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Reviewed work(s):
Source: *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 37 (Spring, 2000), pp. 49-71
Published by: The President and Fellows of Harvard College acting through the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/20167493
Accessed: 24/03/2012 17:23

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From performative utterance to performative object

Pende theories of speech, blood sacrifice, and power objects

ZOE S. STROTHER

In memory of the brilliant, the charming,
the exasperating Mukishi Loange

Mutshi udi matsui, mun'a muthu ashiko matsui.
A tree has ears, [but] the human child has none.

Munzenze Kavuka is about to be legally invested as Chief Kombo-Kiboto in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). It is December 19, 1987, about 9:30 A.M. He stands, axe-at-the-ready, as two young men stretch out a blind-folded ram at his feet. The large crowd jostles nervously and strains to see what will happen. The suspense builds as he begins to dance, flourishing the blade, stutter-stepping over the ram, and back again. As he steps over it for the third time, he brings down the iron blade and beheads the ram with one blow.

In the United States, a president is elected to office in November; however, he does not legally assume that position until months later when he takes the oath of office. Following that legal rite of investiture, the new president gives a speech and is presented to the public in the inaugural day parade. In Eastern Pendeland, this order of inauguration is reversed: the chief-elect is presented to the people in a parade, he gives a speech (fig. 1), and then he undergoes the definitive rite of investiture, beheading the ram. This different order of investiture points to a different evaluation of speech.

For the American president, the oath, the promise to uphold the laws of the United States *in the future,* is what counts. It is a "performative utterance" in its purest form (Austin [1962] 1975:1–11). The oath transforms the president-elect into president and renders him legally accountable for his actions. The longer speech that follows is inconsequential. It may be bland or memorable; it usually aspires to give a vision of what the new president would like to accomplish.

In contrast, the Pende chief-elect addresses *the past.* His speech is a history of the clan, which names their female genetrix and traces the route of migration from their point of origin in Angola to the present. In fact, the difficult task of successfully beheading a ram in one blow is a test for the truth of his declarations. Is he who he says he is? The chief-elect must speak *before* he is invested so that the dead may judge whether or not he is a fit candidate. In the Pende language, "he was invested" *(wasambile)* cannot be divorced from its literal meaning, "he beheaded [the ram] by sword's blade," and its symbolic import, "on that day he told the truth about who we are and whence we came." Although the philosopher Austin would rid speech analysis of a "true/false fetish" ([1962] 1975:151), ritualized performative speech among the Pende may be identified precisely by the inclusion of a true/false test.

Ordinary individuals invoke the power of performative speech on a multitude of occasions: when a child leaves for the big city; when a long lost relative arrives; when someone is ill; before hunting; before killing a dog; when someone hears mysterious noises in the night. Some work at fine-tuning the fire and brimstone of their deathbed oration for most of their adult lives. In fact, oratory is considered so powerful that "domination" is predicated upon rhetorical, rather than physical, prowess. Mediators are the ultimate dominators, because they work mind games in persuading people to do what they swore they would not.

Likewise, when it comes to making performative objects (here called "power objects"), many Pende will say that "it is the words that work" *(mbimbi jikuatshi mudimo).*[1] The role of speech in activating power objects is widely

Many thanks to Constantine Petridis, Mariane Ferme, and the anonymous reviewers for their comments on this essay. They substantially improved its argument, although they may not agree with its direction.

1. In this, they are not alone. Malinowski observed that the Trobrianders attributed the power of their magic to the words used in ritual (1935). In reviewing anthropological literature, S. J. Tambiah observes:

In most cases it would appear that ritual words are at least as important as other kinds of ritual act. . . . very often . . . if the ethnographer questions his informants "Why is this ritual effective?" the reply takes the form of a formally expressed belief that the power is in the "words" even though the words only become effective if uttered in a very special context of other action (1968:176).

As part of a shift in focus from the content of utterances to their "meaning" in performative context, many anthropologists have

Figure 1. Munzenze Kavuka demonstrates that he knows the history of his family during investiture as Chief Kombo-Kiboto. The truthfulness of his account will be tested when he steps down to behead a ram with one blow. Ndjindji, Democratic Republic of the Congo, December 19, 1987, about 9:15 A.M. Photo: Z. S. Strother.

acknowledged in Africa.[2] These objects, whether in the form of statuettes (figs. 3–4) or packets of leaves and animal parts, are enabled by speech to work on the physical world, often to heal, to protect, or to render justice. As in investiture, if the words are right, the action will follow.

Central African ethnography tingles with enigmatic references to "incantations," "conjuring," "spells," and "invocations."[3] As early as 1915, a Kongo evangelist named Kavuna Simon wrote that certain objects *(minkisi)* had "the power to afflict and to heal. . . . They receive these powers by composition, conjuring, and consecration" (in MacGaffey 1993:21). The principles of manufacture are well analyzed. Wyatt MacGaffey explains: "The composition . . . of important *minkisi* requires that a spirit from the land of the dead be captured and included among the medicines. In practice, this requirement is met by including something that has been in contact with the dead, such as earth

examined the actions, social relationships, gestures, and objects used in rituals, which seem to undercut any native claim that words are predominant. For example, in the case of the Trobrianders, Annette B. Weiner argues that the "objects actually are as important as the spell because, without the appropriate object, the action of the spell would be ineffective" (1984:182). Although, as will become clear, my Pende interlocutors would agree with Weiner that words work better in conjunction with objects, this article wishes to explore why it is that they nonetheless privilege speech in the composition of power objects.

2. See McNaughton 1982; MacGaffey 1988:190; Blier 1995:74–78. The most comprehensive studies of African theories of speech have emerged from Mali. See Zahan 1963; Calame-Griaule [1965] 1986; Bâ 1981; Brett-Smith 1994:8–19.

3. Despite widespread references, actual texts are unfortunately rare. For exceptions, see Van Wing 1930; Borgonjon 1965; MacGaffey 1977:173–175; De Boeck 1991.

from a grave" (1990:51).[4] Containers, once ranging from raffia bags to imposing wooden statues, hold both "spirit-*embodying* materials" (like the grave dirt) and "spirit-*directing* medicines," which instruct the arrested spirit "by way of puns and symbols—how to hunt down evil or, say, make a person more decisive in daily affairs" (Thompson 1983:117–118).

Nevertheless, the question remains: why does anyone believe that these containers of medicines will work? The answer lies in the theory of speech and sacrifice. Kavuna Simon cites "conjuring" and "consecration." According to Chief Nzambi from the Eastern Pende, preparing a packet and not speaking is akin to writing a letter and leaving off the stamp. It's not going anywhere.

Writing in 3-D

The unexpected analogy drawn between the performative object (the packet) and a message-bearing form of writing (a letter) demands exegesis. The closest Pende equivalent to the *minkisi* cited by Kavuna Simon are known as *wanga,* preparations used to manipulate the material and spirit world for personal advantage. The emphasis on private gain is important, because it lends the term a distinct pejorative nuance for the Pende that perhaps justifies its translation as "sorcery." *Wanga* may be used to kill and to cause illness. And yet, it is also associated with all talents and abilities that surpass the ordinary. The champion athlete, the "straight-A" student, and the wealthy businessman are all presumed to have acquired *wanga.*[5] Wearing perfume is a classic use of *wanga,* because it involves deploying a pleasant or sexy scent in order to secure favorable reactions from others.

Individuals seeking *wanga* usually purchase ready-made packets of medicine. Others pay significantly more to acquire the recipe for a particular composition. Strikingly, individuals who purchase recipes often do not understand the "why" of the knowledge that they have purchased. They follow the instructions as one might seek to reproduce a recipe from a cooking manual without necessarily comprehending why baking powder is used instead of baking soda. The true specialists are the men who compose the recipes, who have considerable knowledge of healing, and who seek publicity because they live on the earnings generated through services to clients. These individuals, the "great *nganga" (ngina ya nganga),* are recognized intellectuals.

Analysis of recipes reveals unstated but regular principles of composition that justify Nzambi's analogy of packet to letter. The following is Mboyo Mwangu's recipe for a medicine used to prevent the rain from falling *(kihulo).*[6]

> Gather:
>
> > leaves caught swirling. A strong wind begins brusquely and snatches up leaves (even clothes) in a tornadolike funnel. One must catch the leaves in mid-air.
>
> Roast the leaves together with:
>
> > hot pepper *(ndoma)*
> >
> > red clay *(mungundu)*
> >
> > a chip of palm bamboo from the bed where someone died
>
> Place the resulting ashes in the horn of a gazelle *(mbambi).*
>
> Cover the top of the horn with a black rag and pierce it with:
>
> > the longest feather pulled from the tail of a rooster
>
> Place the horn on a rooftop of a kitchen or other building in the vicinity. There are no restrictions on the maker, but one should be very careful in removing the *kihulo* for fear of releasing a torrent of rain.

Mboyo explained the reasons behind the choice of ingredients. Hot pepper is used as an image of expulsive force. When it is roasting, it releases into the air an

4. Depending on the specialty of the *minkisi,* the captured spirit might or might not belong to a deceased relative (Thompson 1983:18). MacGaffey's warning is well taken; Westerners must avoid thinking of "'spirits' as necessarily 'objects of worship'" (1994:126).

5. The ambivalent stance toward *wanga* is marked linguistically in the term signifying "specialist in *wanga."* When used singly, the word *nganga* today carries terrific pejorative impact. Essentially, it signifies "criminal sorcerer," someone who uses his (rarely her) knowledge of physical and metaphysical properties to hurt others. In practice, the term is thrown at older men of jealous or choleric personality who carp about their junior relatives.

