

Decolonizing the University:  
Postal Politics, The Student Movement, and Global 1968 in the Congo

by  
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## Dedication

A ma mère, qui m'a raconté le Congo

A mon père, qui m'a donné le goût des livres

## Acknowledgements

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Part I  
Introducing Kinshasa, the Congolese 1968,  
Postal Politics, and Decolonization

## Chapter 1

### Introduction: History and Memory of the Congolese Left

“The next time you come back to the Congo, bring me one of Proudhon's books,” “papa” Mayala told me. “Especially try to find *The Philosophy of Poverty*.” Well advanced in his seventies, François Mayala had been a long-time labor organizer at the National Union of the Workers of the Congo (UNTC). In my attempt to understand the history of the Congolese Left, Mayala had become a key figure and interlocutor. “Did you know that Marx wrote *The Poverty of Philosophy* in response to Proudhon?” he continued. “Marxists don't like Proudhon so much. For me, I regret disregarding him for so many years. We Congolese don't know anything about anarchism.”

As we talked, the city was roaring just outside of the office's windows: the slum city, the dustbin-town, the failed state's capital, a place that epitomized chaos in Western eyes – Kinshasa. Meanwhile, papa Mayala had already moved somewhere else, as usual jumping from one idea to the next. He told me one more time about his pilgrimage to Marx's birthplace in Treves thirty years earlier while on a visit to the FDR sponsored by West German labor unions. He went on to recite Karl Marx's biography in detail. Among many other Marx trivia, Mayala knew by heart the exact address of the venue where Marx gave a conference in Brussels in 1845. And he evoked Karl's sufferings and Jenny's

sacrifices as if he had himself been a personal acquaintance of the family in London. I had heard Mayala several times in the past claiming how Marx and Engel's writings on colonialisms had been his generation's "introduction to life," but his tone was particularly passionate that morning.

"This Marx, he was a man of learning, you know! He was clever. Already when he studied in Berlin at Humboldt University, he would stand up and make fools of his professors. Marx, what a genius! In Africa, we don't have *ba*Marx. We had the *ba*Nkrumah and the likes, but nobody came after them." Papa Mayala consciously used the *ba*- prefix, a plural marker in most Bantu languages.<sup>1</sup> "We have no one today in Africa, no Marx and no Nkrumah," he concluded.<sup>2</sup>

From conversations with older *Kinois* like Mayala emerged a general sense of nostalgia, loss and decay. These feelings constituted the bedrock of Kinshasa's verbal architecture as I discussed politics with a generation that had lived through five decades of independence.<sup>3</sup> "Which Left? The Left is dead in our country," had been a common

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<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Mayala embraced the common code-switching in Kinshasa, passing from French to Lingala and vice versa.

<sup>2</sup> I never recorded my conversations with papa Mayala, but I often took notes, from which I have reconstructed some of our dialogues. This particular episode is based on my fieldwork notes from August 10 2011.

<sup>3</sup> The concept of verbal architecture – the city as it exists through his inhabitants' words and imagination – is at the center of Filip De Boeck's work on Kinshasa and partly sustains the narrative construction of my text: cf. Filip De Boeck and Marie-France Plissart, *Kinshasa: Tales of the Invisible City* (Ghent: Ludion, 2004); Filip De Boeck, "La ville de Kinshasa: Une architecture du verbe," in *Esprit* 64-12 (2006), p.79-96; Filip De Boeck, "Inhabiting Ocular Ground: Kinshasa's Future in the Light of Congo's Spectral Urban Politics," in *Cultural Anthropology* 26-2 (2011), p. 263-286. Cf. also Kristien Geenen, "'Sleep Occupies No Space': The Use of Public Space by Street Gangs in Kinshasa," in *Africa* 79-3 (2009), p.347-368 and Katrien Pype, "Fighting Boys, Strong Men and Gorillas: Notes on the Imagination of Masculinities in Kinshasa," in *Africa* 77-2 (2007), p.250-271. Recently, Bill Freund has suggested a different reading of the city, but one that still builds on *Kinois*' memories, perceptions and voices. Freund's perspective is useful in this context in his emphasis on the persisting importance of the national significance of Kinshasa as the state capital in its inhabitants' representations, strategies and expectations: cf. Bill Freund, "Kinshasa: An

answer I had received from Congolese when inquiring about the history and the state of progressive politics. One informant, a former 1960s' student leader turned university professor, even suggested I would do better dropping the topic all together: "There never was a Left in our country. You should work on the Right, instead. Name just one politician, majority or opposition, who has been on the Left in the last 50 years. But the Right... They have all been on the Right."<sup>4</sup> That statement came with a mastered sense of provocation – the professor had served for many years in Parliament and was an advisor for a political party that was a member of the Socialist International; but it expressed in its exaggeration a common opinion in Kinshasa. Mayala shared in the general lament about the rotting body of the Left, but when he talked, it always seemed like some sparks of life remained in its carcass.

### **The Emergence of the Postcolonial**

The memories, nostalgia, and unfinished struggles of Congolese Left activists inform the following pages and chapters in many ways. "Decolonizing the University" started as a project of the Congolese student movement, its radicalization in the 1960s, and its repression by the regime of Joseph Mobutu between 1968 and 1971. This dissertation reconstructs the history of student activism, and the relationship between higher education and politics in the Congo in the wake of independence. Yet, I provide a narrative that also accounts for the political passions of young Congolese who, like François Mayala, did not study at the university. Furthermore, I situate the late 1960s' violent struggle between students and the state in a longer history. Some chapters go back

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urban elite considers city, nation and state," in *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 29-1 (2011), p.33-48.

<sup>4</sup> Kabeya Tshikuku, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 3 Aug. 2010.



to Belgian colonial educational policies and Congolese experiences of schooling from the 1920s to the 1950. In other chapters, I revisit the intense moment of anticolonial struggle in the late 1950s, dwell on the crisis that followed independence, and study Patrice Lumumba's (after)lives and the rural rebellions that followed his assassination in the mid-1960s. "Decolonizing the University" centers on higher education and student activism, but it sheds light on Congo's trajectory from colonial domination to postcolonial decay. To put it in other words, the dissertation connects a set of events around the student movement in the 1960s to their many reverberations over several decades of political, social, and cultural change in the Congo.

Different elements of context explain why it is possible to revisit the Congo's history from the vantage point its students in the 1960s. The Congo's dire need for technicians and university graduates of all sorts at the time made higher education a very urgent issue in the new nation. Students came to occupy a unique position in the national imagination that refracted their country's past, present and future. Several studies have accounted for the centrality of education in Congolese history that appeared with so much force in the early 1960s. Researchers have focused on colonial education's limitations, and postcolonial attempts to transcend these limitations.<sup>5</sup> And in recent years, the

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<sup>5</sup> The study of elite in Belgian Congo notably produced a few doctoral dissertations and academic publications in the United States: see notably William Rideout, "Education and Elites: The Making of the New Elites and the Formal Education System in the Congo (K)," Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1971; Newt Gingrich, "Belgian Colonial Education in the Belgian Congo," Ph.D. dissertation, Tulane University, 1971; Marvin D. Markowitz, *Cross and Sword: The Political Role of Christian Missions in the Belgian Congo, 1908-1960* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1973). In the Congo, political scientist Benoît Verhaegen, and a few others were among the pioneers of the critical study of higher education, inaugurating a line of research that focused on the social and political dimensions of university education: see Benoît Verhaegen, *L'enseignement universitaire au Zaïre: De Lovanium à l'Unaza 1958-1978* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1978); Michel Norro, "Civilisation et développement: les rapports Université et développement au Congo," in

historical literature on Congolese education has grown with works focusing on histories of specific institutions, notably Lovanium University.<sup>6</sup> My project builds on these different works, but also attempts to display the importance of connections that have been ignored between power and education and that are necessary to fully understand the stakes of the student movement in the 1960s.

As Achille Mbembe wrote, “Africa did not inherit much from the colonial period.”<sup>7</sup> Referring to Cameroon, Mbembe noted for example that major infrastructures were very few in the country at independence, that there was no national museum, no national theater, no university, and a very small elite. This situation, Mbembe wrote, served as an excuse for the establishment of a dictatorial and despotic regime. Mbembe shows how the “potentate” deployed a discourse about the imperatives of national construction to conduct a “simulacra” of decolonization: independence without freedom.<sup>8</sup>

The situation of infrastructures was not so different in the Congo, despite Belgians’ more dynamic economic planning in the 1950s. The country counted two universities at the time of independence – the Catholic Lovanium University established

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*Etudes Congolaises* 12-1 (Jan. 1969), p.82-97; and Emile Bongeli Yeikelo ya Ato, *L’Université contre le Développement au Congo-Kinshasa* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2009 [1983]). While education studies adopted in the 1960s and 1970s the discourse of national construction, historians of education have since then revisited schooling in the Congo from the perspective of the failure of the postcolonial dreams of development: see notably Marc Depaepe, *In het teken van de bevoogding: De educatieve actie in Belgisch-Kongo (1908-1960)* (Leuven: Garant, 1995); and Marc Depaepe, “‘Rien ne va plus...’ The Collapse of the Colonial Educational Structures in Zaire (1960-1995),” in *Education and Society* 16-1 (1998), p.37-53.

<sup>6</sup> See Ruben Mantels, *Geleerd in de tropen: Leuven, Congo, en de wetenschap, 1885-1960* (Leuven: Universitaire Pers, 2007); Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem (ed.), *L’Université dans le devenir de l’Afrique: Un demi-siècle de présence au Congo-Zaïre* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2007); Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem (ed.), *Les années Lovanium: La première université francophone d’Afrique subsaharienne* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Achille Mbembe, *Sortir de la grande nuit: Essai sur l’Afrique décolonisée* (Paris: La Découverte, 2010), p.42.

<sup>8</sup> *Idem*, p.42-43.

near Leopoldville in 1954 and the State University of Leopoldville opened in 1956. But Belgian colonizers had prevented Congolese from accessing higher education until very late. In contrast to the British, French, and Portuguese, Belgians did not allow Congolese to attend universities in the metropole until the early 1950s. The Belgian colony counted only a handful of university graduates by the time of independence, and not a single lawyer or medical doctor. However, I do not approach the absence of an elite and the discourse on the burden of development to identify a direct continuity between colonial and postcolonial “commandment.”<sup>9</sup> Instead, the dissertation attempts to assess how the sudden strategic necessity to develop higher education gave Congolese students an edge and put them in a position to shape politics and occupy the space between the power and its margins.<sup>10</sup> I notably show how Mobutu’s regime – one of the models of the post-colony in Africa – emerged through violence and the repression of the student movement, but also through the appropriation of its language and ideology.

By focusing on students, the dissertation suggests another angle to the question of Congo’s engagement with the world in the 1960s. Several historians have studied the importance of foreign intervention in the Congo crisis, when the country found itself at

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<sup>9</sup> See also Mbembe’s work on commandment and aesthetics of vulgarity in the postcolony: Achille Mbembe, *De la postcolonie: Essai sur l’imagination politique dans l’Afrique contemporaine* (Paris: Karthala, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> For a chronicle of Congolese student protests (mostly after 1971), see Jean Abembea Bulaimu and Hubert Ntumba Lukunga M., *Mouvements étudiants et évolution politique en République du Congo* (Kinshasa: CEP, 2004). Among the different national histories of Congo, the synthesis of Georges Nzongola is the one that put the most emphasis on the importance of the student movement, by placing it firmly in a long genealogy of the struggle for democracy from the 1960s to the 1990s: Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, *the Congo From Leopold to Kabila: A People’s History* (New York: Zed Books, 2002), p.174-178. Nzongola’s reading of 1960s student protests as the beginning of the struggle against dictatorship adopts a point of view that is widely shared among Congolese today. Yet, as I argue in the following pages, there were also other dimensions to the student movement, and its modalities of engagement with power.

the center of the world, or, at least, at the center of Cold War cartographies.<sup>11</sup> The best among these works show how the Cold War preempted, constrained, or in some cases amplified Congolese statesmen's agency. In this dissertation, I show how students were actors in the Congo crisis of decolonization; and how foreign interventions impacted their understanding of politics as well. Decolonization developed students' cosmopolitan aspirations. They had access to foreign ideas, books, and institutions, and they constituted a privileged public to study the impact of Congo's sudden move to the center of global attention in the 1960s. The student movement was formed through the crisis of decolonization.<sup>12</sup> The language of the Left and its articulation of conflict, which circulated through the channels of the Cold War, was key in this process.

My study of ideological formations in the Congo was made possible by ethnographic research. I recorded most of my interviews with former student activists in 2010, fifty years after independence, in a context that was particularly conducive to remembrance and recollection. But, even more than the particular vantage point of the

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<sup>11</sup> See Lise Namikas, *Battleground Africa: Cold War in the Congo, 1960-1965* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Elizabeth Schmidt, *Foreign Intervention in Africa: From the Cold War to the War on Terror* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p.57-79; Sergey Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War: The USSR in West Africa and the Congo, 1956-1964* (Stanford : Stanford University Press, 2010); John Kent, *America, the UN and Decolonisation: Cold War Conflict in the Congo* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Tatiana Carayannis, *Pioneers of Peacekeeping: The Story of the UN Operation in the Congo* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2009); Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.131-142; Piero Gleijeses, *Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), p.77-184; Alan James, *Britain and the Congo Crisis, 1960-1963* (New York: St. Martin Press, 1996) ; David N. Gibbs, *The Political Economy of Third World Intervention: Mines, Money, and U.S. Policy in the Congo Crisis* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> As Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have shown in their work, conflict serves to constitute political identities, and the case of the Congolese student movement confirms this axiom. See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985), p.149-193; and Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

anniversary of independence, Kinshasa informed the memories of 1960s' student activism that I collected. Before returning at the end of this chapter to the structure of this dissertation, the following pages introduce Congo's capital city from the perspective of the labor activist François Mayala, whom we met in the previous section. Kinshasa is a place of meander and *dérive*, and this chapter attempts to give a sense of the convoluted trajectories that are necessary to circulate inside this city and its memories.

### **François Mayala**

During my different visits to the Congo (in September-October 2007, October-November 2009, January-December 2010, and July-August 2011), I had the chance to meet with a great number of important figures in the history of Congolese nationalism, of the Congolese Left, and of the Congolese student movement, most of them in Kinshasa. Abdoulaye Yerodia – the patriarch of the Congolese Left, former student leader in France in the 1950s, revolutionary activist in the mid-1960s, collaborator of Jacques Lacan in Paris, long-time companion of Laurent-Désiré Kabila, and the Congo's vice-president from 2003 to 2006 – received me a few times in his office in the *Palais de Marbre*, the late Kabila's presidential palace on the hills of Kinshasa. I paid countless visits to Zénon Mibamba, a student leader turned revolutionary fighter in the armed struggle of the mid-1960s, in his office at the Ministry for Women, Gender, and Children. I interviewed several times the late François Kandolo and his friend Valérien Milimgo, the two leaders of the student protest movement of June 4, 1969. Doctor Jean-Baptiste Sondji, a student activist and “prisoner of Mobutu” in the early 1970s and several times Minister under Laurent-Désiré Kabila in the late 1990s, was one of my most important guides in the

history that I narrate in the dissertation. I got the chance to meet many times with several other students who were part of Sondji's underground "student cell" in 1971 – Médard Kayamba, a professor of History in Lubumbashi and former Minister of Laurent-Désiré Kabila from 1999 to 2001; Célestin Kabuya, a professor of Political Science at the University of Kinshasa, and a major political figure since his work as Mobutu's chief of staff in the early 1990s; Alexandre Luba, the Minister of Defense since 2011; and Guy Yangu, a lawyer and political actor in the Lower Congo. I shared meals and conversations with former Mobutist celebrities who had shaped the ideology of the regime in a direction that had its eyes on the Left: Kithima Bin Ramazani, Jacques Bongoma, Joseph N'Singa, and Professors Gambembo and Nzanda-Buana. In Kinshasa, but also in Paris, Brussels, Liège, and Berlin, I interviewed many figures of the Congolese student diaspora of the 1960s whose names and biographies are familiar to many in the Congo: Professor Elikia Mbokolo and his friends and fellow professors Michel-Anga Mupapa and Jean-Marie Mutamba; Jean-Baptiste Mulemba; Célestin Kabayidi; Célestin Lwanghi; François-Xavier Beltchika; Raphael Ghenda; Ambroise Kalabela; Aubert Mukendi. Several women who were among the small group of Congolese female students of the 1960s, and whose relationship to the history of the Left was important even if not always straightforward, shared their stories with me: Antoinette Da Silva, Betty Mweya, Marie-Thérèse Mulanga, and Alice Makanda, to cite only a few of the voices heard in later chapters of this thesis. I talked to some of Lumumba's biological children and interviewed his "spiritual son," Paul Kabongo.

All these persons, and many more, inform this dissertation. Yet, among all the people I met, François Mayala was probably the one who most visibly inhabited and

embodied the history of the Left, the one whose words most convincingly animated its dead body.

On the day when Mayala asked me about Proudhon's book, I had come to the UNTC's old colonial building in the city center of Kinshasa to say goodbye to him. I was at the end of a research trip in the Congo and on my way back to Europe. Kinshasa had become my main "fieldwork site." My research brought me to other places in the Congo(s) – Kisangani, Lubumbashi, Kikwit, and Brazzaville – and many of my archival findings come from archival centers in Belgium, France, and the U.S. Yet, it is in Kinshasa that I conducted most of my research, collected and recorded most of my interviews, and also researched crucial public and private archives at the University, the National Archives, and private Catholic research centers. No less important in my time in Kinshasa were regular impromptu visits to "informants" who were not quite interviewees. While I nearly systematically recorded my conversations with the latter, it was not the case with the former. Our encounters were more informal, and our discussions less structured. Yet, they provided vital elements in my understanding of Congolese politics. Isidore Kabongo, the ineffably generous director of the National Radio was the first of these precious interlocutors and facilitators. Two other persons, initially among my "interviewees," became crucial informants: Doctor Jean-Baptiste Sondji, already mentioned earlier, and Professor André Yoka, maybe the most talented writer in Kinshasa. And then, there was François Mayala.

The office that Mayala shared with a few other colleagues resembled many other administrative settings in Kinshasa. If not for a few chairs and tables, the ubiquitous radio set, a framed picture of the President Kabila and a Primus-beer calendar, the office would

have been a big empty room with fading green walls – the official color of Zaire, as the country was named from 1971 to 1997, and of its state-party, M.P.R. (Mouvement Populaire de la Revolution). Two of Mayala's colleagues were present when I had showed up that morning. At first, they had not seemed particularly interested in our conversation. One had his head buried in a worn-out book that I initially mistook for the bible, but that actually proved to be a history of neurosis and French psychiatry in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; the other had deployed that day's newspaper in front of him. Still, Mayala's comments on Marx caught their attention, and they both lifted their eyes from their readings and turned conspicuously to him. After all, they were labor organizers and discourses on the Left had not lost their power of interpellation on them.

At some point, the flows of Mayala's stories took a curve that brought his colleagues closer to home. He recalled his first contacts with unions in the 1950s. He had just arrived in Leopoldville to work as a clerk at Otraco, the colonial office for transports, when he decided to join.<sup>13</sup> A few months into independence Mayala became a full time employee with one of the unions. He witnessed the tense relationships with the different governments until the creation in 1966 of a single entity, UNTC, which become the Congo's single labor union and paved the way for the institutionalization of authoritarianism under Mobutu's presidency.

Discussing the links between union leaders and politicians in the 1960s, Mayala mentioned the names of several key figures of the time. One of them was Alphonse-Roger Kithima, with whom I had conducted several interviews in 2009 and 2010.

Kithima had served as a long-time collaborator and minister of President Mobutu during

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<sup>13</sup> Established by Henri Morton Stanley in 1881, Leopoldville became Belgian Congo's capital in 1920. Its name was changed to Kinshasa in 1966, a year after Mobutu's accession to power.



his long reign from 1965 to 1997. Earlier in his career, while a friend of Congo's independence leader Patrice Lumumba, Kithima presided over an important labor union in Kinshasa. Mayala told how Irving Brown's money had neutralized Kithima's early longings for the Left soon after independence. He turned to me, the historian, for approval. I nodded at Irving Brown's name, a famous CIA agent and Cold War proponent of anticommunist trade unions in Europe and Africa.<sup>14</sup> Mayala, added: "I know everything, everything." He paused for moment, and then went on to describe the difficult times when many of his friends had to flee Kinshasa after Lumumba's assassination in 1961. "As for me, I was always lucky," he said. "They knew I was a Marxist, but they left me in peace. The UNTC's vice-general director, he would call me 'the Lefty' back then, but it was in a friendly way."

A third man had entered the room during these recollections. At some point, he interrupted Mayala to praise his deep knowledge of history. "You are our union's memory," he told him. "You are our living library. You should write your memoirs. People like you are fast disappearing."

"That's true," Mayala acknowledged. "Us Congolese, we don't write enough about our own history. But where is the money? You need to be able to put food on the table before you can write. You need money to find the time to write, and we don't have any here." Papa Mayala insisted, "There is no money here."

He could not really belabor this point. The lack of resources had transformed UNTC, like so many other public and semi-public institutions in Kinshasa, into a near

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<sup>14</sup> On Irving Brown and a general introduction on the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations' action in the Third World, cf. Nathan Godfried, "Spreading American Corporatism: Trade Union Education for Third World Labour," in *Review of African Political Economy* 39 (1987), p.51-63.

meaningless structure. The days of the CIA pouring money into African Unions survived in the memories of men from Mayala's generation, but this was a time long gone. Forced to compete with a multitude of other unions, UNTC had become the shadow of its former self, when Mobutu's regime had made it into the Congo's single trade union in 1966. In the post-cold war era, institutions like UNTC often only worked towards mere nominal survival, incapable of conducting their original functions and services to the public and unable to even provide a decent living to their employees.<sup>15</sup> “Our children have become much too ‘lucrative’,” said one of Mayala's colleagues. He then explained what he meant: “They don't want to come to work here because there are no salaries. They prefer to go work for Vodacom and the likes, where they know they will be paid regularly.” I suspected that others might not have agreed to blame the new generation for preferring South African capitalism and a job with relative economic security to Congolese labor unions’ philosophy of poverty, but everybody in the room kept silent. The conversation ended with that ambiguous moment of suspension. I had to leave and papa Mayala insisted on walking me out of the building.

### **Kinshasa**

That day in August 2011 had marked my first time at UNTC's offices in many months. Papa Mayala himself rarely took the trouble to leave his house in Mbanza-Lemba, to jump one of the decrepit and packed taxi-buses, to cross the whole city – which often took more than two hours because of the traffic jams – and to go to work. He

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<sup>15</sup> On the relationship between (failed) state’s agencies and citizens in Kinshasa, cf. Theodore Trefon (ed.), *Reinventing Order in the Congo: How People Respond to State Failure in Kinshasa* (London: Zed Books, 2004) and Theodore Trefon, *Congo Masquerade: The Political Culture of Aid Inefficiency and Reform Failure* (London: Zed Books, 2011).

was growing old, and he knew he had nearly nothing to expect from a visit to the union. He knew that his salary would remain meager and irregularly paid. And he knew that the union would not initiate any new projects or develop any plans for action. After all, which institution could have been more irrelevant than UNTC? Some analysts claimed that the so-called informal economy had engulfed more than 80 percent of the working age population, leaving a tiny portion of the workers in the formal sectors in which trade unions were active.<sup>16</sup> After years of destruction, the Congo seemed to “catch up” with neoliberalism and its speculative “millennial” capitalism.<sup>17</sup> The new economic phase materialized in the so-called re-urbanization of Kinshasa.<sup>18</sup> Chinese, Lebanese, and Indian companies reworked dramatically the city center’s landscape between 2007 and 2011, transforming old and devastated avenues into urban speedways, erecting fountains and sidewalks, and building gated communities and executive towers. The UNTC’s headquarters looked even more decrepit in Kinshasa’s emerging esthetics of steel and glass. Mayala knew the union's insignificance in the new Congo. He knew he had nearly nothing to expect or to gain from a visit at UTNC. And most of the time, he stayed at home, where I would usually find him.

Mayala didn't always live in Mbanza-Lemba. When he arrived in Léopoldville-Kinshasa from his native Matadi in the mid 1950s, the young François Mayala first found a home in Renkin (today Matongue), where he later got married and where his first children were born.

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<sup>16</sup> One of the most compelling syntheses on the informal economy remains Janet MacGaffey (ed.), *The Real Economy of Zaire: the Contributions of Smuggling & Other Unofficial Activities to National Wealth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, “Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming,” in *Public Culture* 12-2 (2000), p.291-343 and James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> Filip De Boeck, “Inhabiting Ocular Ground,” p.227.

Colonial Leopoldville strictly relied on segregationist urban planning.<sup>19</sup> Belgian rule forbid Africans to live in the so-called *town (la ville)* or city-center – the northern part of the city, along the Congo river. The colonized lived in *la cité indigène*, an ensemble of workers' camps and planned and semi-planned settlements south of *la ville*. During the 1940s, Leopoldville expanded further south. The Belgians opened a *nouvelle cité*. One of the neighborhoods in the *nouvelle cité*, Renkin became home to the emerging colonial class of French-speaking and tie-wearing clerks, nurses and schoolteachers. Colonial authorities encouraged these so-called *évolués* to leave the crowded old estates and to build larger houses in Renkin.

When Mayala first moved into the neighborhood, Renkin had already become the popular heart of Léopoldville. Iconic sites of late colonial civic life lay there: the YMCA center, King Baudouin football stadium, and the bars and nightclubs around *Place Victoire* where politics mixed with rumba and beers.<sup>20</sup> The face of the neighborhood changed even more in the months following independence in 1960. With the disappearance of colonial limitations to Congolese's mobility and troubles in many rural areas, Leopoldville's population indeed witnessed a spectacular boom at the beginning of

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<sup>19</sup> Marc Pain, *Kinshasa: La ville et la Cité* (Paris: Editions de l'ORSTOM, 1984). See also Johan Lagae's work on the history of urbanism in Kinshasa: Johan Lagae, "Leopoldville-Bruxelles, villes miroirs? L'architecture et l'urbanisme d'une capitale coloniale," in Jean-Luc Vellut (ed.), *Villes d'Afrique: Explorations en histoire urbaine*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007, p.67-99; Bernard Toulhier, Johan Lagae and Marc Gemoets, *Kinshasa: Architecture et paysage urbains* (Paris: Somogy, 2010); Johan Lagae, Luce Beeckmans and Sofie Boonen, "Decolonizing spaces: A (visual) essay on strategies of appropriation, transformation and negotiation of the colonial built environment in postcolonial Congo," in *Hagar: Studies in Culture, Polity and Identities* 9-2 (2010), p.53-90.

<sup>20</sup> Ch. Didier Gondola, *Villes miroirs: migrations et identités urbaines à Brazzaville et Kinshasa 1930-1970* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996).

the 1960s. Newcomers flooded through all the neighborhoods in the old and new *cités*, including Renkin.<sup>21</sup>

Moving out of Renkin-Matonge and into Banza-Lemba in the 1970s, François Mayala followed the movement of the cramped city toward the south and southeast. Kinshasa kept expanding further away from the Congo River and in the direction of the uplands and the delimitation with the Bas-Congo province. Many new peripheral neighborhoods emerged at the time. Without state supervision, people relocated to so-called anarchic settlements. They escaped the demographic pressure of the *cités* to find cheaper plots on which to build their homes. These new neighborhoods were less overcrowded, but lacked the basic services offered in the *cités* and connections to electric, water, sewage or road networks.

Theoretically on Lovanium University's property (today, the University of Kinshasa), Banza-Lemba sat in one of the valleys just next to Mount Amba on top of which the Catholic church and a group of professors from Louvain in Belgium had erected the campus of the first Congolese University in 1954. When the neighborhood emerged in the 1970s, erosion and landslide from Mount Amba already threatened Banza-Lemba. Three decades later, landslides were even more spectacular. And the neighborhood remained enclosed – its streets too narrow for cars or too sandy for motorbikes – and still badly connected to the city's infrastructures. To go visit the Mayalas from Limete, the more central neighborhood of Kinshasa where I lived, required taking a taxi-bus along the then still not patched up *Boulevard Lumumba* until *Rond-Point Ngaba*; then another one from *Rond-Point Ngaba* to *Intendance*, one of the

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<sup>21</sup> Jean Sybil La Fontaine, *City Politics: A Study of Leopoldville, 1962-63* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

campus's two entrances at the bottom of Mount Amba; from there a taxi-moto until the *terrain*, the football pitch and swamps in front of the student dorms piled up on the eastern face of Mount Amba; from the terrain, I would have to walk the rest of the way through Mbanza-Lemba's busy alleys.

In the 2000s, the contrast remained visible between the campus' decayed but massive built architecture and modernist planning on the hill, and the "anarchic constructions" of mixed materials and shapes at the bottom. Every day, scores of students, street children and other bystanders walked up and down the steep paths between Mbanza-Lemba and the campus. They passed from the University's sensory world of 1950s' austere industrial and Catholic wood and metal furniture to the slum's combination of plastic, foam, cement and dirt. The University remained a distinct space of high colonial modernity. Yet, the constant daily movement of people from the slum to the campus blurred the distinction between the two spaces. The emergence of anarchic settlements participated in a broader movement of "colonization" from the bottom-up, which also materialized in the appropriation and transformation of the colonial built spaces in city by the rural migrants, the poor and the impoverished. When people like Mayala were investing in the peripheral areas, others were building annexes to their houses in the older neighborhoods, gradually winning over public spaces and filling gaps between existing constructions, making Kinshasa a palimpsest of colonial Leopoldville, a mix of old and new. The campus also became a place for occupation and colonization by the poor in the 1980s and 1990s. Finally, physical ruination also established continuities between the hill and its surroundings. To the half-finished and never fully built houses of

Mbanza-Lemba responded the half-destroyed student dorms, the half burnt University police station, the broken glass and ceramic everywhere.

Papa Mayala lamented these failed promises of the postcolonial state, but he also still remembered why he had moved to Mbanza-Lemba in the first place. Among the different unplanned neighborhoods, Mbanza-Lemba enjoyed a distinct and strategic advantage: its proximity to the University. Parents hoped that growing up next to the campus would motivate their children to maintain good academic records through primary and secondary school and then aim for a university degree. Papa Mayala indeed felt that his major life accomplishment had been to push all his children through University, and that alone had justified leaving the more urbanized Renkin/Matongue neighborhood. The inhabitants of Mbanza-Lemba, as other African postcolonial urban settings, troubled simple teleological readings that decline narratives sometimes suggest.<sup>22</sup>

### **Researching the Congolese 1968**

The trajectory of a harbinger of the Left like Mayala through the history of Kinshasa talks in many ways to my project. Despite claims to the contrary, the Left was still a relevant category of identification in the city, as conversations with Mayala and others made clear. Yet, the language of the Left had been marginalized in the post-Cold War city. My work tries to recover the full meaning of the political passions that emerged in interviews with former activists. In Kinshasa, the modernism of the 1950s and 1960s

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<sup>22</sup> See James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

and its expired social imagination still appear among the erosion, decay, but also resilience, and creativity that are making the city of today. Similarly, the enthusiasm and hopes of the 1960s lay underneath stories of downfall. Initially, influenced by anthropology of violence and memory and postcolonial studies on ruination, my research developed from an attempt to identify the moment of transition when discourses of emancipation and identification with the global Left started to lose their power.<sup>23</sup>

During my first research trip to Kinshasa in 2007, when I first met François Mayala, my interests focused tightly around a particular sequence of events and a set of questions: I was attempting to document the student events of June 4, 1969 in Kinshasa and their commemorations two years later which led to the nationalization of Congolese universities and institutions of higher education. I hypothesized that the sequence marked a rupture in Congo's postcolonial history. That hypothesis and these events still stand at the core of this dissertation, even though I situate them in a larger context and at the intersection of other histories.

On June 4, 1969 the Congolese army opened fire on university students demonstrating in Kinshasa, killing more than fifty whose bodies were later buried in an anonymous mass grave. The march of several thousands had been organized by student activists protesting the state's unwillingness to reform the higher education system. The massacre was the most tragic episode in a series of events that radically transformed Congolese universities and society between 1966 and 1975 and produced a rupture in historical imagination and subjectivities in a generation of university youth at the time of

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<sup>23</sup> See in particular: Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent in the Ordinary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) and Ann Laura Stoler, "Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination," in *Cultural Anthropology* 23-2 (2008), p.191-219.



what historians now call “global 1968.”<sup>24</sup>

At the beginning of my research, I was also strongly interested to approach the student massacre of 1969 as a “tool of governance” and as a milestone in the history of political violence in the Congo and in the construction of postcolonial political subjectivities, the ideology of authenticity, and the hegemony of Mobutu’s state-party.<sup>25</sup> Anthropologists and political scientists offered some keys to understand how Mobutu’s “authenticity” politics reshaped the everyday lives of Congolese. Nevertheless, in contrast to the crisis of decolonization and Patrice Lumumba’s assassination, the first years of Mobutu’s regime had been relatively neglected by historiography.<sup>26</sup> The two-decade conjuncture of the 1960s and 1970s was a critical period that needed more systematic examination to better grasp the reconfiguration of power relations in postcolonial Africa. The key place of Congo-Zaire in international politics during the Cold War was well known. But the more fine-grained approach of an ethnographic

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<sup>24</sup> See notably Gerd-Rainer Horn, “The Belgian Contribution to Global 1968,” in *Revue Belge d’Histoire Contemporaine* 35-4 (2004), p.597-635 and *The Spirit of 68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America 1956-1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Jeremy Suri, *Power and protest: global revolution and the rise of détente* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Samantha Christiansen and Zachary Scarlett (eds.), *The Third World and the Global 1960s* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012). See also Tariq Ali, *Street Fighting Years: An Autobiography of the Sixties* (London: Verso, 2005) and Luisa Passerini, *Autobiography of a Generation: Italy, 1968* (Hanover: Wesleyan, 1996).

<sup>25</sup> On state massacres and tools of governance, see Alain Dewerpe, *Charonne, 8 février 1962: Anthropologie historique d’un massacre d’Etat* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006) and Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>26</sup> On later periods of Mobutu’s regime, see Thomas M. Callaghy, *The State-Society Struggle: Zaire in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); Crawford Young and Thomas Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); Michael Schatzberg, *The Dialectics of Oppression in Zaire* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988); Jean-Claude Willame, *L’automne d’un despotisme: Pouvoir, argent, obéissance dans le Zaïre des années quatre-vingt* (Paris: Karthala, 1992); Gauthier de Villers, *De Mobutu à Mobutu: Trente ans de relations Belgique-Zaïre* (Brussels: De Boeck, 1995) Bob white, *Rumba Rules: the Politics of Dance Music in Mobutu’s Zaire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008)

historian was needed. No research similar in depth to Nancy Rose Hunt's work on colonial middle figures existed about the University students of the 1960s.<sup>27</sup> My fieldwork therefore looked at individual trajectories of students and a specific series of critical events in the student movement to demonstrate how macro-politics became translated into lived experiences and potent memories.

Most of my interviews in 2007 and 2009 focused on the connection between the events of 1969 and 1971 and the individual and collective biographies of former students. The event of 1969 was central, of course, but its commemoration in 1971 also produced its own richness in histories. The 1969 massacre was an unfinished story that resulted in a repetition of conflict in 1971.

The protest movement was based on Left ideologies, but also on a specific idea of the student—elegant and seductive, cocky and cheeky, radicalized and anti-authoritarian, sly and male—that activists felt was in danger and needed to be defended. Women's presence and participation in the movement was erased in militant literature or reduced to a passive role. In 1971, the government's disciplinary response to the challenge of the movement was a re-gendering and re-sexing of students through their incorporation into the army. In the army, students had to adopt a new language—Lingala— a new and highly sexed vocabulary; they had to conform to certain notions of virility and adopt new practices of promiscuity that opposed the elitist representations of students. The fact that female students were also incorporated in the army rendered this process and its contest over masculinity even more complex.

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<sup>27</sup> Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

François Mayala's younger brother, Moreno Kinkela, had been one of the leaders in the student movement. He played a prominent role in the events of 1969 and 1971 and was condemned to serve time in prison. After being released from prison, Kinkela graduated from the University with a degree in law. A famous lawyer, he maintained connections in the underground world of Congolese Left politics in the 1970s and 1980s. When president Mobutu announced the liberalization of the regime in 1990, Kinkela and several other former student activists, including his former imprisoned comrades Doctor Sondji and Guy Yangu, created a political party, the *Front Patriotique*. In February 1992, François Kandolo, the student leader who organized the demonstration of June 1969, led a gigantic demonstration against Mobutu. Known as *Marche des Chrétiens*, the demonstration was very violently repressed: as in 1969, the army and the police opened fire on protesters – killing probably more than 200 persons – and captured the bodies of the victims. As the opposition to Mobutu took dramatic forms, the *Front Patriotique* came to play a crucial role in national politics. Kinkela became one of the main leaders of the National Sovereign Conference that attempted to fully democratize the Congo. These efforts failed however to produce concrete effects. Laurent-Desire Kabila's military take-over, not the democratic opposition, ousted Mobutu from power in 1997.

An early ally of Kabila, Kinkela became the Minister for Communications in the first post-Mobutu government. Possibly poisoned by political opponents, Kinkela died in 2003. At the time of his death, he had been working on several book projects, including a personal memoir on his involvement in the student movement. In the midst of a succession dispute, one of his daughters convinced herself that Kinkela had been a practitioner of witchcraft. She claimed her deceased father's papers and books were part

of his magical arsenal and she had them all burnt. Still, a copy of the manuscript on the student movement may have survived, the writer André Yoka – one of Kinkela’s closest friends and his chief of staff when he was Kabila’s Minister – told me, and he advised me to talk to Kinkela’s older brother to find out. He had no precise address or phone number to give me, but after showing up a few times unannounced at UNTC, I finally found Mayala at the office.

The heuristic component of my fieldwork in Kinshasa resembled a trial and error game in which outcomes often turned negatives: A would tell me of a collection of documents that I might, perhaps, access through B; B would send me to C; C would remember that he had given away the documents to D; etc. In the last instance, D (or E, or F) would tell me how they lost the documents at the occasion of a removal or how they destroyed them because they were potentially harmful if found by Mobutu’s police. These stories of archival loss and destruction illuminated individual and collective trajectories. Historical evidence in their own right, they testified to Congo’s turbulent postcolonial trajectory, but could also prove disheartening when in the midst of research.

Things proceeded differently with Mayala. He did possess a copy of Kinkela’s manuscript; he was just not sure if he would show it to me. Our first meeting was not conclusive, but we agreed that I would visit again, this time at his house in Mbanza-Lemba. Meeting outside of the city center neutralized some tensions. The former white town had indeed retained its alien character to the rest of the city. The twenty kilometers and two-hour journey from the city center to Mbanza-Lemba accounted for a trajectory of decolonization. Mayala welcomed me inside his house, sent his son to buy a Coke for me, and let me take pictures of his brother’s manuscript. I also told Mayala about my

connection to the Congo: my mother was born in Kasai to a Portuguese father and a Congolese mother, and she lived for 32 years in the country. Like other people I met from his generation, Mayala valued my Congolese lineage. Genealogical disclosure often offered me inclusion in the national family drama, more legitimacy to mind the Congo's past, and a positional inversion in the context of research: instead of the colonial figure of the maternal and authoritative uncle (*noko*) that Congolese have used to refer to Belgians, informants from Mayala's generations often rhetorically placed me in a more filial position relative to them ("our sister's child"). In a cultural context that relied so much on a familial vocabulary to name social and political relations, this was not irrelevant.

The history of the Left was also a familial connection in itself. As I advanced in the research, knowledge of the Congolese Left – and of some of its family's secrets – offered me inclusion. My relationship to informants like Mayala grew with the years, and with my more acute understanding of the characters and events that I discussed with them.

During my different visits to François Mayala, our exchanges always oscillated between political analyses, conversations about Kinkela and the student movement, and Mayala's recollections of political and labor organizing in the 1960s. This dissertation's structure emerged from conversations with informants like him; it features the Left not as its main focus, but as an important subtext to the student movement. Mayala explicitly situated the late 1960s student events in a longer sequence of claim-making and political violence that crisscrossed independence. He did it through his own historical imaginings and memories.

There was a clear script to my visits at the Mayalas: they always took place in the living room. Were Mayala to bring up an anecdote about a strike organized by his union, rant about a “fake progressivist” or instead recall the memory of a long-time disappeared “true communist” comrade, there would always be a moment when he would stand up and reach to his bookshelves in front of us. He would look for an old book or often an old journal issue, find what he was looking for or instead settle on another publication, and read out loud from it to illustrate one of his points. The conversation would then be carried on until he repeated the same exercise or asked his son to find a reference for him. An unemployed young adult with a degree in social psychology, his son Louison served as memory support to his aging father and was the one that always dropped a name or a date when papa Mayala seemed to hesitate.

Mayala referred to his collection of books, journals and newspapers in Mbanza-Lemba as his “red library.” The circulation of books contributed to the articulation of political subjectivities in the 1960s. Nevertheless, Mayala’s relationships to his books at the time of my fieldwork and the type of performance that it gave way to during our encounters is what is more directly relevant here.

Mayala corresponded to a particular type of intellectual. It is beyond the scope of my research to assert if he embodied more or less perfectly the Gramscian intellectual. Mayala was obviously part, through the union, of an outmoded organization that talked to an extinct fringe of the subalterns that had been imagined after the industrial-age Western worker. Still, he was an intellectual in the slums, critically articulating a discourse at the intersection of local living conditions and nationalist, pan-African and global political narratives and theories. Organically the product of the late colonial emerging class of

urban and educated workers, Mayala's knowledge of Marxism and African socialism were anchored in his individual trajectory and a collective experience. This knowledge was not scholastic: it was reflexive, critical, and partly literary.

My reason to begin this dissertation with Mayala, in Mbanza-Lemba, down the hill, at the fringe of campus, is that I am interested to narrate a story that does not start or end with the University's complete insularity from Kinshasa, and with the Left's total alienation from society. Quite crucially to the dissertation are connections that have not been made yet, and that I am articulating in later chapters, between the history of the student movement and other crucial moments in the Congolese/global 1960s: the assassination of Lumumba and the Mulelist rebellions of the mid-1960s.

### **The Left**

I always viewed the triangulated encounters with Mayala and Louison as performances in history, more than just the occasion to retrieve an old man's memories of the 1960s.<sup>28</sup> Our conversations combined with Mayala's back and forth to his books and booklets, producing a critical discourse about the past in the present. That language came to define what I mean by the Left in this work: a critical discourse weaving together local

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<sup>28</sup> I use the phrase performance of history somewhat provisionally, but two main reasons explain my attachment to the term: 1. It would be improper to talk of memory work in the case of my conversations with François Mayala – some parts of our discussions might have qualified as such, but others were certainly more historiographical; 2. The performativity – the choreography, intonations, uses of the library and of the radio, the interactions between the different persons present – were central. At the same time, of course, these discussions were not performances: there was no public for these discussions – or should we account for the readers of this dissertation as a virtual public for these performances in history? For an exhaustive discussion of ethnographical approaches to performance, the different meanings of the concept, and the relationship between performance and power: see Kelly M. Askew, *Performing the Nation: Swahili Music and Cultural Politics in Tanzania* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), p.1-26.

histories with cosmopolitan and transnational horizons, geared towards emancipation, liberation, and the coming of a new world, and anchored in decolonization and Cold War temporalities.

The Leftist ideas discussed in this dissertation are not always those Mayala expressed. The Left refers to different types of discourse in this dissertation: from the struggle for hazing rituals at Lovanium to the adventures of a couple of Congolese students within the Situationist International (chapter 5); and from the African Socialism of Senghor to the Maoist passions of Congolese rebels (chapters 7 and 8). Yet, while he was not a student at the time, my conversations about the Left with François Mayala was truly part of global 1968, as Geoff Eley defined the moment in his history of European radicalism – as the time of the global student village, marked by the circulation of the same books throughout the world, a deep internationalism, the experience of police violence, the search for radical democratic agency, the paradoxical political exclusion and economic inclusion of the students, generational tensions, the politicization of culture, innovations in Marxist thinking, and an anarchist momentum.<sup>29</sup> Yet, there are more than nuances in the configuration, meaning, and relative impact of these elements in the history of Congo. Congolese student activists projected their politics in a transnational arena, but they did not fully sit in the “cosmopolitan panopticon” of 1968.<sup>30</sup> You would need to move more than a few pieces of furniture to make room for the

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<sup>29</sup> Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.341-365.

<sup>30</sup> The phrase “cosmopolitan panopticon” comes from Belinda Davis, Wilfried Mausbach, Martin Klimke, and Carla MacDougall, “Introduction,” in Belinda Davis *et al.* (eds.), *Changing the World, Changing Oneself: Political Protest and Collective Identities in West Germany and the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s* (New York: Berghahn, 2010), p.IX.



Congo (or Africa) in the house of global 1968.<sup>31</sup> This is not how this dissertation proceeds. While global 1968 remains an important horizon in the writing of this history – it was a central element of comparison and context for action, both during the student years and during our conversations – the following chapters find their roots in the specificities of Congolese history. The dissertation also reclaims an aspect of the global 1960s that is usually marginally present in histories Euro-American 1968: the question of decolonization, its unfinished character, and students as key actors in its processes.

There is a common explanation that circulates, among Congolese and foreigners, about the reason why, even under Mobutu, totalitarianism was not imaginable in the Congo: “Congolese were just not ‘serious’ enough to fully embrace an ideology,” so goes the story: there would still be some humor, irony, and epicureanism, always some sort of distance, to create cracks in the machine and room for individuals to manoeuvre. This dissertation instead shows how ideological commitments were deadly serious for some in the Congo. Still, it attends to the potency of political discourses and their limits. The best

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<sup>31</sup> Despite some important recent works, the inclusion of Africa in the historiography of 1968 remains intractable. In his periodization of the 1960s, Jameson argued that the decade started with the Cuban revolution and African decolonization, but that it ended with 1968 and the emergence of the student New Left in Europe and North America, which he considered as “a disinvestment of revolutionary libido and fascination on the part of a First World Left, its return (with some leavening of the newer Maoism) to their own ‘current situation’.” (Frederic Jameson, “Periodizing the 60s,” in Sohnya Sayres (ed.), *The Sixties without Apology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.203). More recent work have showed the centrality of the third world – mostly as a source of inspiration for youth protests and activism – in the understanding of 1968, but they rarely feature Africans as agents and actors in that history. Two important works are important to that regard: Kristin Ross’ study of the French 1968 which strongly emphasizes the importance of Algeria and French colonial past in the event; and Quinn Slobodian’s work on the activism of third world students in Germany and their influence the shaping on student politics in this country in the global 1960s: Kristin Ross, *May ’68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002); and Quinn Slobodian, *Foreign Front: Third World Politics in Sixties West Germany* (Durham: Duke University Press 2012). On the activism of African students in France before 1965, see Fabienne Guimont, *Les étudiants africains en France, 1950-1965* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2000).

way to account for involvement and detachment is to render the performative in the political, and thus the approach in this introduction and the chapters that follow, giving primacy to how memory emerged as part of fieldwork.

### **The Dissertation**

This project emerged from a work in *mise en relation* between ethnographic, memory work, and archival research. In my attempts to locate private archives about the student movement, I came into contact with several people. One of them was the late Tamar Golan, an Israeli journalist, diplomat and scholar who had been close to François Kandolo, the leader of the Congolese student movement in 1969. After the passing of Kandolo, I contacted Golan and asked her if she retained documents on the events surrounding the Congolese student movement. In a response to my email, Tamar Golan expressed her enthusiasm for my research and mentioned she would do “anything” she could “to tell the story of this courageous group students.” Yet, about my request for archival documents, she wrote:

I hope you do not mind if I warn you against a typical Western academic "obsession" with written documentation. Do not hope to find – anywhere – hidden and secret documents. And what is even more important – do not trust any such documents when and even you "discover" them. Africa is a continent of oral tradition. The written word is alien, and hardly ever used in matters of real importance.

Golan made reference to her long collaboration with Félix Houphouët Boigny, the late president of Ivory Coast. Houphouët, she wrote, “refused to have any minutes taken during the deliberations of the Political Bureau of the PDCI. No written documents exist of nearly twenty years of such meetings! He used to tap on his head and say: It is all here!” Golan then addressed the Congolese student movement in the late 1960s:

In the same way, I remember how Kandolo never sent me a single written message to arrange for a meeting between us. He didn't even trust the telephone. He was right! At times, someone looking as a beggar would turn up early in the morning in my courtyard, and simply say: "Go to the Cocktail Party at the Uganda Embassy tonight."

So, it is my strong recommendation that you prepare yourself – and warn your Panel for the Doctorate – that this was, and is, the true reality.<sup>32</sup>

The Congolese student movement's paper trail had probably been less thick than elsewhere in the world, and written evidence are undermined by the comparatively much greater losses in the Congo than in any Euro-American context. Still, this dissertation argues against the idea that writing was alien to Congolese activists. Congolese students wrote constantly and abundantly, including in situations where it was dangerous to do so, and Mobutu's repressive machine also produced its own written material.

