

## **Colonial Encounters with a Clockwork Elephant**

### **Material Culture and *nkisi* in the Emil Torday Expedition to the Belgian Congo 1907-1909**

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Mise en ligne : avril 2024

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.51185/journals/rhca.2023.varia09>

#### **Abstract**

As an envoy of the British Museum, Emil Torday, a collector and proto-anthropologist, was reported as using a clockwork elephant, an example of a seemingly familiar trope in encounters between European and African peoples. In the following case study, these tropes are scrutinised through a deeper analysis of the unpublished sources from the Emil Torday Expedition (1907-1909). Prolific within Torday's detailed transcriptions of local ethnographies and ontologies from the Kasai region, is the term 'kissi', or *nkisi*; employed to represent the interaction between objects, people and spirits. Recognising the capacity to mediate relationships and trade during his time in South-West Congo (1900-1909), *nkisi* practices were promoted to his European readership as a potentially valuable tool. Theoretically anchored in the anthropology of art, this case study extends the critique of colonial hegemony and sheds light on the intercultural conversations about power that took place during the colonial encounter.

**Keywords:** British Museum; African Art; witchcraft; colonial expeditions; Congo

#### ***Rencontres coloniales avec un éléphant mécanique. Culture matérielle et nkisi dans l'expédition d'Emil Torday au Congo belge 1907-1909***

#### **Résumé**

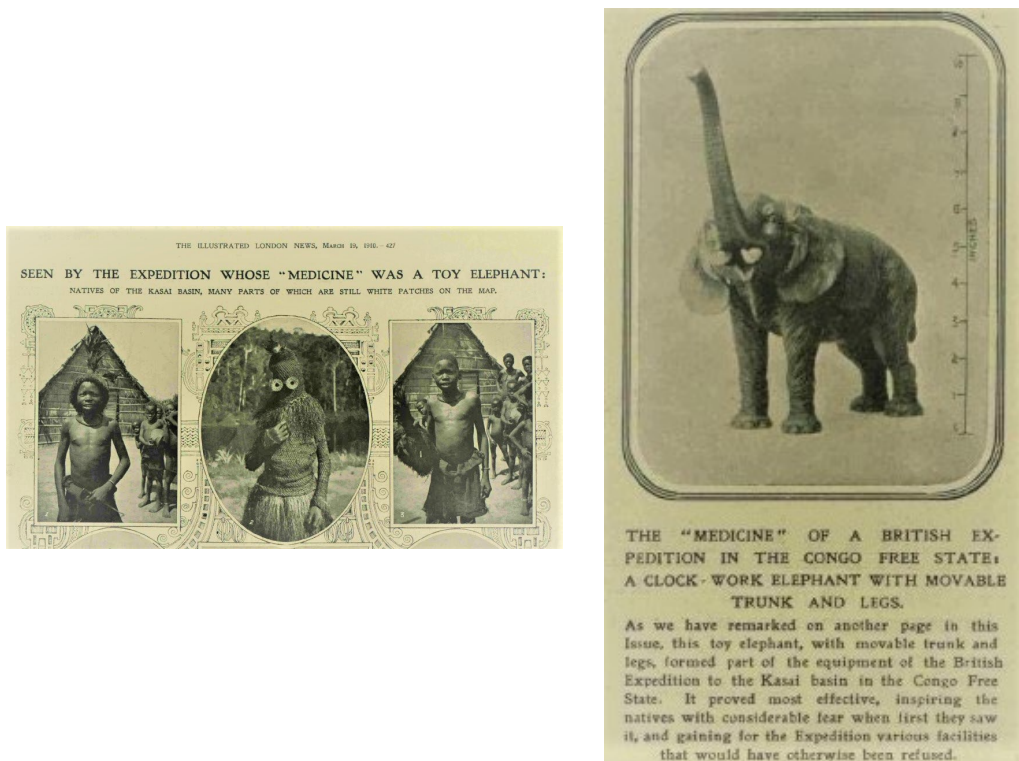
Émissaire du *British Museum*, le collectionneur et proto-anthropologue Emil Torday a été présenté comme utilisant un éléphant mécanique, un exemple de trope apparemment familier dans les rencontres entre les Européens et les Africains. Dans l'article qui suit, ces tropes sont examinés à travers une analyse plus approfondie des sources non publiées de l'expédition d'Emil Torday (1907-1909). Le terme « *kissi* », ou *nkisi*, employé pour représenter l'interaction entre les objets, les personnes et les esprits, est très répandu dans les transcriptions détaillées de Torday sur les ethnographies et les ontologies locales. Reconnaisant la capacité de médiation des relations et du commerce pendant son séjour dans le sud-ouest du Congo (1900-1909), les pratiques du *nkisi* ont été présentées à ses lecteurs européens comme un outil potentiellement précieux. S'inscrivant dans le courant théorique de l'anthropologie de l'art, cette enquête prolonge la critique de l'hégémonie coloniale et éclaire les conversations interculturelles sur le pouvoir qui ont eu lieu lors de la rencontre coloniale.

**Mots-clés :** British Museum ; art africain ; sorcellerie ; expédition coloniale ; Congo



In 1910, *The Illustrated London News* reported that Emil Torday and Melville William Hilton-Simpson had used a clockwork elephant as a “medicine” in the Belgian Congo during their expedition, and that this toy was “effective” in “inspiring fear” among societies living in the Kasai basin; an area the article notes as consisting of many “white patches on the map.”<sup>1</sup> The toy elephant is described by this newspaper as an important item of the expedition’s “equipment” that gained for the expedition “facilities that would have been otherwise refused.”<sup>2</sup> Behind this patronising rhetoric, within Torday’s unpublished fieldnotes, is in fact evidence of a colonial transaction that reveals the complex mediations of power through objects during the colonial encounter. In the broader context of the expedition and Torday’s work, this encounter warrants further examination, using a wealth of unpublished sources.

Figures 1 and 2: Extracts from *The Illustrated London News*, March 19, 1910 (p. 413 & 427)



Torday and Hilton-Simpson were envoys of the British Museum and the first Europeans to cross the land between the Loange and the Kasai River, South West Central Africa, at the end of a two-year expedition in 1907-1909, in the former Congo Free State (1885-1908).<sup>3</sup> The societies referred to in *The Illustrated London News* identify as the ethnic groups of Lele, or *Bashideer*, Pende, and Wongo, and these people had collectively resisted a direct colonial presence in this area between the two rivers for the first twenty years of colonial occupation under King Leopold.<sup>4</sup> Aside from the hyperbolic *Illustrated London News* report, Torday and Hilton-Simpson also reported in numerous publications that the Lele people would only trade (in artefacts and provisions) after they carried out an outlandish performance with a toy elephant, purchased at Hamley’s toy shop in London.