In contrast, when joined to another word, *nganga* comes to signify "ritual expert specializing in . . ." So *nganga khita* is a specialist in the *khita* gynecological ritual; *nganga mukanda* is a circumcizer; *nganga mbua* is a master hunter; *nganga ngombo* is a type of diviner; *nganga buka* is a healer. Doctors trained in Western biomedicine are referred to as *munganga.* In these cases, the individual's knowledge is turned to social benefit.

6. Mboyo purchased this recipe in 1987 from an unnamed source as a gift for his brother-in-law, who was undergoing investiture for the Kime chieftaincy. Mboyo knew that a chief would have need to secure sunny days for masquerades and other festivals.

invisible "smoke" that stings the eyes and hurts abominably, so that people recoil before it. The deep red clay is associated with hunters, surgeons, soldiers, and ritual specialists, who mark their faces with it in order to show courage in the face of danger. In this case, it serves as a symbol of the ability to accomplish difficult tasks. The gazelle is small but so fast that it can cover terrific distances in a few minutes. The rooster is classed as a solar bird, because it crows at first daylight. Like the red pepper, the fragment from the bed where someone has died serves as an image of a great wind moving something before it.[7] Many Pende believe that the death rattle is caused by the dying person's breath *(muhehe)* pushing the spirit *(kivule)* out of the body.

Mboyo's exegesis makes it clear that the seemingly random collage of objects grouped by the recipe expresses a message "written" in three-dimensional materials. Metaphor so dominates the selection process that the recipe is best grasped in its entirety, as a composition, through figurative language, rather than as a list of ingredients:

> Capture these clouds.
> Drive them away,
> As people stampede back from a gust of roasting pepper.
> No matter how difficult,
> Blow them away in a mighty rush.
> Let us welcome the return of the sun.
> Take effect quickly and
> Blow them far, far away.

The recipe's message is ordered according to a certain temporal logic: capture the clouds; blow them away; let the sun return; do it quickly. Rhetorical emphasis is achieved through varied repetition. In this case, the red pepper and the chip from a deathbed underscore the emphasis on moving the clouds elsewhere. The repetition usually indicates the specialized focus of the recipe. In the vocabulary of poetry, the work is structured by a dominant metaphor. In the case of medicines against the rain, either one concentrates on the image of displacing rain clouds or of "drying them up." Mboyo's *kihulo* works under the principle of blowing away any threatening clouds.

As Nzambi suggested, the recipe functions as a form of writing. Much contemporary thought has distinguished writing from speech as a form of language that does not depend upon the presence of its generator. Derrida has theorized that "'writing' signifies inscription and especially the durable institution of a sign (and that is the only irreducible kernel of the concept of writing)" (1976 [1967]:44). Through the collection of objects, the recipe transcribes its message into a semipermanent script that has the capacity to signify in the absence of its creator. The composition is given material form through the metonymical evocation of a metaphor. For example, the rooster's feather serves as a three-dimensional pictogram expressing the idea "return of the sun." The piling up of metaphor gives the message, simple enough in itself ("I want the rain clouds to disappear"), a highly "literary" or aestheticized quality. Anthropologist Luc de Heusch refers to this kind of composition as an "object-discourse" (1970: 812).

Chief Nzambi relies on a simpler recipe structured around the idea of drying up the moisture in the clouds.

> Gather:
>
> one withered leaf picked from a bush of fresh, healthy leaves
>
> some dried stalks gathered amidst a field of flourishing green grass
>
> Place the leaf and straw on a rooftop in the vicinity.

The chief ran to gather these materials when it began to drizzle briefly at a masquerade in 1988. He later explained, "We compare the rain to fresh leaves. And we also compare it to fresh grass. `You [the dried-up leaf] were once fresh, but now you are withered and dry.' Thus, we want the rain to stop [lit. dry up] and be like you.'"[8]

Nzambi's recipe is stripped down to fundamentals. Early in my visit, when I asked frail Chief Kombo-Kiboto to define *wanga,* he took me by the arm with one hand and pointed with the other to the treetops: "All the leaves that you see, they are [the essence of] *wanga.*"[9] The reason for this lies in an oft-cited proverb: "A tree

7. "[The piece from the] bed is [represents] the force to push out with the wind as the spirit [is pushed out from the body at death]" *(Kitanda kidi kuzuka mu muhehe ula kivule).* (All quotations from Pende sources are taken from the author's fieldnotes or tape recordings.)

8. *Tsuenya kufezekesa vula nu diji dia kitebe. Tsufezekese luyadi vula nu mulenge wa kitebe. "Aye, diji wakhadile wa kitebe, henyaha wamikina, aye mulenge wakhadile wa kitebe, henyaha wamikina. Hene tsuakunda vula imikine ula aye diji nu mulenge."*

9. *Meji yagasue muenji kumona, awa wanga.*

has ears, [but] the human child has none."[10] The quality of plants that people find most compelling is their unstinting obedience. A plant, whether started by seed or slip, grows *exactly* where it is placed. It cannot wander off or display a rebellious will of its own. No other being can ever live up to this ethos of steadfastness. Less frequently, people also refer to the capacity for transformation in a seed, which destroys itself to emerge, in a radically different form, as a sprout.

Another day, I expressed my disappointment to old Chief Kingange at the commonness of most of the constituents of the recipes quoted to me, consisting often of stones, eggs, and plants found within a radius of a fifteen-minute walk of the house. He hooted with delight, "*Wanga* is not a metal!," that is, it is not made of something precious or durable or extraordinary. On another occasion, Chief Nzambi seconded this sentiment: "*Wanga* is not [something that] glitters." In fact, the subtlest minds enjoy using the materials of everyday life, whose properties most people do not understand.

If the recipe comprises an "object-discourse," to whom is that discourse directed? When Kingange said that *wanga* was not something flashy, he went on to explain that its power rested in both the leaves and the words: a medicine against the rain also demands a speech justifying the patron's actions *(musanzo).* Kingange recommended telling all that one knew of the genealogy of the recipe, its inventor and who had taught the person who taught it to you: "I bought this [recipe] fair and square from you and now I also have need of it. If clouds stay fixed in place when the wind blows, then I accept that it will rain. But if the wind can drive clouds before it, then may it do so today, so that it rains far from here, permitting me to finish my work."[11]

These speeches are addressed to the dead *(vumbi).* Specialists advise citing the authors of a recipe as a means of "conjuring," that is, of calling interested individuals among the dead.[12] Stating the project or the fact that it has continued for generations is another means of interesting individual spirits, who are pleased that their legacy continues, even when one cannot invoke their proper names.

In the case cited above, it transpired that Chief Nzambi gathered the necessary leaves only after he had gone to an altar to pray. He stressed the interrelationship of word to object:

> If an animal passes, [and] you say, "Animal, die!," will it die? One needs both a prayer *(lukhasa)* and a gun, so that when you take the gun, [and] you fire, [the animal] will die. It's the same thing with the rain. The dry leaf and the withered grass, these are the gun. It's not enough to speak alone.[13]

Nonetheless, the power in the medicine stems from the word. He compared the object (the recipe packet) to a gun; the word provides the "fire" that drives the bullet toward its mark.

Like Nzambi, the specialist Kombo-Kakese emphasized that, although the dead *(vumbi)* activate the recipes, there must be *something* to be activated. The word does not work with everything; the specialist demonstrates knowledge of the unique history or properties of the substance. For example, he might know that blacksmiths are particularly drawn to a certain tree because of its ample shade for their forge or that a certain plant has a long history of association with Pende chiefs. The object-discourse is more likely to be persuasive if it is elegantly expressed through appropriate imagery.

The sorcerer's prayer or the ethics of *wanga*

Orations addressed to the dead come in a variety of forms, depending on the purpose of the communication

10. *Mutshi udi matsui, mun'a muthu ashiko matsui.* Filip De Boeck records that therapists among the Aluund of southwestern DRC cite this very proverb (in their own language) before gathering leaves or scraping powder from the bark of certain trees (1991:159, 181–182, 372, 462). Pende specialists will do the same, either as part of a longer address or in abbreviation (see note 39). De Boeck makes a structural analogy between the "immobility" of the tree and the elder, which "exemplifies the unchanging continuity of the societal order" (1991:181). In rites of investiture, the tree may hold some of these connotations for the Pende as well, but in the context of mixing ingredients to control the environment, the speakers were most concerned with obtaining predictable ("obedient") effects.

11. *Aye, wahanyine ndando ji'aye nu ame. Kila fuji yenya kubeta kosa matsuta enya kumakana. Uvi kila yenyako kumaka hene fuji ikaye, vula inokene kualeha ngumanyise midimo y'ami.* De Boeck records a parallel practice among the Aluund, which he regards as a means of emphasizing "the worth and efficacy of the therapy" (1991:372, 462). A specialist such as Kombo-Kakese, who invents his own recipes, will state that his abilities spring from God and from his parents *(Kujiya ku'ami kuejile kudi Nzambi, kuejile kua Tata nu Mama).*

12. Incidentally, these are not "ancestors" necessarily. People acquire recipes from all sorts of people, including other ethnic groups.

13. *Kila shitsu yabadika, wazuela mu kano etshi "Shitsu, fua!" Yayiya kufua? Pamba lukhasa nu uta, uzule uta uyiloze, ifue. Luholo lumoshi nu vula. Diji dia kumikina nu mulenge wa kumikina, wene uta. Ishiko uzuelele pamba mu kano ndo.*

and on the individual(s) targeted. Eastern Kipende speakers rarely resort to the clumsy circumlocution signifying "ancestors": "the mother's brothers who are already dead" *(malemba afile kale).*[14] Usually, they rely on context and refer vaguely to "the dead" *(vumbi).* Precision in translation is essential, because these speeches have differing constituencies.

