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DUALISM IN WESTERN BANTU RELIGION AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

TORDAY, Emil

The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 1928, Vol. 58, Jan.–Jun., pp. 225–245.

The Western Bantu have always been reluctant to confide their beliefs to strangers. Writing in the middle of the eighteenth century, Proyart stated, quite correctly, I believe, the reason for this reticence:

"Ces peuples, pour ne pas exposer leur religion au mépris, sont très réservés à en parler aux Européens."¹

Even if we are successful in overcoming their fear of ridicule, we are still in danger of making mistakes by reading our own ideas into their minds. They may attach to a word quite a different interpretation to ours, as, for example, in the case of God. To us it conveys the notion of a personal agent, an object of religious worship, conscious, and with powers superior to man, believed to direct and control the course of nature and human life, and, consequently, to be propitiated and conciliated.² All early travellers have honestly striven to find out if the newly discovered savages believed in a supreme, personal God; but while they were asking questions about the Creator, they received answers about creation. The idea of a personal Creator being alien to the Bakongo's conception of the Universe, they accepted easily enough a foreign word, but never followed their teachers in raising the first cause to the dignity of a supreme divinity. The foreign word spread with the white man's occupation of the continent, even preceding it by the indirect expansion of his influence. Where the contact with Christianity was constant and close, the black man's cosmic philosophy changed gradually into a religion of which *Nzambi Mpungu* became

¹ Histoire de Loango, etc., 1776, p. 187.

² Sir J. G. Frazer, "The Golden Bough", in: *The Magic Art*, vol. I, p. 222.

the high-god. But the word travelled faster than its European conception, and when we meet with it in the far interior we must resist the temptation to give it the same value as it has in places where missionaries have laboured for centuries.

The nature of the Supreme Being attributed to the western Bantu is clearly stated by the greatest authority on this subject, the learned Jesuit Van Wing, especially in a paper contributed to *Recherches des Sciences Religieuses*.³ *Nzambi Mpungu*, creator and propagator of all things, is essentially personal; he is invoked in case of private and public calamities, though no set prayers are addressed to him, and he has no special priesthood. Oaths are taken in his name, and it is he who decides the span of man's life and the fate of the surviving soul after death. On the last point the author has subsequently altered his views, and expresses the opinion that it is not God, but the ancestors, who reward or punish in the life beyond.⁴

Father Van Wing's credentials are: Diligent research extending over a score of years among the Bakongo, a charming and sympathetic personality, a perfect knowledge of the language and, what counts perhaps for even more, an unparalleled acquaintance with their spoken literature. The fact that he is an ideal field-worker must not blind us to the possibility that the heathen Bampungu among whom he carried on his researches may have been affected by foreign influences. Even if they themselves were ever Christians,⁵ their close neighbours were so in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, nominally, at any rate, when the State religion in Kongo was Roman Catholic; and though their Christianity was probably never very deep, and has since fallen completely into oblivion, there certainly remains something at the back of their minds of the new faith which came to their country centuries ago. It is a universal practice among them to add a swagger name to their official one, and this is generally the Portuguese form of some saint, such as Domanuele, Dompetelo, Ndonga Zabela.⁶ They speak of such a name as *santu diamo* (my saint), though they have not the faintest notion of the nature of a saint, and give them interpreta-

³ L'Être Supreme des Bakongo", in: *Recherches des Sciences Religieuses*, 1920, p. 81.

⁴ *Etudes Bakongo*, p. 171.

⁵ Fathers Jerome de Montesarchio and de Volterra passed through the country on their way to the Kwango, but made no prolonged stay.

⁶ R. P. J. Van Wing, *Etudes Bakongo*, p. 110.

tions based on some real or fancied resemblance to a Kisikongo word. Surely, if they remember the names of the patron saints given to their ancestors, or to the neighbours from whom they have borrowed the custom, when they were baptized in batches of hundreds by the early Capucins, it is at least probable that they should also retain the name and something of the attributes of the Deity in whose name they were bestowed; this was *Nzambi Mpungu*.

The derivation of the name *Nzambi Mpungu* has been the subject of much speculation. Father Van Wing, who sticks to facts and disdains guesses, states that he does not know it, and we may take this to prove conclusively that the Bampangu have formed no idea on the subject. Bentley also states that the root of *Nzambi* cannot be found in Kisikongo.⁷ It sounds, none the less, like a Bantu word, and occurs frequently in that language with various meanings. Both Cavazzi⁸ and Proyard⁹ mention a skin disease so called; the earlier writer says that it is the title of the doctor curing the disease, while the latter says the illness bears the name because it infects people who have committed perjury in the name of *Nzambi*. A painful eruption of the skin is to this day called *nzambi*, and it is generally believed that those who break the laws of the ancestors will be afflicted with it.¹⁰ Bentley, in his Dictionary, gives *nzambi* as a respectful answer to a call; the word is also used, with the prefix *Na* (lord) as the title of one of the inferior priests acting at initiation.¹¹ *Mpungu* is a very common word. Bentley says it stands for *ampungu* (the highest). It is also the name of a charm found in every village to protect it against disputes, witches, and evil spirits,¹² and there are also certain images¹³ called *Mpungu Ntete*, *Mpungu Basa*, *Mpungu Sekula*, which chiefs have to bring to the *Longo* initiation ceremony.

The name *Nzambi* is found, with trifling modifications, over a great part of Bantu Africa from the Bakongo in the West to the Barotse in

⁷ Rev. W. H. Bentley, *Dictionary and Grammar of the Kongo Language*, p. 96.

⁸ Cavazzi, P. Gio., Antonio da Montecuccolo, *Istoria descrizione de'tre regni Congo*, etc. French translation by Lorbato, under the title *Relation historique de l'Ethiopie Occidentale*, Paris, 1732, vol. I, p. 236.

⁹ *Histoire de Loango*, etc., p. 188.

¹⁰ Van Wing, *De Geheime Sekte van't Kimpasi*, p. 17.

¹¹ Van Wing, *De Geheime Sekte van't Kimpasi*, p. 18.

¹² Id., *Etudes Bakongo*, p. 185.

¹³ Id., "Nzo Longo", in: *Congo*, 1920, vol. II, p. 580.

the east,¹⁴ from the Bangala on the northern bend of the River Congo¹⁵ to the Ova-Herero in the south.¹⁶ It is easy to trace its advent among the Bangala and Herero. Early travellers among the Bangala (Westmarck¹⁷ and Coquilhat¹⁸ report that the Creator, or his vague equivalent, was called *Ibanza* or *Libanza*; Father Cambier¹⁹ gives his name as *Djakomba*. Mr. Bentley manages to turn both of these into *Nzambi*, by dropping inconvenient letters and syllables and arranging the remainder to suit his purpose.²⁰ The real state of affairs is made perfectly clear by his colleague, Mr. Weeks. In a communication written in 1899²¹ he not only states that *Libanza* was the Creator, but also that the natives believed in a destructive principle, the giver of sickness, and the source of all evil-and his name was *Njambe*! What happened probably is that when one of his Christian boys from the Lower Congo fell ill or died, his fellows naturally attributed this misfortune to God, and at first sight *Nzambi* appeared to the unsophisticated natives as the spirit of disease and destruction. During the following years the labours of the missionaries bore fruit, and Mr. Weeks could write in 1914 that *Nyambe*, the god of the Bangala,

"...is regarded and spoken of by them as the principal creator of the world, and the maker of all things."²²

This does great credit to Mr. Weeks the missionary, but detracts somewhat from his merits as a field anthropologist. Such a confusion between God and the Devil does not stand isolated. Proyart records in the middle of the eighteenth century the existence in Loango of

¹⁴ Alfred Bertrand, *The Kingdom of the Barotse*, p. 227.

¹⁵ Rev. John H. Weeks, *Among Congo Cannibals*, p. 247.

