Dress and Body Adornment as Status and Power Symbols in Central Africa: the Nyanga Case

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Populations throughout Zaire are famed not only for the splendor and diversity of their sculptures but also for the incredible variety of materials and techniques used to dress and adorn the human body. This essay will examine various aspects of the permanent and transient body modifications developed by the Nyanga, a people living in the rain forest of eastern Zaire.[1] Nyanga dress and body adornment are rather inconspicuous when compared to some of the other ethnic groups that live in eastern Zaire. Among the Lega, for example, mainly among the male and female members of the major grade levels in the *bwami* association, the search for a beautiful appearance as related to status positions is translated into a great variety of headdresses made in diverse materials and enhanced with all types of accessories. Among the Shi, the enormous assortment of beaded headbands worn by married women is striking. Further southward, members of Luba, Hemba, pre-Luba, and Luba or Lunda related subgroups have developed unique capillary structures in addition to rich body adornment.

Permanent Body Markings

Although the Nyanga have nothing of similar grandeur to offer, they nevertheless have a number of vestimentary and ornamental customs and other forms of body transformations that are anmanifest in different situations and social frameworks and that show a wide range of functions and meanings. On the one hand, they have a number of techniques for permanent body modifications that are an indelible mark of ethnic identity and of manhood or womanhood. On the other hand, they have many techniques and transient means of making the human body appear in a certain way in daily or special situations, as determined by sex and age categories, certain political and ritual statuses, cult membership, permanent or temporary offices and roles, and crisis situations. Some of the devices used convey not only particular messages about a person's social position but also represent symbolic references to certain qualities perceived in animals and plants and metaphorically associated with persons.

Circumcision is practiced on adolescents, while girls from a tender age on elongate the labiae. These two permanent markings reflect ancient traditions and establish ethnic identity (some of the neighbors of the Nyanga do not have these marks), and they are sine qua non expressions of incipient manhood and womanhood. The chipping and

sharpening of teeth (two upper and/or two lower middle teeth), in contrast, is a fairly recent custom introduced from the Nande via the Bakobo (a transitional group between the Nyanga and some southern Nande subgroups). For both men and women this is a completely optional feature; the Nyanga assert that people with large teeth in particular have recourse to it to avoid ridicule. Certain parts (forehead, nose, below the eyes, chest, abdomen, ribs, shoulders, and legs) of the bodies of men and women are adorned with a limited number and variety of designs and patterns (vertical or horizontal straight or zigzag lines; starlike arrangements; herringbone motifs) in the scarification technique. Seven terminological categories are recognized. Some of these body markings are common for both sexes, while others are reserved for either men or women. Because the Nyanga prefer the scars to be darker than the skin, they fill the freshly made incisions with the soot from cooking pots and charcoal. The scarifications are generally thought to be a form of beautification, but they are also considered to be marks of true manhood and womanhood. Persons without the scarifications are mocked and said to be afraid of the razor blade (with which the painful cuts are made). Most scarifications are not linked with social affiliations (kinship groups, cults) or statuses. The *ntunga* type (three horizontal scars on the chest running from shoulder to shoulder), however, is proof that a man has killed an enemy in warfare, and the *miri* version (a line on the back, from shoulder to shoulder) indicates that a woman is an expert dancer. Other scars seen on the Nyanga are the result of bloodletting for sickness or blood pacts.

Some imitation tattoos are produced with the saps of certain fruits, which cause temporary burning and swelling but may leave permanent markings if applied repeatedly to the same part of the body. They occur as a line running from the forehead to the tip of the nose, or as a divided rectangle on the arms. Some women have perforated earlobes containing a seed, bead, or stick, but the wearing of earrings is not widespread.