Many public speeches address the collective dead. For example, the genre *kukombelela vumbi* ("to pray to the dead") is addressed to the collective matrilineal ancestors.[15] It begins by naming certain past chiefs and then petitions for aid in harvesting, hunting, and other communal concerns. Two important proverbs emphasize that invocation of the collective dead sets limits on the use of *wanga* (manipulation of the physical and spiritual world).

Shitsu yena kufuila lukhasa; mutsu, kitela.
Animals die on account of a prayer; a person, for a reason.

Ita, mukumbu; wanga,udi musanzo.
War [requires] a curse; sorcery, a speech of justification.

The first proverb warns that animals die innocently, through no fault of their own, because a hunter has prayed to the dead for survival. In contrast, people die "for a reason," because they have offended someone, living or dead. The second proverb emphasizes that leading a blameless life is the best defense against sorcery. It is the collective dead who judge the "reason" or "justification."

In the second proverb, *mukumbu* refers to the curse by which a chief publicly appeals to the dead to punish his enemies on the battlefield. He must vocalize his grounds for waging war. If he does not, he is sure to lose, because he will be fighting alone. However, many Pende assured me that the dead judge the truthfulness of the speech and will not support an unjust cause.

Like war, the use of sorcery to harm others demands spoken justification *(musanzo),* for example, retribution for acts of adultery, theft, defaulting on debts, failure to share one's goods, and so forth. The actor must speak, "If you did such and so, then may this recipe bring out such and so effect." However, there is danger that this kind of curse may turn back on the speaker.[16] If the supposition is incorrect, the whole process can backfire. Most important, unlike the chief on the battlefield, the sorcerer *does not* call on the collective ancestors. Instead, he or she invokes the inventors of the recipe, the shades of professional colleagues, and all those who have suffered similar wrongs.[17]

Even the use of *wanga* for relatively benign purposes requires spoken justification, probably because advancing one's own desires almost always implies diminishing someone else's. For example, in a system where the number of passing grades is fixed, if I ace my oral exam, someone else will fail. Nonetheless, many argue that a medicine will not work unless the maker keeps "pure." Kombo-Kakese insisted, "If you haven't studied for your oral exam, it won't work. But if you studied, the dead will help you remember. You must be

14. In an important article, Kopytoff (1971) observed that few Western Bantu languages have a word signifying "ancestor." For example, in KiKongo and KiSuku, the word *bakulu* signifies "elders," living or dead. Kopytoff argued that communication with the dead takes much the same form as interactions between living social juniors and elders. Euro-American translators have overemphasized the distinction of between living and dead. Kopytoff's observations correlate well with the Pende. The sacrificial meal that chiefs supervise between representatives of the living and of the dead takes the same form and bears the same name *(kilambu)* as the "tribute" offered from nephew to uncle and from villager to chief. In one prayer, Chief Kende was crystal clear, possibly because of earlier queries on my part: "All people [our family], we have called you here, you who are already dead and you who are living" *(Etsu esuesue tsuamitambika hamueneka, muafile kale nu mudi nu monyo).*

15. Alternatively, this genre of speech is described as "to call the dead" *(kutambika vumbi). Lukhasa* refers to a specific prayer form in which a hunter asks his deceased family members to release game from their corrals so that he may kill to feed his family. One may also "pray to God" *(kukombelela Nzambi). Kukombelelo* signifies "prayer."

16. For similar speeches, see Van Wing (1930) and De Boeck (1991). The "incantations" recorded by Van Wing for Kongo *minkisi* follow the Pende model exactly: for example, "If it is I, the elder, who . . . have two hearts . . ./Then, ye fetishes, eat me./But if it is another man who has cast his eye on him/ Capture the villain! (1930:402). De Boeck states: "The [Aluund] ritual specialist thereby states that if he himself was at the origin of his patient's trouble . . . the evil he caused will turn against himself. This conjuration implies by extension that if he was not implicated, misfortune will come to those who caused the trouble (1991:373–374).

Eastern Pende children are taught to speak a *musanzo* if they hear or see something inexplicable, especially at night. For example, "I have come to harvest caterpillars. I have no problems with you. Go about your business and I'll go about mine." The worst thing to do in such a situation is to remain silent. Some report saying, "If I have stolen something or committed adultery, then I accept that I should die. But if I have not, then you must allow me to pass."

17. Francesco Pellizzi makes the intriguing suggestion that the sorcerer may not call on the collective dead because the plaintiff often belongs to the same descent group as his or her antagonist.

pure when you go take the exam. If you have a problem with your deceased father, or with your uncle, or with someone else, it's a problem."

Not everyone concurs with Kombo-Kakese. His archrival, the hitman Kakoko, sometimes made similar statements. At other times, in marketing mode, he claimed to be able to provide exam medicines that precluded all need for study. In the examples given of preparations designed to stop the rain, one can understand why the dead would be motivated to help render a masquerade jolly. After all, the event is organized in their honor. In the case of war, it is clear that the ancestors invoked would be motivated to aid their kith and kin. Medicines intended to further personal desires (as opposed to communal needs) would require further discussion.

One of the most common medicines available, *kiboba,* is used to dominate others. The Pende view domination as a psychic rather than a physical process centered on the ability to weaken rivals. It usually involves speaking well in public, mediating problems, and having the gift of persuasion. For example, during a raucous election in 1987, Chief Mbuambua took charge and the process became calm and orderly. People nodded sagely: "Mbuambua has a *kiboba.*" The following is a recipe made as a present to me by Kakoko, which he felt appropriate for a student who might face oral exams (although it is clearly oriented towards heterosexual men). He assured me that it makes the voice "paralyzing." The audience need only see the speaker to be convinced. The student need not study: "The examiner will forget that you are there or will question you on a subject that you know all about."

> Submerge in a bottle of perfume, preferably the brand "Perfume Sousarabia":
>
> *kafua khonono* (3 specimens)
>
> *zambo* (a water leech)
>
> *njonjo* (water insect) (3 specimens)
>
> a handkerchief (The cloth has been prepared by a woman who has inserted it for 25 minutes into her vagina, followed by her anus.)
>
> Before leaving for the day, one should rub on some of the perfume. It is not necessary for someone to smell it in order to be affected by it.

Kakoko explained that the plant *kafua khonono* is remarkable for wilting when touched. It appears dead; however, after a few minutes, it dramatically pops back to life. Once attached, the bloodsucking leech *zambo* is hard to remove, as it can bore deeply into the body. In contrast, the insect *njonjo* jumps about so quickly on the surface of the water that it is impossible to trap by hand. The rag capitalizes on the power of sex. According to Kakoko, every man is "weak" before his wife. They may quarrel during the day, but at night they find each other irresistible. "Everyone, even President Mobutu, is glued to his wife." Kakoko, suffering from a series of divorces, asks, "What man is not attracted to his wife?"

The translation of this material writing is:

> Give me the guile to outwit my opponents.
> Make my words unforgettable.
> Let them bore into the memory of the listener like a leech in the skin.
> May I foresee all traps,
> And maneuver with ease to avoid them.
> Make my voice paralyzing so that
> My audience finds me as irresistible as sex itself.

In this case, the word is once again essential; however, the speech is directed first, not to the dead, but to God and to the sorcerers among the dead who act as their agent. When the ingredients are put into the bottle, Kakoko advised saying, "God is above, the dead below. Nzambi made the dead strong. God created all the plants and animals [that is, gave them their properties]. Therefore, may this perfume attract men and women, may they agree with what I say."[18]

The *kiboba* is still fairly benign, but Kakoko, Nzambi, and Kingange all insisted that the more dangerous the enterprise, the more careful the specialist must be to pray to God directly in order to transfer responsibility through the wheedling prayer: "It's not my fault: I am only using the intelligence and materials that *you* created." Once God is hamstrung by this logic, then the speaker appeals to the shades of his colleagues. Chief Nzambi believes that he will also summon all the dead who died from the same ailment: "'You, what did you do that you [deserved to] die?' All the dead who died from that type of *wanga,* these will

18. *Kosa, Nzambi; hatshi, Satana. Nzambi wahuile Satana ngolo. Kosa, Nzambi; hatshi Satana. Nzambi wafukile mitshi eyi nu pelo jiagasue. Hene maji awa anane mala nu akhetsu, anguvuile mbimbi ji'ami.* When asked about his conception of "Satana," Kakoko defined it as "people [buried] in the ground." Clearly, he did not follow some local evangelist's argument and concluded that "Satana" was the fashionable term for "the dead."

activate [lit. strengthen] the *wanga* so that the person dies."[19] Nonetheless, even Kakoko believes that he will never be able to succeed if the victim is truly blameless.

Life on the other side

There is a touching intimacy between the worlds of the living and of the dead in Pende pre-Christian thought.[20] This idea is encapsulated in a favorite proverb: "We came to warm ourselves in the sun's rays, [but] our home is *kalunga* [the other world]."[21] God (Maweze) created the world in a cell of reincarnation. When the dead are buried, they enter the other world *(kalunga),* usually visualized as being located underground. The earth seems limitless: as far as one digs, there is always farther to go. Kombo-Kakese observed that all things spring ultimately from the earth because grains and plants sustain life. During important ritual occasions (for example, during the boys' initiation), the chief is required to sleep directly on the ground to be especially close to the dead.

Kombo-Kakese stated that in the other world, the dead eat, drink, walk, and drive. They do all that the living do except procreate, for they have no body. They retain their earthly appearance, but they are "like air" *(ula muhehe),* "without weight." Normally invisible to the living, they may sometimes be glimpsed in subdued light as a pale reflection. Direct communication between living individuals and dead individuals is possible only in dreams, which are sometimes described as "things from Kalunga" *(ikumba ya kalunga).*

Despite the clear association of *kalunga* with a world underground, no one seems to believe that the dead spend much time there. They are far too restless and interested in the lives of the living; they hover "nearby." It is as if the two worlds are superimposed, with waking hours reversed. Once I upset my host, Chief Kende, by throwing out a basin of water late at night filled with peanut shells and a corn cob. A visitor explained that the action could be misinterpreted as a wish for Kende's harvest to flow away, a dangerous gesture at the time when the *vumbi* are awake.

