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April 6, 1921: The Kimbanguist Representation of a Foundational Milestone between Historicity, Beliefs and Symbolism, and the Hermeneutics of a Struggle for African Consciousness

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes April 6, 1921 as a foundational event of Kimbanguism by articulating its historical, religious, and symbolic dimensions. Through a historical-cultural approach and an integrated hermeneutic methodology, the article reconstructs the healing of Nelly Nkiantondo and the theological and political interpretations that followed. It shows that this date, officially recognized as a public holiday in the Democratic Republic of the Congo since 2023, constitutes a memorial landmark and a vehicle for the struggle for African consciousness. The symbolism of the healing—the restored "head" representing the intelligence and dignity of Black people, and the painful "legs" expressing the incompleteness of salvation—offers a hermeneutics of the postcolonial condition. The article concludes by emphasizing the importance of this day as a matrix of cultural and spiritual liberation and the need for a critical appropriation of this heritage for Africa's lasting emancipation.

KEYWORDS: *Simon Kimbangu, April 6, 1921, Kimbanguism, hermeneutics, symbolism, struggle, African consciousness, colonialism, Kongo messianism.*

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INTRODUCTION

Kimbanguism is a phenomenon that, since its emergence, has attracted the curiosity of scholars from various fields. This study considers it useful to decipher the significance of April 6, 1921, a crucial date in the history of Kimbanguism. This date, which of course had antecedents and was marked by a founding event, represents an act that influenced the trajectory of the religious movement and had profound repercussions on the consciousness and liberation struggle of Africans.

Presidential Ordinance No. 23/042 of March 30, 2023, establishing the list of legal public holidays in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, decrees in Article 1 that April 6 shall be observed as the Day of Simon Kimbangu's Struggle and African Consciousness. This official recognition gives the date a memorial and political dimension that warrants in-depth analysis.

The central research question can be formulated as follows: to what extent does April 6, 1921 constitute a foundational landmark for Kimbanguism, and how does the symbolism of Nkiantondo's healing illuminate the Kimbanguist vision of the liberation of Black people, as well as the memorial and political stakes of this date in contemporary DRC?

To answer this question, the article is organized around several themes: after presenting the theoretical framework and methodology (Section 2), it traces the genesis of Simon Kimbangu's struggle before April 6, 1921 (Section 3), then reconstructs the founding event and its symbolic hermeneutics (Section 4), before analyzing its implications and effects (Section 5) and placing it within the Kongo messianic tradition (Section 6).

As the Latin historians intended (Livy, Sallust, Caesar, Tacitus), this reflection places history at the

service of a patriotic and political approach. It is not strictly event-centered history, but rather a New History, especially cultural history, analyzing Kimbanguist social representations of the facts associated with this date. The article follows Paul Valéry's thought (1894–1913): "If history is not reduced to an amusement of the mind, it is because we hope to draw lessons from it; we believe that knowledge of the past may provide some foreknowledge of the future."

Theoretical Framework and Source Criticism

Theoretical Framework

This study employs a hybrid theoretical framework combining Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics and Valentin-Yves Mudimbe's postcolonial critique. Ricoeurian hermeneutics, distinguishing literal, allegorical, and political levels, enables a stratified reading of Kimbanguist sources. Mudimbe's notion of a "hybrid space" (1988, 1997) illuminates Kimbanguism as an intersection between missionary Christianity and Kongo traditions, revealing an eschatological imaginary marked by symbolic hybridization and identity reconfiguration.

From this perspective, Kimbanguism appears as a phenomenon of "cultural resistance" in which the religious and the political intertwine, as in other African prophetic movements (Worsley, 1968; Ellis & ter Haar, 2004). Simon Kimbangu's explicit claim to messianic status distinguishes him from "unwitting prophets" and places him within a tradition of radical contestation of the colonial order.

Source Criticism

The corpus of Kimbanguist, colonial, missionary, and oral sources presents specific biases.

- Kimbanguist sources (notably the writings of Diangienda Kuntima, 1984; Bandzouzi, 2002; Bongo Nzila, 2008) are marked by hagiographic reconstruction intended to present Kimbangu as "specially called and blessed by God" (Pemberton, 1993). Their chronology is sometimes unclear, but they remain valuable for understanding believers' perceptions.
- Missionary and colonial sources (Security reports, administrative correspondence) are marked by colonial prejudices and hostility toward the movement. Belgian authorities often conflated Kimbanguism with other prophetic movements (the "Ngunzists") to justify repression (Bonhomme, 2021; Raymaekers & Desroche, 1983). They must therefore be used cautiously and confronted with Kimbanguist narratives.
- Oral sources (interviews with Kimbanguist informants) are subject to selective memory and retrospective reconstruction. Their reliability was strengthened through triangulation with written sources and cross-validation (Vansina, 1985).
- The researcher's position as an insider in the Congolese context facilitates access to oral sources but requires constant critical vigilance, made explicit through cross-validation and clarification of hermeneutic choices.

Methodology

This research draws on a plural corpus: oral sources (interviews with Kimbanguist informants), liturgical and mobilizing songs, missionary and colonial archives, and official Church writings. The interviews were analyzed according to the principles of oral history (Vansina, 1985), systematically comparing memory narratives with written sources in order to limit reconstruction bias. The songs were translated from Kikongo and Lingala, taking into account their metaphorical richness and performative dimension.

