

THE ZAIRIAN LANGUAGE POLICY AND ITS EFFECT ON THE LITERATURES IN NATIONAL LANGUAGES

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The existence of hundreds of languages in the Democratic Republic of Congo has rendered the language policy a very critical issue from the time this huge territory became a private possession of the Belgian King Leopold II, through its colonization by Belgium and to today. Each administration responded to this question in a different way. The interest in local languages was instrumental in the emergence of four national languages, namely, Kikongo, Lingala, Swahili, and Tshiluba. After the country's independence, a presidential ordinance made French the official language, and this situation has remained unchanged. The prominence of French negatively affected the growth of literature in national languages, especially during the postcolonial era. The timid evolution the literature in national languages experienced previously and during the first few years after Congo's independence was finally stopped when President Mobutu banned missionaries' periodicals, the only major outlet for writings in national languages.

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One of the main characteristics of many African languages is that they are oral and have yet to develop a literate tradition. In my opinion, this is a serious handicap for those languages. Perhaps there is nothing wrong with this situation for the indigenous speakers so long as people keep using these languages. What is a problem, however, is what will probably befall those languages in the future

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when the formal education of African children becomes generalized, especially in the absence of an appropriate reform of language policies on the part of the political leadership in each individual country. The fact is that most educated Africans have a limited or rather a poor knowledge of their own languages and simply cannot function in them—barely speaking them, let alone writing them. Worse, they are not generally aware of the seriousness of the problem. This is because education is conducted in and based on foreign European languages, and little or no room is given to African languages.

The issue that I have chosen to address is related to the problem I have touched on in these opening lines. In the 1970s, Zaire made a name all over the world with its policy of African authenticity instituted by its president, Mobutu Sese Seko (Joseph Désiré Mobutu).¹ Cities, towns, streets, and lakes officially took up their African names; the country changed from the Democratic Republic of Congo (or Congo Kinshasa) to the Republic of Zaire, and people had to adopt authentic African names. These changes were made not out of any philosophical conviction, but people were forced to enact them by a tyrannical system that itself did not believe much in what it was insisting people do. Behind this façade of African pride or African consciousness espoused by the regime in power, nothing seemed to have been undertaken to put back onto center stage any African languages—not even in the case of Zaire—the four national languages that would represent the most important step toward the affirmation of African authenticity.

Similar to most African countries, the populations in Zaire speak hundreds of languages that have for the most part little or no written literature. The number of languages spoken in Zaire varies according to studies from 251 to 300. The large majority of those languages belong to the Bantu family, which in turn is part of the Eastern branch of the Niger-Congo family known as Benue-Congo. The small number of remaining languages are non-Bantu Central Sudanic languages and are found in the northern region of the Zairian territory stretching from West to East (Ndolo, 1992).

Because Zairian languages are not all mutually intelligible, four major languages have emerged to become *linguae francae*, that is

“a medium of communication for people who speak different first languages” (Crystal, 1987, p. 425) and have now achieved the status of national languages. A national language, as defined by Ndolo based on the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) language delineation, “is a language used by an entity to express its political, social and cultural identity” (p. 2). It should be stressed, however, that for a language to achieve the national language status, it must also be recognized as such by a government body or the constitution. The four national languages in Zaire are Kikongo, Lingala, Swahili, and Tshiluba. What is particular to them is that they each cover one different area of the country, although some of them are intelligible beyond their traditional boundaries. Kikongo (also known as Monokutuba, Kutuba, or Kikongo ya leta) is spoken in the provinces of Bas-Zaire (Lower Zaire) and Bandundu. Lingala speakers are on both sides of the Zaire River between Kinshasa (the national capital) and Kisangani, 1,810 mi (2,912 km) upstream. Swahili or Kiswahili is spoken in the provinces of Nord Kivu (North Kivu), Sud Kivu (South Kivu), Maniema, Shaba, and the eastern part of Haut Zaire (Upper Zaire). Tshiluba is spoken in two regions or provinces—Kasai-Oriental (Eastern Kasai) and Kasai-Occidental (Western Kasai)—in the upper Kasai River watershed.

Of the four languages, Lingala is without doubt the most widely utilized. According to Ndolo’s 1992 study, the number of people speaking Lingala is 12.4 million—37.46% of the national population. Swahili is second with 9.1 million or 27.49% of the people. There are 6.3 million Tshiluba speakers or 19.30% of the national population. Those who speak Kikongo come fourth with 5.2 million and represent 15.75% of Zairians.