In Chapter 2, I build on the abundant scholarship that has already come in support to the crucial role of (post)colonial bureaucracies and of writing in the everyday of Africans in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The chapter is a reflection on the collection of letters that students and other actors in the history of Congo's decolonization exchanged and that I have collected in a multiplicity of archival centers. I question the nature of that specific archive by using the concept of postal politics. Originally suggested by the philosopher Geoffrey Bennington, this concept allows me to problematize a great part of the written documents that underlie my project. At the same time, my use of postal politics focuses less on the written as such, and more on a modality of mediation and a mode of circulation. While Chapter Two explores some very literal dimensions of postal politics – mobilizing a few stamps, many letters, and the biography of one postman – it also takes

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<sup>32</sup> Tamar Golan, e-mail communication to author, 20 June 2010.

the post as a metaphor. The chapter is not only a literal or metaphorical history of the post and letter-writing; it is a first narrative of a central historical arc – a trajectory of the Congo from the 1920s to the late 1960s – that I revisit in the other parts of the dissertation. The chapter also introduces a set of key narrative elements, starting with Patrice Lumumba and the Congolese crisis of decolonization.

The small number of university graduates at the time of the Congo’s access to independence in June 1960 has become a key “fact” in the historiography and memory of Belgian colonialism. In October 1960, a young cultural attaché at the US embassy in Leopoldville told journalists that the Congo did not count more than sixteen graduates at the time of independence.<sup>33</sup> The actual number was probably more around 30 Congolese holders of university degrees at independence, but the attaché’s estimation became rapidly an epitome of the Congo crisis, which plummeted the country into civil war and administrative chaos a few days after the transfer of power. The late opening of higher education to Congolese, in turn, became a central element in narratives about the Congo’s decolonization. A history of the Congolese student movement should not take these narratives for granted; and its starting point should predate the opening of Lovanium in 1954. The dissertation’s second cluster of chapters, entitled *Paths to School*, marks the proper beginning of this history of the student movement, and it takes its starting point with imaginations of the future in the 1920s.

Chapter 3, “A Colonial Horizon of Expectation,” situates the emergence and “prehistory” of Congolese higher education among the fantasies of a Belgian writer, the

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<sup>33</sup> Her name was Barbara Yates. She later completed a doctoral dissertation at Columbia on the history of colonial education in the Congo. She cited the anecdote in her thesis: see Barbara Yates, “The Missions and Educational Development in Belgian Africa, 1876-1908.” Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1967, p.37.

aspirations of Congolese, and the actual educational policies adopted by the colonial state and Christian missionaries in the interwar. I show how some imaginations of the future constrained and limited the development of education for Congolese throughout the period. The chapter notably shows how Belgian colonials attempted to dissociate the creation of an educated colonized elite from the emerging urban culture in Leopoldville and other centers in the Congo.

The following chapter “The Inspired Hill and the City (the People Have Built with Their Own Hands),” tells the story of how, despite Belgian intentions, education became increasingly part of colonial urban culture after the Second World War. The colonial project hoped to maintain educated Congolese outside of militant politics and the potential spirit of insurrection in urban centers. Lovanium University was for example deliberately established outside of Leopoldville. Yet, as the chapter shows, connections between the campus and the city were numerous, and at the end of the 1950s, students took their part in advancing the agenda of political emancipation.

“To the Left” is the dissertation’s third and most voluminous part. It focuses on the sequence from Patrice Lumumba’s assassination to the demonstration of June 4, 1969. In Chapter 5, “Campus Micropolitics and Global Textual Exchanges,” I introduce the diversity of Left positions among students in the 1960s, from the everyday of campus politics to Congolese avant-garde writers and activists. I start with the emergence of the student Left at Lovanium through the conflict around hazing rituals, the definition of student subculture, and everyday tensions between students and academic authorities. Then, the chapter focuses on the involvement of a few Congolese students with the Situationist International in the mid-1960s, suggesting the diversity of “pathways” to

radicalism, and the importance of student international mobility in these processes. Finally, I analyze a unique document, a manifesto written clandestinely by a small group of Congolese activists at the end of the 1960s, and the entanglement between global imagination and the construction of the language of politics. The chapter concludes by returning to the metaphor of postal politics, by developing the role of textual exchanges in Congolese ideological identification.

While Patrice Lumumba is present in nearly every segment of the dissertation, Chapter 6, “Student Politics after Lumumba,” is specifically dedicated to understanding Lumumba’s legacy in the structuration of the Congolese student movement and turn to the Left. In September 1960, after his coup against Lumumba, Joseph Mobutu established a new temporary government, the General Commissioners Government, exclusively made up of students and young graduates. When Lumumba was assassinated a few months later, the responsibility of this government of students was engaged. The chapter explains how student politics later developed as a reaction against the General Commissioners and the participation of an early cohort of Congolese university students in neocolonial projects. I show how the global fame of Lumumba helped to make him the central figure of reference for Congolese students in the 1960s. The chapter also centers on the creation of the first student union in the Congo, UGEC.

“The Student Guerilla,” Chapter 7, provides the first sustained analysis of the role played by students in an otherwise rather well documented episode of the Congolese 1960s: the so-called Mulelist rebellion of the mid-1960s. The chapter makes use of materials as different as a collection of poems, Maoist student newspapers, a book written

by a Congolese refugee in Havana and published by a radical editor in Milano, diplomatic archives, and interviews with former student rebels.

That discussion continues in Chapter 8, “The Dialectics of Revolution and Counter-Revolution,” which looks at more distant connections between the worlds of student politics and Mulelist rebellions. It notably returns to the issue of campus micropolitics, and develops an important episode in Lovanium’s history: the student strike of 1964. The strike explicitly articulated for the first time demands on the decolonization of higher education. The chapter argues that the radicalization of student politics in the context of the strike was partly inspired by the revolutionary rhetoric that went with the Mulelist rebellion, and it shows how that radicalization was recuperated by Mobutu after his coup in 1965.

The last part, “Violence, Authenticity, and the Student Massacre” consists of two chapters. Chapter 9, “Passions in the Congolese 1968,” returns to the history of June 4, 1969, with more information on the student massacre’s origins and consequences. The chapter shows the connections between the political and the personal in student politics. It interrogates the relationship between female and male students, and studies the gendered and affective dimensions of global 1968 in the Congo. I also revisit some issues discussed in previous chapters, like textual exchanges, postal politics, the gendering of student politics, and cultural authenticity. Finally, a last chapter provides a conclusion to the dissertation.



**Figure 1: Louison and François Mayala. 11 December 2010. Photograph by author.**



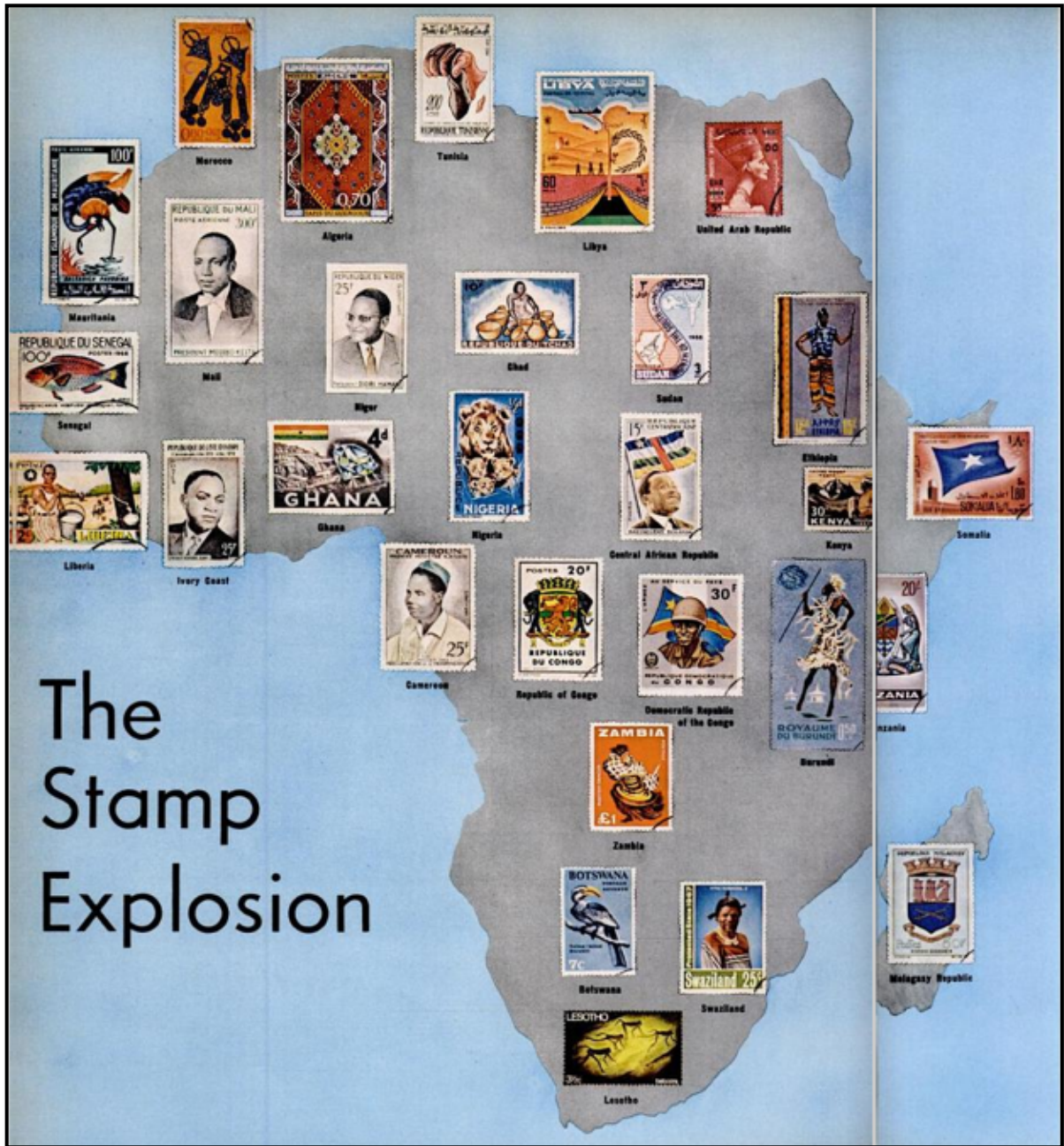


Figure 2: “The Stamp Explosion: Philatelists welcome boom in stamps by and of blacks,” in *Ebony* 25-2 (Dec. 1969), p.142-143.

## Chapter 2

### Postal Politics and Decolonization

“It is the invention of the post which has produced politics”  
Montesquieu, *Of Politics*, 1725

*Verba volant, scripta manent.* Belonging to the last generation of Congolese trained by Belgian missionaries during the colonial period, Louis Mandala could not ignore this Latin proverb. On October 10<sup>th</sup> 1961, Mandala wrote an aerogram – the lightweight and foldable piece of paper that served both as letter and envelope in airmail exchanges – to his friend Pierre Wangata. Mandala was the secretary of the political bureau of the *Parti Solidaire Africain* (African Solidarity Party or PSA) and the secretary of the *Institut Politique Congolais* (Congolese Political Institute or IPC, a research and training center in Leopoldville); Wangata was a member of the IPC who had recently moved to Brussels thanks to connections with Belgian third-worldist activists linked to the Institute. When Mandala started to fill the sections of his aerogram, the two friends had just spoken on the phone. “If you knew how joyful and moved I was as your voice resounded at the end of the line, 5000 kilometers from here,” started Mandala. Phone communications were exhilarating and thrilling in 1961, but they could not replace the feelings of ownership, precision and control of a written message. Accordingly, with his

aerogram, Mandala, a former postal employee, wanted to summarize his conversation with Wangata and make sure that it was well understood. Mandala's attachment to the superior efficiency of the written word allows us to get a sense of the phone conversation. Wangata first announced to his friend that he had obtained a fellowship to study journalism in Belgium and that he needed Mandala to take care of collecting a Congolese minister's signature to authenticate his secondary school's degree. In the second point of the phone conversation, Wangata announced to Mandala that he was sending him suits by plane, to which Mandala replied that it was not secure because of risks of thefts. Mandala then reminded his friend to send him 100 copies of each number of the then Brussels-based journal *Etudes Congolaises*; and informed him that a female companion he had hoped to see that day didn't come because she was indisposed. Then, Wangata wished his friend "a loving evening (*une soirée amoureuse*)" and the latter reciprocated. Finally, in the written summary of the conversation, Mandala added a few more lines on the political state of the country: "Things are not going well. Time only will tell (*Qui vivra, verra*). Rumors indicate that we are going to have a coup soon."<sup>34</sup>

This aerogram and a few other letters that Mandala and Wangata exchanged in September and October 1961 are now held in a yellow folder accessible on request at CEGES, a research center on contemporary history in Brussels. They are part of Jean Van Lierde's collection. An advisor to Congolese politicians and at the same time a researcher on Congolese politics, Van Lierde was himself a very active participant in the exchange of letters between Belgium and its former colony in the 1960s. The reason he included the Mandala and Wangata's mails among his archival gift to the CEGES is that their

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<sup>34</sup> Louis Mandala, letter to Pierre Wangata, 10 Oct. 1961, Jean Van Lierde Papers, CEGES, Brussels.

letters dealt with the “situation of the Congo” in the direct aftermath of independence: this is the rubric under which the letters are introduced in the CEGES archival catalogue. However, the “situation of the Congo” is but only one aspect discussed in these letters. The correspondence is much more informative on a young Congolese’s discovery of Europe and his way to communicate this experience to a friend back home. It offers more abundant details on the two friends’ female conquests; on suits, selling for 4,000 francs in Leopoldville, but costing only 1,450 francs in Brussels and on wristwatches available in Belgium at the quarter of their Congolese price; on Brussels dancing bars where you are not allowed without a female companion; on the generalized “exploitation of man by man” in Belgium where you even have to pay to urinate; on the constant indoctrination of Congolese students; on the hatred of all Belgian women for Congolese men; and on the fact that in Belgium when you disagree with someone over politics, you never talk to that person again. In his letters to Mandala, Wangata explained how he tried to pass for a partisan of the secessionist Katanga province in order to sound out Belgians’ real opinions about the independence of a united Congo. He asked his friend to warn the Congolese Prime minister about all the Belgian members of “Commission of Technical Assistance,” sent to Africa after having been “brain-washed” and whose only goal was to “Balkanize” the Congo. Finally, he asked his friend to hire leftist Belgian researchers for the IPC: “they know better than us the nationalism that we are advocating” and they “can inculcate the patriotic science in us.” A Belgian researcher from the Catholic University of Louvain had just been selected to fill in a position at the IPC that the Senegalese historian Cheikh Anta Diop had declined. Wangata advised Mandala to choose another Belgian candidate, a social worker from the Free University of Brussels who was better

qualified, and also “more human, more in love, who enjoys more to go out, but is also courageous at work.”<sup>35</sup>

If the exchange between Mandala and Wangata informs us about the “situation of the Congo,” it is not in the straightforward fashion that the brief description in the archival catalogue seems to point to. A discourse about politics and decolonization was well at play in these letters, but it was communicated through the intimate mixture of ideas and affects of one friend writing to another. I make use of many more letters written by Congolese and by foreigners interested in the Congo, and that circulated between a multiplicity of locations in the rest of the dissertation. In the chapter, I reflect on the nature of postal exchanges and I offer a genealogy of the emergence of the post as the most significant mode of experiencing the world for Congolese students in the 1960s.

This chapter’s title owes much to Geoffrey Bennington’s exegesis of Montesquieu’s sentence on the concurrent invention of the post and modern politics.<sup>36</sup> Bennington emphasized Montesquieu’s criticisms of the postal nature of politics – the excess of mediations, secrecy, complications and refinement implied by the use of the written word and the multiplication of intermediaries in its communication. Despite these flaws, as the French philosopher noted, the post was consubstantial to modern politics and a world where governance was becoming more complex. Colonial domination and the emergence of new independent governments at the time of decolonization present modalities of power that are particularly prone to analyses in terms of postal politics.

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<sup>35</sup> Pierre Wangata, letter to Louis Mandala, 25 September 1961, Jean Van Lierde Papers, CEGES, Brussels.

<sup>36</sup> Geoffrey Bennington, “Postal Politics and the Institution of the Nation,” in Homi K. Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 121-137.

To a great extent, the drama of Congolese decolonization was played out on airmail paper. The great turmoil around the determination of independence and its contents involved postal exchanges among persons in the Congo. Letters as well as the independent African press, which colonial authorities only authorized in 1957, played a crucial role in the circulation of nationalist lexicons. Political entrepreneurs used post boxes to distribute their pamphlets, in ways that bring forward questions on the postal articulation of citizenship. In December 1959, for example, one of these pamphlets, sent to all post boxes in Katanga by the separatist *Union Katangaise*, called for the organization of a “postal referendum” on the unilateral independence of the “copper province.”<sup>37</sup> In the Congo as elsewhere, the post, as a bureaucracy and as a technology, engineered the construction of the nation and its derivatives as imagined communities.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Crawford Young, *Politics in the Congo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p.497.

<sup>38</sup> Benedict Anderson only alluded briefly to the postal capacities that supported the imagination of the nation through print capitalism: see his comments on the dependence and interchangeability between printer-journalists and post-masters in 18<sup>th</sup> century’s North America: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), p.61. A few historians of nationalism work with stamps. See for example the work of Henio Hoyo on Mexican stamps Henio Hoyo, “Posting Nationalism: Postage Stamps as Carriers of Nationalist Messages,” in Joan Burbick and William Glass, *Beyond Imagined Uniqueness: Nationalisms in Contemporary Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), p.67-92 and Henio Hoyo, “Fresh Views on the Old Past: The Postage Stamps on the Mexican Bicentennial,” in *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 12-1 (2012), p.19-44. See also: Jack Child, *Miniature Messages: The Semiotics and Politics of Latin American Postage Stamps* (Duke: Duke University Press, 2009). Historians of nationalism’s focus on the post and the visual semiotics of the stamps are welcomed. Yet, stamps circulated beyond the confines of their nations. As Geoffrey Cubitt notes in the introduction to a volume on the “imaginative labor” of nationalism, “the nation is established as the basic unit of cultural comparison.” In this sense, stamps, since the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, have certainly participated in the global circulation of national images and the imagination of the world as a set of individual nationalities. Yet, the postcolonial postal archive does not fit well in this framework. Postcolonial stamps in Africa and elsewhere often suggest an imagination beyond borders and non-territorial political communities like pan-Africanism or the third world. In this sense, the stamps did not participate in an imagination project, where “nations become inescapable” and “national belonging becomes a total condition of being.” See Geoffrey Cubitt, “Introduction,” in

However, postal communications and the networks of peoples and ideas that shaped Congolese politics at the time of the Belgian retreat largely went beyond the country's borders.<sup>39</sup>

The post enabled communication between people in different parts of the Congo, but also played into Congolese “strategies of extraversion,” that is, their mobilization of “resources derived from their (possibly unequal) relationship with the external environment.”<sup>40</sup> A history of the student movement in the 1960s is only intelligible through understanding how different sets of Congolese actors used the material and ideological mediations of foreign groups and individuals in their struggle for political power, which can be illuminated through an analysis of Congolese international postal engagements.

Geoffrey Bennington's definition of postal politics took place in the context of continental philosophy. He interrogated the “post” in postmodern and asked how it compared to the “post” in postal. This chapter is interested in a similar question, and suggests a comparison between the “posts” in postal and postcolonial. In the case of

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Geoffrey Cubitt (ed.), *Imagining Nations* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p.1-21.

<sup>39</sup> As it seeks to problematize a corpus of letters written by Africans around decolonization, this chapter adds a contribution to the works on literacy, “tin-trunk archives,” “homespun historians,” and the “world on paper” in twentieth-century Africa. See Nancy Rose Hunt, “Letter-Writing, Nursing Men and Bicycles in the Belgian Congo: Notes Towards the Social Identity of a Colonial Category,” in *The Paths Towards the Past: Essays in Honor of Jan Vansina*, ed. by Robert Harms et al. (Atlanta: African Studies Press, 1994) p. 187-210; Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon of Birth Rituals, Medicalization and Mobility in the Congo* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Sean Hawkins, *Writing and Colonialism in Northern Ghana: The Encounter between the LoDagaa and “the World on Paper”* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); Karin Barber (ed.), *Africa's Hidden Histories and Making the Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); Derek R. Peterson, *Creative Writing: Translation, Book-keeping and the Work of Imagination in Colonial Kenya* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2004); Derek R. Peterson and Giacomo Macola, *Recasting the Past: History Writing and Political Work in Modern Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009).

<sup>40</sup> Jean-François Bayart, “Africa in the World: A History of Extraversion,” in *African Affairs* 99 (2000), p.217-267.

Congo, the passage from colonialism to independence was marked by a dramatic change in the possibilities of some Congolese to engage with foreign ideas and people. The 1960s, the period during which Congolese invented new configurations of power, was the decade when the country “opened up” to the world. Letters are the central archive of that event. I argue that, while letter writing after independence changed in quantity and quality, postal modalities have deep roots in the colonial period. As a result, this chapter is divided in two: a first part investigates the colonial origins of postal politics; and a second part focuses more closely on postal engagements after independence and during the Cold War.

## **I – COLONIAL MAIL**

Postal politics should be seen as a metaphor for the framework inside of which Congolese developed their understanding of the world and articulated ideas and projects about change and collective organizing. Yet, there is also a literal dimension to the concept. Bringing together the metaphorical and the literal allows us to maximize the generative potentiality of postal politics. The following section starts with the latter point.

### **A Philatelist History of the Congo Crisis**

Not surprisingly, when the Congo prepared to celebrate its access to full sovereignty on June 30, 1960, *La Revue Postale*, a respected Brussels-based philatelist journal, devoted its leading article to the event. As the author of the article stated, it was not the journal’s role to discuss the political aspect of independence, but only its



philatelic dimension. There would certainly be new stamps issued in the Congo, but would Belgian philatelists collect them? The journal hoped for a positive answer to that question, but warned the independent nation's future rulers: collectors' interest would prevail only if the Congolese state itself took care of the issue and sale of stamps. Congolese should not renounce "that prerogative of sovereignty" to foreign private agencies, as some other newly African states had recently done. The article also directly addressed publishers of philatelist guides and called them to keep cataloguing the future Congolese stamps by following the numeration started with the Congo Free State and then the Belgian Congo's postal productions. "One should not forget that the future State is only the logical evolution of a continuous process that goes from the struggle against slavery and epidemics to the current emancipation, the crowning achievement of a seventy-five years' undertaking," wrote the journal.<sup>41</sup> This pompous defense of colonialism's legacy only repeated statements by other journalists, politicians and statesmen – including King Baudouin – whose discourses on continuities aimed at regaining control of the definition of a hasty decolonization process that was escaping them in the spring of 1960. Yet, the article frontally addressed the postal politics of decolonization, which was a much less verbalized aspect of the transfer of power.

From Leopoldville's riots in January 1959 to Che Guevara's clandestine mission in the Kivu during the summer of 1965, the Congo captured the world's attention.<sup>42</sup> The

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<sup>41</sup> "Congo indépendant," in *La Revue Postale*, n.37 (May-June 1960), p. 3-4.

<sup>42</sup> Jean-Marie Mutamba-Makombo, *Du Congo Belge au Congo indépendant, 1940-1960: Emergences des "évolués" et genèse du nationalisme* (Kinshasa: IFEP, 1998); and Ernesto Guevara, *Congo Diary: The Story of Che Guevara's Lost Year in Africa* (New York: Ocean Press, 2011). See also Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002); and Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Intervention and the Making of our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Congo crisis featured in news headlines in Indonesia, in conversations among West German students, and on signs that African American demonstrators carried in New York City.<sup>43</sup> Julien Green wrote about Congolese soldiers' rapes of white women in his journal, Nadine Gordimer reported about the administrative chaos that followed the soldiers' mutiny for the American *Holiday* magazine, and Guy Debord commented about the fate of Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba in his correspondence.<sup>44</sup>

For Congolese, international contacts became crucial to the unfolding of the events and to the understanding of independence. Even during the heyday of the Congo's crisis in July and August 1960, when the postal service of the newly independent nation barely functioned, politicians, labor organizers and students continued to post letters to foreign addresses.<sup>45</sup> The unreliability of the system, the letters that never arrived and the ones that arrived late, explain the epistemic uncertainty with which people lived through the Congo crisis. Only a minority could afford the use of telegrams and the telephone and ensure the progress of their correspondences. We have seen how Mandala used the mail as an antidote to the volatility of the spoken word. Other archival evidence on the relationships between Congolese prime political actors and their distant interlocutors display the multiple cross-uses of telegraph, telephone and correspondences. Telegraphs

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<sup>43</sup> Quinn Slobodian, *Foreign Front: Third World Politics in Sixties West Germany* (Durham: Duke University Press 2012); Katrina M. Hagen, "Internationalism in Cold War Germany," Ph.d. dissertation, University of Washington, 2008; Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

<sup>44</sup> Bernard Piniau, *Congo-Zaire, 1874-1981: La perception du lointain* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002); Nadine Gordimer, "The Congo," in *Telling Times: Writing and Living, 1954-2008* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), p.73-102; Guy Debord, *Correspondance* (Paris, Fayard, 1999-2001), volumes 1 and 2.

<sup>45</sup> CIA Agent Larry Devlin who relied on letters to remain in contact with his wife and daughter during the summer of 1960 compares the efficacy of using the Congolese postal service to throwing bottles into the ocean: Larry Devlin, *Chief of Station, Congo: Fighting the Cold War in a Hot Zone* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009).

announced the coming of letters; letters suggested times for phone call appointments; and telephone conversations promised the sending of telegraphs and letters. Those who could not easily access telegraph and telephone had to cope with the uncertainties of postal communication – by taking guesses at the reasons for unanswered letters and by giving way to the sometimes mismatched communications created by lost letters and answers sent before the reception of the question. Letters materialized the tenuous but still crucial thread connecting the Congo to its global imagination.<sup>46</sup>

Post offices – already strategically located buildings and privileged carriers of architectural semiotics during the colonial period – emerged as critical sites in the Congo crisis’ reconfigured political topographies, at a time when armed conflicts disrupted spatial hierarchies of power and well ordained networks of communication.<sup>47</sup>

The crisis that followed the official proclamation of independence on June 30, 1960 began as a generalized mutiny of the army. Soon, it metastasized into an international imbroglio and cold war nightmare, with direct military intervention by the Belgian army and the United Nations, as well as the secession of two provinces.<sup>48</sup> On

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<sup>46</sup> In this sense, this chapter should be seen as a complement to Kevin Dunn’s work on how mostly foreign “imaginings” of the Congo shaped international interventions and local political in the country at different moments in history, including decolonization: Kevin C. Dunn, *Imagining the Congo: International Relations of Identity* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003).

<sup>47</sup> Not incidentally, Elisabethville’s post office was one of the most contested sites in the confrontations between United Nations forces and Katanga’s secessionists from 1960 to 1963: Stanley Meisler, *United Nations: A History* (New York: Grove Press, 1995) see p.121-128.

<sup>48</sup> The literature on the Congo crisis and the importance of foreign intervention is quite extensive, notably on the role of the US and the UN: see a.o. Steven R. Weissman, *American Foreign Policy in the Congo, 1960-1964* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974); Rajeshwar Dayal, *Mission for Hammarskjöld: the Congo Crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976); Madeleine G. Kalb, *The Congo Cables: The Cold War In Africa, From Eisenhower to Kennedy* (New York: MacMillan, 1982); Richard D. Mahoney, *JFK Ordeal in Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Ilunga Kabongo, “The Catastrophe of Belgian Decolonization,” in W. Roger Louis and P. Giffard (eds.), *Decolonization and African Independence* (New Haven:

July 11, 1960, not even two weeks after independence's festivities, the province of Katanga, under the leadership of Moïse Tshombé, seceded from the young Congolese Republic. The powerful Belgian mining company, Union Minière, as well as Belgian settlers supported the secession. The Belgian government never officially recognized independent Katanga, but it collaborated with Tshombé by sending numerous "technical advisors" who helped build a military force and state apparatuses in the secessionist province. In July and August 1960, three UN resolutions condemned Katanga's as well as the diamond-rich province of Southern Kasai's secessions from the central state and ordered a military operation in the Congo. The first UN soldiers arrived in Leopoldville as soon as July 15<sup>th</sup>, but UN authorities disagreed with Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba on the intervention's mandate. UN secretary general Dag Hammarskjöld refused to use the military contingent to directly reduce Tshombé's secession. In September, after intense behind-the-scenes maneuvering from Belgian and American intelligence, general Mobutu "neutralized" both Kasa-Vubu and Lumumba. Yet, while the president remained free, Mobutu had Lumumba held under house arrest and then in prison. After Lumumba made several attempts to escape from prison, Mobutu and the new authorities in Leopoldville transferred the deposed prime minister to Katanga, where he was assassinated in the presence of Tshombé and several of his ministers. Following Lumumba's assassination, the UN came under more intense pressure from Afro-Asian countries and the Eastern Bloc to solve the enduring political and military crisis in the

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Yale University Press, 1988), p.381-400; David N. Gibbs, *The Political Economy of Third World Intervention: Mines, Money and US Economy in the Congo Crisis* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991); Ludo de Witte, *The assassination of Lumumba* (London: Verso, 2001); and Robert A. Hill and Edmond J. Keller (eds.), *Trustee for the Human Community: Ralph J. Bunche, the United States and the Decolonization of Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010).

Congo. Katanga, having enlisted the service of white mercenaries from South Africa and Europe became a symbol of neocolonialism in Africa. The UN used military action against Tshombe in 1961 and, increasingly, in 1962. In January 1963, Tshombe fled to Europe and the authority of the central Congolese state was finally fully restored in the copper province.

Congo broke up into several polities in 1960 and 1961: two competing governments, one established in Leopoldville and the other in Stanleyville, both claiming to be the legitimate holder of national sovereignty, while local rulers in Katanga and Kasai claimed their independence from the central state. This fragmentation manifested itself through improvisation with new anthems, flags, and letterheads, but also through the multiplication of stamps. The various governments in Leopoldville, Bakwanga and Elisabethville, commissioned new stamps, and they also realized a great number of overprints on former Belgian Congo's stamps.<sup>49</sup> *Le Philatéliste Belge*, the concurrent journal of *La Revue Postale*, published an embittered article addressing this situation in its 1961 summer edition.<sup>50</sup> The relative enthusiasm expressed in *La Revue Postale*'s piece from May-June 1960 had waned. Expressing a commonly shared feeling of disaffection for the Congo in Belgium's conservative circles, the author of the article supported the

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<sup>49</sup> The postal production of Katanga is particularly famous among philatelists. The seceded province commissioned its own stamps, but also ordered overprints on Belgian Congo's stamps as well as on the brand new "Independence" stamps of the central government in Leopoldville. Slightly later, during Stanleyville's occupation by Lumumbist rebels in 1964, the dissident revolutionary government issued overprints that have remained famous in Congolese philately. They overprinted "People Republic of Congo" inscriptions on new Congolese stamps from Leopoldville, including a series of stamps on Lovanium University as well as on another series on President Kasa-Vubu. On this and other issues related to Congolese philately, see Guy van Rijn's website: <http://www.congostamps.com> (consulted on July, 23, 2012); see also, among a broader specialized corpus of works, Claude J.P. Delbeke, *The Belgian Maritime Mail – La Poste Maritime Belge* (Monaco: Musée des Timbres et des Monnaies, 2009).

<sup>50</sup> Charles Joncker, "Congo," in *Le Philatéliste Belge*, 107 (July-September 1961), p. 56.

readers who stopped their Belgian Congo’s collections on the day of independence.<sup>51</sup> The philatelists who continued to collect Congolese stamps were unable to keep track of the variety of items in circulation: among others, they were “being served with series on Katanga, issues on the Mining State of Kasai (while other things are still in preparation), all this accompanied by overprints about which we can only say this much!” The author recommended to those readers who were buying the collections from the “sub-states” to abandon these fantasies and instead to focus on the real philatelic interest of the crisis: the specific postmarks used by the military postal services of the Canadian, Swedish, Ghanaian, Ethiopian and Irish troops deployed in the Congo in the name of the UN.

The postal production of the Congo crisis – as much in terms of stamps as in terms of the letters that people were sending and receiving and the political role these letters were playing – deserves to be examined in its singularity. Yet, the postal politics of decolonization emerged well before the crisis, in the aftermath of the Second World War, notably with a young Tetela employee in Stanleyville’s post office named Patrice Lumumba.



**Figure 3: Katanga postal stamps. 1962-1963. Author’s collection.**

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<sup>51</sup> On the break of Belgian colonial romance after July 1960, see Pedro Monaville, “La crise congolaise de juillet 1960 et le sexe de la décolonisation,” in *Sextant* 25 (2008), p.87-102.

## A Colony of Typists

Belgian agents in the Congo often voiced a sense of alienation about their work. Far from the Schumpeterian ideal of aristocratic conqueror, their time was often taken up by the everyday reality of bureaucratic demands.<sup>52</sup> They complained about the number of reports to send up the hierarchical ladder. Hours spent on typewriters kept them away from the actual governing of the colonized, from bivouacs and inspections in remote corners of their territories, and from hunting parties in the wilderness. One word summarized their resentment for the paper colony: *mokande*, in its Gallicized version; *mukanda*, in its more correct Bantu declension. The word was claimed by all the major Congolese colonial lingua franca – Lingala, Kikongo ya Leta, Swahili, and Tshiluba – and appeared as a central lexeme in the new language of power and colonial modernity.<sup>53</sup> *Mukanda* designated the coupons issued by employers that native workers and debtors exchanged for goods in stations' stores, and by extension the European paper and metal moneys that were introduced in the 1890s.<sup>54</sup> The word was also the translation for note, folder, paper, image, photograph, ink, book, certificate, labor contract, calendar, manuscript, decree, and bulletin. More primordially, when *mukanda* meant letter, it

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<sup>52</sup> See Marie-Bénédicte Dembour, *Recalling the Belgian Congo: Conversations and Introspections* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001), p.17-37.

<sup>53</sup> *Mukanda* also designated a boy's circumcision and initiation among a variety of people in Central Africa's southern savanna, in the Congo, Angola, and Northern Rhodesia, which became a classical object in British, American, and Belgian anthropology, with work by Max Gluckman and Victor Turner. Quite tellingly, some scholars are referring to *mukanda* as a school: see Gerard Kubik, *Tsuna-Luchazi Ideographs: A Graphic Tradition of West-Central Africa* (Vienna: Lit, 2006); Lengelo Guyisa, *Mukanda, L'Ecole Traditionnelle Pende* (Bandundu: CEEBA, 1980); see also Elisabeth Lynn Cameron, "Negotiating Gender: Initiation Arts of *Mwadi* and *Mukanda* among the Lunda and Luvale, Kabompo District, North-Western Province, Zambia," ph.d dissertation in Art History, Los Angeles, University of California, 1995.

<sup>54</sup> On the diversity of currencies in Central Africa, see Jane I. Guyer, ed., *Money Matters: Instability, Values and Social Payments in the Modern History of West African Communities* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1995) and Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon*.

encapsulated the experience of colonialism for Congolese. Letters not only determined the lives of the *Bena Mukanda* (literally, the children or tribe of the mukanda), the literate Congolese, but also of their illiterate coevals.<sup>55</sup>

Mukanda marked the imposition of colonial rule over the inhabitants of the Congo basin. At another level, the sending of reports, instructions, letters, parcels, books, and subscriptions to newspapers made colonial rule possible by linking colonies and metropolises.<sup>56</sup> In the interwar years, European writers composed epics celebrating the expansion of the mail service. In France, Antoine de Saint-Exupery became a bestselling author with the publication of *Southern Mail*, his novel on the airmail services between metropolitan France and West Africa.<sup>57</sup> Around the same time but in a different genre, a London's philatelist named Henri Dann narrated the *Romance of the Posts of Rhodesia*, explicitly describing postal expansion in British Southern Africa as a movement from "the most terrible savagery" to "British enterprise and justice," and from "murder, torture, rapine and bloodthirsty raids" to "a well-organised community."<sup>58</sup> In Belgian Africa too, the mail service imagined itself as the heroic fulfillment of civilization and the

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<sup>55</sup> Johannes Fabian defines mukanda as "the kind of 'texts' that colonial (and postcolonial) administration and enterprises produce to ensure their control over the population or labor force." For Fabian, mukanda is marked by the terror it can exercise over illiterate people: see Johannes Fabian, "Text as Terror: Second Thoughts about Charisma," in *Social Research* 46-1 (1979), p.166-203.

<sup>56</sup> Beyond being metonymies of empires, postal networks also constituted the infrastructure of the first transnational – or, rather, trans-imperial – projects in Africa. Created in 1936 in Pretoria, the Africa Postal Union brought together in a partially unified postal network, and decades before the coming together of pan-African realizations, the Belgian Congo, the Portuguese colonies of Mozambique and Angola, the Union of South Africa and South West Africa, as well as the totality of the British dominions, territories, colonies and mandates on the continent: *African Postal Union Agreement as Amended at Cape Town, January 1939* (Pretoria: The Government Printer, 1939).

<sup>57</sup> Antoine de Saint-Exupery, *Southern Mail* (New York: Random House, 1933).

<sup>58</sup> Henry C. Dann, *The Romance of the Posts of Rhodesia, British Central Africa and Nyassaland, and the Cancellations of the Rhodesias and Nyassaland* (Bulawayo: Books of Zimbabwe, 1981 [originally published, respectively, in 1940 and 1950]), p. xxix.



extension of the rule of law through the heart of darkness.<sup>59</sup> These celebratory narratives clearly equated the postal service to the colonial sublime.<sup>60</sup> As the train and the radio, the post sought indeed to reinforce the racial superiority of the colonizer through the colonial sublime, but it also ultimately opened itself to the possibilities of appropriation and rerouting by the colonized. Let's therefore move from celebratory narratives of European postal dominance to the history of Africans using the post and writing letters.

Literacy figured prominently in the arsenal that Protestants and, to a lesser extent, Catholics deployed in their scramble for souls along the gospel frontier in Central Africa. In many places throughout King Leopold's African territory and in the context of continuing disruptions of local ecologies of power and increasing labor demands by foreign intruders, the prospect of mastering reading and writing techniques helped to win over local populations to American and European missionaries in the late 1890s.<sup>61</sup> By the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Congo counted at least sixteen printing presses, producing every year hundreds of copies of the bible in local vernacular languages as well as schoolbooks and periodicals.<sup>62</sup> Literate converts soon became the avant-garde of their church's expansion, as teachers, catechists, and sometimes ethnographers.<sup>63</sup> After

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<sup>59</sup> Jean Du Four, *Cinquante ans d'histoire postale* (Bruxelles: Revue Postale, 1962).

<sup>60</sup> I am here referring to Brian Larkin's redefinition of the colonial sublime: "The erection of factories; the construction of bridges, railways, and lighting systems; indeed the terrifying ability to remake landscapes and force the natural world to conform to these technological projects by leveling mountains, flooding villages, and remaking cities; these were the ways in which the sublime was produced as a necessary spectacle of colonial rule" Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), p.36

<sup>61</sup> Barbara Yates, "The Missions and Educational Development 1876-1908", Ph.D. dissertation, New York, Columbia University, 1967, p. 308-321.

<sup>62</sup> Barbara Yates, "Knowledge Brokers: Books and Publishers in Early Colonial Zaire," in *History of Africa* 14 (1987), p. 311-340.

<sup>63</sup> As in the case of the Swedish missionary Karl Laman's collaborators who compiled 429 notebooks on BaKongo politics and cosmology between 1914 and 1916: Wyatt MacGaffey,

Belgium's so-called "reprise" in 1908 – when the Congo became officially a Belgian colony, and no longer the exclusive possession of Leopold II – the state and private enterprises increasingly courted the converts' labor. They sought to reduce the cost of importing West African employees to staff their offices in Boma, Matadi and Leopoldville. A growing number of Congolese clerks, bookkeepers, accountants and nurses soon embodied colonial modernity through their mastery of the emblems of the new times: "Afro-Victorian" clothing, bicycles, and typewriters.<sup>64</sup>

Missionaries encouraged their converts to publish letters in religious periodicals. Written in local languages, these letters conveyed personal narratives of engagements with new orders of power and scales of wealth. The letters, as Nancy Hunt has argued, served "the brokering of knowledge and the formation of social identities in a colonial situation."<sup>65</sup> In this missionary context and in others, the written word both established distinctions and created connections, between the public and the private, the elite and the crowd, the colonized and the state – at the same time that the institution of schools, churches, police, and courts of justice introduced these very categories.<sup>66</sup> Postal networks constructed publics of letter-writers and created spaces for the emergence of shared

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*Kongo Political Culture: the Conceptual Challenge of the Particular* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000) especially chap. 2.

<sup>64</sup> On typewriters, see Jan Vansina, *Being Colonized: The Kuba Experience in Rural Congo, 1880-1960* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), p. 232.

<sup>65</sup> Nancy Rose Hunt, "Letter-writing, Bicycles and Nursing Men in the Belgian Congo."

<sup>66</sup> Letters constituted a privilege interface between colonized subjects and power, especially after the creation of the native jurisdictions in the mid-1920s that contributed to greatly expand the role of the state in Congolese lives. Private law, often reduced in colonial parlance to "women issues", became the domain of so-called customary tribunals established under the control of Belgian territorial administrators. Over the years, hundreds of Congolese urbanized subjects wrote letters to far-away administrators in their region of origins, asking for their collaboration in the restitution of runaway wives or demanding the official recognition of divorces: see Amandine Lauro, " 'J'ai l'honneur de porter plainte contre ma femme' Litiges conjugaux et administration coloniale au Congo belge (1930-1960)," in *Clio: Histoire des femmes et sociétés* 33 (2011), p.65-84.

feelings of religious, ethnic, and racialized identities in the vast Congo basin.

Letters opened up to censorship, but also expanded possibilities of dissent.<sup>67</sup> Letters became crucial for dissident African churches and communities that colonial repression frontally undermined through imprisonments, relegations and relocations.<sup>68</sup> Messianic churches did not constitute the only vector by which opposition to colonialism reinvented itself in the aftermath of the First World War. The Belgian secret services worried about Congolese sailors and their contacts with white prostitutes and communist activists in Antwerp. The police tried to monitor closely the activities of the very small number of Congolese – never more than 50 – who resided more permanently in the Belgium at the time.<sup>69</sup> Some of these migrants participated in the burgeoning world of pan-African associations and conferences. Through the mail, they likely introduced to the Congo a body of thought that colonial authorities deemed highly subversive. In the more industrialized corners of the colony, protests against working conditions also included the writing of letters to the colonial administration or newspapers.<sup>70</sup>

In February 1944, the police arrested dozens of clerks in Elisabethville, suspected

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<sup>67</sup> In a sense, and in contrast to European creole nationalisms in the 18th and 19th centuries, Congolese nationalism was more certainly the fruit of handwritten and typed letters than of printed materials: see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

<sup>68</sup> Jean-Luc Vellut, *Simon Kimbangu, 1921: De la prediction à la déportation* (Brussels: Académie Royale des Sciences d'Outre-Mer, 2005). Other political formations in the 1930s relied on postal networks, such as Andre Matsoua's movement that attracted an important following among the Lari clerks in Brazzaville, but which was also active in Leopoldville and among the small Congolese community in Paris: Martial Sinda, *Le messianisme congolais et ses incidences politiques: Kimbanguisme, Matsouanisme, autre mouvements* (Paris: Payot, 1972).

<sup>69</sup> Zana Aziza Etambala, *In het land van de Banoko: de geschiedenis van de Kongolese/Zairese aanwezigheid in België van 1885 to heden* (Leuven: Hoger Instituut voor de Arbeid, 1993).

<sup>70</sup> John Higginson, *A Working Class in the Making: Belgian Colonial Labor Policy, Private Enterprise, and the African Mineworker, 1907-1951* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

of a conspiracy to overthrow the colonial order.<sup>71</sup> A letter to a US army officer based in Elisabethville figured at the center of the prosecution. Liévin Kalubi, also known as Beltchika, a former Catholic seminarian and primary school teacher turned state employee, and a central figure in the group of arrested clerks, had composed the letter. Explicitly referring to the Atlantic Charter, Kalubi demanded freedom for the Congolese, “in the full meaning of the word, as the above-mentioned Charter defines it, but not under the term ‘protectorate’ [*tutelle*], which is nothing else but the veiled domination of some European capitalists who dictate to the government to prejudice us in all sorts of way.” The letter listed several requests, including freedom of speech and the press, “the granting of necessary education to the intellectual development of the native, to the progress of civilization, like in other African colonies,” and “free access to other parts of the worlds in order to instruct ourselves about the progress of our country.”<sup>72</sup>

During the 1920s and 1930s, Belgian colonials recorded rumors about the imminent liberation of the Congo by Americans.<sup>73</sup> These Congolese imaginations, linked to Marcus Garvey’s panafricanism and Woodrow Wilson’s principles of auto-determination, partially paved the way for the Elisabethville’s clerks’ letter.<sup>74</sup> Historians have convincingly argued that that letter represented the first Congolese nationalist document. Kalubi-Beltchika and his comrades indeed announced – nearly, in the biblical

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<sup>71</sup> Jean-Luc Vellut, “Le Kantanga industriel en 1944: Malaises et anxiétés dans la société coloniale,” in *Le Congo belge dans la seconde guerre mondiale: recueil d’études* (Brussels: Académie Royale des Sciences d’Outre-Mer, 1983), p.495-523. See also Jean-Marie Mutamba Makombo Kitatshima, *De Congo Belge au Congo indépendant 1940-1960: Emergence des “évolués” et genèse du nationalisme* (Kinshasa: Institut de Formation et d’Etudes Politiques, 1998), p.36-37.

<sup>72</sup> Jean-Luc Vellut, “Le Kantanga industriel en 1944,” p.505-506.

<sup>73</sup> See notably, Mathieu Zana Etambala, “L’armée du salut et la naissance de la ‘mission des noirs’ au Congo belge, 1934-1940,” in *Annales Aequatoria* 26 (2005), p.67-164.

<sup>74</sup> See Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of the Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

sense of the term – Patrice Lumumba’s frustrated postal politics. Incidentally, in the mid-1960s, François-Xavier Beltchika, one of Liévin Kalubi’s sons, became one of the promoters of the student movement’s turn to the left.

In the early 2000s, a biopic directed by Raoul Peck rejuvenated memories of the Congo’s first prime minister.<sup>75</sup> The film took Lumumba’s employment as a major brewery’s salesman in 1957 as the chronological starting point of its plot. Peck established a direct connection between Lumumba’s promotion of beers in Leopoldville’s bars and the beginning of his political activity. This trope brought forward a familiar understanding of Congolese politics, as the encounter of African urban hedonism, Cuban sounds, tie-wearing men, free women, and disenfranchised youth in the informal and public space of the bar. This vision holds much analytic purchase. However, it neglected another approach to politics linked to Lumumba’s earlier work as a postman, an aspect of his life that Peck did not include in his movie. Yet, the long postal episode in Lumumba’s biography is the crucial missing link between the nationalist activism of Congolese évolués at the end of the Second World War, on one hand, and the participation of their children in global radicalized youth’s struggles in the 1960s, on the other hand.

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<sup>75</sup> *Lumumba*. Directed by Raoul Peck. New York: Zeitgeist Films, 2001. Peck’s biopic, as well as his earlier documentary *Lumumba: La mort du prophète*, had a significant impact on recent academic discussions of Lumumba: see notably Janet B. Hess, “Nkrumah/Lumumba: Representations of Masculinity,” in Nicholas Creary (ed.), *African Intellectuals and Decolonization* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012), p.27-36 and Karen Bouwer, *Gender and Decolonization in the Congo: The Legacy of Patrice Lumumba* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010). In Kinshasa, Peck’s movie even seems to have erased older images of Lumumba, to the point that some of the city’s inhabitants believe that the monument to the memory of Lumumba erected on the road to the airport in 2002 was not modeled after the physiognomy of Lumumba himself but after Eriq Ebouaney, the Franco-Cameroonian actor who played his role in Peck’s movie: see Katrien Pype, “Presencing Lumumba: Three Variations on the Memory Politics of Lumumba in Contemporary Kinshasa,” Unpublished paper (Washington: African Studies Association Annual Meeting, November 2011).

## Postman Lumumba

“The Post Office network extended into all the provinces and even into the bush; through it, the government’s orders were relayed to the local gendarmeries and the *Force Publique*. If one day the Congolese Nation were to exist, it would owe its unity to a similar centralism. Patrice dreamed of a general uniting power which would apply everywhere, impose harmony and a community of action everywhere, would receive information from remote villages, concentrate it, base the direction of its policies on it and send back information and orders by the same route to its representatives in every little hamlet.”<sup>76</sup>

In 1944, 19-year-old Isaïe Tasumbu Tawosa, also known as Patrice Osungu, relocated from his native Sankuru to Kalima, in the Maniema province. Tasumbu had studied in Methodist and Catholic missionary schools, but without completing the primary school cycle. However, soon after moving to Kalima, armed with a fake school certificate, he was hired by Symetain, a colonial society, to run its cafeteria. After only a few weeks, Tasumbu’s superiors accused him of theft and he decided to escape Kalima. Leaving town at night, he went on a trip of several days that brought him hundreds of kilometers from the Maniema, to Stanleyville, the Oriental Province’s capital. Tasumbu started a new life, working as a tax collector, and taking up a new name: Patrice Lumumba.<sup>77</sup>

Lumumba was animated by the will to elevate himself. In Stanleyville, he completed his primary education by attending night classes. He also learned to master

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<sup>76</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 95-96.