The analysis is based on an integrated hermeneutics inspired by Paul Ricoeur and Mudimbe's postcolonial critique, distinguishing four levels: literal (reconstruction of facts), allegorical (interpretation of symbols), political (contextualization within colonial relations), and critical (questioning categories inherited from colonial discourse). Triangulation of Kimbanguist, missionary, colonial, and oral sources made it possible to validate interpretations and distinguish attested facts from theological representations.

This approach has limitations: the corpus remains partial (five songs, three informants), and the subjectivity inherent in hermeneutics cannot be completely eliminated. Nevertheless, the diversity of sources and systematic confrontation of narratives provide sufficient reliability to illuminate the historical and symbolic significance of April 6, 1921.

Simon Kimbangu before April 6, 1921: The Man and the Origins of His Struggle

Simon Kimbangu: Birth, Childhood, and Formation in the Colonial Context

Simon Kimbangu was born on September 12, 1887, in N'kamba, in what is now the Ntimansi Sector, Mbanza-Ngungu Territory, Kongo Central Province (Diangienda Kuntima, 1984, p. 17; Iloankoy Nkanga Nsonge, 2010, pp. 17, 39). At that time, administrative districts did not yet exist; they gradually emerged between 1888 and 1910 following the decree of April 16, 1887 (Munayi Muntu-Monji, 2010, pp. 16–17). His native village belonged to the Cataracts District, whose headquarters were in Lukunga (Munayi Muntu-Monji, 2010, p. 17).

He was the son of Kuyela, of the N'laza-Mpanzu clan, and Luezi Wamfuemina, from Sawana village, N'senga Ninianga clan. Through this lineage, he descended from the original Nsaku clan, holder of spiritual authority (Bandzouzi, 2002, pp. 39, 41). This lineage affiliation placed Kimbangu within a tradition in which spiritual authority was transmitted by inheritance, giving his future prophetic mission cultural legitimacy.

A few months after his birth, his mother died, and the child was entrusted to his maternal aunt Marie Kinzembo, who breastfed him alongside her own daughter. Around 1895, his father died, leaving him orphaned before the age of seven (Bandzouzi, 2002, p. 45; Bena Nsilu, 1983, p. 13). His uncle Ndompetelo Mpata mia Mbongo then took responsibility for his upbringing, involving him in commercial activities. Kimbangu worked in this trade, which allowed him to visit Thysville and form friendships, notably with Simon Disueme Ndompetelo around 1913 (Disueme Ndompetelo, interview, 2016).

At school, he attended the Lukengo primary school, run by Protestant missionaries. For four years, under the teacher Jacques Ditele, he learned to read and write in his mother tongue. He then continued his studies at Vula, a major Protestant BMS mission in Gombe-Lutete, where he received a Puritan education (Bandzouzi, 2002, p. 48). This literacy-oriented and rigorous training introduced him to Christian values and moral discipline that would durably influence his religious discourse and praxis.

Kimbangu's childhood thus unfolded in a constant tension between African lineage heritage and Western missionary formation. On the one hand, his affiliation with the Nsaku clan gave him spiritual authority rooted in Kongo tradition; on the other, his experience in Protestant schools placed him within a world of Puritan discipline and literacy, opening the way to a critical appropriation of Christianity. The fact that he became an orphan at an early age, raised by female figures and an uncle engaged in trade, revealed a childhood marked by family resilience and community socialization. These experiences forged a particular sensitivity to suffering and solidarity, later reflected in his role as prophet-healer.

Finally, placing this childhood within the colonial context helps explain the depth of his trajectory: born in 1887, when the Congo Free State was consolidating under Leopold II, Kimbangu grew up in a space of domination and institutional upheaval. The initial absence of administrative districts (Munayi Muntu-Monji, 2010, pp. 16–17) underscored the instability of the emerging colonial order. In this setting, missionary education appeared both as an instrument of control and as a gateway to scriptural modernity, which Kimbangu learned to redirect into an instrument of cultural and spiritual resistance.

Genesis of the Struggle for the Emancipation of Black People within Early Kimbanguist Traditions

Kimbanguist memory holds that, from childhood, Simon Kimbangu experienced unusual events that seemed to announce a liberating mission. In 1895, while participating in a folk musical group called "Sikulu" during a trip toward Kungu, he became seriously ill (Martin, 1981, pp. 57–58; Bongo Nzila, 2008, pp. 7–8). Despite the care provided by Kinzembo and Nsombe, Bikandu's wife, his condition did not improve (Bandzouzi, 2002, pp. 45–46). On the return journey, at Mangulubi, he fell into a deep ravine. When he returned, he explained to Kinzembo: "Mother, do not be afraid! I had gone to seek and visit my Black brothers who are imprisoned at the bottom of this hole so that I could free them and come back up at the appointed time" (Mukonda Diyazolelua, 2007, p. 332; Bandzouzi, 2002, p. 46; cf. Martin, 1981, pp. 57–58). This account, surprising coming from a child of about eight, was interpreted as announcing a mission of deliverance (Bongo Nzila, 2008, p. 8).