The notion that the current status of those four languages was a creation of the colonial authorities to make contact possible between them and the various people with whom the authorities had to deal has to be dismissed. The emergence of these four languages as natural vernaculars is linked to the development of trade relations and communication between the various populations of Central Africa long before the Europeans set foot on that land. This is particularly true for Kikongo, Lingala, and Tshiluba. In addition,

the expansion of Swahili is attributed to the Arab slave trade and Arab influence in the eastern region of Zaire. As a matter of fact, the part of the country where Swahili is spoken was once under the influence of the sultan of Zanzibar whose forces raided the region for slaves. However, the role played by colonization in the widespread use of the national languages should not be discounted.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF LANGUAGE POLICY IN ZAIRE

THE COLONIAL LANGUAGE POLICY

When Zaire was called the Congo Independent State, it was the private property of the Belgian King Leopold II. It remained so from 1887 to 1908 after which he gave it up to Belgium under international pressure. During that period, French was the official language used in any kind of business. However, its use was largely restricted to Europeans. It was not by any means the language of education in most schools for indigenous children.

When King Leopold's former Congo Independent State became a Belgian colony, the colonial authorities did not initially seem to have clear administrative and political goals contrary to the British with their indirect rule, or the French with their *administration directe* (direct rule). They relied for a certain period on what they called *empirisme* (Kadima-Nzuji, 1984, p. 9). For its proponents, it was a policy that rejected preconceived systems, models, and rigid theories. According to the supporters of this policy, colonization could not be the result of spectacular, elegant, and gratuitous speculations. It aimed first at the primitive, disconcerting, and complex man and was based on realism and flexibility.² In reality, however, it seems to be a nonpolicy policy, that is, a policy that was grounded on no philosophical theory or ideology but rather based on the day-to-day mood or interest of a particular administration and was subject to change according to events, particularly in the beginning of colonial rule. Language policy followed the same path. In other words, there was no clearly planned objective for languages in Bel-

gian colonial policies. Before the Second World War, the little education to which Congolese children had access was carried out in vernacular languages.

The language policy during the Leopold era and the colonial period can be characterized as ambiguous or confusing. The confusion arises, first of all, from the inability on the part of the authorities to enforce their policy, and second, from the unclear definition of the term *foreign European language*, when the question was which of French and Flemish (a Dutch dialect) should be the foreign language to be diffused. French was declared the official language of the Congo Independent State on August 6, 1887. All administrators, army officers, school officials, and riverboat captains were constantly ordered to spread the use of French. This is what a 1907 administrative manual stipulates in that respect:

It is . . . necessary to introduce to the Blacks the French language, the official language of the State. It is thus recommended to officials to use, as much as possible, only French terms in their official dealings with State soldiers and workers in a manner so as to have in each post a nucleus of men knowing the rudiments of language and who will in turn propagate it among the natives. (Yates, 1980, p. 258)

One of the consequences of this language policy was that French became a required subject in the two of the four school systems in place: government *colonies scolaires*, which were owned by the state but managed by Catholic missionaries; and secular vocational schools, known as *écoles professionnelles*, owned and staffed by the state. Such a requirement was not applied to subsidized schools—*écoles libres subsidiées*, and independent schools, *écoles libres*. In *colonies scolaires*, “The pupils were to be able to read and write French upon completion of their three-year programme,” but in vocational schools, “the level of instruction was low: the teaching of French ‘will not be in depth, but must be related to the trades that the native will learn and to the relationships with whites which they will have in their work.’ Only in the schools for clerks, established in 1906, was French to be the language of instruction” (Yates, 1980, p. 259).

The policy was an immediate failure and remained so for a long time because of the tremendous problems that arose in its implementation. During that early phase of colonization, Leopold was forced to recruit administrators, army officers, traders, missionaries, and other workers from various European nations because the Belgian people manifested little interest in his African venture. These people came from the United States and from all over Europe—including Finland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Russia, Switzerland, England, Italy, and Portugal—and came to represent more than 40% of the European presence. Besides, the Belgian king was compelled to maintain an international and humanitarian image because, according to the Berlin Act, the territory was supposed to be open to traders irrespective of their nationalities and to all missionaries regardless of the Christian sect to which they were affiliated. Many of these Europeans did not speak French and had to learn it. That fact alone did not help in spreading the use of French. Even among Belgians, some did not speak French. Many Flemish speaking Belgian missionaries, for instance, had a poor command of French.