The dead prefer to travel when it is cool, and the two worlds are most likely to overlap in the early morning and late evening. According to Chief Nzambi, it is no coincidence that these are the very hours when most babies are conceived and born. Chief Samba reports that one is most likely to receive a visitation by dream after 4 A.M. This is also the time of day when one may hear the *vumbi* splashing at the spring, only to arrive and find empty silence, or hear footsteps where there is no one. Because the sun sets around 6:30, the period from 3 to 6 P.M. is called the "daytime of the dead" *(muanya wa vumbi).* Chief Nzambi described this as the time "when things happen." It is the appropriate hour for important speech, lubricated by libations of palm wine, tapped in the early morning or evening, when the dead are active. It is the hour when juniors seek advice from elders and when marriages are arranged. According to Kombo-Kakese, the dead wake us up before they retire for their "night."

The one universal description of the dead is that they wander: "the *vumbi* travel in the air" *(vumbi jienya kwenda mu muhehe).* Chief Samba insisted that they are all around us; we simply do not see them. In 1988 Kakoko noted that the passing wind *(funji)* is full of spirits. The Abbé Gusimana recalled that the Kwilu Pende were emboldened to rebel against abusive labor practices in 1931 by howling winds, which they interpreted as a sign of solidarity from their ancestors.

> That year, the dry season was exceptional. The raging wind blew and whistled. . . . The spirits of the dead live in the wind, in the whirlwinds. In particular, the whistling of the wind . . . increases the faith in the presence of the ancestors who circulate in the wind. The rumor spread that the ancestors were going to intervene to end the inhuman exploitation of the Pende by the Whites. The people's frenzied imagination took a particular form. The wind rumbled. It was the big trucks which transported the ancestral goods."[22]

19. *Kila nganga yakalakala wanga, yamanyisa, idi kuzuela ha kano: "Hakuambila Maweze ndaka muene wafukile mitshi nu Ima yakasue ambe mu wanga. " Hakuambila vumbi hakula kamba mutsu afue: "Enue itshi muakadikile hene muafuile." Vumbi yafuile ku wene wanga unu, yene idi kukolesa wanga hakula kamba mutsu afue.*

20. By no means is lore on the world of the dead monovocal. What follows is the view of the specialists. By 1989 there were many doubters among the Eastern Pende, particularly among those under forty years of age. An important development is signaled by the work of Manesa, a Central Pende who led popular antisorcery movements in the 1980s. He attributed all talk on the dead to the "lies" of criminal sorcerers, who would like to disguise their activities.

21. *Tuejile kuota mutele, ku kalunga kuembo di'etsu.*

22. "Cette année-là, la saison sèche était exceptionnelle. Le vent impétueux soufflait et sifflait. . . . Les esprits des morts habitent dans le vent, dans les tourbillons de vent. Le sifflement particulier du vent est un bien associatif qui excite l'imagination et augmente la foi dans la

The wind sweeping over the savanna evoked the auditory hallucination of trucks passing in caravan. Poignantly, many Pende took this as an omen that the dead were sending spirit-trucks full of goods to make them as rich as their oppressors.

Because they move in the wind, the dead seem susceptible to all that is transmitted through their medium. They can be summoned easily in the early morning or evening by speech. They are drawn to music. Smells, in particular, are known to have a visceral impact on them. The "sweet" odors of ripe bananas, palm wine, perfume, and uncut tobacco easily attract them. Conversely, they flee all strong or foul smells like hot pepper, cigarette smoke, and millet beer. Certain plants associated with unpleasant odors prove to be key ingredients in recipes intended to distance hostile spirits.

Paean to the sneeze

Seeking advice at the gloaming hour, when the dead are able to guide the words of a living elder, suggests a level of comfort that is misleading. En route to a ceremony *inviting* the deceased chiefs to eat with us, the minister in charge stopped to ask a friend to bring along his cigarettes to "scare off the dead"! The two realms are separate, and unregulated interaction can have serious consequences. If the living glimpse the dead (outside of dreams), they risk going mad.

Chief Nzambi insisted that God created the universe with a manifest destiny for people to populate the earth and cover it with cultivated fields. The creator established the dead, as our elders, as the guardians over all that makes life essential: good harvests, good hunts, human reproduction, and now the ability to earn a living through diamond mining. The problem lies in the fact that the jealous, selfish, or power-hungry know no personality reversal at death. Greedy individuals, alive or dead, may interfere with the proper order of the universe to introduce illness, misfortune, and early death. Communication with the dead is hindered by the facts that they are invisible, that they wander, and that there are resentful individuals among them.

The key problems for ritual are how to regulate the boundary between the two worlds and how to approach the good-hearted without coming into contact with the mean-spirited. This need to control the time of contact and the mode of interaction between the dead and the living is illustrated through the most important Eastern Pende cheer, which is used to punctuate a chief's speeches and to create a call-and-response community on ritual occasions.

Call:	*Tshua! Kalunga k'aye!*	Crowd:	*K'aye!*
	Ka mahamba e!		*ee!*
	Ka mahezo e!		*ee!*
	Mate!		*Tshua! Tshua! Tshua!*

The cheer opens by mimicking a sneeze. (*Tshua!* is the onomatopoeic equivalent to "achoo.") It ends with a veritable machine-gun blast of sneezes. The sneeze is a dramatic affirmation of life and health. As remarked earlier, death is defined as the end of respiration. Therefore, if someone appears to have ceased breathing, one may double-check by blowing smoke laden with hot pepper up the nose. Those who are alive should sneeze. If they do not, they are then officially pronounced dead.[23] Some believe that the infertile cannot sneeze, because a sneeze begins at the base of the spine, where sperm also originates. The sneeze is a sign of strength *(kijiyilo kia ngolo).*

The next part of the cheer, lit. "your *Kalunga,*" reasserts the boundaries between the two worlds. The sense is "stay where you belong." We, the living, the sneezing, have our world . . . and you have yours. The cries of the synonyms *Ka mahamba* and *Ka mahezo* underscore the proper mode of interaction between these worlds through altars established by the dead for this purpose. Kombo-Kakese defines a *hamba* (pl. *mahamba*) as "where one prays to the dead."[24]

présence des ancêtres qui circulent dans le vent. Le bruit courait que les ancêtres allaient intervenir pour mettre fin à l'exploitation inhumaine des Pende par des Blancs. L'imagination en délire des gens atteignait un dégré particulier. Le vent bourdonnait. C'était des gros camions qui transportaient des marchandises ancestrales. Le vent sifflait: Oui, ils sont là non, ils sont ici. . . . Le vent violent excitait l'imagination des gens. Nous entendions comme des camions qui passaient" (Gusimana 1970: 65–66).

23. This process is verified for the northern Eastern Pende (Nzumba) by Chief Kikunga-Tembo and for those in the south by Kombo-Kakese and Kakoko. Likewise, Chief Nzambi reports that during trials in the past, an accused sorcerer would be tested by giving *kipomi* poison to his chicken. If he were innocent, the chicken would sneeze and live. If the chicken died, the owner was presumed guilty. Parents also crow with delight when a small child sneezes, as it is a sign of vigor.

24. The term extends also to the rituals instituted by the collective dead to communicate with the living. Working at the opposite end of Pendeland forty-five years earlier, the Jesuit missionary J. Delaere's

Mahamba act as representatives of the dead, who, scattered and disembodied, cannot be addressed directly. They "bring together" the dead and provide a precise location where one can gather with them. The *mahamba* take myriad forms; they most frequently involve the planting of a tree or statuette (fig. 2).

Mahamba address collective well-being and family matters. The most common phrase is that the *mahamba* "take care of" or "protect" *(kubamba)* the village or the clan. This is the same verb used for a babysitter watching over an infant. According to Chief Shatshi, "The *mahamba* are beautiful [or good] because they aid us."[25] In one of the most telling metaphors, Chief Samba described these altars as "transistors" facilitating communication. Chief Nzambi emphasized that the *mahamba* cannot speak. One uses the altar to transmit requests to the dead, but they respond only through dreams or through the insight of diviner-mediums. Thus the altars respect the division of worlds.

The incantation ends with "saliva" *(mate),* to which the crowd responds with the rapid fire explosion of three life-affirming sneezes. The Pende spit at the end of important blessings to show that they have expelled all carping complaints *(mishingi)* from their mouth and mind. It is a show of good faith. Among the Central Pende, saluting the chief is called "giving saliva" *(guhana mate).* It is a gesture acknowledging authority. To paraphrase Chief Nzambi, the message here is, "Now it's time for you to act. We have spoken in good faith."

Finally, the cheer ends by distancing the dead, by reasserting the boundary between worlds, through a barrage of life-affirming sneezes. "It's time for you to go. This is the land for the living."

The pattern of (1) asserting the proper division of spheres, (2) calling the dead to short periods of controlled interaction, and (3) reestablishing proper distance is repeated in innumerable rituals. The sneeze represents a lavish expulsion of breath that testifies to surplus and well-being in its host. The expulsion of saliva cleanses the body of belittling criticisms of family members *(mishingi),* which can provide ammunition to criminal sorcerers. The dead cannot be called without reminding them that they are visitors in a foreign land.