¹⁶ J. Irle, *Die Herero*, p. 72. Kolbe's *Herero Dictionary*. Meinhof, in *Allgemeine Wiss. Zeitschr.*, 1899, p. 394, says "Njambe Karunga" means "fate." Smith and Dale (vol. ii, p. 204 et seq.) give, among other interpretations, the same meaning to "Leza."

¹⁷ *Bull. Soc. Giogr. Commerciale*, Paris, vol. VIII, pp. 432-3.

¹⁸ *Congo Belge*, vol. vi, p. 334b.

¹⁹ *Mission Chine Congo*, 1891, pp. 412-13.

²⁰ *Pioneering on the Congo*, vol. i, p. 248.

²¹ *Missionary Herald*, London, 1899, p. 260.

²² *Among Congo Cannibals*, p. 247.

Nzambi mbi (Nzambi the bad), who, he says, was nothing less than Satan himself.²³

Among the Ova-Herero we can observe a somewhat similar development as among the Bangala. The first Rhenish missionaries came into contact with them about 1844. Believing that "*Mukuru*," their word for "ancestor," stood for a supreme deity, they adopted it, and used it in their teachings and translations for "God." It is only about a quarter of a century late²⁴ that they mention *Ndjambe* for the first time, and then it is used jointly with the word *Karunga*. The new word is linked to an ancient one, just as the foreign and native conceptions of creation and divine power begin to merge into each other. All over Central Africa we find the same process going on; *Nzambi* is taking the place of ancestors and creative principles such as *Nfidi Mukulu* (through the positive efforts of the American Presbyterian missionaries),²⁵ *Mulohwe*, *Kapezya*, *Kalunga*, *Mbumba*, and others.

The origin of the word *Nzambi* can be connected with the known history of Kongo. When Diego Cão discovered the River Congo in 1482, he had on board some native interpreters from the Guinea Coast, where several tribes use the words *Oyambe*, *Onyarne*, *Nyarne*, etc., for the Supreme Being. On his arrival, Cão was given to understand that there existed somewhere inland a great king, the Ntotila of Kongo. To establish relations with him, Cão sent some of his Guinea men with suitable presents on an embassy to this potentate while he set sail for the south. He came back sooner than expected, and found that his men had not yet returned from their mission. Naturally anxious to proclaim his great discoveries to the world, he would not delay his departure for Portugal, and left his interpreters behind him, marooned in Banza Kongo (San Salvador) till his return in 1485. These men had been treated at first with distinction, but when the Ntotila heard that Cão had forcibly taken hostages with him, they were no longer admitted to the king's presence and had to shift for themselves.²⁶ They now naturally learned the language, and were subsequently the means of communication between the natives and the Portuguese who, as Cavazzi points out with indignation, never took the

²³ *Histoire de Loango*, etc., p. 188, 92.

²⁴ In 1870 (see Irle, op. cit., p. 72).

²⁵ W. M. Morrison, *Buluba-Lulua Language*, p. 198.

²⁶ Battell, *The Strange Adventures of Andrew*, edited by Ravenstein (Hakluyt Society), not, p. 105 et seq.

pains of acquiring the use of Kisikongo and were entirely dependent on their interpreters.²⁷ The first missionaries, Dominicans, Franciscans, etc., and those who followed them up to the time of the second mission of the Jesuits (1623–1669), were equally ignorant, and taught and preached by means of interpreters. If it can be shown, as I hope to show, that the Bakongo had at this early period neither the notion of a Supreme God, nor a word to express this notion, then we are justified in assuming that these interpreters used a word of their own language to convey the message of the missionaries, and that *Nzambi* is a corruption of *Oyambe* or of the Akan name for the Supreme Being *Nyame*. The acceptance of the word did not imply, for a long time, at any rate, the acceptance of the idea for which it stood. *Nzambi* never meant to the natives the same thing as it means to Europeans, and to this day such an interpretation limited to those who were brought up from childhood in the Christian faith. This confusion of ideas is the greatest difficulty of the missionaries. Mr. Bentley states²⁸ that the Bakongo's idea of *Nzambi* is confused and vague, and adds that their belief is purely nominal. Father Van Wing²⁹ is not less explicit:

"...even the idea of *Nzambi*, the Supreme Being, has scarcely become Christianized, though the missionaries have adopted this word to preach the Christian faith."

Nzambi is not the only word which was imported and generally used by the missionaries for the new divinity, and subsequently substituted by the natives for the name of the creative principles according to their own ideas. It is, I believe, not generally known that in some parts, perhaps in those where interpreter strained in Portugal were employed, the names of Jesus and Deus were adopted. To this day *Deisos* is sometimes heard among the Bavili.³⁰ But even these were soon given a new meaning. Father Cavazzi, whose book, unfortunately never translated into English, is a storehouse of information,

²⁷ Cavazzi, op. cit., vol. iii, pp. 155 and 159. Van Wing, *Etudes Bakongo*, pp. 37 and 48. The Jesuits Vaz and Cardozo, 1623, were the first to apply themselves to the study of the language.

²⁸ Dictionary, etc., p. 96.

²⁹ *Etudes Bakongo*, p. 113.

³⁰ R. E. Dennett, *Seven Years Among the Fjort*, p. 47.

mentions the use of these names, and relates³¹ that the most obstinate, unconvertible pagans were a tribe which used the name *Desu* for the Creator, to whom they attributed improper (probably reproductive) rites (pratiques). For the Western Bantu, *Nzambi*, *Dezu*, *Deus* were not the names of the God whose Gospel the missionaries preached, but just new appellations for the nature forces called *Bunzi*³² (or *Luangu*) and *Mbumba* in Mayombe, and *Kalunga* and *Mbumba* in Kongo, Angola, and many other parts of Africa. The transition stage in the form of *Nzambi-Bunzi*³³ or *Ndjambe-Karunga*³⁴ and *Karunga-Ndjambe* is met with. Among the Bakongo both *Kalunga* and *Mbumba* survive in the initiation ceremonies, and in the traditional songs we meet with invocations to "sovereign *Mbumba*" besides curses and oaths in his name. Heathen Bakongo, when they throw an offering of food on the ground, still appeal to "*Mbumba* of the earth."³⁵ *Kalunga* means "the sea." The warlike Bapinji in the Kwilu region still give his name when asked about the Creator, while the more commercially minded Bapende, their kinsmen and neighbours, who have been in contact with the coast, use *Monzam*, a corrupt form of *Nzambi*. I have met with it as far inland as among the Badjok we of the Congo-Zambesi watershed³⁶ and among the Baluba-Hemba on the Lualaba.³⁷ *Mbumba*, all over Bantu Africa, means "clay," and implies shaping, as the moulding of pots.

In many parts it has not yet been ousted by a foreign word,³⁸ and is accepted by missionaries as meaning the first cause. *Mbumba* also means "mystery," and is associated with fruitfulness, while *Bunzi* is the giver of rain, fertility and all good things; his symbol, according to

³¹ Op. cit., vol. i, pp. 242 and 243.

³² R. P. Leo Bittremieux, *Mayombsch Idioticon*, vol. ii, p. 545. *Bunzi* is probably a word which has survived from the pre-Kongo period in Mayombe, and may be identical with the Upper Congo Ibanza who "lived under the sea." (Bentley, *Pioneering*, vol. i, p. 250.)

³³ *Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 83.

³⁴ Irle, op. cit., p. 72.

³⁵ Van Wing, *Etudes Bakongo*, p. 83. Congo, 1820, vol. ii, p. 240; 1921, vol. i, p. 53. Bentley, *Dictionary*, etc., p. 502.

³⁶ E. Torday and T. A. Joyce, *Notes Ethnographiques sur des Populations des Bassins du Kasai et du Kwango Oriental*, p. 293.

³⁷ Colle, *Les Baluba*, p. 496.

³⁸ R. P. Gilliard, Congo, 1922, vol. i, p. 46. Mgr. Leroy, in his *La Religion des Primitifs*, also mentions the use of "*Mbumba*" for the Supreme Being.