It is worth pointing out here that in Belgium there was an ethnolinguistic dispute between Walloons (who were French speakers) and Flemings (who spoke a Dutch dialect). The official status of French was evidently not applauded by all Belgians regardless of whether they were in Belgium or in the Congo. It was probably because of that linguistic conflict that the notion of national languages (French and Flemish) was introduced in the Concordat agreement between the colonial government and the Vatican signed on May 26, 1906. According to the agreement, French was no longer required in subsidized Catholic mission schools. Each one could, with the governor-general's accord, establish its own curriculum, as long as the two Belgian national languages were included (Yates, 1980). Nevertheless, the colonial government was unable to enforce this school legislation because of the important role of the Catholic missionaries in the Belgianization policy of King Leopold, and their increasing number. They differed with the administration and did not co-operate with the government policy about French. They strongly opposed it because they believed it

contrary to their objective, which was to Christianize not Westernize Africans. These missionaries favored local languages and feared that French “made available non-religious ideas and the necessary skills for employment outside the mission orbit” (Yates, 1980, p. 262). They were, by and large, not favorable to literacy and rather preferred, in Yates’s words, an elite of religious assistants who would “be obedient, docile, and pious, capable of dispensing doctrine orally” (Yates, 1980, p. 262).

Catholic and Protestant missionaries did not, in general, favor the principle of teaching a modern European language, because in their opinion it gave more mobility to Africans and furnished the temptation of entering the service of the state. Without it, they could avoid “the potentially deleterious moral and political results of introducing a modern language, particularly as the basis of the kind of ‘academic’ secondary education that was perceived to have such harmful consequences in ‘older’ colonies, such as India and Sierra Leone” (Yates, 1980, pp. 62-63).

The Belgians did not warmly accept the idea of French being taught to the Congolese population very much like the British who, according to Dr. Karenga Mutahi (in Ngugi’s [1981] *Writers in Politics*), opposed the teaching of English to Kenyans. However, unlike the British—whose attitude was motivated by fear that the new elite would get access to “some radical progressive literature, especially anti-imperialist communist literature” (as cited in Ngugi, 1981, p. 61)—the Belgian argument against teaching the Congolese a European language was expressed by the opinion of Edouard Kervyn, a top Belgian government official (pro-Catholic director of justice and education) in Brussels:

“First of all, in the opinion of the very experienced colonials, all negroes knowing French refuse to do manual labour,” especially in urban areas. Secondly, missionaries and colonial officials were especially irked when Africans wanted to imitate the dress, behaviour, and language of whites. Colonialists noted derisively that, in knowing a few words of French, an African imagined himself as *civilisé*, who should be accorded special liberties; indeed, the idea of African assimilation continued to upset Belgian colonialists. Thirdly, to have all Congolese study French was “to risk the creation

of a generation of *déclassés*, and anarchists.” Experience in India, [...] had shown that an anti-colonial outlook was fostered by education in a European language. Fourthly, the widespread introduction of French would be a unifying factor that posed a political threat to the white hegemony. (Yates, 1980, p. 272)

Kervyn’s conclusion was that the French language should be taught only to a restricted group of Africans who will be chosen to make up a new indigenous elite.

It was because of the interconfessional rivalry that the Catholic missionaries, reluctantly taking cue from their Protestant competitors, started teaching French in parochial schools. It was not until June 28, 1936, by decree that French was made the sole official language of the colonial administration. However, the use of French in school depended primarily on two major factors: the location of the school and the sex of the learners. In elementary schools in the urban areas, French was taught for boys as an optional second language after the regional lingua franca, whereas in rural area schools, instruction was carried out in a native language, preferably in the lingua franca of the region if possible. In secondary schools, French and the regional lingua franca were mandatory. Other languages were added to the curriculum and varied depending on the types of specialization of students. Dutch was compulsory starting in the 4th year of school in *section moderne* and *section latine*. Indigenous languages were also taught. In *section latine*, the study of Latin and the regional lingua franca was also obligatory. Girls’ education was primarily conducted in a regional lingua franca; nevertheless, French was optional in urban center schools.