Pende theory of speech and blood sacrifice

Kombo-Kakese explained that the strength or power of the dead lies in the air *(ngolo jia vumbi jidi mu muhehe).* When asked why a certain recipe can work, he stated, "It's the speech *(muhehe)* or wind *(funji)* that works; if I do not speak, the dead cannot come to my aid." When asked, "Why do they agree to act on our wishes?" he responded, "Do they want us to suffer? No! They're close by. They're with us throughout the day." What I have translated in the context of this article as "word" or "speech" is *muhehe,* a term signifying "air," "breath," and "breeze" or "wind." Recipes work because the dead are called to act on the message detailed in the material writing; however, the Pende conception of *muhehe* makes Kombo-Kakese's statement more complicated than it appears.

In Pende traditional thought, a living person is composed of the body and its *kivule,* most frequently translated as "spirit," "shadow," or "double."[26] Death

research exactly parallels my own. He defined *hamba* as "un objet ou groupe d'objets légués par les aïeux . . . par lesquels les indigènes entrent en communication avec les esprits tutélaires et se les rendent favorables. Par extension, sont appelés également *mahamba* les rites et les initiations qui, de même, auraient été légués par les aïeux pour le bien du clan. . . . Or, d'après l'expression courante: "*Mahamba, Maweze watulezele na wo* (Nos *mahamba,* c'est Dieu qui nous les a indiqué)" (1942–1945:625). Delaere worked in the Kwilu region (ibid., p. 621, n. 2) where use and knowledge of the *mahamba* were long defunct by 1989.

Because this translation of *mahamba* differs substantially from those published for neighboring ethnic groups (for example, Bastin 1988:13; Hauenstein 1987:98), I cite ample evidence. Chiefs Kombo-Kabenga, Kingange, Kutshia, and Nzambi all defined *mahamba* as "where we pray to the dead" *(kukombelela vumbi).* Chief Samba said, "To call the dead, we plant the *mahamba*" *(Ha kutambika vumbi, tuenya kujika mahamba).* Kakoko, Mukoso, and Mushi all described *mahamba* in the same distinctive phrase, "the life of the village" *(monyo wa dimbo).* Samba regretted that when Christians refuse to participate, the chief is left with too few people to maintain the altars with the consequence that fertility and prosperity necessarily fall.

25. *Mahamba awaha ndaka enya kutukuatsisa.*

26. *Vule* signifies the shadow of an object, for example, "the shadow of a tree" *(vule dia mutshi). Kivule* (pl. *ivule*) can signify (1) the shadow or image of a person *(kivule kia muthu),* (2) a ghostly apparition *(kivule kia vumbi),* (3) a photo, image, or drawing, or (4) the Holy Spirit *(Kivule Kiabonga).* Although associated with a human body, whether living *(muthu)* or dead *(vumbi),* the *kivule* can be separated from its host for extended periods. When one dreams, it is the *kivule* that travels and returns on awaking. Sorcerers are capable of capturing all or part of someone's *kivule* in order to work illness or death. In power objects, one can waylay the *kivule* for a decade or more to use as a tireless spirit-worker.

Although references to *kivule* are widespread, and well articulated, there is also a muddled sense that the person has a third or even fourth component, where individual personality lies. Kakoko referred to this as the "heart" *(tsumbi);* Kombo-Kakese, as the "death body"

Figure 2. Chief Nzambi prays before an altar *(hamba)* as his minister "plants" it. The prayer will be followed by the sacrifice of a chicken, whose blood will render the statuette less vulnerable to thieves seeking objects for the Western art market. Ndjindji, Democratic Republic of the Congo, 1988. Photo: Z. S. Strother.

occurs when the person ceases to breathe: "the breath or wind has left" *(muhehe* [or *funji*] *wazoka).*[27] The body then rots in the ground. The specialists (chiefs and *nganga)* all identified *kivule* with the "breath in the body."[28] When a person is dying, the respiration becomes hard, ragged, panting. There is often a death rattle, indicating that the spirit is leaving the body. When it comes out, the person dies.

What these speakers mean by *muhehe* extends beyond "breath" or "air" to include elements of what Westerners understand as "energy" or, in more old-fashioned terms, "life-force." All living beings have *muhehe,* although in different quantities. Kombo-Kakese stated that pigs have *muhehe,* but plants most certainly do as well: that is why they grow. Earth has *muhehe,* because it nourishes the plants. Water contains significant quantities of *muhehe.* If it is boiled, it releases wind *(funji;* here, "gas"). Wind often accompanies rain. It is *muhehe* that makes water flow or whips it into a whirlpool.

Kakoko stated that all that God created has *muhehe,* especially plants. Otherwise, how could they give fruits? Or flowers? Or wine? Whereas Kombo-Kakese believed that stones have no *muhehe,* because they are hard and solid, without pockets for air, Kakoko insisted that even rocks have *muhehe.* Otherwise, how could they multiply? Moreover, plants sometimes shoot straight out of rock, and one can occasionally crack open a stone to find water. Where there is water, Kakoko emphasized, there is *muhehe.* Dry corn placed in the earth sprouts and gives "moist" corn. The kernel is hard; it does not have enough air to grow until the rain gives it air. That is why seeds can sprout in water alone. Fires have ample *muhehe:* it is the hot air that burns the skin. A baby receives *muhehe* at conception from the blood of the mother. In sum, *muhehe* comprehends all capacity for growth, transformation, reproduction, change, or movement. The best translation might be to adapt Robert Farris Thompson's formulation for the Yoruba concept of *àshe,* "the power-to-make-things-happen" (1983:5).

Speech itself, composed of breath (the very material of life), has a powerful capacity to "make things happen." When speakers of Kipende wish to emphasize literal content, they will refer to *kuzuela ku'endji* (lit. "what he or she said") or *mbimbi ji'endji* (lit. "his or her words"). However, when the speaker wishes to emphasize the power of speech to effect change, they often switch to the word *muhehe.* For example, on December 18, 1987, on the eve of Kombo-Kiboto's investiture, his second minister prayed to the preceding chief for permission to take earth from his grave for the ceremony:

> We pray with this [wine] at the grave marker that you may give us the earth voluntarily. You have chosen your successor. . . . fights and quarrels have not broken out. . . . we have agreed in the mouth, there has been a single candidate. Your word *[mbimbi]* is like the word of God. God gave you potent speech/breath *[muhehe].* You spoke and it was your word that worked and the successor that you chose is the one we have. . . .[29]

Chiefs have no power to designate a successor. The minister, Kayimbo, is referring to an unusual circumstance where the dying incumbent (Mukanzo Mbelenge) recommended that a certain candidate would be best suited to inherit the office. In this remarkable text, the speaker observes that the town has not suffered the usual election-time quarrels. They have enjoyed tranquillity, and Kayimbo attributes it to the persuasive power of the dying man's

(muila wa kufua); and Nzambi, as *"vumbi."* Chief Kindamba located intelligence or personality in the heart, which he defined as part of the body, which goes directly to the land of the dead.

Tracing the history of such nebulous concepts is extremely difficult. Sh'a Makungu of Kavuka, son of the renowned *nganga* Chief Kisanga, stated that the Pende formerly believed that both the *kivule* and the body went to the other world; that was why the flesh "melts" or disappears. Now they tend to argue that the *kivule* alone goes to *kalunga.* Kizoka (one of the three oldest men in the Kasai) supported Sh'a Makunga. The new emphasis on the "spirit" traveling alone after death no doubts owes its emphasis to Christian evangelization.

27. There is a direct relationship between "life" *(monyo)* and "breath" *(muhehe).* "I want to kill you" is expressed by the phrase "I want to make the air go out of you" *(ngukuzole muhehe).* Asthma is described as "suffocating the life" out of someone *(monyo kusukina).* One also hears phrases like "tobacco is suffocating the life out of me" *(makanya angusukinisa monyo)* or "the water suffocated me" (that is, I was drowning) *(meya angukinisa).*

28. *Kivule kidi muhehe mu muila.* For example, Kakoko stated, "The kivule is my breath. It is like a wind. When you die, the *kivule* flees. . . . He who kills the breath, kills the person" *(Kivule kidi muhehe w'ami. Kivule kidi ula muhehe (nga funji). Kila wafua, nu kivule kialenga. . . . Washiya muhehe, wahiya muthu).*

29. *Tuena kukombelela n'awo ku milulu mutuhane mavu kiakiloshi. Pinga y'aye watombele. . . . ishiko kuzoke sashi nu itsumba ndo. . . . tuadivua nu makano, kuakhadile pinga imoshi. Mbimbi y'aye idi kula mbimbi ya Nzambi. Nzambi wakuhuile muhehe wakiloshi. Wazuela nu mbimbi y'aye yene yakuatshile mudimo nu yene pinga y'aye watombele, yene tudi n'ayo. . . .*

recommendation. He compares that potential for the word to create something of value to the "word of God" (drawing on Christian imagery). God gave the departed chief "good breath," or speech capable of achieving peace and goodwill.

Earlier, Chief Nzambi compared speech to the spark that sends the bullet on its path. Kombo-Kakese used another technological metaphor: the airplane may be equipped with gas, oil, and all its parts, but it cannot fly without *muhehe* (wind). It is the act of speaking that activates the recipe. Speech releases energy and sends the message, written in inert matter, out into the world.

Speech itself releases activating energy, but sometimes a project is difficult enough or important enough to demand strengthening *(kukolesa).* Sometimes speech is not enough. Sometimes blood is demanded. *Muhehe* pushes sweat out of the skin. Kombo-Kakese argues, likewise, that it is *muhehe* that makes blood circulate:

> Blood is important because it works and it makes [things] strong. Blood is very powerful. If someone dies, the blood does not circulate [lit. travel] because the person has no wind. It is air that makes blood circulate. [30]

Blood is necessary for the miniature robots made by sorcerers, because "[b]lood is like the gasoline to make it run [or walk]. A person needs air to live and walk. Blood contains air and life. A person or an animal cannot walk if he does not have *muhehe.* The blood has *muhehe* and life."[31] He went on to add that death occurs when the blood loses its air. Kakoko confirmed the surprising link of blood with "circulation," with animating movement. He pointed to the popular rumor that the trucks of wealthy merchants received regular doses of blood in the tank to prevent them from breaking down on the punishing roads of Mobutu's Zaire.

