

Central African Forms of Human Possession: *Calundús*

Divination ceremonies that involved human possession most often were referred to in Brazil by the corrupted Kimbundu word *calundú*. In Angola, *quilundo* was a generic name for any spirit that possessed the living.⁹ These spirits of deceased ancestors possessed the living for a variety of reasons, but usually as punishment for a lack of proper veneration and respect. The punishment was believed to manifest itself in any number of illnesses that could debilitate and even kill the person who was possessed, eating away at his soul until he was dead. In an early eighteenth-century document from Central Africa describing the "pagan rites and superstitions observed by the Negroes from the Reign of Angola," an anonymous priest (perhaps Bishop D. Luiz Simões Brandão) described *quilundos* in the following manner:

When somebody suffers an infirmity . . . , he is understood to have *Quilundos*; in order to cure these they consult a surgeon called *Nganga* of *Quilundos*, who orders that the ill one be put in a dark house at night, accompanied by various of his assistants; and the surgeon goes into another room without any person, where he invokes the Devil, with whom he consults about the illness and results in the *Nganga* saying that he [the ill person] does not have to fear his lost health, since he will restore it for him, and he reprimands him for not recognizing him immediately as the Author of his life, and that as punishment, he allowed him to come down with such an illness in order to reduce him to his obedience; and . . . he promises him his health through the hand of his *Nganga*, who will give him the cure if he makes a pact; he may have his health if he makes a feast (*feira*) for the *Quilundo*, who is the idol invoked, with many demonstrations of gratitude.¹⁰

Because the term *quilundo* had a universal meaning, describing any ancestral spirit who possessed the living, it probably became a widely recognized term for spirit possession across all of Central Africa. Certainly this generic quality made it a recognizable term for Central Africans in Brazil, as *calundú* quickly became the shared idiom for spirit possession in the slave and free black communities.

Once *calundú* took root in Brazil, around the middle of the seventeenth century, its Central African meaning was broadened somewhat. Not only did *calundú* describe the actual spirits that possessed the ill person, but it became the preferred way of describing the ceremonies and dances that preceded possession and divination. Despite these cosmetic changes, Brazilian *calundú* ceremonies were scripted in much the same manner as possession rituals in

Central Africa, with the medium invoking the spirit to enter his or her body, followed by a direct conversation between the spirit and the client. Contrary to the claims of some historians, *calundú* was not a syncretic practice in Brazil, at least not until the mid-eighteenth century.¹¹ As we will see, very specific ceremonies and implements of divination were transported from Central Africa to Brazil.

The vast majority of *calundú* ceremonies were conducted in order to determine the cause of illness. As we have already noted in Chapter 3, African slaves suffered tremendous losses to disease, malnutrition, and overwork in Brazil. Since most Central Africans did not believe in any "natural" causes of physical deterioration outside of old age, these slaves often turned to spirit mediums to learn the origin of their maladies. In the first part of the seventeenth century, it appears that most of these possession ceremonies were confined to the black community. In a 1618 denunciation, it was noted that witchcraft and human possession "serve[d] all of the Guiné slaves in Bahia."¹² There is no mention of whites taking part in African possession rituals during this period.

Yet over time, whites too began to adopt Central African forms of curing, seeking out *calundeiros* (practitioners of *calundú*) to heal their illnesses. The process of white acknowledgement of the power of African cures was a gradual one. At first, whites used Central African diviner/curers only to cure their slaves. In the 1630s, Francisco Dembo cured a number of "sick Negroes" in Bahia, apparently only on Wednesdays. During these meetings, "the souls of the little children . . . from his land" would possess him and give remedies to the gathered slaves. Many of these slaves and freed Africans went to Francisco on their own accord. Whether they paid him is unclear. But other slaves were taken to Francisco by their masters, who paid him for his services. For example, Cosme da Costa paid Francisco six *patacas* to cure his slave Juliana, who "they said was sick from poison."¹³ The practice of whites using African healers to cure other blacks apparently became widespread by the second half of the seventeenth century. In the 1660s, even the Benedictine monastery at Olinda paid "Negro curers" to heal their ailing slaves.¹⁴