Dennett,³⁹ is the south wind, the bringer of rain. In Christianized Loango, *Bunzi* is still prayed to for rain, and skins of leopards are offered to him when rain is wanted.⁴⁰ In the mind of primitive man that which favours the production of the necessities of life becomes the first cause of it. Father Bittremieux, a great authority on Mayombe, where he has resided for many years, states that it is the archaic form of *Nzambi*.⁴¹ If the Bayombe consider the south wind linked with *Bunzi*, this does not mean that they identify one with the other. This may appear self-evident, and yet Father Bittremieux falls into a similar error by identifying the rainbow with *Mbumba*. Wherever the Kongo language or its derivatives are spoken the rainbow is called "*Kongolo*" (the arc)⁴²; I have heard "*Kongolo meme*" (the water arc) and "*Kongolo Mbumba*" (the arc of *Mbumba*); in Mayombe "*Ntsama, nkiama*" are generally used.⁴³ Father Bittremieux says that *Mbumba*, more commonly called *Mbumba Luangu*, is the Kiyombe name for the rainbow.⁴⁴ It is noteworthy that Craven in his Kongo Dictionary gives *Muluango* as meaning "rainbow," and does not couple it with *Mbumba*. The relation of *Muluango* to *Kalunga* will be dealt with at the end of this paper. In fact, the rainbows stands in the same relationship to *Mbumba* as the south wind stands to *Bunzi*; or, to take a similar case in English, as the sky stands to the theological Heaven. The Batetela call both the creative principle and the sun by the same name, but simply laughed at me when I suggested that the sun might be the active principle of creation.

The sea, the south wind, earth, and the sun are examples of symbols, so common in Bantu speech and Bantu art, which constantly baffle the fieldworker. He is a bold man indeed who presumes to be able to distinguish between hard facts and figures of speech when dealing with the African. The effect may be substituted for the cause, and one cause may be replaced by another if they produce the same effect.

³⁹ Bentley, Dictionary, etc., p. 344. R. E. Dennett, *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind*, pp. 115, 116, and 137.

⁴⁰ Dennett, *Black Man's Mind*, pp. 67 and 144.

⁴¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 545.

⁴² Bentley, Dictionary, etc. Cannecatti, *Bunda Dictionary*. Torday and Joyce, *Journ. Roy. Anthropol. Inst.*, vols. xxxv, p. 422; xxxvi, pp. 56 and 295.

⁴³ Bittremieux, *De Geheime Sekte der Bakhimba's*, p. 121. Dennett, *Black Man's Mind*, p. 142; *Folk Lore*, p. 6.

⁴⁴ Bittremieux, *Mayombsch Idioticon*, p. 387.

Livingstone gives a fine example of this. The great explorer asked a Mochuana what he meant by "holiness." "When copious showers have descended during the night, and all the earth, the leaves and cattle are washed clean, and the sun rising shows a drop of dew on every blade of grass, and the air breathes fresh – that is holiness."⁴⁵ One is naturally tempted to think that Livingstone has put his own thoughts into the native's mouth. Nobody who has conversed intimately with Africans will share this view. The Bantu is not a theologian but a man of strong emotions, and, to define "holiness," he gives an account of his feelings in its presence, or, more correctly, of an occasion when he was moved in a similar way. This figure of speech is very effective and very much to the point. Rain, sleek cattle, luscious grass may not affect us as they do a Mochuana; but are there no natural phenomena, as for example the sight of the rising sun suddenly inundating an alpine range with its rosy glow, which make us feel the emotions of a pious Moslem kissing the Kaaba, a devout Catholic entering the presence of the Pope, or a Bantu standing in front of his ancestor's shrine?

It is in vain that we search the earliest accounts of the Bakongo and kindred peoples for the word and idea of *Nzambi*. The first book on Kongo is by Duarte Lopez. His experiences must have been wide, as he stayed nine years in the country (1578–1587), and enjoyed the confidence of the Ntotila to such an extent that he was finally sent by him on an embassy to the Pope. This extremely serious investigator has suffered somehow at the hands of his editor, Pigafetta, who, wishing to enlarge the scope of his book, added a lot of doubtful matter concerning parts of Africa which Lopez had never visited. This must not prejudice us against Lopez, whose information concerning Kongo is reliable on the whole, and has been, for the most part, corroborated by successive travellers. He describes honestly what he saw or heard, but being ignorant of the language he frequently errs in his interpretations. He gives detailed accounts of the people's religion and frequently transcribes the native words used by them, though these are not always easy to identify. He says the natives were pagans and worshipped idols. Neither the word "*Nzambi*," nor any other which might be taken for a corruption of it, can be found in his book. He relates that each person worshipped such idols as best suited his taste; their gods were

⁴⁵ The Zambesi and its Tributaries, p. 64.

"...serpents, beasts, birds, plants, trees, various kind of wood and stone, carvings also on wood and stone, representations of the above to form pictures. And not only did they worship living animals, but also those stuffed with straw."⁴⁶

We must not take him too literally; he knew not the difference between worship and magical rites, just as he uses the word "idols" like all his contemporaries, in a very broad sense. The important point is, that he definitely states that before the advent of Christianity the people of Kongo knew of no living God.

We meet the word "*Nzambi Mpungu*" for the first time, and there once only, in *The Strange Adventures* of Andrew Battell taken from the mouth and notes of this valiant Essex sailor by Purchas. Battell was taken prisoner by the Portuguese and deported to Kongo; he arrived there in 1590, and spent eighteen years in the country. During one of his several attempts to escape he fell in with the Jaggas (Bayaka), and lived with them for twenty-one months; later again he dwelt for six months among natives, and for a considerable time he travelled about trading for the governor. We may assume that he acquired a good knowledge of the language, and this is borne out by internal evidence in his narrative. He was a remarkably keen observer, and many of his descriptions fitted exactly the conditions I found prevailing in 1904 in the Bayaka region. Every word of his rings true, and the simplicity of his account is most convincing. He visited Loango and Mayombe (which is ethnically, and was formerly politically, part of it)⁴⁷ in about 1600. He says that the inhabitants knew of no other religion than that of *Maramba*, in whom they believed, whose laws they obeyed, and whose relics they carried with them. Newly circumcized boys were dedicated to *Maramba* when ten to twelve years old,

"...but, for probation, are first put in a house, where they have hard diet, and must be mute for nine or ten days, any provocation to speak notwithstanding. Then do they bring him before Morumba and prescribe him his *Kin*, or perpetual abstinence from certain meat."⁴⁸

⁴⁶ History of the Kingdom of Kongo, p. 87.

⁴⁷ Dapper, Africa, pp. 321 and 332.

⁴⁸ Battell, op. cit., pp. 56 and 82.

This passage is of such importance that it is necessary to analyse it. Who is this mysterious *Maramba* or *Morumba* with whom we no longer meet in our days? Battell has tripped over one of those figures of speech to which I referred previously. A Muvili going to the enclosure where initiation takes place will say, "I go to the cross-roads," because it is usually situated there,⁴⁹ and the word for "cross-roads" is "*mavambu*." This "house of religion" finds in our days an unworthy descendant in the enclosure of the Bavili "secret sect of Bakimba," which honours Mbumba Luango, and keeps there *T'afu Maluango*

"...the emblem (*zinnebeeld*) of the *nkisi*-snake which we call 'rainbow,' consecrated in its turn to the spirit of the earth."⁵⁰

This "fetish" is also called *Mbumba Luangu*.⁵¹ Since Battell's days religious practices have much degenerated in Mayombe as well as in certain parts of Kongo,⁵² but this passage proves clearly that Battell has observed, or, at any rate, heard of, the initiation ceremony known in Kongo as Longo. This takes place in *Nzo Longo* (house of Longo), which is taboo. The word "*nlongo*" means, according to Father Bittremieux,

"...taboo to look at the great earth spirits as represented by certain stones in the forest, *kisi ntsi*."⁵³

I shall show later that this interpretation needs to be amended; but the linking up of *Maramba* with *Bakisi batsi* (plural) is a matter of some importance. *Bakisi Batsi* (or *baci*)⁵⁴ are the mysterious forces (*nkisi*) of the earth (*ntsi* or *nci*) with the personal plural prefix "*ba*," and as such include the dead ancestors, *Bakulu*, who live in the bowels

⁴⁹ Bittremieux, *Mayombsch Idioticon*, p. 222; Bakhimba, p. 48.