The newspaper, along with other published sources from the expedition, with a more general readership, would have us believe that Torday was using ‘tricks’ fairly typical of those employed by European travellers,

<sup>1</sup> “Seen by the Expedition whose Medicine was a Toy Elephant”, *The Illustrated London News*, Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> March 1910, p.427.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Later Belgian Congo (1908-1960), today’s Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

<sup>4</sup> See Vansina Jan (2010), *Being Colonized, the Kuba Experience in Rural Congo*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press. This has been confirmed through archival research in the colonial archives of the Royal Museum of Central Africa and the Africa Archives, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Brussels. See Van Grieken Michel and Dandoy Pierre (2008), *Inventaire des archives du fonds des affaires indigènes du Congo*, Brussels, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken.

traders and missionaries to 'win over' locals. Torday, in many senses was operating at a pivotal moment of transition from amateur Africanists -missionaries and traders - and professional anthropologists and ethnographers. His work and his approach marked a turn towards professional anthropology. Torday had spent many years in Africa at the point of this expedition and he had developed an understanding of local customs. By the time of this encounter in 1909, Torday had been working in a solely professional capacity collecting for the British Museum. He had honed his techniques as an anthropologist, which had their origins in his earlier years as a trader. This expedition was Torday's third visit to Central Africa, meaning that he already spoke at least three regional languages, was familiar with the geography, and had also developed relationships with scholars in England and Europe before he left in 1907. After an administrative post in 1900-1904 in the Congo Free State, Torday worked for the Compagnie du Kasai as a trader in Kikwit, Southwest Congo. At this point, Torday began to correspond with Thomas Athol Joyce at the British Museum about local cultures and languages, alongside his commercial duties.<sup>5</sup> Torday left behind extensive volumes of field notes and photographs; invaluable sources about the ethnography, local histories and material culture of Central Africa.

Torday's unpublished fieldnotes, held at the British Museum library and the Royal Anthropological Institute in London, also demonstrate the extent taken by Torday, even in earlier visits to Africa (1900-1906), to work with local people to transcribe their histories, understand their material culture and their cosmological universe. Following the expedition (1907-1909), Torday spent his life in London, establishing himself as an Africa expert, called upon for translations, lectures and humanitarian work.<sup>6</sup> By the time of his death in 1930, he had published over 50 works in the barely established field of anthropology.<sup>7</sup> When he returned from the expedition, he co-authored very detailed anthropological tomes with Thomas Athol Joyce (British Museum).<sup>8</sup> He also made huge inroads into the anthropology of art, although this was not recognised until 1990 when Torday re-emerged as a virtually forgotten figure in an award-winning exhibition curated by John Mack. The latter also wrote an accompanying monograph that detailed Torday's contributions to anthropology and provided a detailed biography.<sup>9</sup> The British Museum collection of artefacts, therefore, numbering over 3,000 collected by Torday, are not only well contextualised, they are also accompanied by extensive proto-anthropological fieldwork notes, photographs, unpublished diaries and important pieces of the history and cosmology of the region.

A striking element, in these fieldnotes and unpublished diaries, is Torday's use of the Central African notion of *nkisi*. *Nkisi* is a complex ritual practice used by various African societies in the functions of healing, divining and the interception of malevolent forces (*kindoki* 'witchcraft').<sup>10</sup> Torday wrote about the way he used it to 'win over' local people during his expedition to the Congo Free State, explaining that they allowed him to avoid overtly violent approaches, which he stood against. The fact that he described the clockwork elephant as a "medicine" highlights how he thought of such a strategical use of a toy in the terms of the healing, mediating complexes of *nkisi*. In this article, Torday's sources have been triangulated with later works by eminent anthropologists and art historians that studied *nkisi*, Wyatt MacGaffey and John Janzen.<sup>11</sup> Their work and Torday's sources have been used to explore whether the practice of *nkisi* could be part of a wider Central African system of problem solving and healing complexes. Torday's sources will also be analysed using Bernault's framework of 'colonial transactions'.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Early correspondence is held at British Museum Anthropology Library and Archive (BM), TY M27068 and TY M27069, Emil Torday unpublished fieldnotes and Correspondence from the Congo Expedition, 1904-1909.

<sup>6</sup> Archives and Manuscripts of the Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI), MS 192-8 & MS 424-5, Torday's archives and Manuscripts, 1900-1930; RAI, MS 65, Hilton-Simpson Melville William, *Travels to the Congo*, unpublished, vols. 1-7.

<sup>7</sup> For a full list see Sheppard Rebekah (2018), "A History of Encounter, Encounter with History: the Emil Torday Expedition 1907-1909", PhD thesis, University of East Anglia.

<sup>8</sup> Torday Emil and Thomas Athol Joyce (1910), *Notes ethnographiques sur les peuples communément appelés Bakuba ainsi que sur les peuplades apparentées : Les Bushongo*, Brussels, Musée du Congo Belge; Torday Emil and Thomas Athol Joyce (1922), *Notes ethnographiques sur les peuplades habitant les bassins du Kasai et du Kwango oriental : peuplades de la forêt ; peuplades des prairies*, Brussels, Musée du Congo Belge.

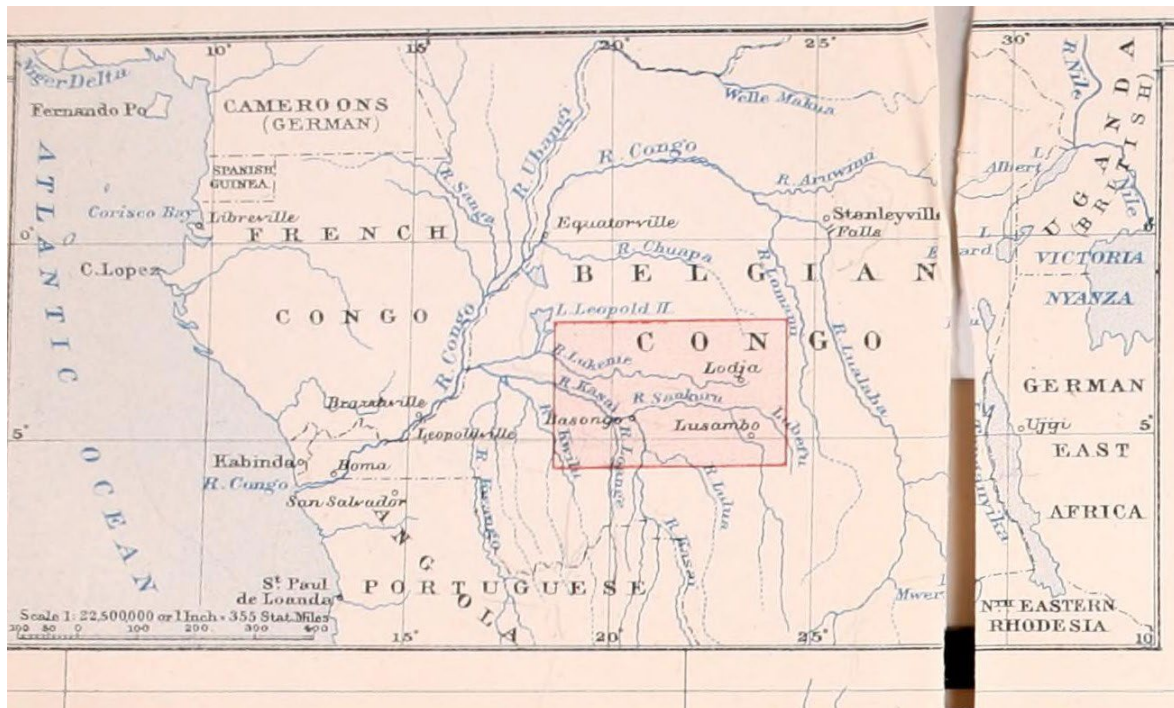
<sup>9</sup> Mack John (1990), *Emil Torday and the Art of the Congo*, London, British Museum Press; Schildkrout Enid (1992), "Revisiting Emil Torday's Congo, 'Images of Africa' at the British Museum", *African Arts*, 25(1), pp. 60-100.