The need to know local languages started at the same time that the teaching of French was mandated. District commissioners were enjoined to learn African languages, and circulars reminding the colonial administration agents to learn and study African languages were frequently sent out. This quote from the 1906 administrative manual explains how significant the knowledge of local languages was for the colonial purpose:

In order that relations with the native bear results, it is indispensable that our officials have at their disposal the means to familiarize

themselves with the idioms of the populations among whom they live. It is thus necessary in all districts, that the basic principles be collected for the drawing up of vocabularies in the various dialects spoken in the State. (Yates, 1980, p. 267)

One cannot know for sure whether these instructions were carried out. The policy regarding African languages became effective with the 1906 Concordat accords whereby the colonial government was to be assisted by Catholic missionaries. A financial incentive was included in the agreement between the state and Catholic missions. Ndolo (1990) noted that 3,000 Belgian francs would be awarded to “the missions for each unknown indigenous language (dialect) for which they provided a grammar, a lexicon, a map indicating the area of diffusion and a collection of useful phrases with translation in the national languages, i.e. French and Flemish” (pp. 76-77).

With regard to the choice of African languages, the colonial government favored Lingala, used as lingua franca by many riverine populations of the Congo river from Kisangani to Kinshasa—mainly the Bangala people to whom it was the mother tongue. Lingala was the language spoken by the first contingent of Congolese recruits to the Belgian colonial army, the *Force Publique* in 1902 (Yates, 1980). Yates tells us that the choice was pragmatic and the rejection of Swahili was due to its association with Arab slave traders. Tshiluba was rejected because its diffusion in the interior was unrecognized, whereas Kikongo was not chosen because “the Bakongo were reluctant to leave their homeland in the Lower Congo [Lower Zaire] to work in the interior where Kikongo was not understood” (Yates, 1980, p. 267). Catholic missionaries’ choice was one of the four regional languages. The Protestants chose the vernacular used by most people near their mission station and started learning, studying, and using these languages from the very beginning of their mission, which began in the late 19th century.

THE POSTCOLONIAL LANGUAGE POLICY

The first decision on language policy in the newly independent Democratic Republic of Congo was the October 17, 1962, presi-

dential ordinance by Joseph Kasavubu, the first head of state, adopting French as the official language. Among the measures of educational reform, Dutch was replaced by English as a required second language in all secondary schools. Ndolo (1992) argued that there has not been any language policy in Zaire since 1960. All decisions that have been made are language practices because apparently they are not based on “careful planning, but rather as a matter of convenience for the time” (p. 94). He describes the 1962 ordinance as a step backward because no convincing reasons were given for the adoption of French as the official language. Hence, the 1962 ordinance had negative effects on national languages. As far as language policy is concerned, there have been only political statements that include recommendations and resolutions, but not a real government plan of action. Here are some of the most significant recommendations:

- In August of 1966 (May 22-26), the Ministry of Education convened a conference for the national and provincial top-level officials. The objective of the gathering was to find ways to “boost and promote the principle of developing and spreading an indigenous language which would become the national language” (Ndolo, 1992, p. 95). Unfortunately no agreement was reached as for the choice of language.
- In 1968, the commission for the reform of the national education made the proposition of adopting a bilingual system whereby French and a national language would be used in primary school. The commission, however, fell short in selecting the language. During the same year, the Ministry of Tourism issued a decree recommending that the four national languages be taught in the first 3 years of primary education, especially in the national and provincial capitals. Once again, no concrete steps were taken to implement the decree.
- The Congress of the Popular Movement for the Revolution (or Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution [M.P.R.]), then a single party, recommended in its first ordinary session in 1972 that national languages should be taught in schools at all levels. Two years later, 1974, the first seminar of Zairian linguists passed a resolution in favor of the reinsertion of national languages in the first

3 years of the elementary education. The resolution was implemented in September of the same year at the beginning of the school year.

- In 1980, the “Politburo” of the single party took among other measures the introduction of national languages in schools as a subject, but the program was terminated after two years (Ndolo, 1992, p. 96). In 1982, the third National Congress of the Party came to the realization that the country did not have a systematic and adequate language policy. But as it had happened in the past, no specific measure was taken to correct the situation.
- In September of 1984, the Ministry of Education for elementary and secondary education initiated an experimental language program in the first two years in a number of selected schools in Kinshasa, the capital city.

The only major change that took place in the language domain was the introduction of national languages in some institutions for higher learning such as all the “Instituts Supérieurs Pédagogiques” (teacher training colleges), the faculty of letters of the University of Lubumbashi and Institut des Sciences et Techniques de l’Information (the school of journalism).