Although blood sacrifice is never a prerequisite for prayer to the dead *(kukombela vumbi),* a chicken is often immolated in order "to strengthen" the altar *(iheta ngolo).*[32] The breath in its blood can extend the altar's life and make it resistant to decay. With such an offering, Chief Nzambi explained that the altar is somewhat less vulnerable to thieves seeking objects for the Western art market (fig. 2). Kakoko queried, if a truck is complete with its tires, spark plugs, all the necessary parts, but the battery is dead, can it function? The blood jumpstarts the battery with an injection of "wind."

I asked Kombo-Kakese, if circulation is so important, why not take a few drops of blood from a living being? In that case, he answered, one has transferred a small quantity of *muhehe,* not enough to do anything extraordinary. Death alone can release all of a being's energy. This focus on the moment of death explains why, although I saw perhaps thirty ritual sacrifices of chickens, rams, and goats, there were seldom more than a few spatters of blood directed at the object (or grave) that was the focus of the ritual. The first spatter is what counts.

I asked Kakoko, if his chicken died while he was on the way to sacrifice it, could he use it anyway? After all, the body was still full of blood. "No, no, no! His breath has left, the blood is clotting, it's not running."[33] He explained that when one slaughters an animal, the blood flows out, and then it clots. The blood of a cadaver has no significance. In fact, the point of the blood sacrifice is less the blood than the capture and direction of the gust of *muhehe* that leaves the body at death. One must kill to catch the life's breath.

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30. *Mahatshi adi nu kukuatshisa ndaka ene adi kukalakala mudimo nu kuhana ngolo. Mahatshi, ungunza. Kila mutsu wafua, mahatshi ashiko kuenda ndaka ashiko nu muhehe. Muene, wenya kwendesa mahatshi.*

Kombo-Kakese used a term that is difficult to translate, stating that blood has *ungunza.* Most typically, *ungunza* signifies the capacity to kill another human being, especially by a means that involves the spilling of blood. Usually applied to murderers or executioners, the term is also used for circumcisers or even for nurses who take blood samples. Soldiers have *ungunza,* because they have been taught how to kill in combat. In contrast, most humans are presumed to be unwilling, indeed unable, to kill their fellows.

When Kombo-Kakese first began to speak of circulation, I was unnerved by what sounded like the theory of oxygen entering the body through respiration and being converted into energy. And indeed, Kombo-Kakese taught for a period in Mennonite mission schools as a young man before following his calling as a healer. Nevertheless, Kombo-Kakese's bitter rival Kakoko, unsolicited, used very similar language, and he did not receive the same education. I believe that Kombo-Kakese "recognized" oxygen as the equivalent to the Pende understanding of "wind in the blood."

31. *Mahatshi adi ula essence ha kukiendesa. Muthu nga shitsu yajiyiloko kuenda kila ishiko nu muhehe ndo. Mahatshi ene adi nu muhehe nu monyo.*

32. "The blood strengthens or nourishes the *hamba* so that it may last for a long time" *(Mahatshi akolese nga adise hamba dikhale masuku avula).*

33. *Ndo, ndo, ndo! Muhehe w'endji wamuzuki, mahatshi adi kubua kàndàndà, ashiko kwenda ndo.*

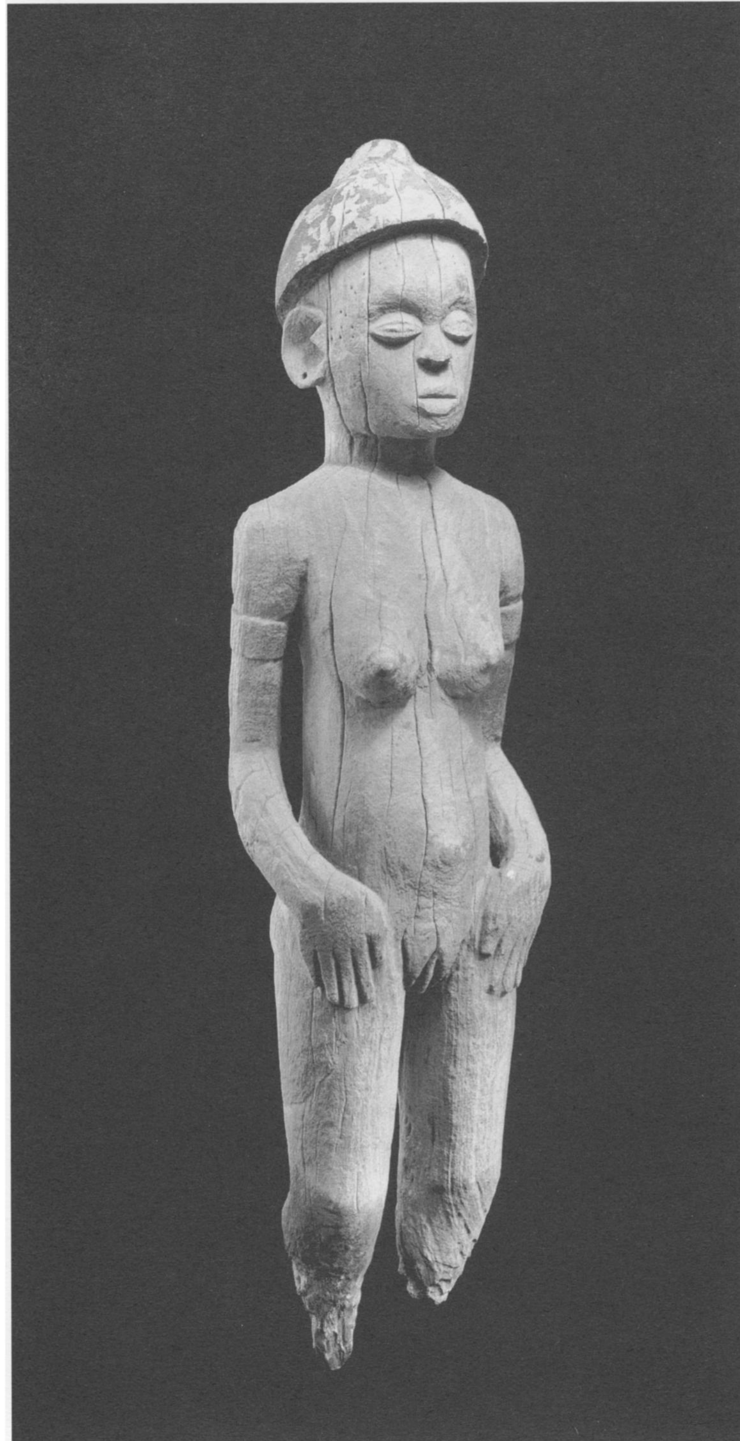

Figure 3. Eastern Pende. A rooftop statuette. H: 100 cm. Private collection, Brussels. Documentation Lavuun Quackelbeen. Photo: R. Asselberghs.

Power objects

The ability to transfer *muhehe* is critical to the conception and mechanics of power objects. Here an important distinction is made between the life's breath of humans and of animals. Strictly speaking, only humans have indestructible *kivule.* The life's breath of animals is usually referred to as "strength" *(ngolo).* For an altar, one transfers the "strength" of the cock, not its "spirit" *(kivule).* No one has ever been haunted by the ghost of a chicken or pig.[34] The "breath" of most animals and plants is presumed to dissipate at death. Power objects require the domination of a human spirit *(kivule).*

To transfer *muhehe,* one must acquire body parts or other materials that retain part of the breath from a deceased entity. These objects are called *lukhau* (pl. *khau*). For humans, these are usually objects touched by the sweat or oil pushed out by the body's *muhehe.* For example, pieces of the noose used by a suicide, moistened by sweat at the instant of death, are classed as powerful medicines for transferring a death wish to game so that they do not seek to flee the hunter. The *lukhau* of a lion (perhaps a bone fragment or a piece of his mane) will be used to ask for the strength of the lion; the snout of a pig may be used by a diviner to ask for the ability to sniff out the distinctive odor of individuals as a pig unearths what is hidden in the ground.

Specialists insist that domination of a human spirit *(kivule)* in a power object entails the "blood" (that is, death) of that person (through sorcery).[35] In the first recipe cited in this article, the chip from someone's deathbed was used as a striking image of a great wind (the life's breath) pushing out the spirit *as* one would like to push away any rain clouds. It was *not* used to fix the spirit of the departed, as might be the case in Kongo. In the case of the suicide cited above, the noose cannot be used to make a power object, that is, to have an enslaved spirit-worker, *unless* the sorcerer sought the death himself. In other *wanga,* the *muhehe*-saturated object acts as an eye-catching metaphor: may the game have a death wish *like* a suicidal man. May my presence be as intimidating *as that* of a lion. May I smell out criminals *like* a pig in search of truffles.