<sup>10</sup> MacGaffey Wyatt and John Janzen (1974), "Nkisi Figures of the Bakongo", *African Arts*, 7(3), pp. 87-89.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*; MacGaffey Wyatt (1977), "Fetishism Revisited: Kongo 'Nkisi' in Sociological Perspective", *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 47(2), pp. 172-184; (1986), *Religion and Society: the Bakongo of Lower Zaire*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press; (1988), "Complexity, Astonishment and Power: the Visual Vocabulary of Kongo Minkisi", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 14(2), pp. 188-203; (2000), *Kongo Political Culture: The Conceptual Challenge of the Particular*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press.

<sup>12</sup> Bernault Florence (2019), *Colonial Transactions: Imaginaries, Bodies and Histories in Gabon*, Durham, Duke University Press.

Figure 3: Part of the Map of the Kasai Basin, published by the expedition members, Melville William Hilton-Simpson and Emil Torday.



Source: Hilton-Simpson Melville William (1911), *Land and Peoples of the Kasai, Being a Narrative of a Two Years' Journey Among the Cannibals of the Equatorial Forest and Other Savage Tribes of the Kasai*, London, Constable and Co (first edition).

## The encounter with the elephant

The expedition members placed huge emphasis on the clockwork elephant in keeping the peace between themselves and local peoples in this area between the Loange and Kasai rivers, which was notorious during the 1890s and 1900s for violent resistance. Hilton-Simpson writes that “it is not too much to claim for the clockwork elephant toy that it prevented a massacre.”<sup>13</sup> The unpublished sources do reveal a sense of immediate danger and hostility for the two men and for locals. In the village of Kenge, the fifth village visited in Lele country in 1909, and the final destination of the expedition, Hilton-Simpson noted in his diary that “the people [were] no longer friendly at all.”<sup>14</sup> The two men and their African assistants were refused water and food, and feared for their lives, or at least that they would have to go back on themselves towards previous villages. They had run out of iron bars, the only commodity that would sell in this region.<sup>15</sup> They could no longer engage in trade.

In previous encounters during 1909 and late 1908, the clockwork elephant had provided entertainment, had been sold as a desirable commodity and had even been used as a tool to divine and interpret the future.<sup>16</sup> Torday had successfully traded four other clockwork elephants for important items of material culture, now held in the British Museum.<sup>17</sup> Before entering the Lele country, Hilton-Simpson, in the unpublished diary, reports that Bondo, the leader that took them to the river crossing, had wanted to purchase the elephant. Hilton-Simpson writes that:

<sup>13</sup> Hilton-Simpson Melville William (1911), *Land and Peoples of the Kasai, Being a Narrative of a Two Years' Journey Among the Cannibals of the Equatorial Forest and Other Savage Tribes of the Kasai*, London, Constable and Co (first edition), p. 324.

<sup>14</sup> RAI, MS 65, Hilton-Simpson M. W., *Travels to the Congo*, vols. 1-7.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, volume 7, p. 45.

<sup>16</sup> See Hilton-Simpson M. W., *Land and Peoples of the Kasai*, *op. cit.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

He was very much impressed with the exhibition that we gave him of our fetish, the walking elephant, and in the evening he came privately to us and offered to buy it. He told us that owing to his infirmities he was unable to go about his village as much as he should wish, and he had no doubt that many things were said about him behind his back which he would like to overhear, and which would not be said if he were able to go about more among his subjects. If he possessed the elephant he could send it out in the evenings to walk around the village, where it could spy upon his people, and upon its return could report to him any plots against his authority which might be hatched. As we possessed two of these elephants, Torday thought it just might be possible that there is some strange fetish or other object which we had not yet seen, and which we should like to secure for the British Museum. He therefore told the chief that he might possibly be induced to part with the elephant if anything that he specially desired was offered in exchange for it. The chief thereupon commenced to offer us all manner of objects, none of which were of sufficient interest to induce us to part with the toy, and finally he said he would give us quite a large quantity of ivory or one or two slaves in exchange for it. No doubt we should have been commercially the gainers had we accepted the offer of the tusks, but we have not come to Africa to trade in ivory, and we did not wish to compete with the Kasai Company in this matter; so we decided not to sell the elephant at Bondo, and it turned out lucky for us that we retained both the toys until we reached the unknown country.<sup>18</sup>

Within these extracts, are revealing notions about the role of artefacts in surveillance, and that they could stand in by proxy for power and leadership. In any case, according to this report, the notion of trading this artefact for ivory and slaves indicates it had a high value. This reported incident, and others like it, offer a new context for the display of the elephant in Lele country. The present article will also demonstrate that notions of surveillance, and embodiment are not part of an arbitrary belief in ‘magic’ or ‘superstition,’ but are part of complex systems of power and agency that are part of *nkisi* practices.

With the Lele, Torday adopted this use of the elephant to stand in for the power of Europeans, named *Bula Matadi* by Congolese locals, and events surrounding the display had a more menacing air:

The chief [of Kenge] was then shown the elephant secretly in T[orday]’s tent. He entered the tent and as soon as he was in he jumped out backwards with a squeak and then stood, with staring eyes, wagging his tongue. He was then induced to look again, but he would not stay more than a few seconds and hurried off to the village saying ‘I’ll fetch those chickens.’ A little later the old aggressive chief came along and T talked straight to him and pointed out how *Bula Matadi* would come to fetch us; how we did not care whether there was war or not. T remarked to one chap ‘I sleep but the elephant never sleeps’ and wagged his finger at his face.<sup>19</sup>

Zoe Strother, the art historian, studied this encounter using the published accounts, and has correctly cautioned us about examining this encounter as a naïve interpretation by African peoples of European technology as magic.<sup>20</sup> The encounter reported in the unpublished sources further confirms Strother’s point and the reception of the elephant of course, did not represent a naive acceptance of any objects as ‘magic.’ However, the expedition members did manage to trade, eat and continue on their journey following this encounter, and this shift does need to be attributed to something. For this shift in stalemate of trade to occur, there was some kind of agreed value exchange, or perhaps an underlying fear of violence or coercion may have tipped the balance (certainly, no guns or other overt forms of violence were reported as being used). At the least, there was some level of mutual, inter-cultural, understanding that took place, which does not need to involve the interpretation of elephant (or Torday) as having ‘magical’ powers.

As stated, this was not the only time the expedition had used the elephant, or even traded or sold the elephant itself. In the context of the broader ethnography of the region discussed below, and taking into account Torday’s previous experiences, there is some evidence of the fact that Torday was at least attempting to use this piece of material culture as an *nkisi* or ‘medicine.’ As such, it could be that the elephant may have, in some small part, stood in for something else; perhaps, by proxy, for the violence that had been experienced during the first 20 years of engagements between the Lele people and the mobilised forces continually attempting to infiltrate their land directly.<sup>21</sup> The encounter demonstrates what Bernault has called “a collision of imaginaries” (European and African), where many agents (including non-human agents) in all layers of the encounter were acting upon each other, often in unintentional ways.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270-271.

