be tested, e.g., the concrete nature of witchcraft-substance [invisible substance a witch sends out from himself to contact a victim] is vague and indeterminate about what might be proved or disproved, namely, the operation of witchcraft. The manner in which witches carry out their exploits is a mystery to Azande, and since in waking life they have no evidence on which to base a theory of action, they fall back upon the transcendental nature of the soul. . . . It is possible to understand, therefore, that a man accused of bewitching another may hesitate to deny the accusation and even to convince himself for a short while of its evident untruth. He knows that often witches are asleep when the soul of their witchcraft-substance flits on its errand of destruction. Perhaps when he was asleep and unaware something of the kind happened and witchcraft led its independent life. In these circumstances a man might well be a witch and yet not know that he is one. In Azande culture witchcraft is so much a daily consideration, is so much taken for granted, and so universal, that a man might easily suppose that since anyone may be a witch it is possible that he is one himself.[13]

Persons accused of kindoki kia dia are nearly always older, graying members. By "eating" others' life force they are thought to be able to extend their own life force. This, according to folk belief, is the main reason there are more old than young in-

dividuals in the villages. While this might at first glance appear to contradict the respect normally given to the old, it will be recalled that the secret community of ndoki is structured like the true community. Therefore, it too has its elders and leaders, those who have advanced to authority through experience and knowledge. Older ndoki are likely to be the most powerful.

An alleged evil ndoki may be forgiven his sin when he confesses it and convincingly explains to concerned members why and how he has been engaged in such activities. They may also require him to pay a modest fine (often an animal) as compensation for the loss or suffering of the victim. They then cut the animal's throat, and the blood is figuratively drunk by the ancestors of the clan-section. This animal blood symbolizes ndoki's own blood. Shedding it, he makes himself available to severe punishment. Whenever he is found guilty, his blood will flow; that is, he makes himself liable to be killed if he should resume his evil activities.

Among harmful ndoki, the deadliest ones are believed to be *minziula* (singular, *munziula*). The word *munziula* comes from the verb *ziula,* "to exhume, unearth." Eager for money, they make it their specialty to exhume recently buried persons to steal and sell their personal belongings: sheets, blankets, and other gifts the dead have received to use in their childhood life in the new world. Generally they go to the tomb at a time when no one is expected to be in the vicinity. Using their evil power, they unearth the recent dead, open the coffin, and take whatever may be of value. Then they go to a nearby river to wash their acquisitions before selling them. At this particular time they are deadly. Any unfortunate person who happens to see them will be mercilessly executed at once, so that he cannot reveal their secret, for otherwise he would endanger their business. To know how they get their goods would mean not buying in their stores. Fortunately, most of them (but by no means all) are secretly known so that no one is willing to enter their stores. For example, at Tadi, a local commercial center near Sundi-Lutete in Kivunda district, there was, at the time I left the area in 1967 to attend the University in Kisangani, a well-known business munziula by the name of Muzenge.[14] Those who bought his goods were mostly his business partners; otherwise he would already have gone bankrupt.

Most ndoki are initiated into the institution of kindoki in early childhood by a relative who happens to be ndoki or even by a mother while the child is still in the womb. But occasionally an attempt is made to claim an older child whose mind has already been formed by community values. Such efforts often do not succeed, and may have disastrous results.

An interesting case occurred in the 1960s in the village of Kimata, about five miles from my own village of Banza-Lele. A husband and wife, both of whom were ndoki, decided to initiate into kindoki their twin children, a daughter and a son. Among BaManianga, twins are always given the same set of names rather than being named in the usual fashion. Whether they are both boys, both girls, or one of each sex, the first child to emerge from the womb is considered the older and is always named Nzuzi. The second, or younger, is always named Nsimba. Anyone encountering a person with one of these names will know that he or she is a twin.

Nzuzi, in this instance, was a girl with a sweet temperament. She was always mild natured, incapable of being angry at anyone. Because she was the elder, she was the first of the twins that the parents tried to induct into kindoki, at about age seventeen. But because of her goodness and sweetness of character, she did not possess enough of the inborn hardheartedness required for her to develop into ndoki. Instead, she was gradually destroyed by the attempt, and died. She was an easy prey to be "eaten," for she was incapable of understanding evil and defending herself.

Then when her brother, Nsimba, was about twenty years of age, his parents began the effort of initiating him into kindoki. Nsimba was different from his sister. He tended to be moody and changeable, with a mean streak in his character. This indicated a "bad" side that might be developed further, to make him a successful ndoki. By the age of twenty, however, most people have developed a balance among the qualities of their character that is not easily changed. Any attempt to lead them into kindoki is likely to result in violent inner conflict as the "good" side resists being overwhelmed by the "bad." This is what happened to Nsimba.

The details of the initiation process are unknown. Probably it involves taking the novice to the ndoki "market," the meeting

place where they come to propose people to be "eaten" and to bargain over them without pity. Ndoki can have no heart; they must be willing to sacrifice near and dear ones in their own families. Nsimba responded to his parents' effort by struggling so violently against it that at times he appeared confused and crazy. When in a crazed state, he would tell what his parents were trying to do to him. He did not see how he could possibly become involved in killing people without cause; he was also angry at his parents for what he knew they had done to his sister, and was heard to threaten to kill his father violently by his own hands. During crazed spells he sometimes had to be tied down to prevent him from doing damage or going to look for his father, whom he could not forgive. (He was not angry toward his mother, but felt sorry for her, believing that she only followed the lead of his father.)

After a while he left his father's village and went to live with his mother's family in Banza-Lele. When he was away from his father, he returned to being a normal, pleasant person. He seemed even nicer than before, as if the struggle had actually strengthened his good qualities. But it was difficult to avoid coming into contact with his father on occasion. It was also believed that the father made invisible night visits to try to gain control over him. After any contact with his father, Nsimba would go crazy again and lose control. It was as though he had been taken over by an evil spirit. He would laugh and shout insults about his father, saying, "He tried, he didn't succeed." Afterward he would not remember what had happened.

Usually there is one person in the community who is able to calm down someone in that condition. Nsimba, with help, always managed to overcome these attacks. Eventually his mother's family obtained a nganga (priest-healer) to attempt a cure. As far as I know, Nsimba succeeded in shaking off his father's effort, and eventually married and had children of his own.

The end result for someone like Nsimba is not always benign. Some remain in conflict the rest of their lives, and in fact may not live very long. If the ndoki cannot succeed in capturing him, but will not let go, the victim will remain in trouble. But sometimes the ndoki will decide it is not worth it to continue the struggle and

will give it up, as Nsimba's father may have done. In other cases, the ndoki may die, thus releasing the victim. But anyone who is not released by one means or another can never be permanently well. On the whole, attempts to claim initiates into kindoki later in life rather than in early childhood seldom seem to succeed completely. There is too much resistance on the part of the victim. Such incidents still occur, and show interesting signs of adapting to modern conditions.