<sup>77</sup> On Lumumba’s biography, see Jean-Marie Mutamba Makombo, “La destinée de Patrice Lumumba (1925-1961),” in Mabilia Mantumba-Ngoma (ed.), *A la redécouverte de Patrice Emery Lumumba* (Kinshasa: Institut de Formation et d’Etudes Politiques, 1996), p.11-52; Jean Omasombo and Benoît Verhaegen, *Patrice Lumumba, jeunesse et apprentissage politique* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1999); Jean Omasombo and Benoît Verhaegen, *Patrice Lumumba, acteur politique: De la prison aux portes du pouvoir, juillet 1956-février 1960* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2005). Two years after moving to Stanleyville, Lumumba joined the middle Hemery (later spelled as Emery) to his name, and in 1951, he had his identity officially changed to Patrice Hemery Lumumba Mumbard.

French, which he only very imperfectly spoke in his previous life. In 1947, a Postal School opened in Leopoldville and admitted Lumumba as part of the first group of students. They were trained to fulfill middle positions in the postal administration. After nine months of courses in the colony's capital, including classes on accountability, postal ethics, and postal geography, Lumumba graduated as the third best student in his cohort of thirty-five. In 1948, the postal administration assigned him to Yangambi. The following year, Lumumba transferred to Stanleyville's main post office as a third-class assistant. Between 1950 and 1955, he progressed both in his career, reaching the position of main assistant in the checking accounts service, and as a public figure in the Congo's third most important urban center.

A cluster of local associations of *évolués* – the literate Congolese men who worked as subaltern white-collar employees in state and private bureaucracies – formed after the Second World War.<sup>78</sup> Lumumba became an active member in several of these associations, gaining leadership positions in ADAPES (the association of alumni of the Scheutist Catholic missionary school network, even though Lumumba himself was not an alumnus of their schools), AES (the general association of *évolués* in Stanleyville) and APIPO (the Oriental Province's Native Postmen's association). A correspondent for several Leopoldville-based newspapers and then for the Brussels-based journal *L'Afrique et le Monde*, Lumumba wrote articles on the activities of local associations in

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<sup>78</sup> On the discursive emergence of the category "évolué" in the Belgian Congo and on Congolese *évolués'* associative engagements and strategies of cultural embourgeoisement, see Daniel Tödt, "Les Noirs Perfectionnés": Cultural Embourgeoisement in Belgian Congo during the 1940s and 1950s." Working paper, Sonderforschungsbereiches 640, n.4/2012.

Stanleyville, the conditions of *évolués*, and the postal service, defending postmen against widely accepted beliefs that they were losing letters and parcels on purpose.<sup>79</sup>

Thus, Lumumba came to politics as a zealous employee in the postal service, an ambitious figure in Stanleyville's associative world, and a regular contributor to newspapers and journals. He depended on the postal service as the purveyor of his professional identity and means of subsistence. Postal communications also gave Lumumba the means to build his public persona against the mutually reinforcing limitations of a rigid colonial order and of a provincial center in the middle of the rainforest. A few iconic items defined upward social mobility in the late 1940s and early 1950s: bicycles, individually-owned and decently-furnished houses with multiple rooms, fancy suits, ties, bowties, and, of course, typewriters.

Feeding a sheet of paper into the typewriter, turning the knob and adjusting the paper, pressing on the typewriter's keys, pushing the carriage return lever from left to right, occasionally disentangling type bars and replacing exhausted ribbons made up primordial routines that supported political and social elevation. Young literates mobilized mechanical writing, the French language, and the postal service – all markers of colonial bureaucracy – in attempts to widen limited spaces and possibilities. In Lumumba's case, self-improvement and politicization rapidly blurred. Unable to attend Lovanium University, he subscribed to long-distance teaching programs in Belgium. Having exhausted the local library's collections, he ordered books and pamphlets from France. Estranged from local Catholic colonials, he corresponded with the minister of

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<sup>79</sup> Jean-Marie Mutamba Makombo, *Patrice Lumumba, correspondant de presse: 1948-1956* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005), p.13-15.



Colonies Auguste Buisseret and other liberal politicians in Brussels.<sup>80</sup> Several years before he advertised the superiority of Polar beer over Primus to gaudy crowds in Leopoldville, Lumumba developed his social capital and crafted his public persona by typing letters in Stanleyville.

“You can become a true academic from your home if you learn with tenacity and method – I am telling you this after a long gained experience,” wrote Lumumba to a friend in April 1954. A self-taught postal employee, Lumumba never became *un vrai universitaire* – a true academic – strictly speaking.<sup>81</sup> However, he inspired many university students who accessed institutions of higher education in the years that followed his death, partly because his life so eloquently reflected their own struggles, hopes, and dreams at the time of decolonization.

Lumumba was not only a proud self-educated *évolué*; he was also a very active member in the world of “native associations” in Stanleyville. One of the places where Lumumba crafted his fame and strategy for personal advancement was Stanleyville’s postal association. It was as the postal association’s president that King Baudouin granted him an unusually long audience during his visit to Stanleyville in 1955.<sup>82</sup> APIPO, the association of postal employees, stood apart in the constellation of associations in which

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<sup>80</sup> Through this patronage, Lumumba achieved *immatriculation*, a legal status that saved him from some of the many racial discriminations that Congolese were the object of day to day and that the administration only granted after house inspections during which the candidate had to prove he and his family had fully adopted Belgian middle-class lifestyle and values. In 1955, King Baudouin granted him a long interview at the occasion of a visit to Stanleyville; and in early 1956, Lumumba participated in a trip to Belgium organized for Congolese dignitaries.

<sup>81</sup> Cited in Verhaegen and Omasombo, *Patrice Lumumba, Jeunesse et apprentissage*, p.123.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Patrice Hemery Lumumba, “Editorial,” in *L’Echo Postal*, 1-2, 1955, p.27-28. Despite Lumumba’s own narrative about the creation of APIPO, some evidence seems to suggest that he might not have been at the origin of the association, but that Antoine-Marie Mobe might have been its first president until his replacement by Lumumba in 1953 (see Verhaegen and Omasombo, *Jeunesse et apprentissage*, p.178 and 205).

Lumumba took part, not only because he acted as its founding president, but also because of its multi-racial consistency.<sup>83</sup> Despite the “I” in its acronym that stood for *Indigènes*, APIPO counted a significant number of white employees in its ranks, claiming by January 1955 the membership of 18 European agents and 90 African clerks, “without taking into account the postmen and the sentries.”<sup>84</sup>

Lumumba came up with the idea for APIPO in July 1951.<sup>85</sup> White and black employees were gathered in a bar to celebrate the retirement of Monsieur Dyseller, Stanleyville’s principal collector. The association would reproduce and cultivate the good companionship between postal workers that this celebration had allowed. Postal and beer politics need not to be exclusive in the Belgian Congo, and APIPO actually proved them to be totally intertwined. After the district commissioner authorized the association at the end of 1953, its weekly meetings systematically began with an aperitif.<sup>86</sup> Beer and champagne helped lubricate the relationships between white and black members. Only a few years after General Governor Petillon cancelled the old ban on European alcoholic beverages for the colonized, APIPO’s aperitifs indexed the mid-1950s timid attempts at

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<sup>83</sup> The Belgian journalist Pierre de Vos, in a book marked by several factual mistakes, suggested that white postal employees forced their participation in APIPO as a way to control Lumumba and restrain the politicization of the association: Pierre de Vos, *Vie et mort de Lumumba* (Paris: Calman-Levy, 1961), p.42. Despite De Vos’ lack of reliability, the divergence of white and black participants’ agendas in APIPO was obvious. It is also worth noting that Lumumba’s most intense engagement with APIPO arrived at a moment when he was meeting mounting opposition inside AES and starting to shift his political discourse from a reformist and moralist discourse on *évolués* to an increasing attention to the Belgian-Congolese community (see Verhaegen and Omasombo, *Patrice Lumumba*, p. 186).

<sup>84</sup> Patrice Lumumba, “Editorial,” in *L’Echo Postal*, 1-1, 1955, p.1.

<sup>85</sup> Patrice Lumumba, “Rapport de fin d’exercice, année 1954,” in *L’Echo Postal*, 1-1, 1955, p.2-5.

<sup>86</sup> APIPO – then headed by Antoine-Marie Mobe, with Lumumba as its secretary-treasurer – had already organized a party in February 1952: see Patrice Hemery Lumumba, “Nouvelles de Stanleyville,” in *La Croix du Congo* 8-20, 24 February 1952, p.1-2 (reproduced in J.M.K. Mutamba Makombo, *Patrice Lumumba correspondant de presse (1948-1956)* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2005), p.98-99).

inter-racial socialization.<sup>87</sup> Lumumba had been the close friend of a young Belgian researcher who conducted fieldwork in Stanleyville in 1951 and 1952 on African urbanization. The memory of this rare friendship certainly stayed with Lumumba as he strove to achieve “harmony between the races,” mutual respect and human solidarity through his postmen’s association.<sup>88</sup>

APIPO offered Stanleyville’s postmen an interracial and strongly homosocial space for socializing. Women were more marginalized than excluded, as in other similar associations. They did not participate in the weekly meetings, aperitifs and movie performances; yet postmen’s wives and children participated in excursions to the countryside.<sup>89</sup> Their presence allowed Lumumba to compare the postal service to one large family. A few white women particularly marked Lumumba’s depiction of these country trips and contributed to his emphasis on their prestige and distinction. These visits were meant to be instructive and allowed the postmen to discover rural places in the vicinity of Stanleyville: in 1954, Bengamisa and its school for agricultural assistants along the Lindi River, and in 1955, Yanonge and its small community of *évolués* on the

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<sup>87</sup> L. Delfosse, “A propos de l’accès des Congolais dans les établissements publics pour Européens,” in *L’Echo Postal* 1-3 (1955), p.54-56.

<sup>88</sup> The researcher, a sociologist named Pierre Clément, wrote a beautiful text on his relationship with Lumumba a few months after his assassination. In Stanleyville, their friendship had been nurtured by daily meetings after Patrice’s working day, sometimes for dinners with other Europeans in Pierre’s house, in the *Centre Extra Coutumier’s* bars to enjoy music, dancing, beer and cigarettes, or at Patrice’s house to discuss the research reports he wrote for Pierre. In December 1952, they went together on a road trip that brought them to Patrice’s village, where they stayed for over a month. When Pierre left the Congo at the end of 1953, the two men kissed, tears in their eyes, showing a very unusual display of affection that encapsulated the extraordinary and in a way excessive nature of this interracial friendship.

<sup>89</sup> Patrice Lumumba, “Bilan 1955,” in *L’Echo Postal* 1-4 (1955), p.75.

Congo River.<sup>90</sup> These excursions produced a particular type of spectacle in which postmen featured both as viewers and actors. A *convoi postal* of urban dwellers, dressed in their Sunday best, sought to impress onlookers as well as photographic and movie cameras. The excursions displayed a complex engagement with colonial aesthetics: a fascination with Western fashion attributes, the French language, and genuine companionship with Europeans, but also, at the same time, the cultivation of distinctively African cultural forms.<sup>91</sup> Lumumba's deference to Belgian colonials, his praises for Belgian colonialism and political support for the Belgian-Congolese community need to be considered together with praises for Congolese autochthony. He bracketed the colonial relationship through strategic cultural essentialism.

In December 1955, APIPO organized a celebration of Saint Nicolas day, the iconic children's day in Catholic Belgium. That celebration encapsulated the creative dimension of Lumumba's politics and its strong bond with other forms of cultural collage in colonial Africa. A huge group of fancy-dressed postmen gathered at the

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<sup>90</sup> During his first years in Stanleyville, Lumumba often biked with friends to Bengamisa, Yanonge, Yakusu and other semi-rural settings in the area (Verhaegen and Omasombo, *Jeunesse*, p.114). In 1952, as ADAPES' vice-president, he also organized a memorable country trip to Yangambi (the agronomic center on the Congo River where he had first been stationed after his time at the Postal School). The description of the Yangambi expedition – which involved crossing the Congo river on canoes after dark and sleeping out in the open in the middle of the forest – diverges significantly from the APIPO's excursions and is more reminiscent of boy-scout's literature: Patrice Hemery Lumumba, "L'ADAPES de Stanleyville en excursion à Yangambi," in *La Croix du Congo* 35-20, 21 September 1952, p.4 (reproduced in Jean-Marie Mutamba Makombo, *Patrice Lumumba correspondant de presse*, p.111-113).

<sup>91</sup> The participation of black urban postmen in native dances and musical performances during the excursions expressed their embrace of the colonial double consciousness, their eagerness to play with bodily prescriptions, and maybe their pleasure to disempower their white superiors and to relegate them to mere spectatorship. Pierre Clément remembered later that Lumumba did not particularly cherish the "modern" Congolese rumba in the early 1950s, but that he always eagerly joined in "traditional" dancing parties. Clément certainly missed the modern character of Lumumba's supposedly traditional dancing. Verhaegen and Omasombo note that during his youth in Sankuru, Lumumba was renowned for his excellence at a dance known as the *Ngomo ya masele*, which translates as the nun's dance (Verhaegen and Omasombo, *Jeunesse*, p.88).

city's port (the *beach* in Congolese usage) to welcome the saint. The latter emerged on a pirogue, together with a squad of "14 sturdy singers-paddlers" and tam-tam players:

"It was a raving spectacle to which all the Lokele riverside residents and those who were crossing the river joined; everybody was running to see what was happening and a good number of cinema amateurs seized the occasion to put this picturesque and truly unique scene on tape."

The saint was then driven in a "luxury limousine" to a school where he distributed gifts to postmen's children, after a speech by the Chief Collector and a performance of the postal brass band. Distinction, difference, and interpretative slippages were at the core of the celebration-collage, as Lumumba amusingly noted that the Lokele riverside residents considered that the saint was "a great witch doctor (*féticheur*) sent by King Baudouin."<sup>92</sup>

*L'Echo Postal* was the space where Lumumba's spectacles really produced their effect. The journal marked the association's extension from its original basis in Stanleyville to the entirety of the Oriental Province. Its readers in remote corners of the province vicariously participated in the urban *évolué* culture of Stanleyville. The journal educated postmen and tried to make them better employees and better Congolese. Lumumba published articles that promoted a prudent nationalism mixed with a form of colonial patriotism. He praised "true friendship" between Congolese of different ethnic backgrounds as the way forward for "the evolution of our country."<sup>93</sup> Lumumba also contributed a series of articles on race, which paraphrased the biological section in a

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<sup>92</sup> Patrice Hemery Lumumba, "L'Amicale des Postiers en action," in *L'Echo Postal* 1-4 (1955), p.80-81.

<sup>93</sup> Patrice Hemery Lumumba, "Vous faites-vous aisément des amis?" See also Patrice Hemery Lumumba, "L'action est base de tout progrès," in *L'Echo Postal* 1-2 (1955), p.35-37.

UNESCO booklet on the topic.<sup>94</sup> This series undermined ideas of racial superiority, clashing with a tenet of Belgian colonialism and laying the ground for Congolese national pride.<sup>95</sup> In the mid-1950s, Lumumba used to praise Belgian colonialism by asserting its divergence from the apartheid regime in South Africa. An emphasis on racism – by deconstructing its scientific bases or by establishing its absence from Belgian colonial principles – allowed Lumumba to formulate a strong and original insight to actual practices in the Belgian Congo. Lumumba’s contributions to *L’Echo Postal*, which arrived after his accession to the status of *immatriculation* and his progressively closer relations with Belgian liberal politicians in 1954, marked his initial espousal of a critical and provocative tone in his writings about colonialism.<sup>96</sup>

The educative mission of *L’Echo Postal* became clear through articles on the history of the postal service.<sup>97</sup> Contributors insisted on the post’s support for the “civilizing mission” and the construction of a “more prosperous Congo.” In the words of Stanleyville’s chief collector, Roland Tavernier, the postal service’s contribution to civilization and development was manifest in its censorship of pornographic material, its enabling of economic exchange, and its preservation of secrecy and discretion. For Tavernier, the accessibility of the post encouraged exchanges between Congolese, commerce, and cultural progress: “By providing the means for correspondence, we indeed create among a good number of natives the need to learn to read and write.

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<sup>94</sup> *What is a Race?*

<sup>95</sup> Patrice Hemery Lumumba, “Les races humaines,” in *L’Echo Postal* 1-1 (1955), p.17-20; 1-2 (1955), p.40-42; 1-3 (1955), p.69-72; 1-4 (1955), p.88-91.

<sup>96</sup> Verhaegan and Omasombo, *Jeunesse* p.156.

<sup>97</sup> R. Tavernier, “Histoire de la poste,” in *L’Echo Postal* 1-1 (1955), p.5-6 ; R. Tavernier, “Histoire de la poste: suite,” in *L’Echo Postal* 1-2 (1955), p.45; L. Delfosse, “Histoire de la poste,” in *L’Echo Postal* 2-1 (1956), p.7-9; L. Delfosse, “L’Union Postale Universelle,” in *L’Echo Postal* 1-3 (1955), p.59.

Furthermore, our services are involved in circulating books, periodicals and distant courses at prices that are not profitable for us.”<sup>98</sup> Lumumba wrote similarly on the crucial role of the post as a colonial and national institution. Furthermore, he signaled the affective dimension of postal communication: “How sad must a customer feel when, running hastily to the post office to drop an important and extremely urgent letter, he receives this ready-made answer: ‘the office is closed’.”<sup>99</sup>

The role of postmen as collaborators in the colonial project entailed a series of obligations. Lumumba stressed the respect of hierarchy, notably between black employees of varying ranks, as well as the need to act politely and with as much deference towards black customers – even illiterate postal users, he added – as one would towards a white customer.<sup>100</sup> Contributors to *L’Echo Postal* also promoted work ethics for postmen that included honesty, punctuality, politeness and a developed sense of personal hygiene: fingers that will manipulate other people’s books, stamps and bank notes should not be put in one’s nose, mouth or ear.<sup>101</sup> Postmen had to be honorable family men, listeners of educational talks on the radio, and readers of instructional books and journals.<sup>102</sup> Despite the role of alcohol in creating the friendly atmosphere during APIPO’s meetings, postal employees were to follow the principles of temperance: “a drunkard, a lustful or an adulterous man” did not possess “the necessary qualities of a

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<sup>98</sup> R. Tavernier, “Réflexions sur notre activité administrative,” in *L’Echo Postal* 1-2 (1955), p.33-34.

<sup>99</sup> Patrice Hemery Lumumba, “Postiers, soyons dévoués,” in *L’Echo Postal* 1-3 (1955), p.53.

<sup>100</sup> Patrice Hemery Lumumba, “Quelques devoirs des agents des services publics et plus spécialement des postiers,” in *L’Echo Postal*, 1-1 (1955), p.9-12. See also Patrice Hemery Lumumba, “Quelques devoirs d’un homme civilisé,” in *L’Echo Postal* 1-2 (1955), p.44.

<sup>101</sup> Patrice Lumumba, “Quelques règles de politesse et de savoir-vivre,” in *L’Echo Postal* 1-2 (1955), p.46.

<sup>102</sup> L. Delfosse, “Buts à atteindre,” in *L’Echo Postal* 1-4 (1955), p.83-85. See also, L. Delfosse, “Famille,” in *L’Echo Postal* 1-2 (1955) p.47-48.

good agent in the postal service. Men like these will sooner or later break the public trust by stealing and by neglecting their work.”<sup>103</sup>

Few since Sartre have paid much attention to Lumumba’s appropriation of colonial postal politics. His biographers, Benoit Verhaegen and Jean Omasombo, discussed with more details his struggle for power around the city’s association of *évolués* (A.E.S.) than his affiliation with the postal service.<sup>104</sup> Yet, the post was central in the emergence of Lumumba’s proto-nationalist ideals. In the articles that he contributed on the postal service, and in his activities with APIPO, Lumumba started to push out of colonial orthodoxy and used the discourse of colonial ethics, hygiene, and morals to develop a revolutionary ferment that would serve to deeply contest the colonial order of things. Sartre’s comparison between Lumumba’s work in the postal service and his later political organization is reminiscent of Lenin’s writing in *The State and Revolution* on the necessity to radicalize forms of existing state-socialism, by retaining state and nearly-state apparatuses, but devoid of their bourgeois bureaucracy. Lenin used the example of the postal service to present the effective administrative structures that the revolution should retain after getting rid of capitalism’s inequalities and “wage slavery,” and he wrote: “To organize the whole economy on the lines of the postal service so that technicians, foremen and accountants, as well as all officials, shall receive salaries no higher than “a workman’s wage,” all under the control and leadership of the armed

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<sup>103</sup> R. Tavernier, “Réflexions au sujet du comportement du postier,” in *L’Echo Postal* 1-4 (1955), p.78.

<sup>104</sup> In 1951, Lumumba was elected as an advisor of the A.E.S. In 1952, he became the association’s secretary; in 1953, its vice-president; and in 1954, its president. In 1953, ADAPES (the association of the Scheutist’s former students) and APIC (the local association of Congolese state employees) also chose Lumumba as their president.



proletariat – that is our immediate aim.”<sup>105</sup> Similarly, the rationality and the universality of the postal service became an important metaphor for Lumumba. His work at the post helped him to build a sensitive understanding of the nation and model for political action.

### Prison Letters

“A 14-year-old boy who wanted to go to America, told me that he would like to go even if it meant leaving Africa forever. But he would not be allowed to go by the District Commissioner, the Black Population Commissioner, all the Belgian authorities. ‘They know that if they gave one of us permission to quit today, the whole of Kinshasa would be empty tomorrow!’ Most of the boys [in Leopoldville] craved to visit other parts of the world.”<sup>106</sup>

In April and May 1956, Patrice Lumumba took part in a one-month state-sponsored study trip of Congolese notables to Belgium.<sup>107</sup> His program included visits to the postal administration in Brussels.<sup>108</sup> Until the very last couple of years of the colonial regime, very few Congolese enjoyed the privilege of travelling to Europe. Lumumba’s

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<sup>105</sup> See Vladimir I. Lenin, *On Politics and Revolution: Selected Writings* (New York: Pegasus, 1968), p.213.

<sup>106</sup> Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, *Food and Leisure Among the African Youth of Leopoldville (Belgian Congo)* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 1950), p.117.

<sup>107</sup> The notables included native chiefs, collaborators of the colonial administration and leaders of associations, like Lumumba. The ministry of colonies, the general governor’s services in Leopoldville and of colonial enterprises who participated in financing the program chose the list of visitors. A first group of 15 notables travelled Belgium in 1953; 20 others followed in 1955; in 1956, Lumumba was part of a group of 16 visitors; the following year, a last group of 18, including for the first time 6 women, travelled to the metropole (Jean-Marie Mutamba Makombo Kitatshima, *Du Congo Belge au Congo indépendant*, p.313-315).

<sup>108</sup> Before departure, Lumumba thought he would spend time observing postmen in Brussels and in rural areas, and that he would also visit the postal museum in Brussels: see “Un beau voyage,” in *L’Echo Postal* 2-2 (1956), not paginated. However, the program was already very loaded and the Ministry of Colonies did not grant a lot of room to Congolese visitors in determining their agenda. In the end, Lumumba visited the office of postal checks on May 8 and Brussels’ main post office on May 9: see Zana Aziza Etambala, “Lumumba en Belgique, du 25 avril au 23 mai 1956: Son récit de voyage et ses impressions: Document inédit,” in Marc Quaghebeur (dir.), *Figures et paradoxes de l’histoire au Burundi, au Congo et au Rwanda* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2002) p.211.

trip crowned his success in Stanleyville, not only the success of his corporate activism inside the postal service, but also his mobilization of local and distant social networks and cultural resources. His Belgian trip also positioned Lumumba in the struggle over political leadership that dawned on Congolese in the mid-1950s and that seemed to open completely new venues of ascent for the colonized. However, Lumumba had made enemies among Catholic missionaries, colonial agents, and rival members of local associations in Stanleyville, and the enmity coalesced to counter his upward trajectory. In just a few weeks, the dignitary on a European trip became a detainee in Stanleyville's prison.

While Lumumba was studying postal routines in Belgium, judicial authorities started to discreetly inquire about his professional activities. After several denunciations, the police opened Lumumba's mail, checked his registers, and soon discovered irregularities.<sup>109</sup> On his return to Congo, a judge interrogated Lumumba and he acknowledged embezzlement. He had misappropriated money with which he had been entrusted at the post office, executing transfers from large companies' accounts into his own and covering it through bookkeeping manipulations. However, Lumumba insisted, his intention had always been to reimburse these sums of money.

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<sup>109</sup> There are probably connections between the colonial justice's inquiry on Lumumba and the increasing contestations of his leadership as the president of Stanleyville's *évolués* association (AES). Tensions in AES seemed to have emerged around the liberal Minister of Colonies Buisseret's introduction of state schools in the Congo, which Lumumba strongly supported against the opposition of Catholics. Besides, Lumumba's conversations with King Baudouin in 1955 provoked jealousy among his opponents in the association and suspicions of his use of the presidency as a strategy of personal advancement. However, it was through a denunciation of Lumumba's financial management that his opponents led the struggle against him, which resulted in his removal from the association in the weeks that preceded his trip to Belgium (See Verhaegen and Omasombo, *Patrice Lumumba, acteur politique*).

“If there are services in which employees’ future is dangerously thwarted as a result of their heavy responsibilities,” Lumumba had lectured his colleagues at the occasion of the very first meeting of APIPO, on February 9, 1952, “the postal service is the first of them.”<sup>110</sup> In Stanleyville, Lumumba had become fluent in the language of colonial morality. His speeches and articles relayed calls for respect emanating from the established order of work and power. However, his own social mobility demanded the acumen of a forger. There was no other way to proceed in the colonial double bind, which paid Congolese clerks like the lower section of the Belgian proletariat while demanding them to live up to the material standards of its middle class to prove “civilized” status.

Salaries were low, even for *évolués*, and the cost of life in urban centers could be overwhelming. Twice denied the financial assistance to which he was entitled as a state employee, Lumumba had not seen any other solution to the financial dilemma obstructing his great social and political ambitions than that of helping himself directly to the funds at the post office. In front of the judge, Lumumba proved that he had stopped any malpractice months before, and had even started to reimburse the embezzled sums. Yet, Stanleyville’s judicial authorities did not show sympathy for the offender. Lumumba was preventively imprisoned on July 6, 1956, and his requests to be freed before the trial were denied. On March 4, 1957, he was finally judged, found guilty and sentenced to two years imprisonment; the state, which had demanded a harsher conviction, appealed against the judgment. Lumumba was transferred to Ndolo prison in Leopoldville, where the state appeal was rejected. Ultimately, through a political act posed by the government

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<sup>110</sup> Jean Marie Mutamba Makombo, *Patrice Lumumba, correspondant de presse*, p.98-99.

in Brussels, Lumumba's sentence was reduced to 14 months. Considering the time he had already spent in prison, he was finally freed on September 7, 1957.

All Congolese post offices "looked alike" and displayed "the same atmosphere, the same rumor, the same noise," as Lumumba wrote once.<sup>111</sup> So did prisons. Both institutions defined the experience of colonialism, beyond a simple politics of enclosure.<sup>112</sup> Like most Congolese, Lumumba was well familiar with Belgian colonial prisons. Back in Sankuru, his father had been locked up at least twice for domestic violence and for dowry disputes in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>113</sup> In Stanleyville, in a province that counted more prisoners than in all the colony's other provinces taken together, Lumumba had often had friends and acquaintances behind bars. One state administrator gave the number of 200,000 for Congolese passing through prisons' doors every year in the early 1950s.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Patrice-Emery Lumumba, "L'acheminement d'une lettre," in *La Croix du Congo* 18-32 (27 August 1950), p.4 (reproduced in Jean-Marie Mutamba Makombo, *Patrice Lumumba correspondant de presse*, p.78).

<sup>112</sup> See Florence Bernault, "The Politics of Enclosure in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa," in *A History of Prison and Confinement in Africa*, ed. by Florence Bernault (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2003), p.1-53. Bernault suggests that prisons were part of "a larger doctrine of spatial confinement" in Africa, and that a "mental enclosure" constituted "the hidden horizon of the history of modern confinement in Africa": *Idem*, p.34-35.

<sup>113</sup> Omasombo and Verhaegen, *Patrice Lumumba, jeunesse et apprentissage*, p.116

<sup>114</sup> Paul Cornil, "Prisons congolaises," in *Bulletin de l'Administration des Prisons* 7-2 (February 1953): 361-369. A couple of decades later, popular painters would remember colonialism through the production of hundreds of paintings known under the name of "Colonie Belge." This popular genre included a few core features: showing a rural colonial station where a black soldier is flogging a black inmate who lies on the ground with his bare buttock exposed, while a white official and a few weeping women are watching. "Colonie Belge" sought to elicit personal memories from onlookers who had lived through the colonial period, as all could personally relate to the penal system and to bodily punishments, for having experienced them first hand or vicariously through their kin and friends: see Johannes Fabian, *Remembering the Present: Painting and Popular History in Zaire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p.68-70; Bogumil Jewsiewicki, *Mami wata: La peinture urbaine au Congo* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003); and Léon Verbeek, "D'une thèse de doctorat à la constitution d'une banque de données: Naissance d'un projet de

Several new penitential complexes opened at the time in remote rural areas, as the state turned to confinement as a way to relocate the unemployed population that illegally resided in urban centers. However, the relegation of prisoners in these remote prisons did not break their sense of connection with the city, as shown in one anecdote from Luzumu, the isolated prison camp in the Lower Congo where Mobutu would later confine student activists. In September 1955, a detainee at Luzumu named Pierre Kashama escaped during a wood chore around the prison. The wood squad's other prisoners talked the only soldier watching over them into going all together after Kashama. They knew where Kashama lived in Leopoldville, and if they could find him there and bring him back to the prison, the soldier would avoid being punished for his escape. The fact that the soldier was easily convinced by the prisoners' argument indicates a shared imagined geography about the proximity of the prison to the city. Unfortunately for the soldier, the trip from Luzumu to Leopoldville took long hours. When the small group finally arrived in the city, the police had been warned about their disappearance from Luzumu and easily arrested them. The soldier was dismissed from the army, the detainees were brought back to the prison, and Kashama remained missing.<sup>115</sup>

Prisons accommodated not only vagrants and peasants who had tried to escape taxes and forced cultures, but also Congolese of better means, as the archives of late colonial confinement indicate. Take the example of Boniface Matanda. On the day of his transfer from Leopoldville's prison to Kansangulu in September 1956, Matanda's

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recherché et d'une équipe," in Léon Verbeek (ed.). *Les arts plastiques de l'Afrique contemporaine: 60 ans d'histoire à Lubumbashi* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008), p.11-28.

<sup>115</sup> A. Hoebanx, letter to J. Cuypers, 19 Sept. 1955, G.G. papers, Archives Africaines (AA), Brussels.

belongings amounted to a pair of ripped trousers, an overworn short-sleeved shirt, a pair of used shoes, half of a belt and 320 francs.<sup>116</sup> It was not much, but it was nearly privileged compared to the mass of his fellow inmates who, in many cases, wandered around barefoot and rarely enjoyed access to monetary resources. The same week that Matanda arrived in Kasangulu, a Raleigh bike left the same prison and was transferred to Thysville, where its owner, Célestin Kasandji, had been sent to serve the rest of his sentence.<sup>117</sup> Another man who passed through Kasangulu in 1956, Paul Simba, entered the prison with a phonograph and five records, objects as indicative of insertion into the world of colonial consumption and material accumulation as a Raleigh.<sup>118</sup> As more and more *évolués* served time in prison in the 1950s, the penitentiary administration started to experiment with cellular incarceration, deemed too harsh for the “natives” but needed for “Europeanized” blacks. As a Belgian commentator noted, *évolués* made one of the most obvious publics for the penitentiary system, since they could best understand its logic and be affected by it.<sup>119</sup>

During Lumumba’s time in prison, several articles appeared in the press denouncing conditions of detention for Congolese. The Brussels periodical, *L’Afrique et le Monde*, published one of these articles under the title “The Congolese penitentiary system, as we have seen it.” A certain Boniface Stanislas Lupaka, an accountant and friend of Lumumba, signed the article, but it is not difficult to recognize Lumumba’s pen

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<sup>116</sup>, E.T. Van Petegh, *Liste des détenus transférés de la prison centrale sur celle de Kasangulu*. 22 Sept. 1956, G.G. papers, AA, Brussels.

<sup>117</sup>“Envoi vélo détenu Kasandji” 29 Sept. 1956, G.G. papers, AA, Brussels.

<sup>118</sup>“Effets de Paul Simba,” 30 Jan. 1956, G.G. papers, AA, Brussels.

<sup>119</sup> The judge in charge of Lumumba’s case resorted to a different, but in way related argument to deny him parole in August 1956: “Detention [...] constitutes the best social solution: in prison, Lumumba enjoys, thanks to his status as an *immatriculé*, Europeans’ favorable regime” (Verhaegen and Omasombo, *Patrice Lumumba acteur politique*, p.41).

behind the name of his friend.<sup>120</sup> The piece vehemently denounced the everyday use of physical punishment, the hygienic condition and comfort of dormitories, and the quality food which “a European would never serve to his dog.”<sup>121</sup> The attack was taken seriously by the colonial press, which still justified the hard conditions of detention as part of punishment. Around the same time, colonial authorities were inquiring about ways to correct the flaws of the penitentiary system, sending a mission through French Equatorial Africa, South Africa, and Kenya.<sup>122</sup>

The ebb and flow of modern life brought more educated Congolese behind bars in the 1950s. However, literacy did not exempt one from problems in the penitentiary universe, as the punishment log for Inongo prison in 1956 testified. The 1,177 carefully listed punishments for that year brought forward the contested terrain of the everyday in the prison. Daily floggings disciplined prisoners for a multiplicity of motives, including laziness, sexual intercourse, theft of food, refusal to eat, throwing of food in latrines or at a guard’s face, insult, laughing during the morning call, smoking, rumors about plans to poison detainees, and use of native medicines. Punishments also targeted a detainee who illegally possessed a bible, and others who were caught reading during work time, such as Camille Tumba who received two strokes for that reason on April 4 and then again four more strokes for having sent a clandestine letter on May 10.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> B.S. Lupaka, “Le système pénitencier congolais tel que nous l’avons vu,” in *L’Afrique et le Monde* (December 13, 1956), p.7.

<sup>121</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>122</sup> The mission was particularly inspired by the so-called pipeline to progress and civilization that the British had deployed in their counter-insurgency measures against the Mau Mau rebellion: “Etude du régime pénitencier et de l’organisation de la police judiciaire en Afrique Equatoriale Française, en Afrique du Sud et au Kenya,” s.d., G.G. papers, AA, Brussels.

<sup>123</sup> Receiving letters could also expose one to the rule of the lashes, as Donatien Nzita experienced in November 1957. Nzita was in prison for debts, and had been detained

Lumumba was more fortunate in his correspondence from prison. He wrote numerous letters to authorities, including King Baudouin, in order to have his sentence revised. These lengthy letters intertwined praises for the Belgian-Congolese community, detailed legal arguments, and autobiographical elements. Lumumba's epistolary activism certainly played a role in his ultimate liberation in August 1957, despite the hostility of a group of local colonials in Stanleyville. While in prison, Lumumba also completed a book manuscript, which he sent for publication to an editor in Belgium.<sup>124</sup> For political reasons, and following the negative advice from the Ministry of Colonies, the book was not published, only appearing in 1961 after Lumumba's assassination. In one of the letters he wrote to the publisher from prison, Lumumba composed an autobiographical sketch to be placed on the back cover of the book. He finished the letter with a strong euphemism about his status at the time of writing: "I have always been at the service of the Government, but I am presently on personal convenience leave. Without any indiscretion, I plan to embrace a liberal and independent profession. This will allow me to

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successively in Leopoldville, Inongo, and finally Basombo where the letter found him. His cousin, Joseph Manoma, followed on several messages that Nzita had sent him, one directly through the mail and the other two through detainees who had been freed from Inongo and had regained the colony's capital. Manoma's letter conveyed news about family – deaths, births, a nephew's expulsion from school – and addressed Nzita's demands for books, including a steno handbook, and for clothes. Manoma replied that it was impossible to send books to the prison and that, unlike in Inongo, he did not know anybody in Basombo who could have sneaked the books in; as for the clothes, Manoma simply refused to send any of his own, as Nzita "had played too many tricks" on him, and he finished the letter on this note: "I have learned from your friend Raphael that you signed convertible bonds and indicated my name as a guarantor, and also that you tried to have me killed by a witch doctor, of which you are very fond. For everything, I am thanking you indefinitely."

<sup>124</sup> Patrice Lumumba, *Le Congo, terre d'avenir, est-il menacé?* (Brussels: Office de Publicité, 1961).



focus my efforts on the evolution of my country and further collaborate with Belgians for the Congo's civilization and industrialization.”<sup>125</sup>

Lumumba's book read as a long epistle to the Belgian public and evidenced the same ambiguity that transpired in his letter to the publisher: a mix of veiled and sometimes even nearly cryptic critiques of colonialism on one hand, and advocacy against “racist nationalism” in favor of the “Belgian-Congolese community” on the other hand. In a certain way, and despite his failure to have the book published, Lumumba's ambiguity and artifice reflected his attempts at pragmatism, in a context of intense colonial censorship, at a moment in his life when he was trying to rebound after a personal catastrophe.

Even after having co-founded the Congolese National Movement, and having turned himself into the harbinger of national independence, Lumumba continued to negotiate and advance his political projects through letters to Belgian and other foreign correspondents. His personal destiny, but also the state of his country, would increasingly be intertwined in his messages posted through the mail or sent through other means. By the time of the Congo's independence in 1960, the *Ecole Postale's* former student had become a charismatic leader and a seasoned letter-writer, conversant with many genres of correspondences, and writing in French and at least three Congolese languages with ease. His political imagination followed the pen's contact with paper and the tempo of typewriting.

Typewriters, pens, and letters were crucial to Lumumba's understanding of the world and engagement with reality, and they marked the mutual encroachment of politics and sensibility in his life. The Brazzaville-based Spanish poet and journalist Luis Lopez

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<sup>125</sup> *Idem*, p.13.

Alvarez, who would qualify his friendship with Lumumba at the end of the 1950s as “romantic” and “bohemian,” often visited Leopoldville and his friend at the peak of the Congolese political turmoil. He remembered Lumumba’s days at the Congolese National Movement’s headquarters in May and June 1959 in the following terms: “In his small office at Kalembelembe [street], he was receiving people from every corner of the country, he was typing letters, he was giving orders to two activists who were busy duplicating pamphlets.”<sup>126</sup> At some point, Alvarez, a fellow traveler of nationalist activists in francophone Africa and beyond, visited Leopoldville and Lumumba nearly every weekend. However, their own relationship was also epistolary, and increasingly so after the contingencies of political struggles kept the two friends separated for important numbers of weeks. Alvarez mentioned for example the letters that the two exchanged during Lumumba’s time in jail from October 1959 to January 1960 and cited from Lumumba’s answer to the first letter that he had sent him from Stanleyville’s prison: “Reading you, seeing your handwriting again, I could represent your image in front of me, and by doing so, I could have an overview on our rambles and friendships,” Lumumba wrote. In a strong acknowledgment of the affective dimension of postal exchanges, he added: “You see that human love is irresistible!” The letter continued in the same sentimental tonality: “I know that the storm will pass and that I will have the pleasure to see you again and that, seated around a table, we will sing Freedom.” Finally, Lumumba concluded: “My dear Luis, my thoughts are flying towards you throughout my jail’s walls and, by the same love that has always united us, I embrace you fraternally.”<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Luis Lopez Alvarez, *Lumumba ou l’Afrique frustrée* (Paris: Cujas, 1964) p.46.

<sup>127</sup> *Idem*, p.55-56.

A few months later, in June 1960, days before independence, Lumumba was out of jail and again working from an office in Leopoldville. From that office, the nationalist leader negotiated the forming of the future independent government with the “resident-minister” Walter Ganshof van der Meersch. To facilitate the negotiations, Ganshof invited the Belgian peace activist Jean Van Lierde to the Congo. Another European friend of Lumumba, Van Lierde was expected to convince him to lower his political demands. He wrote down the following in his journal about Lumumba’s office at that time: “His mail is there in front of me, solid piles of expresses mixed with letters and telegraphs. You can feel that at the decision level, he is the only one to see everything.”<sup>128</sup>

If Lumumba’s memory survived after his death, it was in part because of the strength of his words. Lumumba evoked the coming of a strong Congolese state, that would rest on modernist notions of justice and therefore on the written word. After the declaration of independence, Lumumba’s verbal constructions collapsed; and his own end came through the interplay of teleprinters, coded messages, violations of legality, and sheer violence.<sup>129</sup> Yet, the experience of imprisonment played an important role in Lumumba’s trajectory and construction as a nationalist leader. Confinement increased

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<sup>128</sup> Cited in Jean-Claude Willame, *Patrice Lumumba: La crise congolaise revisitée* (Paris: Karthala, 1990) p.78.

<sup>129</sup> Two weeks before his transfer to Katanga and assassination, Lumumba was able to address a last letter to Rajeshwar Dayal, the UN representative in the Congo. The letter was filled with legal considerations, recalling the letters to his lawyers and to the colonial authorities during his previous periods of imprisonment in 1956 and again, but this time for political reasons, in 1959. After having described to Dayal the conditions of his confinement – barely nourished, wearing the same cloth for more than one month and forbidden to wear shoes – Lumumba detailed all the regulations that this regime violated. He concluded: “The legislation on the penitentiary regime is not respected. This is simply arbitrary confinement, and one should add to that the non-respect of our parliamentary immunity. I have described to you the situation and I ask you to inform Mister the General Secretary of the United Nations, who we thank for his intervention in my favor. [...] I remain calm and I hope that the United Nations will help us to get out of this situation. I am for the reconciliation between all the children of this country. I am writing this letter clandestinely and on bad paper.” In Jean Van Lierde, *La pensée politique de Patrice Lumumba*, p. 393.

Lumumba's involvement in the writing of letters, an involvement that was equally political and affective. To many regards, Lumumba's life appears as exemplary of the collective biography of Congolese *évolués* during the colonial period. Yet, his postal investment – the importance of letters as expressions of friendship and as tools of empowerment in the face of power's injustice – also strongly talked to the generation of Congolese students that came to age directly after independence.

## II – COLD WAR CORRESPONDENCES

Imprisonment in 1956 and 1957 exacerbated Lumumba's necessary reliance on foreign protectors and allies. Thousands of other Congolese shared his lot in Belgian Congo's jails. Writing and sending letters became crucial for many of them to maintain their social relationships and plead their cases in the face of the perceived arbitrariness of an alien judicial system. Letters reflected the role of imprisonment in the politicization of Congolese at the eve of decolonization. Lumumba, for example, often called the Belgian Congo an open-air prison. The many months he spent in detention probably helped him to build his understanding of colonial power. With the acceleration of political struggles at the end of the 1950s, international postal exchanges took another dimension. The individual motivations of letter writers became blurred with the collective stakes of political passions. Furthermore, the context of the Cold War also made its apparition at the time. Not all Congolese correspondents were fully aware of it, but the Cold War determined where their letters circulated and how they could be read and interpreted.

## **International Brotherhood and Postal Money Orders**

Lumumba's period of confinement kept him away from the many transformations of Congolese politics that happened at the same time. In July 1956, "Conscience Africaine," a group of Congolese Catholic personalities led by Joseph Malula and Joseph Ileo, advised by two Belgian professors from Lovanium University, published a manifesto calling on the Belgian government to prepare for the Congo's auto-determination. The manifesto was the first public intervention explicitly articulating nationalist claims in the colony, and it greatly impressed the population.<sup>130</sup> A few weeks later, ABAKO, the association that promoted the language and culture of Kikongo-speakers and would soon turn itself into a political party, published its own manifesto as a response to "Conscience Africaine" and went a step further by demanding independence, not only self-determination. Another development during Lumumba's incarceration was the Belgian government's authorization of African unions in January 1957, a demand supported both by ABAKO and Conscience Africaine. Labor was crucial in the evolution of colonial politics: it was the necessities of the labor market that pushed the Catholic Church and the colonial state to finally develop secondary education after the war and, finally, higher education for Congolese in the 1950s. It was also through opportunities opened by Belgian labor unions that many of the first Congolese to study in European universities were able to travel abroad; and it was in the corporations, which were the only legal labor organizations before the reform of 1957, that many of those who would

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<sup>130</sup> "Africans who couldn't read pasted treasured copies on their walls. The Manifesto was sold at a football game, and amazed Europeans watched African fans buy it up like pieces of Chickwanga bread." Alan Merriam, *Congo: Background of a Conflict* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1961), p.71.

become the first generation of Congolese politicians received their first experience of activism.

If prison had not stopped Lumumba's career in the postal administration, he might well have transformed the APIPO into a full-fledged union in 1957. Soon after his liberation in September, Lumumba became a prominent member in Leopoldville's colonized public sphere, and during the summer of 1958, he became a founding member of the Congolese National Movement (MNC), together with Joseph Ileo, a couple of students from Lovanium, and local figures among the city's *évolués*. A few months later, Lumumba was able to capture the leadership of MNC, the Congo's first political party, conceived as a platform to force Congolese independence from Belgium. Lumumba's efforts at building the MNC as a strong political platform, notably by securing the help of foreign actors, are well known; his work with labor unions is less familiar but similarly important. The two aspects combined reveal the multi-faceted postal politics of Lumumba in the context of the Cold War.

In December 1958, the colonial administration granted exit visas to Lumumba, Gaston Diomi and Joseph Ngalula and allowed them to attend the All-African People's Conference in Accra. Accra radicalized Lumumba and confirmed the end of his rhetoric about Belgian-Congolese community. During the Conference, Lumumba met with many important figures of the time, with whom he would maintain contacts during the two years that followed. These men included Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Touré, Frantz Fanon, the Kenyan trade-unionist Tom Mboya, and Irving Brown, the AFL-CIO Paris-based representative in Europe.<sup>131</sup> After Accra, Lumumba travelled to Brussels twice, to Ibadan,

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<sup>131</sup> Van Lierde included several letters written by Lumumba to Nkrumah and Sekou Toure: Jean Van Lierde, *La pensée politique de Patrice Lumumba*. See also Kwame Nkrumah,

and to Accra again for a second time. In Belgium, he became acquainted with communist activists, including the lawyer and former senator Jean Terfve. The MNC relied on Belgian communists to print pamphlets and produce propaganda material, such as party buttons, ties, and headscarves.<sup>132</sup> This part of Lumumba's international engagements would be significantly glossed over and exaggerated by his opponents. Ultimately, Lumumba's so-called communist allegiances determined Belgian and American assassination plots against him. It is less well known that Lumumba's encounter with Irving Brown in Accra also led to support for the MNC. That connection, more directly focused on labor activism, complicates oversimplified views on Congolese positions within the Cold War.

Directly after Accra, Lumumba and Antoine Ngweza, the MNC general secretary, wrote a letter to Brown, following on the "burning desire" expressed by Brown to see the MNC establish its own union. The letter was the first of a long series and inaugurated a long-lasting relationship between the AFL-CIO and Congolese labor organizations.<sup>133</sup> The American support notably materialized in the form of two Volkswagen cars that Lumumba used during the electoral campaign directly preceding the Congo's

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*Challenge of the Congo* (New York: International Publishers, 1967). On the relationship between Lumumba and Fanon, see Alice Cherki, *Fanon: A Portrait* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), p.142 and 146. On Brown at Accra, see Yvette Richards, *A Personal History of Race, Labor and International Relations, Conversations with Maida Springer* (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004), p.219.

<sup>132</sup> Patrice Lumumba, letter to Marcel Levaux, 21 Sept. 1959, Marcel Levaux Papers, Centre des Archives Communistes en Belgique (CArCoB), Brussels.

<sup>133</sup> A. Ngweza and F. [sic] Lumumba, letter to Irving Brown, 20 Dec. 1958, Irving Brown Files, 1943-1989, Box 6, The George Meany Memorial Archives (AFL-CIO Archives), Silver Spring, Maryland.

independence, in April 1960.<sup>134</sup> Lumumba soon chose Alphonse-Roger Kithima, whom he knew from his years in Stanleyville, to develop the MNC's labor organization, the National Union of Congolese Workers (SNTC). A former employee in the telegraph administration, Kithima would stay at the head of SNTC and then other labor federations for most of the 1960s. During his years as a union leader, he would maintain close contacts with Brown and others in the AFL-CIO, notably AFL's pan-African activist, Maida Springer.