<sup>19</sup> RAI, MS 65, Hilton-Simpson M. W., *Travels to the Congo*, vol. 7, p. 45.

<sup>20</sup> Strother Zoe (2013), *A Photograph that Steals the Soul: the History of an Idea*, in J. Peffer and E. Cameron (eds.), *Portraiture & Photography in Africa*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, pp. 177-212.

<sup>21</sup> See Vansina Jan (2010), *Being Colonized*, *op. cit.*; Vansina Jan (1962), “Long Distance Trade Routes in Central Africa”, *The Journal of African History*, 3(3), pp. 375-390.

<sup>22</sup> Bernault, *Colonial Transactions*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

Steering us ever closer to heterogeneous operations of the colonial encounter are both Bernault's explorations of a Gabonese notion of agency – power or capacity (*ngul*) – and Torday's unpublished fieldnotes about the Kasai region and his notion of *nkisi*.<sup>23</sup> Bernault writes that understandings of agency were at the heart of the colonial encounter.<sup>24</sup> Her working definition of agency is “the ability to make extraordinary things happen, and the causes that people imagine behind unusual action and change”, and this is especially apt for the following explorations of the working translations of ‘occult’ forces by Torday.<sup>25</sup> It can illuminate our understandings of what *nkisi* is or does, and how the invisible force was mobilised as a form of political agency on the part of Europeans and Africans. This case study unpicks the “ability of individuals or institutions” to exert “out of the ordinary transformative acts over people and things” to demonstrate the utility of Torday's writings about object-actions, spirits and causation in the context of European annexation of the former Belgian Congo in the early twentieth-century.

Bernault's work addresses the intersection between African and European notions of power and political agency and what has been called ‘magic’ during the colonial encounter.<sup>26</sup> With Gabon as her primary case study, her work is wholly applicable to colonial engagements across the continent, but is especially informative here. It provides a particular context for the fact that – despite innumerable statements to the contrary – Europeans did actively engage in, and alter, the realms of witchcraft and magic, inclusive of the broader and more cross-culturally applicable term, political agency.<sup>27</sup>

Bernault's research involves an exploration of an overarching notion of political and ‘mystical’ agency that is engaged with in equal measure by Europeans and African during colonial encounters and various political strategies taking place in continual performances of hegemony; allowing space for the inclusion and adaptation of symbolic, synecdochic and metaphorical presentations during the colonial encounter. Studies of dialogic engagements and intersecting and developing epistemologies allow space for the European involvement in such practices. Such studies are an explicit reminder that agency – causation and extraordinary power – is and has been defined in multiple ways across time and space. Herein lies the placement of *nkisi* as a transactional ‘life force’, one among many Bantu terms and strategies of political agency, to be grappled with and transacted in by Torday, local political leaders, ‘medicine men’ and colonialists.

## The regional application of *nkisi*

For those familiar with studies of *nkisi*, they may note that *nkisi* practices, and certainly artefacts labelled *nkisi* in museum displays, are not usually found in this region of Central Africa. Significantly, there is considerable evidence that *nkisi* is not associated with a particular artefact, or even region, but that it can be looked at as a broader system used across a vast region, something which the Torday sources would seemingly indicate. As can be observed in the archival records of ethnographic museums containing Central African collections, many traditional art historical and museological categorisations have assigned *nkisi* to the Kikongo-speaking region and to a series of objects, *nkisi nkondi*, or nail fetish.<sup>28</sup> In the anthropological literature, following Wyatt MacGaffey's work, definitions became much broader, and *nkisi* has alternately been compared with as ‘medicine’, ‘therapy’, ‘divination’, ‘witchcraft’ and ‘fetish’.<sup>29</sup> Following MacGaffey's work, understandings of *nkisi* expanded out to include an array of artefacts, including natural artefacts such as stones, rivers or trees, used as part of a healing or problem-solving complexes.<sup>30</sup> As such, the practices of *nkisi* can be attributed across a broad region, beyond the scope of ethnographic or museological boundaries of particular artefacts or even linguistic studies of certain terms. *Nkisi* could be looked at in a similar way to John Janzen's work on the healing complex across Central Africa, *ngoma*, which may or may not involve the physical aspect of the ‘drum of affliction’ to which it was once associated.<sup>31</sup> This type of study allows for the

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> MacGaffey W. and Janzen J., “Nkisi Figures of the Bakongo”, *op. cit.*

<sup>29</sup> See Torday's works in their entirety, as he uses these words interchangeably. MacGaffey W., “Complexity, Astonishment and Power”, *op. cit.*; “Fetishism Revisited”, *op. cit.*; MacGaffey W. and Janzen J., “Nkisi Figures of the Bakongo”, *op. cit.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> John Janzen's work on Bantu healing has been influential in establishing a regional context for a complex of ritual practices that are associated under the term of *ngoma*, or ‘drum of affliction’. Janzen John (1992), *Ngoma: Discourses of Healing in Central and Southern*

idea that *nkisi* might be shorthand for Europeans to understand what it is that objects are *doing* in various contexts (rather than what form they take). It is certainly the case for Emil Torday, who used the term *nkisi* without ever finding a comprehensive translation.<sup>32</sup>

Wyatt MacGaffey rightly stated that disciplinary divisions have led to *nkisi* being subdivided between medical anthropologists, art historians, art critics, anthropologists and others by students of African political systems, musical instruments or dance, reducing the totality of *nkisi* to a “phenomenon”, a singular aspect that corresponds with a particular western institution.<sup>33</sup> It should be noted here that those very same museological categories were developed *after* the Emil Torday collection arrived in Europe (the first of its kind in the UK). Thus Torday’s fieldnotes are a vital source for uncovering broader regional systems and cultures, and writing and recording local terminology, which was yet to be sub-categorised, as this happened upon his return. MacGaffey underlined that this unilateral understanding of *nkisi* obscured its sociological function and I would argue, that unilateral understandings and the bounded categories of museums along ethnographic lines, have somewhat obscured the regional application of *nkisi* in the long durée, and even in the colonial encounter.<sup>34</sup>

This broadening out of *nkisi* as an analytical category, means we can look at artefacts collected and used by the expedition as a powerful tool that was used on both sides of the encounter. *Nkisi* has been studied in the literature as a transactional ‘life force’<sup>35</sup> and Torday promoted its use by other colonisers and Europeans, because he had seen how this complex system was the essence of power when used by powerful figures, such as Congolese political leaders and so called ‘medicine men’, or *nganga*.

## Did Torday make kissi?

Torday’s fieldnotes and his publications describe varied forms and functionalities of *nkisi*, which is quite an elusive concept to explain, thus meaning that Torday often uses the term “kissi” (*nkisi*), when it cannot be translated, or ‘medicine’, with some explanation about what the ‘medicine’ is doing (when it goes beyond a western understanding of healing discourses).<sup>36</sup> Prior to the aforementioned encounter with the elephant, Torday offers numerous examples of *nkisi* in action, and how it could be associated with a person, turned into a material (for example a powder) or housed within an object or animal in a very fluid and mobile way. Throughout the expedition, Torday and his assistants applied medicines and powders in arbitrating disputes, for example. Torday describes his phonograph, as “speaking kissi” and is even told that he can override a dietary prohibition given to his cook by administering his own “stronger kissi from Europe.”<sup>37</sup> Torday portrays a real confidence in his knowledge of the methods of the attribution of these powerful forces, and this gave him the ability in some instances, especially when he spoke fluent Kimbala, to make *nkisi* from an array of objects, all with metaphorical significance that Torday and local people understood.<sup>38</sup> Making *nkisi* meant exerting control: over bodies, administering medicines, food provision, law and order and collecting taxes without dispute.

