

# THE OVIMBUNDU UNDER TWO SOVEREIGNTIES

---

A Study of Social Control and Social  
Change Among a People of Angola

Adrian C. Edwards

AFRICAN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDIES OF  
THE 20TH CENTURY



AFRICAN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDIES  
OF THE 20TH CENTURY

---

Volume 22

THE OVIMBUNDU UNDER TWO  
SOVEREIGNTIES

---



**Taylor & Francis**

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

**THE OVIMBUNDU UNDER TWO  
SOVEREIGNTIES**

A Study of Social Control and Social Change  
Among a People of Angola

ADRIAN C. EDWARDS

First published in 1962 by Oxford University Press for the International African Institute.

This edition first published in 2018  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

© 1962 International African Institute

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

*Trademark notice:* Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-8153-8713-8 (Set)

ISBN: 978-0-429-48813-9 (Set) (ebk)

ISBN: 978-1-138-58997-1 (Volume 22) (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-429-49123-8 (Volume 22) (ebk)

**Publisher's Note**

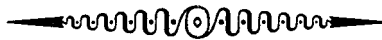
The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original copies may be apparent.

**Disclaimer**

The publisher has made every effort to trace copyright holders and would welcome correspondence from those they have been unable to trace.

THE OVIMBUNDU  
UNDER  
TWO SOVEREIGNTIES

A STUDY OF SOCIAL CONTROL AND SOCIAL  
CHANGE AMONG A PEOPLE OF ANGOLA



ADRIAN C. EDWARDS

*Published for the*  
INTERNATIONAL AFRICAN INSTITUTE  
*by the*  
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS  
LONDON IBADAN ACCRA  
1962

*Oxford University Press, Amen House, London E.C.4*

GLASGOW NEW YORK TORONTO MELBOURNE WELLINGTON  
BOMBAY CALCUTTA MADRAS KARACHI LAHORE DACCA  
CAPE TOWN SALISBURY NAIROBI IBADAN ACCRA  
KUALA LUMPUR HONG KONG

© International African Institute 1962

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN  
COX AND WYMAN LTD, LONDON  
FAKENHAM AND READING

*To My Parents*



**Taylor & Francis**

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

## CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	xi
NOTE ON ORTHOGRAPHY	xiii
INTRODUCTION	xv
I. THE OLD SOCIETY	1
1. History	1
2. Ethnography	6
3. Economics and Social Structure	8
II. THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT	21
III. CHIEFS AND HEADMEN IN GUMBA	35
1. The History of Gumba	35
2. Chiefs, Government Headmen, and Traditional Headmen	39
3. Headmen and their Villages	45
IV. THE INTERNAL STRUCTURE OF VILLAGES	49
1. The Village Epalanga	49
2. Information on Household Heads	52
3. Kinship and Marriage in the Village Setting	56
4. Headmen and Kinship Cores	58
5. Kinsmen and the Choice of Residence	61
V. VILLAGE ECONOMICS	65
VI. THE CATECHETICAL SCHOOL	76
VII. KINSHIP	90
1. General Aspects	90
2. Kinship Terms	93
3. Kinship Norms	96
4. Analysis of the Old Kinship System	99
5. Contemporary Kinship Norms	100
6. Descent, Inheritance and Succession	105
7. Kinship in a Changing Society	107
VIII. MARRIAGE	111
1. The Significance of Preferential Marriage	111
2. Husband, Wife, and Household	115

## CONTENTS

IX. SOCIAL CONTROL	128
1. Introduction	128
2. Guilherme and Paulo	128
3. Kapapelo and Sapapula	136
4. Lusase, Sapapula, and Luanga	145
5. Social Control and Social Structure in the Disputes	149
CONCLUSIONS	155
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE OVIMBUNDU SINCE 1900	163
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE OVIMBUNDU BEFORE 1900	164
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF OTHER WORKS OF SIGNIFICANCE	166
INDEX	167