Body Painting

Body painting is not very developed in its range of patterns and symbolisms. White color is made from kaolin. There are two kinds of red: *ngora*, a powder obtained from red stones, which is considered to be the most beautiful color and a sign of joy; *ukaru*, a powder derived from certain trees. The white and red colors, which are also used to cure certain sicknesses, are applied all over the oiled body or in strips and dots on the face and arms. A bride joining her husband's group is oiled, perfumed, and rubbed with *ukaru* red; if she has had her first menstruation in the home village, *ngora* red is put on her forehead. Twins and their parents paint their bodies white for celebratory dances, and so do the performers in dances following the successful killing of an elephant. In dances connected with hunting magic, some participants have the entire face and body covered with white dots to represent the spots of the leopard and to inspire fear. Banana flour serves to whiten the face in some dances linked with the ritual transfer of the sacred patrimony. Black color, derived from charcoal dust, soot of pots, or saps of certain fruits and vines, is used to paint imitation tattoos on the body and in earlier times was applied for warfare.

Hair

Hair is considered to be potent and dangerous. It is a strict obligation of a wife as a sign of love to remove her husband's body hair, but a husband cannot do this on his wife. A man's head hair is cut or shaved by "someone with whom he is familiar", that is, his wife, a paternal aunt, a son, a grandfather or grandson, a maternal uncle or sororal nephew, or a brother-in-law. A woman's hair is cut by women of her *uhiso*, a category of persons with whom she does not stand in an avoidance relationship. When a young woman is betrothed but has not yet joined her husband's homestead, she must be shaved in her future husband's village if her mother dies. Hair is cut in the early evening and normally not when there is thunder, lightning, and rain; only when a man and his wife mourn the death of their first child can their hair be shaved at sunrise. The cut hair is hidden in the garbage heap behind the house or buried at the foot of a banana or *misiro* tree. Many crisis rituals, such as ablution and mortuary or initiation rites, require partial shaving of the hair. In the *nkekuya* initiation, for example, the shaving is done by a tutor: the hair is rubbed with banana beer, symbolically cut with a *kikaka* leaf (symbol of becoming strong and fat), and then shaved with a razor. The cut hair and the leaf are then hidden by the new initiate.

The chief's hair in particular is thought to be very powerful; it is cut at his initiation ceremonies by an official barber called *mubei* (a position inherited in certain kinship groups) and concealed. Following these rites, fully enthroned chiefs never cut their hair short. With the chief's special permission, an expert hunter and also his well-trained hunting dog are allowed to wear some of his hair: "the chief's hair protects because the chief inspires fear and awe". Hunter and dog carry some of the chief's hair wrapped in a little bundle of bark cloth or spider web around the neck: "like the chief, the spider scares insects, even small birds." The chief's hair in this context is apotropaic, making them immune to injury by wild animals, and it also guards the expert hunting dog against curses (to which most of the dog's failures are ascribed). The Nyanga consider the chief's hair to offer this protection because curses launched against the chief's hair are ineffective since he successfully underwent "the curse" of so many trials and difficult experiences during his secret initiation rites. The ruling chief is also specially bonded with his predecessor because his *kabunguru* bundle (one of the chief's essential paraphernalia) contains a lock of hair from the nape of neck, in addition to two incisors and bits of fingernails of the deceased chief.

There are different styles of hairdressing for men and women. Adult men have a completely shaven skull for mourning. A woman's hair must never be shaven entirely as long as her husband is alive: "it would be equivalent of wishing her husband to die." Even when her husband dies but her parents are still living, her hair is only partly shaven, leaving a central strip. A child's hair is shaven completely only when the second parent dies (to shave it all while one parent remains alive: "would be the equivalent of the child's wishing that parent also to die"). Young men have the *kikongo* hairstyle of trimmings at the base of the hair; older men favor the *kitetu*, short cut hair with trimmings all around the head, or the *mutangakuru*, shaved hair leaving a broad central short cut strip. A woman also receives the *kitetu* haircut after the birth of a child when she is first washed, oiled, dressed with a large bark cloth, ceremonially fed, and then brought out and seated on a pile of firewood and shaved. Otherwise the typical style for women is *turara*, two transversal strips of hair left on each side of the skull and joining above the forehead and the neck with two crosswise cut strips of hair in the center.