*Nkisi* is not based upon a fixed form, and could be altered to best suit a situation, using metonymic reference, of which Torday manipulated. To demonstrate the potential of *nkisi* in ‘peace-keeping duties’, Torday describes an incident where he replicates the practice of applying *kaolin* - white clay - to bodies and

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*Africa*, Berkeley, University of California Press. See also Hunt Nancy Rose (2013), “Health and Healing in Africa”, in J. Parker and R. Reid (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern African History*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 378-395. There are sources from coastal central Africa which have identified *nkisi* to have been in existence since the sixteenth-century.

<sup>32</sup> Torday states “the magical image receives its magical power from the kissi applied by magician” and that “the ordinary name for things of magical power is ‘kissi’”. Torday Emil (1913), *Camp and Tramp in African Wilds, A record of adventures, impressions, and experiences during many years spent among the savage tribes round Lake Tanganyika and in Central Africa, with a description of native life, character, and customs*, London, Seeley, Service and Co, p. 100.

<sup>33</sup> MacGaffey W., “Complexity, Astonishment and Power”, *op. cit.*, p. 189; MacGaffey W., “Fetishism Revisited”, *op. cit.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> The historiography of the term *nkisi* is rich. The discovery of archival sources confirm that Kikongo-speaking indigenous scholars had originally authored the much-used missionary sources of Karl Laman. See Janzen John (1972), “Laman’s Kongo Ethnography: Observations on Sources Methodology, and Theory”, *Africa*, 42(4), pp. 316-228.

<sup>36</sup> BM, TY M27068 and TY M27069, Emil Torday unpublished fieldnotes and Correspondence from the Congo Expedition, 1904-1909; Torday E., *Camp and Tramp...*, *op. cit.*; Torday E. (1925), *On the Trail of the Bushongo*, Londres, Seeley, Service and Co.

<sup>37</sup> Torday Emil, *Camp and Tramp...*, *op. cit.*, p. 84, p. 276.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84 and pp. 257-258.

objects, presented in the situation as *nkisi*. Very often, the white substances applied to bodies, masks, ‘medicine bundles’ or ‘power figures’ (*nkisi*) is Kaolin. Kaolin is a white clay found in the rivers, where the local water spirits, *ngesh*, reside.<sup>39</sup> Torday resolved a dispute by applying “*poudre de riz*” to “the head, arms, chest and legs of two African potentates.”<sup>40</sup> Deceitfully, Torday did not tell the ‘potentates’ that it was *poudre de riz* (face powder, or make up) but “informed them that it was composed of many mysterious components, the chief of which was the powdered skulls of men slain in war.”<sup>41</sup>

This practice involves metonymy to transfer the power or capacity of an ancestor, spirit or agent between and among the participants in the given ritual practice. A *nkisi*, as Luc De Heusch puts it, consists of “spirits of the dead metonymically caught in a metaphorical trap.”<sup>42</sup> This was a perfectly apt association to make with the white powder, as *Grave* dirt, *kaolin*, bones or other relics of an ancestor or of a deceased former priest of the charm, can also be used to metonymically incorporate a specific capacity.<sup>43</sup> MacGaffey writes that

*minkisi* (sing. of *nkisi*) incorporated and were incorporated in, by means of medicines, the bodies of the individuals over whom their power was directly exercised. This relationship was also metonymic, in that elements associated with the client or victim were put into the *nkisi* and elements of the *nkisi* were put into him, too, in the form of a potion that he drank and of materials that were rubbed on his body or attached to it. The priest or agent (*nganga*) of the *nkisi* was also incorporated in it by parallel procedures of initiation.<sup>44</sup>

This use of materials, or ‘medicines’ applied to objects and people was at the root of Congolese notions of remedying situations, including curing illness, and exerting agency over subjects. This practice has been noted by Geschiere and others in the process of ‘witchcraft’ in a modern setting.<sup>45</sup> All the forms and materials changed over time and space and also according to particular practices of a given *nganga*; his or her particular expertise or a given diagnosis, meaning it is perfectly reasonable that a foreign person could adjust the materials as long as the associations were understood. Despite this changeability, archaeological evidence demonstrates that ‘charms’ or ‘medicines’ in an array of forms had been used by practitioners across equatorial Africa for centuries.<sup>46</sup>

*Nkisi* can also house the potential or capacity of the person or thing it is supposed to stand in for. In the following example Torday was reported a local *nkisi* in action that he had observed and been told about. These reports are from Mbala/ Pende country (approximately the Gungu Province and the town of Kikwit), where Torday had spent extended amounts of time as a trader (1904-1906).<sup>47</sup> It is a detailed example of *nkisi*, which shows the potential for capacities and powers to transfer from human to animal, to object (a white powder, attributed to a particular person/ancestor). An example of such a transition from human, ancestor, to object, embodying their capacity, is detailed in Torday’s 1913 publication, *Camp and Tramp in African Wilds*.<sup>48</sup> Torday had learnt that powerful and important ancestors could have their own *nkisi* - that is, a material attributed to them, or standing in for their personhood, after passing away. This *nkisi* became associated with a person and gave others in possession of this *nkisi* the capacity to act in the physical world in particular ways, depending of course upon the attributes of both the *nkisi* and the person whom it synecdochically or metaphorically stood in for.

<sup>39</sup> *Ngesh* is Kuba terminology for “nature spirits” and kings (the Kuba kingdom lies in the region adjacent to this one). On *ngesh*, see the work of Mack John (1981), “Animal Representations in Kuba Art: An Anthropological Interpretation of Sculpture”, *Oxford Art Journal*, 4(2), pp. 50-56. For *ngesh* in the Lele context in particular, see Sheppard Rebekah (2017), “A History of Encounter, Encounter with History”, *op. cit.*, pp. 100-101, p. 103 and p. 182; Bundjok Henry (2008), “Les Lele. De la culture matérielle à l’histoire du XVI<sup>e</sup> au XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle”, PhD thesis, University of Lubumbashi. The word for Kaolin in Kikongo is *mpemba*, which also means cemetery. MacGaffey Wyatt (1990), “The Personhood of Ritual Objects: Kongo, “Minkisi””, *Etnofoor*, 3(1), p. 51.

<sup>40</sup> Torday E., *Camp and Tramp...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 257-258.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> De Heusch Luc (1971), *Pourquoi l’épouser ? et autres essais*, Paris, Gallimard, p. 182, cited in MacGaffey W., “Fetishism Revisited”, p. 174.

<sup>43</sup> MacGaffey W., “The Personhood of Ritual Objects”, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>44</sup> MacGaffey W. (1988), “Complexity, Astonishment and Power”, pp. 190-191.

<sup>45</sup> Geschiere Peter (2006), “Witchcraft and Modernity: Thoughts about a Strange complicity”, in J. Kiernan (ed.), *The Power of the Occult in Modern Africa: Continuity and Innovation in the Renewal of African Cosmologies*, Berlin, LIT-Verlag, pp. 45-74.