Whites sought out African curers to heal their sick slaves, perhaps because they believed that African "witchcraft" would respond only to African cures. In the late 1730s, several slave masters in Bahia took their ailing slaves to a Carmelite priest named Luis da Nazaret. The slave masters hoped that Father Luis would be able to exorcise the demons that were making their slaves ill. Father Luis examined the slaves and determined that they were infected with *calundús*. Instead of trying to cure the slaves in the manner prescribed by the Catholic Church, Father Luis ordered the masters to take their slaves to African *calundeiros*. He admitted that "exorcisms did not remove that caste of

feiticos because they were a diabolical thing," and that "only the Negroes were able to remedy" the *calundús*.¹⁵

This admission by a Catholic priest was revealing. Not only was an official of the church acknowledging the power of African spirits, but he conceded that the church's most powerful weapon against witchcraft—exorcism—was impotent against the strength and power of "diabolical" African spirits. As the reputation for African spiritual strength grew, some whites became impatient with the ineffectiveness of exorcisms, as well as with the bleedings and purgings that were the common medicinal remedies for most ailments in the Western world. Looking for stronger remedies, whites began to tap the strength of African healing powers, especially *calundús*.

Despite the occasional acknowledgment of African spiritual powers by Catholic clergymen, most priests viewed the white embrace of *calundú* with a great deal of scorn. In 1685, the Bahian priest, Father Domingos das Chagas, wrote to the Holy Office stating that "many white persons cure themselves with [*calundús*] with such little unease of conscience as if they worked a very moral thing."¹⁶ In January 1715, Father Antônio Pires wrote from Bahia complaining about the proliferation of "Lundus."¹⁷ Seven months later, Father João Calmon noted that the Lisbon Tribunal was "very distant from this Bahia, where the witchcraft and merriment that the Negroes make, which they call *Lundus* or *Calundus*, are scandalous and superstitious, without it being easy to avoid them, since even many whites can be found in them."¹⁸ And finally, in 1720, an anonymous report from Rio de Janeiro complained about "various Ambunda [Mbundu] cures, which are not effective except by art of magic, to which the whites give great credit, [and] they consult the Negroes."¹⁹ In the view of many Catholic priests, the "great credit" that whites gave to Central African *calundeiros* was an indication that some whites were not only conceding medical superiority to Africans, but they were also acknowledging the religious power of their African slaves.

Knowledge of Angolan *calundús* was widespread among the Portuguese in Brazil by the end of the seventeenth century, provoking negative commentary from a variety of observers. Even poets were compelled to comment on the "satanic" rituals of the Angolans. Gregório de Mattos, perhaps the most famous poet of colonial Brazil, wrote the following verse describing the white adherents to *calundú*:

All these quilombos,
With peerless masters,
Teaching by night
Calundus and fetishism

Thousands of women
Attend them faithfully.
So does many a bearded man [a Portuguese]
Who thinks himself a new Narcissus.

This much I know: in these dances
Satan's an active partner.
Only the jovial master
Can teach such ecstasy.²⁰

Perhaps the most famous description of *calundú* comes from the travel narrative of a pious "pilgrim" on his way from Bahia to Minas Gerais in the 1720s. The pilgrim was sleeping one night on the property of a certain slave master when he was awakened by what he described as "a horrendous clamor . . . that seemed to be the confusion of hell." The next morning the pilgrim lodged a complaint with the master, who assured him that he would order his slaves not to perform their *calundús* that evening. The pilgrim asked the master, "What are *calundús*?" And the master answered that "they are entertainment or divinations that the slaves are accustomed to making in their lands . . . for learning various things, like from where illnesses arise; and for divining some lost things; and also for having luck in their hunts and agriculture; and for many other things." The pilgrim, shocked at this revelation, reprimanded the master for consenting to his slaves' performance of such "superstitious" rituals. The pilgrim also accused the master of having morally sinned by breaking the First Commandment (Thou shalt have no other gods before me).

Wanting to set himself right with the church, the master called for his slaves to gather and meet with the pilgrim. The pilgrim immediately challenged the Master of the *Calundús* (*Mestre dos Calundús*). The pilgrim describes the following exchange:

I asked the Master of the *Calundús*: Tell me, son, (better to call him [son] than father of evil) what are *Calundús*? He said to me with great embarrassment and shame that they were used in his lands when having parties, recreation; and divination. You don't know (I said to him) what this word "Calundús" means in Portuguese? The slave told me that he did not. Then I want to explain to you (I said to him) the etymology of the name, what it signifies. Explained in Portuguese and Latin, it is the following: that it hides the two: *Calo duo*. You know who these two are that are hidden? It is only you all and the devil. The devil hides and you all hide the great sin that you make by the pact that you have made with the devil; and you all

are teaching it to others and making them sin in order to carry them to hell when they die.²¹

Having sufficiently frightened the master and his slaves, the pilgrim repeated the Catholic orations and litanies with his new converts. He also ordered the master to burn all of the musical instruments—*canzás* (scrapers), *tabaques* (cylindrical, conical drums, usually played between the legs), tambourines, castanets, and so on—used in the *calundús* so that there could be a full “resurrection” of their collective souls.