Kithima never officially turned his back on Lumumba. He did not follow the path of some of his comrades inside the MNC, like Cyrille Adoula, his brother-in-law, fellow union leader and future Prime minister, and Joseph Mobutu, his close friend, future army colonel and dictator, who betrayed Lumumba at crucial moments in 1960. Each time I met the late Kithima in 2009 and 2010, he always insisted on his persistent fidelity to Lumumba, until his death and beyond, and also to Mobutu, from 1965 to the present. Yet, the former labor organizer was careful to avoid mentioning certain episodes in his life.<sup>135</sup> For most of the summer of 1960, in the troubled months from the Congo's independence in June to Lumumba's so-called neutralization by Mobutu in September, Kithima was travelling for SNTC in different African countries and the United States.<sup>136</sup> He claimed

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<sup>134</sup> "Prévisions budgétaires pour le lancement du Syndicat National des travailleurs Congolais," 14 April 1960, Irving Brown Files, 1943-1989, Box 6, AFL-CIO Archives, Silver Spring, MD.

<sup>135</sup> Such as his involvement with British secret services in December 1960, a few weeks before Lumumba's death: see Susan Williams, *Who Killed Hammarskjöld? The UN, the Cold War and White Supremacy in Africa* (London: Hurst & Company, 2011), p.134-135.

<sup>136</sup> Thomas Turner, in his brief biographical sketch on Kithima, suggests that the union organizer travelled inside Africa and to the US together with Patrice Lumumba: Thomas Turner, *Ethnogenèse et nationalisme en Afrique Centrale: Aux racines de Patrice Lumumba* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000), p.426-427. It is possible that Kithima travelled with the prime minister in Ghana, Guinea and Tunisia in August. However, it is very doubtful that Kithima and Lumumba were in the United States at the same time. As he told me during our



that his absence from Congo proved that he did not participate in the plots that led to Lumumba's assassination. The complex configuration of the Congo crisis could and did nurture suspicions about a possible involvement of Kithima in some of the anti-Lumumba schemes, but he took care to deny any such allegations.<sup>137</sup> Kithima's opponents also used his closeness to Irving Brown to claim that he was an agent of the CIA, as we saw in the Introduction with Papa Mayala. In the early 1960s, well-known Lumumbist figures like the Belgian lawyer Jules Chomé and Lumumba's former Minister of Information Anicet Kashamura spread these accusations against Kithima.<sup>138</sup>

The content of Kithima's correspondence with Brown and others at the AFL-CIO reveal the dramatization of postal politics in the aftermath of the Congo crisis of June 1960. The epistolary relationship between Kithima and Brown was particularly intense between September 1960 and November 1961, a time during which SNTC aggressively pushed for the creation of a unified federation of labor unions in the Congo. Demands for financial support constituted the major topic of discussion in Kithima's letters.<sup>139</sup> On September 18, 1960, freshly back from New York, Kithima communicated to Brown his

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encounters, Kithima was in New York when Lumumba was "neutralized" in September 1960 – this chronology is supported by the epistolary evidence from the AFL-CIO archive.

<sup>137</sup> A. Kithima, letter to I. Brown, 20 Nov. 1961, Irving Brown papers, AFL-CIO archives, Silver Spring, MD.

<sup>138</sup> See notably Anicet Kashamura, "Le labyrinthe congolais," in *Rencontres Méditerranéennes* IV-12 (December 1963), p.307.

<sup>139</sup> Jean-Claude Willame mentions the several travels of Irving Brown to the Congo in 1960 and presents him as one of the participants in the US conspiracy against Patrice Lumumba. Other sources (AFL-CIO archives and Maida Springer's souvenirs) actually suggest that Brown played a different role: opposing the demonization of Lumumba in US governmental circles and then later condemning his physical elimination as a counter-productive measure in the anti-communist struggle in Africa. Still, Kithima operated in his relationship with the AFL-CIO in a context of rumors in which Brown was believed to have spent millions of dollars in Leopoldville in August and September 1960 to convince nationalist members of parliament to discontinue their support of the prime minister (which some of them indeed did at the end of September, at a crucial point of the struggle between Lumumba and Kasavubu). On the alleged bribing maneuvers of Brown in August 1960, see Willame, *Patrice Lumumba*, p.379.

plan to create restaurants for Leopoldville's poor workers and unemployed. The AFL-CIO was to send Kithima financial help to launch the project as soon as possible, to prevent the Catholic and socialist labor unions from stealing his idea. In the months that followed, Kithima's letters carried many more demands of financial intervention from Brown and the AFL-CIO, some more oriented towards the support of SNTC's activities and others focusing on Kithima's personal needs.

On September 26, Kithima suggested that the AFL-CIO could give the SNTC a fourteen-thousand-dollar gift that the Congolese union would use to purchase the building that it was currently renting – a demand that he would repeat in letters dated from November 3 and December 8 1960, and from January 3, February 3, March 10, 11, and 14, 1961. On November 3, 1960, Kithima also asked Brown for three thousand dollars for his personal expenses. On November 30, he wrote, directly in English, “I am going through enormous difficulties. *Will you please send me one Thousand Dollars. Thanking you.*” On December 8, writing from London, Kithima adopted a more determined tone, telling Brown he was expecting “sixty-five one-hundred dollar bills” at the occasion of the coming meeting in Paris; then, a week later, his tone was more cautious: “a small amount, even two thousand dollars” could be given to him. Writing again in English on February 4, 1961, the labor organizer asked for one thousand francs, “*because I want to pay the rent and other things. The life is very dear at the present time so that your help will much be appreciated.*” Another letter sent on the same day requested a fifteen-hundred-dollar donation for the Congolese musicians labor union, which would serve to buy recording material. Letters often introduced American financial support as only a fair compensation for Kithima's work: requesting “a little help” on

March 10, 1961, the Congolese labor unionist wrote to his American sponsor: “Let me remind you that I could work as a state employee (*un fonctionnaire*) and earn a living as anyone else. But neglecting labor organizing would show a lack of maturity, because labor organizing will bring peace and progress to the country. I therefore sacrifice myself for that purpose without being paid for it.” A week later, on March 17, Kithima wrote to Maida Springer, still in English: “Dearest colleague, you must admire my mind of sacrifice. (...) If I realize the unity of trade union movement, this is certainly an astonishment for all trade union movement of the world. The AFL-CIO *surtout*, because I have many friends in this organization (...) I hope to receive a present from my colleagues of USA perhaps I’ll be invited on congress AFL-CIO at Miami in April.” The following day, another letter from Kithima reminded Brown of his promise to send a typewriter to Leopoldville. Then again, on April 15, “I am convinced that you will not fail to remind our friends of the gift that I should soon receive;” on the 17<sup>th</sup>, “I would ask you to send me by telex a return ticket from Brazzaville to Paris so we can meet and can talk over a period of three days” about the financial help that AFL-CIO should grant the SNTC; on the 25<sup>th</sup>, requesting twelve hundred dollars, “I have many expenses to face and this note constitutes a desperate call for you, my benefactor.” On May 13, “I want to inform you that I am myself very embarrassed to live; it becomes very difficult.”

Brown and the AFL-CIO certainly did not answer all these demands, but they still strongly supported Kithima and the Congolese trade unions throughout the 1960s. Maida Springer valued Kithima’s efforts towards labor unity in the Congo and believed it normal to contribute to his financial well-being.<sup>140</sup> Brown personally opposed the

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<sup>140</sup> Springer also defended the project to create a training center in Leopoldville, where union members would learn “how to answer the telephone and conduct a telephone

ongoing influence of Belgian unions, through the Congolese Catholic and socialist labor organizations, and he was interested in encouraging Kithima's rivalry with Adoula, even when US agencies would impose the latter as the Congo's new prime minister in 1961. Most importantly, Kithima benefited from the Cold War, and the close cooperation between the CIA and AFL officials like Brown and Jay Lovestone, another correspondent of Kithima. Brown was particularly worried about the disaffiliation movement from the pro-Western international federation of labor that trade unionists from Ghana, Guinea and Nigeria had launched in 1959. The support for Kithima served to expand American allegiances among African labor activists beyond Kenya and Tom Mboya, and contain communist and non-aligned tendencies in the continent. In many of his letters to Brown, Kithima stressed how much he suffered because of his alliance with American labor unions and the accusations that he was a puppet of the Americans – accusations that were made publicly during the pan-African meetings of labor unions and that were passed on in anti-American newspapers.

As many observers have noted, Lumumba did not sufficiently measure the constraints that the blocs' rivalry imposed on African decolonization. Lumumba believed he could play both the Eastern and the Western cards at the same time, as well as one against the other; but this only resulted in assassination plots against him both in Brussels and Washington. After Lumumba's murder in 1961 and until Mobutu's accession to the presidency in 1965, Congolese political entrepreneurs understood they had to learn the language of the Cold War. Yet, some were more skilled than others.<sup>141</sup> A degree of

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conversation", "how to make and keep appointments" and "how to receive visitors" (Springer, letter to Lovestone, 22 March 1962).

<sup>141</sup> Antoine Gizenga was among the most successful letter-writers. In the middle of the crisis between Lumumba and Kasa-Vubu at the beginning of September 1960, Gizenga wrote a

skepticism at the revolutionary fervor of some Congolese sympathizers is perceptible in the Soviet archives.<sup>142</sup> Similarly, some of the politicians who embraced the idioms of “freedom” and “anti-communism” sometimes seemed utterly unconvinced and untrustworthy to US officials.<sup>143</sup> Kithima was quite successful compared to other contenders in the search for foreign sponsors. Still, his rhetoric fluctuated over time and between his epistolary communications with Americans and his public interventions in the Congo.

Kithima and others greeted UGEC, the left-leaning union of Congolese students, at its creation in 1961, as a welcomed addendum to the labor movement. Student radicalism emerged in a context of ideological volatility, in which someone like Kithima

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letter to the Chinese government. Historians of the relationships between China and Africa report that, four days after Gizenga’s letter, Beijing replied by sending one million pounds to the Congolese politician. While Lumumba was under house arrest in Leopoldville, Gizenga was able to establish a legitimist government in Stanleyville. Foreign backers’ support allowed Gizenga to maintain his government for several months, until he agreed to participate in a process of reconciliation with Leopoldville’s authorities. On Gizenga’s letter to the Chinese government: see David H. Shinn and Joshua Eisenman, *China and Africa: A Century of Engagement* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), p.471, n.34.<sup>142</sup> See the Soviet documents in Lise Namikas and Sergey Mazov (eds.), *A CWHIP Conference Reader for the International Conference The Congo Crisis, 1960-1961, Washington, DC, 23-24 September 2004* (Washington: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2004), tome 2. See also Lise Namikas, *Battleground Africa: Cold War in the Congo 1960-1965* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), p.33-47.

<sup>143</sup> US officials also expressed doubts about some communications from Congolese politicians. Yet, they gave attention to even obviously eccentric requests. One such case concerns a letter written by André Lukusa, an obscure figure from Kasai, to John F. Kennedy. Lukusa announced to Kennedy his recent creation of a Congolese Democratic Party, which he introduced as modeled after the US Democrats’ charter. The post-independence chaos had pushed Lukusa to create the party: “After the Congo’s accession to independence, most of our political leaders [...] introduced a regime of terror in their respective provinces. [...] The population underwent flogging, arbitrary arrests, lack of freedom of speech and of movement, and massacres of intellectuals, etc. In one word: unquestionably a communist regime.” Lukusa asserted that his recently created party already enjoyed a following of 700,000 members. However, only Kennedy’s financial backing would allow the party to “spread the Democratic doctrine and to save the Congo from communism.” André Lukusa, Letter to John Fitzgerald Kennedy, 24 Feb. 1962, Documents related to the Congo and the Congo Working Group, 1960-1964, box 6, U.S. National Archives (NARA), College Park, Maryland.

could condemn Belgian labor organizations' interferences in the Congo as neocolonial maneuvering, and then, a few weeks later, declare that the concept of neocolonialism, as a perverse invention of Soviet imperialists, should be banned altogether. Still, words mattered. As Kithima mentioned several times in his letters regarding his own successes at convincing pro-communist activists to join SNTC, persuasion, not dollars, changed people's minds. The Congolese labor organizer's remark was not totally facetious: the ability to articulate potent vocabularies, more than consistency, contributed greatly to the success of organizations such as SNTC and UGEC.



**Figure 4: “The Fairy God Father of Tradeunion Paternalism in Africa.” 1961. Irving Brown Papers, AFL-CIO, Silver Spring, MD.<sup>144</sup>**

<sup>144</sup> That caricature, drawn from anti-Semitic stereotypes, illustrates the conflation of diverse ideologies and political histories in the postal politics of decolonization. The document is interesting for its representation of Kithima's signature sartorial attire. The leader of SNTC is shown with a suit and a bowtie. Next to him, L.L. Borha of the National Council of Trade

### **To His Excellency the President**

The politicians who seized power in the Congo in 1960 were successful letter-writers. They also received letters themselves, of course, and not only from their foreign correspondents. The archive of postal politics opens itself only to a fragment of the messages exchanged at the time of decolonization. Because of accessibility and conservation, letters sent from the Congo to Western countries are much more easily accessible than those that stayed inside the country. Regardless of the uneven documentation, Congolese also engaged other Congolese in postal relationships and used the mail to advance political and individual projects.

This is how Allan Meriam, an anthropologist at Northwestern University who lived in Lupapa, a small Songye village in the Kasai, described the postal enthusiasm of one his young informants:

“A. felt that as soon as independence was declared, money would be readily forthcoming, and one month before the date was busily preparing a letter and its carbon copies to be sent to Lumumba, Kasa-Vubu, Kalonji, and two or three others, asking for immediate disbursement of funds so that he could study in an American University – A. had had six years of grade school education.”<sup>145</sup>

Meriam was probably amused by A’s letters. However, A’s expectations were not totally unrealistic. As we will see later, with independence, access to higher education, and more particularly to foreign schools, became a reality for many more Congolese, including some who had not finished high school. Meriam did not cite from his informant’s letters.

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Unions of Nigeria and his more “traditional” outfit reinforce the image of “Europeanized” distinction of the Congolese.

<sup>145</sup>Alan Meriam, *Congo: Background of a Conflict*, p.178-179. Meriam’s description of Lupapa in 1959 and 1960 is full of contradictions. He judged that the villagers’ “world view” was “almost non-existent,” and at the same time, he described daily gatherings at his interpreter’s house, where “ten to twenty young men” would religiously listen to the news program every morning and evening on the village’s only radio: *Idem*, p.175-177.

Yet, what he conveyed about their writing process – the carbon copies – suggests a formalism that probably extended to the style of the composition.

Congolese wrote to their authorities with deference, recycling formulas previously reserved for Belgian colonials. The letters that people like Meriam's informant wrote to ministers and senior civil servants in Leopoldville are not easily retrieved in today's Kinshasa, but we can access the archives of other bureaucratic entities that claimed sovereignty over the former Belgian Congo. The paper trail produced by the short-lived Popular Republic of the Congo is a good example. Established in Stanleyville from August to November 1964, with Christophe Gbenye as president, the Popular Republic established its authority over territories "freed" by the Simba rebel fighters. In Chapter Seven, I will further focus on the details of the history of the rebellions, but I want to focus here on the archival dimension of that episode. During the military operation that crushed the rebellion, Belgian soldiers and mercenaries seized the Popular Republic's paper work and administrative correspondences. This material found its way to the CRISP, a Belgian research center that closely followed political developments in the Congo. The CRISP also received documents directly from Congolese actors. The animators of the African section of the research center – Jean Van Lierde, the friend of Lumumba that we have already encountered; Benoit Verhaegen, a professor at the University of Lovanium who also played an important role in the history of the student movement; and Jules Gérard-Libois, a Left Catholic intellectual who was acquainted with many Congolese labor activists and politicians – used their personal networks to collect archival documents. In the last years of the 1950s, they had acted as diligent allies of Congolese nationalists, and they counted friends in all the camps that were in



confrontation after independence in Leopoldville. Every year, from 1959 to 1969, the CRISP published an annual collection of documents on the Congo that provided to the public a synthesis of the events of the past year as well as copies of selected papers and statements from Congolese political parties and institutions. Verhaegen, established in Leopoldville, was very active in political circles during the first year of independence; while Van Lierde and Gérard-Libois were engaged in correspondence with Congolese activists that confused the realms of research, friendship, and political engagement. The power in Leopoldville did not always encourage the archiving and publication of work conducted by Belgian researchers. In 1962, Pierre Wangata, the member of the Congolese Political Institute with whom we opened this chapter, wrote to Pierre Duvivier, a former Belgian colonial agent who had served as Patrice Lumumba's principal private secretary in July 1960 and who had turned himself into a Congo scholar. Wangata was back in Leopoldville, but he was sorry to announce to Duvivier that it would be impossible to send him the political documentation that he had promised him: "postal secret is not respected and the security services does not let anything true."<sup>146</sup> The CRISP was usually more successful in its collection of documents. Congolese actors often valued its work and impatiently waited for its yearly publication. During the Congolese rebellions, Gérard-Libois himself travelled to recently "liberated" areas and participated in the collection of the documents abandoned by the rebel activists. The Belgian researcher had a sensibility for the minutia of the rebels' bureaucratic apparatus, and he collected many documents that inform us about the postal practices during the few months of the rebellion.

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<sup>146</sup> Pierre Wangata, letter to Pierre Duvivier, 21 Jan. 1962, Jean Van Lierde Papers, CEGES, Brussels.

A set of documents is particularly instructive to that regard: the letters of applications that people spontaneously sent to the new rebel authorities. Examples of letters showed different profiles: one writer hoped to be hired as “chief of music” into the army, others as police commissioners, some as typists and accountants, and many as clerks (*commis*). Some candidates typed their letter, others wrote long-hand. Most magnified their addressees and opened their applications with sentences like, “Allow me to divert you one moment from your heavy duties to introduce a job candidacy in front of you” and, “I have the honor to come very respectfully in front of your high kindness to ask you the favor to obtain me a provincial direction inside the public service.” Job candidates showed different degrees of literary sophistication in their letters, but they shared similar backgrounds, having usually completed a few years of post-primary schooling. Their letters indicated their mastery of French, a language that connoted late colonial modernity and education. Despite the armed rebellion that had brought leftist and nationalist politicians into power, many candidates reproduced older forms of address and did not write differently than they would have to a Belgian colonial official. Yet, others hybridized the language of colonial bureaucracy with revolutionary elements. They mentioned their own history of political engagement and sacrifices as Lumumbist followers, victims of “imperialism’s mercenaries,” and asked to be compensated with a job appointment. “I have been a militant in the MNC/L since 1960, I have suffered a lot (*j’ai beaucoup subi la souffrance*),” one candidate wrote. Another: “I have been threatened several times by the Imperialists’ gangs for proclaiming that the people’s voice was like god’s voice” and “this is the reason why I come to introduce my candidacy to you and that I believe that you will not fail to relieve me of the thirst that I suffer in my

heart (*soulager mon Cœur de la soif que je souffre*).” Some candidates provided credentials to their professions of faith – “my references can be requested through the hierarchical ladder to the MNC’s revolutionary committee of my municipality” – while others directly conveyed their nationalist fervor in their writing: “Following the cleaning out of colonialist and imperialist lackeys, I am convinced that our Province urgently needs to hire truly nationalist employees. And as a fellow nationalist, I took the liberty to respectfully send you my candidacy, despite the hundred others that [you] will probably have already received. I count on our sympathy as a true nationalist, and I am sure that you will receive me with open arms. Long live the Popular Army of Liberation! Long live his Excellency Mister the President! Long live his government!” The letters’ signatures reflected positioning vis-à-vis the new regime: “Your humble servant,” “Your future servant,” and “Your gifted candidate” translated older relationships of power, while “Your poor nationalist,” “Your brother in arms,” and “Your committee member of MNC/Lumumba” gestured towards a revolutionary tone. The most emblematic lexical innovation concerned the adjectivization of Lumumba: “Please accept, Mister President, my most profound and best Lumumbist greetings.”<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Jean-Denis Lindeko, letter to Christophe Gbenye, 20 Sept. 1964; Evariste Mussa, letter to Monsieur le commissaire en chef du gouvernement révolutionnaire, 19 Aug. 1964; Adolphe Pharay, letter to Président Provincial du Gouvernement de Libération Populaire, 24 Aug. 1964; Edouard Christian, letter to Président Provincial du gouvernement révolutionnaire, 28 Aug. 1964; Jean-Marie Satidi, letter to Ministre de l’Intérieur, 24 Aug. 1964; Raphael Epenge, letter to Monsieur le Commissaire en chef, 25 Aug. 1964; Pierre Katumbutele, letter to Président provincial chargé au ministère provincial des affaires intérieures, 23 Aug. 1964; Simon Abasi, letter to Monsieur le ministre des affaires intérieures à Stanleyville, s.d.; Augustin Baelo, letter to Son excellence monsieur le président, 25 Aug. 1964; Kilongozi Gilbet, letter to Kingese Alphonse, s.d.; Florent Likumu, letter to Monsieur le Président du gouvernement révolutionnaire de la PR, 26 Aug. 1964; Valentin Mandefu, letter to Monsieur le président, 11 Aug. 1964. All the letters are part of Jules-Gérard Libois Papers, Contemporary History Section, Royal Museum for Central Africa (MRAC), Tervuren.

Job applications belonged to a specific genre. Letters that Congolese sent to foreigners often followed different rhetorical strategies than letters they sent locally. Yet, the very language in which job candidates wrote testified of the continuum of postal politics. International mail at the time of decolonization was rooted in postal routines that dated from the period of Belgian colonialism and that had been honed in written communications with present and future employers, the state, and its local challengers. The lexical innovations of the job letters and of the minutes of political gatherings also found their ways in communications within progressive transnational postal exchanges. Members of MNC/L also conveyed their “most Lumumbist regards” to foreign addresses.<sup>148</sup>

### **Interested in Friendly Correspondence with the Whole World**

“MOUYEKE DOMINIQUE, Ecole Nationale de Formation Para-Médicale et Médico-Sociale J. J. Loukabou, B.P. 1215, Pointe-Noire, RÉPUBLIQUE CONGO-BRAZAVILLE. Interested in friendly correspondence with the whole world”<sup>149</sup>

“Dear comrade,” Théodore Nanshakale, a student at the University of Elisabethville, began his letter in February 1960 to Marcel Levaux, a member of the Belgium communist party. “We share the same aspirations and the same convictions to radically suppress man’s exploitation by man. I have read enough Marxist theory. Now, I need to act [...]. Show me the methods to use, the principles and the rules to follow. I am impatiently waiting for your booklets.” The message concluded with an enthusiastic

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<sup>148</sup> Bruno Mutabo and Jules Diya, letter to Cercle d’Education Populaire, 19 June 1964, Jules-Gérard Libois paper, Contemporary History Section, MRAC, Tervuren.

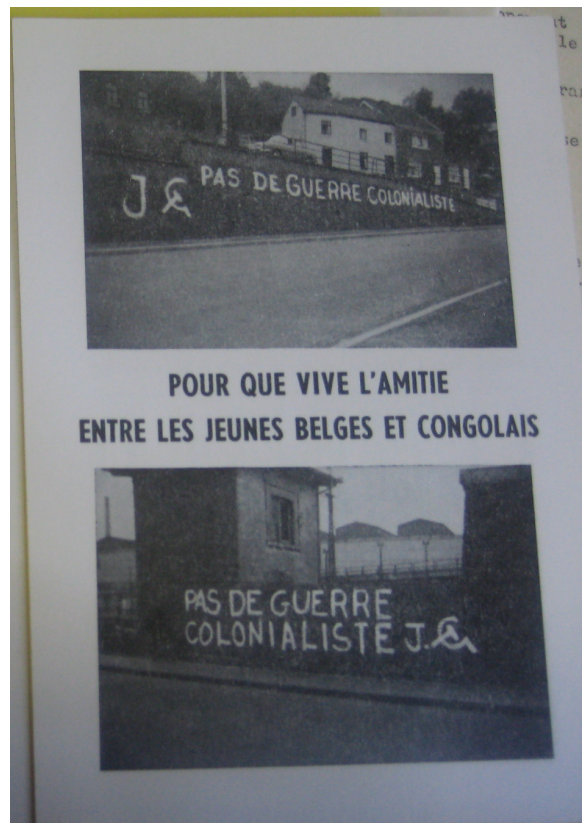
<sup>149</sup> “Pen Friends,” in *World Student News* 24, 3-4 (1970), p.32.

“Sincerely, warmly, I am shaking your hand, comrade.”<sup>150</sup> Writing this first letter to Levaux in February 1960, Nanshakale had probably found his contact information on the back of one of the communist pamphlets that increasingly circulated in the colony after 1958, despite official censorship. In the second part of the 1950s, Belgian communists clarified their condemnation of colonialism and greatly intensified their propaganda activities in central Africa. Starting in 1955, they published a periodical *L’Eveil du Congo*, in which they promoted African nationalism and introduced revolutionary ideals to the Congolese, by translating *the International* for example. The Party’s anticolonial platform developed even more after the Congolese “political awakening” of 1958 and Leopoldville’s riots in January 1959. The Party helped publish new titles, newspapers and leaflets directed at aspiring young Congolese. Yet, colonial censorship still greatly interfered with Belgian communist hopes to create a connection with the Congolese. Establishing direct postal communications became even more important in that context for Belgian communists. Even after independence, postal exchanges remained primary in Belgian communists’ attempts to connect with Congolese. In August 1960, for example, the Belgian Communist Youth produced a postcard that showed images of slogans against the military intervention in the Congo – “No colonialist war” – painted on walls by communist youth militants in Liège. The postcards included a written message “to all the youth of Congo,” in which the Belgian communists denounced the hatred between blacks and whites created by European capitalists and praised the Soviet Union as an ally in the total liberation of Africa. We don’t know if or how these postcards reached their intended addresses in the Congo. However, that initiative testified to the numerous

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<sup>150</sup> Théodore Nanshakale, letter to Marcel Levaux, 19 Feb. 1960, Marcel Levaux papers, CARCOB, Brussels.

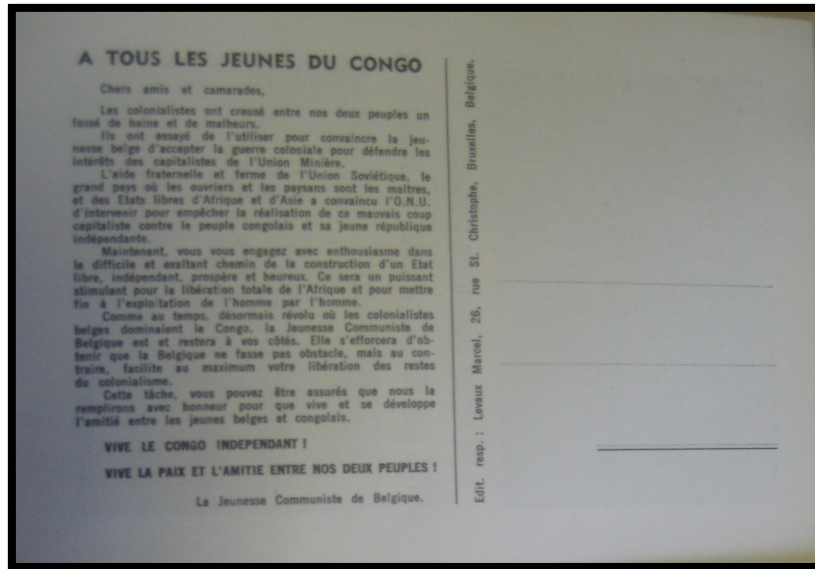
opportunities that foreign actors offered to Congolese letter-writers. Incidentally, with their message to the Congolese youth, Belgian communists offered an ironic coda to a long tradition of colonial postcards about the Congo in Belgium, marked by racial stereotypes, ethnographic erotica, and the reproduction of exotic scenes and landscapes.<sup>151</sup>



**Figure 5: “Pour que vive l’amitié entre les jeunes belges et congolais.” Postcard. 1960. Congo Papers, CARCOB, Brussels.**

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<sup>151</sup> See Christaud M. Geary, *In and Out of Focus: Images from Central Africa, 1885-1960* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, National Museum of African Art, 2003).



**Figure 6: “A tous les jeunes du Congo.” Postcard. 1960. Congo papers, CARCOB, Brussels.**

“This is amazing when I think about it: I was writing to Jean-Paul Sartre, and he was responding,” professor Wamba-dia-Wamba told me when we met.<sup>152</sup> Congolese correspondents often took the initiative to address foreign interlocutors. When he was writing to Sartre in the early 1960s, Ernest Wamba Dia Wamba was still a high school student at the Baptist mission of Kimpese in the Lower Congo. Young students like Wamba and Nanshakale engaged foreign celebrities, political parties, embassies, administrations, as well as international organizations through the post for various reasons. They were writing to satisfy their intellectual curiosity and in an attempt to develop their knowledge of politics and world affairs. They were also seeking support for associations and youth groups in the Congo, attempting to get their share of Cold War money. A great number of letters concerned requests for scholarships and enquired about the conditions to attend foreign universities and join the thousands of their peers

<sup>152</sup> Ernest Wamba Dia Wamba, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 7 Nov. 2010.

dispersed throughout the world in pursuit of education after 1960. Like Nanshakale, some writers posted their letters in attempts to start conversations on political ideology and strategy. Writing also allowed young Congolese not only to escape the constraints of ideological containment, but also to imagine fraternal bonds beyond racial lines with seemingly unbigoted “comrades.”<sup>153</sup>

Moving between countries and continents for some of them, participating in international correspondences for others, Congolese students constructed a place for themselves outside colonial assignments in the early 1960s. The progressive constitution of the student movement as a leading force behind the Congo’s quest for the “second independence” came together with students’ participation in international networks of letter exchange. In 1963, while a great number of nationalist politicians had already fled from Leopoldville to Brazzaville, a group of young union members and students constituted the Pan-African Youth Movement (that would change its name a few years later into The “Afro-World” African Association for Friendship Between Peoples). In one of its annual reports, Afro-World would define its goal as facilitating fraternal, friendly and lively correspondence between young people in the Congo and their peers throughout the world.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Writing from Leopoldville to his fellow party-members in Brussels, Eddy Poncelet, the Belgian CP’s correspondent in the Congo in August 1960, evoked young Congolese unemployed workers’ enthusiasm for communism. He reported to his comrades that he was overwhelmed with demands from young Congolese willing to study in the USSR, but also convinced that joining a communist organization would then allow them to marry a white girl (Eddy Poncelet, letter to Marcel Levaux, 17 Aug. 1960, Marcel Levaux Papers, CARCOB, Brussels).

<sup>154</sup> “Rapport des principales activités de l’Association d’Amitié entre les Peuples en 1968,” 10 Feb. 1969, International Union of Socialist Youth (IUSY) papers, International Institute of Social History (ISSH), Amsterdam.



Postal politics vernacularized international relations for the Congolese during the 1960s. Statesmen and powerbrokers wrote letters, but so did students and clerks. Decolonization and its difficult realization had placed the Congo within a multiplicity of new global maps. It had introduced pan-Africanist, third-worldist, and various hemispheric geographies as so many projections available for young Congolese. Letters offered venues to learn about the world and experiment as members of an African nation. Communication with foreigners sanctioned this new political subjectivity. With decolonization, new types of foreign interlocutors also started to make their way into Congolese politics. European anticolonial activists seemed to take the place that the “Americans” occupied in Congolese imagination in the 1930s and 1940s, as the foreigners who would bring liberation from Belgian rule. A significant difference was that, contrary to the fantasized American liberators, anti-colonial activists from the 1950s and 1960s could be reached by the mail of course, but also sometimes in person. Luis Lopez Alvarez, the Spanish poet and journalist who visited Patrice Lumumba from Brazzaville every weekend during several months in 1959, was often the only white person in the bars where Lumumba brought him during long nights. Lopez was struck by “the avidity for knowledge of all the Congolese youth at the time” and the variety of questions from Lumumba’s young comrades that he had to answer.<sup>155</sup> One year later, in the middle of the Congo crisis, Eddy Poncelet, a comrade in the Belgian Communist youth and a member of the party’s colonial group, was among the few Belgian communists who travelled in the Congo, immediately after independence, to support Lumumba’s government and help create a new Congolese political party gathering all Left nationalists. Arriving in Leopoldville in August, Poncelet immediately wrote to his

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<sup>155</sup> Luis Lopez Alvarez, *Lumumba ou l’Afrique frustrée*, p.45.

comrades in Brussels about the enthusiasm encountered both in governmental circles (where, after just a few days in the Congo, he was offered the position of Assistant General Secretary in the Ministry of Youth and Sports), and more generally among the youth:

“I notice that we have a huge moral credit and that there is not any prejudice against us. At the contrary! (...) Since yesterday, I am facing the procession of individuals who have heard about my arrival, I am not sure how. They come to “shake my hand,” to ask for a study fellowship, to inquire about how to easily get a white girl to marry in Belgium, etc.!!! It is touching and really nice. I don’t dare anymore to set a foot in some parts of the *cit * – not because I am afraid of expressions of hostility – but because I am surrounded by tens of unemployed youth gather around me and all want to make me visit their “plot” – how to satisfy everybody?...”<sup>156</sup>

It was indeed difficult for European communist and anti-colonial activists to satisfy all the demands that young Congolese addressed to them in person or through the mail. Some written requests sounded eccentric to Belgian communists for example, but they carefully took pains to provide some answers, at least for as long as they believed that their efforts at proselytism could produce effects in the context of the Cold War (i.e. until the time of their disinvestment from Congo c.1965). The access to white women, for instance, was an issue that was repeated in letters that Congolese wrote to each other, as in the correspondence between Louis Mandala and Pierre Wangata, as well as in letters that they sent to European addressees. This genre of correspondence pointed to the gendered, and in this case sexual, dimensions of postal politics.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Eddy Poncelet, letter to the Belgian Communist Youth, 17 Aug. 1960, Marcel Levaux Papers, CARCOB, Brussels. Poncelet had been in charge of establishing contacts with Congolese students in Belgium after 1958. He notably contributed to organize the travel of Congolese students to the international youth festival of Vienna in 1959: Eddy Poncelet, personal interview, unrecorded, Ostend, 18 Feb. 2011.

<sup>157</sup> Merriam suggests that many Congolese men in the few months before independence believed that the transition to power would mean access to white women (Alan Merriam, *Congo: Background of a Conflict*, p.202).

The marital and sexual dimension of postal politics sometimes expressed itself in very direct ways, as in the case of letters written to the Belgian Communist Party. In other cases, Congolese penned their demands in more oblique ways. On February 1, 1964, a young nationalist militant, Michel Samuel Lokomba addressed such a request to the International Union of Socialist Youth. Writing directly in English, Lokomba started his letter by thanking the IUSY for sending him its newspaper. He then continued with his request:

For providing my English knowledge, I wish to be in correspondance with a young socialist wife, about twenty-five old, who speaks english and is able to write both english and french. I'm twenty-nine. In this world where the problems became very complicated, I think the colloquy is indispensable. My better interest inclines on the questions relating the development of the young countries. Will you, henceforth, note my new adress: B.P. 870 Stanleyville (Cong Leo). I hope reading you back quickly.  
Yours sincerely.<sup>158</sup>

Lokomba was eager to improve his command of English. He made a few lexical mistakes. Where he wrote “wife,” he probably meant “woman.” His letter signaled the gendering of postal exchanges at the time of decolonization. While postal archives count few letters written by Congolese women, Lokomba’s request for a “socialist wife” was in line with the “sexual decolonization” of a generation of young Congolese men who aspired to international travels and access to romance and intimate relationships with European women.

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<sup>158</sup> Michel Lokomba, letter to I. Swivey, 1 Feb. 1964, IUSY Papers, IISH, Amsterdam. At the age of 28, Lokomba had been active in labor activism and received training at the Institut d'Etudes Sociales in Louvain; in Bukavu, just before independence, he had been a member of Kashamura's CERE and one of the redactors of the party's journal *La Verite*; at the time of independence, he had moved to Leopoldville to work in the direct entourage of Patrice Lumumba; the hunt of Lumumbists after September 1960 had seen him relocating to Stanleyville.

It is difficult to know the exact emotional investment in letters on the part of Congolese writers like Lokomba. Some letters expressed the frustration and excitement with postal communication, its temporality, and the uncertainty of its effectiveness; others read like messages in a bottle and seemed to indicate that their writers were more interested by the performance of the postal communication than by the satisfaction of their demands.

### Headshots

The poetics of postal exchanges was defined by young Congolese who saw in mundane scraps of papers opportunities to enlarge their networks, sources of support, and access to the world. “Mister President,” wrote Eugène Gbana Lissasy to the International Union of Socialist Youth in Vienna on June 5, 1965,

It is with great pleasure that I take the liberty to send you these few lines. One day, around noon and under Africa’s scorching sun, I was coming back from school. On my way, I picked up two dirty scraps of paper on which, to my great surprise, the name of IUSY was mentioned. As I am interested in the topic, and in front of such a coincidence [*devant tel aléa*], I read and reread so many times these few lines dotted with dirt but that talked to me about African socialism.

Further in his letter, Lissasy explained his interest in socialism:

If I don’t need to inform you, Mister President, that Africa is a continent like any other, and that other African countries already observe that socialism, I don’t see why Congo/Leopoldville should be deprived of its share [*se doit en être privé de sa part*].

The Congolese people [...] has already bitterly noted that its authorities take advantage of its ignorance to protect itself against the observance of African socialism. At the same time, the people is decided that the day will come when tyranny, imperialism and neo-colonialism will end.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Eugène Gbana Lissasy, letter to *Monsieur le Président de l’IUSY*, 5 June 1965, IUSY Papers, IISH, Amsterdam.

Lissasy did not define or specify what he meant by African socialism – even though he clearly stated what was not. Socialism appeared in the letter as a secret formula, kept away from the Congolese people, but that could be obtained with the help of foreign supporters. Despite references to the Congolese people, the letter presented itself as the initiative of an individual, who found the information about the IUSY and interpreted it by himself. Lissasy signed the letter, “Your new follower.” He was ultimately willing to secure his individual affiliation with the International Union. As usual with such letters, Miguel Angel Martinez, the General Secretary of IUSY replied that the organization was not accepting individual memberships. Yet, after he was done with his school exams, Lissasy wrote a second letter to the IUSY at the end of June. In this second letter, the young Congolese student wrote that he was willing to create a socialist youth group, which could become a member of IUSY, but all the “boys and men” he had contacted “are afraid to hear the word ‘socialism.’ All are afraid of police’s clubs [*matraques*], handcuffs and cruelty.” Lissasy did not doubt that he would succeed in the future to gather a group of twenty young men for his socialist association. Meanwhile, he hoped to maintain a relationship with the IUSY that would help him to “get the Congo out of its stagnation and out of the hands of its tyrannical government.” Therefore, despite Martinez’s response that IUSY only engaged with other youth movements and not individuals, Lissasy continued to phrase his request as one of personal assistance, in a quest of personal intellectual self-advancement that recalled Lumumba’s thirst for distant learning programs in the 1950s:

With the moral support [of IUSY], if I have to take classes on socialism and communism, I will take these classes, in order to convince [*convaincre*] the Congolese masses’ ignorance, starting with my closest friends. I would mostly

like to receive propaganda books and journals that I will seriously study myself at home.<sup>160</sup>

Individual letter-writers like Lissasy often failed to secure the support of foreign organizations, despite their efforts and repeated attempts. As an internationally recognized association, UGEC was more successful. The Congolese Student Union became affiliated with different international federations and organizations, including IUSY. Congolese students in Central Europe, especially in Hungary and Yugoslavia – where the president of the local section of UGEC in the mid-1960s lived in the “Patris Lumumba” student house in Belgrade – participated in the International Union’s activities in Vienna and benefited from the logistical support of the International Union in producing their letterhead correspondence papers and in other militant expenses. Between 1963 and 1965, Philippe Luyeye, the personal secretary of President Kasa-Vubu and the president of FEBESCO, a Congolese federation of boy-scouts, also maintained close contacts with IUSY, travelling to a seminary of socialist youth in Israel in 1964 and working on the creation of an association of “young democratic socialists” in Leopoldville. Some signatures and letterheads had more weight than others. For example, when youth militants of Lumumba’s MNC wrote in 1964 to Belgian progressives – asking among other things to receive “the list of the all the books that deal with socialism” – they could reasonably expect an answer.<sup>161</sup>

Postal communications did contribute to the organization of Congolese politics. However, initiatives like that of Lissasy are emblematic of the sense of possibilities that

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<sup>160</sup> Eugène Gbawa Lissasy, letter to Miguel Angel Martinez, 25 June 1965, IUSY Papers, IISH, Amsterdam.

<sup>161</sup> Bruno Mutuabo and Jules Diya, letter to Cercle d’Education Populaire, 19 June 1964, Jules Gérard-Libois Papers, MRAC, Tervuren.

young Congolese saw in postal opportunities, even if they did not directly yield actual measures of material support. In that regard, it is interesting to consider the evolution of the rhetoric used by Victor Mafwa, another young Congolese who tried to secure the support of IUSY through three letters sent between 1962 and 1964. In contrast to Lissasy, Mafwa entered into contact with IUSY after he had already created a youth organization, the National Association of Congolese Youth (ANAJECO). Mafwa did not hesitate to exaggerate the importance of ANAJECO. In a first letter on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1962, he mentioned that the association counted close to 9,000 members, and that it had been established to fight against “our young Republic’s capitalists who don’t like when the youth tastes the air of freedom.” Like Kithima in his letters to Irving Brown, Mafwa asked for a plane ticket that would allow him to go to Vienna to discuss with UISY comrades their “long experience of leadership in the socialist domain.”<sup>162</sup> On February 19, 1963, Mafwa was again soliciting a plane ticket for Vienna, “because the success of the socialist youth of the world depends of us, the leaders.”<sup>163</sup> Finally, on November 20, 1964, Mafwa sent yet another letter, making again the case for the necessity of his travel to Vienna:

We are reminding you that ANAJECO until today encounters many difficulties to maintain close contacts with you, and this is why we are asking you to send us immediately a return ticket to allow our President to arrive to you without any delay, in order to solve the different problems on IUSY’s extension [in the Congo] and on a few problems regarding our guiding lines at a global level.

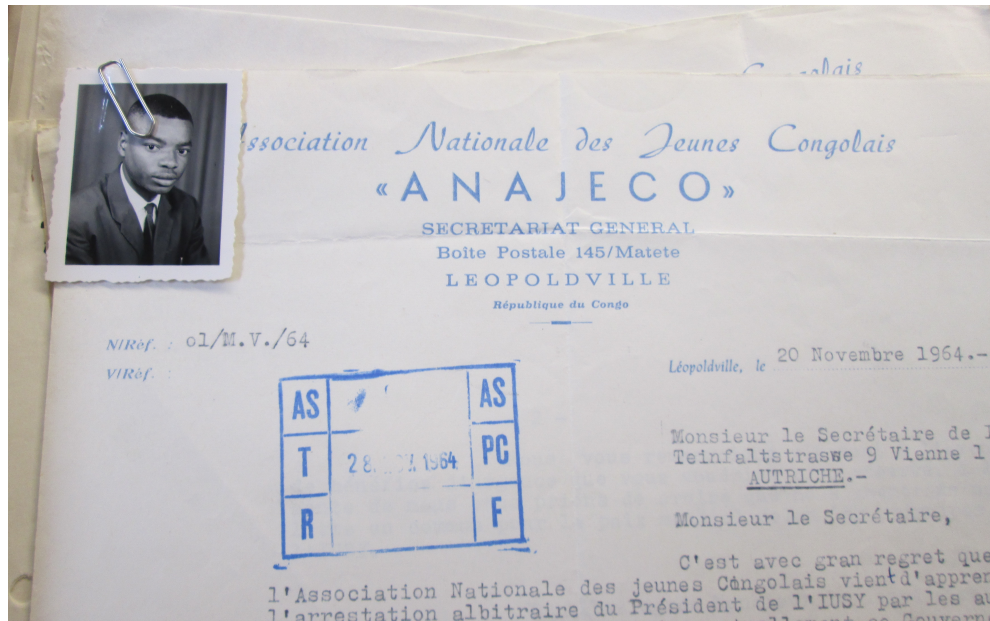
Mafwa did not alter significantly the content of his message to IUSY – he still remained vague on his association’s actual activities and on its ideological program. Yet, he joined to the letter a photograph of himself, which I read as an attempt to amplify his credibility

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<sup>162</sup> Victor Mafwa, letter to Monsieur le President de l’Union Internationale de la Jeunesse Socialiste, 1 May 1962, International Union of Students (IUS) Papers, IISH, Amsterdam.

<sup>163</sup> Victor Mafwa to Per Assen, 19 Feb. 1963, IUS Papers, IISH, Amsterdam.

and reinforce his postal credentials, even though once again, IUSY did not comply and did not send him a ticket to Vienna.



**Figure 7: Victor Mafwa to Per Assen, 20 Nov. 1964, IUS Papers, IISH, Amsterdam**

Young Congolese often inserted photographic headshots inside their envelopes to foreign addressees. This gesture personalized contacts with strangers and provided a visual support that individualized and reinforced the authenticity of their postal exchanges. However, these pictures were striking by the stiff postures of their photographed subjects, and by their nearly generic character, even in exchanges that, unlike Mafwa's letters to IUSY, happened in a context of clear comradeship. These photographs of formally dressed young men seemed to suggest associations with the figure of the *évolué* and its most well-known incarnation, Patrice Lumumba. The attachment of young Congolese to the memory of the assassinated independence leader was also aesthetic, and several informants recalled in 2010 adopting in the 1960s Lumumba's hairstyle, goatee and glasses.



## Lumumba as Stamp



Figure 8: Seychelles postal stamp. 1961. Author's collection.



Figure 9: Mongolian postal stamp. 1961. Author's collection.



Figure 10: Moroccan postal stamp. 1961. Author's collection.

“The dead Lumumba ceased to be a person and became Africa in his entirety,” wrote Sartre in 1963.<sup>164</sup> The English translation of *La pensée politique de Patrice Lumumba*, the volume for which Sartre wrote his long piece on the Congolese martyr of independence, was

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<sup>164</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Colonialism*, p. 113.

published as *Lumumba Speaks*. Yet, many of the texts gathered in the volume were actually not speeches, but letters. These included the *Letter to Pauline*, Lumumba's last message to his wife, which became the *Urtext* of Congolese nationalism and an object of imitation for generations of activists.<sup>165</sup>

In a pamphlet against Mobutu, published in 1971 by Maspero in Paris and quickly banned by French authorities after pressures from Kinshasa, Cléophas Kamitatu, a foreign ally of Lumumba, questioned the new regime's rehabilitation of the assassinated Prime Minister. As we will see in Chapter Four, Mobutu indeed proclaimed Lumumba a national hero on June 30, 1966, to appeal both to Congolese Lumumbists, including the students, and to foreign pan-Africanists. Challenging the sincerity of the measure, Kamitatu asked: "When will we see postal stamps to commemorate [the national hero Lumumba]?"<sup>166</sup> After Mobutu's accession to power in November 1965, the country released several series representing the president and the new order of power he sought to embody, but Lumumba was indeed left out of Congolese postal production. Yet, several foreign countries had released Lumumba stamps during the 1960s. These stamps contributed, together with photographs, posters, and paintings, to the ubiquitous

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<sup>165</sup> Following a cycle of conferences organized by Laurent-Désiré Kabila's office in 1999 – the so-called Quinzaine d'éveil patriotique – Michel-Ange Mupapa published a leaflet around the *Letter to Pauline*: Michel-Ange Mupapa, *Les sources congolaises d'inspiration patriotique (La dernière lettre de Lumumba à Pauline)* (Kinshasa: CEDI, 2000). A former student activist in FEANF, UGEC, and UJRC, Mupapa dedicated his leaflet to fellow student activists from the 1960s, including Valérien Milingo (one of the main organizers of the demonstration in June 4, 1969), Moreno Kinkela (François Mayala's brother and student leader in 1971), and professors Mutamba Makambo and Elikia Mbokolo (two of Congo's most well historians and fellow activists with Mupapa in France in the 1960s). Published a few months before the assassination of President Kabila, Mupapa's leaflet was part of the efforts of some supporters of the new regime to articulate a political ideology on a Lumumbist basis. The letter established an emotional connection between the struggle for independence in 1960 and the struggle for full sovereignty in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

<sup>166</sup> Cléophas Kamitatu, *La grande mystification du Congo-Kinshasa: Les crimes de Mobutu* (Paris: François Maspero, 1971), p.177.

presence of Lumumba during the decade.<sup>167</sup> They created the global purchase of Lumumba's heroic stature, which certainly reinforced his irresistible attraction among Congolese youth. Those who travelled and studied abroad were constantly reminded of Lumumba's popularity in pan-Africanist and third-worldist circles. The Lumumba stamps produced in the 1960s and issued in socialist and non-aligned countries (Morocco, UAR, Mongolia, Ghana, Guinea, the Seychelles, Egypt, and Congo-Brazzaville) contributed to the stylized image of Lumumba, pictured with a penetrating gaze and signature glasses, forming a horizontal axis, and the alignment of goatee, mustache and parted haircut on a vertical axis; the bowtie appears as a pregnant addendum to the image. Not less significantly, several of the stamps associate Lumumba's face with maps of the Congo and of the Congo in Africa – a projection into the world that inspired Congolese students. This image was later revisited and radicalized by the Cuban artist Alfredo Rostgaard in a poster he made in 1972 for the Organización de Solidaridad de los Pueblos de África, Asia y América (OSPAAL), the Cuban third-worldist association created after the Tricontinental Conference of 1966 in Havana.