<sup>46</sup> Insoll Timothy (2011), “Introduction. Shrines, Substances and Medicine in sub-Saharan Africa: Archaeological, Anthropological, and Historical Perspectives”, *Anthropology & medicine*, 18(2), pp. 145-166.

<sup>47</sup> His own house still stands in the region, and he is still remembered there.

<sup>48</sup> Torday E., *Camp and Tramp...*, *op. cit.*; Torday E., *On the Trail...*, *op. cit.*



After Molime, a wood carver Torday cites as his friend, had passed away, Torday writes that he entered the body of an elephant, which was then killed just as Molime reappeared in the village, where he lives to this day.<sup>49</sup> In this example, the power of Molime and his *nkisi* was in disappearing, and thus providing a protection from danger. The passage further explains that Molime “owned a *kissi* after his death” that “made anyone on whom it is sprinkled invisible.”<sup>50</sup> Torday was told that this particular *nkisi* attributed to Molime, an important ancestor, was capable of action in the material world after his transference into an animal and his reappearance in the village.<sup>51</sup> Molime, “with the aid of his *kissi*,” disappeared under the ground when the village was “burnt down,” along with his family.<sup>52</sup> This power of invisibility helped him to kill many of his enemies and had transferred, or was housed, into both an animal and a powder.<sup>53</sup> Molime’s ‘spirit’, embodied in his *nkisi*, was attributed to the interception of dangerous forces (or enemies).

This passage about how *nkisi* worked corresponds with the understandings of *nkisi* in the art historical and anthropological scholarship from the regions where *nkisi* is usually attributed, the coastal Kikongo speaking areas of Central Africa. Similarly to Torday’s labelling and use of *nkisi*, in the ethnographic literature, practices labelled *nkisi* in the Kikongo region could mobilise forces, or agency, in curing illness or regulating disputes, or predicting and divining; thus establishing causality for unusual events or “unnatural” illness.<sup>54</sup> The broader literature also indeed notes that *nkisi* could be used as a shell or housing to contain the capacity or qualities of a soul or spirit, capable of action.<sup>55</sup> These “shells or bodies” were often assemblages of many diverse materials and artefacts held in baskets.<sup>56</sup>

The human body, too, can be viewed like a container within this cosmological universe, where substances, often called ‘medicines’, were applied, on both the human, object and the *nganga* (‘medicine man’). There is certainly an anthropology of containment in Central African material culture that engages the relational aspects of these agents in both attributing causality and cure.<sup>57</sup> The anthropological literature states that this is done through metonymy - where an object or material physically stands in for a person - and metaphor - where verbal or visual associations evoke a prescribed and shared understanding of meaning within local, visual and linguistic cultures.<sup>58</sup>

During the encounter with the Lele and Wongo peoples, the elephant seemed to stand in for the surveillant and patrolling aspects of the colonial presence. In later years, there is some evidence for colonial powers committing their crimes by proxy. Strother writes that contemporary horror stories from southwestern Congo report that depraved sorcerers created miniature robots to execute their crimes.<sup>59</sup>

Objects or collections of objects, during Torday’s time too, could have been sent out to intercept malevolent forces. For instance, earlier in the expedition, Torday wrote about Doka in his fieldnotes in a neighbouring region. Doka were nocturnal wanderers of a threatening nature, that could be intercepted by ‘fetishmen’ (*nganga*, or *nkisi* practitioners).<sup>60</sup> Recording a similar term, *doki* in the Kikongo-speaking region

<sup>49</sup> Torday E., *Camp and Tramp...*, *op. cit.*, p. 98, where Torday also states: “My friend Muimbi has somewhat similar powers, for when he was captured by the village of Kolokoto he took some of his *kissi*, disappeared under the ground, to reappear some 800 yards away, and when the men of Kolokoto still kept up the pursuit he took the form of a rat, ran down a hole, and never came up till he got to his own village”, *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> See Ngokwey Ndolamb (1984), “The Cultural Construction of Illness: the Case of the Mukund Among the Lele of Zaire”, *Africa*, 7, pp. 115-132. For a regional study of healing and Bantu discourse see Janzen J., *Ngoma*, *op. cit.* Insoll also highlights the inadequacy of European medical discourse to describe the totality of sub-Saharan practices of divination, shrines and medicines—such as *nkisi*—in an archaeological context. Insoll T., “Introduction.”, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-166.

<sup>55</sup> MacGaffey W., “Complexity, Astonishment and Power”, *op. cit.*, p. 191. This practice is analysed in the *long durée* in relation to a Portuguese translated Shona example in Roufe Gai and Miller Joseph C. (2020), “African Voices Echoing in European Texts: The Muffled Meanings of the Madzimbabwe of the Mocarange between the Sixteenth and Nineteenth Centuries”, *History in Africa*, 47, pp. 5-36.

<sup>56</sup> Mack John (2013), “Baskets of Wisdom: A Central African Trope” in T. A. Heslop and H. Anderson (eds.), *Basketry and Beyond: Constructing Cultures*, Norwich, Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, pp. 128-141.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> De Heusch L., *Pourquoi l'épouser?*, *op. cit.*, p. 181, cited in MacGaffey W., “Complexity, Astonishment and Power”, *op. cit.*, p. 190; MacGaffey Wyatt (2000), *Kongo Political Culture: The Conceptual Challenge of the Particular*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press.

<sup>59</sup> Strother Z., “A Photograph that Steals the Soul”, *op. cit.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

some 65 years later, MacGaffey and Janzen translate it as a “selfish, anti-social witch” who intercepted the spirit selves with *nkisi* in “his nocturnal patrols.”<sup>61</sup>

Theories of transmigration from humans to objects, in terms of their capacities (good or malevolent), at least draw attention to the potential of such encounters to provide evidence for the notion of Europeans sending out object agents to carry out their violent actions. Moreover, the threat of surveillance marries with the watchful and menacing colonial presence. The elephant, with *Bula Matadi*'s (European's) threat, may have been a doka; it was a strange act, surrounded by ritual, some of which will resonate, some of which would have seemed alien and bizarre. The encounter demonstrates at least the potential for objects to carry out the malevolent duties of Europeans by proxy; to survey silently, bring illness and disease, conflict, violence and a whole host of novel agents through which to carry out these duties. With the assistance of Bernault's framework, *Bula Matadi* and its agents could be seen as part of a world of ‘invisible strangers’ that also played a role in the encounter.<sup>62</sup>

In all instances, *nkisi* and the practices it describes were employed to survey, administer justice, determine causality and cure or remedy illness, disaster or deviations from expected social norms. This multiplicity in knowledge and power meant that there were often overlapping notions of control.<sup>63</sup> To obtain power, status and trading monopolies in Central Africa, mastery of ‘medicine’ and ‘divination’ was integral, and may have included awareness of precedents in resolving disputes, skills in medicinal herbs, mastery of ironworking, geography, weather, weaving, sculpting, diplomacy, memory work or whatever best fit the situation or ‘affliction’, client or society.<sup>64</sup>

As Jayne Guyer and Samuel Eno Belinga's work has outlined, prestige, wealth, or power in Equatorial Africa, rested upon an individual's ability to harmoniously draw together kinfolk, clients and dependents; creating an environment where skills and knowledge were nurtured and could thrive.<sup>65</sup> Bernault reminds us that spirits and ancestors played a significant role in the political economy and that ritual experts (*nganga*) were respected and required for their drawing together of all of these aspects through ‘charms’ or their own bodies, which were in themselves seen to contain a mystical substance that could be used to create harmony or for healing.<sup>66</sup> Bernault then draws together the importance of this aspect of power within colonial transactions on the ground, for both Africans and Europeans, offering detailed and well-grounded examples throughout her book that are embedded in historical context; one which offers some context for the evidence provided in Torday's sources.