I am familiar with another case from the late 1980s, in the village of Kingila, not far from Sundi-Lutete. A woman of around sixty had to return to Kingila, her family's village, after the death of her husband, a schoolteacher. During all the years of their marriage he had refused to let his wife or children visit Kingila because it had a reputation for being rife with harmful kindoki. The woman's aunt was well known as a powerful ndoki who had tried to give those powers to her daughter and son when they were in their teens. Both had gone insane. The aunt had worked for years trying to destroy the family of the widow returning to her village.

The widow brought with her a mature daughter, whom we will call Bernadette, in order to protect her identity. The aunt soon determined to capture Bernadette and turn her into a ndoki like herself. Bernadette was not able to put up a strong resistance, though she became confused, mentally troubled, and would do crazy things like running out of the house unclothed. Later she said the ndoki had taught her to fly an airplane, in which she was sent out with a video camera at night to spy on her brothers and sisters and report back on what they were doing.

After a few years Bernadette and her mother, the widow, were brought to Kinshasa to live with another daughter in order to escape from the conditions of the village. Away from the malevolent aunt, Bernadette improved somewhat, confessing what the ndoki had done to her but still talking crazily at times. She was angry, and like Nsimba kept repeating, "They tried, but they didn't succeed." Not long afterward, the aunt died, and Bernadette went to stay with her brother in Kisangani where she could be treated by a woman famous for cures of such cases, using herbs and other methods. Women are often outstanding healers. At last report, Bernadette had improved considerably.

Bernadette's case is noteworthy because of the way in which ndoki have adapted the imagery of modern technology to describe their invisible night flights and methods of spying on their victims. Far from feeling threatened by the contemporary science of the West, they quickly grasp parallels with their own practices and apply them. Bernadette apparently believed that she had literally been able to fly an airplane and use a television camera.

These cases illustrate another important point. Ndoki are not free to attack anyone they please. They are restricted to members of their own family line. Thus they follow the usual family pattern, only in reverse: while a good leader is devoted to being a servant of his family's needs, a ndoki leader is just the opposite. He cannot feel sympathy for anyone; he must be heartless and willing to sacrifice his closest family members.

Sometimes the "day" and "night" leaders in a family end up being the same person. This happens when a harmful ndoki is the only man available to assume the position of family leader, because of his age, experience, and knowledge of family history. This creates a period of crisis for both the family and the leader, who is faced with a contradictory role.

That occurred in my own family. The leader, who had once tried to poison me as a child and had worked hard to do harm to family members, decided upon becoming the leader that he would renounce kindoki and try to become a good person before he died. He was near the end of his life. Some ndoki are not as virulently hateful as others and even retain a modicum of goodness, as this man did. He had long hated my half-brother Philemon, the charismatic religious leader, because he was always afraid of being exposed by him. When he came to Kinshasa for dental work, he did not stay with any of his own children, who were successful in business, but begged to stay with Philemon, who he believed could help him overcome his bad side and thus die as a good person. He lived there for two months. I saw him, took him places where he needed to go, and felt sorry for him. He returned to the village, confessed, and asked to be forgiven. He wanted to assume the duties of a true leader, of protecting and helping his family. Because of his change of heart, he was welcomed and forgiven.

Whereas in the United States a person having been punished

for a crime has great difficulty in being received back into the society, which remains unforgiving and suspicious, among BaManianga, if a person confesses and asks for forgiveness he will be fully restored to the community. The separating of anyone from the community is only a means of getting him or her to return and have a change of heart.

There are even some ndoki who try to do as little harm as possible. They attend the market in order to protect their own family members through negotiation, rather than to sacrifice them. They are known as protective ndoki, and are considered to be of value to a family.

The Cleansing of Kindoki

Inevitably, a counterreacton, an anti-"eating" kindoki movement, arose in the Manianga area. It was called Munkukusa, from the verb *kukusa,* "to confess, to purify oneself, to throw away, to cleanse." Its aim was to liberate individuals from the bondage of kindoki kia dia and help them be "born again." With few exceptions, it was well received throughout Manianga, and flourished through the mid-1950s.

According to the men considered upstanding in my area, Munkukusa was accidentally founded in 1951 by an unidentified individual believed to be Christian, somewhere in Manianga. He was doomed to encounter insurmountable difficulties. Married, he successively lost three children, according to Efraim Andersson.[15] As expected, their mysterious and premature deaths were attributed to kindoki.

Tired of raising children fated to die, the bereaved mother decided to leave her husband, who, in her thinking, was "eating" their children, and return to her native kanda. She accused her husband of being the "great eater" of their children for the reason that they did not belong to him, i.e., were not in his bloodline but hers. Without consulting or discussing the matter with him, she spread this word and groundlessly tarnished his reputation as a decent person. This, however, did not make him bitter toward her. The more she hated and accused him, the more he loved and missed her. He often visited her, but neither she nor her family

would welcome him. Whenever he showed up in their village, people would scream, "Ndoki, ndoki, ndoki. . . ." Deeply shaken but not discouraged, he prayed unceasingly for his wife, but to no avail.

Finally convinced that he could never persuade her to return, he concluded that the only remaining way to have a heart-to-heart talk would be to publicly confess that he had indeed "eaten" his children; but at the same time, he would declare that both he and his wife "ate" them by common consent. By doing this, he would cause his wife also to be hated, denounced, and expelled, and she would have no alternative but to make things up with her husband. This was a dangerous plan—for he could be stoned to death—but also an ingenious one. He went miles away to make preparations for the event. As a devoted Christian, he devised the use of a cross in an oath to guarantee that if he should ever again "eat" his children or any other person, he would be mercilessly killed. This cross thus became a symbol of death as well as the symbol of salvation. He took animal and human excrement, grave earth, palm wine, and other objects as gifts to his host family. The reason he used animal and human excrement is not clear; perhaps it was a symbolic casting out of his evil nature, an indication that he would henceforth abstain from looking back to the dark and wretched past.

Once ready, he set off. Aware of the nature of his visit, everyone awaited him with curiosity. As he arrived, he presented gifts to the chief of the family and then dug a cross-shaped trench, at the center of which he mixed grave earth and palm wine to make *nteke* mud. Facing the cross, he confessed his (untrue) kindoki: "I am the ndoki who have eaten my children without apparent purpose. If I do it again, ancestors, God, and all of you who are here be my witnesses, I will not deserve to live again. I should be killed instantaneously."[16]

To seal his oath, he smeared himself with mud from the crossed hole, a sign of self-curse. His confession later became the formula of the kukusa rite.[17] After his ceremony, he urged his wife to do the same, because he announced that they had jointly eaten their children. Annoyed and confused, she denied all the allegations. But as there is no physical evidence to distinguish a ndoki from a non-ndoki, her own relatives began to express hatred and

to threaten her, and they did not dare listen to what she was saying in self-defense. As far as they were concerned, she was a ndoki and was to be treated as such. The more she denied it, the more she risked her life. To relieve the tension and save her life, she publicly admitted her complicity. Taking the same oath her husband had sworn, she promised to look not behind but ahead. Her husband thereby clearly came out the winner. She returned with him.