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<sup>167</sup> The popularity of Lumumba's photographic representations predated his assassination. During the electoral campaign in April 1960, for example, MNC activists planned to cover a significant part of the propaganda expenses by the benefits generated from the selling of Lumumba's photographs: "We have recently made the experience to launch on the market personal photographs of Mister Lumumba. As a test, we ordered 30.000 photographs that were sold in 8 days. Not only were these photographs bought at the price that we imposed, i.e. 10 francs a piece, but some merchants bought rather important numbers of these photographs and resold them three times the price" ("Commentaires sur les prévisions budgétaires du MNC," 14 April 1960, p.2, Irving Brown Papers, AFL-CIO, Silver Spring).



**Figure 11: Alfredo Rostgaard, “OOSPAAL Lumumba poster,” 1972**

As Isabelle de Rezende has shown in her work, the “visual genealogy” of Lumumba – the “spectacle” that the postal worker, associative leader and politician created through his dress and look, the many photographs that circulated of him, and Lumumba as “icon” and “man-image” – is complex.<sup>168</sup> “Lumumba’s visual embodiments,” De Rezende writes, “expressed tensions among his many selves: statesman, martyr, *évolué*, family man, and the gregarious, socially successful man or charismatic leader. Each of these images simultaneously contained the others.”<sup>169</sup> Stamps were another venue in which “Lumumba’s personage as a complex global sign” developed. Postal services throughout the world used iconic photographs of Lumumba and the visual elements – the clothing, glasses, and haircut – that De Rezende analyzes as indexes of

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<sup>168</sup> Isabelle de Rezende, “Visuality and Colonialism in the Congo: From the ‘Arab War’ to Patrice Lumumba, 1880s to 1961,” Ph.d. dissertation, The University of Michigan, 2012.

<sup>169</sup> *Idem*, p.345.

the ambiguous status of the colonial *évolué*, which Lumumba's visuality embodied to perfection and transcended at the same time. As highly mobile devices, stamps made the junction between the image that Lumumba created of himself and that talked to the historical experience of late colonialism in the Congo, on one hand, and the global image of Lumumba detached from its initial "historical frameworks, from historicity," on the other hand.<sup>170</sup>

Stamps also connected the postman and the freedom fighter. They showed the arch of postal politics in the Congo, from the "brokering of knowledge" of Nancy Hunt's Protestant letter-writers, to the global imagination of postwar rights-seeking and freedom-aspiring *évolué* petitioners studied by Jean-Luc Vellut, to the piles of cold-war correspondences in the archives of the AFL-CIO, the IUS, the IUSY, the CRISP, and the Belgian Communist Party.<sup>171</sup> Postal politics – the real and imagined mediation of foreign actors, institutions, and bodies of thought, in the articulation of ideologies, construction of knowledge about the self and the other, and development of emancipation projects – defined a major mode of apprehending the world for literate and illiterate Congolese.

As an institution that marked and defined the experience and subjectivities of the colonized, the post invites comparisons with the prison. Foucault's famous rhetorical question at the end of *Discipline and Punish* comes to mind: "Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?"<sup>172</sup> If we put the post at the center of a similar triangulation, the third institution should obviously be the school. This chapter paves the way for the history of education that follows. Like the post, a tool of control and censorship, as

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<sup>170</sup> *Idem*, p.396

<sup>171</sup> Nancy Rose Hunt, "Letter-Writing, Nursing Men," and Jean-Luc Vellut, "Le Katanga industriel en 1944."

<sup>172</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Random House, 1975), p.227-228.

well as a venue for self- and collective-advancement, colonial education served both domination and emancipation.

As a metaphor for “strategies of extraversion,” this exploration of episodes in postal history orients other chapters. It provides a framework to understanding the Congolese student movement in the 1960s as an interface with the world.<sup>173</sup> If the post is the metaphor, Lumumba is the example. As many other historians have underlined, there is a strong religious and biblical dimension to the reception of Lumumba by Congolese publics. It can be argued that many Congolese students in the 1960s approached the memory of Lumumba like the exemplary lives of saints and martyrs of Christian history. The *letter to Pauline* was an object of imitation, while the postal achievements of Lumumba set standards for children and grandchildren of the *Bena Mukanda* in the 1960s. Lumumba’s example to Congolese students was based on ideals of sacrifice and martyrdom for the nation, attention to the powerless and the oppressed, pride in the culture and dignity of black men and women. In this regard, Lumumba resembled other African “fathers of independence”: Nkrumah, Nyerere, Touré, Kenyatta, Senghor, Kaunda, and others. Yet Lumumba began not as a teacher, labor activist, or poet-politician. He began as postal employee.

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<sup>173</sup> Its function as an interface place the student movement in tension with a central question in the history of colonialism and modernity in Africa: the question of the mediations between state and society in Africa, between foreign hegemonies and internal political dynamics, and also between global capitalism and indigenous traditions of accumulation, as well as among various and sometimes contradictory ethic registers, epistemologies, and cosmologies: see Jean-François “Africa in the World;” Jane I. Guyer and Samuel M. Eno Belinga, “Wealth in People as Wealth in Knowledge: Accumulation and Composition in Equatorial Africa,” in *Journal of Africa History* 36 (1995), p.91-120; Karin Barber, “Popular Arts in Africa,” in *African Studies Review* 30-3 (1987), p.1-78; and Anthony Kwame Appiah, *In My Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).



**Figure 12: Guinean postal stamp. S.d. Author's collection.**



**Figure 13: Soviet postal stamp. 1961. Author's collection.**



**Figure 14: Ghanaian postal stamp. S.d. Author's collection**



**Figure 15: UAR postal stamp. S.d. Author's collection.**



**Figure 16: Congo (Brazzaville) postal stamp. 1966. Author's collection.**

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A generation after the death of Montesquieu, the French revolutionary Louis Antoine de Saint-Just complained about the “prolixity of the government’s correspondence.” Noting that it was “impossible to govern without brevity,” he added: “The demon of writing is waging a war against us.” Ben Kafka, who studies how



paperwork turned into “a technology of political representation” at the time of the French Revolution, notes that theorists “always preferred the voice of power over its written traces.”<sup>174</sup> Kafka’s observation is anchored in a specific context, marked by Jacques Derrida’s critique of logocentrism in European philosophy.<sup>175</sup> Not directly connected to methodological debates in African studies, the critique of logocentrism is still reminiscent of long-time disinterest in African written archives. And as we saw in the previous chapter with Tamar Golan, analysts of African politics have often privileged the oral over the written. However, particularly at the time of decolonization, letters played a crucial role in the workings of power in Africa.

Ben Kafka’s first observation is that a letter always “creates the possibility of misaddressing it.”<sup>176</sup> Unpredictability, together with the possibility of misunderstanding, was certainly a dimension in Congolese experiences of postal politics. Letters sometimes did not reach their addressees, and letter writers often failed to reach their goals and obtain what they expected from their correspondence. As we will see, postal exchanges played a crucial role as spaces of projection and interaction where young Congolese articulated a sense of themselves and of the world.

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<sup>174</sup> Ben Kafka, *The Demon of Writing: Powers and Failures of Paperwork* (New York: Zone Books, 2012), p.11. The citation of Saint-Just features on pages 52 and 53.

<sup>175</sup> Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967).

<sup>176</sup> Kafka, *The Demon of Writing*, p.10.

Part II  
Paths to School



## Chapter 3

### A Colonial Horizon of Expectation

*The road, of course, was a dangerous place. The danger of and the anxiety about the road to school, was particularly that it might be blocked. Moving on the road to school was an adventure, thrilling and scary largely because it might at a moment be taken away. It was the possibility, first of all, that the journey might be cut short before the goal was reached that made the journey anxious.<sup>177</sup>*

*Look at the shoes that we are wearing today. For me, it is still a symbol of wealth: we had to work to buy shoes. Our children were born with shoes, but we, in our youth, we had to walk 350 kilometers barefoot to go to school.<sup>178</sup>*

Leopoldville radiated with prosperity on the day of its State University's fiftieth anniversary. Triumphant arches of flowers added to the capital's luxuriance and a multitude of foreign guests reinforced the already cosmopolitan fabric of a city where Africans, Indians, Europeans, and Chinese lived among each other in an "Orientalist" atmosphere. Despite Leopoldville's affluent landscape, news of an imminent conflict between Germany and Russia loomed large over the celebrations, while competing groups took the University's anniversary as an excuse to attack Belgium's tutelary control and display their own antagonism over the future of a liberated Central Africa. The year was 2026.

Such was the background to Paul Salkin's novel, *Le problème de l'évolution noire*

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<sup>177</sup> Rudolf Mrazek, *A Certain Age: Colonial Jakarta through the Memories of its Intellectuals* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), p.127.

<sup>178</sup> Daniel Palambwa, personal interview (with Daniel Tödt and Cécile Michel), recorded, Kinshasa, 17 Aug. 2010.

[The problem of black evolution], published in Paris in January 1926.<sup>179</sup> A Belgian colonial magistrate in Elisabethville, Salkin projected future problems, such as the League of Nations' incapacity to foster peace in the world, and the threatening "internationalization of nationalism" in Egypt, India, or China.<sup>180</sup> A work of fiction, *Le problème de l'évolution noire* featured the first elaborate description of a Congolese university with its black students and professors. The book appeared several decades before the actual development of higher education in the Congo. The first non-religious Congolese to attend a university in Belgium was Thomas Kanza in 1952, and Lovanium, the colony's first university, opened only in 1954.

This chapter opens space to begin considering the long gestation of Congolese higher education from the fiction of Paul Salkin to the Catholic achievements of the 1950s. A parallel between Salkin's fictional construction and the actual institutional genesis of the colonial educational apparatus runs through this chapter and the following. Furthermore, biographical fragments and personal memories of Congolese who were "born without shoes" and who travelled the road from primary schools to university punctuate my discussion of colonial education. In reading about and listening to these fragments, I found inspiration in Rudolf Mrazek's ruminations on the history and memory of the colonial elite in Java. As Mrazek notes, schools acted as roads: unschooled commoners stayed on the side of the road, while a more privileged minority inhabited it, "pregnant with future," enjoying "a new space of transparency, of

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<sup>179</sup> Paul Salkin, *Le problème de l'évolution noire: L'Afrique Centrale dans cent ans* (Paris: Payot, 1926).

<sup>180</sup> See Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.55-136.

straightforward (or soft-curved) correctness, promise of safety, and even power.”<sup>181</sup>

The road is not a distinctive figure in Salkin’s fiction per se, but it is a relevant entry point to understand his imagination of a Congolese university in the rather destitute field of 1920s’ Congolese schooling. Salkin’s book visualized the telos of colonial education. It placed for the first time the idea of the university further along on the road of colonialism. I am not inclined to look at this fiction as a set of more or less accurate (pre)visions of the future. Instead, my reading replaces Salkin’s expectations in their context of production: his “futurology” talked to his present above anything else.<sup>182</sup>

Colonialism, the historian T.C. McCaskie wrote, authorized the effects of modernity, but did not author them.<sup>183</sup> In the same vein, a colonial reformer such as Salkin did not ghostwrite Congolese discussions of politics, imaginations of the world and utopias in the 1920s or afterwards. We should try to follow Salkin on paths that he travelled himself.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Rudolf Mrazek, *A Certain Age*, p.130-131.

<sup>182</sup> Paul Salkin, *Le problème de l'évolution noire*.

<sup>183</sup> “In short, modernity in Asante was about the authorization of culturally specific historical conjunctures of enunciation and address, and within this project the exercise of colonial power acted upon pre-existing terms of reference and inference and set new ones.” T.C. McCaskie. *Asante Identities: History and Modernity in An African Village 1850-1950* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p.122.

<sup>184</sup> *Le problème de l'évolution noire* was received with many reserves in Belgian colonial circles after its publication in 1926. It seems to have fallen into a relative oblivion in the decades that followed. Since then, the novel has been rediscovered several times. Starting in 1966, Crawford Young opened his *Politics in the Congo* with a commentary on the novel, but only to underline the unforeseen and precipitated aspect of decolonization in the Congo, which happened much earlier than foreseen by Salkin: Crawford Young, *Politics in the Congo: Decolonization and Independence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967). A few decades later, Marc Quaghebeur tried to make room in studies and histories of Belgian colonial literature for Salkin. Quaghebeur revisited Salkin in the context of his patrimonial approach of the colonial past and the search for a shared cultural identity between postcolonial Congo and Belgium based on this patrimony and a peripheral position vis-a-vis the francophone core. He went on to republish Salkin’s novel with an introduction by Isidore Ndaywel e Nziem, Congo’s premier historian. Ndaywel rightly pointed to some limitations and stereotypes of the novel but included it as part of Congolese patrimony and insisted on Salkin’s premonitions, including the imagination of a Congolese university decades before the creation of Lovanium: see Marc Quaghebeur, “Des textes sous le

His novel remained silent to the ways in which the colonized made their own history, but it certainly opened wide the book of Belgian colonial anxieties and revealed the panorama against which Congolese journeyed towards school and modern politics.<sup>185</sup> Anti-clerical, free-thinker, and philo-socialist, Salkin diverged significantly from more orthodox authors in the colonial library. Yet, his imagined future pointed to a widely shared horizon of expectation, which brought together higher education, radical politics and authenticity. The present chapter dissects this horizon from the moment of its articulation in the 1920s to its reformulation by young Congolese students in the 1950s. By doing so, the chapter seeks to interrogate an order of possibilities that appeared in the aftermath of the First World War and remained potent well into the era of Congolese student protests and decolonization.

Talking with Congolese who were schooled during the colonial period, I sometimes found echoes of Mrazek's comment about the colonial specificity of elite schooling in Java:

As this was a colony, and as most of these journeys were being cut short, the dynamics of the adventure, the anxiety of the journey, surpassed what might have been experienced elsewhere. The modern passions of education culminated here, in this place and at this time.<sup>186</sup>

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boisseau," in *Papiers blancs, Encre noire: Cent ans de culture francophone en Afrique Centrale*, ed. by Marc Quaghebeur and Emile Van Balberghe (Brussels: Labor, 1992), p.VII-XCIV; and Paul Salkin, *L'Afrique Centrale dans cent ans: Le problème de l'évolution noire* (Brussels: Archives et Musées de la Littérature, 2001). Finally, the sociologist Marc Poncelet has offered a first attempt to situate Salkin in the context of the debates about theories of colonialism in the 1920s and 1930s: see Marc Poncelet, *L'invention des sciences coloniales belges* (Paris: Karhala, 2008).

<sup>185</sup> On colonial anxieties in the Belgian Congo, see Nancy Rose Hunt, "Rewriting the Soul in a Flemish Congo," in *Past and Present* 198 (2008), 185-215; Jean-Luc Vellut, "Le Katanga industriel en 1944: Malaises et anxiétés dans la société coloniale," in *Le Congo belge durant la Seconde Guerre Mondiale* (Brussels: Académie Royale des Sciences d'Outre-Mer, 1983), p.493-556; Benoît Verhaegen, "Communisme et anticommunisme au Congo," in *Brood and Rozen* 4-2 (1999), p.113-128.

<sup>186</sup> Rudolf Mrazek, *A Certain Age*, p.128.

However, some Congolese also told a story of boredom, injustice, racism, and bigotry, when remembering colonial education in the 2000s. Their experiences and memories – as well as the very hardships they braved while walking down to school – color my own perspective on paths to schools in the Belgian Congo.

### A New Beginning

Paul Salkin joined Belgian Congo's magistracy as a deputy judge in Elisabethville in September 1912. At the age of 43, he was significantly older than most first-term colonials.<sup>187</sup> Typically, state agents entered the career in their early twenties and retired in their early forties. Why did Salkin abandon the comfort of his bourgeois life in Belgium to embark on a late African journey?<sup>188</sup> Colonial literature's clichés come to mind. In the early 1910s, images of tropical colonial territories as places of escape for Europeans running away from debts, crimes and failed romances still held strongly.<sup>189</sup> Let's, however, imagine a different scenario and turn to another colonial cliché: the literary appeal of Africa.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> On colonial administration in the Congo, see Marie-Bénédite Dembour, *Recalling the Belgian Congo: Conversation and Introspection* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000) and Lewis Henri Gann and Peter J. Duignan, *The Rulers of Belgian Africa, 1884-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

<sup>188</sup> In Belgium, he left behind his wife, the portraitist Maria Lambiotte and their teenage sons Jacques and Emile – the latter to become a famed pop art painter. The Salkins lived in the prestigious Kortenbergh abbey, outside of Brussels, and not far from Tervuren and its Congo Museum.

<sup>189</sup> On Belgian colonial literary imagination, see Pierre Halen, *Le petit belge avait vu grand: une littérature coloniale* (Brussels: Labor, 1993) and Pierre-Philippe Fraiture, *Le Congo belge et son récit francophone à la veille des indépendances sous l'empire du royaume* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003).

<sup>190</sup> Pierre Halen has convincingly argued about the importance of the reading of Stanley's *In Darkest Africa* and other travel narratives on the Congo published at the end of the 19th century in the relationship of the Belgian French-speaking bourgeoisie with Africa. These readings, and particularly the memory of these readings, transformed Africa into a place of



The writing of two books punctuated Salkin's colonial career. Both books displayed the marks of a careful, attentive and well-read amateur scholar. Published in January 1920 with a foreword by the Belgian Marxist sociologist Laveleye, Salkin's first book, *Etudes africaines*, attempted to advance scientific colonialism and built on its author's mastery of a vast and eclectic body of texts.<sup>191</sup> The book advocated a compromise between indirect rule and protectorate: African societies should develop along their own lines and not follow the destructive path of Christianization, industrialization and Europeanization. A large ethnographic corpus and some historical works on Sudanese and West African kingdoms fostered Salkin's sympathy for "Bantu civilization." However, that latter concept remained rather abstract in his writings: a lost entity and coherence that Europeans had the moral duty to restore.

In 1925, Salkin was promoted to the rank of effective judge at Elisabethville's court. The following year, the Parisian publisher Payot released *Le problème de l'évolution noire*, with a foreword by Maurice Delafosse, the famous French ethnographer and former administrator in West Africa.<sup>192</sup> The Belgian Congo and Katanga had changed a lot in the six years that had passed since Salkin had published his

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pure literature, adventures, fantasies, and furtive initiations for Belgian readers: see Pierre Halen, "A partir des images du Noir en Belgique, perspectives," in *Images de l'Afrique et du Congo-Zaïre dans les lettres belges de langue française et alentour: Actes du colloque international de Louvain-la-Neuve (4-6 février 1993)*, ed. by Pierre Halen and Janos Riesz (Brussels: Textyles éditions, 1993), p. 337-348.

<sup>191</sup> Paul Salkin, *Etudes africaines* (Brussels: Larcier, 1920).

<sup>192</sup> The preface was one of the last texts that Delafosse published. He died three months after Salkin's book came out. On Delafosse and French colonial humanism, see Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism Between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005); Emmanuelle Sibeud, *Une science impériale pour l'Afrique: la construction des savoirs africanistes en France, 1878-1930* (Paris: EHESS, 2002), p.58-62, 93-104, 171-183, 245-272; Jean-Loup Amselle and Emmanuelle Sibeud (dir.), *Maurice Delafosse: Entre orientalisme et ethnographie, l'itinéraire d'un africaniste, 1870-1926* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1998).

first book. The pace of industrialization accelerated considerably and the *Union Minière* had grown to boast impressive quantities of copper exported every year.<sup>193</sup> The title of the novel directly betrayed how Salkin felt about these developments. “Don’t be fooled,” wrote Delafosse in his foreword, this book “is not a work of imagination nor a prophetic novel.” The French ethnologist reminded Salkin’s readers about recent problems in Central Africa, and he explicitly cited the development of Kibanguism in the Congo and the general nuisance of the “Bolshevik movement.” In that context, the book had to be read as “a carefully thought-out insight on the result of a social evolution that sees its normal progression affected by maladjusted forces.”<sup>194</sup>

*Le problème de l’évolution noire* opened with the opposition between two groups of students and political activists in Central Africa. “Europeanized” students wore glasses, ties, fedoras and varnished shoes. In their eyes, only an African elite could rationalize the black continent, and they aimed to enforce the civilizing mission, the rule of the law and industrialization. The University of Leopoldville was their stronghold. On the other side, “nationalists” were recognizable by their necklaces, bare feet and tunics. They struggled to liberate Africa from European domination and to restore the Bantu civilization. “Africa will be African, as Europe is European and Asia is Asian” served as their motto. Their bastion was the University of Tounkeia, dedicated to the “agrarian, fraternal and religious genius” of the black race. The opposition between the “Europeanized” and the “nationalists” during the celebrations of the University of Leopoldville’s anniversary occupies several chapters in Salkin’s book and introduces the novel’s dialectic heart. The book then follows a Belgian professor of colonization at the

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<sup>193</sup> See Bruce Fetter, *The Creation of Elisabethville, 1910-1940* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1976).

<sup>194</sup> Maurice Delafosse, “Préface,” in Paul Salkin, *Le problème de l’évolution noire*.

University of Leopoldville and his British cousin as they embark together on a trip throughout the region after attending the University's anniversary. The cousins visit a large plantation owned by a greedy African capitalist; a Catholic monastery, managed by a white missionary and dedicated to the reconstruction of native societies; and the small farm of an African-American returnee who was living in utter simplicity, teaching local children to recover "the forgotten values of their race." The two travelers also sojourn at the king of Bakouna's court, a model of a semi-independent protectorate where European and African geniuses meet in maintaining order and prosperity. The multicultural city of Tounkeia, home to the nationalist university, marks the last stop in the cousins' trip. When rumors about the imminent war in Europe reach town, African soldiers of the *Force Publique* seize this opportunity to stir a general uprising. Civilized Africans in turn abjure their love for Europe, take off their Western clothes, and instantly convert themselves to Ngoism and African traditionalism. In the last pages of the novel, the king of the Bakouna proclaims himself the emperor of all Bantu people, promising his protection to foreigners but reclaiming for himself all sources of authority. "All blacks have the same blood," he solemnly announces, "and whites don't know how to rule blacks."

The novel rewrote well-known Congolese figures as fictional characters. Simon Kimbangu constituted a major source of inspiration for Salkin's writing on Ngoism. Kimbangu was a former Baptist catechist in the Lower Congo. During a few months in 1921, he had acted as an independent preacher and healer, gathering an impressive number of followers. Denounced as a dangerous agitator by Catholic missionaries, Kimbangu was arrested in September 1921. A condemnation to death, ultimately

commuted to a life sentence in prison, and the deportation of many of his followers did not directly alter the enthusiasm for Kimbangu in the Lower Congo and Leopoldville. The colonial press vehemently denounced the prophet and explained his spectacular success with allusions to conspiracies, the communists, and Marcus Garvey.<sup>195</sup>

Paul Panda Farnana was another source of inspiration for Salkin. Like Kimbangu, Panda was born in the late 1880s in the Lower Congo. Instead of a Baptist education, Panda studied as a young boy at Boma's *colonie scolaire*, the first state school established in the Congo by the Leopoldian regime. In 1900, an officer in the colonial army brought Panda to Belgium. At a time where there were probably no more than ten Congolese students in Belgian schools, Panda received a secondary education in Brussels and then studied agronomy and agriculture in Vilvoorde and in Nogent-sur-Marne, in France. Hired as an agricultural agent, Panda moved back to the Congo in 1909 and worked in several locations in the Lower and Upper Congo until returning to Belgium in 1913. A volunteer in 1914, he was arrested and detained in Germany for the duration of the war.<sup>196</sup> After the war, Panda created and became the president of the *Union Congolaise*, an association that took inspiration from W.E.B. DuBois's National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and that gathered the handful of Congolese who lived in Belgium at the time. Panda participated in the first national colonial congress in Brussels in December 1920 and in the second pan-African congress in London, Brussels and Paris in August 1921. In public speeches, Panda advocated for

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<sup>195</sup> See Robert A. Hill, *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers: Volume X: Africa for the Africans, 1923-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>196</sup> See Frans Bontinck, "Mfumu Paul Panda Farnana, 1888-1930, Premier (?) nationaliste congolais," in V.Y. Mudimbe (ed.), *La dependance de l'Afrique et les moyens d'y remédier: Actes de la 4e session du Congrès international des études africaines, Kinshasa* (Paris: Agence de coopération culturelle et technique, 1980), p.591-610.

the development of professional and academic education in the Congo, the training of Congolese doctors, the intellectual promotion of native authorities and their participation in the government of the colony.

A third figure that Salkin fictionalized is Stefano Kaoze. Born near the Tanganyika Lake in Eastern Congo, Kaoze became, in 1917, the first Congolese Catholic priest of the colonial period. Trained by the White Fathers, a missionary society, Kaoze was a close collaborator of Monsignor Roelens with whom he travelled throughout the colony, in Belgium and in Italy.<sup>197</sup> In published letters and essays, Kaoze defended the dignity of Bantu culture and its possible accommodation with Christianity. Panda and Kaoze met in Belgium in 1920 and seemed to have fraternized. Newspapers associated them both in attacks against the so-called leniency of colonial authorities toward black agitators. However, Salkin portrayed them as antagonistic figures, using Panda as the inspiration for Europeanized Africans and Kaoze as the inspiration for the so-called nationalists who sought to restore Bantu civilization.

Salkin's colonial reformism offered a complex statement on colonial fiction and reality. He announced his ambition to contain his book's fictional dimension on the cover page, with a title evoking more an essay than a novel. Delafosse's prefatory comments also reminded the reader of the proper genre in which to place Salkin's project: a serious work on colonial governance camouflaged as fiction. The novel was therefore a simple pretext. Accordingly, the fictional dimension of the book, Salkin's imagination of the future, was limited by the imperative to make sense in the present. All the characters, events, and places in the novel betrayed straightforward analogies with their sources of

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<sup>197</sup> Zana Aziza Etambala, "Stefano Kaoze, sa formation, son ordination et son voyage en Europe (1899-1921)." In Marc Quaghebeur et al. (eds.), *Congo-Meuse: Volume 6 - Aspects de la culture à l'époque coloniale en Afrique Centrale* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008), p.17-61.

inspiration in the 1920s. In other words, Salkin did not believe in the intrinsic potential of literature. Yet, he used the form of the novel to denounce the lack of consistency of his own world's reality. The specter of revolt in his book's plot indeed unveiled what the writer considered as the illusion of assimilation and the fiction of colonial control in Belgian Congo.

The interplay of fiction and reality broadened the novel's horizon of expectation. As suggested by Reinhart Koselleck, the modern concepts of change and history emerged from a particular configuration of the tension between the past as remembered in the present, or space of experience, and the future made present, or horizon of expectation.<sup>198</sup> *Le problème de l'évolution noire* symbolized the coming together of a new sensibility to politics in the Congolese context. Not a sensibility exactly commensurate with Koselleck's modernist examples, in which experience totally loses its ability to determine the content of expectation, but a sensibility still marked by the rhetorical pre-eminence of future over past. That sensibility would fully blossom after the Second World War, at the occasion of the colonial state's embrace of social and economic planning. Yet, it emerged earlier, at a time when Belgian authorities, in an attempt to break apart from the stigma of the Leopoldian Free State, tried to profile the Belgian Congo as a rationally administered territory where the state acted as the balancing power between economic interests and the native population. Salkin fit well within an expanding web of individuals, agencies and apparatuses that worked to re-create and re-imagine the colony in the 1920s. Divided along ideological lines, their discursive interventions shared an investment on the future at the expense of a sometimes silenced past.

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<sup>198</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

The Belgian context of new beginnings entered into resonance with the search for equilibrium between inductive science and art in colonial government, expressed by theorists in France and the United Kingdom.<sup>199</sup> International debates about colonial governance became more acute in the 1920s, especially with the need for postwar mandatory powers to defend their colonial politics in front of the League of Nations. Many argued that the colonial administration had to be codified, rationalized and theorized. Yet, others insisted on the “art of governing the natives,” an intimate relationship of power that rested more on character than science. Salkin was a participant in these discussions. Like Lucy Mayr and Margery Perham in London, like Delafosse, Robert Delavignette and Henri Labouret in Paris, the Belgian magistrate participated in a critique of colonialism as a *mission civilisatrice* and the promotion of cultural relativism as a new starting point for thinking about the administration of African territories. Yet, Salkin lacked the degree of institutionalization of his fellow reformists at Oxford University or the Ecole Coloniale in Paris. To some extent, he appeared as a maverick in the Belgian colonial scene, but his books also voiced an understanding of colonialism that would influence Belgian governance in the Congo and the problematic materialization of the educational apparatus he imagined in the quiet of his office in Elisabethville.

Belgian authorities followed Leopoldian policy and entrusted Christian missions with the responsibility to educate the Congolese, at the same time that they privileged Catholic (and Belgian) missions over their Protestant (and British, American or Swedish)

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<sup>199</sup> In her study of Franco-British conceptions about colonial government, Véronique Dimier showed how international debates about colonial governance became more acute during the Interwar period, especially with the need for new mandatory powers to defend the legitimacy of their politics in their dependencies in front of the League of Nations: Véronique Dimier, *Le gouvernement des colonies: Regards croisés franco-britanniques* (Brussels: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2004).

opponents. For decades, most Congolese children could only hope to access village schools and a few years of rudimentary teaching based on religion. Only a few thousand pupils frequented the small numbers of schools with full primary programs. Throughout the huge colony, and next to the seminaries preparing Congolese young men for priesthood, a handful of schools – including a few directly organized by the state – provided more advanced training for technicians, teachers, nurses, and medical assistants. The first secondary schools preparing students for higher education were not inaugurated before the Second World War, and universities would only emerge at the eleventh hour of Belgian colonialism in 1955 and 1956. However, as should be clear by now, higher education for Congolese appeared for the first time in the 1920s – not as tragedy nor as farce, but as anticipation inside a colonial magistrate’s attempt at fiction. Before most members of Lovanium’s first cohorts were even born, Congolese students in absentia, in their very inexistence, weighed on the subjectivity of Belgian colonialism. Salkin’s visualization of this inexistence is a fitting chronological starting point for a history of higher education in the Congo.

### **Education, Law, and Colonial Racism**

What did the scene of colonial writing look like when Salkin was promoting the themes of the inauthenticity and danger of education for Congolese? “Besides our territorial state agents whose work is to take care of native politics and besides a handful of magistrates that are naturally drawn towards these questions by their frequent contacts with blacks,” lamented the editorialist of one of Elisabethville’s newspapers in 1921, “there might not be more than twelve or so persons in Katanga who concern themselves



with the ways in which blacks are administered.”<sup>200</sup> Salkin belonged to the small group of colonials who took pride in their interest for the government of Africans. Despite his dissonance as a left liberal, Salkin’s work found its place among colonial instances of legitimation. In 1929, the colonial magistrate was one of the authors of the two-volume coffee table book, *Le Miroir du Congo Belge*, an ambitious editorial project – published in the context of the preparation of Belgium’s centennial – that gathered some of the most well established colonial voices of the time. *Le Miroir du Congo Belge* aimed to describe the diversity of Congolese natural and human landscapes. The two capacious volumes mobilized a large body of photographs that left “Europeanized” Congolese out of the frame and instead evoked ethnographic representations and sexualized black bodies by giving much room to pictures of young women displaying tattoos and naked bodies.

“*Les Nègres*,” Salkin’s chapter in *Le Miroir du Congo Belge*, summarized his views on colonialism: his opposition to industrialization and direct rule, his defense of native authorities, the restoration of African civilizations, and the social relevance of domestic slavery and polygamy.<sup>201</sup> The chapter opened with a sentence that directly addressed the racialized and erotic visual material of the book: “Their bodies’ sooty color, their sexual organs’ development, their inner gaze’s bottomless void still mark the unjust disfavor that has led to representing them as the curse of Ham’s victims.” Racial difference structured Salkin’s condemnation of the invasive nature of colonialism. “Soon,

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<sup>200</sup> *L’Etoile du Congo* (20 March 1921), p.1.

<sup>201</sup> Paul Salkin, “*Les Nègres*,” in *Le Miroir du Congo Belge* (Brussels : Editions N.A.E., 1929), t.2, p.141-160. Other authors included the future governor general Pierre Ryckmans, the colonial magistrate Leon Guebels (a former colleague of Salkin in Elisabethville and a published writer of colonial fiction and Congolese folklore under the name of Olivier de Bouveignes), the Catholic journalist, socialite, and famous proponent of Belgian nationalism Pierre Daye, the Museum of Tervuren’s head ethnographer Jules Maes, and *Conseil colonial’s* secretary Jacques Crockaert.

the beautiful and strange villages will be invaded by European rubbish, and paddlers' old hymns will be replaced by fashionable songs," concluded the writer. Once again, he was mobilizing anticipation as political criticism. Yet, he also lamented about the present. By teaching French and imposing European customs, he wrote:

We have brought to light two types of humanity that dishonor our race and the black race: the lazy and venal negro woman, ludicrously covered by our women's dress; the indolent negro, self-satisfied, disguised as a European, wearing a straw hat, pleated trousers and a tie. Thinking of themselves as our equals and unable to equal us, they feel despair, hatred and envy spring up in themselves.<sup>202</sup>

So much for recent comments about Salkin's support of "black evolution"! In the 1920s, the juxtaposition of Africans with fedoras, varnished shoes, ties, and glasses indicated imperfect mimicry to white colonials in the Congo and to far away metropolitan readers.<sup>203</sup> In the eyes of these readers, the prospect of "civilized Africans" wearing ties and glasses was intrinsically associated with ridicule or suggested dystopia. Salkin's anticipation of so-called Europeanized blacks dwelled on his views of the results of Christianization, education, and a capitalist economy of wage labor and mass consumption in the Congo. This vision also integrated visible results of assimilation in more "advanced" fronts of culture contact, which Salkin visited or extensively read about: West and South Africa, the Caribbean and North America. Outside of the "Bantu world," India particularly embodied problems with colonial education, as Salkin knew from Lord Lugard. In India, "purely secular and intellectual training" had created "an

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<sup>202</sup> Idem, p.160.

<sup>203</sup> "Europeanized" Africans provoked colonials' anxieties and disgust, as shown in the case of Salkin. They also become the object of recurrent jokes shared by missionaries (See Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon*, p.122), but that also of popular representations that circulated in the metropole, as in the famous case of Herge's *Tintin au Congo*: see Nancy Rose Hunt, "Tintin and the Interruptions of Congolese Comics," in Paul S. Landau and Deborah Kaspin (eds.), *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p.90-123.

educational class” distinct from “the vast illiterate masses,” while university education fostered “politically minded” individuals who became “prey to the agitator and the anarchist;” and “education in Africa travelled along the same road.”<sup>204</sup>

A cosmopolitan reader like Salkin amalgamated information from different locales in his imagined spectacle of central Africa in the twenty-first century. In his first book, he had already referred to Liberian “political praters,” communist black South African workers, Indian nationalist university students, unproductive Haitians, and deprived American blacks as examples of those who did not stick to the *équerre bantoue* (the bantu measuring stick).<sup>205</sup> Salkin used these different examples to imagine Congolese capitalists and university students, but only presented as pure negativity.

In *Le problème de l'évolution noire*, Europeanized characters remained nameless and Salkin never used direct speech when they talked. The literary limitations in developing these figures as characters suggested a failure to detail an image of colonial moderns. Yet, colonial judges such as Salkin, not unlike missionaries, addressed "modern" subjects on an everyday basis. The exercise of colonial justice came with a

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<sup>204</sup> Frederick Lugard. *Education in Tropical Africa* (London: Colonial Office, 1930 [first published in 1925]), p.3-4. A British officer and colonial administrator, Lugard served as governor in Hong Kong and then in Nigeria. His essay on *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (1922) was a reflection of the politics he had conducted in Nigeria and it became the bible of British-style indirect rule: see Véronique Dimier, *Le discours idéologique de la méthode coloniale chez les Français et les Britanniques de l'entre-deux-guerres à la décolonization (1920-1960)* (Bordeau: Centre d'Etudes de l'Afrique Noire, 1998). On the importance of India as the counter-example of what was done in the Congo in terms of education, notably in the discourse of Jesuit and Baptist missionaries who had previously worked in South Asia before going to the Congo, see Barbara Yates, “The Missions and Educational Development 1876-1908”, Ph.D. dissertation (New York, Columbia University, 1967), p.271-277.

<sup>205</sup> Salkin had borrowed the very term of “Europeanized” from Frederick Lugard, who meant by that the coastal elite of “black dandies” and “detrribalized Afro-Victorians” against whose influence he promoted the implementation of indirect rule through selected “traditional” rulers: see Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), p.233.

necessary recognition of the colonized judicial clientele as individual, nameable subjects. In contrast to his fictional work, the reality of Salkin's life as a colonial magistrate was filled with and depended on African "moderns" whose singular identities and individualities he could not totally ignore.

In 1926, as Salkin published his novel, the state was establishing a standardized network of native jurisdictions. The reform redressed the legal system's pre-existing vagueness in an era in which a variety of colonial agents had turned themselves into purveyors of judgments in litigations between Congolese; it instituted a network of native civil jurisdictions sometimes directly managed by Congolese. The legislator sought to restore native customs and traditional authorities. Yet Belgian territorial agents and colonial magistrates, as controllers of native authorities and appeal judges, still enjoyed unprecedented access in managing Congolese everyday life in the new system.

The 1926 reform sought to moderate native juridical conceptions by advocating for the plasticity of custom and sanctioning evolution towards European values in urban settings; it also institutionalized a racialized legal order. Still, while Salkin castigated colonial mimicry, some of his colleagues, particularly judges associated with social Catholicism, encouraged the work of literate, multilingual, and "Europeanized" Africans in the native jurisdictions as a new class of cultural brokers who sometimes combined access to local customs and new powers. The most famous exegetist of the new legislation on native jurisdictions was Antoine Sohier, a colonial magistrate who arrived at Elisabethville in 1912, the same year as Salkin, and spent most of his Congolese years there, climbing the hierarchical ladders to become attorney general in 1925. Sohier's work as a cultural translator was most apparent in his own series of publications on

colonial law, including a journal in which he solicited contributions from Congolese on questions of jurisprudence and the history of local customs. In 1943, from his retreat in Belgium, Sohier published a small book of memories on his years in Katanga. The book remembered with an empathic and amused eye the very social configuration that Salkin had opposed: a frontier society made of a motley crew of European interlopers of diverse origins and of African intermediate figures ranging from white firebrands' female lovers to manipulative paramount chiefs. Yet, the Catholic magistrate could not totally repress Belgian colonialism's suspicion of the capability of Congolese to permanently inhabit the modern world, or to put it on other words, of their capacity to join civilization.<sup>206</sup>

Salkin's colleagues like Sohier remained trapped in the contradictions of colonial humanism, advocating for the respect of local customs and the spirit of the native mind on the one hand, and for the necessity of orienting Congolese towards more "humane, rational and neutral" practices of punishment on the other. These Catholic theoreticians of colonization shared much of the anticlerical Salkin's horizon of expectation. They

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<sup>206</sup> Antoine Sohier, *Tréfonds: Récits d'Afrique* (Paris: A. Maréchal, 1943). The first chapter in this book of souvenirs expressed well his ambiguity towards middle figures, welcoming their efforts in the construction of the new society, but also warning of their incomplete integration of modern values. The chapter told the story of Kabongo, a friend of Sohier. When Sohier first met Kabongo, the latter was a young villager who had murdered an aunt that he believed to be a witch and the former was a young substitute in charge of prosecuting him. Strangely, the situation evolved into a patron-client relationship, and after having served his time in prison, Kabongo became a close acquaintance of Sohier's family in Elisabethville. The magistrate helped him find a job in a colonial enterprise and witnessed his progressive evolution, which was marked by the appearance of new garbs: first a jacket, then shoes, a tie and finally a trench coat. One day, Kabongo announced his baptism and soon took a Christian woman as his wife. At the occasion of yet another visit to the Sohiers, Kabongo showed up with the bikes he had just bought for him and his wife. After a few years, he seemed to have proven his full integration into the world of civilized Africans. Yet, the story ended with a tragic scene that saw the poor Kabongo discovering a fetish in his house, understanding it as a sign of a witch's action against him, falling into despair and a sort of madness, and dying just a few days later. Kabongo's ultimate fall back to the world of magic and out of the world of colonial morality seemed to reinforce Belgian ambiguity towards African modernity.

consciously risked modifying local ecologies of power and morality, but they always kept in mind the dangers of excessive Europeanization: sartorial nonsense and excessive mimicry.

Education did not differ from law. The 1920s and 1930s saw the deployment of built-in mechanisms of enclosure in that domain too, in the sense that the school system's development was meant to produce the racialized limits to its own extension. Part of the logic of the development of education in those years rendered the idea of a black university unthinkable. The non-event of higher education in the Congo required will. Despite the lack of any significant secondary education at the time, universities for Congolese appeared as incongruities for ideological more than material motives. It would have been difficult to find any Congolese ready to embark on a university education at the time, but even attempts to change this situation were seen with suspicion by promoters of so-called Europeanization and Christianization. As Salkin's literary work reveals, the non-creation of Congolese universities happened in a transnational context in which Belgian fears were nurtured by a multiplicity of sources, as we have seen. The specters of communism, pan-Africanism, and nationalism, partly explain the use of vernacular African languages in schools and a pedagogy that limited itself to the teaching of writing, reading, arithmetic, hygiene, manual labor and Christian morality.

A longer history also informed the orientation of colonial education in the 1920s and 1930s. The genesis of European schooling dated from the 1880s. It included state initiatives and the autonomous development of missionary education. Very early on, the state appealed to Catholic missionaries to manage schools for soldiers and clerks for the administration, as in the *colonies scolaires* of Boma and Nouvelle-Anvers. Mission

societies quickly moved beyond the first schools established in mission posts that centered only on basic literacy.<sup>207</sup> The competition between Protestant and Catholic missionaries helped the expansion of school networks through the multiplication of village schools and the training of local catechists and teachers to administer them. In 1906, the concordat between the Vatican and the Free State formalized the collaboration between Catholic missions and the State, and secured lands and subsidies from the state in exchange for the establishment of schools by Catholic mission orders.<sup>208</sup>

Before the First World War, the educational landscape in the Congo was uneven. Very different approaches to schooling coexisted, and regional unbalances were striking in the density of educational networks. Many of the close to 20 missionary societies working in the Congo at the time, particularly among Catholic orders, reluctantly developed education beyond the minimum necessary for religious proselytism.<sup>209</sup> However, this first period of colonial schooling strongly marked Congolese history.<sup>210</sup>

Historians of early colonial education like Barbara Yates have stressed the common reluctance of communities to entrust missionaries with their children. Evidence

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<sup>207</sup> On the beginning of Scheutist schools in the Kasai region, see Joseph Van Keerberghen, *Histoire de l'enseignement catholique au Kasayi, 1891-1947* (Kananga: Editions de l'Archidiocèse, 1985), p.11-45.

<sup>208</sup> On the concordat and on Catholic-Protestant rivalries, see Marvin D. Markowitz, *Cross and Sword: The Political Role of Christian Missions in the Belgian Congo, 1908-1960* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1973), p.38-51.

<sup>209</sup> Barbara Yates, "The Missions and Educational Development in Belgian Africa," p.14-15.

<sup>210</sup> Yates counted around one hundred "central schools," based in mission stations, and several thousand village schools in function by 1908. That year schooling population was around 26,700 students in Protestant schools and 19,400 students in Catholic schools, but the numbers would very soon change with the ascending Catholic domination of schooling. A few specialized schools were also already in place by this time: the United Congo Evangelical Institution in Kimpese, where Protestant evangelists and teachers were trained from different parts of the colony; the White Fathers' seminary in Mpala, that would soon produce the first Congolese Catholic priest; as well as a few state vocational schools, training civil and military clerks and nurses. See Barbara Yates, "The Missions and Educational Development in Belgian Africa," p.86-102.

suggests that, in many regions, former slaves made up for the vast majority of school populations during the first years of a mission society's implantation in a given area.<sup>211</sup> The most iconic educational institutions of the Leopoldian period, the *colonies scolaires* in Boma and Nouvelle-Anvers were originally opened to welcome orphans and redeemed slaves who were literally the children of the state. By the end of the 1890s, as Yates noticed, a change developed in Congolese approaches to missionary schools. She attributed the change to Congolese enthusiasm for reading.<sup>212</sup> It is probable that missionary stations appeared also to some Congolese as sanctuaries as they escaped heavy and violent demands in labor from the state and private enterprises.<sup>213</sup> Schooling in the Congo developed at the end of the 1890s, when missionaries began to realize the benefits of the Congolese "educational craze." Despite their many shortcomings, the first colonial schools produced Panda and Kaoze, as well as anonymous clerks who settled their families in the colony's emerging urban centers after studying in *colonies scolaires* in Moanda, Boma, and Nouvelle-Anvers. For example, in the 1900s, Protestant schools trained the small army of Western-dressed BaKongo teachers and evangelists who composed 429 notebooks on Kongo political culture at the request of Swedish missionary Karl Laman in the 1910s.<sup>214</sup> The same mission's schools of the 1900s and 1910s also produced a generation of skilled and literate Congolese who enthusiastically followed

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<sup>211</sup> See for example Joseph Van Keerberghen, *Histoire de l'enseignement catholique au Kasayi*, p.15.

<sup>212</sup> See different occurrences of this idea: Barbara Yates, "The Missions and Educational Development in Belgian Africa," p.133, 171, 177; p.308-321.

<sup>213</sup> Tensions resulted between missionaries and other colonial actors in some cases. Yet, in others, missionaries collaborated closely with private companies in exchange of subsidies: see for example Flavien Nkay Malu, *La mission chrétienne à l'épreuve de la tradition ancestrale (Congo belge 1891-1933)* (Paris: Karthala, 2007), p.33-53.

<sup>214</sup> Wyatt MacGaffey, *Kongo Political Culture: The Conceptual Challenge of the Particular* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), see particularly p.35-41.



Kimbangu in 1921.<sup>215</sup> The first cohorts of Congolese teachers and foreign missionaries taught manual work, religious lessons, and more or less elaborate forms of literacy to a growing public of young colonized. By bringing together scores of young boys and some girls, who lived their lives in direct confrontation with the colonial economy and power, these teachers inaugurated the long road to schools that Congolese travelled throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

“A black who knows French easily becomes uprooted,” wrote Salkin in a widely shared critique of academic education. “He rapidly thinks he is the equal of the white and even superior to the white. These Europeanized inevitably became obstacles to civilization’s progress.”<sup>216</sup> Other authors compared educating Congolese in French to serving alcohol to children or to poisoning the whole social order. A colonial critique in 1930 warned that instruction would pervert African students with dangerous words like progress, justice, independence and self-determination, just as the possession and use of gramophones, stylographs, alarm clocks, and cigarettes had already fooled black urbanites into believing they were the whites’ equals.<sup>217</sup>

These judgments did not represent the full spectrum of colonial discourse on education for Africans. However, Belgian colonialism’s inherent racism, together with economic imperatives, made agricultural and industrial education, as well as basic

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<sup>215</sup> Similarly, in 1930, the Lari, the most well educated “tribe” in the neighboring French Congo, violently rebelled to protest the arrest of its own *ngunza* (prophet), Andre Matswa: see Phyllis Martin, *Leisure and Society in Colonial Brazzaville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.68-69.

<sup>216</sup> Paul Salkin, *Etudes africaines*, p.15.