The aspect of containment, transference or capacity also meant that items that are seemingly peripheral to power structures, perhaps even analysed as regalia, ‘representing’ power, were, in fact, the mediator of the power itself.<sup>67</sup> This is a core aspect of the anthropology of art in Central Africa. Beyond representation or metaphor, is the embodiment of power within and between objects and humans, giving artefacts in themselves, with the right contextual conditions, enormous power in all transactions. The art-historical notion of representation is replaced, in this context, by the notion that materials can stand in for people, or other objects, in a synecdochic fashion.<sup>68</sup> Gell is quite explicit in his treatment of objects (or ‘art works’) that they are not replacements for words or symbols of meaning, but are “systems of action that are intended to act in the world, not encode symbolic propositions about the world” [emphasis mine].<sup>69</sup>

As systems of action, objects played a powerful and active role in the colonial encounter. Herein, in this containment, capacity, housing, synecdochic or metonymic properties, or whatever *nkisi* is, is the essence

<sup>61</sup> MacGaffey W. and Janzen J., “*Nkisi* Figures of the Bakongo”, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-88.

<sup>62</sup> Bernault F., *Colonial Transactions...*, *op. cit.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*; Willis Justin (2013), “Chieftaincy”, in J. Parker and R. Reid (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern African History*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 208-223.

<sup>64</sup> Guyer Jayne and Belinga Samuel Eno (1995), “Wealth in People as Wealth in Knowledge: Accumulation and Composition in Equatorial Africa”, *The Journal of African History*, 36(5), pp. 91-120. For an example of ‘afflictions’ and causation and their remedy, see also Ngokwey N., “The Cultural Construction of Illness”, *op. cit.*

<sup>65</sup> Guyer J. and Belinga S. E., “Wealth in People as Wealth in Knowledge”, *op. cit.*

<sup>66</sup> Bernault F., *Colonial Transactions*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>67</sup> Fraser Douglas and Cole Herbert (eds.) (1972), *African Art and Leadership*, London, University of Wisconsin Press, is the classic analysis of regalia in Africa, which looks at the relationship between form and function to examine how regalia represented notions of power and rule in African societies.

<sup>68</sup> De Heusch, L., *Pourquoi l'épouser ?*, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

<sup>69</sup> Gell Alfred (1998), *Art and Agency*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 4-8.

how objects during the expedition may have engaged with European/African spiritual, material or physical worlds. Torday, at least on a practical level, recognised this power and attempted to explain to his European audiences what this meant in the effective governance of Congo, a governance that necessitated an understanding for local practices, in an area that was difficult to control by the ‘ideal’ means.

## Colonial travel guides: using nkisi

Clearly, Torday had found immense power in the invisible realm of ‘spirits’ and ‘witches’ through his engagement with “kissi”, or *nkisi*, “medicine” or “fetish.”<sup>70</sup> He instructed Europeans to engage power with *nkisi* in order to push forward the European agenda. Torday transmitted such instructions about *nkisi* in published texts, as well as lectures, which instructed Europeans travelling to Africa about the practical applications of ethnography, guides to hunting, administering medicine and employing Africans in service.<sup>71</sup> Torday explicitly explains how Europeans can engage with power mechanisms and *nkisi*, in order to trade, rule or garner information without the use of (direct) violence.

Torday, for example, administered much *nkisi* and also promoted the administering of *nkisi* to “wean the Bambala from cannibalism”<sup>72</sup> or “prevent [people] from going to war.”<sup>73</sup> The advice and detail given in such texts (especially the more popularised texts) render them part of a broader genre that Freed has called “colonial travel guides.”<sup>74</sup> In Freed’s article “Every European Becomes a Chief”, she states that this genre emerged because the low numbers of personnel in the Congo required every European to function as a chief.<sup>75</sup>

Torday’s advice about *nkisi*, with the notions of power offered in Bernault’, Guyer’ and Belinga’s work, allude to the fact that Torday understood that to function ‘like a chief’ in this Congolese context, required mastery of what Europeans called magic or fetish, including the various mystifying technologies and medicines (thus local power mechanisms, or agency, *nkisi*).<sup>76</sup>

Torday reveals that these methods deviate from the ‘ideal’ means of colonial rule for Europeans. Acutely aware of the European prejudices of his target audiences, Torday asks them to forgive his transgressions into “the futilities of magic” or a “belief in false Gods” and to take note of the local specificities of law and order because people “must be sworn in a manner which they regard binding” and Europeans, as he instructed, must engage in ritual practices – “kissi” - in order to keep peace.<sup>77</sup> The unpublished fieldnotes reveal a fairly developed understanding and it appears at times that Torday loses his ‘European’ sense of self and immerses himself into local practices completely, finding a curiosity, fascination and passion for Africa that would occupy him for the rest of his life. Whether or not Torday really did transcend his ‘Europeanness’ as a ‘rational’ objective observer’, will remain a mystery. In any case, in order to engage, it is clear that Europeans transgressed from the European notion of the *ideal* concept of rule.<sup>78</sup> More importantly, is the evidence in such sources of local agency; a successful transaction or trade either meant violent coercion (notably unsuccessful, putting aside, for the moment, its moral repugnancy) or a degree of cooperation.

<sup>70</sup> Bernault F., *Colonial Transactions*, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11; Gordon David M. (2012), *Invisible Agents: Spirits in a Central African History*, Athens, Ohio University Press.

<sup>71</sup> Torday E., *Camp and Tramp...*, *op. cit.*; Torday E., *On the Trail...*, *op. cit.*

<sup>72</sup> Torday E., *Camp and Tramp...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 257-258.

<sup>74</sup> Freed Libbie (2011), “Every European Becomes a Chief: Travel Guides to Colonial Equatorial Africa, 1900-1958”, *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 12(2).

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

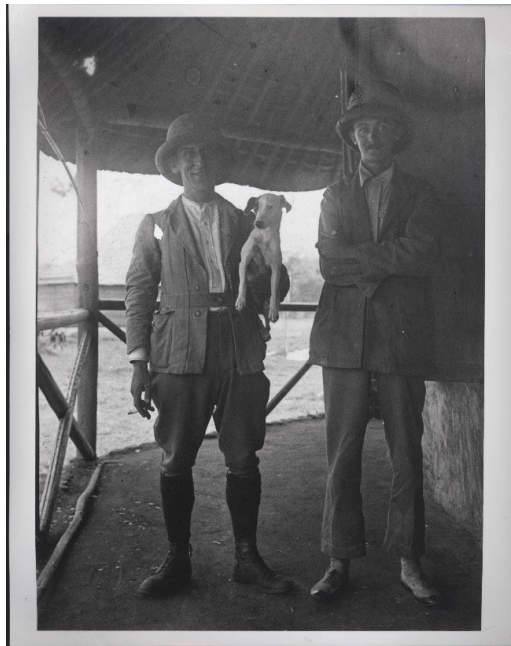
<sup>76</sup> Guyer J. and Belinga S. E., “Wealth in People as Wealth in Knowledge”, *op. cit.*

<sup>77</sup> Torday E., *Camp and Tramp...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 257-258.