From then on, the movement spread from village to village, area to area, until it swept most of Lower Zaire and part of the Congo Republic. For many, Munkukusa was the answer to their daily nightmares. As there would no longer be disease or death because of kindoki, everyone began looking forward to a happier future; and since this could only materialize through the kukusa rite, the movement enjoyed a huge success. As Andersson writes,

> Kundu [witchcraft-substance] and kindoki, which the people had long suffered under, were to be eradicated. If kundu could be destroyed, all disease would come to an end and death itself would be put to flight. By radically and definitively forswearing all kindoki the blacks who were now threatened with total extinction, would be able to increase and survive. Salvation had come with the Munkukusa rites. For this reason all, from infants to old people on the brink of the grave, must enter Munkukusa, in which was seen the only way to salvation from death. . . .
>
> To get rid of kindoki and stop the ravage of diseases was thus the primary aim of the Munkukusa rites. To this were gradually added other motives . . . such as e.g. that the field-produce should for those who had gone through Munkukusa no longer be eaten up by wild animals. In conformity with old tradition, this too, was thought to be due to the havoc played by bandoki. The bandoki sent their animals, i.e bikonko to the neighbors' fields to spoil these. Similarly, the Munkukusa rites brought luck in the hunt. One would "vonda bibulu biabingi, kadi biabio bandoki bibayambudi" (kill many animals, for the bandoki would now abandon them) . . . through the performance of the Munkukusa rites the lost fertility would be regained.[18]

Consequently, the foremost concern of every family leader was the cleansing of all members. Whenever a leader sought the kukusa rite, he called back home all those deemed to be under

his protection. Even those who had moved to big cities were urged to return, for all were to participate; he would not tolerate any excuse. For example, Masamba[19] was outcast from his community for refusing to kukusa. As far as his understanding of it was concerned, Munkukusa was nothing but a heathen movement. His reasoning was influenced by missionary attitudes toward this important rite. But from what I have heard, the movement cannot be regarded as anti-Christian or pagan, for it is clearly an attempt to Christianize traditional beliefs and practices. For example, before the start of the ceremony a Christian song was sung, such as this very popular one:

Let us go see the cross
Where Jesus died for us.
Where is the Savior?
He died for us.

Cross, cross
Where Jesus died for us
Where we shall leave
All our wrongdoings.

Where he was tormented
Dying for us
We can see love
From God.

On the cross the Savior
Broke
Completely Satan's head.
He took away his force.

At the tomb Satan
Is saddened
To see the Savior
With his angels.[20]

(For the Kikongo text of this song, see the appendix.)

This clearly shows that the aim of Munkukusa was not to slander Christianity, as some missionaries claimed. At first, initiates of Munkukusa were neither anti-Christian nor antiwhite, but, due to the disparagement of the true meaning of the rite, they broke with Christianity and with whites. All those who refused to

take part in the rite were treated as if they were ndoki, and were regarded as tools of the whites. They were so isolated that their life became almost unbearable. To this day, some of those Christians who refused to kukusa are still suspected of being ndoki, of "eating" others.

How the Cleansing Rite Was Conducted

When inhabitants of a village sought to cleanse kindoki, they proposed a date to kukusa to the Munkukusa organizers; then they informed their relatives who had moved to towns to come back to the village. They were required to kukusa, too.

Here is how it was done around 1953 in Banza-Lele, where I was born. On the eve of Munkukusa, almost all adult children of the father's side *(bana bambuta),* led by the family chieftain, went at night to Makulu, the ancestors' resting home, or burial place. This visit had two purposes: to inform the ancestors and invite them to take part in the forthcoming event (since the veneration of family members who now dwell beyond the realm of death is necessary for our well-being, they cannot be caught unaware), and to get grave-earth.

They walked in two lines. They were not allowed to look back because to do so would mean being weak or afraid. They could be stripped of their *mwana mbuta* status (literally, "eldest child," but more broadly *mwana mbuta* includes all those born on the father's side with the potential for leadership). Arriving at Makulu, they encircled the grave of the oldest and most powerful ancestor considered to be the leader of both visible and invisible families. In my clan-section, it was the grave of ancestor Nsuni.

Speaking in the name of all bana bambuta, the mwana mbuta who had at that time achieved some degree of fame for his traditional wisdom greeted them by pouring down palm wine. Then he explained the reason for their visit:

Forgive us coming
To visit you at this time.
The fathers you left us are not well.
They are suffering,

Old people are dying.
We the children are deeply saddened
To witness their miserable life.
If they are continually dying
In whom will we take pride again?
To end this suffering
As children this is what we have decided:
Tomorrow all our fathers
Who moved to towns
As well as who stayed in the village
Are to kukusa.
Come and be our witnesses.
Whoever is responsible
His verdict is death.[21]

(For the Kikongo text, see the appendix.)

When the speech was over, the chieftain poured wine alongside the grave. Smearing the soil with wine, he created the mud with which he anointed all bana bambuta who made the trip. It was their blessing from their forefathers. They were required not to wash that mud away before the entire rite was ended. In the meantime, the remaining mud was put in a pot and carried back to the village.

As they started out on their return to the village, they fired a gun, a symbolic invitation for the dead to follow behind them; then they began to sing:

In power we are going
In power you come.
(Mu lulendo tweti kwendila
Mu lulendo lwizila.)

When they arrived at the entrance to the village *(fula dia vata),* one of the mwana mbuta who did not make the trip fired a gun to announce both his brothers' successful return and his forefathers' visit. Shortly thereafter the whole community gathered together to welcome them in songs and dances. Each abided by a communal agreement not to sleep so as to avoid angering their guests. To entertain them well the whole night they sang and danced.

In the meantime, the mud the chieftain had brought was deposited at the pulpit of the Protestant church. (The village of Banza-

Lele is overwhelmingly Protestant.) Since each clan-section was to bring its own grave-earth, the pulpit was completely heaped with mud. Then, early the following morning, after the singing and dancing, a cross-shaped pit was dug outside the church. Contrary to usage in the Kibunzi area, where two different crosses were used—a cross-shaped pit symbolizing the cross of Jesus and a wooden one symbolizing the death by nailing to the cross of any ndoki who refused to abandon his kindoki[22]—in the Banza-Lele region there was no wooden cross, only the cross-shaped pit. When the pit was ready, all the mud deposited in the church was taken out and dumped into it. To lighten it, palm wine was poured in again. The Bible was read from, Christian songs were sung, and then the great moment came, namely, kukusa. The first person to take the stand was Duki (Chief) Mabwaka, who represented the village in governmental matters. He cleansed himself by saying:

As I am chief of this village
Many suspect me
As a ndoki.
Now I am standing in front of this cross.
You the elders at Makulu are witnesses;
You brothers here too are witnesses.
If indeed I am a ndoki,
If I ate someone,
Let it be the end.
Otherwise if I do it again
My reward will be death.

(For the Kikongo text, see the appendix.)