<sup>217</sup> See Gaston Moulaert, “L’effort colonial de la Belgique,” in *Revue économique internationale*, (July 1930), p.13-50; A. Houyet, “L’organisation politique, administrative et judiciaire de l’Afrique française du Nord,” in *Congo XI-I* (1930), p.221-249; Gaston Hédo, *Mosselmans, Ombre blanche: Impressions et souvenirs du Congo* (Brussels: Editions de la Gaule, 1930).

religious instruction, nearly the only legitimate forms of schooling offered to Congolese in the 1920s and 1930s. In this regard, the US south, Tuskegee, and Hampton influenced colonial education in the Congo as they had done in the German Togo and elsewhere in Africa.<sup>218</sup>

Louis Franck, a Flemish liberal politician, served as Minister of Colonies from 1918 to 1924. Franck was particularly interested in the American model of agricultural education; and he took a special interest in the Phelps-Stokes Fund and its commission for the improvement of education in Africa.<sup>219</sup> The commission's report, by Thomas Jesse Jones, included a chapter on the Belgian Congo underlining a lack in the

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<sup>218</sup> See Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa*. Zimmerman includes the Congo Free State in his expansive review of the globalization of the American New South in the 1890s and 1900s (see his fourth chapter, from p.176 to 205). Booker T. Washington and other persons associated with Tuskegee, like the sociologist Robert E. Park, became closely associated with E.D. Morel and the Congo Reform Association after 1903. In addition to his campaign against Leopoldian atrocities in Central Africa, Morel was also involved in the promotion of the collaboration between Washington and German officials. For Morel and Park, the Germans' approach to industrial education, and their collaborations with Tuskegee graduates on the cultivation of cotton in Togo, provided the accurate answer both to Leopoldian barbaric violence and to the menacing perspective of total labor freedom in Africa. In that perspective, Zimmerman presents self-proclaimed Belgian interest for Tuskegee and Belgian declarations about the opening of a "Congolese Tuskegee" in 1912 as a way to divert criticism, "calculated to make Belgian rule appear as progressive to colonial liberals" (p.179). What Zimmerman does not account for is that this rhetoric had concrete repercussions in the Congo and that the US South model of industrial education influenced practices in the Congo despite the non-realization of a Congolese Tuskegee per se. The importation of industrial education and of the US model in the Congo was realized through the American Baptist, Methodist and Presbyterian missionaries that worked in the Belgian colony and had created schools there: see Paul Serufuri Hakiza, "Les Etats-Unis d'Amérique et l'enseignement en Afrique noire (1910-1945), in *La Nouvelle Histoire du Congo: Mélanges offerts à Frans Bontinck, c.i.c.m.*, ed. by Pamphile Mabilia Mantuba-Ngoma (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004), p.229-249; as well as Martin D. Markowitz, *Cross and Sword*, p.52-54. Salkin's novel also bore testimony of the resonance of Tuskegee's expedition to Togo in the Congo. The novel featured several characters presented as "returnees," African American agricultural settlers who taught Congolese the virtue of manual labor, hygiene and the attachment to the soil by their own experience: see particularly the chapter entitled "Le Homestead": Paul Salkin, *Le problème de l'évolution*, p.67-70.

<sup>219</sup> Thomas Jesse Jones, *Education in Africa: A Study of West, South, and Equatorial Africa by the African Education Commission, under the Auspices of the Phelps-Stokes Fund and Foreign Mission Societies of North America and Europe* (New York: Phelps-Stokes Fund, 1922).

educational apparatus. Jones partly explained this lack by the inner conditions of the colony and the “backwardness” of its population: “The task of supplying any kind of education to eleven million primitive and, in some instances, barbarous people, distributed in groups of varying numbers over a territory almost a million square miles in extent, cannot be fully appreciated even by a student of education.”<sup>220</sup> The report’s recommendations for the Belgian Congo included the central ideological motive of the Fund: the focus on character building in education and on manual and agricultural work. However, the report noted that, “in rather striking contrast” with other colonies, mission education in the Congo had targeted exclusively the “primitive multitude” and therefore “overlooked the need for the development of Native leadership.” The first recommendation to Belgium was therefore to make sure to develop two distinct types of educational terrain: one for the mass of school-aged children, the other for “native teachers and leaders.”<sup>221</sup>

During Louis Franck’s tenure, the Ministry of Colonies prepared an educational reform that was officially launched in 1926. The reform dramatically restricted the use of French, banning it from all schools except for a few advanced primary and middle schools in urban centers.<sup>222</sup> The government postponed the creation of secondary schools in the Congo, moving higher education away from the colonial horizon of expectation.<sup>223</sup> Schools became places for education and moralization that would socialize the colonial

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<sup>220</sup> *Idem*, p.257.

<sup>221</sup> *Idem*, p.286-287.

<sup>222</sup> Edgard Polomé, “The Choice of Official Languages in the Democratic Republic of the Congo,” in Answar S. Dill (ed.), *Language, Society and Paleoculture: Essays by Edgard C. Polomé* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982), p.26.

<sup>223</sup> See Marc Depaepe, “Parallélisme belgo-congolais dans l’histoire de l’enseignement,” in Pierre Kita Masandi and Marc Depaepe, *La chanson scolaire au Congo belge: Anthologie* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2004), p.27.

system's auxiliaries through work. In that respect, Belgian policy did not differ much from the reform conducted in African British colonies at the same time and that Frederick Lugard dubbed "one of the principal landmarks of imperial policy in the twentieth century."<sup>224</sup>

Louis Frank's reform in the 1920s sought to homogenize the educational system. Without sending students to the United States, the Congo participated in what Robert Trent Vinson, in a history of African Garveyism, calls the transatlantic channel of education.<sup>225</sup> Frank's reform illustrated the influence of the "globalization of the US South" on the Congo, notably through the distinction between education and instruction that that was central to the reform.<sup>226</sup> Education became a tool in the "fixation" of a large workforce of cash and food crops producers in rural areas, and it helped train a smaller number of semi-skilled employees for the state bureaucracy and private enterprises in urban centers.<sup>227</sup> The vast majority of pupils attended schools for only a couple of years (the first degree), while a minority received two more years of schooling (the second degree). However, Catholic subsidized schools multiplied after the reform. In 1944, they reached a maximum of 5,020 primary schools of the first degree with 242,918 students, and 839 primary schools of the second degree with 65,840 students.<sup>228</sup>

Salkin was no Cassandra. His voice was echoed by those of other colonials of various sensibilities – both Catholics and agnostics worried about the advent of

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<sup>224</sup> Frederick Lugard. *Education in Tropical Africa*, p.19.

<sup>225</sup> Robert Trent Vinson, *The Americans are Coming! Dreams of African American Liberation in Segregationist South Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012), p.7.

<sup>226</sup> On the globalization of the US South: see Zimmerman. On Frank's reform and the distinction between education and reform: see Kita Kyankenge Masandi, *Colonisation et enseignement: cas du Zaïre avant 1960* (Kinshasa: Editions du CERUKI, 1982), p.167.

<sup>227</sup> *Idem*, p.172-173.

<sup>228</sup> *Idem*, p.191.

Kimbanguism, Paul Panda's agenda of demands, the circulation of pan-African ideas, and the threatening perspective of a revolt of literate Congolese. Yet, while Salkin's ideas resonated in Brussels, they certainly did not kill the enthusiasm of young Congolese for education. These youth had been a major force behind the multiplication of schools in the colony, regardless of debates among colonizers and missionaries. As the historian of colonial education Marc Depaepe notes, the massive extension of elementary education after the 1920s "automatically created the aspiration for something more."<sup>229</sup>

### **Rural Trails**

The minor seminary of Mbata-Kiela was the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary's first institution of secondary education in the Belgian Congo. The missionaries of the congregation, known as the Scheutists, opened Mbata-Kiela at the end of the 1920s, two decades after the White Fathers' seminary of Baudounville/Mpala on Lake Kivu, but around the same time that other congregations opened similar institutions throughout the colony.<sup>230</sup> The schools slightly expanded the order of educational possibilities for Congolese beyond the rudimentary apparatus that had been established through the Frank reform. In contrast with the curricular limitations of the majority of schools, the minor seminaries produced Congo's first intellectual elite, with an

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<sup>229</sup> Marc Depaepe, "Parallelisme belge-congolais dans l'histoire de l'enseignement," in Pierre Kita Masandi and Marc Depaepe, *La chanson scolaire au Congo Belge*, p. 27.

<sup>230</sup> See Zana Aziza Etambala, "Stefano Kaoze: Sa formation, son ordination, et son voyage en Europe," in *Aspects de la culture à l'époque coloniale en Afrique Centrale* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008), t.2, p.17-62. Yates notes the Vatican's pressure on Jesuits to open the Lemfu's seminary in 1922: see Barbara Yates, "The Missions and Educational Development 1876-1908", 110). Rome probably exerted similar pressure on other Catholic missionary societies, as all of them had opened a seminary by the end of the decade. Pope Benedict XV had affirmed the necessity to train an African clergy in *Maximum Illud*, issued in 1919, see V.Y. Mudimbe. *Tales of Faith: Religion as Political Performance in Central Africa* (London: The Athlone Press, 1997), p.110.

instruction that included French, Mathematics, and Latin. Unlike the “bush schools” made of mud and cob, the seminaries welcomed their students in often impressive brick buildings that included dormitories, refectories, chapels, classrooms, galleries, and sometimes cloisters.

Mbata-Kiela was a small post in the hilly and dense Mayombe forest, the vast hinterland of Boma, squeezed between the Portuguese enclave of Kabinda, the French Congo, the Atlantic Ocean and the Congo River. In the 1920s, the Mayombe was already well integrated into the colonial economy of plantation capitalism and Catholic proselytism. Yet, the region appeared remote to those among Mbata-Kiela's students who originated from towns and villages sometimes situated hundreds of kilometers away from the Mayombe, as the Scheutists' apostolic province reached, well behind the Lower Congo, to the Equator, the Kasai and the region around Lake Leopold II.

At the occasion of their Christmas vacations in 1932, a group of Mbata-Kiela's seminarians ventured out for a one-week trip through the forest. Every night, the students stopped in villages where they received shelter and food after long hours walking under the rain. Their final destination was Moanda, the Scheutist missionary post on the Atlantic shore. The ocean was as foreign as the Mayombe forest to some students, and particularly to the small group who originated from Leopoldville: Jacques Masa, Albert Amani, Joseph Malula, Eugene Moke, and Paul Lomami-Tshibamba. Decades later, these *Kinois* still remembered the hardships of the long walking days on the forest's steep trails as well as the surprise of experiencing seawater's salty taste.<sup>231</sup>

As they travelled unfamiliar territories, the young seminarians probably struck up

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<sup>231</sup> See Eugène Moke, *Itinéraire et mémoires: Souvenirs personnels* (Kinshasa: Saint-Paul, 1989).

some of the many songs that circulated through primary schools in the colony and that straightforwardly carried the words of Belgian educational ethics in the 1920s and 1930s. Many of these songs lauded the civilizing mission of Christian schooling. “Come! Come! To our mission! To cultivate your intelligence! Abandon your savagery and become good Christians,” a line from the Lingala *E Nza* song, was a typical example.<sup>232</sup> “The school bells ring. We must study. We are not like the children who ignore their ABCs. Young people, abandon laziness for courage and progress,” from the song *Kengele ya Masomo*, was another.<sup>233</sup> These naïve texts also literally sang the praises of the path to school. Examples abound, in the Swahili *Mwanafunzi hodari*: “The courageous student goes to school with happiness and desire. On the road to school, he remembers mentally the homework and the arithmetic exercise that he has done at home the day before;”<sup>234</sup> in the Lingala *Ngbo na Sira*: “The students are on the road, they come back from school. They will continue to work, do their homework and help adults during the holidays. Then, they will go back to the mission because they want to become Congo’s intelligent children;”<sup>235</sup> or in the French *Tous Ensemble*: “Young boys, on your way! Let’s walk all together, as little soldiers. Let’s walk a military pace. We are going back to school.”<sup>236</sup> Lines like these expressed the expectations of the path to school.

Roads from and to schools were spaces where students learned, rehearsed, and spread the ideological constructions of colonial education. Travelling these roads was essential to the experience of schooling, and to the trajectory of future political actors,

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<sup>232</sup> Pierre Kita Masandi and Marc Depaepe, *La chanson scolaire au Congo Belge: Anthologie*, p.85.

<sup>233</sup> *Idem*, p.106-107.

<sup>234</sup> *Idem*, p. 147.

<sup>235</sup> *Idem*, p.154.

<sup>236</sup> *Idem*, p. 193.

who unconsciously absorbed and would later twist, accommodate, and transform the naive little colonial songs about change and a new order to come.

Decades after their excursion through the Mayombe, Mbata-Kiela's seminarians became some of the most important figures in Congo's political scene.<sup>237</sup> In the second half of the 1940s, Lomami-Tshibamba wrote a pair of articles that put the issue of indigenous political rights on the table for the first time in the colonial news media.<sup>238</sup> In 1946, Jacques Massa, Eugene Moke, and Joseph Malula were the first black priests to be ordained in Leopoldville. Massa later pioneered the field of Christian trade unionism, while Moke and Malula continued to progress in the church hierarchy, the latter to become Leopoldville's first black bishop in 1959, the only African member of the liturgical commission during the Second Vatican Council between 1962 and 1965, and the Congo's first cardinal in 1969.<sup>239</sup> Not less significantly, another boy in the group of seminarians, Joseph Kasa-Vubu, who led the first organized anticolonial political party in the 1950s, ABAKO, became the mayor of one of Leopoldville's native communes after the first municipal elections of 1957, and served as the Congolese republic's first President from 1960 to 1965.

Back in the early 1930s, after the Vatican established the Mayombe as a distinct

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<sup>237</sup> As Rudolph Mrazek writes about Java, "the modern and colonial schools provided for leaders – for all leaders – and more totally than elsewhere in the world. It seemed to happen lightly. Particles of school energy and learning spilled, scattered through the colony, made for the articulation of, and indeed substituted for, politics and even revolution" (Rudolph Mrazek, *A Certain Age*, p.177). In the Congo too, schools provided for all political leaders, some revolutionary and others more conservative. The added flavor of the Belgian model was the Catholic influence of the road to politics.

<sup>238</sup> See Roger Bodart, "Entretiens avec Lomami Tshibamba," in Marc Quaghebeur et al. (eds.) *Congo-Meuse, volume 7: Aspects de la culture à l'époque coloniale en Afrique Centrale: Littérature, théâtre* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008), p.101-108.

<sup>239</sup> On Malula, see Léon de Saint Moulin, *Œuvres complètes du Cardinal Malula* (Kinshasa: Facultés Catholiques de Kinshasa, 1997), 7 vols.



apostolic vicariate, the vicar apostolic of Leopoldville relocated Malula, Moke and Masa to Bolongo in the Equatorial province, another seminary in the middle of another forest, eight days of sailing from Leopoldville and more than thousand kilometers away from the Mayombe. Two years later, the young men moved again, this time to the major seminary of Kabwe, in the Kasai, where Kasa-Vubu had preceded them by a few years.<sup>240</sup>

At the time of Malula and Kasa-Vubu's schooling, Leopoldville was already the most important urban center in the Congo, but Catholic missionaries still favored rural settings for the work of evangelization and institutional construction of the Church. Leopoldville was not particularly well endowed with schools before the mid-1930s and no seminaries were established in the vicinity of the city before Malula's own initiative to do so in the early 1960s. On June 9, 1946, when Malula, Moke and Masa became Leopoldville's first black priests, they had spent close to two decades of schooling and training far away from the capital city, including eight years spent in Kabwe without a single visit to their families in Leopoldville.

Paths to school could be long in the Belgian Congo. Young boys traveling on trucks, boats, bikes, or walking their way to school, participated in the large enterprise of mobility that colonialism increasingly became in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>241</sup> Education was meant to bring along progress; however its telos was blurred by Belgian colonialism's unease with African urbanites. Colonial schooling remained tied to the utopian model of the Christian village that Belgian missionaries dreamed would spread throughout Central

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<sup>240</sup> Inaugurated in 1930 by the Scheutists, Kabwe was one of only three senior seminaries in the Congo in the 1930s. See Baudouin Mwamba Mputu, *Le Congo-Kasaï (1865-1950): De l'exploration allemande à la consécration de Luluabourg* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2011), p.102-104.

<sup>241</sup> See Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon of Birth Ritual, Medicalization and Mobility in the Congo* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

Africa at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: close by mission stations and far from both African pagans and European freethinkers, villages of converts were meant to foster pure communities of believers. Educational hubs in rural locations developed from the 1920s to the 1950s as the offspring of earlier missionary dreams of Promethean transformation of Central Africa. The apostolic provinces of the Jesuits and Scheutists – the Lower Congo, the vicinity of Leopoldville, the Kwilu and Kassai areas – were particularly well endowed with rural educational hubs, which would provide most of the first generation of university students in the 1950s. These places, like Kisantu, Kabwe, Mbata-Kiela, Moanda, Lemfu, Kimpese, Mikalayi became bright spots on the map of the new Congo, as missionary stations, often endowed with seminaries, middle schools, and teachers' colleges, as well as schools for girls managed by female congregations.

The most emblematic of these educational hubs was probably Mikalayi, in the Kassai. Marked by the long leadership of Emery Cambier, a Scheutist father, Mikalayi (also known as Luluabourg Saint-Joseph) started as a gigantic missionary outpost for hundreds of Luba runaways and slaves in the 1890s and progressively became home to thousands of children and students, with primary schools, a normal school for teachers, a minor seminary which students demanded after seeing the photograph of the first Congolese priest Stefano Kaoze, a school for native administrative assistants, a school for native clerks (*commis*), various medical and nursing schools, boarding schools for boys and girls.<sup>242</sup> Despite the town's complete dedication to education and religion, Mikalayi appeared already too urban to some priests by the mid-1920s and was therefore deemed

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<sup>242</sup> See Luc Vints and I.S.M. Zana Aziza Etambala, *100 jaar zusters van Liefde J.M. in Zaire, 1891-1991* (Leuven: Kadoc, 1992), p.48-54; Martin Kalulambi Pongo, *Etre Luba au XXe siècle: Identité chrétienne et ethnicité au Congo-Kinshasa* (Paris: Karthala, 1997); Joseph Van Keerberghen, *Histoire de l'enseignement catholique au Kasayi, 1891-1947* (Kananga: Editions de l'Archidiocèse, 1985), p. 11-24, 38-39, 45-54, 71.

improper for the training of future priests. In a letter to his bishop, the director of the minor seminar of Mikalayi wrote the following: “I am becoming more and more aware everyday of the inappropriate location of the seminary, here, at the heart of the mission. We are unable to transform the mentality of the seminarians: everything we say or do is directly neutralized by the environment in which they find themselves.”<sup>243</sup> Two years later, the seminary was transferred to Kabwe, a more isolated and secluded location, separated from Mikalayi by the difficult passage of two rivers.

Mikalayi became a center for Catholic converts, and therefore a basin of recruitment for private enterprises. Education entertained a direct, even if sometimes ambivalent relationship to colonial economy and the world of consumption – while relationships between missionary and private enterprises concerning educated youth varied from tense, as in the case of Jesuits, to very close and cordial, as in the case of the Benedictine fathers in Katanga. Father Van Keerberghen, a Scheutist missionary himself and education historian in the Kasayi, writes about the students of the school for clerks in Mikalayi: “This category was marked out to work in close contact with Europeans, and therefore had to be Europeanized, to a certain degree, in relationship to their manners, behavior, and dress.”<sup>244</sup> Generally, eyeglasses symbolized the relationship between education, religion, consumption, and the emergence of new subjectivities. In missionary memory, glasses (known as *talatala* in several Congolese languages) remain symbols of colonized “misunderstanding” of the modern world. Stories of students’ self-harm circulated in colonial Mikalayi; missionaries believed that some young Congolese “mutilated” their own eyes with the hope of receiving medical prescription for glasses,

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<sup>243</sup> Father Van Zandijcke to Monsignor De Clerq, September 8, 1929, cited in Joseph Van Keerberghen, *Histoire de l'enseignement catholique*, p.56.

<sup>244</sup> *Idem*, p. 166-167.

the ultimate sign of “intellectuality.”<sup>245</sup>

If Mikalayi embodied well the concentration of educational institutions in missionary outposts, Kinzambi in the Kwilu marked the progressive intellectual expansion of Catholic rural schooling at the end of the 1930s. Kinzambi, a place where Catholic missionaries experimented with a pedagogy less anxious about critical thinking and the dangers of knowledge, produced some of the most prominent nationalist and revolutionary figures of the 1960s. Antoine Gizenga, Pierre Mulele, Cleophas Kamitatu, and Bernardin Mungul’Diaka were among them.

Joseph Guffens, a Jesuit missionary in the Kwilu, established Kinzambi in the mid-1930s, as the center of a new congregation of Catholic Brothers (*les Frères Joséphites*). The new congregation followed young Congolese demands for a native order of teacher-brothers. As Catholic Brothers, the Joséphites embraced a religious vocation and abided by the rule of celibacy. Yet, unlike monks or priests, they exclusively focused on professional activity, in this case teaching. The *Kifrère*, the institution created in 1935 by Guffens, was strikingly unusual in the Belgian colonial educational system: it offered a training different and superior to existing post-primary schools of the time, the *écoles normales* and *écoles moyennes* training teachers and clerks; at the same time, Kinzambi’s *Kifrère* differed from seminaries that prepared Congolese priests.<sup>246</sup> Not unlike Mikalayi, Kinzambi soon evolved through additional schools, including a minor seminary, established next to the *Kifrère*. Ultimately, Joséphites spread Guffens’ pedagogy in the region, as they were sent to other schools after ending their years of training at Kinzambi.

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<sup>245</sup> See T.K. Biaya, “Ethnopsychologie de quelques anthroponymes africains des missionnaires du Kasai occidental,” in *Annales Aequatoria* 16 (1995), p.204.

<sup>246</sup> See Kiangu Sindani, *Préparer un peuple parfait: Mgr Joseph Guffens, 1895-1973* (Kinshasa: Editions Saint-Paul, 1992) and Kiangu Sindani, *Le Kwilu à l’épreuve du pluralisme identitaire, 1948-1968* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2009).

In an interview in 2010 with Daniel Palambwa, one of the first brothers to be trained at Kinzambi, I asked him about Michel-Ange Mupapa, another of my interviewees. In the 1950s, Mupapa had been a student of Palambwa at Kinzambi; a decade later, he became a very active student militant in leftist African student associations in France. “Mupapa, he is a bit of a revolutionary,” I prompted Papa Palambwa, himself a former member and deputy of the “conservative” CONACO party in the 1960s.<sup>247</sup> “Oh yes,” Palambwa answered, “Mupapa inherited Guffens’ revolutionary spirit.”<sup>248</sup> Palambwa was eschewing the difficult question of left and right, I believed at first. However, he came back on the genealogy between Guffens’ “revolutionary spirit” and 1960s revolutionary history. Palambwa indeed also taught Pierre Mulele, a more well-known figure of the Congolese revolution in the 1960s, and he explained Mulele’s radicalism by his education at Kizambi. Ludo Martens has told the story of Mulele’s exclusion from Kinzambi’s seminary in 1946, following his refusal to believe in Virgin Mary’s virginity.<sup>249</sup> Sharing another version of the story, Palambwa argued that Mulele did not contest the virginity through Jesus’ conception, but questioned it after the birth of the Christ. In other words, Mulele wondered, how could Mary be called a virgin while she physically delivered Jesus. If she had delivered the Christ, how

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<sup>247</sup> Palambwa entered politics after abandoning his status of Catholic brother in 1962. Yet, he remained very close to the Catholic church, and he returned to teaching after the end of his political career in 1967. When I visited him, Papa Palambwa was a very well known figure in his neighborhood, in the popular district of Lemba. He was an elder in the neighborhood, but he was also well known for the classical music lessons he delivered to children in the courtyard of his home. During one of our meetings, he answered my questions while walking back and forth to the blackboard in front of which his protégés were reading music, in a way performing for me and for the children the Guffensian pedagogy he outlined when answering my questions. At the occasion of another visit, Palambwa sat with me while the children rehearsed several numbers and covered the recording of our conversation with Gregorian chants.

<sup>248</sup> Daniel Palambwa, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 10 Aug. 2010.

<sup>249</sup> Ludo Martens, *Pierre Mulele ou la seconde vie de Patrice Lumumba* (Antwerp: EPO, 1985).

could her hymen be intact? Mulele's opposition was therefore not doctrinal, but semantic. In Palambwa's recollection, it showed the influence of Kinzambi's encouragement of critical thinking. Crucially in his narrative, Mulele was not expelled from the seminary, but he asked to leave for a Jesuit *école moyenne* after a conversation with Guffens, who supported his decision. In Palambwa's memory, Kinzambi was a place concerned with the Catholic discipline that also welcomed rational discussion and the idea that young educated Congolese could think for themselves.

Guffens sought the emergence of a Congolese elite, but his project was subsumed in Catholic politics of mass conversion. V.Y. Mudimbe suggests that teachers, more than priests, were the critical agents of conversion in colonial Congo, as they enjoyed more sustained and direct contact with children. Training a native professional "cadre of Christian teachers" served to construct a new Christian order, but also mitigated its effects through the proximity of educator and educated. By embracing an elitist educational project outside the pathway to priesthood, Mudimbe notes, Guffens reoriented schooling toward a certain form of emancipation. However, he also notes: "the emancipation project was rigidly formulated in this colonial, highly elaborated grid of acculturation for a few chosen ones".<sup>250</sup> The elitist track produced a local elite that acted as agents in the new order of Christianity and civilization. In Mudimbe's words, schools increased African alienation by cutting off the colonized from their past and by "marking the actuality of a colonial consciousness" and its reproduction.<sup>251</sup>

Mudimbe overstates the difference between Guffens' *Kifrère* and minor seminary education. He himself received the latter in the 1950s at Kakanda seminary, outside of

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<sup>250</sup> V.Y. Mudimbe, *Tales of Faith*, p.115-116.

<sup>251</sup> Idem p.116.

Jadotville in industrial Katanga.<sup>252</sup> Palambwa's unpublished memoirs abound with details that show commonalities between the more classical seminary education and Kinzambi's *Kifrère*: the importance of manual labor, student participation in producing the food they consumed, the high attrition rate, and the separation from one's family.<sup>253</sup> Kinzambi quickly evolved in the direction of an educational complex in the model of Mikalayi. Guffens enforced measures of residential seclusion between different age groups, but during class hours students mixed, with the more advanced aspirants practicing pedagogy by teaching their juniors.<sup>254</sup> Unlike seminaries, education at Kinzambi did not focus on Latin and classical culture: it also developed modern languages and science.<sup>255</sup> When I visited Papa Palambwa's home in August 2010, he had also invited Augustin Awaka, another alumnus of Kinzambi in the 1940s. The two octogenarians insisted on the quality of French training at Kinzambi, on Guffens' emphasis on teaching his students to speak with a proper Gallic accent, and his opposition to the more Germanic pronunciation taught by Flemish missionaries. What marked the experiences of Palambwa and Awaka was Kinzambi's mark of distinction: Kinzambi's students became deeply aware of the superiority of their education, contrasted to rudimentary training of most *évolués*, superficially Europeanized but who remained far from intellectual equality with the colonizer.

Despite the advantageous position of Kinzambi in the colonial school system, as

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<sup>252</sup> Mudimbe spent several years of "total closure" at Kakanda, which were followed by four years in a Benedictine monastery in Rwanda, where his life presented itself "as metaphor and as aspiration to a radical separation from the world." V.Y. Mudimbe, *Le corps glorieux des mots et des êtres: Esquisse d'un jardin africain à la bénédictine* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1994), p.17, 23, and 26.

<sup>253</sup> Daniel Palambwa Andzwa Empak, "L'école de mon patelin: Notes autobiographique présentées par Kiangu Sindani," unpublished manuscript, p.34, 36, 61.

<sup>254</sup> *Idem*, p.36.

<sup>255</sup> *Idem*, p.44.

Mudimbe has underlined, Guffens' project was not revolutionary. Protestants were already ahead. They had, in Mudimbe's words, "moved from an education of values" to the promotion "of a new type of consciousness: acculturated but capable of functioning in the civil society as well as in the Church on the basis of merits, competence and cultural integration."<sup>256</sup> In many regards, Protestant schooling preceded Catholic training in promoting a professional education for Congolese, as Nancy Rose Hunt's *A Colonial Lexicon* demonstrates. Protestants also often expressed reservations about academic education, and they did not pioneer institutes of higher education. A few Protestant secondary schools developed after the Second World War and Protestant Churches started to send students to universities in the United States at the end of the 1950s. More than the will to do so, Protestants lacked the means, as well as the support of the state. The crucial impulse for higher education came from Kisantu, a missionary station along the Bas-Congo railway, and a place not so different from Mbata-Kiela, Mikalayi, or Kinzambi, as we will see in the following chapter.

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<sup>256</sup> V.Y. Mudimbe, *Tales of Faith*, p.117.



## Chapter 4

### The Inspired Hill and the City (these people have built with their own hands)

*A little Bazombo boy once told me he would be happy to live forever among books. "Would you like to be a librarian? – I don't know. Anything so long as I can see books, touch them, and read them from time to time."<sup>257</sup>*

Suzanne Sylvain was a woman of several worlds. Born in Port-au-Prince to a family of Haitian intellectuals, educated in Paris and New York, she moved to Leopoldville during the Second World War. Her Belgian husband, Jean Comhaire, had been sent to the Congo to work in the General Governorate's Information services.<sup>258</sup> A folklorist and anthropologist, Sylvain conducted research in Leopoldville's African neighborhoods. Her work resulted in the publication of *Food and Leisure Among the African Youth of Leopoldville*, a short book quite distinct from other Congolese ethnographies of the same period—that is, publications written by white men (missionaries and territorial administrators) and dedicated to linguistics and the study of customs in rural “tribal” communities. An ethnographic gem, Sylvain's work contained

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<sup>257</sup> Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, *Food and Leisure among the African Youth of Leopoldville (Belgian Congo)* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 1950), p.119.

<sup>258</sup> Jean Comhaire, “Vie et oeuvre d'une folkloriste en Afrique,” in Szilard Biernaczky (ed.), *Folklore in Africa Today: Proceedings of the International Workshop, Budapest 1-4 XI, 1982* (Budapest: Department of Folklore, 1984), p.103-118.

fragments of voices usually absent in the archive of colonial social sciences: urbanites, women, and children. Part of her ethnographic *enquête* focused on the perceptions and aspirations of several hundred school-age children in the city. In a questionnaire administered to 308 male students in several primary and post-primary schools, Sylvain found out that one-third of them aspired to become “clerks,” and that the vast majority of the children desired to access “white collar” professional occupations, only available through advanced schooling in French. Among parents, Sylvain noted a universal desire for the education of male children, as this was viewed as “the golden door to opportunity.” Sylvain also discovered that “country relatives who wanted more education for their boys sent them to town with the mother, or to one of the mother’s relatives.”<sup>259</sup>

This chapter begins with a powerful trio that stood out in Sylvain’s research: schools, cities, and popular aspirations. To a certain extent, education and urbanization developed in parallel as two consequences of the economic and administrative expansion of Belgian colonialism in the Congo. In the 1930s, and increasingly so after the beginning of the Second World War, the colonized transformed Congo’s urban landscape by migrating to towns on their own initiative and against colonial regulations. In parallel, the colonized pressured the church and the state to open more schools throughout the colony. Yet, despite widespread beliefs to the contrary today, the development of educational hubs in urban centers appeared relatively late and often did not include the most prestigious institutions.

The Catholic Church enjoyed a near monopoly on education in the Belgian Congo after the 1910s. The remote locations of many educational institutions reflected the

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<sup>259</sup> Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, *Food and Leisure*, p.121.

cartography of missionary investment in the colony. Early on, the state established a few specialized schools in towns in a deliberate attempt to more directly control the training of personnel needed for the administration and to compete with the Church, as the latter tended to retain the best students for priesthood.<sup>260</sup> However, the colonial administration was never willing or capable of competing with the Church's educational apparatus beyond these few specialized schools. Nor was the state willing to truly address the needs of African urbanites.

Still, the school and the city were intimately bound. Most students who trained in rural Catholic elitist schools joined the crowds of migrants to the city. Students who graduated from Catholic schools often remained on the path that missionaries had imagined for them, by serving the Church as priests or in other capacities. The students who planned their own ways to towns instead belonged to the large numbers that were dismissed from schools without a degree. As V.Y. Mudimbe has noted, these students diversified the sociology of colonial centers. "The elitist organization of the colonial third cycle of education" sent back "each year former seminarians and school drop-outs to public and ordinary life, most of them bitterly frustrated by rejection." These former students "joined the ranks of *évolués* produced by the *écoles normales*, and *écoles moyennes*."<sup>261</sup> In the words of Mudimbe, these educated migrants to the city brought with them their knowledge of Western civilization's crisis, learned at school through the critique of reason, the unconscious and capitalism. Some of them had also been exposed

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<sup>260</sup> See William Milford Rideout, "Education and Elites: The Making of the New Elites and the Formal Education System in the Congo (K)," Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1971, p.331-332.

<sup>261</sup> V.Y. Mubimbe, *Tales of Faith: Religion as Political Performance in Central Africa* (London: The Athlone Press, 1997), p.118.

to negritude and pan-Africanism. Their more developed academic background helped to further the critique of colonial ideology in colonized urban circles. In the city, the educated elite found conditions to articulate a political program, as well as pockets of freedom from the Church and from the state, even though decades of colonial regulations had attempted to secure the control of colonized urbanites.

As this chapter explores colonial urban dynamics, it also resumes the path to higher education where the previous chapter concluded. In the mid-1920s, Paul Salkin imagined that Central Africa's first university would be a state institution based in Leopoldville. He situated the university in Kalina, the central part of town (the city—referring back to Leopoldville), developed in the context of the transfer of the colony's capital from Boma to Leopoldville. Kalina's development took decades and went through different phases and several aborted master plans.<sup>262</sup> In the 1940s, a few urban planners included institutions of higher education in their projections for Kalina, but these schools never materialized, and Salkin was proven wrong by the actual development of Congolese university education. As we will see, Lovanium was deliberately established outside of Leopoldville.

Even if his forecasting failed to be realized in terms of the location of Congo's first university, Salkin identified a potent specter in Belgian approaches to colonial education: an imagined articulation of power and knowledge – what I call the “evolutionary complex.”<sup>263</sup> Combining visions of missionary work, internal migrations,

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<sup>262</sup> See Johan Lagae, “Léopoldville, Bruxelles: Villers miroirs? L'architecture et l'urbanisme d'une capitale coloniale et métropole africaine,” in *Villes d'Afrique : Explorations en histoire urbaine*, ed. by Jean-Luc Vellut (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007), p.67-99.

<sup>263</sup> I deliberately hint at Tony Bennett's theorization of the exhibitionary complex: Tony Bennett, “The Exhibitionary Complex,” in Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley, and Sherry B. Ortner

industrialization, capitalist relations of production, and African enjoyment of European goods and ideas, the “evolutionary complex” linked together African mimicry of European politics and fashion, the dissolution of native authorities, and the black city.

In reaction to the negative visions articulated by Salkin, Congo’s path to higher education sought to avoid the threatening perspective of uprooted, overdressed, and spectacle-wearing Bantus. Instead, the path was agrarian and removed from the Europeanization of Congolese worldviews; hence the relatively remote locations of elitist secondary schools and of Lovanium. All these institutions followed the model set up by the seminaries. Their ambition was to create a Christian civilization that would counter the mimicry that Salkin announced and denounced in 1926. However, as this chapter will argue, the last stretch of the path to school connected the hill on which Catholic missionaries built Lovanium to the cradle of Congolese urban culture in Leopoldville.

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(eds), *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p.123-154. Bennett developed this concept in a critical dialogue with Foucault’s discussion of the emergence of new technologies of surveillance through carceral archipelagos that reconfigured power and governmentality during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Exhibitionary complex designates the set of disciplines, technologies, and institutions that contributed to make masses governable, but made them the subject rather than the object of knowledge. Bennett developed his argument from a variety of empirical cases, mostly museums, fairs, and exhibitions, which transformed the masses into individual spectators that internalized the gaze of power. Temporalization of knowledge was ubiquitous to the exhibitionary complex, notably around the idea of the evolution of races, a message that defined the organizations of a multitude of exhibitions and museums. Salkin’s decision to migrate to the Congo in the 1910s marked a break of a kind from the exhibitionary complex: a departure from seeing to being. Salkin’s critique of colonialism might also be read as an attack against the temptation to push forward the ideas of racial hierarchies at the core of museums and exhibitions by setting cultures and races in motion through the civilizing mission. Therefore, what I mean by evolutionary complex is the image that emerges from Salkin’s critique, from his vision of colonialism (and not from the actual policies that Belgian and other colonial powers implemented), and that articulates 19<sup>th</sup>-century European constructions of race with 20<sup>th</sup>-century programs of social transformations in colonized territories.

## The City

The empathetic portrait of black Leopoldville that Pierre Ryckmans shared in a private letter to his wife in October 1930 stands out next to other images of the colony's new capital circulating in Belgium at the time. In the 1920s and 1930s, journalists writing on Leopoldville always boasted about the great number of cars, the large avenues, and the expensive hotels of the white town, but they never acknowledged the creativity and social energy that emerged from the city's African quarters.<sup>264</sup> Ryckmans, not yet the General Governor of Congo, was on a six-month mission investigating labor conditions in the colony when he wrote his impressions on "native" Leopoldville.<sup>265</sup> "Certainly, there is vagrancy, prostitution and laziness," Ryckmans conceded. "Certainly. But, on the other side, how much effort and how many good examples!" Ryckmans marveled at the initiatives displayed in the *cité*, "the shop counters, photographers, hotels, guesthouses."<sup>266</sup> A bit further in the letter, Ryckmans used the anecdote of a Congolese mechanic who successfully competed with white garage owners and provided his whole street with electric lighting at night through his workshop's dynamo. Ryckmans expressed again to his wife his sense of astonishment at discovering the separate

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<sup>264</sup> Among others, see Pierre Daye, *L'Empire colonial belge* (Brussels: Editions du Soir, 1923).

<sup>265</sup> Born in Flanders in a French-speaking and Catholic bourgeois family, Ryckmans first arrived in Africa as a war volunteer in 1915. After the conquest of Ruanda-Urundi, Ryckmans acted as Royal Commissioner in these territories and organized their new colonial administration. After a decade in the Great Lakes region, he moved back to Belgium in 1928. From 1934 to 1946, he served as the Congo's General Governor, playing an important role in the Belgian colony's participation to the war effort, as well as in the transfer of Congolese uranium to the United States in the context of the "Manhattan Project." After the war, and until his death in 1959, Ryckmans served as the Belgian representative to the United Nations' Trusteeship Council, and also became the Belgian commissioner for atomic energy. See Jacques Vanderlinden, *Pierre Ryckmans, 1891-1959: Coloniser dans l'honneur* (Brussels: De Boeck, 1994).

<sup>266</sup> Jacques Vanderlinden (ed.), *Main d'œuvre, église, capital, et administration dans le Congo des années trente: Journal de Pierre Ryckmans* (Brussels: Académie Royale des Sciences d'Outre-Mer, 2007).

Congolese side of Leopoldville, “*la ville* that these people have built with their hands, with their initiatives, and after their day at work.”<sup>267</sup> Ryckmans underlined the word *ville* in his letter, a term he chose against the more common *cit * or *quartier* to acknowledge the dignity and autonomy of African life in Leopoldville.

Colonized urbanites in the Belgian Congo had to live their life in a rather constrained environment. Colonial regulations and bylaws claimed control over the space of urban centers and over the time of their residents. The colonizer was notably attached to the separation of white and black residents. Segregation measures were first codified in Elisabethville in 1912, the same year Salkin moved to the city. That year the local administration in the copper mining center inaugurated a structured segregationist approach to the colonial urbanism. However, the issue of African urban residence remained under debate during the following decades.<sup>268</sup> In 1921, General Governor Lippens was shocked to see that whites and blacks still lived together in some parts of Elisabethville. Lippens initiated a project to destroy the existing “native quarter” (or *cit * in colonial parlance) and replace it with a new workers camp constructed by the army and more directly under colonial control. That project did not, however, go far. In 1923 the Vice-General Governor Heenen redirected the discussion on the future of the *cit *. Heenen thought that the administration’s task was to build a new settlement that would give birth to a real “native commune.” His idea followed the desire of industrial employers in Katanga to “stabilize” the work force, breaking away from a long decade of accommodation in which workers reintegrated with their rural origins after a few months in Elisabethville’s mines. Heenen called for a new *cit *, in which workers who

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<sup>267</sup> *Idem*, p.137.

<sup>268</sup> See Fernand Gr visse, *Le Centre Extra-Coutumier d’Elisabethville: Quelques aspects de la politique indig ne au Haut-Katanga industriel* (Brussels: Institut Royal Colonial Belge, 1951).

permanently opted for urban residence would settle and in which a new native organization, distinct from the village, would develop. This new African urban society would mirror Belgian communal life, adopt private property, foster individualism, and, ultimately, produce its own governing institutions. The foundation of Elisabethville's new *cit *, later known as Kinshasa, began in 1929, but without the full implementation of communal autonomy envisaged by Heenen. Two years later, an official decree, inspired by Katanga's realization, mandated the organization of *centres extra-coutumiers* (extra-customary centers). The decree established their juridical personality, the participation of a few Africans in local government, and a specific supervisory authority distinct from the territorial administration.<sup>269</sup>

The decree on extra-customary centers was meant to express Belgium's so-called pragmatism and was the combination of direct and indirect rule in the Congo. It was applied in all the major centers in the colony, but not in Leopoldville, even though it was the colony's most important urban concentration, with a population of nearly 50,000 in 1930. Belgium remained uneasy with African permanent urban settlement and with official recognition of some autonomy in the management of African communes. The non-application, at first, of the extra-customary decree in Leopoldville marked Belgian colonial administrators' residual fear of unoccupied young men, free women, rebellious soldiers, angry workers and alienated clerks.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> See Pierre Charles, *Le probl me des Centres Extra-Coutumiers et quelques-uns de ses aspects* (Brussels: Etablissements G n raux d'Imprimerie, 1936).

<sup>270</sup> The idea of extra-customary centers encountered hostility already in Elisabethville, where it had been experimented first. The centers sought to stabilize the workforce of the colonial economy. Yet, people within Union Mini re expressed strong criticisms for the centers, claiming that they did not offer the same possibilities of surveillance as the more rigid worker camps. For these business interests, communal autonomy and local self-government for Africans was dangerous and could foster subversion: see Sean Hanretta,



That fear of the administration was reflected in the disinterest of the missionaries. Catholic missionaries remained indeed absent from Leopoldville's *cit * for most of the Interwar period. Religious institutions were first established in the European part of town, even when they addressed Africans; for instance, the primary school established by the Fr res des Ecoles Chr tiennes in 1910, their vocational school in 1919, and Saint-Joseph's primary and middle school opened with the ambition to educate Congolese clerks by the Scheutists in 1922. Under the impulse of Rapha l de la Kethulle, a Scheutist missionary and professor at Saint-Joseph most commonly remembered in Kinshasa as "Tata Raphael," the Boy Scout movement started to appeal as early as 1928 to an elite of African boys and youth from the *cit *. Yet, Catholic educational activities remained removed from black L opoldville. Paths to school required the crossing of racial and social lines, daily travel in different worlds separated by a buffer zone, back and forth from the *cit * to the white town.

The number of white missionaries in Leopoldville remained limited in the 1930s — not exceeding fifty priests and nuns. Missionary orders were still greatly suspicious of urbanized Africans at the time, considering the city and its important white population as corrupting factors on the newly baptized and preferring rural areas as worthy pastoral territories. During his trip in 1930, Ryckmans talked to Jesuit and Scheutist priests who were starting to reverse their thinking about missionary activities in urban settings.<sup>271</sup> In the mid-1930s, the Scheutists at last decided to inaugurate a parish in Leopoldville's *cit *. Yet, the territorial administration, wary of the installation of White missionaries within

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"Space and Conflict in the Elisabethville Mining Camps, 1923-1938," in Florence Bernault, ed., *A History of Prison and Confinement in Africa*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2003, p.205.

<sup>271</sup> Jacques Vanderlinden, *Main d'œuvre,  glise, capital, et administration dans le Congo des ann es trente*, p.119.

African quarters, delayed the opening of the church. Only in 1936 did Saint-Pierre finally reach completion and see the celebration of its first mass.<sup>272</sup> The following year, Jesuit missionaries were also reaching into the native quarters, this time through the airwaves, with the inauguration of the first radio station in the city, Radio-Léo. Around the same time, the Scheutists organized Catholic Congolese men into guilds of clerks, mechanics, carpenters, masons, traders, horticulturists, nurses, boys, and company workers. At the same time, youth were mobilized through a colonial section of the *Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique* in the black parishes.

Belgian Catholic missionaries certainly increased their activities toward black urbanites in the last few years of the 1930s. Later, the uncontrolled wartime influx of migrants to colonial towns would critically slow down the evangelization of “detrribalized” Africans: the urban population was growing exponentially but no new missionaries arrived from Europe. The affirmation of the Church’s physical presence in the native quarters and its attempts at controlling the social terrain came too late and without enough force. The Catholic Church remained on the margins when African migrants from diverse origins in the Congo basin and further away in West Africa defined the forms that urban culture took around the Stanley Pool, in Brazzaville and Leopoldville.

To repeat Ryckmans’ words, Congolese built their city with their own hands and initiatives. The so-called Coastmen particularly contributed to Congolese urban tonality,

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<sup>272</sup> François Bontinck, “Les missions catholiques à Léopoldville durant la Seconde Guerre mondiale,” in *Le Congo belge durant la Seconde Guerre mondiale: Recueil d’études* (Brussels: ARSOM, 1983), p.399-418.

and in the 1920s, Senegalese migrants created Leopoldville's first African Association.<sup>273</sup>

On the opposite shore, in Brazzaville, French Equatorial Africa's capital, the West African presence was even more important. Coastmen introduced West African and Cuban sounds and helped shape Congolese music in the 1930s. They also contributed to initiating another crucial element in the Congolese capitals' culture: the display of elegant and rare European fashions that startled Salkin out of his senses.<sup>274</sup> Cultural innovations percolated from Brazzaville to Leopoldville, and vice versa. In the 1930s, the European press in Leopoldville called for more policing on the two porous and seemingly dangerous borders: the native quarters and the fluvial border with Brazzaville.<sup>275</sup>

African messianism was part of the "smuggled goods" that made Belgian colonizers anxious. Prophets like Simon Kimbangu, André Matsoua, Simon-Pierre Mpadi, and Mavonga N'Tangu spread a discourse about salvation and the injustice of the colonial order that drew from old prophetic traditions in the Lower Congo and from the Christian bible. These prophets, usually former Catholic and Protestant catechists, shared with many in Leopoldville or Brazzaville the experience of colonial society's limits to education and personal advancement. They created a community of resentment against the colonial situation that connected people in Leopoldville, Brazzaville, and their rural hinterlands. The colonial state answered with repression, relocating, for example, entire families of Kimbanguists from the Lower Congo to far-away regions of the colony. Yet,

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<sup>273</sup> See Ch. Didier Gondola, *Villes miroirs: Migrations et identités à Brazzaville et Kinshasa, 1930-1970* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), p.21-167 and Charles Tshimanga, *Jeunesse, formation et société au Congo-Kinshasa, 1890-1960* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001), p.42ff. On the photograph Hezekiah Andrew Shanu and role of West Africans in Leopoldville earlier in the colonial period, see Christraud M. Geary, *In and Out Focus: Images from Central Africa, 1885-1960* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, 2003), p.104-106.

<sup>274</sup> Ch. Didier Gondola, *Villes miroirs*, p.244

<sup>275</sup> *Idem*, p.48.

the state also answered Kimbanguism with education. Historian Jean-Luc Vellut has showed, for example, how colonial administration requested Catholic missionaries to open a network of French-speaking schools in the area most intensely touched by Kimbanguism, as a concession to “a social demand” and the acknowledgement of the “future-oriented character and modernity of the Kimbanguist hotbed.”<sup>276</sup> The extension of schooling in Leopoldville similarly developed from the tension between Congolese aspirations to education, the state’s desire for control, and the Church’s ambition of hegemony.

After the Second World War, as Suzanne Sylvain predicted, Belgian authorities could not but acknowledge social differentiation among the colonized and the emergence of *évolués* who vocally expressed the colonized appetite for education and the desire to see more schools for their children.

Crossing the Congo River could be a strategy for advancement. It was the road that young Abdoulaye Yerodia took in 1950. He left Leopoldville and the Collège Sainte-Anne to join his Senegalese father who worked for the French *Congo-Ocean* railway company in the harbor of Pointe-Noire. The following year, Yerodia transferred to the prestigious *Lycée Savorgnon de Brazza* in Brazzaville. From there and with a fellowship from the railway company, he was able to move to France in 1953 to study philosophy at the Sorbonne. Brazza served as a gateway to French universities for other young men from Léopoldville. The French colonial capital also welcomed female students from the Belgian Congo, as schools for girls in Léopoldville had a poor reputation.

As the educational system expanded in the Congo in the after-war years new

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<sup>276</sup> Jean-Luc Vellut, *Simon Kimbangu, 1921: De la prédication à la déportation: les sources* (Brussels: Académie Royale des Sciences d’Outre-Mer, 2005), vol.1, t.1, p.xxii.

secondary schools opened in Leopoldville, but the most prestigious schools remained located in rural settings. When Lovanium opened its doors in 1954 none of the thirty-four students in its first cohort had been educated in Leopoldville.