Dress

The Nyanga have few items of daily dress, but here again sex, age, and status distinctions are significant. Children begin to dress when they start walking and speaking. Boys get a very small strip of loincloth *(kabinga)* made in beaten bark, which fits tightly between the legs; they keep it until they start trapping birds, at which time they get a slightly larger loincloth *(kintoro)*. Girls get a small strap of bark cloth *(usere)* that covers only the pubic area, but as they "begin to feel shame" they wear the *kabinga* like the boys; when their breasts grow, the girls dress in *kintoro* consisting of two separate pieces to cover front and back. A man provides his son with his first loincloth, dresses him, and teaches him to wear it well (e.g., the boy must not use his bark cloth in the *kintoringa* fashion, that is, with the overlapping parts of the front and back sides both tucked under the belt; by doing this the boy would be accused of wishing the death of his parents). A woman clothes her daughter in the same way. Young men, even when already married, wear the loincloth with a belt of bark or a narrow raffia belt *(mugi)*; only when a man has fully mature status does he assume a wider raffia belt *(mushweshwe)*.

Adult men and women have only a limited amount of clothing. The men wear a loincloth of beaten, sometimes reddened, bark cloth that is passed between the legs and held in place by a belt (ranging from a simple vine to a plaited raffia band, according to activities and statuses). The bark cloth is made from one of various species of ficus tree, some of which are more highly rated for their quality than others. The Nyanga distinguish three types of men's loincloths according to size and mode of wearing. The classic daily worn loincloth *(iyomume)* hangs evenly in front and back but is fairly tightly pulled up and large enough to cover most of the buttocks. A bigger loincloth *(urese)* is draped low to the knees and is preferred by men for dancing. Another large loincloth *(karondo)* hangs lower in the back than in the front, the back part tucked under the belt to form a sort of tail; this is desired for certain types of dances *(kiyowa, bukondo)* that demand energetic movements.

Women also have a bark cloth dress *(iyomina)*, which is made of two parts: inserted under the belt, one part covers the buttocks and the other part the lower abdomen; underneath a small piece of bark cloth called *mushuku* hides the genitalia. From the sixth month of pregnancy on, women place pads made of several species of leaves underneath the *mushuku*. They alternately wear forest leaves one day, leaves of fallow fields the next; the leaves are said to have a soothing and medicinal effect. Married women with small children and older women frequently don a goat's hide (dried, softened by oiling, bending, and trampling); in some parts of Nyangaland an antelope hide is preferred. The hide *(uhu)* is fixed over the left shoulder (the left is the woman's power); the left hind and foreleg are sewn together. The hairy part of the hide is normally placed on the outside. During the mourning period for an enthroned chief when many presciptions weigh on the community, however, women turn the hide inside out "because the land is upside down." This hide dress is also used to protect a baby carried on the back against rain and sun and to cover pots and unprepared food. Some kinship groups have a distinctive sacred patrimony *(ntungo)* of a white goat's hide or a sheep's hide. This special hide is worn by women who stand in a sororal niece relationship to such a group and who have received this sacred patrimony in ritual transfer as a means of "strengthening them so that they may have children."

To sleep, the husband and the wife put on a very small bark cloth, called *mukunguro* (lit., protector) for men and *kishuku* for women, that covers the genitalia. These are not worn during the day but are left behind the bed. The Nyanga state that there is a double purpose to this dress: to prevent small children sleeping with father and mother from touching their parents' genitalia; to avoid "bad dreams" (even if there are no children, the couple still wear the pieces of bark cloth).