It is worth mentioning that despite the absence of any language policy and the situation of national languages that has been discussed, one national language has been expanding, not in a normal school environment but outside it. This language is Lingala, which has been growing tremendously since it was selected by the colonial administration. There are several reasons for the expansion of Lingala to the point that wherever one goes in Zaire, one is very likely to find someone who knows the language. Soon after it was chosen by the colonial administration, Lingala became the language of the army, the police, and the White colonial agents throughout the country. The situation has not changed in regard to the armed and police forces. In addition, Lingala is the language spoken in Kinshasa (the nation’s capital) and is therefore associated with prestige, the politico-administrative, social, and even economic power of the capital of a nation with a highly centralized government. Moreover, Lingala was the medium par excellence that the Zairian president used consistently to address political ral-

lies all over the country. Mobutu spoke the language because (a) it is the lingua franca of Equator Province, his native province, (b) as a soldier he used it in the colonial army, and (c) he lived in Kinshasa even before becoming president, and as a president he resided there for three decades. In addition, Lingala has an advantage over the three other languages because of economics as Ndolo (1992) pointed out:

Besides Politics and the army, inter-provincial trade has helped Lingala. The development of small and middle businesses owned by Zairians as well as that of less conventional business (smuggling), intranational and international (Congo, Angola, Cabinda) trade have resulted in a tremendous movement of people between the capital and provinces on the one hand, and between Zaire and other countries on the other hand. In most cases Lingala is the lingua franca these traders resort to. (p. 52)

One major factor that has also helped the expansion of Lingala is popular music. Although there is no statistics available, one can state without hesitation that almost 90% (if not more) of Zairian popular music is sung in Lingala, and it is produced by bands and singers living in Kinshasa. Another element no less important is that the national and provincial radio and television have devoted more time to programs in Lingala than to any other national language. Ndolo's research reveals the following figures for the year 1986: 2,000 hours were in Lingala, 624 hours in Swahili, 520 hours in Kikongo, and 520 hours in Tshiluba.

Before closing the language issue, it should be brought to attention that in spite of all the government efforts to make French the official language, it is still spoken by a minority and will probably continue to be so. French remains the language for the executive, judiciary, and legislative branches, and in education, and it occupies a considerable position in the media. Besides, it is used in international relations and business. On the national level, the majority of the population speaks one of the four national languages. According to Matumele, a Congolese researcher on the language issue, "Most oral transactions are carried out in Lingala or

the lingua franca of the province; French being used mostly for written records” (as cited in Ndolo, 1992, p. 53).

LANGUAGE POLICY AND LITERATURES IN NATIONAL LANGUAGES

The major consequence of the language policy is very evident in the literary field, and in the press. More and more people write in French. Writings in local languages tend to be published in the newspapers that have become less and less important, whereas only works in French found their way to the rare publishing houses. In the 1960s and thereafter, more works in French came out as more new writers appeared in the literary arena. Among those writers who have achieved an audience outside Zaire are Vumbi Yoka Mudimbe and Zamenga Batukezanga, to name just two, both of whom have written numerous books, although the local audience for their works is restricted because both use French.

Of the four national languages, only Kikongo seemed to have developed a literature in the Western sense thanks to the efforts of various Protestant missionary groups.

Here, literature refers to writing in general as opposed to creative writing or “belles lettres” for the following reasons:

1. There is a direct relation between the two. In many cases, creative writings came into existence because of or in the form of religious literature. The translation of the Bible or parts of the Bible for instance led eventually to more personal religious creations such as hymns, songs, prayers or somewhat secular works in *Minsamu Miyenge* (or *The Messages of Peace*), a monthly journal first published in 1892 (Mbelolo, 1972). This is not unique to Zairian literature.
2. The creation of a newsletter, newspaper, or a journal in the national languages was of great importance because it provided an outlet for prospective and potential writers. This happened not only in Congo but elsewhere in Africa wherever literatures in local vernaculars blossomed. The Bible, the Koran, and *Pilgrim's Progress* served as the points of departure of literatures in African lan-

guages (Ge'ez and Amharic literatures in Ethiopia or Ajami literature in West Africa).

The efforts that the early Protestant missionaries made to first learn local languages so that they could teach the gospel were instrumental in the promotion of works in those languages. By 1874, the first attempts were made in Kikongo. The first such document known was a compilation of vocabulary and grammar and a reader, *Nsamu Wambote (Good News)*.