Scholars sometimes resist treating objects as tropes rather than as magical substances. Arnold Rubin maintained that power sculpture accumulated and concentrated "essences" in order to channel energy "toward the accomplishment of particular objectives" (1974:10). This explanation seems to work in the case of Bamana power objects (McNaughton 1979:23–24). However, anthropologist Luc de Heusch has refuted the work of E. P. R. Van Caeneghem for making similar claims for the Luba people of the Kasai.[36] Van Caeneghem had argued that the Luba *bwanga* should be considered as an "assemblage des forces vitales subalternes auquel un ancêtre est invité à prêter son concours" (de Heusch 1970:811). In contrast, de Heusch finds no evidence to regard the power objects as "accumulateur de forces vitales"; he argues instead that the ingredients draw on a figurative language, both metaphoric and metonymic, which "forme un discours imagé que l'on pourrait traduire comme ceci: que mon *bwanga,* sauvage comme un lion, fort comme un aigle, semblable à l'œil perçant du hibou, au cri d'alarme de l'oiseau mukeke, dépiste les sorciers malfaisants et les écarte de ma demeure." The metaphoric objects describe the protective or offensive action of the power object; the metonyms tie the object to its owner or patient (1970:811–812).

De Heusch is one of the few scholars to emphasize the importance of speech. He writes that the metaphoric and metonymic series do not grant the object its power: "Il faut tenir compte ici de l'invocation à l'ancêtre, invité à se fixer dans l'objet-discours. La parole, sous la forme de l'incantation . . . complète la métonymie initiale, réalisant une cohabitation symbolique du propriétaire du *bwanga* . . . et de l'ancêtre" (1970:812). De Heusch argues that the word is critical in fixing the animating spirit in the object. In the case of the Pende, this captured spirit is far more likely to be that of a junior relative than that of an "ancestor." However, the

34. However, an exception is sometimes made for fierce carnivores like leopards or crocodiles, who incarnate so much *muhehe* that they are presumed capable of striking back after death. The man who kills one of these animals must undergo the same rites for distancing the spirit of the victim as for that a human being.

35. In this case, fingernails or hair or an object touched by sweat or shadow (all *lukhau*), are acquired *before* the death as part of the process of bewitching the intended victim. Kombo-Kakese remarked, "The object belonging to the person sacrificed . . . is like a photo negative. The photo may deteriorate, but you still hold the negative. The person may die, but you still hold the 'photo.' If it is lost, the spirit is freed."

36. I am most grateful to Constantine Petridis for bringing Luc de Heusch's article to my attention.

speech used to *make* the object (which justifies capturing the spirit) directs the "object-discourse" to the attention of the dead, often ancestors, sometimes teachers or colleagues or brothers in suffering.

Power objects among the Pende take a multitude of forms. At present, the only objects made for public view comprise certain architectural statuary intended to embellish the chief's ritual house (figs. 3–4). These statues are widely believed to advertise that the chief has secured spirit-workers to guard the village around the clock, sentinels who never sleep or lose focus. They are often referred to, in Franco-Kipende slang, as the *gardes du corps.* Despite the belief that they are never mounted without the cost of human life, the statues are not associated with visible attachments of medicines, as the chief's connection to sorcery must remain elusive.

Other practitioners often use miniatures that may be easily concealed. For example, during a recent antisorcery movement, bonfires consumed packets of medicines as well as models of cars, planes, and masqueraders, sometimes with horns of medicines attached to their backs. The accused also offered up miniatures of chiefs' axes, bells, staffs, and other insignia. I have seen small figures discovered that fit into the palm of the hand. The expert Kakoko emphasized that power objects need take the form of statuettes only when they are used by the chief (as public warnings) or for making certain miniaturized robots. To send a robotic serpent, one need only weave a braid of straw to hold the animating *kivule.*

Although one can fortify metal by plunging it into a medicated solution, most Pende have a horror of making power objects permanent. When asked why he did not make his power objects out of stone, Kakoko protested, "You don't want to make it eternal! When [Chief] Kombo dies, a new Kombo must make his own. Who would use the old figure? People are afraid to have all of those spirits around. [Who would want them] tied eternally?!" Kombo-Kakese explained that when the chief's architectural sculpture is in poor condition, or the chief dies, the spirit *(kivule)* is liberated. Its work is finished, and it is free to go. "It is made in wood because man's life on earth is not eternal. It is not made in metal: how long will the owner live?"

The scandal of the "fetish": talking to things?

In the early literature on power objects, chroniclers were profoundly disturbed by what they perceived as an inability by the practitioners to distinguish between the material and the immaterial (De Brosses 1760). For observers, this confusion must have seemed most evident and most scandalous when practitioners actually seemed to be engaged in talking to things. MacGaffey writes, "The most obvious external sign of the personification of *minkisi* is that they are invoked as willful beings and urged to carry out assignments on behalf of their clients" (1990:53).

In 1987 during the investiture for the new Chief Kombo, I witnessed one of the elders, Kabangi, addressing a tree about to be felled for the planting of an altar: "You, *mutala* . . ." Later when I played the tape of the blessing for Chief Nzambi, he was disgusted. Kabangi never did anything right. "In order to cut down the *mutala* [an altar], we do not address the tree, saying, 'We have come to cut you down!' *We tell the dead* that we have come to fell the *mutala.*"[37] And yet, in 1988 I heard Nzambi himself address the center pole of his ritual house: "You are the center pole of the house, you are the microcosm of the village with its fields and forest. All the seeds and grains that we have given you, as you grip the earth, may they be rooted in the earth over there, may all the seeds grow. . . . *Tshua, tshua, tshua. . . .*"

Nzambi explained the seeming inconsistency. Before the tree is felled (and again when the seeds to be protected are placed in the hole), one prays directly to the dead, usually citing several ancestors by name (fig. 2). However, once the tree or statuette is consecrated as an altar, then one may address the object directly as a representative for the dead. "When I go to fell [the tree], I say to my ancestors, 'The *hamba* that you left is that which I have come to fell.' When it is planted, the tree becomes a person. It takes the place of the dead."[38] One may also speculate that the sacrifice of a chicken or goat transfers *muhehe* or life's breath directly to the object, lending it a certain animation and life-span. Nonetheless, the message is always directed toward the dead. Kakoko explained that the dead must listen and approve your project for it to work. "You hope that the

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37. *Ha kukoka mutala, tsuenyako kuambila mutala (mutshi) etshi "Tsueza kukukoka" ndo!* Tsuenya kuambila vumbi *etshi tsueza kukoka mutala.*

38. *Tangua nguya kukoka, ngudi kuambila malemba ami* [lit. "my maternal uncles"] *etshi, "hamba di'enu muashile diene ngeza kukoka edi." Ha kujika, mutshi udi kubua muthu. Udi kuza [holo dia] vumbi.*

Figure 4. An Eastern Pende power object masquerading as an altar (and fooling no one) in front of a chief's house. This female statuette shows the effects of nearly ten years of weather, insect damage, and children's play. Commissioned in 1979, it was once a full figure (including feet). As termites gnawed away from below, the chief was obliged to rebury it over and over again to keep it from toppling. The statuette was finally decommissioned in 1988, when the entire house complex was replaced. Name of site and sculptor withheld. Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photo: Z. S. Strother.

vumbi are listening, but you can't see them to address them directly, so you address the leaf, animal [or other material] being collected."[39]

In the formation of power objects, the same rules apply.[40] Like the chief going to war, the specialist *(nganga)* must justify his intention to take human life (through *wanga*). He gives the sorcerer's prayer defending his actions. He may cite unethical behavior, the voiced complaints of relatives *(mishingi),* or the

39. In complicated compositions, specialists recommend speaking as one gathers the individual components (especially plants), and again as one realizes the final form. According to Kombo-Kakese, first one addresses the dead to seek their support, and then the plant, to specify the particular qualities sought. He gave the example of *kadia makuba,* a small tree on the savanna with dark red sap that bleeds and coagulates like blood: "You, *kadia makuba,* you are not purchased [that is, of foreign or slave origin], you have walked with all of the chiefs. It is you [who are essential to] the chief's protective medicines. We are plucking you so that no one may bewitch the chief. `A tree has ears; the human child has none.' Therefore, you should listen to me."

40. MacGaffey believes that Van Wing exaggerated the distinction in Kongo between "charms" and "ancestors" through a Christian need to separate "magic" and "religion" (1977:176–177; 1986:122). However, in Pendeland in 1987–1989, it was the Christians, both Catholic and Mennonite-trained, who were rejecting any distinction between *mahamba* (altars) and *wanga,* collapsing both into "sorcery." They classed *mahamba* as idols, hence products of the devil, because they seemed to receive prayers (fig. 2).

Figure 5. Tshibumba Kanda-Matulu, *Le 30 Juin 1960, Zaïre Indépendant* (Zaïre Independence, June 30, 1960), 1970s. 17 3/4" x 24 5/8". Oil painting. Bol Collection. Photo: Frank Herreman. Note the embarrassed demeanor of King Baudouin, who must listen to an honest portrayal of Belgian colonialism in the Congo.

desperate need of the chiefdom for protection. As noted earlier, no one may die without cause. Once the transfer of *kivule* is made, however, the proprietor will directly address the spirit in the object to give it orders . . . or to decommission it. For example, the owner of the object shown in figure 4 released the human spirit within it when he replaced the weather-and-termite-damaged figure with another. He spoke to the spirit within, holding the statue in both hands, directing his words to the face of the statue, emphasizing his own dominion: "I have not given you away for no reason. I have already acquired your 'sister' who will replace you. Me, I am your father. I am your mother. . . . Go with good will. 'With clear eyes, and supple limbs. May you not meet any impediments.'"[41] The farewell speech ended with a familiar father's blessing for children setting out on a long voyage.

All speech acts articulated in conjunction with power objects may be performative in a strict sense, but their makers do not accord them equal weight. In the case of Kongo, Kavuna Simon attributed the abilities of power objects to heal or strike to "composition, conjuring, and consecration" (in MacGaffey 1993:21). Pende specialists emphasize the importance of the speech made when the "object-discourse" is physically assembled: when the dead are called ("conjuring") and the objects are dedicated to a particular purpose ("consecration"). The words that follow in invocation of the object are merely technical, indicating where to go and what to do. The latter discourse can become quite dramatic (even hair-raising) in a performance context when a specialist is seeking to impress his client (for example, MacGaffey 1991:127–131); however, this second order of speech already presumes the empowerment of the figure.