As he knelt, the supervisor of the rite dipped his hand in the mud to anoint Duki Mabwaka's face so that he received the ancestors' blessing. From that very moment he was under kukusa oath. With the exception of the first line, all those who did kukusa repeated what Chief Mabwaka had said, then dipped their hands in the mud and marked the sign of the cross on their own faces, sealing the oath. If one were to remain innocent of being ndoki, this sign would serve as a blessing; if not, it would work as a self-curse. Regardless of age or gender, each individual was to kukusa. Those who refused became outcasts, unwanted. Children said nothing, but were to stand in front of the cross-pit and place

grave-earth mud on their faces. It took the whole day for everyone to kukusa. When it was over, the cross-pit was covered. It remained for several months under the protection of the chief.

The climax of the rite would come in an emotional confession in which a renowned ndoki would publicly denounce his science. The confession is the pragmatic achievement of the Munkukusa rite. It can be interpreted as leading to the psychological and social integration of the whole community. Because of its importance, I will give an example of such a confession as fully as possible. I do not reveal the name of the individual for two reasons: he was my grandfather, and since he is now dead I am bound by tradition to respect him. Accordingly, the pseudonym *tata* (father) Yola is used.

Yola was often suspected of being a harmful ndoki, but since he was pleasant to people in ordinary daily life, it was difficult to confirm this. But he led a double life. While during the day he was one of the nicest men in the village, at night he was one of the ugliest, one of the merciless ones.

According to his own account he became a ndoki by biological inheritance when he was still a fetus in his mother's womb. It was she who wanted him to be a ndoki. She handed on to him bad spirits *(mpeve zambi)* and witchcraft-substance *(kundu).*[23] Kundu is the invisible organism by means of which a ndoki "eater" accomplishes his work. It is an integral part of his being; without it he cannot do any harm. It is the motive agent of every imaginable evil act caused by kindoki. This belief has been widely observed, as Hallen and Sodipo note in their study of witchcraft: "Witches are sometimes thought to derive certain of their powers from witchcraft substance, either internal to the body of the witch, or kept by her in some external, secret place."[24]

Here is the full account of what tata Yola confessed to the public: "Although kindoki is everywhere, we have a rule limiting our operational zone to blood brotherhood. No ndoki is allowed to operate outside his zone, that is, no ndoki is entitled to attack an unrelated individual. Hence, each ndoki operates in his own circle. This is the rule of kindoki by which we all abide firmly and with good grace. It may however be overruled in case a treaty exists between ndoki of different clan-sections. It must be pointed out that if at any time I want to operate outside my territory, the

first step is to gain the approval of an allied ndoki related to my intended victim. Only after an accord has been reached does the door for me open. Any intruder who acts on his own to harm non-kin will be killed by other ndoki. This is the type of protection we provide to our families. It is misleading to believe that we only eat; we protect too. A 'ndoki-less' family will never stand; it will be consumed in a very short time, for no one will protect it." This statement is confirmed by Wyatt MacGaffey's researches in Lower Zaire: "*Kundu* [witchcraft] power is not intrinsically selfish, however; a good magician has to have *kundu* because without it he cannot make the dead appear. Elders must have *kundu dyandundila kanda,* with which they protect the clan."[25]

To continue with tata Yola's confession: "As you know, bandoki love to do things together. This togetherness is vital to avoid unpleasantness and sudden attacks. There may be three or four different associations of bandoki in a single village; mine boasts of ndoki from three different clan-sections. Nevertheless, I have the privilege of not naming them. The unique advantage of these small groups is that they ease our burden; otherwise all the major decisions are taken by all bandoki of neighboring villages engaged in *kitemo.* [*Kitemo* in this case can be described as a commercial association in which each participant brings his own contribution.] In other words, when we intend to 'eat' a specific person we persuade the ndoki of the family concerned to contribute him or her. If they refuse, the matter must be debated, and sometimes it may take weeks or months before a satisfactory solution is found.

"When no family volunteers to provide a victim, we draw lots. Again, this process may take weeks or months. We are very patient. But in general, everything goes smoothly as planned. However, my most frustrating experience as ndoki comes when I have no alternative but to provide my closest relative such as son, daughter, brother, sister, or parent. Doubtless this is the most devastating period for any ndoki. There are those who decline to comply with the demand, but by doing so they endanger their own lives. Therefore we appreciate a ndoki (but by no means do we encourage him) who sacrifices his own life in order to save that of his beloved kin.

"Certainly you are interested to hear how we catch our victims.

When everyone sleeps is the propitious time to operate. Then our soul leaves this physical body and flits out to the intended victim's house. Shortly afterward it has captured the soul and neutralized it. It then returns or joins other ndoki at their headquarters called Kanga dia bandoki. This soul is like our physical body. From the moment of the attack, the victim grows sick until death if the purpose is to 'eat' him. I strongly deny that during this operation we are naked. We are neither naked nor clothed. The body in which we operate has nothing to do with clothing or nakedness. Since my purpose in this confession is to become a 'born again' human being, I would rather prefer to stop here."

Astonished, no one dared to ask him anything more.

His testimony was disappointing in his failure (perhaps it was not his concern) to unveil the mystery behind the fascinating question of how a ndoki is capable of "eating" another human being. But in general it was a revealing and helpful experience. It eased tensions between himself, his closest kin, and the remainder of the family, but it did not diminish the grief they felt about his diabolical activities.

Priests of Divine Science

A fuller insight into the phenomenon of kindoki can be gained by studying the notion of *kinganga.* The two are parallel and interconnected.

In his Kikongo-French dictionary, Karl Laman, a Swedish missionary who studied BaManianga, defines *kinganga* as the usage, customs, manners, quality, and rights pertaining to a pagan medical priest. That is, he understands it to be a pagan priesthood. He is both right and wrong. It is a priesthood, and from a Christian point of view it can be seen as "pagan" science; but from the traditional African point of view, it is not pagan—it is divine. The nganga can be regarded as the bridge between the communities of the dead and the living beings. (The terms *nganga* and *kinganga,* like *ndoki* and *kindoki,* refer respectively to the practitioner and his art. *Bandoki* and *banganga* are plurals.)

Nganga is neither a magician, witch, faker, nor sorcerer; yet he is all of these and much more. As used by BaManianga, the term

nganga denotes a physician or medical man, pharmacist, prophet, seer, visionary, fortune-teller, priest, and ndoki. He uses his kindoki to provide help rather than harm. It is not inaccurate to call him the good ndoki, or counterwitch, of bandoki. Working closely with an ancestral spirit, he sits above any imaginable kind of human power. He becomes thereby the factotum and guardian of the community secrets. To some degree he lives in a world of his own. He is the last hope to whom the individual and the entire community turn in time of despair. His kindoki is humano-spiritual; he is possessed by a spirit without being a spirit himself. Remaining constantly in touch with the spirit, he connects the two communities.

When a family's nganga is elected chief, he mostly remains inactive in government affairs, consigning political duties to his closest follower, who could be called, in Western terms, vice-president. His religious obligations are far more demanding than his political ones; if he neglects the first he could be in conflict with the spirit, a situation no one wants to be in.