<sup>78</sup> Bernault F., *Colonial Transactions*, *op. cit.*

Torday's travel guides offer advice, including the use of *nkisi* and other measures that could avoid the use of firearms or coercive control, but this does not mean such acts were benign or lacking in violence of a different sort. As Bernault cautions, acknowledging these transactions as value, does not detract from the asymmetrical power relationships at play, nor does it diminish the fact that one party usually suffered considerable loss or harm.<sup>79</sup> In the Kasai, trading posts could only be resisted for so long before they covered the vast terrain of Congo, along with palm oil plantations and huge losses to traders and middlemen in inland Africa.<sup>80</sup>

**Figure 4: Photograph of Emil Torday and Melville William Hilton-Simpson on the Emil Torday Expedition 1907-1909**



Source: Photograph courtesy of the British Museum Library Anthropology Library, London, UK

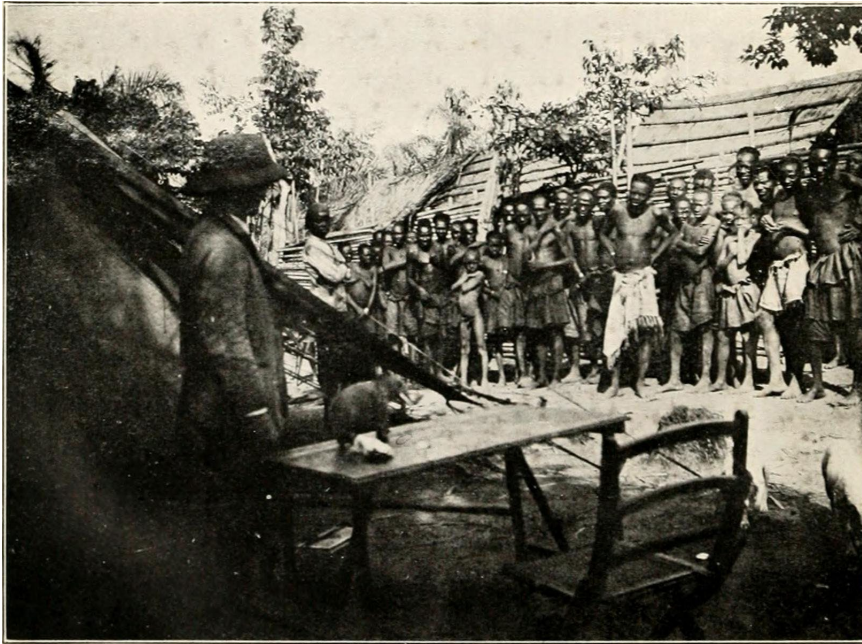
Torday's use of *nkisi* in this project of occupation demonstrates the rising importance of professional Africanists, collectors, and field anthropologists in evidencing the workings of power on a practical level in the move towards direct occupation and control of trade.<sup>81</sup> Overlapping power structures meant that the play with European knowledge entered into a fluid and dynamic currency of competing epistemologies, dependent on their efficacy to ward off unpredictable intrusions to daily life; a 'chief's' responsibility, whether African or European.

<sup>79</sup> Bernault F., *Colonial Transactions*, *op. cit.*

<sup>80</sup> See Vansina J., *Being Colonized*, *op. cit.*

<sup>81</sup> Schildkrout Enid and Keim Curtis (eds.) (1998), *The Scramble for Art in Central Africa*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press; Urry James (1972), "Notes and Queries on Anthropology and the Development of Field Methods in British Anthropology, 1870-1920", *Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, pp. 45-57.

Figure 5: Emil Torday (left) displaying the Clockwork Elephant in Kenge, a Lele Village, Kasai, Republic of the Congo. Location of photograph Identified through the placement of a print in Hilton-Simpson's unpublished diary (volume 7), Royal Anthropological Institute. Taken June 1909



Source: Hilton-Simpson M. W, *Land and Peoples of the Kasai...*, op. cit., p. 427

Torday's advice about a 'non-violent' approach can also be situated in broader historical moments in the colonial project; a recognition that the extension of colonial power required an engagement with Central African mechanisms of power and the political economy. This 'non-violent' approach can also be specifically anchored in the context of the international outcry, led by the Reform Congo Movement, about the abhorrent, violent treatment of African subjects under King Leopold's rule (1885-1908) before it was annexed to Belgium in 1908.<sup>82</sup>

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It is suggested here that the elephant was used by Torday to embody the European, colonial, threat. Torday's use of the clockwork elephant in 1909 to subdue 'hostile' societies engaged with his earlier observations that *nkisi* could transfer agency into objects in order to exert power over people and that it was possible to insert new spirits, agents and objects into the process. Given Torday's insight and 'successful transactions' using local value systems and currencies, it is also suggested that this embodiment was received within a well-understood frame of reference by the Lele people, or across an even broader region of Central or Equatorial Africa.

Such engagements, described in Torday's field notes, penned during his time in the former Belgian Congo (particularly during 1907-1909), reveal the nature of colonial power relationships, challenging the idea of total colonial power.<sup>83</sup> The anthropology of colonialism and subaltern studies has long challenged the notion of a unified and coherent imperial policy through such case studies, which show that, through the agency and involvement of local people, policy and rule on the ground had their own temporal and spatial particularities.<sup>84</sup> Early ethnographic fieldnotes such as these can expose the way in which Europeans and

<sup>82</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja Georges (2002), *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila: A People's History*, London and New York, Zed Books.

<sup>83</sup> Bernault extends this even further, naming this process 'transgressive hegemony'. Bernault F., *Colonial Transactions*, op. cit.

<sup>84</sup> Berman Bruce (1979), "Coping with the Contradictions: The Development of the Colonial State in Kenya, 1895-1914", *Journal of African History*, 20, pp. 487-505; Cooper Frederick (1994), "Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History", *American Historical Review*, 5, pp. 1516-1545; Cooper Frederick and Stoler Ann (eds.) (1997), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial*

Africans thought about and grappled with power, minute-by-minute. As Torday demonstrates, strategies employed by Europeans, even those with a more scientific purpose, often carried out actions in Africa that contradicted the European ‘ideals’ of colonial rule (as well as the European self-presentation as superior, ‘rational’, scientific observers).<sup>85</sup> Notable in such sources are various, rather messy, political strategies taking place in continual performances of hegemony, allowing space for the inclusion and adaptation of symbolic, synecdochic and metaphorical presentations during the colonial encounter which, of course, involved material transactions. Studies of dialogic engagements and intersecting and developing epistemologies allow space for European *and* African involvement in such practices and the inclusion of novel items of European manufacture within developing local systems of power.

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<sup>85</sup> See for example Hunt Nancy Rose (1999), *A Colonial Lexicon of Birth: Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo*, Durham, Duke University Press; Bernault F., *Colonial Transactions, op. cit.*, p. 9.

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