41. *Ngetshia kulaba kukuhanako. Ngahete kale pandji'aye wa kusengunuka. Eme, sh'aye. Eme, kin'aye. . . . Uye kiakiloshi . . . "Ku meso pe, ku malo lelu. Isasa nu ibundji ikotome."*

What makes speech powerful? S. J. Tambiah argued that metaphor is ideally suited to ritual because both involve the transfer of an attribute from one object to another. "The rite of transfer portrays a metaphorical use of language (verbal substitution) whereby an attribute is transferred to the recipient via a material symbol which is used metonymically as a transformer." Tambiah believes that the material symbols add "realism." He also makes the nonbeliever's argument that all ritual is fundamentally addressed to the human participants, dismissing accounts that "it is immaterial objects such as the adze and the canoe or the soil that are addressed and that the spells and magical substances are used as causal agents in direct contravention of known physical laws" (1968:189, 194, 201).

Tambiah's analysis persuasively explains the interrelationship of metonymy and metaphor that one finds in the material composition of Pende ritual and recipes, but he sidesteps all emphasis on the act of speaking itself. One may accumulate an unending mass of material metaphors without effect, without vocalization. De Saussure made a distinction between *langue,* the totality of language available to a social group, and *parole,* individual spoken expression.[42] This distinction is not marked in Kipende, where *mbimbi* (lit. "words") may signify both "language" and individual utterance. The distinction in Kipende lies between "words" *(mbimbi)* and "speech." When words command a listener, they become *muhehe* (energy or wind) capable of effecting change.

No better example exists of these beliefs than the career of Patrice Lumumba. His astonishing speech on Independence Day (June 30, 1960), in which he dared excoriate Belgian colonialism before King Baudouin himself, secured him an enduring place in the Congolese imagination (fig. 5). In Pende terms, Lumumba almost defines *kiboba,* the medicine for domination through the voice (fig. 6). Dibwe dia Mwembu writes, "Not only did he know how to speak to crowds and stir them to action . . . , it is also believed that no one could stop him, or find arguments capable of invalidating his" (in Jewsiewicki 1999:59). Raymond Nduba Kwebati ponders, "Lumumba must have used fetish objects or black magic when he spoke, because no one could contradict him. When he called for the immediate independence of a united Congo, everyone was with him. Everyone applauded. . . . When he finished . . . no Belgian had the nerve to ask him questions or refute what he said" (quoted by Dibwe in Jewsiewicki 1999:59). Many Congolese attribute independence to the performative agency of the speech itself: "When he spoke, the ground trembled, the radios jumped. The whites were ill at ease and couldn't sleep; they fled" (Léon Tshilolo, quoted by Dibwe in Jewsiewicki 1999:59) (fig. 7). The fact that independence followed smoothly on his speech demonstrated, like the investiture for a Pende chief, that "on that day he told the truth about who we are and whence we came" (figs. 1, 5).

Figure 6. Burozi (signed Tshibumba), *Patrice Lumumba Giving a Public Address,* mid-1990s. 17 1/4" x 10". Acrylic painting. Bogumil Jewsiewicki Collection. Photo: Frank Herreman.

42. De Saussure [1972] 1983. For a superb discussion of these concepts in relation to the Dogon, see Calame-Griaule [1965] 1986.

Figure 7. Burozi, *Lumumba's Speech Causes Panic,* mid-1990s. 15" x 19 1/4". Acrylic painting. Bogumil Jewsiewicki Collection. Photo: Frank Herreman.

Why speak? Many Pende would answer that they speak because someone is listening. Depending on the situation, they speak to the collective dead, to individual interested spirits, and to God the Creator. Words have power because they travel in the medium through which the dead move. They are composed of the very substance of life itself. In reference to Lumumba's speech, historian Bogumil Jewsiewicki has noted, "[I]n Congolese culture, the spoken word is a very important element because the truth is said in a human voice. Local memories are publicly said and not put into writing. So it means that the human voice has a special power. In part, also, because the human voice can in some way put in the present the ancestors' voice" (in Lubangi 1999). In his investiture speech, the individual Munzenze Kavuka speaks publicly as himself for the last time (fig. 1). Henceforth, he will speak through positional succession as Chief Kombo-Kiboto, merging his voice with those of his predecessors.

Words are potent, but their effect can be unpredictable. Will they be lost in the wind? Will the intended party receive the message? Will the wrong people overhear? Speech disperses into the air, and its effects are as difficult to control or predict as those of the other denizen of the air, the dead themselves. The transfer of energy into altars and power objects divorces the word from the gaseous mutability of language to form what de Heusch calls an "object-discourse." Transformed into a form of writing, speech thereby gains a substantiality and a life-span that it might not otherwise enjoy.

Research note

This article is based on extensive interviews with nine men: specialists Kombo-Kakese (Mukishi Loange) and Kakoko; Chiefs Kombo-Kiboto (Mukanzo Mbelenge), Kingange (Kaluma a Mbangu), Nzambi (Kibunda a Kilonda), Kende (Katshivi Koji), Samba a Kavundji (Ngoyi Kisabu Kavundji), Kikunga-Tembo (Kangodio Kanyama); and blacksmith Ngoma Kandaku Mbuya. *Kubulumuna luthondo.*

While a sociologist may find this sample statistically small, I count myself lucky that it is so large. Within the terms of local discourse, there is no such thing as disinterested knowledge. Individuals seek detailed information about the dead and power objects in order to manipulate their physical and spiritual environment *(wanga).* Consequently, most individuals will refuse categorically to speak of the mechanics of *wanga,* seeking to avoid acquiring reputations as sorcerers, although they will talk volubly of manifestations that they have witnessed. They reveal knowledge of the dead in tidbits (for example, "A ghost stole my palm wine!") but decline to synthesize for fear of appearing to know too much. When I became interested in the subject, after learning of the close connection of Pende art objects to beliefs on the dead, most people stonewalled, recommending that I consult "the experts," that is, chiefs and *nganga.*

In her extraordinary work based in France in 1969–1975, Jeanne Favret-Saada argues that special demands are placed on the researcher in cases where the neutral exchange of information is impossible. "For he who succeeds in acquiring such knowledge gains power and must accept the effects of this power; the more one knows, the more one is a threat. . . ." She discovered that the discourse on witchcraft in the Bocage varied depending on the position assigned by the speaker to the interlocutor. For example, a bewitched will speak in a radically different way to another victim, to an "unwitcher," and (through silence) to the suspected witch. She concludes that the ethnographer "cannot study witchcraft without agreeing to take part in the situations where it manifests itself, and in the discourse expressing it" (1980 [1977]:11, 16, 20).

In my own case, after about sixteen months in the field, chiefs with whom I had established relationships were willing to talk at length on the realm of the dead. As ritual intermediaries, they could claim that this knowledge served the public good. Most were willing to touch on the mechanism of power objects only in the most benign of their public duties, for example, preventing the rain from falling at masquerades. On the subject of the statuettes used around their houses, most concluded by nervously disclaiming deep knowledge.

Recognized *nganga* (specialists) are rare, and the Eastern Pende town of Ndjindji was exceptional in hosting two who were capable of attracting clients from the distance of several days' travel. Kombo-Kakese (Mukishi Loange), to whom this essay is dedicated, was renowned as a leading historian and healer. A bit of an imp, he was nicknamed "Socrates" by the young men for his bald pate and rhetorical questions. Most in Ndjindji described him as *nganga buka* ("white nganga") and believed that he used his considerable expertise to watch over the chief and the population. Nonetheless, knowledge like his is not taken likely. Some visitors became visibly nervous in his presence, and I have seen him take advantage of that anxiety. He died in 1996.

His bitter rival, Kakoko, would not let me avoid him, no matter how hard I tried. He was unique among the Eastern Pende because he actually advertised himself as a hitman specializing in lightning strikes. The diamond-city Tshikapa is gripped with fear every December when he makes his annual visit. (December is the month marked by the most lightning activity.) He inspires almost universal loathing and fear . . . and enjoys it! Nonetheless, even Kakoko entertains clients for herbal remedies. He is also a formidable gardener and chef, building on his knowledge of plants. I was surprised to see how much his information contributed to this article. He provided a valuable "check" on Kombo-Kakese's teaching.

Conversations with Ndjindji's *nganga* were distinctly different in texture from those with chiefs. They tended to be brief and often ended with a bombshell metaphor on which the speaker would refuse to elaborate. In hindsight, I realize that both *nganga* periodically tested my knowledge as a potential rival. Kakoko, in particular, did his best to lure me into a formal apprenticeship through small gifts of information. He had traveled to conduct his studies and concluded that I was engaged in the same enterprise. Although I believed that I was steering away from sensitive information, my association with chiefs and *nganga* made it clear in popular opinion that I was engaged in a similar quest for power. As Favret-Saada's work implies, it was impossible to study *wanga* without being assigned a position in the discourse in which it is

verbalized. My seeming acquisition of knowledge eventually made me appear menacing to a group of bewitched (Strother 1996). Fortunately, Kombo-Kakese intervened to defuse the situation.

Because of the special difficulty of this subject, I have chosen to quote extensively from the specialists interviewed. First of all, this method indicates something of the dialogic nature of the fieldwork. It indicates who is willing to talk about what and conveys something of the flavor of the discourse itself. These men are all masters of metaphor. It is important to preserve a distinction between what was actually said and my own attempt to translate and interpret a statement like Nzambi's that composing a power object is like writing a letter.

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