⁵⁰ Bittremieux, *Mayombsch Idioticon*, p. 504. Nkimba, mentioned already by Dapper (p. 337) as Cymbos-Bombas, is an astonishing mixture of Kimpasi and Longo ceremonies as practised in Mayombe. The name of its "fetish" Mbumba Luangu indicates such a fusion. An excellent description of it can be found in Bittremieux, *De Geheime Sekte der Bakhimba's*.

⁵¹ Bittremieux, *Mayombsch Idioticon*, pp. 320 and 387.

⁵² Dennett, *Black Man's Mind*, p. 132. Van Wing, *Kimpasi*, p. 82.

⁵³ Bittremieux, *Mayombsch Idioticon*, p. 515.

⁵⁴ Dennett, *Black Man's Mind*, p. 167.

of the earth,⁵⁵ and are the guiding voices of the dead. We may thus infer from Battell that it is in them alone that the Bavili believed; it is their laws which were kept and their relics which were always carried with them. When he says that "they are sworn to this religion at ten or twelve years old," he shows that the clan initiation ceremony, as a rite of ancestor worship, with seclusion, circumcision, in fliction of a taboo, and ordeals, is an old institution, though Bentley denies its existence.⁵⁶

It seems strange that after declaring that *Maramba* is the only religion of the Bayombe, Battell should say that "the king is so honoured as though he were a god among them, and is called *Sambe* and *Pongo*, that is God,"⁵⁷ all the more so as "*Nzambi* " has only recently become a name in common usage in Mayombe. Battell probably used a word with which he had become familiar in San Salvador, whence he came, and applied it to the king who, as the living ancestor, *Muluango*, exacted something like divine honours, and, as rain-maker, claimed divine powers. The word never occurs again in his book.

Father Antonio Cavazzi, of Montecuccolo, is beyond doubt our best authority on the early days of Kongo. He went there in 1654, stayed till 1667 and, after spending about three years in Rome, returned in 1670 for another long stay. He affirms his knowledge of the language by damning all missionaries who are ignorant of it.⁵⁸ Whilst living in the capital he observed the belief in *Nzambiampungo*, but says that other gods were not less adored and worshipped.⁵⁹ For many years after Cavazzi Christianity was but a cloak to the natives, and "they had two strings to their bow: the Catholic and the pagan faith."⁶⁰ When he comes to the interior, among the Jaggas (Bayaka), he finds that the most pronounced characteristic of their religion is the worship of the dead; they have no ideas of an intelligent, supreme, all-powerful

⁵⁵ Bittremieux, *Mayombsch Idioticon*, pp. 505, 508, and 148. Dennett, *Black Man's Mind*, pp. 81 and 82. "Tsi" may also mean "country" in the regional sense (see Bittremieux, p. 673). Bentley, *Dictionary*, etc. ("nxi"), p. 403.

⁵⁶ Bentley, *Dictionary*, etc., p. 507. Weeks, however, has observed initiation in the very part of Kongo where his colleague resided (see *Primitive Bakongo*, p. 171 et seq.).

⁵⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 46.

⁵⁸ *Op. cit.*, vol. iii, pp. 155 and 159.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 240.

⁶⁰ Dapper, *op. cit.*, p. 357.

God; they have no other gods than their ancestors, and do not even possess a word in their language for the Supreme Being. It is the ancestors who are invoked, and it is to them that first-fruits are offered.⁶¹ Further south in Angola he finds that the queen law-giver, Tem-Ban-Dumba, has restricted their whole religion to the worship of the departed.⁶² Their "idols" are kept in bags and boxes; statues and temples are erected for them.⁶³ Their priests and priestesses bear the name of the special idol they attend, and every province has its own idol.⁶⁴ These idols correspond to the ancestral baskets of the Kongo clans,⁶⁵ but the presence of anthropomorphic carvings appears at first strange, these being strictly taboo in the ancestral huts of Kongo. But this taboo does not seem to have been universal, for Dennett observed at the coronation of a Bavili chief the display of a statue of his predecessor, still wearing the cap, insignia of chieftainship, which was in the course of the ceremony transferred to the head of the new chief."⁶⁶ Cavazzit hen states that

"...in olden times the kings of Angola adored an idol called Calunga, i. e. the sea, or, according to others, the Supreme Lord."⁶⁷

Cavazzi uses the word "idol" as loosely as "fetish" is used nowadays; it seems to imply anything which has to do with religion or magic.

The next important witness is the Capucin Father Jerom Merolla of Sorrento, who went to Kongo as a missionary in 1682 and made two stays in the country. He was not an ideal missionary, but he had a quick eye for interesting things, and if we take his failings into account we find in him a useful guide. He mentions *Ziambia-bungù* once in the text, and gives *Zambiambunco* for "God" in his glossary. In the

⁶¹ Cavazzi, op. cit., vol. ii, pp. 159–61 and 172–4.

⁶² Ibid., vol. ii, p. 244.

⁶³ Ibid., vol. ii, p. 242.

⁶⁴ Ibid., vol. ii, p. 245. Torday and Joyce, *Man*, 1907, p. 52: In the Kwilu region, the Bambala Muri (probably survivals of the crowned chiefs, high-priests of ancestor worship), take the name of the bracelet which they inherit with their rank from their predecessor.

⁶⁵ Van Wing, *Etudes Bakongo*, p. 143.

⁶⁶ *Black Man's Mind*, p. 19.

⁶⁷ Op. cit., vol. ii, p. 272.

text the word occurs in connection with a purely Cristian ceremony. An image of the Holy Virgin was carried in procession in Cabinda, and the native women

"...clapp'd their Hands after the manner of Devotion and cried out in their *Language, Equadi Ziambiabungù, magotti, benchi, benchi*, That is, This is the Mother of God, oh how beautiful she is."⁶⁸

"*Equadi*" is a corruption of "*Na Ngudi*," a title of honour of matrons, and the last three words stand for *mbotem ingi, mingi* (very, very good), the words a stranger learns in Kongo as soon as he has given his first tip. That this had nothing to do with native religion is clearly shown by Merolla's account that the people of Cabinda were given to worship "clouterly carved idols."⁶⁹ Friar Anthony's efforts to convert the famous or notorious queen of the Jaggas, Zinga, make interesting reading. The pious Friar addressed her as follows:

"Madam, when I behold so many large and fruitful Valleys, enriched and adorned by so many Chrystal Streams, and defended from the Injuries of Weather by such high and pleasant Hills, all under your Majesty's command, I cannot forbear being so bold, as to ask who was the Author of these? Who fecunded the Ground, and afterwards ripens the Fruit? To which the Queen, without the least Hesitation, readily answered, My Ancestors."⁷⁰

This passage is ambiguous. If the notions of the Jaggas do not differ from what we know of practically all Bantu, the queen attributed only the acquisition and the fertility of the land to her ancestors. Ancestors are creatures, and creation is not among their attributes.

Another passage in Merolla relates to the priesthood of ancestor worship and the *rôle* attributed to the priests by their followers.

"Let us proceed to speak of other Wizards, who commonly die violent Deaths, and that for the most part voluntarily. For the present I shall speak only of the Head or Chief of these Wretches, from whom

⁶⁸ Jerom Merolla, Churchill, vol. i, p. 716. Ibid., p. 719.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 719.