Additional types of dress are used by men in ritual situations and also by women. Nyanga elders engaging in cult activities for ancestors and divinities affix cercopithecus monkey skins to their belts. Some kinship groups keep such a hide of a species of large monkey *(munkimankima)* as their sacred patrimony; sororal nephews of these groups, who have obtained through ritual transfer the right to wear this hide, display it at dances and other occasions by placing the head through a central opening and letting the hide fall on the chest and in the back. Men who exercise the special statuses of circumcisor and guardians of the lodge and the adolescents leaving the seclusion area during the elaborate circumcision rites don large raffia fiber costumes *(mumpuri)*. Women and children wear skirts of straps of dried banana leaves *(bisantsa)* during certain phases of the rites. Men carrying the sacred *nkekuya* bundle with which they will "strengthen" their sororal nephews approach their village dressed in a costume of *miobore* leaves with their faces and shoulders painted with white dots. This is to signify the arrival of this potent bundle and to scare away women, children, and noninitiates. A person subjected to the poison ordeal must only be clothed with a skirt of banana leaf strips *(bisantsa)* and a belt of dried banana bark *(mutete)*. Before childbirth, a woman's loincloth and belt are removed while a bundle of *mpombo* leaves (to soften the skin) is attached between her legs.

Apart from a considerable amount of insignia of office (drums, iron gong, stool, spear, scepter, bell, rings, quiver, bow, arrows), the enthroned chief *(mwami)* and his ritual wife *(mumbo)* each own a distinctive loincloth in oiled and reddened beaten bark *(tuhuhuma, rubuo)*. The chief also has several belts: two reddened *miri* of plaited vine; one *ncambi* made of wild boar skin and decorated with leopard, monkey, and genet teeth; and one *kataba* of raffia and adorned with beads, cowries, and hair from the wild boar. The ritual wife has a belt of wild boar hide ornamented with leopard teeth and an eagle claw. A person struck by lightning is healed by being beaten all over by this belt.

Headdress

Headdresses in the form of caps, hoods, headbands, diadems or crowns are not used by Nyanga men or women for daily purposes. To protect themselves against rain in the forest, people may select a large green banana leaf. To shield themselves from rain in the village, men and women may throw a *coero* hide over the head. *Coero* is a dried and trimmed hide of sheep, or of *mubale, mpondo,* and *mukaka* antelopes; made by men it is used in domestic work when grinding banana flour, preparing vegetables, or cooking. The *coero* is subject to ritual pollution and it is surrounded with taboos (e.g., if one uses it as a head cover to go to the toilet, one must remove it during defecation; if a child defecates on it, the hide is left for one day in a river and then given to an old woman who no longer engages in sexual intercourse; it cannot be left in the house of a woman's married son or daughter for fear of ritual pollution should they have intercourse). The immanent sanction for misuse of the *coero* hide is leprosy.

Elders involved in cult activities may wear a simple skullcap in bark cloth. The chief possesses as one of his essential paraphernalia a simple cap *(kembo)* constructed from the pelts of a flying squirrel that has been killed by a Pygmy; the ritual wife has such a cap made from the flying squirrel, bush baby, or genet hides. In some cases, a feather headdress *(isara)* fashioned of *bulikoko* (the bird is a symbol of elegance and good singing) or chicken feathers is owned and worn by the members of a particular kinship group as a distinctive sacred patrimony *(ntungo)*. These items that form part of the patrimony are thought to be power objects that strengthen the group and the individual.

The most important context of ceremonial usage of hats occurs in the elaborate circumcision rites. The hats are worn by the circumcised young men *(batende)* and by a

dignitary called Shebatende, the guardian of the lodge and the protector of the intitiates. Shortly before the young men return for a first visit to the village following a long seclusion, Shebatende himself comes to the village to inform the boys' mothers that their sons will be arriving soon. He wears an elaborate costume consisting of a large piece of bark cloth dress and three large neck, chest, and hip pieces of raffia fibers, numerous raffia neck rings and armbands, and a *kikumbu* hood of bark adorned with white and red dots. The baglike hood stands slanting backward on his head, his face covered with a raffia fiber veil *(kanyenya nkie)*. In the back of the hood Shebatende fixes tailpieces of numerous animals trapped by the boys during the seclusion period and from five to more than ten living *nectaridae* birds (symbols of good luck). In addition to hiding his

Fig. 1 Ritual experts, who own the sacred bundle of the circumcision rites and who also act as circumcisors, don elaborate raffia fiber costumes and hoodlike masks in dances preceding and following circumcision.

identity from the onlookers, the purpose of this outfit is to impress the mothers by telling them that their boys were well taken care of in the lodge, that they ate much meat, and that they fattened like Shebatende. (During his visit the speechless Shebatende drops bundles of game meat at each of the men's houses in the village, as an indication of the surplus of food they enjoyed.)

