Ngombu yakusekula in Western Equatorial Africa & the Southern Savanna

This Chokwe tahiye Ngombo —shaker of the ngombo basket— works outside his shrine house in Southern Congo, near Kahemba. The Ngombo divination technique exists (or has existed) from the Atlantic coast to Malawi on the Southern Savanna.
As winnowing grain, the tahyi shakes the basket so that one or two symbols moves forward to the white and red clay lumps on opposite rims. Shaking the basket represents sifting the truth from falsehood. Possession by the Kayong‘u spirit may cause the diviner to shake, thus shaking the basket. Specific symbols are called tuponya or ankishi.
Tuponya or ankishi

*Kishi* represents ancestor spirit, *mukishi*, masks and costumes used at circumcision and funerary rituals. Thus, generally the mystical power associated with human beings, alive or dead.

Human figures in the basket:

*Akulumpi*, „the elders,“ the chief and his kin;

*Chamutang‘a*, a man sitting huddled with chin on hands and elbows on knees, irresolute, changeable person;

*Katwambimbi*, the weeping or mourning man, a mischief maker, one who mourns the loudest at a funeral and is to be suspicioned in the death.

Victor Turner, „Ndembu Divination and its Symbolism“
The *mahamba*

The diviner shown here is also a priest of other shrines, or *mahamba*, representing numerous facets of life such as matrilineal ancestors, patrilineal hunters, various nature and healing cults and forces.
"Throwing the bones" is the most widespread form of divination in Nguni-speaking societies of Southern Africa—Xhosa, Zulu, Swazi, and others. The "bones" represent various aspects of social and metaphysical life, the diviner throws them on a mat and then "reads" the configuration of successive throws to interpret a case at hand. This is Ida Mabusa, a well-known Swazi diviner who died ca. 2000.
At Betani, near Mbabane the capital, Ida Mabusa‘s training college for sangomas attracted many clients from across Southern Africa, and nearly two dozen apprentice *twasa*‘s, or *amakweta*. In 1982 a simple telephone call to this center would suffice to send the vehicle to pick up clients who lived nearby. Clients might also spend the night at Betani. Below, the drums warm in the sun in preparation for the night sessions of trance song-dancing in advanced divination when several levels of ancestors, nature, wild-animal, and alien spirits are called down.
Ida Mabusa here studies the constellation of bones and other objects she has „thrown“ on the mat before her. When she was called, and became *twasa*, she was sick and roamed the bush for months before she established a relationship with a therapist-teacher.
“Throwing the bones” and 20 questions

An advanced apprentice is here reading the bones for a client (right), while another apprentice (left) who has discussed the case with client answers „yes“ or „no“ to a string of questions posed by the diviner. Such questions establish the nature of the issue and the relationship of the client to the likely cause, all the while assuring the detached objectivity of the diviner.
Bilumbu in Kinshasa: Kishi Nzembela

Kishi Nzembela (left) in her divination room, with paintings of Jesus (lower left), the Trinity (above middle) and her daughter Janet (off picture to right). Altars to patrilineal and matrilineal ancestors are in the yard outside.
Bilumbu in Kinshasa:
Nzembele
Bilumbu in Kinshasa: Layout of an urban diviner’s compound
Bilumbu in Kinshasa: The male ancestors
Bilumbu in Kinshasa: The female ancestors
Bilumbu in Kinshasa: God, Jesus, and Janet
Kongo neo-Christian divination with *ngunza* "prophet"
Mama Marie Kukunda’s counselling and divining sessions were open to the public. Here several clients have brought their matters to her, including Dr. Bill Arkinstall, who seeks her advice on whether he should move to another hospital that has invited him. Her “techniques” include reading scripture verses, closing her eyes and praying, and offering straight-forward advice and answers. Occasionally she will offer minor therapies, but usually she only divines and counsels.

Mama Marie says that God has inspired her with the gift of divination. She is a devout member and deaconess in the Congolese branch of the Swedish Covenant Church.
The paternal and maternal clans of a sufferer, dying of cancer, meet to resolve an ancient dispute that diviner Marie Kukunda, *ngunza*, has determined has contributed to the sufferer’s affliction. Decades earlier, the sufferer’s paternal clan, generations-long slaves of his mother’s clan, left for their home without redeeming themselves. Their departure was hostile, leading them to curse the land and the women of the masters they were forsaking. Marie Kukunda also divined that the sufferer had himself been to blame in his sickness.
Which twin did he strike?

Marie Kukunda, diviner

Sufferer, dying of cancer

Speaker for clan of father of sufferer, former slaves of mother’s clan

Speaker for and head of sufferer’s matrilineal clan
Reading the Signs: Sufi Islamic medicine in East Africa
Sufi Islamic medicine: The blessing of the sheik

Sheik Abdullah of Taiba, in Central Sudan, listens to devotees problems and concerns, then he blesses them and may send them elsewhere for treatment by his staff or elsewhere for specialized care.