⁷⁰ Jerom Merolla, Churchill, vol. i, p. 746.

the rest take example. He is called in the Country Language *Ganga Chitorne*, being reputed the God of the Earth, and to whom is consequently paid the first Fruits of all it produces, due to him, as they say, as its Author, and not either to the ordinary Work of Nature, or to the extraordinary one of Providence. This Power he also boasts to be able to communicate to others, when and as often as he pleases. He further asserts, that his Body is not capable of suffering natural Death; and therefore to confirm his Adorers in the Opinion, whenever he find his End approaching, either thru Age or Disease, he calls for such a one of his Disciples as he designs to succeed him, and pretends to communicate to him his great Power and afterwards in Publick (where this Tragedy is always acted), he commands him to tie a Halter about his Neck, and to strangle him therewith... If this Office were not thus continually filled, the Inhabitants say, that the Earth would become barren, and Mankind consequently perish. In my Time one of these Magicians was cast into the Sea, another into the River, a Mother and her Son put to Death, and many others banished by our Order, as has been said."⁷¹

Merolla's unfortunate victims were obviously the so-called "crowned" chiefs, i. e. the spiritual heads of clans and priests of ancestor worship. Their attributes, the general veneration which they rightly inspire, their voluntary violent death, are minutely described by Father Van Wing.⁷² "*Ganga chitorne*" might stand for "*Nganga chintoto*" (priest of the soil); but Cavazzi, familiar with the language, calls such a high-priest-considered God on earth, entitled to first-fruits, etc. – "*Chitombe*," and in another place, "*Chitomba*."⁷³ "Ch" and "K" are interchangeable; the word corresponds thus to *Chitumba* nad *Kitumba*, meaning "the presumptive," as e. g. in *Kitumba Kifume* (the heir-apparent to the chieftain-ship). Such a "crowned chief" was presumptive ancestor of the clan. Otherwise Cavazzi agrees with Merolla, without sharing his fanaticism, and adds that no chief or governor was obeyed by the people unless he was recognized by this sacred chief.⁷⁴ The secular power requires the sanction of the spiritual. Cavazzi men-

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 681.

⁷² Etudes Bakongo, p. 138 et seq.

⁷³ Op. cit., vol. ii, pp. 254 and 269.

⁷⁴ Ibid., vol. ii, pp. 256–7.

tions that nobody, not even princes, may enter the Chitombe's hut.⁷⁵ Merolla attempted to do so, but had to retreat before the threats of the people.⁷⁶

It appears then that up to the end of the seventeenth century, two hundred years after the advent of the first missionaries, the name of *Nzambi Mpungu* was unknown beyond the sphere of direct Christian influence; and, even then, if we may judge he passed from the present, "Creator" was used in the sense of "creation"; "God the Father," in that of first ancestor. This is illustrated by the following incident: Beyond the range of a Catholic mission a high-priest of the Kimpasi initiation ceremony, who generally bears the name of *Na Kongo* (the national ancestor), proclaimed himself *Nzanbi*.⁷⁷ In the middle of the eighteenth century Proyard finds in Loango *Nzambi a n'pongon* already spoken of as the creator and judge of men's actions.⁷⁸ Since then, the word has made rapid strides and has conquered a great part of the continent. But the victory is only an apparent one. The natives know what the white man understands by the name, and answer his questions in a way which will give satisfaction. That has not changed an iota in their ancient beliefs, and they will confide now and then in a friend, like Mr. Junod, and tell him that creation is simply due to Nature.⁷⁹ Nature is something kind yet awful, beneficent yet cruel; it is without hatred or favour, like the immense expanse of the sea (*Kalunga*) and the ever fruitful earth (*Mbumba*). An Ila philosopher⁸⁰ whether he be wrong or right as far as his own people are concerned – has got to the bed – rock of Western Bantu belief, when he said that creation was due to the conjunction of the Sky, i.e. Rain and the Earth. The beginning of all things is not due to the two elements as such, but to the reaction of one on the other, and their continuance is attributed to the same cause. Creation is the original procreation. What is, has always been; life started as it is maintained. As they see water, in the shape of rain, produce the fruits of the soil, the Bakongo believe that *Kalunga* and *Mbumba*, their prototypes, united to bring forth the Universe. And this dualistic idea pervading their religion is reflected

⁷⁵ Ibid., vol. ii, pp. 258–9.

⁷⁶ Merolla, op. cit., p. 719.

⁷⁷ Van Wing, *Etudes Bakongo*, p. 59. 5 *Histoire de Loango*, etc., p. 188.

⁷⁸ Henri Junod, *Life of a South African Tribe*, vol. ii, p. 279.

⁷⁹ Smith and Dale, *The Ila-speaking Peoples*, vol. ii, p. 196.

⁸⁰ Van Wing, *Etudes Bakongo*, p. 59.

not only in all its phases, but also in their conception of human society, including the ancestors, who are as living and loving to them as their parents who "still walk the grassy plains."⁸¹

Bentley stated many years ago that "the totem is transmitted from father to son,"⁸² but he was simply referring to a taboo which, contrary to the apparent usages of inheritance, descended patrilineally. He did not notice that this taboo was the outward sign of something much more important, and that his discovery disclosed the existence of bilateral descent in Bantu social organization. The patrilineal taboos have no connection with the totem, for, if we use this word as implying a mythological descent from a totem animal ancestor, then the leopard, *Ngo*, is the only totem known to the Kongo nation in its widest sense, comprehending all peoples who at any time recognized the spiritual or temporal lordship of the Ntotila, the living incarnation of *Na Kongo*, the Lord Kongo. This includes the inland tribes far beyond the Kwilu and the various seceded kingdoms such as Loango, Kakongo, Mayombe on the right bank of the Congo, and, in the south, Angola. The question whether the name of this people, "Bakongo," is derived from *Ba-Ngo* or *Basi-Ngo* (the leopard-people) we shall never be able to decide, as little faith can be attached to etymological derivations. Nor can we accept unreservedly Dennett's unsupported dictum that *Ngo* was the name of the first *Na Kongo*'s wife, though it must be noted that in Loango the sisters of the living ruler, potential mothers of kings, bore in his days the title "*Ngo*," i. e. "leopard".⁸³

The bearing of this on clans shall be dealt with later. The Ntotila is certainly more than an ordinary king, "*mutinu*" (ntinu in the archaic form), an appellation which he bears as a secondary title, and which has been also assumed since their emancipation by various chiefs (*mani*) of lesser countries who were formerly his vassals. *Ntotila* was translated in the seventeenth century as "his majesty," and Bentley interprets it as "emperor." But both these words imply a secular power, while there is palpable proof that *Ntotila* must be of a spiritual nature. The king of Kongo is the only person entitled to it in his lifetime, but lesser potentates, the former feudal princes, who are all scions of his royal house, also receive it after their death. This is, at any rate, the

⁸¹ *Pioneering*, vol. i, p. 263.

⁸² *Pioneering*, vol. i, p. 263.

⁸³ *Black Man's Mind*, p. 144.

case with the king of Loango⁸⁴; a fact which clearly implies ancestorship of some kind, a sort of holiness which is proper to the living *Urvater*, the incarnation of the first begetter of the nation (just as the Herero chiefs are living *Ovakuru*),⁸⁵ but cannot be attained by the heads of the younger branches until after death. *Ntotila* is the totem incarnate, the leopard-man.⁸⁶

It is well to remember, however inconsistent this may be with historical accounts, that from the native point of view there is really only one tribe, and that is Kongo, divided into exogamous branches, the result of quarrels and migrations. All these divisions, however, maintain their mystical allegiance and spiritual affinity to Kongo. Every person claims descent from Kongo,⁸⁷ and whenever a woman bears a child she is delivered at the same time of a leopard, for that is the name, "*ngo*," by which the after-birth, "the brother born at the same time," goes.⁸⁸ A leopard may be killed in self-defence only and the slayer has to retire into seclusion for three days after this sacrilege, probably for expiatory rites. The heart of the totem-animal, i. e. the part containing the greatest quantity of blood and, consequently, most of the soul, must be eaten by the sacred chief, or, in his absence, by the secular chief while the rest of the flesh is consumed by the elders after offering some to the ancestors. The hide becomes the couch of chiefs, and the claws, fangs and hair (whiskers would be more correct)⁸⁹ are deposited in the ancestral basket, there to mingle and to be worshipped with the relics of defunct chiefs and albinos, the latter being considered reincarnations of ancestors.⁹⁰

The taboos inherited, one from the mother and one from the father, can scarcely be connected with totems. They do not correspond to the name of the clan or tribe, which alone is treated with reverence; nor is there any trace of a belief that the life of each individual of the group

⁸⁴ Id., p. 24, quoting Bentley.