In Kimbanguist tradition, this episode formed part of a vision in which Black people were considered to have been imprisoned for more than 4,400 years because of past transgressions, a perception supported by songs and biblical references (Nzakimwena Matondo, 1993, pp. 14–16). This representation echoed certain historical claims that described Africa as stagnant and without history (Ki-Zerbo, 1973, p. 10; Hombessa, 2006, p. 465). Thus, from childhood, Kimbangu seemed to embody a critical consciousness, comparable to Plato's Allegory of the Cave, aimed at freeing Black peoples from cultural and ideological constraints (Dubois & Van Den Wijngaert, 1981, p. 150).

Another significant event occurred in 1914. With his friend Joseph Kumpenda Kimonekene, Kimbangu was collecting palm nuts when he miraculously transformed a spoiled kernel into a fresh one. He declared: "This is what Christ does with us sinners and mortals. He purifies us, makes us pleasing to God, and takes us into his service" (Diangienda Kuntima, 1984, p. 18; Nzakimuena Matondo, 1993, p. 67; Bandzouzi, 2002, pp. 51–52). This prodigy symbolized spiritual purification and the transformation of Black people. Kimbangu insisted on the need to follow the Decalogue and change one's mentality through a Kimbanguist neo-culture, symbolized by the Church's banner.

In 1913, he married Marie Mwilu Kiawanga Nzitani, in accordance with his great-uncle's wishes (Bandzouzi, 2002, pp. 50–51; Lelo-Bakumba Nsilulu, 2016, p. 144). The couple were baptized and religiously married on July 4, 1915, at Ngombe-Lutete, on the Tombe River (Bandzouzi, 2002, p. 52). From 1918 onward, Christ's calls intensified. Kimbangu often discussed with his friend Nsumbu Simon the Israelites' exodus from Egypt and claimed to receive divine instructions (Mukonda Diyazolelua, 2007, p. 338). In November 1920, he fled to Leopoldville to escape these injunctions (Diangienda Kuntima, 1984, p. 24).

On April 2, 1921, he confided to Simon Nsumbu: "If this country were not ours, we too would leave the country this April. But since we are at home, it is I, Kimbangu, who will leave, and in about forty years colonization will come to an end" (Mukonda Diyazolelua, 2007, p. 338). On April 4, 1921, he announced to the same Nsumbu: "Namesake, I want to begin the work that Jesus Christ entrusts to me" (Mukonda Diyazolelua, 2007, p. 340). On the evening of April 5, 1921, he asked his wife to ring the bell at six in the morning to mark the beginning of his ministry (Diangienda Kuntima, 1984, p. 29). With Marie Mwilu's encouragement, he definitively accepted Christ's mission (Mukonda Diyazolelua, 2007, p. 335).

Thus, the genesis of the struggle for the emancipation of Black people emerged through a series of childhood experiences and symbolic prodigies interpreted as signs of things to come. These narratives, transmitted by witnesses and recorded by Kimbangu's first secretaries (Lelo-Bakumba Nsilulu, 2016, p. 139; Martin, 1981, p. 57), constructed a collective memory in which individual history merged into a universal mission. They expressed a liberationist vision that, by articulating Kongo tradition, Christian symbolism, and criticism of colonialism, prepared the emergence of a spiritual and political paradigm intended to transform the condition of Black people.

April 6, 1921, Simon Kimbangu Initiates His Liberating Mission: Facts, Representations, and Symbols

The Factual Dimension of the Event

April 6, 1921 constituted a major milestone in the history of Kimbanguism because it marked the official beginning of Simon Kimbangu's ministry. That morning, during worship, he preached on the "exodus of the Israelites from Egypt," a theme that already announced the liberating dimension of his work. After the service, he left Nkamba with his son Charles Kisolokele Lukelo for the Nsona Kin'yenzi market, where he was to sell tobacco received as payment for sawing wood for Kiniuka, an entrepreneur from Kintumba village (Bongo Nzila, 2008, p. 15; Mario Swalezi Nlandu, interview, 2018).

On the way, at Ngombe-Kinsuka, he met Nelly Nkiantondo, wife of Lubaki, who was suffering from severe headaches. Although he had already passed her hut, he was seized by an inner impulse attributed to Christ. Kisolokele claimed to have seen a luminous being holding a sword. Kimbangu placed his bundle on his son's head, returned to the sick woman, prayed, and declared: "Nkiantondo, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, be healed and rise" (Diangienda Kuntima, 1984, p. 29). The healing was immediate, but Nkiantondo accused him of causing her illness and called him a sorcerer (Mabiala Mantuba-Ngoma, 2014, p. 165; Martin, 1981, p. 62). Later, she acknowledged that she had been healed while complaining of persistent pain in her legs (Bandzouzi, 2002, p. 59).

Upon returning home, Kimbangu expressed his frustration in an evening prayer: "See, Lord, how right I was to refuse your mission. Because of the good deed I performed in your name, through your power and for your glory, I suffered insult, threat, and humiliation" (Diangienda Kuntima, 1984, p. 30). According to tradition, Christ strengthened him and advised him to inform the authorities for his protection (Bongo Nzila, 2008, pp. 15–16).