Protestant missionaries played a seminal role as linguists and translators (Gérard, 1981). Their works included *Dictionary and Grammar of the Kongo Language* written in 1888 by William Holman Bentley, a Baptist missionary; a translation of the New Testament by a Swedish missionary named Nils Westlind in 1891; and of the Bible by another Swede, K. E. Lamann, in 1905. It should be made clear that they were assisted by Africans, one of whom is Donzwau M. D. Nlemvo (1879-1938).³

The early writings were strongly influenced by Christian faith. They were primarily traditional genres that were utilized or interpreted for a Christian purpose. One such traditional form was the interpretation of dreams or *ndozi*, which no longer served to predict the future as had been the case. Instead, *ndozi* developed into a real poetic genre that interpreted dreams as allegorical Christian visions. It was started by Abeli Kiananwa, who published his first *ndozi* in *Minsamu Miyenge* as early as 1894. The same journal also contained proverbs or *ngana* of the Kongo people that catechists used for proselytization ends. Pauli Dikoko and Davidi Malangidila were the best known in this form of writing.

The most popular genre of all was hymns. Veritable panegyric poems were not an unknown genre in the oral tradition of the Kongo people. The catechists composed hymns that were sometimes inspired by tunes learned at the mission or other times set to new tunes, and they composed lyrics now not in the honor of their ancestors but of God or Christ. The first collection of such hymns was published in 1887 under the title of *Minkunga Miyenge (Peace Songs)* and contained hymns composed by Abeli Kiananwa, D. Makosi, E. Ndaki and other missionaries among whom was Nils

Westlind. The 1915 and 1929 editions of *Minkunga Miayenge* had 423 hymns composed by the three catechists and many others including Pauli Dikoko and David Malangidila. Next to hymns, the most popular genre of writing that drew upon orature for Christian ends was *nsamu* or *kimpa* (tale) that, as Mbelolo (1972) put it, “constitutes with proverbs the richest part of the oral repertoire of most African societies” (p. 128). In those tales, a Christian interpretation or meaning was given to narratives that were typically African.

The transfer of ownership of the so-called Congo Independent State from Leopold II to his country affected the written output in indigenous languages in that it went through a period of decline. Indeed, once the territory became a Belgian colony, the Protestant missionaries (exclusively non-Belgian) who had been very helpful in the promotion of the local languages had to face a strong competition from Catholic missionaries, particularly those of Belgian origin whose number increased.

The revival of written works in Kikongo took place in September 1926 after the International Missionary Council in Le Zoute, Belgium, which put emphasis on vernacular languages. Unlike the previous writings, which were all from the former Protestant missionary center of Mukimbungu, the new written works came from the mission center of Kimpese. The results of the council were felt in the publication of textbooks, a collection of tales under the title of *Nsweswe Ansusu Ampembe ye Ngana Zankanka (The Young White Hen and Other Tales)*, and an adaptation of *Robinson Crusoe* in Kikongo in 1928 prepared by an American doctor, Catherine L. Mabie, and Thimothé Vingadio, one of the first pupils of the Kongo Evangelical Training Institute at Kimpese. In 1956, new hymn writers (such as Miguel Nekaka, Samuel Nsimba, and Remy Malutama) had their compositions assembled in a hymn book, *Minkunga mia Kintwadi (Songs of Unity)*, which also contained the earlier hymns. Hymn writing remained a favorite genre into the 1960s and even later, and was enriched by the contribution of such well-known writers as Vingadio, Nekaka, Samuel A. Nsimba, A. Emile Disengomoka, Jacques N. Bahelele, Remy Malutama, André Massaki, Lucien Fwasi, H. Antoine Wantwadi, Noé Diawaku, and Fukiau kia Bunseki. It remained essentially a reli-

gious genre, although some hymns were praise poems blended with patriotic awareness, especially those composed in the late 1950s and all published in *Minkunga mia Kintwadi* by the disciples of Simon Kimbangu, the founder of today's Church of Jesus Christ on Earth by the Prophet Simon Kimbangu.

Another publication combines a collection of tales and poems with the title of *Tangeno Nsamu (Read the Tales)*. It was the result of joint efforts of a local writer named Joseph Ngangu and an American missionary, Mary Bonar. The translations of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, and in particular the Swedish missionary John Petterson's novel *Nsamu a Mpanzu (The Life of Mpanzu)*, the longest Kikongo novel to date written in three volumes (1935 and 1938), served, in Mbelolo's opinion, as the springboard for Congolese prose writers.