⁸⁵ Irle, op. cit., p. 72.

⁸⁶ E Ntotil'aka is a great oath. Bentley, Dictionary, etc., p. 502.

⁸⁷ Van Wing, Etudes Bakongo, p. 77.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 244.

⁸⁹ Lopez relates that any person bringing a leopard skin without the whiskers to the chief was severely punished (Pigafetta, History of the Kingdom of Kongo, p. 50).

⁹⁰ Van Wing, Etudes Bakongo, p. 147.

is bound up with that of one of the tabooed species.⁹¹ Father Van Wing, however, records an incident which may be taken as a sign that in a remote past the tabooed object itself may have been totemic, the secondary totem of the gens or clan. One word for taboo is "*kinkonko*" (plural *binkonko*), and "*nkonki*" also means genital parts, "*ki*" being the prefix denoting "that which pertains to." In a game played by children, not unlike "piggie went to market," one finger after the other is closed upon the palm to the accompaniment of conventional rhymes; when the thumb alone remains erect, the child says: "and this is *munkonki* (the personal form of *kinkonki*), the root of the clan."⁹²

Bantu sociologists have paid much attention within recent years to the Kongo clan, *kanda* (pl. *makanda*), *ekanda*, or, in a more archaic form, *dikanda* (pl. *mikanda*), the social group comprehending all individuals of both sexes, dead, living, and to come, who trace their descent in a direct uterine line from a common ancestress, first, original mother of the clan.⁹³ There is no difficulty in tracing a person's mother, but, when it comes to the father, the Bantu conception of "*tata*," which has been translated (quite wrongly) by "father," has such a wide meaning that confusion is well-nigh inevitable. There are male and female "*batata*"; besides the father provided by nature, a Mukongo may call his mother's sister, or brother, and certain grand-uncles, and even great-nephews "father" if the law of succession concedes this title to them.⁹⁴ There is also a relationship through the father, "*kitata*," which is exceedingly misleading; it defines the ties to one's father's matrilineal (clan) relatives.⁹⁵ But there is a direct patrilineal relationship which is entirely different; it is the gens, *luvila* (pl. *tuvila*; in the archaic form, *mvila*, pl. *zinvila*).

Both Van Wing and Bentley say that the words *kanda* and *luvila* are synonymous and interchangeable.⁹⁶ Father Van Wing considers the tribe an extension of the clan, and yet he admits no distinct characteristics to them. However, he translates "*luvila lu nsi etu*" as "our tribe and country," and says, on the opposite page, that the only word

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 118.

⁹² Ibid., p. 125. s

⁹³ Ibid., p. 118 et seq.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 131 et seq. Bittremieux, *Mayombsch Idioticon*, p. 638.

⁹⁵ Van Wing, *Etudes Bakongo*, p. 134.

⁹⁶ Van Wing, *Etudes Bakongo*, p. 118. Bentley, *Dictionary*, etc., p. 36.

denoting "clan" in a general sense (*en general*) is *kanda*.⁹⁷ He also contrasts the *Mpangu* tribe with the *Mpangu* clan.⁹⁸ Father Bittremieux, on the other hand, is quite explicit; he says that "*dikanda*" means "matriarchal system," and the "*mvila*" stands for gens (*geslacht*), descent (*afkomst*), sib (*sibbe*), tribe (*stam*), etc. He makes it quite clear that descent in the latter is patrilineal. A child belongs to his mother's clan, but is born into his father's tribe; he is freeman of the *kanda* and son of the *luvila*.⁹⁹ Both clan and gens are exogamous in themselves; but where a *kanda* and a *luvila* of the same name exist side by side, the members of the one can freely intermarry with the other. Two persons who are "free" (*bapfumu*) of the clan Vaku cannot marry; they are brother and sister by descent. Nor can two persons who are children (*bwana*) of the tribe Vaku marry; they are brother and sister by origin. But a freeman of the clan Vaku may marry a girl, child of the tribe Vaku, for they are neither both free of the same clan nor children of the same tribe. There is no incest.¹⁰⁰ Each tribe, or gens, traces its descent from a male ancestor in the male line, each clan from an ancestress in the female line. The tribes claim descent from Kongo himself. Whence come the clans, and who were their ancestresses? Amongst the ancient documents collected by Paiva Manso¹⁰¹ there is an account of pre-European history (confirmed by Cavazzi), attesting the general belief that the Meshi-congo (Bakongo) were foreign conquerors coming from the interior, who had subjugated the native Ambundu.

May not the present-day heads of clans be the descendants of the potential queen-mothers of the aboriginal clans married to Na Kongo or his sons? In Mayombe we find that the king of Loango is obliged to marry a princess of Ngoio after his coronation and to discard all his former wives.¹⁰² The chief of Ngoio is a representative of the original lords of the land, and as such a sacred chief (*mfumu mpu*, capped or crowned chief), head of a clan. Instead of being suffocated like other clan chiefs when his natural death appears to be imminent, he is killed

⁹⁷ Van Wing, *Etudes Bakongo*, pp. 116 and 117.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁹⁹ Bittremieux, *Mayombsch Idioticon*, pp. 112 and 424.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 110 and 112 et seq.

¹⁰¹ Vte. de Paiva Manso in *Boll. Acc. Sc. Lisboa*, 1877, p. 266.

¹⁰² Dennett, *Black Man's Mind*, p. 37. The King of Kakongo must marry a Soio princess. s. 8. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

on the night after his coronation.¹⁰³ This may be the price at which the conquerors allowed him, to retain, nominally at any rate, the temporal, as well as the spiritual, power. Such marriages would have been of great political value as uniting in their offspring both the rights of the original owners of the soil and those of the conquerors. When the Bakongo spread inland across the Inkisi river, a similar process may have taken place, resulting in the formation of new clans without increasing the number of gens; it may be for this reason that we find there several clans linked to a single gens, forming part of the same tribe.¹⁰⁴ Apart from descent there is a great similarity between gens and clan. Both have praise, or strong, names (*ndumbululu*, *kumbu ki ngolo*), and clan¹⁰⁵ and tribal¹⁰⁶ chiefs are enthroned with religious rites. I believe I shall be able to show that both have their initiation ceremonies.

One is naturally tempted to assume that in the remote past when they were equal in number, clans and tribes bearing the same name were endogamous. I have not succeeded in finding any positive proof for such a marriage custom. But there are signs that something like endogamy is achieved in an indirect way. Having two distinct lines of descent one would expect to find two forms of inheritance, as among the Ova-Herero, where inheritance of property is in the clan (*eanda*), and succession to chieftainship in the gens (*oturo*).¹⁰⁷ Such a differentiation has never been noted among the Bakongo; on the contrary it seems to me that further investigation will show that succession, at any rate, may be tied to both matrilineal and patrilineal descent. Cross-cousin marriage is not only practised among them, but it is favoured as a union which produces fertility and strength.¹⁰⁸ Whenever the successor of a deceased chief, temporal or spiritual, has to be designated, the elders unite, and discussions, lasting sometimes several days, take place to choose the right person; not only in Kongo, but in many other Bantu tribes.¹⁰⁹ If the succession were purely matrilineal

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 120.

¹⁰⁴ Van Wing, *Etudes Bakongo*, p. 81 et seq.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 142 et seq.

¹⁰⁶ Bittremieux, *Mayombsch Idioticon*, p. 570.