A day following this visit, the boys and Shebatende return to the village. The boys are dressed like Shebatende with the above-mentioned outfit, but no live birds are attached to their hoods; each boy has a carved and decorated pole *(nkoma)* made of prescribed *muremeri* wood (a wood that when cut dries fast; a reminiscence that the boys' wounds healed rapidly). Silently they enter the village in one row following the order in which they were circumcised; they are led by Shebatende and trailed by tutors who carefully collect all fibers that might be dropping from their costumes. The boys stand in one row in the center of the village, resting hands and chin on the upright poles; the tutors are seated in front of them.

Tutors and mothers then address the boys saying „wake up", but silently they raise their shoulders (this is a way of hiding their identity, but at the same time indicating that they are full of strength). Mothers then bring *butea*-ring money and are shown their sons, one by one, by the tutors who slightly lift their face veils. Food is then offered to the boys, who eat together, speaking softly, near the village outskirts. The mothers rejoice saying that „our sons are tough; they are swollen, they are fattened, they are alive." Returning to the lodge without greeting anybody, the boys undress and place the costumes and hoods on their beds. (The dresses and hats have been made by the boys themselves during their seclusion; however, when the raffia costumes were partly finished, they had been sent to the village so the women could soften them with three kinds of oils. Shebatende, however, has the hat and the costume he used from the time the first boy was led into the lodge to be circumcised. When the paraphernalia are not worn they are kept high up near the ceiling of his house, so that the boys may heal as fast as the hat dries, the hat symbolizing rapid recovery.)

Later that same day, the disguised boys return to the village to receive food and eat it there; all leftovers are placed in the bag in the back of the bark cloth hat. Afterwards costumes and hats are burned with the lodge.

The Nyanga hats used in this initiation context are conceived as devices that temporarily disguise the individual identity of the new initiates at the coming-out ceremonies. The young men appear to the community as a collective and undifferentiated yet very distinctive unit. They are at the end point of a long transition that changed them into adult males, but certain rites necessary to complete the process still remain. The hats are made in bark cloth, which symbolizes the dryness of their wounds, (i.e., their wounds are completely healed); the bark cloth is derived from certain fast-growing trees to represent the rapidity with which they recovered. The hats are hung with the exuviae of small animals killed during the seclusion period to indicate that the young men were taken care of properly during the initiation.

Adornments

Body adornments, although simple in form, are made in a variety of materials and fall into several functional categories. A few ornaments are worn indiscriminately by males or females without particular reference to status or affiliation. To this group belong the narrow plaited raffia rings *(bisumbusumbu)* for arms and legs given to young boys and girls by their parents as embellishments. As the girls grow up and before they marry, they receive from their fathers metal rings for arms and legs, beaded necklaces and waistbands, or waistbands of plaited raffia called *minono*. The waistband worn by nubile girls and all women, however, is more than an adornment; it is linked with concepts about „doing things right" (a woman must always wear it to make her husband's food or to engage in sexual intercourse).

Male and female dancers in general, regardless of the specific nature and purpose of the dance, are allowed to wear fringed upper arm straps of plaited raffia fibers *(ndorera)* and anklet bells *(ntsumbo)* made of pods or manufactured in iron and attached to a raffia or hide strap. These objects are usually worn by a soloist or a few dancers and passed around among others during the performance. Public dances are also an occasion utilizing ornaments, such as plaited raffia rings and beaded necklaces, to be conferred as gifts and rewards to the performers.