Nsamu a Mpanzu was the first novel to be written in Kikongo. It is generally believed that Petterson was assisted by a catechist named Samuel Lema. A. Emile Disengomoka (1915-1965) was the first indigenous novelist in Kikongo. He is mostly known for his novel *Kwenkwenda (Where Shall I Go)*, which was published by 1943. It deals with the conflict between tradition and Christianity. In 1948, he was the winner of the Margaret Wrong Award. Disengomoka was also author of two books of essays, *Luvuvamu mu nzo (Peace in the Family)* and an adaptation of the American R. O. Winstedt's *Right Thinking and Right Living*. Other writers of his generation are Samuel A. Nsimba with his numerous articles in *Minsamu Miayenge* and hymns, Jacques N. Bahelele, Remy Malutama, and Jackson Ngangu. Bahelele's novel *Kinzonzi ye ntekolo andi Makundu (Kinzonzi and his Grandchild Makundu)* came out in 1948. His book of folk tales, *Bingana bia nsi a Kongo (Tales of the Kongo Country)*, was published in 1953. The following year, his religious book *Nsamununu za mambu ma Nzambi (The Art of Preaching the Gospel)*, which he coauthored with Joseph Samba, was printed. Malutama wrote only hymns. Ngangu wrote *Tangeno Nsamu (Read the Tales)* in collaboration with an American missionary, Mary Bonar. It is a book of poems and tales especially intended for adolescents.

André Massaki is probably the first autobiographical author with his *Nsamu a Nsiamindele* (*The Life of Nsiamindele*). The book appeared first in *Sikama*, a Kikongo newspaper in 1959. Its title changed to *Mwan'Ansiona* (*The Orphan*) when it was published in the form of a book in 1960. Massaki wrote essays on family life (*Luzingu lwa Nkento ye Bakala mu Nzo* [*The Life of Wife and Husband*]), on the question of God and race (*Nzambi muna Nkia Kanda Kavwilu e?* [*What Color is God?*]), and a translation of *God and the Man* by American Mervyn M. Temple under the title *Nzambi ye Muntu*. His last book was Disengomoka's biography, *Disengomoka. Zingu Kiandi: 1915-1965* (*Disengomoka. His Life: 1915-1965*).

One of the main characteristics of all the writers in Kikongo is without doubt hymn writing. Lucien Fwasi was a very renowned composer despite his virtual state of blindness. Other composers of hymns are H. Antoine Wantwadi, Noé Diawaku, Robert Youdi, Alex Nsimba, and Fukiau kia Bunseki. Their hymns appeared in *Minkunga mia Kintwadi*. The most prolific of all writers in Kikongo is Fukiau kia Bunseki, who wrote a collection of proverbs under the title of *Mampinda ma Kongo wakedika* (*The Philosophy of a Real Mukongo*), published in 1960, in addition to his 1961 *Wazola zinga mokina ye Bafwa* (*If You Want to Live, Be With the Dead*), an essay with poems, *Twaduswa ye Twadisa* (*To Be Governed and Govern*), which is a political essay that appeared the same year, another essay, *Dodokolo Tata* (*Please Forgive Me Father*) in 1962, two studies of Kikongo grammar, *Dingu kia uding'a Kikongo* (*Research Strategies in Kikongo*) in 1961, and *Nding'a Kikongo* (*Kikongo Language*) in 1962. He also wrote a treatise of algebra titled *Alidzeba* in 1963. In the second half of the 1960s, he wrote *Tambula Nsengo* (*Receive the Hoe*) (essay, 1966), *Imeni mu nding'andi* (*About the Language*) (essay with poems, 1966), *Nkongo ye nza yakunzungidila. Nza-Kongo* (*Mukongo and the World Around Him. Kongo-Cosmogony*) (a philosophical study, 1966), and *Kimpodi ye Kinganga-Mpodi* (*Kimpodi and Mpodi-Magic*) (1967). His most interesting works, from a literary standpoint, are *Mampinda ma Kongo wakedika* (*The Philosophy of a Real Mukongo*) and *Dingo-Dingo* (*The Cycle of Life*), both pub-

lished in 1966. These are collections of poems characterized by a strong influence of techniques of oral art.

The bulk of Kikongo literature came from Protestant missions. Catholic missionaries also started a few newspapers—*Ntentembo Eto*, *Kukiele*, *Tsungi Mona*, *Lukwikilu Lweto*, and *Longete*, *journal dia Balongi*—that obviously became the only platforms for the Congolese who wanted to try their hand in writing. However, nothing of any significant importance in literature has been produced so far, although more study needs to be done on the writings in Kikongo produced in Catholic mission circles.