All banganga do not possess the same power and qualifications. There are different classes, and the most important are described in the following discussion.

Ngang'a Ngombo, the Searchers of Causes

Every living thing, every event of fortune or misfortune occurring to particular individuals or the whole community, must be attributed to an origin or cause. Nothing is ever thought of as uncaused. Though fortunate events such as good luck *(nsunzila)* remain inexplicable and are gladly accepted, any unfortunate event must be explained. In case of serious illness or death, for example, when not due to natural old age, the community members bring the case to ngang'a ngombo, the priest who searches causes. In order to obtain a more reliable explanation and result, they usually consult a distant ngang'a ngombo whom they perhaps do not know. The farther away, the better and more acceptable are his findings. A local ngang'a ngombo may take advantage of turmoil within the group to reach his verdict.

Ngombo refers to the fetish, which is the incarnation of the

spirit he uses to carry out his divination. It is generally made away from the village. It includes *mpemba* (chalk), *tukula* (something red), and an object or plant recommended by the spirit. Nganga is dressed in leopard skin (the symbol of power) and *mbongo* (traditional bark cloth, a fabric for rich people); he carries a walking-stick and a box in which he keeps all his mysterious objects, especially white ashes believed to be from the dead (*mungw'a basenzi,*[26] literally, "indigenous salt"), palm nuts to launch curses against whoever is the evildoer, raffia threads, *luvemba* (leaves of a plant used for healing), snails, armlets, and many other objects.

After he has collected what he needs, he gathers the consulting family to begin the process of "cause finding." The method he adopts is that of question and answer. There are no idle onlookers; all members are required to be active from the start until the end of the process. They sing, clap hands, and dance. Then, conversing with them, he makes inquiries about the case:

Nganga: E ma a a (Take!)
Audience: Vana (Give)
Nganga: E sweka (Hidden)
Audience: E solula (Find)
Nganga: E e malavu (Drink)
Audience: E e sala ntete (First perform your duty, then you will have your drink.)

This colloquy must be repeated at least three times before nganga moves on to the next phase, which he inaugurates with this song:

I am going to make ngombo with this chalk
I am the true nganga
Let us fight
Hurry up
Where is the cause I will miss?
I am the nganga . . .
(E mu luvemba yatela ngombo e wawa ee wawaa
Mono nganga e wawa ee wawaa
Twakakaseno e wawa ee wawaa
Kuma ntangu ee
Kwe diabwila yazimbwe?
Mono nganga eee . . .)[27]

As he falls into ecstasy, the audience designates a very wise man to challenge the nganga's reliability by asking him: "Why have we consulted you? What have we lost?" (Nkia bila tukutombele? Nki tuvidisi?). The nganga ignores the question and continues to sing: "Kwe diabwila yazimbwe e?" Then, softly but firmly, he responds, "You have consulted me not because you have lost something; you have consulted me because one of you is near death." Aloud, he then asks himself, "Are you sleeping, nganga?" (Nganga lele e?).

Audience: Proceed with your speech. (E le e le mama.)
Wise man: Is the patient a man or a woman? (Nga mbevo yabakala evo yankento?)
Nganga: A man (or a woman, as the case may be).

Saying this, he denounces the family to which the culprit responsible for the illness presumably belongs.

In the meantime, the innocent family (paternal or maternal) exults: "Oh, oh, you endlessly give no end of trouble to us, now who is right? Can you talk big again? Stop bewitching. Let the [little] children grow up peacefully." (Oh, oh, lelo kamba beto, ka lumweni ko? Luvova diaka bwabu? Luyambula kindoki kieno. Luyambula biabana biakula.)

Then he proceeds to the greatest challenge of all, the isolation of the suspected ndoki. Before denouncing him or her, nganga is entranced. His eyes become almost red, he speaks in an unintelligible language no one understands. It is believed that at this particular moment he is a man of two worlds. He is taken into the other world to confront his spirit, his *nkisi.* He remains in ecstasy until an agreement is reached as to who the ndoki is. As he emerges from the other world, he unhesitatingly accuses him or her. It is a surprise if the accused individual is not an elder. With this, his task as ngang'a ngombo ends. He may recommend the patient to a particular *ngang'a mbuki,* or healer.

Ngang'a Mbuki, the Healers

Ngang'a mbuki, or ngang'a nkisi as most people prefer to call him, is the physician or medicine man who cures both physical and spiritual diseases. He organizes one or more meetings at which

he gives himself up to dance, ecstasy, and all kinds of gestures, setting himself up as an indispensable and powerful person.

He openly uses his nkisi, or spirit, materialized into *futu,* a small bag containing several objects more or less whimsical. For nkisi cannot participate in the healing process without the material support of futu. The indigenous medicine or herb the nganga prescribes to his patient must have been recommended by nkisi; otherwise it will do no good.

Sometimes he prescribes nothing to the patient but goes to the root, namely, the bewitching person, so that nkisi, or spirit-force, can either neutralize or kill him. As Konda Jean told Laman, "The nganga may bury nkisi medicines at the entrances to the village. When a witch crosses them the nkisi goes after him, but if an innocent person (muntu wa nana) without any witchcraft crosses them the nkisi will not follow him."[28] To succeed in his profession, the nganga must scrupulously follow nkisi's instructions; if he does not, the nkisi will be angered and even turn against him. Nkisi is the provider and nganga the "spirit carrier." In other words, he is nkisi's servant.

In 1972, as I was investigating Kongo-Manianga religion for my *mémoire de licence* at the University of Zaire, I had the privilege of talking with my older half-brother, Philemon. Before converting to Christianity he had been a famed ngang'a nkisi. Because of this reputation his own community frequently suspected him of being an "eater" of others' souls. His life was sometimes threatened, but he could not give up a profession he loved so much. In becoming Christian he closed the door to his "pagan" past life. He never wished to discuss it with anyone. Surprisingly, then, he was more than cooperative in responding to my inquiries. Here is how our conversation went:

Q: When and how did you become nganga?
A: First and foremost, I must tell you that I was not nganga. I was mbuki (healer). I do not recall when I started curing because as you know we do not put much interest in chronology of events; I was probably less than twenty-five years old. As to the second part of your question, I was recommended to heal the sick in a dream.
Q: You did not learn it at Kinkimba? [Kinkimba, a kind of school, will be discussed below.]