¹⁰⁷ Irle, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

¹⁰⁸ Dennett, *Black Man's Mind*, p. 36. Van Wing, *Etudes Bakongo*, p. 191.

¹⁰⁹ Van Wing, *Etudes Bakongo*, pp. 140 and 157. Torday and Joyce, *Kasai*, pp. 14 and 44. Schmitz, *Les Basonge*, p. 462; *Mayombe*, p. 415 (the two last

no difficulty could arise. Neither legitimacy nor primogeniture are considered¹¹⁰; there must be some other principle guiding the elders which has escaped us. I venture the theory (it is nothing more, though supported by circumstantial evidence) that an attempt is made to find a person who is of both the clan and gens of the original chief. In the first instance this can be achieved only in the second generation. The first successor of a chief will be his sister's son, who is of his clan (inherited from his mother) but not of his gens (which is that of the chief's sister's husband). The same will be the case with the new chief's sister. Should she, however, marry the first chief's son, her cross-cousin, a child of such a union will inherit from his mother the clan and from his father the gens of the first chief whose prospective heir he is. A chief like this might, like the noble chief of Mpangu in his praise-song, proclaim himself a whole man, i. e. a full-blooded Mpangu.¹¹¹

The division into genets and clans is closely connected with the western Bantu conception of the dual soul. Every person has a spiritual soul (*moyo*), and a sensory soul, which is called *mfumu kutu* (VanWing), *lunzi* (Bittremieux), *mwanda* (Bentley), and various other names, all meaning exactly the same thing. The functions of the spiritual soul are to think and will those of the sensory soul to perceive by the senses. The sensory soul can leave the body, as it does during sleep and fainting,¹¹² and return, while the departure of the *moyo* means death. The sensory soul resides in the head, but the spiritual permeates the blood, and is thus spread all over the body, though most of it is in the heart and liver. For this reason the spilling of blood is such a serious crime: it offends and curtails the victim's soul. For the same cause it plays such an important part in magic.¹¹³ The death of a Mukongo occurs in two stages: first he loses his senses by the departure of the sensory soul; now he is no longer a man, but he is not yet a corpse, because as long as red blood remains in him his soul is still in his inanimate body. The blood has to dry up before the soul can join

in the Van Overbergh collection). (See also the wars of succession in Kongo under Affonso I and Affonso II.)

¹¹⁰ Dapper, op. cit., pp. 353-4. Van Wing, *Etudes Bakongo*, p. 119.

¹¹¹ Van Wing, *Etudes Bakongo*, p. 80.

¹¹² Id., *Kimpasi*, p. 25.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 22 et seq.

the *bakulu* (ancestors),¹¹⁴ and it is to hasten this happy event that in many parts the corpse is dried over or beneath a fire.¹¹⁵

While the spiritual soul has become an *nkulu* and continues its life underground, what happens to the sensory soul? Our greatest authority on the Bakongo, Father Van Wing, says that his Bampangu could not tell him any more whither it went than whence it came.¹¹⁶ This means that the Bakongo whom he had specially studied do not know, or no longer know. We have then to look to some other part of the country for the solution, and we find it nearer to the capital in the region where Weeks and Bentley have made their observations. Weeks never understood, and consequently would never admit, the duality of the soul; *mnoyo* (the spiritual soul) meant simply life to him,¹¹⁷ and, consequently, he saw no reason to inquire about its fate after death. But both he and Mr. Bentley grasped that *mwanda* (the sensory soul) was something spirit-like, and they naturally asked questions about its final destination. They were told by some that it went to dwell in a great mysterious forest; others, however, asserted that it went to a land under the sea.¹¹⁸ Among the Bampangu, an inland tribe, there can be no question of the sea; but Father Van Wing was told about spirits, very powerful spirits indeed, who dwell in virgin forests near or in the rivers.¹¹⁹ These are the *nkita* (or *bakita*), spirits of men who have died a violent death; the greatest among them are those of heroes fallen in war, the ancestors from the beginning, the first progenitors (*de voorouders van't begin, de oorvaders*),¹²⁰ probably the conquerors of old who had led the tribe to its present home. *Nkita* (*Bakita*) is a personal form of *Kita* (*bita*) (shade).¹²¹

According to Bakongo notions, the perceptible counterpart of the sensory soul is the shadow, just as the name is linked with the spiritual

¹¹⁴ Van Wing, *Etudes Bakongo*, p. 276 note.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 278. Monteiro, *Angola*, vol. i, p. 274. Proyard also mentions the matter.

¹¹⁶ Van Wing, *Kimpasi*, p. 25.

¹¹⁷ Among the Primitive Bakongo, p. 283. Bentley, however, makes a distinction between soul and spirit (see his *Dictionary*, etc., under "soul").

¹¹⁸ Bentley, *Dictionary*, etc., p. 503. Weeks, *Bakongo*, p. 278.

¹¹⁹ Van Wing, *Kimpasi*, pp. 44 and 93.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹²¹ Bentley, *Dictionary*, etc., Appendix, p. 849.

soul.¹²² If we put these statements together, can there be any doubt that we have to deal with a second kind of ancestors, corresponding to the second soul? The *moyo* (which I propose to call the "maternal soul") goes to the *bakulu* (clan ancestors) underground, while the *mfumu kutu* (the "paternal soul") joins the *nkita* (gens ancestors) under or near the water. Before one is certain that the *nkita* are of the same rank as the *bakulu* ancestors, it is necessary to show that they are made the object of some form of worship, distinct from the share they may have in the libations on graves. There can be no doubt that this happens, though it has been observed in certain parts of the country only. The Bakongo chiefs in the north-eastern section of the kingdom retire before their enthronement with their principal wife to the forest for some weeks, and there perform rites and dances before the *binkita* ancestral relics, consisting of teeth and hair.¹²³ Father Van Wing puts the word "*binkita*" in inverted commas and offers no translation; it is obviously the plural of "*kinkita*." "*Ki*" is a prefix denoting that the thing pertains to the noun that follows. The meaning is "relics of *nkita*"; thus the *nkita* and *bakulu* are put on the same footing. There remains, however, the clan initiation to which an equivalent has not yet been mentioned.

It exists, however, in *Kimpasi* or *Ndembo*, of which Cavazzi had already heard, but which has been hitherto considered a secret sect. It corresponds in so many ways to Longo, the clan initiation, that it is impossible to conceive that it should have a different character. The habitation of the neophytes in both is called "*vwela*"¹²⁴ or "*vela*"; both take place in secreted enclosures which are burnt after the ceremony is over.¹²⁵ As in the house of the ancestors, a fire is kept alive in both which must on no account be allowed to go out.¹²⁶ In both it is, if not necessary, at any rate desirable, that an albino should be present, these "white lords" being considered reincarnations of ancient chiefs.¹²⁷ In both taboos are inflicted and secrecy enjoined.¹²⁸ And, as for the Ban-

¹²² Van Wing, *Kimpasi*, pp. 26 and 28.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

¹²⁴ Van Wing, in *Congo*, 1920, vol. ii, p. 236. Weeks, *Bakongo*, pp. 160 and 172.

¹²⁵ Van Wing, in *Congo*, 1921, vol. i, p. 370.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1921, vol. i, p. 58. *Etudes Bakongo*, p. 146.