In this context, Simon Kimbangu went to Chief Médaillé Mvuti Ndompetelo, of the Nzundu Chiefdom, to obtain his political support and authorization to begin his work. He told him: "The Lord Jesus Christ has entrusted me with carrying out his mission in your region. What do you say? May I begin it with your permission?" (Bongo Nzila, 2008, p. 16; Mukonda Diyazolelua, 2007, p. 341).

Mvuti responded directly by giving his consent: "Go ahead, Monsieur Mpalanga tadi, begin the work! ... Especially now that the Lord Jesus has just given us a free hospital! Why not authorize it? What more is there to say? Work!" (Bongo Nzila, 2008, p. 16). Thus, Kimbangu was authorized to begin his ministry, respecting the hierarchy of local authority, even though the decision was not ratified by the Belgian colonial authorities.

Only after granting this authorization did Mvuti Ndompetelo question Kimbangu about the objectives of his mission. He replied: "The Lord Jesus gave me three things which I have brought to you: the Church, the State, and the Kikongo language" (Kimbangu Kiangani, 2017; Mario Swalezi Nlandu, interview, 2026).

Through this response, Kimbangu defined his mission as a triple foundation:

- The Church: to establish an autonomous spiritual community rooted in Christian faith but adapted to African realities (revitalism), with a civilizing mission. According to Ngoma Binda-Phambu (2021), Kimbangu opened the way to genuine inculturation of Christianity in Congolese Black society (p. 466).
- The State: to emphasize the importance of an independent political organization belonging to Congolese people and of social justice serving the people. He announced the fall of colonialism and the repossession of Congo by its sons, his action seeking to overturn relations of domination.
- The Kikongo language: to value cultural and linguistic identity so that faith and governance would be expressed in the people's language. This orientation, marked by an explicit nativism, guaranteed national cohesion and the transmission of values.

This episode reveals the complexity of the genesis of Simon Kimbangu's ministry: it combined a miraculous event, social misunderstanding, political legitimation, and a symbolic articulation of religion, culture, and emancipation. April 6, 1921 thus became a foundational date in which Kimbangu's vocation to liberate Black people crystallized by combining spiritual healing, affirmation of identity, and the demand for independence.

Symbolism of April 6, 1921

The Date as Symbol

April 6, 1921 remained heavily charged with symbolism for Kimbanguists.

- It was first marked by the symbolism of the month of April: the Israelites left Egypt between late March and early April, at Passover. For Simon Kimbangu and his followers, April represented the month of deliverance, not only for Israel but also for Black peoples, assimilated to the Hebrews in bondage. Kimbangu himself revealed this on April 2 and 6, 1921, announcing that colonization would end in about forty years. Kimbanguist songs such as "Ana Isaeli muna Ngipiti Farao Ntinu i m'bangiki" (1932) (Department of Kimbanguist Songs, p. 3; Bazangika Basakinina, 2024, p. 239) and "Tukudilu tutaninu muna moko ma n'kua wa mbi" (1960) (Bazangika Basakinina, 2024, p. 260) expressed this comparison by affirming that Kimbanguists, and by extension Congolese people, considered themselves contemporary Israelites.
- The symbolism of the year 1921 reinforced this reading. The Christian baptism of Kongo King Nzinga a Nkuwu in April–May 1491 (Ndaywel è Nziem, 2012, pp. 137–138; Longo Kazumba, 2006, p. 89) inaugurated European spiritual domination extending over 430 years, from 1491 to 1921, a duration likened to the Israelites' enslavement in Egypt. From this perspective, Kimbangu appeared as a modern Moses charged with liberating Black peoples from this long spiritual and cultural servitude (Diangienda Kuntima, 1984, pp. 30–31).
- Thus, April 6, 1921 was not reduced to a factual event: it became a foundational landmark in which biblical symbolism transposed onto African history crystallized. It situated Kimbangu's mission within sacred time, connecting the memory of ancient Kongo, criticism of colonialism, and the hope of universal emancipation.

The Actors in the Event and the Gender Dimension of Kimbanguist Symbolism

April 6, 1921 was not reduced to a miraculous healing: it brought together actors whose presence and significance went beyond the simple event. Simon Kimbangu and his son Charles Kisolokele Lukelo were there, direct witnesses to the appearance of Christ who ordered Nkiantondo to be healed (Diangienda Kuntima, 1984, p. 29). The narrative emphasized the union of heaven and earth to save the Black person (of whom Nkiantondo is the image) suffering for millennia, placing the event within a cosmic drama (Mario Swalezi Nlandu, 2026, March 5).

The figure of Nelly Nkiantondo introduced an essential gender dimension. A Black woman suffering from the "head," she represented both Eve, author of original sin, and Africa wounded by history (Suami Luzayadio, 2015, pp. 6–10). Her name, meaning "what gratitude?!" referred to the ingratitude of peoples toward their liberator, comparable to the Lingala saying "melesi bapesa na mbua": the dog that hunts game but is later driven away. Among Bantu peoples, a name symbolizes the person, their vital force, and influences their being (Dubois & Van Den Wijngaert, 1981, pp. 45–46; Kasongo Yambo, 2009, p. 130). Nkiantondo's healing therefore symbolized the restoration of female dignity and, by extension, that of Black people.