## LIST OF MAPS AND CHARTS

Angola and the Umbundu Kingdom at the end of the nineteenth century	3
Gumba in its geographical setting in North-Western Umbundu country	36
Village of Epalanga	50
Chart 1. Marriage relationships centred round Sapapula and Ndjoleya	91
Chart 2. Intermarriage between descendants of Mbatl, Sasamela, and Mwehombo	96
Chart 3. Sapapula as centre of a constellation of kinship ties	97



**Taylor & Francis**

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The fieldwork on which this study is based was undertaken as a Research Fellow of the International African Institute between November 1955 and December 1956. I am grateful to the Executive Council of the Institute for awarding me the Fellowship and to Professor Daryll Forde, Director, and Mrs. B. E. Wyatt, then Secretary of the Institute, for much help in various ways.

Professor Meyer Fortes and Dr. Jack Goody were my supervisors during my period as a research student, their advice and criticism being the hammer under which my arguments have acquired some sort of shape. I must also acknowledge the great help and stimulus of Dr. Mary Douglas of University College, London, who contributed greatly to the revision of the manuscript for publication. I am also grateful for the assistance of Dr. V. W. Turner of Manchester, Mr. Charles White, who provided information on the Ovimbundu in Northern Rhodesia, Dr. Ernst Westphal, who introduced me to Umbundu, and Dr. and Mrs. Guy Atkins, who gave me much helpful advice and information.

In Lisbon the late Professor Mendes Correia, Professor Antonio de Almeida, and Dr. Roderigo de Sá Nogueira of the Instituto de Estudos Ultramarinos received me most courteously and were responsible for obtaining authorization for my work from the Overseas Ministry. Dr. and Mrs. Scott, of the Liga Evangelica, Lisbon, aided me with advice, introductions, and a much valued personal friendship.

I should also like to acknowledge the assistance of Senhor Norberto Lopes, at that time Director of Civil Services, the Archbishop of Luanda (the Very Reverend Moyses Alves de Pinho), Colonel Manuel Nascimento Vieira, then Governor of Huambo, Senhor Alberto de Oliveira Mendes, and the British and Portuguese staffs of Messrs. Robert Hudson and Messrs. Hull, Blyth and Co. (Casa Inglesa).

To Dr. Gladwyn Childs I owe both my introduction to the Umbundu people through his book, and his personal hospitality and interest. Other Protestant missionaries who helped

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

me in various ways are Dr. Gilchrist, Mr. Henderson, Mr. Okuma, and Mr. Theodore Tucker. The late Padre Albino Alves, C.S.Sp., of Nova Lisboa, Padre C. Estermann, C.S.Sp., of Sá Da Bandeira, and Padre J. Feltn, C.S.Sp., of Bimbe, gave me advice, information, hospitality, friendship, and much kindness.

The people of Epalanga and its neighbourhood were most patient and polite to me. I must mention by name my servant, Pedro Epalanga Chimbalanya.

## NOTE ON ORTHOGRAPHY

The orthography for Umbundu words used here is that adopted in the *Dicionário Etimológico Bundo-Português* of Padre Albino Alves. Generally speaking, I have used this for names of villages and of individuals (apart from Christian names). Towns, European settlements, and chiefdoms have been spelt according to the accepted Portuguese orthography. Dr. Childs has given all place names of Umbundu origin in his Umbundu orthography. Hence, my Cassongue is his Kasongi.



**Taylor & Francis**

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

## INTRODUCTION

The Ovimbundu<sup>1</sup> of central Angola appear under various names<sup>2</sup> in narratives by nineteenth and early twentieth century travellers in West Central Africa. In the present century three anthropological studies have been written about them by Childs,<sup>3</sup> Hambly,<sup>4</sup> and Hastings,<sup>5</sup> as well as two shorter studies by Bastos<sup>6</sup> and Santos Brandao,<sup>7</sup> and a large number of articles.<sup>8</sup> Despite the large amount of documentation available there existed a considerable number of gaps, especially as regards the political system and the kinship system.<sup>9</sup> In proposing to work among the Ovimbundu, I hoped to be able to fill in these gaps, and in particular to provide a study of what appeared to be a double-descent kinship system. I also hoped to study the reactions of an African society to Portuguese rule.