Brazilian *calundú* ceremonies varied somewhat from curer to curer, but the broad contours were the same for all practitioners. And despite the fact that some of the cures were made for whites, all of the ceremonies remained distinctly Central African in form and philosophy. For instance, on August 12, 1701, Felícia Pires, a forty-year-old white woman from Rio Real, Bahia, appeared before an official of the Inquisition to confess her sins. Felícia declared that she had been stricken with blindness for a number of years, when one day, her husband, Mateus Nunes, told her that he knew of a man named Pedro de Sequeira who owned a slave who could restore her vision. Felícia sought out Pedro de Sequeira, who told her that she would have to give a cow for the cure that his slave Branca would perform for her. Felícia agreed to these terms, and a time was scheduled for her cure.

On the appointed night, Felícia was accompanied by a young mulatta, who guided her by the hand to the house of Pedro de Sequeira. When they arrived at the house, they were led to a smaller auxiliary house on the same property, where they were greeted by a large group of slaves, as well as by Pedro de Sequeira. Some of the gathered slaves began playing instruments—*canzás* and *tabaques*—while Branca danced and sang in “the language of Angola.” She wore only a white loincloth, and on her torso were stripes of white clay that she called “*pemba*.” After a great deal of dancing and singing, Branca gave a great leap and suddenly fell to the ground as if she were asleep. One witness, João da Cunha, claimed that when Branca fell unconscious two “*negra*” assistants outfitted her with a “painted cat skin” that was hung around her waist, a band of red taffeta, also around her waist, a white cloth on her chest, as well as a “naked dagger” and a little hoop, one held in each of her hands. Soon, she rose, and in a voice that the others said was that of *nganga*, she called for the spirit of her deceased eldest son. Branca claimed that the spirit would not appear to her because he was “ashamed” by the great number of people who were witnessing the invocation. In order to sate the spirit’s hunger and earn his respect, a table had been arranged with food and drink, including a drink called “*aluá*.” Apparently pleased with the offerings, the spirit finally appeared

and offered an herbal remedy for Felícia’s blindness, a remedy that ultimately did nothing to alleviate her lack of sight.²²

Though the broad outline of this case may be clear, it might be helpful if we provide a little background and explanation for some parts of the ceremony. Felícia Pires consulted Branca in the hopes that Branca could remove the *calundús* that were causing her blindness. When Felícia entered the room, she heard the musical instruments of spiritual invocation—*canzás* and *tabaques*—both instruments of Central African origin.²³ As Branca danced, the music and her Kimbundu orations were designed to invoke the spirits of her children to enter her body. The white clay, or *mpeмба*, with which Branca anointed herself was to make her more accessible to the spirit world. It was believed that the spirits of the dead went to *mpeмба*, or the underground world of the white clay, when they left their coffins.²⁴ White clay came to be understood as a symbol of the “good” dead and was used widely in Central Africa as a protective balm against malevolence.

When the spirit finally entered Branca’s body, she fell to the floor motionless. As she recovered, she was no longer Branca, but took on the identity and the voice of her deceased son, a transformation that was signified by the addition of the “cat skin” wrap and other implements. Hearing the altered voice and speech pattern of Branca, the other Africans immediately knew that she had been possessed, fulfilling her role as the *nganga*. In this case, the *nganga* (Branca) was possessed by her deceased son. In order to facilitate the ceremony, offerings of food and drink were made to the spirit, who, through Branca’s body, ate and drank the offerings, including the *aluá*, a Kimbundu word for an alcoholic beverage made from fermented rice flour, corn meal, or pineapple husks.²⁵ Food and drink were a common way of placating angry or uncooperative ancestral spirits. Branca’s son ultimately offered a remedy for Felícia’s blindness, a remedy of herbs and roots that Branca later retrieved from the woods.