¹²⁷ Van Wing, *Etudes Bakongo*, p. 147. Weeks, *Bakongo*, p. 159.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 123. *Ibid.*, p. 245.

tu the name is not a mere sound and outward sign, but the integral part of his personality; in both a change in the status, such as admission to the clan and the gens, requires that a new one should be assumed.¹²⁹

"Longo" is a word used for "taboo," and "Nzo longo" may thus mean the "tabooed house." But I am convinced that Father Van Wing is right in accepting the other meaning of *longo*, "legitimate wedlock," in this connection. *Longo* is one of those rites which one finds so frequently in connection with changes in the mood of the individual's life; it is, however, not a puberty rite as generally believed, but one preparatory to parenthood as one might expect from its name: for the African the principal reason for marriage is the begetting of children. Marriage itself does not bar a man from admittance to *Nzo longo*, but any man who has begotten a child can no longer be initiated;¹³⁰ and among the Bavili, a girl who conceives before passing through the painting-house (the survival of former female clan initiation) is severely punished,¹³¹ or has to undergo special rites and is called "*kumbi* of *Mbumba Luangu*," bride of the principal *nkisi* of initiation.¹³² The real puberty rites are connected with *Kimpasi*, and *Longo* and *Kimpasi* are the principal *rites de passage* in a western Bantu's life. The *Longo* initiation is separate for boys and girls; in the course of it the former are circumcized, while the latter have some slight operation performed on them; in *Kimpasi* both sexes are initiated together.

Kimpasi, or *Ndembo*, is neither a guild, nor secret society, nor sect. Father Van Wing, in his learned exposition of the subject tentatively points himself in that direction.¹³³ Internal evidence leaves no doubt that it is a puberty rite connected with the absorption of youths and maidens in the totem, and their incorporation in to the gens (tribe) to which their *nkita* ancestry calls them. It is believed that by union with the original ancestors of the nation or tribe they will acquire some of their virile powers, and thus succeed in producing the riches valued by them above all "human riches," i. e. children. The ceremony takes place in an enclosure, called in ordinary language "*nzo lufuba*," but spoken of by the initiates as the "*nkita* village" or "our Kongo."¹³⁴ The

¹²⁹ Van Wing, *Kimpasi*, p. 28.

¹³⁰ Id., in *Congo*, 1920, vol. ii, p. 234.

¹³¹ Dennett, *Black Man's Mind*, p. 51.

¹³² Bittremieux, *op. cit.*, p. 293.

¹³³ Van Wing, *Kimpasi*, p. 78.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 15 and 16.

principal officiating priest is called for the occasion *Na Kongo* (Lord Kongo).¹³⁵ The enclosure must be in the forest near water, as it is in such places that the *nkita* ancestors dwell.¹³⁶ When several gentes are initiated at the same time, a separate hut is reserved for each, and some distinction is made between children of pure descent and such as have the blood of slaves in them.¹³⁷ Should the initiation be delayed, barrenness of women and other misfortunes will remind the villagers of their duties to the *nkita*.¹³⁸ Young people of both sexes are admitted; they are supposed to die the *nkita* death, travel to *nkita* life, and, finally, after resurrection, return to their homes as new-born *nkita* children.¹³⁹ Ordinary death implies the loss of both souls, and is final; *nkita* death means the gradual merging of the individual paternal soul into that of the tribe and totem. The verb used by Father Van Wing's informants to describe the journey of the soul to its new sphere is "*fu-tumuka*"¹⁴⁰ (i. e. to ascend); had they wished to express a change they would have said "*vilula*." With the *nkita* death the sensory soul leaves the candidate, and, while it ascends, he (or she) must pretend to be insensible to the ill-treatment to which the neophytes are ungrudgingly subjected.¹⁴¹ The boys and girls are laid out naked in pairs, "but must not know each other, even as if they were palms."¹⁴²

This appears to be symbolical of their loss of the senses, especially if taken in connection with the sexual excesses, such as coitus, masturbation and pederasty, which are practised¹⁴³ after the recovery of, or reunion with, a special powerful "ripened" sensory soul. Every individual's soul is a fraction of the undivided tribal soul, as every tribal soul is an integral part of the Kongo soul – hence the saying that the novices "go to Kongo, our Kongo." There appears to be some affinity between the proto-elements and the two souls; *Mbumba* attracts the maternal, *Kalunga* the paternal, soul. Thus we find that at the clan initiation *Mbumba* is the presiding genius, while in *Kimpasi* it is *Ka-*

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 17.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 14.

¹³⁷ Ibid., pp. 15 and 69.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 12. p.

¹³⁹ Van Wing, *Kimpasi*, p. 42.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 62.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 53. Ibid., p. 54 et seq. Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁴² Bentley, *Dictionary*, etc., p. 507.

¹⁴³ Weeks, *Bakongo*, p. 163.

lunga, represented by "Kalunga's stone,"¹⁴⁴ who forms the pivot round which the ceremonies turn. *Kalunga's* stone is surrounded by objects which come either out of the water or are derived from aquatic plants,¹⁴⁵ while the central piece of the *Longo* rite is a mushroom-shaped termite-nest, i. e. soil fetched up from the depth of the earth.¹⁴⁶ The departed maternal souls (*bakulu*) dwell in the bowels of the earth, while the paternal souls go after death as *nkita* under the sea or haunt the rivers. This proximity to earth and water apparently gives the ancestors some influence over the elements, and it is for this reason that they are approached with prayers in case of famine, drought, and other calamities due to them.

The linking of the souls with the creative elements is common far beyond the confines of the western Bantu. The Baluba believe that the genius presiding over the world of the departed is *Kalunga Ndembo*,¹⁴⁷ and *Ndembo* is one of the words used by the Bakongo for the place where the living unite with the souls of the dead. The resemblance of the word *Mulungu*, so widely used among the eastern Bantu, with the Bakongo word *Muluango* may be a pure coincidence; but it is at any rate worth noting that the Yao, like the Kongo people, use it occasionally for the rainbow too.¹⁴⁸ Dr. Stannus considers¹⁴⁹ that *Mulungu* is more like a place where spirits dwell than a personality, and according to Duff MacDonald,¹⁵⁰ it is a spirit consisting of all the departed spirits added together. Like *Kalunga*, the *Mulungu* of the

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 43. In a ceremony which appears to be a degenerate form of, or a supplementary rite to, Kimpasi, the stone used is described as "a pillar of rock," like a man without arms and head (Bittremieux, op. cit., p. 595 et seq.). The *Kalunga* "fetish" (see Colle, Les Baluba, Van Overbergh collection, p. 435) of the Baluba consists of an erect tree-trunk with faces looking in opposite directions at the summit. The protruding chins of the faces increase the resemblance to a phallus. Phalli of clay moulded on wooden cores were observed among the Bayanzi in the Kwilu region (see Torday and Joyce, Journ. Roy. Anthropol. Inst., vol. xxxvii, p. 141). In Kimpasi, the fruit of *Amomuma lbo-violaceum* erves, in consequence of its shape, as the emblem of pud-viri (see Van Wing, Kimpasi, p. 75).

¹⁴⁵ Van Wing, Kimpasi, p. 44.

¹⁴⁶ Id., in Congo, 1920, vol. ii, p. 48.

¹⁴⁷ R. P. Colle, op. cit., p. 447 et seq.

¹⁴⁸ Duff MacDonald, Africana, vol. i, p. 67.

¹⁴⁹ "The Wayao in Nyasaland," in Harvard African Studies, vol. iii, p. 312.

¹⁵⁰ Op. cit., vol. i, p. 66.

Yao is the rain-giver, and the Akamba believe that he dwells in the clouds or in the sea.¹⁵¹ Mr. Lindblom is of opinion that *Mulungu's* name is identical with *Mumbi*, a word derived, according to him, from the root *umba*, to shape like a pot,¹⁵² i. e. the same as that of *Mbumba*. But there is good reason to believe that this is a case of mistaking identity of functions for identity of personality, for one of his informants clearly indicated to Mr. Lindblom duality in the creative principle.¹⁵³ It seems quite possible that the Kiyombe name of *Mbumba Luangu*, by combining the names of the proto-elements, tries to express their union which, as the rainbow, stands for the symbol of creation.

I cannot end this paper without expressing my indebtedness to my friends, Father Van Wing, Captain Rattray, and the Rev. Edwin W. Smith, for the great help I have derived from their books, and, perhaps even more, from their conversation. This does, of course, not imply that they share my views.

¹⁵¹ Gerhard Lindblom, *The Akamba*, pp. 247 and 251.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 244.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 251.