In some contexts, a particular ornament given to a person has a special social meaning. Young girls selected to become *kihanga* (an unmarried spirit wife who lives in sanctioned union with a lover and bears children for her own patrilineal descent line) receive from their fathers small oiled and reddened raffia rings *(butea a tukushi)* to be displayed on their arms as „a mark of appropriation". A man may offer his female cross-cousin a beaded necklace as a sign that he would like her to become his wife. After arrival in her husband's mother's house, the bride, if she is a man's first wife, hangs a plaited raffia cord *(kanya muho)*, a symbol of effort, around his neck. The bard performing the epic songs fixes armlets made of fibers cut from dried banana leaves *(nderema)* on the upper arms.

Men and women, young and old, sport amulets *(kashumyashumya)* around the neck or wrists. They are of varied shapes and materials: a turtle bone attached to a plaited necklace to protect against neck aches; a carved rectangular piece of *bombi* or *buninge* wood to prevent attacks by evil *binyanyasi* spirits. Hunters, in particular specialists owning expert hunting dogs, possess several types of amulets intended not only to protect against forest dangers, sorcerers, and witches but also weaken rival hunters. Such amulets, worn around the neck, across the chest, or at the hip, are of strictly prescribed materials, such as a necklace with one fang of a leopard or with a horn of a *mukaka* antelope that died a natural death in the forest.

Nyanga men an women worship a number of male and female divinities who actively intervene in the life of individuals and social groups by inflicting misfortune, disease, and death if neglected or wronged, and by bringing countless rewards if correctly propitiated. Distinctive sacra are associated with each cult and include shrines, containers (bags, baskets, pots, calabashes), consecrated animals (chickens, dogs, goats, sheep), and special insignia (many of them worn by devotees only at certain times during cult procedures).

These insignia comprise the following categories of adornments:

— plaited raffia rings placed around the neck or on the left or right wrist
— copper and iron rings used as necklaces, armlets, or anklets
— armlets of hide with iron bell attachments
— plaited necklaces adorned with black seeds or glass beads; a pectoral, such as two tusks from a wild boar, may be attached to the necklace
— headbands fashioned from a strap of plaited raffia or hide studded with small discs of

polished giant snail shell or beads
— small feather headdresses, mostly made as dense tufts of *bulikoko* feathers
— ornaments for the front part of the head consisting of a disc of copper or plaited raffia and surmounted with hair from a warthog
— plaited raffia straps, sometimes beaded, slung across the chest and the shoulders

All these insignia are differentiated by generic terms. For some divinities only one such set of insignia is used; for others there are rarely more than two such sets. Some divinities have similar insignia, but there is a variation in the material or in the manner of wearing them or in their combination with a second set. On the left wrist, devotees of Kiana wear a plaited raffia ring, those of Muriro a copper bracelet, and those of Nyangengu an iron bracelet. In addition to the plaited raffia ring on the left wrist, devotees of Nyamurairi have an armband of hide with an iron bell attachment on the right wrist, and those of Kahombo a copper anklet on the left leg and a beaded strap slung across the chest. Some of these cult ornaments are worn permanently, others only in special circumstances. Devotees of Nkango always wear four plaited raffia rings around the left wrist, while the small headdress of *bulikoko* feathers is put on when the successful hunter returns with game; worshippers of Mmeshemutwa also have a similar headdress, which is kept in a shrine. There are also regional differences. Even with a limited number of insignia, the Nyanga nevertheless succeed in distinguishing various groups of devotees.

Every kinship group possesses its distinctive sacred patrimony *(ntungo)*. It may be an utensil or tool (a calabash, a billhook knife, a hammer), a domestic animal (dog or goat), the hide of a certain animal, a secret musical instrument (mirliton or complicated zoomorphic sculpture also used as a musical instrument), a medicine bundle, or an ornament that can be worn on the body.