This reading extends into the history of Marie Mwilu Kiawanga Nzitani, Kimbangu's wife. After her husband's arrest, she accepted the sacrifice and led the clandestine movement from 1921 to 1959, ensuring the continuity of the prophetic work despite

colonial repression (Bamvuidi Mfunu Muilu, 2010, p. 54). Songs such as "Mama Mwilu ngeye ndumba a ntete" celebrated her restorative role, asserting that she came to correct the tarnished image of women in religious history after Eve, Rebecca, Delilah, or Potiphar's wife. She thus joined the lineage of great Kongo women resisters, such as Kimpa Vita, the seventeenth-century Antonian prophetess, Mafuta, Queen Nzinga, and others.

Gender symbolism in Kimbanguism revealed a dual dynamic: on the one hand, recognition of women's suffering as a metaphor for the curses inflicted upon Black people; on the other, rehabilitation of women as central actors in spiritual and political liberation. Kimbanguist songs, sometimes carried by inspired women such as Julienne Bialonga, open a field of research into how sung liturgy reflected gender relations within the Kimbanguist Church and Congolese society.

Thus, the event of April 6, 1921 was not limited to an individual healing: it transformed representations by articulating Black deliverance, the restoration of women, and criticism of collective ingratitude. It projected Kimbangu's mission into a cultural anthropology in which salvation concerned not only the soul but also social relations, wounded memories, and gender balances.

The Symbolism of Nelly Nkiantondo's "Healing"

For Kimbanguists, Simon Kimbangu's healing of Nelly Nkiantondo was not merely a therapeutic act: it condensed a critical and prophetic vision of the Black condition. The "sick" "head" represented the spirit, intelligence, and judgment—faculties that nineteenth-century racialist ideology, notably Joseph Arthur de Gobineau in his Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races (1855), denied to Black peoples, declaring them incapable of producing a culture comparable to that of White people. This prejudice, relayed and amplified by colonial discourses, nourished a negative and dehumanizing perception (Bandzouzi, 2002, p. 91). Healing the "head" thus became a powerful metaphor: for Kimbanguists, spiritual and psychological therapy was necessary so that Black people could become conscious of themselves, rediscover themselves, reinvent themselves, and transform their world.

But the episode contained a second dimension. Although Nkiantondo had been healed, she still complained of pain in her legs. For Kimbangu, this persistent ailment expressed her "bad faith." The legs symbolized the capacity to move forward, to walk toward emancipation. The incompleteness of Black salvation was therefore attributed to ingratitude and doubt in the face of the act of rehabilitation. The healing became an ambivalent sign: it revealed Christ's liberating power but also the fragility of a people hesitant to recognize its liberator (Mario Swalezi Nlandu, interview, 2026).

This scene overturns representations. It shows that oppression resided not only in colonial structures but also in the internalization of prejudice and the difficulty of believing in one's own liberation. The sick "head" represented intellectual and spiritual alienation, while the painful "legs" embodied the inability to walk toward the future. By healing Nkiantondo, Kimbangu therefore did more than relieve an individual suffering: he performed a constructive act, a radical critique of racist discourse, and an invitation to collective reinvention. This was the beginning of his struggle for the emancipation of Black people.

Thus, Nkiantondo's healing became a parable of African history: it denounced centuries of subordination, exposed wounds of the mind and body, and opened the way toward an emancipation that could be complete only through recognition, gratitude, and confidence in the power of spiritual transformation. It did not merely situate Kimbanguism within a cultural anthropology of liberation; it rooted it in a philosophy of liberation, in which healing was not only physical but also symbolic, calling for a refounding of Black being through recovered dignity and intelligence.

Simon Kimbangu Wanted to Pass by Nkiantondo's "House"

On April 6, 1921, Simon Kimbangu went to Nsona Kin'yenzi, following Christ's command, knowing that he was supposed to heal Nelly Nkiantondo. Yet, standing before the sick woman's hut, he hesitated. This hesitation was not insignificant: it expressed his acute awareness of the ingratitude that, in his view, often characterized Black people's reaction toward their liberator. In his evening prayer, he explained to Christ that he had anticipated this rejection. But Christ, moved by affection for the people to be delivered, threatened him with death unless he obeyed (Diangienda Kuntima, 1984, pp. 31–33).

The scene was charged with powerful symbolism. Nkiantondo's hut became the image of the African home, of the land of Black people, which Kimbangu believed he could pass by without delivering. Christ forced him to return and confront ingratitude in order to save nevertheless. The song "Nkunga se tu yimbila" by Mpata Bruno, recorded in 1921 (Department of Kimbanguist Songs, p. 15), translated this tension in its refrain: "Oh mercy, you came to find us. If it were only your anger, we would have

wandered forever. But you, moved by compassion, found us. Oh Jesus, Lord, do not abandon us."

Kimbangu eventually saved the Black person through Nkiantondo, but she subsequently despised him, confirming his fears. This rejection, which he considered a recurring behavior among Black people, nourished his regret. The verse of the song "Nkia mbi yavanga" expressed this pain: "What wrong have I done in delivering you, Black person, from your subjugation! Thirty years in prison! I, Kimbangu, did not seek to escape this fate" (Bazangika Musunda wa Sadi, 2019, p. 76).