Other Brazilian *calundú* rituals varied somewhat in the types of materials used for invocation of the spirits, but they still conformed with Central African practices. For instance, in the 1680s, an Angolan slave named Lucrécia performed *calundús* in Bahia, wearing ribbons and a crest of feathers on her head. After singing and dancing, she fell to the ground motionless, and flour was sprinkled on her face. Like the white clay that Branca used to invoke the spirits, the ribbons, feathers, and flour invoked the spirits for Lucrécia.²⁶ Once Lucrécia finally divined the cause of her client’s illness, she applied medicinal herbs to achieve the cure.²⁷

In other cases, the blood of chickens, cows, or other animals also was used to induce the spirits to possess the curer. For instance, in 1712, a freed An-



A *calundú* in northeast Brazil, seventeenth century. Dancing to the sounds of *tabaques* and *canzás*, several of the Africans appear to have already been possessed by ancestral spirits. In particular, note the man with the crest of feathers on his head and the woman at the center of the painting. The feathers indicated possession by a powerful ancestral figure, perhaps a former chief or king. Also note the man on the far left, imbibing what may be the ceremonial drink *alud* from a clay jar. Painting by Zacharias Wägenar (1614-1668), "Negertanz," *Thier Buch*, pl. 103; courtesy Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Kupferstich-Kabinett, Dresden, Germany.

golan woman named Angela Vieira was denounced for performing *calundús* in Bahia. To invoke the spirits, Angela anointed herself with the blood of a calf, which had been slaughtered by those gathered in her house. The calf was given to Angela by the cattle trader, Dionizio Soares, and his "*parda* concubine," Josepha. Angela later divined various illnesses and used roots to cure them.²⁸

Similarly, in the 1680s, a slave named Caterina cured with *calundús* in Rio Real, Bahia. Dressed in the skins of "wild animals" and anointed with white clay on her face, Caterina sang and danced to the playing of the *canzás*. In the language of her homeland (Angola), she spoke in the voices of her deceased relatives, who provided her clients with explanations for their illnesses. Later, Caterina went to the woods to search for roots and herbs to cure her clients.²⁹

Still other *calundús* resonated more clearly with the slaves' specific African regional pasts. In 1721, in the town of Rodeio, Minas Gerais, whites and blacks gathered at seven o'clock every Saturday night to consult a Central African woman named Gracia. Accompanied by three other African dancers, Gracia invoked the ancestral spirit to enter her body. But Gracia did not invoke just any spirit. She invoked Dom Filipe, who the denouncing priest "suppose[d] was a King of Kongo." There was no Dom Filipe among the many people contesting the Kongolese crown during the early eighteenth century. Nor was there a Dom Filipe who was King of Kongo in earlier years. There was, however, a Dom Filipe who was King of Ndongo from 1626 to 1664. Perhaps Gracia was being possessed by the former Ndongo king, or perhaps Dom Filipe was some other venerated ancestor. Either way, once Gracia was possessed, some of her clients fell to their knees in front of her, "speaking to her as if she were Dom Filipe, giving her lordship [and] making great reverence to her." Among other things, Gracia/Dom Filipe attempted to cure blindness and divine the location of runaway slaves.³⁰

While it is important to note that specific ethnic rituals, like Gracia's invocation, were replicated in Brazil, it is more vital that we recognize the deeper meanings of these rituals. Just like the divination rituals discussed in the previous chapter, *calundú* was Central African religion in action. It was not the "diabolical superstition" or "witchcraft" that some Portuguese observers would have us believe that it was. Central Africans utilized familiar rituals and cures like *calundú* to address illness and social conflict, just as they had done in Central Africa. The setting and context changed, but the applicability of ritual and belief did not. If anything, the unexplainable pain and suffering associated with slavery only reinforced the need for the kinds of temporal remedies that ancestral spirits provided.

This emphasis on ancestor worship and spirit possession remained strong

in Brazil, even as large numbers of whites began embracing elements of a Central African worldview, seeking African spiritual remedies to their everyday problems. In the face of Catholic, and even secular, persecution, Central African religious forms maintained their resiliency, catering to the medical and spiritual needs of African slaves, while at the same time offering an alternative for whites seeking remedies to their worldly ills. Though white adherents to African beliefs sometimes had different temporal imperatives than Africans (i.e., finding runaway slaves), they were nonetheless embracing a worldview in which the powers of Africans and their ancestors were predominant. In these ritual settings, white adherents became dependent upon the religious power of diviners and curers who were often their slaves. By endowing Africans with this power, *calundú* and other Central African religious forms posed themselves as direct challenges to white Portuguese Catholic hegemony.