The recurring types of ornaments falling into the category of the sacred patrimony of a social group are the following:
— anklets of small polished discs of giant snail shells
— necklaces made simply of a strap of goat's hide, twisted banana bark fibers, or plaited raffia; some may be decorated with black seeds and some have appendages; the pectorals used are tusks of a small wild boar or a piece of carved and polished elephant bone
— headbands of wild boar"s hide studded with cowries, or of plaited raffia covered with small snail shell discs
— small headdresses of tufts of chicken feathers arranged on a vine
— tufts of animal hair placed on top of the head
— cowrie-studded nets worn over the head
— belts of *mukaka* antelope hide, sometimes decorated with cowries
— a cord slung across the chest with an attachment of a polished flat piece of wood carved in the shape of two inversely superposed triangles

The general tradition underlying the reasons why kinship groups possess such a sacred patrimony involves an ancestor who obtained this item and liked it, or was healed from sickness or „strengthened in his being" after acquiring it. He subsequently imposed upon his descendants the sacred last will *(irai)* to preserve and use the object. Regardless of whether the sacred patrimony is an animal or a manufactured object, it is thought to have an intrinsic power. When the leaders of the group, for example, decide to make the object, there is a ritual during which the male members of that group participate in a joint meal. They then make offerings to the ancestor to request his blessings since he was the first to own that object and to ask him „for strength, good health and long life". In most cases, any person, male or female, can acquire through ritual transfer from his maternal uncles's group the right to own that sacred patrimony. The

plea to obtain the item follows divination and is generally conditioned either by „personal loss of force" or by a wife's failure to bear children.

The modalities involved in the formal appeal and ritual transfer differ somewhat from group to group and also depend on the type of object (some of the sacred musical instruments and medicine bundles are transferred only between men through initiation). In the simpler instances involving men or women making the request from their maternal uncles, the general pattern is as follows: the nephew or niece directly approach a maternal uncle bringing him the gift of a goat or a large calabash of beer; when the demand is accepted, and following a joint meal, the sacred patrimony is then taken by the maternal uncles to his or her village, where they receive food and presents and give blessings to their nephew or niece. Those items that are transferred as a sacred patrimony and as power objects that can be worn on the body are generally kept in the house, often in a table rack above the bed, or in a shrine where they are stored in a bag, basket, pot, or calabash. The objects are worn only in special ceremonies linked, for example, with their ritual transfer or when the elder members of the owning group introduce their younger kinsmen to them.

Some ornaments are indicators of high political status. The head *(mutambo)* of a local patrilineal group has a copper ring around the right arm and a leopard teeth necklace. The person of *muhunga* status (i.e., second in command in the local patrilineal group) places a copper ring on the left arm. The chief *(mwami)* and his ritual wife *(mumbo)* own numerous obligatory insignia, which they receive at the secret enthronement rites. Some of the insignia are inherited from the predecessors; others are newly manufactured and brought to the rites by three different categories of officials. The royal paraphernalia include a few objects that can be worn as body ornaments:

— a necklace in small polished discs of giant snail shell, which is the sacred patrimony that chiefly groups possessed before their immigration from Bwito, owned by the chief and the ritual wife
— bracelets in copper and ivory owned by the chief and the ritual wife
— a wrist protector made of bush baby pelt filled with powerful exuviae and owned by the chief
— leopard teeth fixed to a strap of wild boar's hide and used as a necklace by the chief and the ritual wife
— an iron finger ring worn by the chief
— a hairnet of cowries
— the *kabunguru* bundle fixed around the neck of the chief and containing human and animal exuviae (hair and nails of predecessors; eyebrow of gorilla, tooth and eyebrow of lion, claw of aardvark, small elephant tusk; some of the animal exuviae are obtained from Nyanga-related neighboring groups)

Following the enthronement rites, most of these ornaments are not regularly worn. The *kabunguru* bundle, for example, is preserved in a special house by two officials; some of the other insignia are kept in a large quiver made of bark. When the chief dies, some of the insignia are inherited or held temporarily by two officials who respectively supervise the burial and guard the tomb.