### **The Inspired Hill**

The first Congolese University was inaugurated only a few years before independence. Yet, steps towards Congolese higher education were already taken a few decades earlier. Belgian academics, answering the call of Jesuit father and “missiologist” Pierre Charles, created the University of Louvain Medical Foundation in the Congo (also known by its acronym Fomulac) in 1926. A small group of lay academics were at the origins of Fomulac, and Fernand Malengreau, a chemistry professor, soon became the most active among them. Malengreau notably supervised the opening of Fomulac’s hospital and a nursing school in Kisantu. Inaugurated one year later, the nursing school aimed to produce staff for its own hospital, but also itinerant nurses, who had trained under the Jesuits and who had conducted most of the evangelizing work in the region to act as catechists-teachers.<sup>277</sup> The choice of Kisantu was related to the good reputation of its primary and post-primary schools. The mission station was also home to Hyacinthe Vanderyst, a Belgian priest and agronomist. Arrived in Kisantu in 1906, Vanderyst left his mark on the struggle against sleeping sickness and the promotion of tropical

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<sup>277</sup> See Ng’Ekieb Mukoso, *Aux origines de la mission du Kwango 1879-1914: Tractations et premiers jalons de l’oeuvre jésuite belge au Zaïre* (Kinshasa: Facultés universitaires catholiques, 1981). In 1930, around the time of the creation of Fomulac and Cadulac, 3,114 catechists-teachers trained by the Jesuits were teaching to 53,354 children throughout the Kwango region: see Monsignor Van Hee, “Rapport sur l’exercice 1929-1930,” in *Main d’œuvre, église, capital, et administration dans le Congo des années trente: Journal de Pierre Ryckmans*, ed. by Jacques Vanderlinden (Brussels: Académie Royale des Sciences d’Outre-Mer, 2007), p.283-295.

agriculture. At the end of the 1920s, he had also become a lonely proponent of the establishment of Catholic universities in the colony to train Congolese doctors and agronomists.<sup>278</sup>

Fomulac was soon joined by a second foundation, the University of Louvain Agricultural Center in the Congo, or Cadulac. Its first school for agricultural assistants opened in Kisantu in 1934. Like their colleagues at Fomulac, agricultural assistants at Cadulac were meant to support the itinerant model of colonizing rural Congo. To supplement Belgian territorial coercive supervision of agricultural activities, their actions were intended to boost industrial and agricultural production in crops like cotton and “rationalized” food producing.<sup>279</sup>

During the 1930s and early 1940s, Fomulac and Cadulac opened other nursing and agricultural schools in Katana and Kalenda, in the Kivu and the Kasai provinces respectively. A school for “native” medical assistants, which copied a similar state institution in Leopoldville, completed the nascent educational hub in Kisantu in 1936. Just a few years after Salkin’s death, Kisantu and its sister institutions epitomized a model of colonial education that supported missionary work and state control.

During the Second World War, a progressive trend developed among Catholic students and academics who imagined that the end of the conflict would be the moment

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<sup>278</sup> See notably Hyacinthe Vanderyst, “Les futures universités catholiques au Congo: Leurs rapports avec l’enseignement secondaire,” in *Bulletin des missions*, November-December 1928, p.254-259. On Vanderyst: see Flavien Nkoy Malu, *La mission chrétienne à l’épreuve de la tradition ancestrale (Congo belge, 1891-1933)*, Paris: Karthala, 2007, p.135-136. See also Marvin Makowitz, *Cross and Sword: The Political Role of Christian Missions in the Belgian Congo, 1908-1960* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2007), p.67.

<sup>279</sup> On cotton and colonial coercion, see Osumaka Likaka, *Rural Society and Cotton in Colonial Zaire* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997).

when Congolese would access higher education.<sup>280</sup> Guy Malengreau, Fernand Malengreau's son and a law professor at Louvain, was among this rising generation of Catholic colonial experts. In 1945, he advocated for a school of commercial and administrative sciences for Congolese. That school opened two years later in Kisantu, uniting the medical and agricultural schools through a new common institution named the *Centre Universitaire Congolais Lovanium*. Guy Malengreau's plan was to transform Kisantu into a full-fledged university; however, he encountered resistance both inside the Catholic Church and from the state.

The development of higher education was nevertheless unavoidable. More officials supported initiatives taken at Kinzambi, Kisantu and elsewhere to advance academic education for Congolese.<sup>281</sup> The state finally decided to sponsor five *collèges*, or secondary high schools established on the Belgian model, that prepared students for higher education.<sup>282</sup> In parallel a new reform of primary schooling was adopted in 1948 through the institution of a dual system. The "ordinary path" offered four more years of primary education to the "masses." The aim was to prevent rural families from sending their sons to urban or missionary centers where they could receive a more developed education than the two years of village schools.<sup>283</sup> Not surprisingly, the ordinary path

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<sup>280</sup> See Jean Sohier, *Ma mémoire africaine*.

<sup>281</sup> On official visits in Kinzambi after the war, see Daniel Palambwa Andzwa Empak, "L'école de mon patelin: Notes autobiographique présentées par Kiangu Sindani," unpublished manuscript, p.60.

<sup>282</sup> The five original colleges were Mbanza Boma and Kiniati (both operated by the Jesuits in the Bas-Congo and Kwilu regions), Kamponde (operated by the Scheutists in Kasai), Dungu (a Dominican college in the Uele) and Mugeru (operated by the White Fathers in the Kivu): see Markowitz, *Cross and Sword*, p.69.

<sup>283</sup> Catholic missionaries and administrators considered that, once they had left their original "milieu," young Congolese became lost to the "Europeanized" lifestyle and could not be convinced to return to the village (see notably Joseph Van Keerberghen, *Histoire de l'enseignement catholique au Kasayi*, p.144). However, not all colonials were blind to the fact

focused on “manual activities” and “agricultural exercises.”<sup>284</sup> The reform also instituted a “selected path.” After the first two years of primary schooling, missionary inspectors were in charge of selecting a minority of students, the future elite, based on intellectual and moral criteria. Some missionary orders, however, were initially reluctant to conduct this selection; while others were unequipped and unprepared to do so. Schools offering the selected path were low in numbers and unevenly distributed in the colony. Students who resided too far away from them rarely accessed the selected path.<sup>285</sup> Despite flaws in the system and a high degree of Malthusianism at all degrees of selection, the reform of 1948 transformed the school system: it legitimated the advocates of Congolese higher education.

Several factors played to the advantage of Congolese universities, notably criticisms of Belgium’s insufficient promotion of colonized elites at the United Nations.<sup>286</sup> Rising tensions between the Catholic Church and colonial authorities (notably during the liberal tenures at the Ministry of Colonies in 1946, 1947, and 1954-1958) also worked in favor of the bishops’ support for Lovanium. Finally, the idea of a

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that young Congolese’ reluctance to remain or return to their urban homes was linked to the regime of forced cultivations. In 1944, for example, the inspector for Catholic education in the Kasai noted that students were now considering as a natural and constitutive part of their education the manual and agricultural tasks that previous cohorts of school children had strongly opposed in the 1920s. For the inspector, if the police harassment, forced cultivations and gerontocracy of village life disappeared, young people would happily remain in their rural home and dedicate their life to agriculture (Van Keerberghen, *Histoire de l’enseignement catholique au Kasayi*, p.166-167).

<sup>284</sup> Kita Kyankenge Masandi, *Colonisation et enseignement: cas du Zaïre avant 1960* (Kinshasa: Editions du CERUKI, 1982), p.194-197.

<sup>285</sup> *Idem*, p.199-203.

<sup>286</sup> The former general governor Andre Ryckmans, as well as Joseph Van Wing, a Jesuit missionary and well-known colonial ethnographer, were also among those supporting the idea of a Congolese university, as both a “war debt” to the Congolese and political measure that would strengthen the fidelity of the *évolués*: see Marvin D. Markowitz, *Cross and Sword: The Political Role of Christian Missions in the Belgian Congo, 1908-1960* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1973), p.68.



Congolese university benefited from opposition to the alleged subversive influence of university education on African students in *metropolitan* institutions. Colonial authorities were indeed not looking forward to Congolese following the path taken by the numerous British and French colonized subjects who studied in London or Paris.<sup>287</sup> On January 1, 1949, Malengreau wrote a long letter to the Minister of Colonies in favor of a Congolese university, after which the government authorized Lovanium.<sup>288</sup> The letter successively evoked the “necessity to start training the intellectual and moral elite that might become tomorrow the leading class that will rule over the masses’ destiny;” the bewilderment of that future elite in case of more delay as well as the probable United States criticisms; and the imperative to train this elite in Africa, where it will “stay in touch with the people who it will guide and advise tomorrow.” In the last couple pages of the letter, Malengreau insisted on the crucial importance of the future university’s Catholic character. The law professor clarified the conservative nature of the kind of political emancipation through education that he had in mind:

The goal is the education of a true native elite, that is a class of Blacks for whom instruction will not be a factor of moral decay and anarchy, nor a weapon for revolutionary agitation that could compromise our civilization work, but will be rather a means to collaborate in this work by joining to their professional training

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<sup>287</sup> See Marvin D. Markowitz, *Cross and Word*, p.71-72.

<sup>288</sup> Scholars have had difficulties recognizing the conservative motives behind the creation of the university. In the face of all the oppositions to higher education in the Congo, it has been difficult for some not to envisage the proponents of Lovanium as critics of colonial racism and advocates of Congolese emancipation (see for example Markowitz, *Cross and Word*, p.75). Furthermore, many scholars have reduced the politics of higher education in the Congo to the particular politics of the figures that have promoted its creation: for a recent example, see Ruben Mantels, *Geleerd in de tropen: Leuven, Congo, en de wetenschap, 1885-1960* (Leuven: Universitaire Pers, 2007). The unproblematic association of higher education with progress and self-determination in turn ignores the systemic critique produced by the student movement in the 1960s and the academic critique that has served as a support to the movement.

a strong moral and civic education and an acute sense of responsibilities.<sup>289</sup>

Malengreau adhered to the idea that proper colonial higher education was incompatible with an urban environment. At the opposite point of view, some people in the Church wanted to establish the future university in Leopoldville as part of a more aggressive affirmation of religion in the sphere of power. In October 1950, Lovanium's board of trustees finally chose the Jesuit station of Kiwmenza, situated 25 kilometers from the colony's capital as the future site of the university. The board considered Kimwenza an acceptable compromise: the proximity with Leopoldville would allow Lovanium to "radiate out" to the city. Yet, the university would be sufficiently removed, assuring "a sane and peaceful residence for students" and not jeopardizing their "religious, moral and scientific education."<sup>290</sup> In 1952, Lovanium authorities finally acquired a large plateau, known as Mount Amba, in the direct vicinity of Kiwmenza that offered a beautiful view of Leopoldville and the Congo River. Construction soon started on the plateau and the university officially welcomed its first students in January 1954.

Despite the move from Kisantu to Mount Amba, and the gradual participation of students and professors in the nascent sphere of Congolese politics in Leopoldville, Lovanium remained marked by its separation from the colonial city.<sup>291</sup> That separation

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<sup>289</sup> Guy Malengreau, letter to Pierre Wigny, 1 January 1949, Lovania Papers, Bureau for Catholic Education (BEC) Archives, Kinshasa.

<sup>290</sup> Guy Malengreau, *L'Université Lovanium des origines lointaines à 1960* (Kinshasa: Editions universitaires africaines, 2008), p.39.

<sup>291</sup> Two Lovanium professors served as the main advisors of the *Conscience Africaine* group during the redaction of their manifesto in 1956, which inaugurated a new era of Congolese nationalist demands. Led by Mbata-Kiela's already renowned alumnus, Joseph Malula, at the time the first priest in charge of an African parish in the colony's capital, these Catholic elites and their Belgian sponsors organized to counter-attack against recent socialist and liberal initiatives in trade unions as well as other associations of *évolués* that were competing for the small power openings progressively conceded by colonial authorities. As

particularly appealed to students who did not originate from Leopoldville. This was the case of Oswald Ndeshyo, a Congolese Tutsi from Masisi in the Kivu. He joined Lovanium in the late 1950s after several years spent at the major seminary of Baudouinville in Northern Katanga. Discussing his memories of the University in an interview with me, he emphasized the clerical aspect of the campus. “Priests directly managed the student dorms,” he offered as an example. “In the end,” he added, by comparing Lovanium to the major seminary he had just left, “I was not so much disoriented: I found myself in a familiar environment. And Lovanium was very far from the city. And it was all surrounded by the forest.” Asked if he sometimes ventured into the city, he answered: “I had no family in Leopoldville. I did not know the language. So I very rarely went there. We only went when we had something to buy at the central market.”<sup>292</sup>

The relative seclusion of Lovanium appeared even more clearly in comparison to the situation of the *Université d’Etat*, conceived as a white institution for children of Belgian colonials based in the Congo. The latter opened its doors in 1956 in the center of Elisabethville.<sup>293</sup> By contrast, Lovanium evoked the seminaries and *collèges* that were built with the idea to maintain students outside of the “world.” In Mbata-Kiela, Kabwe or

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we saw in Chapter Two, the manifesto led two years later to the creation of the Congolese National Movement, the first major political party, initially also an initiative of Congolese Catholics, in which a few students from Lovanium played an important role.

<sup>292</sup> Oswald Ndeshyo, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 7 June 2010. Professor Oswald Ndeshyo is a former dean at the University of Kinshasa’s department of Law and an important actor in the “political transition” and military rebellions of the 1990s and 2000s. As we will see in Chapter 8, he became a major student leader in the early 1960s.

<sup>293</sup> The University of Elisabethville occupied several buildings in the city center of Elisabethville from its creation in 1956 until 1959, when it moved to the slightly more peripheral location that it still occupies today. See Michel Lwamba Bilonda, “L’Université de Lubumbashi: de 1956 à nos jours,” in Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem (ed.), *L’Université dans le devenir de l’Afrique: Un demi-siècle de présence au Congo-Zaïre* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2007), p.37-57.

Bolongo, forests and the lack of roads guaranteed seclusion for the seminarians. Lovanium was more easily accessible, but the university's site, soon nicknamed the Inspired Hill (*la colline inspirée*),<sup>294</sup> was reminiscent of the topography of sites like the Benedictine Collège de la Karavia in Lubumbashi, the Scheutist educational hubs of Mikalayi and Kamponde in Kassai, the Jesuit collèges of Kikwit, Kiniati and Mbanza-Boma, and the Josephites schools in Kinzambi. These different sites visually elevated schools in the colonial landscape, and created an experience of isolation from urban settings. The latter, physical seclusion, is a trope present in most memoirs written by Congolese who went through these schools in the late 1940s and in the 1950s.<sup>295</sup> This idea was repeated in interviews: several informants insisted on the fact of separation, and the affective and social isolation of Catholic boarding schools. By comparison, they remembered their arrival at Lovanium as a moment when horizons opened. While access to the university meant a break from the intrusive discipline of the secondary schools, frequent references to the image of the *inspired hill* in the discourse of my interviewees acted as a narrative reminder of the role of the campus' topography in separating the worlds of Catholic missionary education and colonial urban modernity.<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> *La colline inspirée* was a novel written by the French Catholic author Maurice Barrès. Published in 1913, the novel described the struggle between mysticism and submission to authority inside the Catholic church: Maurice Barrès, *La colline inspirée* (Paris: Emile Paul, 1913). The reference to the novel in Lovanium's nickname seemed to have been lost on many students, who interpreted instead the qualification of *inspirée* more as a comment on Lovanium's conductivity to intellectual work than to a specific spiritual quality of the site.

<sup>295</sup> V.Y. Mudimbe, *Le corps glorieux des mots et des êtres: Esquisse d'un jardin africain à la bénédictine* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1994); Sampassa Kaweta Milombe G-M, *Conscience et politique au Congo-Zaïre: De l'engagement aux responsabilités* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003), p.17-18; Joseph Kabemba Biabululu wa Mayombo, *Le destin de Biabululu, l'enfant de la patience* (Kinshasa: Editions Universitaires Africaines, 1998), p.15.

<sup>296</sup> It is revealing to note for example that Godefroid Sampassa calls the Benedictine *collège* of La Karavia in Elisabethville the *inspired savanna* in his autobiography, to indicate both the high intellectual level of the *collège* in which he studied in the late 1950s and early

Lovanium remained inside the logic of the Belgian Catholic colonial educational system. The self-avowed goal of the system was to produce Christian subjects and very specific colonial middle figures, yet prevent the emergence of overly Europeanized Africans. It was also a complex, discriminating system. In the career of any given student, moments of selection and rerouting punctuated every turn of the path, with risks of dead-ends, detours and roadside accidents. Decisions were not always in the hands of the student, even for the few elected ones who survived colonial attrition rates.

During a long afternoon of discussions with Aubert Mukendi and his wife Josée in their apartment in the suburbs of Paris in January 2011, this point emerged with clarity. After graduating from the *Collège Saint-Boniface* in Elisabethville in 1954, Aubert joined the Catholic seminary of Kansenia under pressure from his teachers. A few months in Kansenia convinced him of his inability to embrace an ecclesiastical vocation, and he moved back to Mwene Ditu, his parents' hometown in Kasai. "I borrowed my dad's bike to wander everywhere with my female cousins," Aubert told me. This forced the local priest to realize that there was "no more hope with this one." Former professors from Saint-Boniface then wrote to the territorial administrator to ask him to assure that Aubert would continue his education: "The territorial administrator summoned me and my father to his office, and he ordered me to go study at the Fomulac in Kalenda. If I refused to become a medical assistant, he would otherwise draft me for a "voluntary" military service of seven years. So I said: "I'll go to Kalenda."<sup>297</sup> Aubert only stayed one year at

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1960s as well as the profound isolation of the students. The *collège* is an interesting example because it was first established in the more remote location of Luishia near Jadotville; however, its transfer to Elisabethville hardly affected the isolation of students from the rest of society: see Sampassa Kaweta Milombe, *Conscience et politique au Congo-Zaire*, p.17-21.

<sup>297</sup> Aubert Mukendi, personal interview, recorded Paris, 15 Jan. 2011.

Kalenda, after which he was able to transfer to Lovanium and study mathematics, a topic of his choice and not one imposed by a priest or colonial administrator. The memory he shared with me was not devoid of amused remembering of the paradoxes of colonial emancipation, as Mudimbe would surely detect.<sup>298</sup> Aubert's anecdote expressed well how young Congolese experienced the rigidity of Catholic education in colonial Congo. Jean-Baptiste Mulemba, to take another example, explained to me how he was forced to follow an educational path that he did not want to. A few years younger than Mukendi, Mulemba grew up in Leopoldville, into a family from the Lower Congo with close acquaintance to the Kimbanguist Church. Yet, Mulemba started his education in Catholic schools. After primary school, he wanted to continue his education in Saint-Raphaël, a professional school that trained clerks for the state and private enterprises. The missionaries refused to let him register in Saint-Raphaël. Because he had graduated from primary school with very good results, Mulemba was forced to enter the most prestigious Saint-Joseph school, which had started to prepare Congolese students for university education. The logic of missionary education was based on rigid presuppositions about the desirability of certain educational paths and professional careers over others, which did not always correspond to young Congolese' own perceptions. At the age of 12, Mulemba did not know anybody who had accessed university, and did not dream of joining such an institution. Instead, he admired one of his older cousins who worked as a

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<sup>298</sup> Aubert Mukendi's anecdote of "coerced emancipation" through school was reflected in a story shared by Jean-Baptiste Mulemba about schooling in Leopoldville during the 1950s. After primary school, Mulemba was sent "by force" to the Collège Sainte-Anne, the Scheutist elitist secondary school situated in the white section of Leopoldville. To follow in the steps of one of his cousins, Mulemba wanted instead to attend the Saint-Raphael school in the *cité*, which trained native clerks and did not teach the Latin and Greek classes that Mulemba did not want to take. However, when he showed up at Saint-Raphael, the school director did not accept him and sent him back to Sainte-Anne: Jean Baptiste Mulemba, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 18 July 2011.

clerk for a Portuguese company in Leopoldville, and he wanted just to follow his path. This did not make sense to the Belgian missionary who decided to send Mulemba to Saint-Joseph.<sup>299</sup>

In November 2009, Justin-Marie Bomboko, the first Congolese student at Free University of Brussels in 1955, shared a similar reflection about the first part of his higher education in the late 1940s. A native Equateur, Bomboko moved to Bas-Congo to attend the administration section of the *Centre Universitaire*, “as they pretentiously called” the school. Remembering that period of his life decades later, the sense of possibility that he might have felt at the time disappeared in his words. Instead, Bomboko remembered Kisantu as an “experiment” before Belgians finally decided they could grant Congolese access to universities, and “we were among the guinea pigs.”<sup>300</sup>

When Lovanium opened, it became the final destination along the road to education for the Catholic missionaries’ protégés. Joseph Kabemba, who later entered the University as a medical student in 1956, recollected the first commencement ceremony at the *collège Saint-Jean Berchmans* of Kamponde in 1953 when a few senior students were getting ready to join Lovanium. Kabemba remembered one sentence in particular in the speech by the school’s director: “You are at the beginning of a long line to come, and that will continue to infinity.” In 1947, the *collège* had started with 36 students in the first year, but only 6 of them survived the yearly selections and graduated in 1953:

Our elder colleagues left us that night with their eyes turned towards the University of Kimwenza which was going to open its first preparatory year in 1954. Myself, I was then only in the *4e année latine*. I had still a long road ahead of me. I was happy and at the same time very melancholic. But I felt courageous because I knew that my turn would come too. The opening of Lovanium had made us less anxious about the future. From then on, at the end of every school year, a group of young

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<sup>299</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>300</sup> Justin-Marie Bomboko, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 6 Nov. 2009.

people would leave the *collège* with a parchment that would open them to new horizons.<sup>301</sup>

The nuances of Kalemba's memories illustrate well the ambiguity of the road to school for young Congolese. The Catholic Church developed a program of higher education in the 1940s and 1950s to continue its work of conversion. Despite continuing clerical supervision, higher education marked a rupture for students who had survived the harsh selection process of primary and middle schools and colleges. New paths, not always intended by the Church, opened for these students: from one Congolese institution to another, from Congo to Europe, and also from rural to urban worlds.

### **Decolonizing the Swimming Pool**

The late 1950s and early 1960s saw a geographical shift in the distribution of elitist schools from rural locations to urban centers, particularly Leopoldville. Congolese demands were instrumental, as well as the new political orientation of the Ministry of Colonies under the tenure of August Buisseret between 1954 and 1958. Buisseret opened a network of *athénées*, state secondary schools that followed the elite curriculum of metropolitan education. All these new schools were established in urban settings. To compete, the Church was forced to adapt its offerings and develop elite education in towns.

Many students in the newly opened elitist secondary schools in Leopoldville in the 1950s – the Catholic Sainte-Anne school and *Collège* Albert, and the state *athénées* of Kalina and Ngiri-Ngiri – were the children of *évolués* trained in rural Catholic complexes like Kisantu, Mikalayi and Kinzambi. While their parents had migrated to the

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<sup>301</sup> Joseph Kabemba Biabululu, *Le destin de Biabululu*, p.34.



city, working as medical assistants, clerks and qualified workers for the state and private enterprises, students in Leopoldville's new schools became the first generation of elite to be trained in the city. After 1959, hundreds of students fled the Luba-Lulua conflicts in Kasai to join relatives and attend schools in Leopoldville. Their presence marked the new role of cities as sites of refuge in contexts of political violence.

By the late 1950s, young Congolese enjoyed a greater flexibility in the construction of their own educational paths. Some students alternated between rural and urban schools, and others between Catholic and state institutions. Buisseret's *athénées* offered second chances to students who had been expelled from the Fathers' schools, including several of my informants like Jean-Baptiste Mulemba, Elikia M'Bokolo and Anasthase Nzeza – all three good students, in Leopoldville's *Collège* Sainte-Anne for the two former, and at the Jesuit *collège* of Mbanza-Boma for the latter. They were expelled for expressing disinterest or defiance for their schools' religious curriculum and found refuge at the *athénée interracial* of Ngiri-Ngiri in Leopoldville's *cité*. In that respect, *athénées* expanded the role played by Protestant primary schools as a safety net for pupils who had to negotiate the hard and oftentimes arbitrary discipline of missionary schools. Like Lumumba, many Congolese were able to advance in their education thanks to the competition between Protestants and Catholics, passing from one network to the other following personal inclinations and measures of exclusions.<sup>302</sup> There were many Protestant primary schools, but Protestant secondary education was underdeveloped, with a few exceptions like Kimpese in the Lower Congo. In that regard, the *athénées* extended the benefits of schools' concurrence to the secondary education.

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<sup>302</sup> See Pierre Erny, *Sur les sentiers de l'université: Autobiographies d'étudiants Zaïrois* (Paris: La Pensée Universelle, 1977), p.395-397.

The reforms initiated by Buisseret started to change the map of Congolese education. The “white exodus” of July 1960 that followed Congo’s independence from Belgium on June 30 completed that transformation, as the number of professors dramatically decreased and issues of safety suddenly rendered urban locations much more attractive than isolated rural schools. An important consequence of the post-July 1960 movements was the Africanization of students at the Jesuit *Collège* Albert, the most prestigious school of Leopoldville where nearly no Congolese had been admitted during the colonial period, as well as of the *athénée* of Kalina, also a predominantly white institution before independence.<sup>303</sup> Malonga Miatudila was one of the students who made the transition from the Scheutist Sainte-Anne school to the Jesuit *Collège* Albert in 1960. “Jesuits were much more *cool* than Scheutist fathers,” he remembered when we met at his home in the suburbs of Washington DC in June 2011. “With the Scheutists, it was the whip (*la chicotte*): you felt the spirit of Tata Raphaël.”

As we saw earlier, the famous missionary Raphael de la Kéthulle de Ryhove organized youth movements in Leopoldville in the 1920s. He also supervised several Scheutist schools, notably Sainte-Anne and Saint-Joseph, and pioneered sport activities in Leopoldville from the 1920s to the 1950s.<sup>304</sup> To this day, Tata Raphaël remains a popular character in urban memory in Kinshasa, even though he is also remembered for his use of

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<sup>303</sup> Guy Yangu, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 1 June 2010.

<sup>304</sup> Tata Raphaël early on identified youth vagrancy as one of his main targets (Raphaël de la Kéthulle de Ryhove, “Le vagabondage à Kinshasa,” in *Congo* 3-2 (1922), p.727-730. His struggle for education, sport and youth movements resulted from the relatively hostile environment of Leopoldville towards missionary Catholicism, as he exposed in 1948 in a letter to his successor at Collège Saint-Joseph: “You realized that this action was a successful means to make revolve around us and keep under the missionary’s influence that mass of young people who not only escaped us, but who were becoming hostile towards us.” (cited in François Bontinck, “Le directeur d’école, alias Tata Raphaël,” in Marc Quaghebeur (dir.), *Figures et paradoxes de l’Histoire au Burundi, au Congo et au Rwanda*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2002, p.64).

corporal punishment. Miatudila contrasted the environment created by the generalization of these punishments at Sainte-Anne (“the spirit of Tata Raphaël”) with the environment of *Collège* Albert, “where you were there just to... study,” he told me, with one of those laughs that seemed to express the oddity of an educational system so remote in time and space when remembered from Rockville, Maryland in 2011. Doctor Miatudila continued to develop the contrast between Sainte-Anne and *Collège* Albert, exposing, to my surprise, the greater attrition of the Scheutists. When he left Sainte-Anne in 1960 only eight students graduated that year from a cohort that initially consisted of thirty students: “It was a real regime of terror,” dramatized Miatudila. By contrast, “at the Jesuit *collège*, most of the colleagues who started with me finished with me,” he said.

Despite the lesser severity of the Jesuits, *Collège* Albert remained undisputed as the most prestigious school in the city. For Miatudila, the son of a bank clerk who counted the son of Prime Minister Iléo among his classmates in 1961, moving to *Collège* Albert also meant a greater experience of social diversity.<sup>305</sup> The reproduction of power probably always opens opportunities for its contestation. Not surprisingly, a great number of leaders in the student movement were alumni of elite institutions like *Collège* Albert and similar institutions, such as *Collège* Karavia in Elisabethville.

The shift in the distribution of elitist secondary schools in the late 1950s and early 1960s meant that more city students began to access higher education. The first few cohorts at Lovanium had been composed exclusively of graduates from the rural colleges and of former seminarians. The situation changed after 1957 and 1958, with the arrivals of students like Paul-Henri Kabayidi, whose identity was strongly marked by Leopoldville. “Me, I am a *Kinois*,” Kabayidi told me when we met in 2011. “I was born

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<sup>305</sup> Malonga Miatudila, personal interview, recorded, Rockville, Maryland, 3 April 2012.

at the general hospital of Kinshasa... *Voilà*... I was born in Kinshasa, I grew up in Kinshasa, I have always been in Kinshasa.”

Paul-Henri Kabayidi became a major political organizer in the mid-1960s, but he was already interested in politics as a teenager in the 1950s. The house of his parents became a regular meeting place for his friends from schools and others who studied in Brazzaville but spent weekends home in Leopoldville. As political events unfolded in the 1950s, discussion groups mushroomed throughout the Congo. However, Leopoldville offered Kabayidi and his friends opportunities that were not available elsewhere.

“Sometimes, we had guests over.” They invited Thomas Kanza, an alumnus of Sainte-Anne and the first Congolese to study in Belgium, when he came back to the Congo in 1957. Other guests included people who lived on Kabayidi’s street, like Jean Bolikango, a teacher at the Scheutist school and one of the most prominent *évolués* of Leopoldville; Alphonse Makwambala, the president of the *Parti du Peuple*, and one of the rare Marxists in the Congo before 1960; and Antoine Nguvulu, a trade unionist and another member of the *Parti du Peuple*.<sup>306</sup>

Kabayidi participated in a new type of student politics at Lovanium – he attended the Catholic University from 1958 to 1960, when he transferred to the Free University of Brussels. With other *bana Lipopo* (children of Leopoldville), he created an association on the campus called *Ata Ndele*, literally “sooner or later.” *Ata Ndele* referred to a song released in 1955 by Adou Elenga, a young star of Congolese Rumba and the Leopoldville-born son of a West African clerk. “*Ata Ndele, mokili ekobaluka*: sooner or later the country will change.” “*Ata Ndele, mundele akosukana*: sooner or later the [domination of the] white man will end.” Elenga predicted the liberation of the Congo.

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<sup>306</sup> Paul Kabayidi, Personal interview, recorded, Brussels, 12 Feb. 2011.

Colonial authorities arrested him and banned his song.<sup>307</sup>

By naming their association after a symbol of anticolonial urban culture, students from Leopoldville at Lovanium announced the provocative tone and unconventional style of their politics. When I asked Paul Kabayidi if *Ata Ndele* was a cultural association, he answered: “No. No. No. Political. Well... cultural or political, everything was mixed.”<sup>308</sup>

*Ata Ndelists* opened the campus doors to the world of Congolese music, its popular opposition to Belgian rule, and its celebration of fashion and hedonism.

The aesthetic of Congolese music and urban culture challenged the ethic of work and obedience taught in rural missionary schools. The *bana Lipopo* of *Ata Ndele* introduced a strong ferment of independence and subversion – the spirit of “black Leopoldville” – in an institution that had hoped to crown decades of missionary Christianity. Furthermore, these students disrupted the colonial logic of ethnic assignation. Catholic boarding schools had indeed produced and encouraged ethnic identifications among the aspiring Congolese elite; and regional associations and *mutuelles*, grouping Lovanium’s students by provinces or district of origins, maintained the primacy of ethnicity in everyday student experience on campus. These ethnic associations also sought the membership of students from Leopoldville, a city nearly exclusively populated by “migrant” families from the Lower and Upper Congo, and from the Kwilu, Kwango, and Kasai areas. By participating in *Ata Ndele* rather than ethnic

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<sup>307</sup> See Gary Stewart, *Rumba on the River: A History of the Popular Music of the Two Congos* (New York: Verso, 2000), p.71; Ch. Didier Gondola, *Villes miroirs*, p.274; Ch. Didier Gondola, “Bisengo ya la joie’: Fête, sociabilité et politique dans les capitales congolaises,” in Odile Goerg (ed.), *Fêtes urbaines en Afrique: Espaces, identités et pouvoirs* (Paris: Karthala, 1999), p.87-111; Ch. Didier Gondola, “Ata Ndele... et l’indépendance vint: Musique, jeunes et contestation politique dans les capitales congolaises,” in Hélène d’Almeida-Topper et al. (eds.), *Les jeunes en Afrique: La politique et la ville* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1992), p.463-483.

<sup>308</sup> Paul Kabayidi, Personal interview, recorded, Brussels, 12 Feb. 2011.

associations, *bana Lipopo* on campus expressed pride in the urban, cosmopolitan, and creole culture of their city. “To be born in Leopoldville or to be a resident of many years’ standing is a source of respect from others,” noted the anthropologist J.S. La Fontaine, who researched urban politics in the early 1960s. La Fontaine focused her work on the *cit *, but she also considered the campus in her study of Leopoldville’s distinct identity: “A student of Lovanium University told me that the students brought up in Leopoldville stand out among the others; they tend to keep together in cliques which ignore the tribal and provincial ties that unite other students in groups of friends.”<sup>309</sup>

*Ata Ndelists* made other students at Lovanium aware of their own provincialism and lack of sophistication. Quite tellingly, when I questioned Nestor Mpeye about class distinction on campus, he mobilized the narrative of the city and the country. Mpeye entered the university in 1959 after graduating from the “bush” Jesuit *coll ge* of Kiniati. To my question on class, he first answered: “One black student drove an Impala. Does it ring a bell for you? It was the Rolls Royce of the time.” That student was the son of a “*grand bwana*,” a school director in Leopoldville and “therefore an * volu *, therefore a darling of the Fathers. To access the level of school director, you really had to be someone.”

When I met Professor Mpeye in Kinshasa, he had had a very successful career as a professor, former rector at the University of Kinshasa, and former statesman under Mobutu. Yet, he still remembered vividly the view from the other end of the social spectrum when he first arrived at Lovanium: “Contrary to our colleague who drove the Impala, most of us were the children of petty * volu s* or even of peasants.” The students

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<sup>309</sup> J.S. La Fontaine, *City Politics: A Study of Leopoldville, 1962-1963* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1970), p.133.

who came “from Leopoldville mostly, and also from Stanleyville or Elisabethville impressed us.” “The children of *Union Minière*,” for example, “were urbanites. While, in my case, I had never seen an electric iron before coming to Lovanium.” Similarly, students from Stanleyville “had considered themselves the equals of *évolués* and other *fonctionnaires de l’Etat*” since they were 15 or 16. “They were *urbanized*, we were not.” Professor Mpeye “strongly remember[ed] that difference.” He directly followed with an emblematic dialogue between an urbanized student and his provincial friend, linking class to sociability, music, and gender: “—Us, we go out on Saturdays. — Oh, really? Where do you go? — We go dancing. — Dancing? With women?” Professor Mpeye laughed and said “*enfin bref*,” then laughed again. He had finished answering my question.<sup>310</sup>

Several other informants added similar memories, but my conversation with one of them in particular, Thomas Mambo, is worth mentioning, as his trajectory shows even more clearly how urban culture offered itself as an alternative to missionary hegemony. Mambo became a student at Lovanium in 1963 at the age of 23, after renouncing his religious engagement as a Catholic Brother in the far-away Kivu province. At the time he still bore the name of his Portuguese grandfather, Santos. Only later, with Mobutu’s authenticity measures in 1972, would he become Elanga Mambo *ex-Santos*. In 2011, we sat in a Congolese bar in Brussels together. The loud music probably guided the course of our conversation, and we spent quite some time talking about Afro-Club, a dancing group that the young Santos created at the University back in the 1960s. Arriving at Lovanium from his monastery, Thomas Santos realized that, like all the other students from seminaries and boarding schools, he did not know how to dance. “Those who knew how

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<sup>310</sup> Nestor Mpeye, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 10 April 2010.

to dance at the time were the *Kinois*,” he said. “At that time, there was a group of headstrong students, the *Ata-Ndelists*. I made friends among them and we went down to dancing clubs every weekend: to the Mambo, the Phoenix Bleu, the Afro-Milano, the Péruche Bleue, etc.” The former Catholic Brother brought back to the campus what he learned during the weekends. With money from the University, he bought a player and records and began to teach dancing to other students from the interior. The Afro-Club was his main activity at Lovanium, and it concluded a personal journey out of his monastery in Kivu.<sup>311</sup>

Lovanium did not keep to the model of colonial Catholic medieval revivalism like other monastery-like educational complexes in the Congo. The Inspired Hill opened itself to the world and the teeming city of Leopoldville. The students who had grown up in the colonial capital intensified communications between the University and the *cité*. *Bana Lipopo* participated in politicizing the Lovanium student body through establishing connections with politicians, as we saw above. They also transformed Lovanium deeply by altering its image. This may seem more superficial than connecting students with anticolonial politicians, but in many ways, Lovanium emerged first as the surface of a projection, a mere image, or what the colonizer called “a shopping window onto the future”.<sup>312</sup>

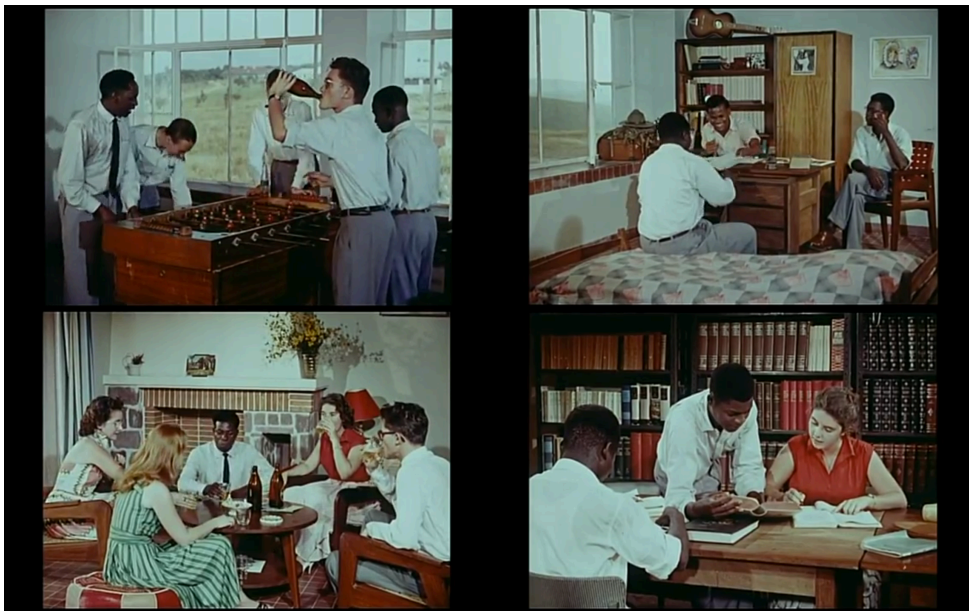
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<sup>311</sup> Thomas Mambo-Santos, personal interview, recorded, Brussels, 26 Feb. 2011.

<sup>312</sup> In 1953, Walter De Paeuw, the director of the mining department at the general government in Leopoldville, articulated the iconic function of the University at the occasion of a meeting of Belgian Catholics in Leopoldville. De Paeuw confessed that he doubted that “the intellectual capacities of Congolese” would legitimate the erection of a University in the colony. However, “it is opportune for political reasons to create a real university,” De Paeuw added, “even if potential students are only a tiny minority.” The verbatim transcription of the meeting did not explicate what De Paeuw meant by “political reasons.” Yet in the eyes of Belgian Catholics, the University represented a way to restore the prestige of the church



In real life, students never exactly conformed to the colonial script. But, in 1958, the Belgian director Gérard De Boe captured on film a version of what the colonizer wanted to see in the university. The ten-minute propaganda film, simply entitled *Lovanium*, featured scenes in which white and black students were studying and playing together. The biracial campus appeared on the screen as a poster-child for the so-called Belgian-Congolese community, which attempted at the time to challenge African nationalism's ineluctability. The film advanced its political agenda without much subtlety. By doing so, it introduced more ambiguous elements about life on the campus. Sequences on leisure, music, beer drinking, and coeducational sociability certainly participated in conveying the film's message of interracial conviviality, but they also evoked the popular culture of hedonism in Leopoldville in ways that might not have been fully intended by the director.



**Figure 18: Gérard De Boe. “Lovanium.” Movie screenshots. 1958.**

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among Congolese *évolués* “Lovania: Procès-verbal de la réunion du comité central du 4 novembre 1953 au Cercle Albert Ier.” Lovania Papers, BEC, Kinshasa.

De Boe's film did not present an adequate portrait of interracial relationships at Lovanium. It did however suggest the rapidly changing atmosphere on campus, in the wake of the accession of *bana Lipopo* to the university. As appeared in interviews with several students, they gained their education as much in the backstreets of the *cités* and in contact with *cowboys* and members of the "dangerous classes," as on the school benches of the Scheutist Fathers.<sup>313</sup> The city's spirit of defiance was expressed through student slang and in the humor conveyed in student journals. It also sometimes emerged in moments of protest and charivari.

"It is worth your research, I should tell you that story." The opening of Lovanium's swimming pool in 1960 was an event that Professor Mpeye remembered particularly vividly. Monsignor Malula, the former Mbata-Kiela's seminarian and first black bishop of Leopoldville, had just been added to the University Board when the swimming pool opened. Yet, that gesture towards Africanization, in the perspective of the coming independence, was not necessarily synonymous with emancipation for Lovanium students. "This swimming pool, well, it was a real gift... But what did this gift hide?" Monsignor Malula protested to Rector Gillon about the possibility of female and male students "together half naked" in the swimming pool: "This is not in our culture! What is this about? It cannot work like that," Professor Mpeye told me, impersonating Malula. Gillon accommodated Malula's demand of separate pool hours for male and female students. This strongly upset students on campus, and they decided to sabotage the official inauguration of the pool. "This started a real revolt. A revolt!" Students

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<sup>313</sup> On Congolese cowboys, see Ch. Didier Gondola, "Tropical Cowboys: Westerns, Violence, and Masculinity among the Young Bills of Kinshasa," in *Afrique et Histoire* 7 (2009), p.75-98. See also, Paul Raymaekers, *Prédélinquance et délinquance juvénile à Léopoldville (1960-1961): Cliché sociologique* (Brussels: Paul Raymaekers Foundation, 2010).

contested Malula's summoning: "What does that mean? Which culture? Whose customs?" Instead of joining the academic authorities and the Governor General the day of the swimming pool's inauguration,

we decided to all go take a bath together in the small pond that existed at the time on the side of student dorms. Oh, that was really... a *guindaille* [a student celebration marked by debauchery], as people say in Belgium. Then we decided to all go together in our swimming suits to the official residence of Rector Gillon. The Rector could not believe it; he was really distressed, and Malula then started to preach to us.<sup>314</sup>

However, the protest was partly successful: "In the end Belgian female students were authorized to use the swimming pool at the same time as us." However, the Congolese female students on campus, who were all at the annexed nursing school, "were still banned to do so by the Catholic nuns who supervised them: 'No, no, that is out of question.' So we could see them go to the swimming pool all dressed, and they chose moments to go there when we were in class." Mpeye, the former student of the rural and secluded *collège* of Kinyati, concluded with a smile in his voice: "Anyway, that was an extraordinary episode."<sup>315</sup>

On the eve of independence and six years after the opening of the university, the uproar over the swimming pool demonstrated a surprising fusion of Belgian and Congolese traditions of youthful irreverence. It marked the emancipation of Lovanium students from the missionary mold.<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> Nestor Mpeye, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 6 April 2010.

<sup>315</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>316</sup> Other memories of Lovanium show the liminal character of the swimming pool in the topography of the campus, as a place of demarcation and encounter between professors and students, and between leisure and work: see notably Albert Muylkens, "Lovanium, avant, pendant et après," in Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem (ed.), *Les années Lovanium: La première université francophone d'Afrique subsaharienne* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010), vol.2, p.97-98.

### ***Pamba Schools, Independence, Politics***

A few weeks after students at Lovanium ended an official and formal reception with an improvised “revolt” in swimming suits, Congolese soldiers’ mutiny put an abrupt end to the celebration of the country’s independence. While the University was not excessively affected by the army’s mutiny in July 1960, the exodus of white teachers severely handicapped secondary schools. Martin Ekwa was the man who had to face the crisis in secondary education. A Jesuit Father who had been trained at Kinzambi and then in Belgian and Italian Universities, Ekwa became the new head of the Catholic Office for Education in the aftermath of independence. In the chaos of the crisis, the new official state ministry, despite the support of UNESCO agents, clearly lacked the means to fulfill its ambitions.<sup>317</sup> In that context, Ekwa, in charge of the vast majority of schools in the country, became a de facto substitute Minister of Education. When we met in Kinshasa, Father Ekwa remembered the period as a time of collapse: “You must remember that at the time it was terrible. From one day to the next, there was a total void.” He repeated the latter phrase two more times and continued: “One wonders how the country stayed together. And, in my opinion, the country remained together through the parishes.” Father

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<sup>317</sup> UNESCO, and particularly its French representatives in the Congo, attempted to reform the whole educational system in the Congo. UNESCO worked directly with the different ministers of education, pushing for immediate and radical Africanization of the teaching personnel in the country – and therefore establishing a network of *Ecole Normale* (three-year teachers colleges) in the different provinces. Ekwa was not necessarily opposed to the question of Africanization and of the modernization of pedagogy that UNESCO advisors advocated. However, he reacted vehemently to their influence and presence in the Congo, as anti-clericalism was also on the agenda of the UN experts. During our meeting in 2010, Ekwa still harbored his critical views of UNESCO. However, looking at the actual policies in the early 1960s shows that Ekwa collaborated with both the State and UNESCO in designing a reform that was meant to transform secondary education in the Congo and terminate its extremely elitist status by making sure that at least 10 per cent of the Congolese children accessed it. See Josué Mikobi Dikay, “La politique de l’Unesco pour le développement de l’éducation de base en République Démocratique du Congo: 1960-1980.” Doctoral dissertation, Université d’Orléans, 2008, p,123-138.

Ekwa was convinced that the church kept the country together in what he described as a sort of interregnum: “The Belgians were gone. They had abandoned their cars in the middle of streets and they had crossed over to Brazzaville, to go to.... It was something terrifying.” Ekwa’s memory of the Catholic Bureau of Education at independence showed the difficulty of the way out of colonialism, and a crisis that was both personal and political. “A void!” he repeated again. “We were wondering what we had to do: Should we continue to govern? Should we continue or not? And how?”<sup>318</sup>

Secondary education was greatly affected by the shortage of professors. In July and August 1960, many had left Congo in the aftermath of the mutiny. State-run *athénées* were particularly handicapped, even with the technical support of UNESCO and its sending of Haitian professors.<sup>319</sup> The situation remained volatile in many schools. The Belgian teachers who had remained in the Congo wanted to receive assurance about their safety. In 1961, after a new mutiny in Luluabourg in the Kasai, Belgian teachers went on strike to demand open return tickets that would allow them to more easily escape in case of new tensions. The Belgian government sent Pierre Leroy, a former colonial governor in Stanleyville, to evaluate the situation of Luluabourg’s ninety Belgian teachers and their fifty fellow technicians, usually former colonial agents who continued to work as advisors to their Congolese successors in the administration. Leroy wrote critically about the technicians’ motivation and effectiveness, but he praised the work of the teachers. For Leroy, the Belgian presence was generally beneficial in the context of the Cold War and what he perceived as the threatening and growing influence of Eastern Europeans in the region. The presence of teachers specifically was crucial and if the Belgian government

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<sup>318</sup> Martin Ekwa, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 7 Dec. 2010.

<sup>319</sup> See Camille Kuyucu, *Les Haïtiens au Congo* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2006).

was to recall them, this would seriously affect local authorities and population, as “education was sacred” for Congolese. Leroy concluded by stating obvious reasons that explained the continuing presence of thousands of Belgian teachers in the former colony: “Our teachers exert a tremendous influence on the country’s evolution by educating the next generation of leaders.” The Belgian government’s duty was therefore to maintain the presence of its teachers, while also remembering that they constituted “the greatest means of pressure in our possession.”<sup>320</sup>

The immediate post-independence years were a period of great pressure on the Congolese government to develop the school system, mostly in the direction of academic education.<sup>321</sup> The draft governmental project of July 1960 clearly established “national education” as a priority.<sup>322</sup> In the years that followed, politicians tried to use state resources to establish new schools in their regions of origin.<sup>323</sup> With independence, the parts of the country that had been left out of the network of Catholic schools wanted to

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<sup>320</sup> Pierre Leroy, “Compte-rendu de mission à Luluabourg (du 13 au 17 novembre 1961),” p.23, Assistance Technique papers, Diplomatic Archives, Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AD), Brussels.

<sup>321</sup> Rideout, “Education and Elites: The Making of the New Elites and the Formal Education System in the Congo (K),” Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1971, p.530.

<sup>322</sup> The project explicitly included the teaching of a “national ideal” to Congolese youth as a central part of national education. The government announced the training of thousands of university students in the years to come, both in the Congo and in foreign universities: see J. Gérard-Libois and Benoît Verhaegen, *Congo 1960* (Brussels : Crisp, 1961), t.2, p.580-581.