The event revealed a tragic dialectic: Christ's love and Kimbangu's obedience enabled Black people to become free, but this liberation encountered unbelief and contempt. Some understood the salvation brought and asked forgiveness; others persisted in doubt. According to tradition, these two attitudes continued into the present. Faced with the unbelief of the inhabitants of Nkamba, Christ asked Kimbangu to carry out his ministry elsewhere. But the elders, by asking forgiveness, brought the incident to a close (Diangienda Kuntima, 1984, pp. 31–33).

This scene condensed a cultural anthropology of deliverance: it showed that emancipation could not occur without confronting ingratitude, doubt, and wounded memory. Nkiantondo's house became the symbol of a hesitant Africa, oscillating between rejection and recognition, contempt and forgiveness. Kimbangu's act, compelled by Christ, inscribed liberation in a paradoxical logic: saving despite unbelief, delivering despite refusal, persevering despite humiliation. It is within this tension that the depth of his prophetic mission was revealed—a mission in which Black history was read as a struggle between acceptance of salvation and the temptation to lose it.

Simon Kimbangu's Disappointment and Black Disobedience

On April 6, 1921, Simon Kimbangu faced a tragic contradiction: he came to deliver, yet he was rejected by the very people he helped. As stated above, although Nelly Nkiantondo was healed, she continued to complain of pain in her legs, a symbol of the incompleteness of Black salvation, hindered by ingratitude and doubt. Christ asked him to persevere, to follow his example, and to love despite rejection (Diangienda Kuntima, 1984, pp. 31–33).

The hymns translated this tension. "Ndeko moyindo" denounced the pride of the delivered Black person: "You were in a deep pit; Kimbangu pulled you from its depths! But afterward you became filled with pride. That pride takes away your intelligence and makes you regress" (Bazangika Musunda wa Sadi, 2019, pp. 57–58). Healing became a parable: salvation was offered, but pride prevented its significance from being grasped.

Kimbangu's mission carried profound cultural significance. Although he had partially delivered Black people, they turned against him. Kimbanguist tradition saw this sclerosis as the effect of unbelief. Several songs asserted that Black people had to go through further stages to recover their birthright, which Kimbangu conceptualized as the "second independence" (Bandzouzi, 2002, p. 91).

Despite resistance, the emancipatory action had begun. The hymn "Lumbu'eki" attributed sacred value to April 6: "This day is the realization of a promise: God's power has manifested itself among us, Black people rejected by the earth..." (Bazangika Musunda wa Sadi, 2019, p. 48). The event became a theophany, an irruption of the divine into the history of the oppressed.

This dialectic between salvation offered and salvation refused echoed great philosophical tragedies: from Plato to Hegel, human beings hesitate to leave the cave or recognize the Spirit calling them. In Kimbangu's thought, this hesitation became a metaphor for colonized Africa, oscillating between liberation and sclerosis. Like Kimpa Vita in the seventeenth century, he faced the distrust of his own people, revealing that emancipation could not occur without inner transformation.

Visions of Christ, shared by Kimbangu and his priestly collaborators, confirmed the sacred dimension of this mission (Mukonda Diyazolelua, 2007, pp. 338–340; Bongo Nzila, 2008, pp. 22–23). The songs, still sung today, extend this memory of ingratitude and deliverance, inscribing April 6, 1921 as a sacred date on which the consciousness of Black emancipation is still at stake.

Issues and Implications of a Memorable Day for Black Consciousness

The Rehabilitation of Black People

April 6, 1921 inaugurated an irreversible process: the rehabilitation of Black people. Simon Kimbangu's act was not limited to a miraculous healing; it sought to restore a fallen people to its original condition, returning its rights and self-esteem. According to Kimbanguism, Black people once held sovereignty over humanity. Joseph Ki-Zerbo recalled that "from Prehistory onward, Africans were the first to emerge ... Africa, through Egypt, is still the locomotive and teacher of the world" (cited in Ade Ajayi & Crowder, 1988, pp. 9–10).

Phoba Mvika added that it was "this ancient Africa ... that taught humanity to walk, speak, dress, eat, think, and love gods and human beings" (1986, pp. 104–105). Cheikh Anta Diop finally emphasized that "Black people were predominant ... in civilization, technical and military supremacy" (1967, p. 11, cited by Bena Nsilu, 1983, p. 4).

From this perspective, Simon Kimbangu asserted that Africa, the cradle of humanity, was destined to guide the world toward a marvelous future. But having offended God, it would have been humiliated through the creation of other races that subjugated it. Hence the enigmatic aphorism: "The White man will become Black and the Black man will become White," a formula advocating a return to the original state and announcing an inversion of roles (Kanga Matondo, 2007, p. 143; Bandzouzi, 2002, p. 91).

This aphorism, regarded as subversive, was central to his arrest. During the trial, Judge De Rossi questioned him about the phrase, considered evidence of his intention to expel Whites from the Belgian Congo. Kimbangu replied: "This phrase should not be taken literally ... God will reveal its meaning later, when the time comes" (Bandzouzi, 2002, p. 105). Joseph Diangienda Kuntima recalled on March 24, 1992, during the funeral of Charles Kisolokele Lukelo, that this statement was the trigger for his father's condemnation (Bandzouzi, 2002, p. 397).