Calundú and the Forging of Economic Passageways

While *calundú* clearly had entered the consciousness of most Brazilians by the beginning of the eighteenth century, its actual practice remained the preserve of Central Africans, who used its powers to improve their daily conditions, not only from a divining/curing perspective but also from an economic perspective. Among economic historians of Brazil, there has been a great deal of debate over the degree to which slaves were able to negotiate economic spaces within the slave regime. Some scholars have argued that master exploitation and social control left little room for slaves to create their own economic passageways, while others have suggested that slaves grew and sold their own crops, resulting in a "peasant breach" of Portuguese economic control.³¹ In addition to earning money by selling various foodstuffs, a small number of slaves and freed Africans also were able to create economic inroads for themselves by selling their religious services, requiring whites to pay for their divinations and cures, as well as for those of their slaves.

For instance, in the 1630s, Francisco Dembo was called to diagnose the illness of a slave named Caterina, who belonged to Francisco da Almeida. Almeida wanted to know if Caterina was truly ill or whether she was just pregnant. Francisco confirmed Caterina's suspicion that she was sick with *feticos* (witchcraft), and he subsequently removed some powders from under her arm that were the source of her illness. Francisco de Almeida paid Francisco one and a half *patacas* for his cure but was later angry to learn that Caterina was indeed pregnant and probably would have healed "without [Francisco] curing her." Since Caterina would have been forced to work through her pain had she

been diagnosed as pregnant, Francisco's divination not only paid off for him financially but it relieved Caterina of some toil and hardship, at least in the short term. Again, we see slaves using their religious power to ameliorate their collective condition, undermining the dominant social and economic order.³²

Francisco certainly was not alone in using his religious gifts to earn a living. In 1698, Gracia, a slave on Ilha de Maré in Bahia, performed *calundús* to divine various things. In addition to curing a number of people, Gracia divined the location of a stolen canoe and determined whether a woman's husband was being faithful to her. Despite the fact that Gracia was a slave, witnesses said that she "had fame as a diviner and that this was how she earned her living."³³ Whether Gracia kept all of her earnings or whether she was a *negra de ganho* (slave for hire)³⁴ who split her earnings with her master is unclear from the record. Either way, she was probably able to build a modicum of economic independence with her religious skills.

Other slaves clearly worked as *negros de ganho*, performing divinations and cures for a variety of clients and then splitting their earnings with their masters. In 1705, a man named Domingos Coelho was accused of hiring out his slave Domingos to divine and cure "in the houses of many white men" in Bahia. Several people testified that Domingos "cured and divined with the favor of his master and he split with him his earnings."³⁵ Using the proceeds from their cures, slaves like Domingos, Francisco, and Gracia could begin to gain some degree of financial freedom, perhaps eventually earning enough money to purchase their way out of bondage.

Even though slaves made economic inroads using their religious powers, masters also profited handsomely. We have already seen how the Angolan slave, Branca, attempted to cure Felícia Pires of her blindness. Before Felícia was able to consult Branca, Branca's master, Pedro de Sequeira, required that Felícia give him a cow as payment for the cure. Apparently, Pedro de Sequeira made quite a handsome profit from the African curers that he owned. Several years earlier in 1694, he received payments for the cures of yet another of his slaves, a woman named Luzia, who also performed *calundús*.³⁶

Whites even went so far as to purchase slaves for the explicit purpose of earning money from their cures. In the 1680s, in Bahia, Pedro Coelho Pimentel admitted that he purchased the married couple Lucrécia and André "because they would always give him some earnings from their cures." Pimentel knew their reputation because Lucrécia had been owned by several other masters who had named her as a curer. Just as Pimentel planned, both slaves earned money for him with their divination and healing skills.³⁷ That masters were confident enough to purchase slaves solely on the premise that they would

earn money from their cures demonstrates that there was a high "market" demand for African diviners and healers, providing us with further evidence of the widespread embrace of Central African religious power.

