



AFRICA IN MOVIMENTO / AFRICA ON THE MOVE

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TITLE: THE MOVEMENT OF METAPHORS:

THE CASE OF PEMBA AS A METAPHOR OF POWER IN CENTRAL AFRICA

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ABSTRACT:

'You do not throw out a bone with meat, as you do not throw out a child with life' (*kifuba k'a ki texi a ni xitu, a mutu k'a mu texi a ni muenhu*). This is how Ngana, a woman refugee who in the context of the post-colonial civil war in Angola migrated from her small native town to the capital, Luanda, reflected on her experience of violence and dispossession. While she spoke both Portuguese and Kimbundu, she also switched between these two languages. Portuguese was a language culturally associated with the power of institutions, it was the meta-language of "legitimate" statehood. Kimbundu was instead a meta-language of reflexivity used contrapuntally to Portuguese and in the context of relations of kinship, neighbourhood, friendship and relations of affinity outside of the spaces identified with "officialdom". Portuguese was also the language associated with writing, whereas Kimbundu was the language of an epistemology of aurality. Portuguese and Kimbundu thus also articulated different cultural corporealities and topographies. Taking seriously the vocabulary of this bilingual language of reflexivity, I try to show that the implicit referent of the statement about power was a metaphor that is common to the political culture of Central Africa as a whole and that in the literature is usually spelled *pemba* or *mpemba*. The paper argues that understanding conflict is to understand its deep cultural dynamics in terms of the languages people use to reflect and understand their experience, for it is here that the articulation between "part" and "whole", the "particular" and the "general" is made and unmade. Further, that the cultural dynamics of conflict need to be seen on a continuum with other forms of change, movement across space being perhaps the most conspicuous aspect.

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