A: No. I never attended that school. As a matter of fact, in my days Kinkimba was already a thing of the past.
Q: How did you come to know the right medicine to use for a particular disease and patient?
A: I often dreamed it. My ancestors, chiefly *nkaka* Bayengika [our grandmother], were always with me. At night when I was asleep they not only revealed to me the names of *minti* [herbs and plants] to use, they also showed me how to use them. This is the main reason why I hardly ever experienced failure in my career. I was well equipped.
Q: Can you tell me some of the minti you often dreamed?
A: I cannot recall all, but some are *munsangula* to cure *kinsiala* [chronic diarrhea and toothache]; *kinseka* to cure skin disease; *nsa* to soften cough; *nlulukulu* to relieve stomach ache due to poisonous food; *kimbanzia* to defend or protect someone from something or someone else; *nkusa-nkusa* to fight ulcer.
Q: How did you handle an emergency? Did you wait first for an ancestor to tell you what to do?
A: No, I could not wait for their participation. I only used my personal knowledge. I also got some help from uncle Wamba, who himself was strong in healing. [He is now dead.]
Q: Did you like this profession?
A: Fighting bad spirits in order to save someone's life high-spirited me. It made me aware of being somebody.
Q: Then why did you give it up?
A: I did not give it up. I was called to be Jesus' servant. [His fundamentalist spiritual group refuses to recognize the validity of traditional Kongo religion.]
Q: Any regrets?
A: Yes, for I lost my close ties with the ancestors. No, for I feel much happier to be associated with Jesus.

The main distinction between nganga and ndoki is that while most nganga (but by no means all) possess both ndoki and nkisi, ndoki has no nkisi, or benevolent spirit. Because of this, they see one another as adversaries rather than friends or colleagues.

Training in the Science of Kinganga

Because of the important role nganga play in Kongo society, it is vital to understand how one is initiated into kinganga, the

mysterious science of dealing with life on two levels. Today, any persons whom the ancestors elect can become nganga by either a dream or by direct initiation from another nganga chosen by the family's ancestors. But in the past it was different. To become nganga one had to attend a local traditional school called Kinkimba (or, in other parts of Manianga, Kimpasi, literally, "suffering"). The chief concern of this school was the complete formation of the individual as a human being. The importance it had in those days can be compared with the importance of a university today. A country without a university and university graduates is considered backward or worthless; similarly, a community with no Kinkimba graduate was not well respected. For example, in Manianga today we recognize two kinds of families or communities; those with university graduates are "first class," and those which have none are "second class." The same could have been said about Kinkimba.

Generally, four fields were taught. In the first, law *(kinzonzi),* the students were taught to become good judges *(nzonzi),* advocates, and guardians of the ancestors' land. They learned how to argue and speak well. They studied tradition *(kinkulu),* enigma, proverbs, and *bunseki* (from *nseki,* which Laman defines as "the person who begins, who leads off with a song, a tune; director of a song; composer of a song)."[29] Musicality is an indispensable tool for a nzonzi. A nzonzi who does not know how to sing cannot preside over a Manianga marriage ceremony. He must be a good singer and dancer to claim his salary for whatever he is to do for his host family.

The second field, medicine and pharmacy *(kinganga kia buka),* represented by my brother's work, has been described above.

In the third field, tradition and history *(kinkulu),* students studied the history of Kongo-Manianga roots, migration, and the tradition of the major clan. After graduation they became teachers of their particular tradition to their communal brothers who were not so fortunate as to attend Kinkimba.

The fourth field, *kinganga kia ngombo,* encompassed religion, psychology, parapsychology, and philosophy.

Besides his field of specialization, each student had to take general courses to make him a complete being. Some of the

general training dealt with how to be brave and wise in order to protect the family or any other person against enemies; how to endure sufferings and others' teasings (for example, when a student made a mistake, he was to be scourged; however, he was not allowed to cry or pull a long face; he was to be happy all the time); how to handle emergencies; how to be a decent individual; and how to master Kinkimba language so that when members of the community talked, no neophyte could follow the conversation at a distance (whoever failed to speak it fluently could not graduate).

The teachers were called *mabaku* and the students *nkimba.* Fathers who sent sons to this school were obligated to build their sons' huts *(mafwokula).* It is not clear whether they also built the teachers' huts. The site where the school was built was called *nlemba,* or *vwala.* It was holy as long as the school stood there. Any outsider was by law forbidden to loiter around.

Generally the school was for young unmarried men, but sometimes married individuals willing to obey the teachers and the school rules were admitted. A family with no Kinkimba graduate was a mere mockery. Girls were never part of the school. Nevertheless, since the tradition exhorts men not to cook their own meals, good housewives were hired to cook at the Kinkimba. They were called *malambi,* "cookers." They thereby became part of the school and to some extent even became students of the school. In this way many of them picked up fluency in Kinkimba language. These women learned much from students' conversations and as a result rose from being "second" to being "first" class members of their families. Very often men who had not attended Kinkimba sought their advice.

The initiation rite of Kinkimba was carried out according to a fourfold pattern consisting of selection, separation, transition, and reunion. Separated from the others and locked up, the initiate experienced a personal life crisis. Beth Elverdam describes this kind of initiation:

> The novices are brought into a world which has no connections with ordinary life. Often they are considered as non-existent and regarded as dead or embryos. In this way they are trapped in a situation in which there is little or no possibility for them to return

> to the ordinary world before the rite is over and they are reborn through the incorporation rite. They are psychologically under stress and in this connection one might postulate that their perceptive mechanisms are raised to a more acute level of sensitivity.[30]

This is true also of Kinkimba. Benjamin C. Ray adds:

> At this critical period people are neither what they were nor what they will become. Initiates are neither children nor adults, male nor female, human nor animal. They are momentary anomalies, stripped of their former mode of being, ready to become something new. Similarly, the time between the seasons and the time between the years belongs neither to the old nor the new, but to both. It is a time out of time, when the usual order of things is reversed and thrown back to primordial chaos, ready to become reestablished and renewed in a new order of temporality.[31]

The exit from one stage of life to the next, that is, from babyhood to ancestorhood, is marked by death and rebirth. Consequently, death is never portrayed as the end. Although every "life-exit" requires symbolic death, the pain the initiate goes through is experienced differently by each individual. Doubtless the Kinkimba rite was the climax of every imaginable suffering and joy.

The length of schooling varied from two to four years. Owing to the lack of a dating system, schooling was numbered by seasons. Throughout his attendance at the school, each initiate was to comply with the school rules. Once having entered, the student was not permitted to return home until the rite[32] or school was over. He was to comply with all teachers' orders. Any reluctance might be punished severely. Living at a holy site, the student was ipso facto holy. He was not supposed to be seen by an uninitiated person *(mungwala).*[33] Anyone who was caught having gone to the village and in the act of performing sex, even with his own wife, was executed without mercy; otherwise his defilement would contaminate the school's purity and holiness. According to Reverend Bahalele,[34] in other parts of Manianga such an individual was buried alive by his own community to show its disapproval of his not living up to its expectations.

As one might expect, the most time was devoted to the training

of banganga in the secret knowledge of two different worlds: the visible world of human beings and the invisible world of spirits. Not only did they learn how to protect the society against evil, or kindoki kia dia, they also learned how to behave vis-à-vis the spirits. They were even invited to initiate themselves with nkisi of their choice.

The acquisition of all such knowledge, as might be supposed, was a one-way communication. Students could neither doubt nor ask questions. Upon graduation, they became the most important members of the society. What they accomplished for their communities may be compared with what the academic world is accomplishing today in other ways.