I arrived at Nova Lisboa in roughly the centre of Umbundu country in October 1955. Here, as in Lisbon, I was told that it would be very difficult to find an area where the traditional social life of the Ovimbundu as described in the literature

<sup>1</sup> A plural from the singular Otjimbundu. The adjective and the name of the language is Umbundu. The Ovimbundu people are entirely distinct from the Kimbundu people of northern Angola and the two languages are not mutually intelligible. However, the confusion between the two has gone so far that both Europeans and Africans speak of the Ovimbundu people and language as Kimbundu and of the true Kimbundu as Kamundongo.

<sup>2</sup> Mambari, Nano, Ovimbali, and so on.

<sup>3</sup> G. M. Childs, *Umbundu Kinship and Character*, Oxford, 1949.

<sup>4</sup> W. D. Hambly, *The Ovimbundu of Angola*, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, 1934.

<sup>5</sup> *Ovimbundu Customs and Practices* (unpublished thesis) 1933, D. A. Hastings.

<sup>6</sup> Traços Geraes sobre a Etnografia do Districto de Benguella in *Boletim de Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa*, 1908, pp. 5-15, 44-56, 81-99, 135-40, 169-76, 197-207.

<sup>7</sup> Articles in *Mensário Administrativo* (Luanda) March-April, July-August 1950, and Sept.-Oct., Nov.-Dec. 1952.

<sup>8</sup> See Bibliography.

<sup>9</sup> For an examination of the ethnographic material as it then was, see Merran McCulloch, *The Ovimbundu of Angola*, Ethnographic Survey of Africa. International African Institute, London, 1952.

## INTRODUCTION

could be observed. Eventually I decided to work in the Bimbe area, in the extreme north-western corner of Umbundu country. The census<sup>10</sup> indicated that Bimbe had a smaller white population than any comparable area of Umbundu country, and people who knew it considered that it was one of the areas most likely to retain a relatively conservative social life.

In Bimbe I settled in the village of Epalanga in the chiefdom of Gumba. The advantage of Gumba lay in the conservatism for which its people were noted in other chiefdoms; its disadvantage lay in its proximity to the northern boundary of Umbundu speech and culture, which led me to collect some items of ethnographic information not typical of Umbundu country.<sup>11</sup> On the whole, I am satisfied that the people of Gumba were in the past as in the present Ovimbundu in both speech and way of life.<sup>12</sup>

Many of my discoveries were at first negative ones. I could not find any evidence that there was a double system of kinship groups actually in existence; the villages were not composed of agnatic kin; the chief seemed lacking in power. Nor was it easy to obtain detailed information about the past even from old men. There is little interest nowadays in history, nor are the old social institutions regarded, even by those who once participated in them, as being necessarily better than those of the present day. The reason for this attitude seems to lie in Umbundu social psychology with its readiness to accept European authority and values. Interesting as the motivations behind this attitude are, this 'cultural amnesia' caused me much disappointment. I found it much easier to get texts on the caravan trade, and on ceremonial practices and proverbs, than on the political and kinship systems. The inadequacies of the information I received on the political system may be explained by the fact that Gumba is on the fringe of the area tributary to the old kingdom of

<sup>10</sup> Of 1950.

<sup>11</sup> The payment of fines by a man to his dead wife's kin had been formerly practised in Gumba, and still is further north. It does not seem to have been known in living memory elsewhere in Umbundu country.

<sup>12</sup> The northern limit of Umbundu speech is now somewhere to the north of the administrative post of Cela. As there has not been substantial migration from the south, it is reasonable to assume that it is many years since the Gumba-Cela boundary was also the language boundary.