Some masters probably did not share the earnings of their diviner/curer slaves, but these slaves still benefited from their religious powers. Because they were such valuable moneymakers for their masters, they likely were treated differently than other slaves. At the very least, *calundeiros* reaped the benefits of the offerings that were made to the spirits—foods and wines that the majority of undernourished slaves could only hope to have. The *calundeiros* also opened up culturally resonant moments of "freedom" for their enslaved brethren. Every *calundú* ceremony included a small entourage of helpers who aided the *calundeiro* in his or her invocations—dancers, musicians, and so on. By including other slaves in the proceedings, the *calundeiro* ingratiated himself or herself to others in the community, reinforcing not only the religious importance of *calundú*, but also the social "freedoms"—music, dance, and food—that came along with it.

Other Forms of Medicine and Curing

In addition to the various generic *calundús* that were performed in Brazil, there were several specific types of *nganga* who divined with possession rituals. The *nganga nzambi* was a "priest of the spirits" whose specialty was the treatment of illness, particularly illnesses due to the retributions and punishments made by the forgotten spirits of the dead.³⁸ In 1721, a Portuguese priest, Father Joseph de Modena, returned to Lisbon from Angola and was questioned about his mission in Central Africa. In the process of his interrogation, he was asked what *Zumbi* was. The priest responded:

Zumbi is an illness that comes naturally [but which] the witch (*feiticeiro*) attributes to diabolical arts, saying that the sick person is suffering from the soul of one of his dead relatives. The sick person gives many edible things to the *feiticeiro*, who says that the soul of the dead person requests these things and that because he was not given the referred things, the dead person entered the body of the sick person and caused him this illness. And the *feiticeiro* is called in order to cure from the *Zumbi*, and they give him banquets and parties with the food he requests.³⁹

The *nganga nzambi* sated the hunger of angry spirits all over Central Africa, from Angola to Benguela, curing numerous people of illnesses caused by their dead ancestors.⁴⁰ Given the prevalence of disease and illness in the slave communities of Brazil, it is not surprising that Central Africans continued curing

in this fashion even after they were enslaved. The *nganga nzambi* apparently was not uncommon across Brazil during the early eighteenth century. A 1720 report from Rio de Janeiro noted that there were "various witches whom they all call *Ganganzambes* [who] kill or give life . . . and in this there enter many Brazilian-born whites (*brancos filhos da terra*)."⁴¹ Though we have no specific descriptions of the *nganga nzambi* at work in seventeenth- or eighteenth-century Brazil, we know that they were practicing their art, most likely hidden behind the more generic term for those who practiced spirit possession—*calundeiros*.

The second specific *nganga* who operated in Brazil was the *nganga wisa*. *Nganga wisa* literally means "priest of power." I can find no description of how the *nganga wisa* operated in Central Africa, but there is one tantalizing description from Brazil. In the 1690s, a slave named Luzia cured various people in a "public house" in Rio Real. Luzia called for her assistants to play *canzús* and sing to her in the language of Angola. She emerged dancing and carrying animal skins in her hands. Luzia began to tremble and then suddenly leaped into the air. Just as she made her leap, the doors to the little house were closed and the candles were blown out. As the crowd waited silently in the darkness, a rattling noise could be heard on top of the roof. Without warning, something fell from the ceiling and there was a loud smack on the table in the middle of the room. Then a voice announced, "I am *gangahuiza*." Subsequently, through *nganga wisa*, Luzia was able to effect her cures.⁴²

Human possession was not the only Central African form of divining/curing that made its way across the Atlantic. The Kongolese influence, in particular, contributed other cures to Brazilian slave communities. For instance, in 1789, a slave named Antônio Congo was denounced for "making *calundús* with two dolls" on Fazenda Santa Guiteria in the town of Itatiayo. Using his two dolls to divine and cure, Antônio healed many patients who could not be cured by Portuguese surgeons or herbalists. Some of Antônio's clients paid as much as ten *oitavas* (twelve mil-réis) for their cures, more than one-tenth the cost of a prime male slave in Brazil's mining region.⁴³

The two dolls referred to in Antônio's denunciation were probably *kitekes*, wooden statues that served as representations of the ancestors among the Kongolese. These "dolls" were apparently common in eighteenth-century Brazil. Seventy years earlier in 1720, a Catholic priest in Rio de Janeiro reported that Central Africans possessed "various images that they call *Quitacles* to which they give cult, saying, this is my son; this is my father; this is my brother. And just as though [the image] were alive, they offer it sustenance."⁴⁴ As in the case with human possession, the spirits of deceased ancestors could be invoked to possess the *kiteke* and proffer advice, remedies, and so on. In order to facili-