Education of young people in the traditions and ways of the community, even without any kind of formal schooling, still persists in family groups. Men gather after work in the shelterhouse to relax and talk. Their discussions are not merely of events of the day or happenings in the village. The oldest man, who is often the family leader as well, leads the talk, which dwells on family history, going as far back as possible. He talks of where the people came from, the fields they work, the forests they have, notable incidents in their history. Others who are close to him in age chime in, adding what he may not remember. Small boys listen respectfully; teenagers are taught more directly and may ask questions. They are not required to start attending these sessions at the early age of five, but many do, pushed by their mothers. The groups also discuss family principles and beliefs. For example, my family has strongly believed in the principle that a child should never be beaten. This was because many generations ago a child died as the result of a beating, and it was determined that no child should ever again be so treated.

By the age of twenty-five a man will know his entire family history, which he will carry in his head wherever he may go. Even if he leaves home to work elsewhere, he will return from time to time and hear it again when the elders gather almost every day to talk. Nowadays a family member will often act as a kind of secretary and make written records of the family story.

Since men work in their fields alone much of the time and in groups only to accomplish particular tasks, these meetings are important for knitting family bonds. Women, on the other hand,

work together in their fields and bring the girls of all ages with them. Their talk of family takes place as they work together. The smallest boys remain in the village and play together, supervised by old men and women who can no longer work; these boys also help those who are too feeble to care for themselves. Then, if they are not too small, they meet with the men in the shelterhouse when they return from work.

A New Type of Priesthood: Kingunza

Many Christians, as we have seen, continue to rely privately on traditional priest-healers (nganga) despite the effort by Western-based churches to suppress them. But for Christians who feel driven to resolve the conflict between two religions, both of which they feel committed to, new syncretic, independent churches or religious movements have sprung up in both the villages and the larger cities. These movements have created a new category of priesthood known as *kingunza.*

The new priest, or *ngunza,* functions essentially like the traditional nganga described above. But unlike nganga, who depends on the guidance of the ancestors, ngunza depends on the Holy Spirit. People come to him, just as to nganga, to seek blessings or help in misfortune. But instead of specializing in one particular kind of service, such as healing, searching causes, or solving problems, ngunza encompasses them all.

Since illness continues to be attributed to bad spirits, ngunza's role is to expel them. A sick person may be brought to a meeting of the group, often an outdoor area, where people sometimes sit on rows of benches in an enclosed yard. Or they may meet in the leader's house, if there is room. A church building is not considered necessary, since God is held to be everywhere and cannot be confined to a particular space. Some groups, in fact, do not believe in meeting indoors at all.

The rituals, a blend of various Christian and native traditions, vary considerably from one group to another, for they tend to work out their own original approaches. The elders of the church—*prophètes*—pray, sprinkle holy water, or swish towels to chase the evil spirits away. Confession, which we have seen to be a

key element in traditional rituals of cleansing and reconciliation, has assumed even greater importance in many independent churches. To head off communal or family misfortune, members can go to ngunza daily to confess sins, thereby making themselves able to begin each new day as a cleansed person. Traditionally, mass confession was used only after a crisis had been reached, when the buildup of "sins" in the group had led to an explosion requiring each person to confess his or her part. In kingunza, individuals confess their sins daily as a way of preventing such a buildup over a period of time. This idea of daily confession was doubtless borrowed from the Catholic Church.

Ngunza, like nganga, must be in touch with the world of spirit. He does this through the exercise of psychic perception and receiving messages in dreams. My half-brother Philemon is such a *prophète,* and is in much demand. Spiritual messages, however, are not delivered on the spot as they are in Western spiritualist churches, or by Western-style psychics, who seem to be involved most commonly in a kind of business enterprise. One may ask ngunza questions, but the answer usually comes later, for the spirit chooses when and how to give.

In the larger cities, kingunza provides an opportunity for people with a wide variety of backgrounds to participate together, because the Holy Spirit offers a kind of universality, as contrasted to the specific ancestors of a village group. It is a useful adaptation to the otherwise disintegrative forces of modern urban life. But independent churches thrive as well in the villages, where they may be tied to a single community or to a group of neighboring villages. The flexibility of kingunza allows it to flourish everywhere.

Unknown to the conventional Christian churches, groups of their regular members sometimes meet privately with ngunza, rotating their meetings among their homes. In the 1960s many were expelled from their churches when they were found out. Harassed by the churches and disillusioned that they were not receiving the spiritual help they desired, many have left voluntarily to found their own independent churches.

Perhaps the first, and most famous, of the independent churches is Kimbanguism. Its origin is described by Mahaniah Kimpianga:

> Modern *prophetisme* in most of the Kongo areas has for origin the appearance of Simon Kimbangu. April 6, 1921 Kimbangu from Nkamba village in Bas-Zaire cured a dying woman and became known instantly as a prophet by the whole population of the Belgian Congo (today Zaire). September 12, 1921 Kimbangu was arrested and sent to the central prison of Elizabethville (today Lubumbashi). Kimbangu died after 30 years of imprisonment. Recognized as *nganga* [before being jailed], Kimbangu was being visited by people from Bas-Zaire in hope of resurrecting the dead, healing the sick, blessing by laying on of hands in order to protect them from all kinds of diseases and witchcraft. Let us note that the people of Belgian Congo, in particular in Lower Zaire, were impatiently awaiting a redeemer to save them from the rupture of the traditional structure of their lives.[35]

Kimbanguism is an exception to some of the above comments about independent churches, in that it is a widespread organization, not limited to one local or ethnic group centering on a particular ngunza. Its main headquarters is in Kimbangu's village, Nkamba, which, like Mecca, has become a center for pilgrimages.

The close political association of the Christian churches with colonial rule is evident in the suppression of Kimbanguism and the explosive growth of new churches with a revival of interest in traditional beliefs following independence. To many, Christianity is acceptable only when it can be reconciled with traditional beliefs. An example can be seen in Kimbanguism's adaptation of an element of Christian ritual, "In the name of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and Simon Kimbangu," thus adding the idea of ancestors to the Holy Trinity.

There may be a subtler and deeper significance in this as well. Carl Jung has argued that a trinity is an incomplete symbol; universally, a group of four, or a quaternary, has represented completeness and can be found in religions worldwide.[36] By adding the human element to the divine, Kimbanguism in effect not only blends Christian and African traditions, but restores spiritual completeness.

Individuals caught in the crosscurrents of religious conflict sometimes go through periods of tumultuous inner upheaval before reaching an acceptable balance among the influences to

which they are subjected. An interesting case is that of a man I knew in Kinshasa, Masala Dominique, originally from Kingoyi area, district of Mongo Luala.

I came to know tata Dominique at the choir in a church I attended. After choir practice he often took me to the bakery where he worked to give me free bread. He was married and had one daughter, and both he and his wife were devoted Christians. Despite our friendship I did not know the real tata Dominique until perhaps two years later. Besides being a member of our choir, he was a deacon and *nlongi* (teacher) in an underground religious sect. Contrary to most ngunza movements, this was a movement of fundamentalist Christians who were also members of a missionary church. But being members of the church did not mean accepting 100 percent of its teaching. They rejected any teaching that did not fit their religious beliefs. They were so conservative they accepted literally everything the Bible says, refusing to believe that the New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. Daily confession of sins was strictly required. It reads in part: "In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit I kneel before you the apostles of Jesus to confess any wrongdoing I have done today. Forgive me so that my heart may be clean as snow." (For the Kikingo text, see the appendix.)