Related Objects

Certain objects that cannot be termed adornments properly speaking are an intrinsic part of the appearance of men and women. Essential for men are the shoulder bags *(mahwehwe)* made in monkey hide or in the pelts of a potto in which they carry personal belongings (small tools, pipes, tobacco) and small animals killed in traps. Some

men who are devotees of particular divinities carry a plaited bag in which some cult paraphernalia are kept.

For women with babies the *ngobi* cradling gear for carrying the child on the back is of primary importance. The cradling gear consists of broad bands plaited in raffia (by men specialized in that technique) and arranged as a device *(kikamba)* that gives back and buttock support to the child and allows the baby to be tied to the mother's body. The cradling gear is undecorated, but generally a small funnel-shaped calabash or horn is tied to it for giving the child an enema. Young girls and husbands returning with their wives from the fields may also be seen carrying the baby with the woman's *ngobi*. This simple object is surrounded with numerous taboos because it is thought to be linked with the growth and general well-being of the child. The Nyanga often say that *ngobi* is the child; if one threw it away, it would be the equivalent of throwing away the child, and a person would not be able to have other children. When a man sleeps with his wife the *ngobi* must not be in another house. If this were the case, the *ngobi* can no longer be used so it is unknotted and given to an old woman who sweeps it away with the dirt when she cleans up her house. When the object, which can suffice for several children of one couple, becomes unusable it is given to an old woman who simply scoops it up with other dirt as if it were only leaves. Under no circumstances can the object be burned; if it burns with the house, special purifications and goat sacrifice must be made to lift the taboos (the same procedure used when lightning kills a person in the village). Nobody must step over a *ngobi* lying on the ground; it is an act of sorcery, and if one who had done it subsequently slept with a woman, the child would cough incessantly. Nobody must be beaten with a *ngobi*, lest he or she contract leprosy. A *ngobi* may not be borrowed or loaned because it is the child. If the baby who is carried in it dies, however, the *ngobi* is unraveled and placed with the child in the tomb. One of the euphemisms for „X died" is „the *ngobi* in which mother carried him/her has broken" (in no other circumstance can one say that the *ngobi* broke because it would be the equivalent of saying that the child broke). When the *ngobi* is being plaited or being repaired, the craftsman must chew roasted bananas, not only so that the child may grow and prosper but also so that the child will not suffer from *busima* sickness. When the *ngobi* is no longer needed because the child can walk, it is carefully hung up in the house so that sorcerers could not cut a piece from it to bewitch the child.

Note

1 Field research among the Nyanga was carried out from 1954 through 1958 under the auspices of l'Institut pour la Recherche scientifique en Afrique centrale (Brussels). For general information about the Nyanga, see the bibliography.

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Summary

The author analyzes the forms, functions, and meanings of permanent body markings (circumcision, elongation of the labiae, sharpening of teeth, and scarification) and body adornment among the Nyanga of the eastern Zaire forest region. Special attention is paid to body painting, hairdo, dress, headdress, and various other types of adornment in their relationships with sex, age, and status distinctions (chiefs, devotees of cults, members of voluntary associations) and particular rituals. Other objects, such as shoulder bags for men and the *ngobi* cradling gear for women, are intrinsic part of their outer appearance.

Zusammenfassung

Der Autor analysiert die Formen, Funktionen und Bedeutungen von bleibenden Körpermarkierungen (Beschneidung, Verlängerung der Lippen, Zuspitzen der Zähne und Narbentatauierungen) und von allgemeinen Verzierungen am Körper der Nyanga in der Waldregion des östlichen Zaire. Besondere Aufmerksamkeit liegt auf Körpermalerei, Haartracht, Kleidung, Kopfschmuck und verschiedenen anderen Verzierungsarten, die jeweils in Bezug gesetzt werden zu Geschlecht, Alter und Rangunterschieden (Häuptlingen, Kultverehrern, Mitgliedern von freiwilligen Vereinigungen) und zu einzelnen Ritualen. Andere Objekte, wie Schultertaschen für Männer und das *ngobi* (Kindertragvorrichtung der Frauen), sind wesentlicher Teil des äusseren Erscheinungsbildes der Nyanga.