Writings in Lingala, Swahili, and Tshiluba have not been explored yet. It is imperative that such a study be done immediately. One common feature to these writings, however, is the association with Christian missions (especially the Catholic missions) because they played a more important role in education as an integral part of the Belgian colonial enterprise and were in all parts of the country. Given the importance of newspapers (which became the only forum that the Congolese had for any kind of writings in national languages), it is therefore important to mention some of them. There were three important newspapers in Lingala: *Lokasa la Catey*, *Ekim'ea nsango*, and *Lokasa la Bisu*. Kadima pointed out a collection of tales and fables by André-Romain Bokwango under the title of *Masapo ma Bangala (The Tales of the Bangala People)* (see Kadima-Nzuji, 1984, p. 278). The Belgian General Gilliaert, commandant-in-chief of the colonial army, made available to indigenous soldiers booklets written in Lingala by noncommissioned Congolese officers containing local folk tales. Some of the newspapers in Swahili were *Kirongozi*, *Shauri na Hadisi*, *Hodi*, and *Habari ya Boyulu*; and in Tshiluba the following were published: *Dibeji dipiadipia dia mamweto Mariya*, *Nkuruse*, *Tshisumbu tshia balongi ba kale*, *Lumu lwa Bena Kasai*, and *Dibeji dia Balongi ba Kale*.

After examining the language issue since Zaire became independent, the following conclusions can be reached:

1. The need to promote the national languages does exist genuinely on the part of the Zairian people. This is what has come out of all

the gatherings organized by the national education authorities, the party or the language specialists.

2. There is a serious lack of a language policy in Zaire and the situation should be corrected.

Furthermore, there is no organized body in the executive branch in charge of the language issue. The political leadership has failed to take concrete measures to implement various resolutions expressing the will of the people. There is a lack of political will on its part. This probably explains why most resolutions have neither been implemented nor enforced. It is not surprising that there has never been a presidential ordinance on the language issue, or national languages, in particular, during 30 years of a dictatorial regime that has ruled by ordinance. African authenticity promoted by Mobutu was a political farce. If, in the beginning, it appeared to be “the refusal by Zaire blindly to embrace imported ideologies” that “was designed to provide a philosophical context within which ordinary Zairians may identify the cultural heritage to which they are inextricably bound” (Yates, 1980, p. 277)—which is very noble—in reality it revealed itself as a lack of political ideology. All Zairians remember well Mobutu’s slogan echoed by his government-controlled media: “We are neither to the left nor to the right, not even in the center.” That is to say that Mobutu did not have any political, economic, or social plan for Zaire—to say the least. The result of the lack of political direction has led the country to a total bankruptcy. African authenticity was for Mobutu a way to oppress his people and enforce his authority.

The successive political systems, from the Leopold era through the colonial period to Mobutu’s dictatorship, have had far-reaching negative consequences on literature in national languages. During that period of time, literature in Zairian languages went through three different phases that corresponded with the administration in place. The literature in Kikongo illustrates this situation convincingly. The first phase coincided with the Congo Independent State. Literature in Kikongo made a timid start, and it was essentially religious because it began in Protestant missions. When the country became a Belgian colony, which was the second phase, there was a

small body of works that can be considered literary. Christian missions, in particular the Protestant, played a crucial role in that development. Colonial administration followed suit, especially in the army. During the first 4 years of independence, the trend was reversed by the first government, and it stopped under Mobutu's rule. In contrast, more emphasis has been put on French. With the banning of missionary periodicals in 1973 by Mobutu, an important outlet for writing in Kikongo and the other three national languages was closed off, and such literary activity as there had been since these times was chiefly in French.

NOTES

1. Zaire regained its old name of Democratic Republic of Congo since May of 1997 after Mobutu was overthrown. However, throughout this article I have used Zaire and Zairian because the study focuses on the period up to Mobutu's regime.

2. "La Belgique s'est de tout temps soigneusement gardée d'importer, dans ses territoires africains, des systèmes préfabriqués, de grandes théories rigides. La colonisation ne peut être le résultat de spéculations élégantes, spectaculaires et gratuites: c'est l'homme qu'elle vise d'abord, l'homme primitif, déroutant, complexe. Son efficacité dépend de son réalisme autant que sa souplesse." This passage of *L'action sociale au Congo Belge et au Rwanda-Urundi* was quoted in Kadima-Nzujii, 1984, p. 9.

3. See François Bountinck (1978), Donzwau M.D. Nlemvo. *Revue Africaine de Théologie*, 2, iii, 5-32 as cited by Gérard, 1981.

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