Members of this sect were expected to live like monks; secularism was their number one enemy. But this did not mean that they rejected their traditional values. Despite the purity they aspired to, a mixture of Christian and traditional beliefs existed among them. Most of the time they kept themselves separate from the rest of society, but when important events occurred, such as a death, a marriage, or restoration of a broken covenant with ancestors, they were not only involved but observed all the required rites. When an inexplicable death within a community required consultation with a nganga, members of this sect did not object. They attended, even though they considered themselves to be more powerful than banganga.

After becoming acquainted with the real tata Dominique, I (being young and full of questions) wanted to know why he became a member of that religious community. This is what he told me.

As a youth he had attended a Catholic elementary school in Mongo Luala. After graduation he moved to Matadi, the largest city in Lower Zaire and Zaire's seaport, the "city of milk and honey." About a month after he arrived, he found a job and was making good money. He regularly attended mass for about a year, but after being immersed in the permissive atmosphere of the city, he said goodbye to mass and the church. Thereafter he became a heavy drinker and went to bed with all kinds of women. Being alcoholic and "oversexual," he grew so careless of his work that he finally lost his job.

Then one night, sitting in his tiny, half-lighted apartment, he began to see what he called "spiritual lights"—blue, yellow, red, and white. Frightened, he ran into the streets, but this unexplainable mystery would not let him escape. Exhausted, he fell to the ground. Then he heard a soft voice: "Dominique, stand up. Go to Bikuta Axel. Tell him what you saw." It was his first time to hear the name of Bikuta Axel, and he was even more frightened and confused. He had no idea who the man was who had spoken to him, nor did he know where to find this Bikuta Axel.

For two days he confined himself to his apartment, not knowing what to do. In the meantime, a close friend was so worried that he went to see him. After Dominique told his story, the friend took him to another friend, a churchgoer, to find out about Bikuta Axel. This friend knew Bikuta Axel and gave them his home address. Bikuta Axel was the national leader of a prophetic movement.

Tata Dominique hurried to Bikuta's house to tell him his vision. The interpretation he received was that God was calling Dominique to the ministry. He joined Bikuta's prophetic movement and was converted to Protestantism. He was happy to be able to put his life together again. He found a job and a year later married a young woman who was also a member of the movement. All of his spare time was devoted to religious activities: worship, prayer meetings in private homes, and Bible reading.

On the eve of the political independence of Zaire, the company he worked for was closed. Unemployed, he persuaded his wife to move to Kinshasa. They settled in Kintambo, where they joined another group within the same movement. A few weeks later he found a job paying so well that he bought a motorcycle and a portion of land on which to build his own house. Despite his

material success, he remained completely devoted to the church, the movement, and his clan-section. He did so in order to avoid any repetition of his mistakes of the past.

As a friend, he constantly urged me to join the movement, but to no avail. Later he became critical of my own belief, which he said he could not understand. I was a member of a church and choir he approved of, but as long as I refused to join his movement also, in his mind I was not yet saved. Despite our religious differences, we remained good friends. Any time I was in need he did not hesitate to help me. When I went away to the university we continued to correspond for a year.

Tata Dominique was so indoctrinated by Christian teachings that he had no time to examine himself about what he was being taught. He accepted everything without question or doubt. Then in 1971 he met a friend who was studying anthropology at the National University of Zaire, Kinshasa. They became good friends and saw each other regularly. In spite of having attended Protestant elementary and high schools, this friend did not consider himself a Christian. He said that before going to the university he also was brainwashed and accepted Christianity as the only road to salvation, "but after I became a student of anthropology, I began to understand the importance of one's own culture. Consequently, I questioned the teaching of the missionaries and their condemnation of my culture."

After hearing this, and because of the respect he had for his university friend, tata Dominique became so disillusioned about his new faith that he suffered a psychotic breakdown. Since he did not have a good education, he could not think his way through to a resolution of his conflict. He became withdrawn, critical of Christianity, the sect, and even Jesus Christ. He no longer believed that he could not be saved outside the church. The only remaining thing to do, then, was to return to his traditional beliefs. To make public his departure from the church and the prophetic movement, he married a second wife, becoming polygamous, an intolerable sin in the eyes of church teaching. Unless some unexpected event happens to him again, he has no intention of rejoining either the church or his former sect.

Similar cases can be found in almost every corner of Manianga. Those who begin to question the missionary teachings and intent

may break irrevocably with them and return to their familiar saviors: the ancestors. Returning to traditional beliefs after a temporary lapse, they often become the most conservative traditionalists, because they want to make up quickly for whatever damage their conversion to Christianity and neglect of traditional values may have done to the community and the kanda.

An Overview of Kindoki

Kindoki has been viewed by outsiders—and by many Westernized Africans—as the survival of a "primitive" superstition that stands in the way of progress and the development of Manianga society. But after becoming engaged in this study, I have come to regard it as a complex system of social checks and balances that works for the health and wholeness, the preservation and continuance, of the community, capable of providing opportunities for wealth, power, knowledge, and dedication to the common good while controlling the disruptive factors of anger, vengeance, and violence. Seen in this light, kindoki is a subtle cultural science that serves a vital function. It is an impressive social achievement that cannot be easily abandoned. So deep are its roots, it is likely to survive in adapted forms in the course of social development.

III

THE CONCEPT OF DEATH

Death as an Opening to a Better or a Worse Life

The traditional Manianga explanation of death is that to die does not mean to be finished, to vanish or decompose. Rather, in dying one gets the opportunity for a better life if one has lived according to social norms and expectations, or for a worse life if one has not. Death is defined primarily as a departure, a change. To die is to leave the visible world for the invisible; it is to say no to hunger, misery, disease, and worry. It is to say goodbye to the earth. Mujynya, who has studied the Banyarwanda people of Rwanda, finds a similar idea when he writes of the person who has died: "He has left, he has gone back, he has preceded us to the home of our elders 'the ancestors,' he has said goodbye to the earth . . ."[1]

This departure, however, is not an eternal separation. From time to time the deceased return home to warn, inform, or give instructions to the kanda or an individual member regarding an upcoming event looming large *(lwengisa),* or to reprimand or punish *(semba).* The departed are also impelled to return when there is an important event such as a marriage, *matanga* (a rite honoring the dead), or a dispute between two clan-sections. When the deceased feel neglected by the living, they have a sanctioned right to let their displeasure be known, to punish or blame the person who is the cause of their neglect. They may also punish the whole kanda; that is, the welfare of everyone, the fertility of the soil, may be damaged.

The kind of life the dying person is to lead in the next world is a reflection of the life he or she has lived on earth. A good man is believed to go to Mpemba, the ancestors' world, a world without hunger, thirst, disease, or feud. It is a world where one enjoys the