However, the Belgian authorities were not naïve. They remained vigilant and closely scrutinized each of his speeches, detecting in them the seeds of revolutionary thought.

The issue went beyond the healing of a woman or the preaching of a prophet: it involved a transformation of representations. The rehabilitation of Black people meant radical contestation of the colonial order, questioning racial hierarchies, and demanding a "second independence," not only political but also spiritual. The Belgian authorities, aware of the revolutionary significance of this discourse, interpreted every word as a threat. For Kimbanguists, however, this sacred day inaugurated a symbolic inversion of the world in which Africa was to reinvent itself and reclaim its role as humanity's guide.

The Struggle against Deculturation and the Awakening of African Consciousness

April 6, 1921 was not only a day of healing and revelation: it marked the beginning of a struggle against deculturation, the deliberate and programmed process of suppressing African cultures by colonizers. Pamphile Mabiala Mantuba-Ngoma defined deculturation as "planned cultural and religious eradication ... intended to assimilate the dominated into the conquerors' culture" (2008, pp. 85–86). Black people were expected to deny themselves, forget themselves, and adopt Western culture, presented as the sole path to civilization.

On September 10, 1921, Simon Kimbangu denounced this undertaking, emphasizing Black people's fascination with the material well-being of Whites and the destruction of their African soul (Bandzouzi, 2002, pp. 91–92). He then took upon himself a mission: to encourage Africans to play a central role in their own rehabilitation, break the constraints imposed by White people, and awaken a dormant African consciousness. From April 6 onward, his words and actions restored Black self-esteem, attracting crowds from the Belgian Congo, French Congo, and Angola to consult the "Ntumua," the Messenger of Christ.

This struggle was articulated within a broader intellectual debate. Franz Crahay referred to the "short circuit" of blindly imitating Western methods (Dubois & Van Den Wijngaert, 1981, p. 40). Paulin Hountondji rejected the confinement of the Muntu within a cultural ghetto, while Kangafu Kutumbagana advocated a critical openness to the West without loss of personality (ibid., pp. 50–51). Adnan Haddad formulated the necessary balance: "Much Africanness is isolation, little universality is impoverishment ... a well-reasoned marriage between Western sciences and African knowledge produces a mixture that is easy to digest" (2001, p. 108).

Within this logic, Kimbangu appeared as a Black leader in the image of Christ "whitened" by colonizers, an extraordinary phenomenon for a people marked by the "Curse of Ham" myth. Hope was reborn: "Ex Africa semper aliquid novi" (from Africa there is always something new) (Ki-Zerbo, 1973, p. 649). Edward Blyden had already asserted in 1881: "The advancement of Africans must be achieved through methods of their own. They must possess a potential distinct from that of Europeans ... We must show that we are capable of moving forward on our own, of making our own way..." (Ki-Zerbo, 1973, p. 619).

This renaissance required a neo-culture: a New Black person, spiritually pure, mentally sound, and powerful, capable of reinventing and using themselves, transforming and enhancing their living environment, and reclaiming humanity's torch. Kimbanguist songs expressed this confidence: "Buya vang'enza" states that "When I created the world, I also created the Black Race ... It is my chosen Race and comes from my promise ... Africa is the refuge of the whole world" (Bazangika Musunda wa Sadi,

2019, pp. 43–44). The Kimbanguist Theatre Group specifies the mission in "Kimbangu naponi yo": "Protect them! Moralize them! Save them! Heal them in the name of Jesus! Deliver them from Satan's torments! Bring them into the Promised Land!" (ibid., p. 35).

Thus, the struggle against deculturation, begun on April 6, 1921, was not limited to cultural resistance: it sought spiritual and identity-based refoundation. Simon Kimbangu proposed a liberating paradigm in which Africa, far from following behind, would once again become a source and guide for humanity. They place their trust in these commitments. However, action is necessary to turn them into tangible realities: this is the demand of pragmatism.

Popular Reception and Colonial Reaction

April 6, 1921 opened an irreversible breach in African history. Through his words and gestures, Simon Kimbangu became, for thousands of Congolese and Africans, a defender and deliverer: crowds flocked to Nkamba to hear his speeches, receive his blessings, and be healed. This sudden popularity revealed the expectations of a people seeking dignity and hope, finding in him a model of development and a redeemer. But this fervor alarmed the Belgian colonial authorities. Missionaries and administrators perceived the movement as a direct threat to their interests. As Mabika Kalanda wrote, Kimbangu's message "magnified the Black race, self-confidence, and the temporary nature of the suffering inflicted by Whites" (1965, pp. 184–185). The trial confirmed this fear: through his actions, songs, and writings, Kimbangu had positioned himself as a formidable opponent of the colonial system. On September 10, 1921, he stated that his spiritual being would fight against injustice and that he had come to liberate Congo, Africa, and the Black Race (Bandzouzi, 2002, pp. 91, 110).

The colonial reaction was relentless. Simon Kimbangu and his followers were imprisoned, sentenced, and exiled (Munayi Muntu-Monji, 1977). Chomé recalled that Kimbanguists suffered terribly for nearly four decades because of their liberationist ideas (1959, p. 64). Insults, imprisonment, torture, and deaths affected 37,000 heads of household and thousands of their members, producing approximately 150,000 martyrs (Diangienda Kuntima, 1984, p. 10). This persecution, far from silencing the movement, paradoxically strengthened its memory and legitimacy: the blood of the martyrs became the cement of collective consciousness.

Thus, popular reception and colonial reaction illustrated a dramatic dialectic: the adherence of the masses, who saw Kimbangu as a liberator, and colonial fear, which identified him as an irreducible adversary. The brutality of repression inscribed Kimbanguism in the universal history of cultural and spiritual resistance. By triggering this dynamic, the day at Nkamba transformed suffering into memory and persecution into a source of identity, opening a new path in which Africa, humiliated by colonialism, regained the strength to think of itself as the subject of its own history.

Discussion: April 6, 1921 in the Kongo Messianic Tradition

April 6, 1921 was part of a long prophetic tradition in the Kongo region while marking a decisive rupture. Like the Antonian movements of the seventeenth century, Kimbanguism arose in a context of crisis and colonial domination, combining missionary Christianity with local religious traditions. But unlike Kimpa Vita, who was burned alive for heresy, Kimbanguism survived the death of its founder and institutionalized itself as a Church. Unlike the Matsouanism of André Matsoua, which evolved from political trade unionism toward religiosity, Kimbanguism began with religion and transformed into political protest.

Within this messianic tradition, Simon Kimbangu belonged to the category of "claimant" messiahs, explicitly asserting his status and divine message. This radicalism explains the violence of the colonial reaction. Kimbangu's stance, asserting that he would deliver his people from oppression, intensified the confrontation with Belgian authorities.

The movement carried an implicit political dimension. Jean-Germain Gros described it as a "religious cult and symbol of modern Congolese nationalism." The central question was the transition from "magical" power to political power. Kimbangu, without an explicit political program, exercised immense influence: he predicted independence, was denounced by missionaries, and died after thirty years of detention. Georges Balandier emphasized that his success was expressed through the mass destruction of magical statuettes (mikisi), a sign of profound cultural transformation.

Finally, the reception of the events of April 6, 1921 revealed historiographical tensions. The Kimbanguist Church established this date as the beginning of the prophetic ministry, a sacred memory and identity pillar. Missionary sources, such as Jennings, even when discussing other Ngunzists, referred instead to March 13, seeking to minimize the importance of the event. Cecilia Irvine noted that April 6 corresponded to the day on which the healing was reported to the missionary, rather than necessarily the act itself. Colonial archives varied according to their prejudices

and their desire to control the movement. The hagiographic texts of secretaries Nfinangani and Nzungu, despite confused chronology, remained valuable for understanding believers' perceptions. Jeremy Pemberton recalled that these narratives sought to present Kimbangu as "specially called and blessed by God," in a genre close to the Gospel. It should also be noted that, since 1914, Simon Kimbangu had recorded everything he experienced, especially in relation to his mission (Bandzouzi, 2002, p. 51). Since this is a connected history, in Sanjay Subrahmanyam's sense, studying contacts between societies initially opposed to one another, challenging ethnocentric prejudices, producing a "counter-narrative" to Eurocentric history, and offering a new understanding of local perceptions of non-European societies (Bertrand, 2007, pp. 69–89; Zugina, 2007, p. 62), this study gives greater consideration to Kimbanguist theses as more probative for early Kimbanguism, which began without missionaries or Belgian colonists.

Conclusion: The Day of Simon Kimbangu's Struggle and African Consciousness

April 6, 1921 was not merely a miraculous healing: it embodied a proclamation of dignity and an opening in African history. On that day, Simon Kimbangu rose to wage a cultural, ideological, and spiritual struggle aimed at rehabilitating Black people and announcing a just and independent society. Nkiantondo's healing became a parable: the restored head symbolized recovered intelligence and dignity, while the still-suffering legs recalled the incompleteness of salvation, linked to the ingratitude and unbelief of his own people.

Kimbangu denounced the immorality of colonialism, rejected domination, and announced decolonization. He demonstrated that Black people were capable of free creation and self-determination, but he asserted that this breakthrough would be possible only through a "second independence," a spiritual liberation preceding political liberation. In this sense, colonial domination appeared as a system rooted in a spiritual logic that had to be broken.

The historicity and symbolism of this day show that it shaped not only a religious movement but also a new African consciousness. Africans had to look at themselves through Kimbangu's powerful acts and speeches, assess their capacities, and project themselves into the future. Official recognition of April 6 as a public holiday in the DRC since 2023 confirms the event's memorial and political significance. Patrice Lumumba had prophesied it: "Africa will write its own history, and it will be, in the north and south of the Sahara, a history of glory and dignity ... Without struggle, they will obtain nothing, neither now nor ever" (cf. Ki-Zerbo, 1973, p. 9).

This conclusion opens several avenues: comparing Kimbanguism with other African prophetic movements, analyzing contemporary reception within communities and the diaspora (Mokoko Gampiot, 2008), studying intergenerational memory, and exploring the gender dimension of symbolism and women's roles (Santos, 2010). As Sarró (2023) reminds us, understanding contemporary Kongo culture, including Kimbanguism, is essential to grasping identity dynamics in Central Africa.

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