<sup>323</sup> For example, in 1962, Joseph Ngalula, then the Minister for education in Cyrille Adoula’s government, attempted in a private correspondence to convince the Belgian government to financially support the erection of a secondary school in Bakwanga, in his home Southern-Kasai, a region that had just been reintegrated in the central state after a period of secession under the leadership of Albert Kalonji. The Belgian embassy suggested to the Minister of Foreign Trade and Technical Assistance to reject the request and to approach the question as part of the general discussions on Belgian support of Congolese education: see J. Tilot, letter to Maurice Brasseur, 24 Feb. 1962, Assistance Technique Papers, AD, Brussels. It is interesting to note that the creation of a secondary school had been one of the first projects of Albert Kalonji in Bakwanga, even though he was not able to carry it through: Albert Kalonji Ditunga, *La sécession du Sud-Kasaï, la vérité du Mulopwe* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2005), p.320.

catch up and petitioned the government to see the erection of their own *collège*. Yet, demands were no less pressing in places that already counted a good number of schools. The problem was not only the exodus of Belgian teachers, but also the insufficient development of the existing infrastructures – a problem that predated independence. In 1958 for example, the Catholic parents’ association in Léopoldville petitioned the General Governor for the construction of more classrooms and schools in the city. The association noted that 650 children had completed the primary school cycle the year before, and that because of the constraint of space, only 350 of them had been admitted in secondary schools. The others “were forced to err in the streets of the *cité*.” The parents also complained that their children were often forced to study in the open air and at the mercy of weather conditions because of a lack of space.<sup>324</sup> Demographic pressure increased throughout the 1960s and transformed education. Between 1962 and 1968, for example, the number of children in primary schools went from 1,837,132 to 2,338,895; during the same period, the number of students in secondary schools grew from 68,350 to 162,237.<sup>325</sup> The increase of the numbers of students also followed from the relative generalization of Congolese girls’ access to school. From 5,000 female students in Congolese secondary schools in 1959, there were 14,000 in 1963.<sup>326</sup>

In most schools, the number of students per class increased significantly, while the quality of education reportedly decreased in many schools. In the years that followed independence, teachers became the professional category the most prone to go on strike.

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<sup>324</sup> Association des Parents d’élèves de l’Enseignement Catholique, Léopoldville, 22 July 1958, Miscellaneous Papers, BEC, Kinshasa.

<sup>325</sup> Ghislain Bitoma and Julien Ntil, *Enquête sur les professeurs miliciens en République Démocratique du Congo, année scolaire: 1968-1969* (Kinshasa: Office National de la Recherche et du Développement, 1970), p.7.

<sup>326</sup> Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, *Femmes de Kinshasa: Hier et aujourd’hui* (Paris: Mouton, 1968), p.243.

They protested against the many and frequent delays in the payment of their salaries and the degradation of their living conditions. Many qualified teachers abandoned education for more lucrative positions in politics and in the administration, and were often replaced by people who lacked training, experience, and motivation.<sup>327</sup> One of the direct consequences was the fact that many children experienced significant delays in their education, with frequent cases of pupils finishing primary school at the age of 15 or 16, instead of 12.<sup>328</sup>

As churches and the state were unable to satisfy all demands, other actors invested in the field of education. In the Lower Congo, a local labor union, calling itself the General Union of Labor Confederations of Congolese Peasants and Workers, started its own primary and secondary school, the *Collège et Lycée National Saint-Georges*. The school answered specific needs in a region where the population's hostility to colonialism and Christian missionaries favored the search for autonomy. Opened in September 1960, the school occupied a dancing bar during its first year and then cabins built by the students themselves.<sup>329</sup> Several individuals in Leopoldville deployed the same spirit of initiative. They opened private schools to cater to children who had not been admitted in official institutions and those who had been dismissed elsewhere. These schools, often situated in the so-called shantytowns of Leopoldville, never enjoyed a good reputation and were commonly referred as *écoles pamba* (or, worthless schools). Yet, as people in

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<sup>327</sup> *Idem*, p.234.

<sup>328</sup> *Idem*, p.235-236.

<sup>329</sup> The union unsuccessfully applied for funding to the AFL-CIO to support its school in 1961, claiming at the time already more than 500 students: see Hector-Georges Massianga-Foundou, letter to Irving Brown, 31 August 1961; and Maida Springer, letter to Hector-Georges Massianga-Foundou, 27 October 1961; Irving Brown Papers, AFL-CIO, Silver Spring-MD.



Leopoldville agreed, a *pamba* school was better than no school.<sup>330</sup>

Between 1958 and 1965, the short window of time during which political parties were authorized in the Congo, politics offered an alternative form of schooling for young Congolese. This often happened in conjunction with training opportunities provided by labor unions; for example, the General Union of Labor Confederations' Saint-Georges school was also sponsored by Joseph Kasa-Vubu's Alliance des Bakongo (ABAKO) which attempted to neutralize the colonial state in 1959 by establishing alternative institutions that it directly controlled – from the police to the tax administration. Schooling through political activities often took less “institutionalized” forms than in the case of the Saint-Georges school. Militancy taught a variety of skills. Journalists and political analysts have often depicted the *jeunesses* – the youth branches of Congolese political parties – as disguised militias and violent groups of vigilantes. *Jeunesses* did indeed often serve as muscle for political leaders, notably in the contexts of violent struggle: the Lulua-Baluba conflict in Kasai in 1959; Katanga's secession in 1960; the establishment of Stanleyville's Popular Republic of Congo in 1961; and the start of the Mulelist armed struggle in the Kwilu in 1963. Yet political parties also provided opportunities for young people to learn how to type, speak, and debate.

In the collection of autobiographical fragments on education gathered by French researcher Pierre Erny at the beginning of the 1970s, one of the anonymous students who contributed to the volume stressed the importance that schooling took in the lives of many Congolese. He quoted the last words of his dying mother: “I will never see you

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<sup>330</sup> On *pamba schools* and Leopoldville's shantytowns (known as the squatting zones), see Paul Raymaekers, *L'organisation des zones de squatting: Elément de résorption du chômage structurel dans les milieux urbains des pays en voie de développement: Application au milieu urbain de Léopoldville (République du Congo)* (Paris: Editions Universitaires, 1964).

again, my child, but know that you will not be parentless, because I leave you with a mother and a father: your school.”<sup>331</sup> Political parties could function as substitutive families, both nourishing and authoritarian. Like schools, militancy taught ways to look at the world and to the future. As a Belgian stamp celebrating the coming independence of the Congo in 1960 illustrated, colonial education at a basic level taught young Congolese to locate their own position on the globe. At the time of decolonization, politics often took over from school. .



**Figure 19: Belgian postal stamp. 1960. Author’s collection.**

Antoine Tshimanga was one of the “graduates” of the school of Congolese anticolonial politics. A well-known activist in Leopoldville, Tshimanga was attacked and kidnapped in his home in Limete in 1965, never to be seen after that.<sup>332</sup> Tshimanga had

<sup>331</sup> Pierre Erny, *Sur les sentiers de l'Université: Autobiographies d'étudiants Zaïrois* (Paris: La Pensée Universelle, 1977), p.87.

<sup>332</sup> Kamitatu accused “the Binza group” of having been at the origin of Tshimanga’s disappearance: Cléophas Kamitatu, *La grande mystification du Congo-Kinshasa: Les crimes de Mobutu* (Paris: Maspero, 1971), p.214.

been a deputy minister for defense in Antoine Gizenga's nationalist government in Stanleyville in 1961. Before that, he had been the leader of ANAJECO, an alliance of different youth branches of nationalist political parties. In 1959, Tshimanga had also been among the creators of a labor union, the National Union of Congolese Workers. During the last months of colonialism, Tshimanga became a "cas célèbre", after his condemnation for communist propaganda.<sup>333</sup> Before his arrest, Tshimanga was a student at the *athénée* of Ngiri-Ngiri in Léopoldville. Yet, the institution was not very welcoming to activists like him. In an interview about his years at the *athénée*, Anastase Nzeza evoked the figure of Antoine Tshimanga when he was trying to explain to me the colonial mentality of the school's professor of Latin, Madame Van Nieuwerbergh:

The example that comes to mind is that we had a schoolmate who was older than us. His name was Antoine Tshimanga. This gentleman was already strongly involved in politics. He was a nationalist. For the whites at the time, he was a communist. You see what this means. So, in 1958, Kwame Nkrumah organizes the Panafrican conference. Tshimanga manages to attend. He comes back. From then on, he became the pet hate of all the whites at the *athénée*. And, as he is in the class of Madame Van Nieuwerburgh, our professor of Latin, she was constantly tormenting him. For any small thing, it was: "Tshimanga, get out! Tshimanga, go in the corner!" Furthermore, he was older. We were 15, 16 or 17 years old and he was above 20. He must have been 22 or 23, or maybe older. He was an adult student. So, he felt embarrassed in front of us.<sup>334</sup>

Tshimanga did not graduate from the *athénée*. In 1959, the colonial police arrested him for political subversion. He stayed in prison nearly until independence, despite the efforts of his lawyer, the Belgian communist senator Jean Terfve, to have him released. Politics,

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<sup>333</sup> Tshimanga had been in contact with Belgian communists since 1958. After 1960, he was targeted in the numerous anticommunist publications that focused on the Congo : see for example, Pierre Houart, *La pénétration communiste au Congo* (Brussels: Centre de Documentation International, 1960), p.40. In 1959, his name had been cited as one of the leaders of the anticolonial movement in the first Russian-language book on the Congo: see Lise Namikas, *Battleground Africa: Cold War in the Congo, 1960-1965* (Stanford : Stanford University Press, 2013), p.40.

<sup>334</sup> Anastase Nzeza, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 1 June 2010.

labor activism, and the experience of repression offered him the instruction that his Belgian professors at the *athénée* did not want to provide him.

Germain Mukendi was a comrade of Tshimanga in the youth branch of Lumumba's MNC. His journey through school was rather similar. In Luluabourg, in his native Kasai, he completed his primary education at the school of the Force Publique, the colonial army. After two years of secondary education at the local *athénée*, he dropped out of school, moved to Leopoldville and focused completely on politics. Later, he completed one year of studies in Law in Brazzaville. About his "political education" in Leopoldville at the time of independence, he said: "I was the little one who was trained by the Party."<sup>335</sup>

Many young activists at the end of the 1950s and early 1960s never arrived at the university. Like Lumumba, they combined different degrees of formal schooling with self-directed and informal learning. Their own exit from the school system often served as defining moments in the definition of their militant trajectory. This was certainly the case for Albert Kisonga who, before joining the crowd of young Lumumbists like Tshimanga and Mukendi, had successively attended Catholic and Protestant schools in the Lower Congo, the *athénée* of Ngiri-Ngiri and Army of Salvation's school in Leopoldville, and finally the *athénée* of Bagira, in the vicinity of Bukavu, in faraway Kivu. In 1959, after a strike in Bagira, Kisonga had been expelled from the *athénée*. A militant of the radical wing of a local political party, the CERE, Kisonga accumulated a variety of experiences in the following two years: he worked as a militant journalist in the Kivu, was part of the Minister of Information's advisors in Leopoldville in July 1960, became friends with the Cameroonian anticolonial fighter Félix Moumié, enjoyed

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<sup>335</sup> Germain Mukendi, personal interview, unrecorded, Liège, 22 April 2011.

discussions with Frantz Fanon, travelled to Paris and Moscow, and spent time in prison in Stanleyville. By June 30, 1961, Kisonga was the private secretary of Adrien Omari, the president of the Kivu's provincial government. For the first anniversary of independence, he was chosen to inspect the troops during the public ceremony. His former classmates of the *athénée* were particularly thrilled to see the honor given to the former student leader in the strike of 1959. Yet, in his memoirs, Albert Kisonga wrote that the ceremony motivated one of his former teachers, also in the attendance, to “pack his suitcase” and return to Belgium.<sup>336</sup>

### **Cultural Authenticity**

Different reasons may have pushed a Belgian teacher to leave the Congo in June 1961. That the promotion of an undisciplined former student was one of them is not particularly astonishing. Independence was a serious test for an educational system that only partially fulfilled the role of social elevation and of emancipation that Congolese expected and demanded from it. Father Ekwa, the long-time head of the Catholic Bureau for Education (BEC), confirmed the tense climate in schools after independence: “With the notion of immediate independence, students said: ‘OK, but in all our schools, there are only Belgians.’ Because there were no Congolese yet.” This is why many missionaries, despite a few racist incidents at the beginning, were very happy to see Ekwa becoming the new head of the BEC:

As soon as students in a high school were ready to rise up against a rector, well, the school authorities would tell them: “We are not the ones in charge; it is Father

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<sup>336</sup> Albert Kisonga Mazakala, *45 d'histoire congolaise: l'expérience d'un lumumbiste* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005), p.39.

Ekwa who instructs us to do what we do.” Therefore all [the students in the country] knew me, at least by name.<sup>337</sup>

Decolonization equipped dissatisfied students with a powerful tool to further their critique of education. Some students left the school system altogether, not always of their own volition. Even in such cases, they often retained strong connections with former classmates and participated in making the connections between the world of school and the world of politics.

Decolonization reinforced Catholic schools as the Congo’s most prominent institutions, as semantic machines—in the French sociologist Luc Boltanski’s words—that confirmed reality through co-producing symbolic violence and safety, allowing individual identification and a sense of permanence through time.<sup>338</sup> Besides functioning as police, colonial schools and other institutions served to produce new modern subjects, define their position in the social order, and program the routes and trajectories opened to them. During the last few years of colonialism and during the first decade after independence, education became the ultimate purveyor of social identity. It served to discriminate among those who could and could not belong to the worlds of modernity, civilization, respectability, and middle-class accumulation. Schools became even more important in the lives of Congolese during the Congo crisis, because they resisted better the general “decomposition” of most colonial institutions in 1959 and 1960.<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> Martin Ekwa, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 7 Dec. 2010.

<sup>338</sup> Luc Boltanski, *De la Critique: Précis de sociologie de l’émancipation* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009).

<sup>339</sup> The term decomposition was notably used by Antoine Saintraint, the territorial administrator of Madimba in Bas-Congo. Saintraint, who was assassinated in July 1960 in the context of the army rebellion, had taken the initiative in April of that year to officially hand out power to Congolese assistants, in an attempt to push the administration to recognize the de facto disappearance of Belgian authority in the face of ABAKO’s

A few years after the end of the crisis, in 1972 and 1973, Pierre Erny started a pioneering work on paths to university education in the Congo that has informed my own research in crucial ways. Erny asked 400 of his first-year students in psychology at the Kisangani campus of the National University of Zaire to write autobiographical narratives. The material gathered by the French psychologist mostly covered the 1960s. Several students more advanced in age – they might have well been the grown-up brothers and sisters of the teenagers who Suzanne Sylvain worked with in Leopoldville at the end of the war – mentioned the 1950s and their memories of colonial education. Like the Haitian anthropologist, Erny pieced together fragments of testimonies into a book. In his conclusion, he made sense of the many dissonant voices and sometimes embittered narratives in his students' autobiographies by identifying a general "bipolarity" characteristic of that generation of educated youth in Congo/Zaire. Erny embraced a language of social and cultural pathology. He saw a problematic distance between the "intellectual and affective acquired characteristics of the prime education in the environment of the village and of the family, marked by traditions and paganism" on the one hand, and "the later influence of the Western and Christian school" on the other hand. For Erny, the result was a psychological instability in students who failed "to be themselves and to accept themselves totally at a time when they are increasingly

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disobedience campaign in the Bas-Congo. In his speech at the occasion of his improvised transfer of power in Madimba, Saintraint singled out education: "Schools remain, without any doubt, the sector that best resisted the process of decomposition that the territory is subjected to. The thirst for education is nearly proverbial here, the already very good network of primary schools never stops its expansion, and this capital remains untouched. [...] However, one should note that [...] demographic pressure and [...] the increasing demands for the generalization of post-primary education will very soon become nearly insoluble problems for the rulers of the country." The speech is reproduced in J. Gérard-Libois and Benoît Verhaegen, *Congo 1960* (Brussels, CRISP, 1961), t.1, p.140-145.

penetrating another intellectual universe.”<sup>340</sup> Erny’s view of students’ “cultural identity” as pathology are problematic. This conclusion, despite the empathy of the French psychologist, only reinforces colonizers’ ambiguities about education – from Salkin to the Scheutist missionaries – which used a rhetoric of cultural authenticity to preserve a system based on racial inequalities. Erny identified the relation to time and the future induced by schooling and the colonial system, but posited it as the extreme opposite of the “customary visions of things” and yet another factor of cultural inauthenticity. His analysis provided a legitimization for Mobutu’s politics of authenticity that developed at the time, yet it completely failed to acknowledge that students themselves had developed the critique from which the new regime’s ideology had emerged.

The many autobiographical fragments used by Erny to articulate his notion of bipolarity instead may be read as deliberate acts of denouncing the (post)colonial order of things, not as signs of individual or collective psychological failing. Ultimately, Erny missed the significance of political engagement among these Congolese students. He conducted his research in the early 1970s at a time of defeat and recess for the student movement. But the entire decade of the 1960s had been marked by student contributions to national politics. As we will see in the following chapters, the belief that academic education was necessary to attain material success and respectability contributed to the prestige enjoyed by university students around the time of decolonization, as much as any dire need for university graduates after the white exodus of 1960. This prestige imbued students with important political capital that they began to deploy immediately after independence, as their question became how to decolonize the very system that had produced them.

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<sup>340</sup> Pierre Erny, *Sur les sentiers de l’Univesités*, p.430.



Part III  
To the Left

## Chapter 5

### Campus Micropolitics and Global Textual Exchanges

The trajectory of Congolese student politics in the 1960s and early 1970s draws a clear movement towards the Left. During the colonial period, Congolese had planted many seeds of protest. Yet, at the time of independence, there was no established and strong labor movement and no political parties that could claim to embody a tradition of radicalism. For many Congolese in the 1960s, the Left was a novel idea, and it took roots thanks to the cosmopolitan yearnings of a new generation that sought to appropriate foreign ideas and political sensibilities in order to understand and change the situation of Congo in the world. The Left was a floating idea. It was a generational label that created consensus and drew boundaries; an attitude and a rallying cry, but not a genetic marker or compelling identity.

The appeal of the Left for young Congolese came from its power to challenge the worldviews linked to missionary schooling. As a posture of dissent, the Left allowed young Congolese – including young seminarians – to articulate criticisms of the established (colonial) order, whereas their teachers often expressed conservative opinions that justified social and political inequalities. By expressing dissident political opinions, pupils and students claimed their intellectual independence from their own education. For

children of peasants and workers, moving towards the Left could be a way to combine loyalty to their social origins with intellectual dispositions acquired through schooling. Yet, in some cases, students identified with political ideas that placed them in opposition to their family.

An emblematic example was Paul Kabongo, the son of a businessman in Luluabourg. In 1959, at the age of 16, Kabongo abandoned everything to follow Patrice Lumumba in his struggle for immediate independence, becoming the “spiritual son” of the anticolonial leader. After the assassination of Lumumba in January 1961, Kabongo lived a long life of exile, closely associated with the Congolese Left’s diasporic routes and transnational connections.<sup>341</sup> Talking to me about the meaning of the Left, Kabongo reflected on the diversity of his experiences throughout the world, the many important people he had met, and the various ideas and discourses he had mastered. For him, the Left was about being well travelled, cosmopolitan, initiated, and highly discriminating. In his own words, only the children of rich people, like himself, could truly be on the Left. As he said to Lumumba, “I am not following you for the money or for a title – my father

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<sup>341</sup> In the first part of the 1960s, he was associated with Lumumbist revolutionaries and guerilla fighters in Brazzaville, Stanleyville, Cairo and Bujumbura. Later, in Paris, he established bridges between the world of Congolese radical students and the French cultural avant-garde. Under the direction of Jean-Marie Serreau, he performed in Aimée Césaire’s *Une saison au Congo* in 1967. The following year, he actively participated in barricades and occupations in the Quartier Latin during the student commune. Expelled from France, he then took refuge in Algeria, at a time when the country remained a global revolutionary center, despite the coup against Ben Bella in 1965. Decades later, in 1997, Kabongo abandoned Algeria and returned to Kinshasa. Following Laurent-Désiré Kabila’s seizure of power, Kabongo became one of the first directors of ANR, the new regime’s information agency and security police. A few years later, he served as governor of Kasai, his province of origin: Paul Kabongo, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 8 July 2011.

is rich enough that he could even pay for your salary every month. Me, if I am a militant, it is by pure idealism.”<sup>342</sup>

Kabongo’s trajectory is unique and distinct in many ways. Yet, other interviewees shared with me similar sentiments about the Left, associating it with a construction of the self and a sense of distinction.<sup>343</sup> In the 1960s, the Cold War pushed Congolese to take sides and situate themselves with regard to ideological polarities that lacked deep-rooted meanings in Central Africa. The absence of an established homegrown tradition weakened the Congolese Left, but it also offered Congolese the freedom to redefine what the term meant to them. This chapter briefly introduces the diversity of meanings of the turn to the Left, as well as the two-way traffic of ideological appropriation in the Congolese global 1960s.

### **Student Baptism at Lovanium**

In 1961, while Lovanium already attracted students from nine African countries outside of the Congo, the University Rector, Luc Gillon, decided to promote the offering of classes in English to increase the University’s outreach to English-speaking countries on the continent.<sup>344</sup> A contingent of Catholic students from Nigeria, but also students

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<sup>342</sup> Paul Kabongo, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 8 July 2011.

<sup>343</sup> In several interviews with student activists, an important moment in the formation of a Left identity appeared to have happened in the context of Catholic secondary education. Former student activists remembered the realization of a discrepancy between the Church’s message of social justice and the discriminatory practices of individual missionaries and teachers as a crucial moment in their personal political formation. This appeared notably in interviews with Valérien Milimgo, the vice-president of AGEL at the time of the student march of June 4, 1969, and Jean-Baptiste Sondji, one of the student leaders in the movement of 1971 : see Valérien Milimgo, personal interview, recorded, 30 April 2010 ; and Jean-Baptiste Sondji, personal interview, recorded, 4 Oct. 2007.

<sup>344</sup> See “Université Lovanium. Procès-Verbal de la Réunion du Conseil d’Administration,” 30 Oct. 1961, p.5, Van Der Schueren Papers, Leuven University Archives (LUA), Leuven.

from Rhodesia and different East African countries, joined the campus in October 1962. The arrival of *les anglophones* did not go unnoticed. They indeed collectively refused to submit to the ordeal of first-year hazing (*le baptême des bleus*), which was a fundamental part of campus life. Over a period of a few weeks at the beginning of every academic year, senior students known as torturers (*les bourreaux*) presided over the initiation of the greenhorns (*les bleus*) through a series of more or less humiliating games and trials. This ritual was a highly sensitive matter on the inspired hill.<sup>345</sup> Hazing organizers inside Lovanium student government (the General Assembly of Students at Lovanium or AGEL) resented West Africans' refusal as a major breach in the close-knit "human community" that was performed, produced and reproduced through the annual ceremonies. An incident occurred when torturers decided to force a few of the reluctant English-speaking students into one of the hazing trials in front of the University restaurant. This is how Father Liétard, the Belgian priest in charge of student dorms and restaurants in the 1960s, described the incident: "The *anglophones* stumbled. They did not want to hear anything. The other students only asked them to wear a blue ribbon on their arm before entering the restaurant, but they refused. So the others brought them in front of the administrative building by force and cropped their hair."<sup>346</sup> In the tense discussion that followed, one of the torturers hit a university guard who had been called to intervene. The "torturer" apologized; the guard accepted the excuses; and everybody peacefully dispersed. A few hours later, Monsignor Bakole, Lovanium's academic

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<sup>345</sup> Already in 1958, black students had been "kept away" from hazing, because of "fears of fights": see Reuben Mantels, *Geleerd in de Tropen: Leuven, Congo, en de Weetenschap, 1885-1960* (Leuven: Universitair Pers Leuven, 2007), p.256.

<sup>346</sup> Father E. Liétard, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 17 Aug. 2010.

secretary, lodged a complaint against the student who had lost his temper. For AGEL students, this was a sign of academic authorities' belligerence.<sup>347</sup>

Lovanium's so-called student folklore (*le folkore estudiantin*) belonged to the corpus of imported invented traditions used to cement ruling-class culture in Africa.<sup>348</sup> The sensitivity over student hazing in 1962 pointed to the early signs of tensions around the remaking of the Congo's elite after independence. Another expression of student nervousness and concern came a few days after the clash with Bakole and the university guard. AGEL addressed a memorandum to the Minister of Public Administration to raise the issue of nepotism and irregular nominations in the state administration. In their memorandum, the students demanded the inscription in a law of a "stratification of ranks," linking functions and salaries in the civil service with the candidate's years of higher education. "Without [such a law]," the students argued, "the Congo's true independence will not be guaranteed."<sup>349</sup>

Hazing rituals represented the independence and autonomy of students on the campus. Hazing is an imperfect translation. The word that students used at Lovanium, *baptême*, literally translates as baptism – it was also the colloquial term that francophone students used in Belgium. Religious authorities in Belgian universities did not systematically oppose student christening and student folklore. Yet, there was a residual anticlerical dimension in hazing rituals and a carnival-like appropriation of church

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<sup>347</sup> De Kerchove, telex to Denterghem, 20 Dec 196, Diplomatic Archives, Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AD), Brussels.

<sup>348</sup> Terence Ranger, "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa," in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.211-262.

<sup>349</sup> Christophe Mateene, letter to Rector Gillon (with copy of the memorandum to the Minister of Public Administration), 24 Dec. 1962, AGEL Papers, Rectoral Archives, University of Kinshasa (UNIKIN), Kinshasa.

vocabulary. In the Congo, this religious aspect had a distinctive resonance. Missionaries indeed put an important stress on baptism. Unlike in Europe, a great number of the candidates for baptism were teenagers and adults. In many cases, particularly in rural areas less densely occupied by missionaries, children accessed baptism after a few years of schooling at a mission station. For many, education and the entrance to the church were deeply linked. Missionaries turned baptism from the private and familial ceremony that it had become in Europe into a public spectacle that addressed both the community of the faithful and the public of the “heathen,” the not-yet-baptized. As Nancy Rose Hunt has shown, missionaries often used elements of the “native rituals” and age-group initiation cults which they tried to eradicate.<sup>350</sup> The autobiographical narratives of students collected by Pierre Erny in Kisangani in 1972 suggest that memories of Christian baptism were very important in many cases. Baptism was the most notable moment of conversion and of transition from the family to the school and from the world of the village to the world of colonial modernity. Some narratives of baptism rituals directly evoke aspects of traditional initiation camps: “On the day of the baptism, all the catechumens had their hair shaved off. Following the tradition, people who had already been baptized hit and spat on the catechumens. Often, you went with your godparent, who was in charge of protecting you.”<sup>351</sup> The student baptism at Lovanium was not very different from that description – it also included shaving off the *bleus*’ hair, actual or simulated beating-up, and trials that recalled forced labor and the penal colony. It is difficult to assess how students in the 1960s understood the connection between the types

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<sup>350</sup> Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon of Birth Rituals, Medicalization and Mobility in the Congo* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), p.27-79.

<sup>351</sup> Pierre Erny, *Sur les sentiers de l’université: Autobiographies d’étudiants zaïrois* (Paris: La Pensée Universelle, 1977), p.394.

of baptism. In his book, Erny cites a Jesuit missionary who complained in 1967 that many students arrived at Lovanium alienated from the church after years in coercive Catholic boarding schools, and with a suspicion “for anything that smells like, as they say, ‘parish priests’ (*pour tout ce qui sent, comme ils dissent, les curés*).”<sup>352</sup> Yet, it is possible to imagine that students might have experienced hazing ceremonies at Lovanium both as reversal and as reiteration of their Christian baptism. Like its religious model, student baptism was a moment of forced humility, a moment when the “dirty *bleus*” appeared symbolically naked – wearing shorts, a tie without a shirt, and no shoes – in front of their peers and their elders, *les poils* (the hairy). At the end of the baptism, students received the distinctive student cap (*la penne*) that was the sign of student prestige when they went down to Leopoldville during the weekends. Student baptism was both the ritual of entry into the prestigious community of students and an initiation to the codes, cryptic schoolboy humor, and slang that created the cohesion of the student community.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>353</sup> The slang and humor were particularly developed in a student newspaper entitled *Le Furet*, which was published irregularly throughout the 1960s. The linguist Nyunda ya Rubango, who studied at Lovanium from 1968 to 1971, offers many examples of the student slang in a beautiful autobiographical narrative: Nyunda ya Rubango, “De Lovanium à la Kasapa via caserne: mémoires d’un pèlerin metis,” in Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem (dir.), *L’Université dans le devenir de l’Afrique: Un demi-siècle de présence au Congo-Zaïre* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2007), p.97-124. See also Nyunda ya Rubango, “Mémoires de la colonie en vrac,” in Marc Quaghebeur and Bibiane Tshibola Kalengayi (dir.), *Congo-Meuse, volume 6: Aspects de la culture à l’époque colonial en Afrique Centrale* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2007), p.145-190 and Nyunda ya Rubango, “Tango ya Ba-Papa Bol: Ou une page de chronique lovaniarde,” in Nyunda ya Rubango and Bogumil Jewsiewicki (eds.), *Littérature francophone, Université et Société au Congo-Zaïre: Hommage à Victor Bol* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1999), p.151-183.





**Figure 20: “Le pré-baptême des bleuss.” *Echos de Lovanium* 7-2 (April 1962), p.8.**



**Figure 21: “les Anglophone et les retardataires n’ont pas échappé à a noble tradition.” *Echos de Lovanium* 9-1 (Feb. 1964), p.1.**



**Figure 22: “Les bleus arrachent les mauvaises herbes à la main.” *Echos de Lovanium* 9-1 (Feb. 1964), p.8.**



**Figure 23: “Un honorable poil saisit l’opportunité d’avoir sa barbe peignée par un un bleu.” *Echos de Lovanium* 9-1 (Feb. 1964), p.2.**

From the anecdote of the frustrated hazing session of 1962, and similar moments of tensions around student baptisms later in the decade, it would be easy to trace the thread of students' anxieties about class, mobility, and recognition. In the next few pages, and in the two chapters that follow, I explore a different, but not totally unrelated, lead. University graduates worried about social reproduction in the aftermath of Belgian colonialism. Yet their frustration and sense of entitlement regarding governance and power were only some of the aspects of their political subjectivity during the 1960s. More crucial to understanding that historical sequence, the radicalization of student politics, is the object of this cluster of chapters.

Students negotiated their turn to the Left in a cold war context and in parallel with the development of Congolese politics at the national level. Furthermore, as we will see in just a moment, student radicalization took place in a global context, and its history reveals long forgotten connections with foreign and seemingly remote traditions of political radicalism. But let us come back for the moment to the micropolitics of Lovanium campus, and to the last few months of 1962.

Directly after the opening of the academic year in October, the atmosphere on campus was already tense at the beginning of the semester, with widespread resentment against the high levels of failure after the second session of exams, which students blamed on professors' unfounded willingness to reproduce Belgian standards of high selectivity and the usual skimming of the student body after the first year. It must also be noted that the increase in the number of students, which was a permanent feature throughout the 1960s, was particularly strong that year, with a student population that passed from 440 the year before to 786 in October 1962. This certainly played in

sustaining the tension both among students and academic authorities.<sup>354</sup> Finally, rumors circulated on the university's plan to suppress AGEL. The crisis over hazing appeared in that context. AGEL activists believed that academic authorities had masterminded from the very beginning the intractability of these newcomers on campus. This conviction increased the resentment of those who were attached to Lovanium's student folklore. Students were suspicious of the real motive behind academic authorities' opposition to hazing. As one of them wrote, Gillon and Bakole pretended that student initiations contradicted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but they had themselves personally assisted in some hazing "ceremonies" in the past. Were not university authorities, nearly totally composed of Belgian nationals, except for the token presence of the academic secretary, manipulating the English-speaking new recruits with the intention to sow discord among a student body that counted much fewer white members than in the pre-independence years and therefore looked more alien and threatening?<sup>355</sup>

Bakole's complaint with the police only added insult to injury. On December 15, AGEL announced a general strike. Bakole felt compelled to withdraw his complaint. However, two students were still expelled from the university as a result of the fight.<sup>356</sup> On December, 19, Christophe Mateene, AGEL president and at the time a finishing student in African linguistics, ordered another "unlimited strike."<sup>357</sup> The Belgian ambassador in the Congo, sending his note about the incident to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the day after Mateene's letter, expressed the opinion that Lovanium's authorities

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<sup>354</sup>See "Situation du budget ordinaire de l'université de l'année civile 1959 à 1963," Van Der Schueren Papers, LUA, Leuven.

<sup>355</sup>: "Malaise sur la colline inspirée," in *Présence Univeristaire*, 11 (Jan. 1963), p.59-61.

<sup>356</sup> De Kerchove, telex to De Denterghem, 20 Dec. 1962, Consular correspondences, AD, Brussels.

<sup>357</sup> Christophe Mateene, letter to Rector Gillon, 19 Dec. 1962, AGEL Papers, UNIKIN, Kinshasa.

would not give in to the student strike this time. Mateene's attempt at blocking the campus did not pick up. Inside AGEL, a group of "youngsters" accused Mateene and other "elders" of having deliberately sabotaged their own strike due to their fear of directly confronting academic authorities. Mateene was forced to resign; Gérard Kamanda, a law student, replaced him as student president.<sup>358</sup>

AGEL's "palace revolution" followed from academic authorities' attack on a core symbol of student corporate cohesion. The defense of student baptism and the removal of Mateene were expressed through the rhetoric of respect for student traditions, a coded word for a younger generation's aspirations to radicalism. The opponents of Mateene became the harbingers of the campus Left, in that their ambition was to radicalize AGEL's opposition to academic authorities. Throughout the history of Lovanium, the successive leaders of AGEL, and particularly the president, exerted a great authority on their fellow students. Elected at the beginning of the year, the president was generally held with great respect and considered as the legitimate spokesperson and leader of the whole student community. The powerful nature of AGEL's presidency also made it a disputed position, one that could yield real influence on campus; hence the coalition of

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<sup>358</sup> Jean-Claude Willame, "The Congo," In Donald K. Emerson, ed. *Students and Politics in Developing Nations*. New York: Praeger, 1968, p.54-55. Mateene graduated a few months later and moved to the United States to work with anthropologist Daniel Biebuyck on the translation and edition of the *Mwindo Epic*, which the two published in 1969. The same year, Mateene defended a doctoral dissertation at the Sorbonne on the grammar of the Nyanga language. A professor at Lovanium and then Lumumbashi, Mateene served for two decades as the head of the division of language policy at the Organization of African Unity, successively based in Kampala, Addis, and Nyamey. He died in 1998 in Kinshasa (see Neville Alexander, "Instead of an obituary: Kahombo Mateene," in *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies*, 25:1 (1999), 162-163). An online biographical notice on Mateene quite enigmatically states that his resignation from AGEL presidency was provoked by the opposition of "a very pungent minority wing" inside AGEL that was "supported by a political mafia group in the city" ("Kahombo Mateene: Biographie." [http://www.lesbahundes.com/bhd\\_ecrivains\\_05.php](http://www.lesbahundes.com/bhd_ecrivains_05.php))

younger radicals against Mateene in 1962, and their promotion of Kamanda as his substitute. The latter was well known on campus for his brilliant oratory skills and his Left positions.

Students were eager to express themselves on the national political scene and to repeat, for example, their recent demonstration on October 20, 1962, in front of the United States embassy, in favor of Congolese nationalism.<sup>359</sup> They were also willing to do battle with the status quo on campus, notably in racial terms. A few months after the coup against Mateene, student activists again publicly raised the issue of institutional racism at Lovanium. They accused white professors and academic authorities of having organized a theater play “in the shadows.” “Strangely enough, on the day of its performance, African students were not allowed [entrance] on very doubtful grounds.”<sup>360</sup> Distrust was peaking and never totally disappeared in the months and years that followed.

In one of the many parallels between campus and national politics that appeared at nearly every turn of Lovanium’s history, at the same time that AGEL activists voiced their impression that Lovanium authorities were trying to get rid of them, the central government was arresting more of the politicians in the opposition, including Christophe Gbenye, the chief of MNC-L, Lumumba’s party. Taking advantage of the wave of criminality that followed the escape of two hundred inmates from Makala prison in September, including the legendary assassin Angwaluma, the government decreed a state of exception on November 12, 1962.<sup>361</sup> Victor Nendaka, the “Congo’s J. Edgar Hoover” as *The New York Times* called him, took the title of “military governor of Leopoldville,”

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<sup>359</sup> “Politique congolaise: chronologie des évènements du 1-10 au 31-10 1962,” in *Etudes Congolaises* 10 (Dec. 1962), p.59.

<sup>360</sup> “Le malaise continue...” in *Presence Universitaire* 12 (April 1963), p.49-50.

<sup>361</sup> See *Congo 1962* (Brussels: CRISP, 1963), p.82-92.

while continuing to head the *Sûreté*, Congo's secret police.<sup>362</sup> Not surprisingly, the Belgian ambassador reported rumors that the incidents around hazing at Lovanium had been orchestrated by pro-Lumumba activists who were plotting the ruin of the Catholic University.

### **The Situationist International**

Just as Lovanium academic authorities' attempts to repress a few students' overt unruliness only contributed to radicalize AGEL and moved the whole student body towards the Left, Nendaka's hunting for Lumumbists in 1962 proved to be counterproductive for the regime in the medium term. The repression radicalized the Congolese nationalist camp, first guiding activists towards exile, but ultimately pushing them towards military insurrection and guerilla warfare.

In the chapters that follow, I narrate a set of untold parallels between the student movement and the Lumumbist insurrection in the mid-1960s. The latter added a series of layers in students' understanding of the language of the Left. I am interested in recovering the influence of national politics on student politics, but also the reverse: how Congolese students participated in moving the opposition to the Left and how they contributed to turning the insurrection into an event of global significance. The construction of the Congolese revolutionary movement was an international collaborative work. The mediation of foreign supporters, of Congolese letter-writers' postal addressees, was crucial. A later chapter discusses further the involvement of well-known foreign figures in Congolese revolutionary politics of the mid-1960s, like Ernesto Che Guevara,

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<sup>362</sup> Lloyd Garrison, "Congo Politics: Position of Adoula Becomes Shaky as Opposition to Regime Rises," in *The New York Times*, 2 December 1962, p.243.

Mao Tse Toung and Gamal Abdel Nasser, to cite just three of them. This section discusses other characters of the global 1960s, whose involvement in Congolese affairs has escaped historians' attention so far: Guy Debord, Raoul Vaneigem, and their comrades in the Situationist International (S.I.).

Debord and the S.I. are central characters in the history of youth protest and of the intellectual Left in Europe during the 1960s. In France, but also in other countries where they were active, like Italy, the Situationists pioneered a critique of art, reality, spectacle, and the everyday that inspired student protests in 1968. Rather unnoticed by his biographers, Guy Debord, the writer, filmmaker, and radical bohemian who animated the S.I., participated in the global passion for the Congo from the beginning to the mid-1960s. Not surprisingly, Congolese students contributed to the S.I.'s enthusiasm for the Congolese revolution. At some distance from Lovanium's micropolitics and the tensions around student baptism, the encounter with a group of European avant-garde activists marked another cardinal point in the cartography of the Congolese student Left in the 1960s.

This is not the place to elaborate on the history of the Situationist International or Guy Debord's contribution to artistic and political avant-gardes in the 1960s. Suffice it to say that the historiography of the Situationist International and related movement greatly minimizes the role of the third world in the global imagination of the Situationists.<sup>363</sup>

Maybe even more importantly, the historiography rarely underlines the participation of

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<sup>363</sup> For example, Andrew Hussey, one of Debord's biographers, notes Situationists' interest in the Congo, but only parenthetically as a near incongruity, and describes the Congo as one of the "most far-flung and unlikely parts of the world": Andrew Hussey, *The Game of War: The Life and Death of Guy Debord* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2001), p.180. For a less condescending account of the third world connections of the Situationist International, see Patrick Marcolini, *Le mouvement situationniste: Une histoire intellectuelle* (Montreuil: L'Echappée, 2012).



third world activists in these movements. The Lettrist International, for example, the group that preceded the S.I. and that developed the practice of *dérive* as a poetic exploration of urban spaces and a critique of everyday life, had an Algerian section at the time of the war against France. Later, one of the most active members of the French section of the S.I. in the mid-1960s was Mustapha Khayati, a Tunisian student at the University of Strasbourg who later joined the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine in Amman.<sup>364</sup>

Considering its interest for political transformations at a global stage, it should not be surprising that the S.I. developed a sustained interest for the Congo as soon as the country made the world's newspapers' headlines in 1960. In a letter dated from July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1960, and addressed to André Frankin, an animator of the Belgian section of the group *Pouvoir Ouvrier* and a member of the S.I., Debord expressed his concern for the Congo: "Are we going towards colonial recapture, that is, a new Korean War?" For Debord, Lumumba and Kasa-Vubu were "in a position that recalls the end of Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg." He added: "It is rather touching to see a chief of government as disarmed as Lumumba. He was in the end quite clever in always choosing the side of the masses that outflanked him." Debord, who predicted Lumumba's assassination, also wrote in his letter: "What has been happening in the Congo in the past 12 days will have to be studied for a long time and in all aspects, and seems to me to be an essential experimentation of

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<sup>364</sup> Khayati was the main redactor, in 1965, of two Situationist publications, translated into Arabic and widely distributed in Algeria: *La Lutte des Classes en Algérie* and *Adresse aux révolutionnaires d'Algérie et de tous les pays*. In 1966, Khayati wrote *De la misère en milieu étudiant* (translated as *On the Poverty of Student Life*), the pamphlet that triggered a series of disturbances at the University of Strasbourg and then strongly influenced the rebel youth of 1968.

the revolutionary conditions of the third world.”<sup>365</sup> Situationists’ attempts to “study” the Congo crisis later developed into a few theoretical propositions in their journal. In an unsigned article entitled “Géopolitique de l’hibernation,” the author, probably Debord, described the Congolese people’s reaction in 1960 as a total refusal of the colonial rationality and a “most dignified continuation of Dadaism.” He called Lumumba a poet who hijacked the language of the master to transform the world.<sup>366</sup> The poetic nature of the Congolese crisis was further developed in a later issue of the Situationist journal:

Information is Power’s poetry (the counter-poetry of the police). It is the mediated fraud of what is. At the opposite, poetry must be understood as the immediate communication in reality and real transformation of that reality. [...] Poetry belongs to the level of greater richness in which, at a given stage of social-economic formation, life can be lived *and transformed*. [...] Finding poetry is like reinventing the revolution, as some phases of the Mexican, Cuban, and Congolese revolutions have obviously proven.<sup>367</sup>

When Congolese nationalists seized the flag of Lumumbism and decided to launch an armed struggle against the pro-US government in place in Leopoldville, Debord and the Situationists sat in the front rows and applauded. As Debord wrote around that time, in a letter to Béchir Tlili, a Tunisian student in France: “If revolution must be reinvented everywhere, we must confess that what we know the least about, where we will need the most imagination, studies and certainly experimentations, is the conception of the revolutionary movement in underdeveloped countries.”<sup>368</sup> In the eyes of the Situationists, the Congo was one of the terrains where the future of the world revolution and a new political form could emerge. Answering the question of whether the Situationist

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<sup>365</sup> Guy Debord, *Correspondance: Volume 1, Juin 1959-Août 1960* (Paris: Fayard, 1999), p.356-357.

<sup>366</sup> “Géopolitique de l’hibernation,” in *Internationale Situationiste* 7 (April 1962), p.3-10.

<sup>367</sup> “All the king’s men,” in *Internationale Situationiste* 8 (January 1963), p.29-30.

<sup>368</sup> Guy Debord, *Correspondance: Volume 2, septembre 1960-décembre 1964* (Paris: Fayard, 2001), p.256.

International was a political movement, an article in the 1964 issue of the journal answered:

The S.I. has nothing to do with hierarchized power, under any form. The S.I. is therefore neither a political movement nor a sociology of political mystification. The S.I. offers to be the highest degree of the international revolutionary consciousness. This is why it tries to enlighten and coordinate the gestures of refusal and the signs of creativity that define the new outline of the proletariat, the implacable will for emancipation. Articulated around the masses' spontaneity, such an activity is indisputably political; unless one denies this quality to the agitators themselves. As far as new radical trends appear in Japan (the extremist wing of the *Zengakuren* movement), in the Congo, in the Spanish underground, the S.I. grants them a *critical* support, and therefore attempts to help them practically. But against all the "transitional power," the S.I. refers to a permanent revolution of the daily life.<sup>369</sup>

In a letter to an Indian correspondent from January 1965, Debord confirmed that the Situationist International had established contacts with radical minorities that it hoped to influence in Japan, Spain, and the Congo.<sup>370</sup> "In the Congo," wrote Debord, "these are only Mulelist students, [and] we don't know what practical consequences can come out of it. We will try to publish a leaflet on the conditions of the Congolese movement, if we can gather first enough direct meaningful information."<sup>371</sup>

A few months later, Simon Djangani Lungela, a Congolese exchange student in Paris, became a member of the French section of the Situationist International – at the time the French section did not count more than 10 members in total. Lungela, who had dropped out of Lovanium after a year of studying economics and then worked briefly as a teacher, had been one of the five Congolese selected out of 250 candidates to participate

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<sup>369</sup> "Le Questionnaire," in *Internationale Situationiste* 9 (August 1964), p.26.

<sup>370</sup> Parallel to their involvement with Congolese students, the Situationists developed contacts with Japanese activists in the radical student group *Zengakuren*: see Andrew Hussey, *op. cit.*, p.179. Toru Tagaki, the vice-president of *Zengakuren*, was one of the interlocutors of Debord at the time: see Guy Debord, *Correspondance, Volume 2: septembre 1960 – décembre 1964* (Paris: Fayard, 2001), p.249-254 and 259-260.

<sup>371</sup> Debord, *Correspondance: Volume 3*, p.15-16.

in a two-year training program sponsored by the French Office of Radio Cooperation. Together with students from other francophone African countries and from France, they followed academic courses taught by famous French journalists and learned different journalistic techniques. The Congolese trainees were housed in the mansion of the *Société des Ingénieurs Civils*, rue Blanche, only minutes away from Pigalle. They got into the habit of spending their nights in the *quartier Latin*, the meeting point of Parisian students and post-existentialist bohemians. The trainees quickly met other students from Leopoldville and Brazzaville and their French friends. Members and sympathizers of the Situationist International were active presences in the Parisian nightlife. Yet, this is not how Lungela became acquainted with them. Another Congolese student, Joseph Mbelolo ya Mpiku, made the connection.

Mbelolo ya Mpiku had been friends with Lungela since childhood – they studied together in the same primary and secondary schools in Luozi and Kimpese, in the Lower Congo. Mbelolo had moved to Belgium in 1962. He studied to become a French teacher at the *école normale* of Nivelles. One of his professors was Raoul Vaneigem, a young Belgian anarchist who had joined the Situationist International in 1961. Mbelolo and another of his Congolese comrades in Nivelles, José Da Nzungu, spent a lot of time with Vaneigem outside of the classroom and became part of the Situationist complex web. With Vaneigem, Mbelolo and Nzungu travelled several times to Paris, meeting with Debord and others. The two Congolese students read and commented on the two major texts that the Situationists were preparing in those years: Vaneigem's *The Revolution of Everyday Life* and Debord's *The Society of Spectacle*. In 1966, Mbelolo had completed his training at Nivelles and was now a student at the University of Liège. He was an

active militant in the local section of the General Union of Congolese Students (UGEC) and had stayed in touch with the Situationists. When his friend Lungela arrived from the Congo to the French capital city, Mbelolo made the trip to Paris and introduced the newcomer to Debord and Vaneigem.<sup>372</sup>

Mbelolo participated in the discussions around the booklet on the Congo that Debord was preparing, but he did not contribute to the writing *per se*. It is likely that Lungela was more involved – he was living in Paris, at the center of the Situationist world, and his involvement with the group was particularly intense. His time in the S.I. was rather short, however: in August 1966, he moved back to Kinshasa, and in December 1967, he officially resigned from the avant-garde group.<sup>373</sup> The first mention of the booklet project, presented as a collective project of the S.I. appears in a letter of Debord to Khayati in December 1964, therefore before Lungela's arrival to France.<sup>374</sup> Yet, the production of political texts inside the S.I. were very often the result of a collective work, and it is very likely that Lungela was at the forefront with Debord in authoring the text on

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<sup>372</sup> Joseph Mbelolo Ya Mpiku, phone interview, unrecorded, 5 July 2013. Today, Joseph Mbelolo is a professor of literature and communication in different schools and universities in Kinshasa.

<sup>373</sup> In Kinshasa, Lungela had become one of the most famous journalists on the national radio. A couple of years after his return, he created and anchored a show called "Place aux Vedettes" ("Let's give way to the stars"), for which he received and interviewed star musicians of the Congolese rumba every Sunday afternoon. Later, Lungela served as the program director of the national radio, *La Voix du Zaïre* at the time. At the end of the 1960s, Lungela was the author of a theater play, specially written for the radio. The play, which was entitled *La haine dans l'amour*, dealt with the topic of jealousy. It won a prize at an "interafriquean theatrical contest" organized by the French state radio ORTF: see Robert Cornevin, *Littératures d'Afrique noire de langue française* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1976), p.240.

<sup>374</sup> See Guy Debord, *Correspondance: Volume 2, op. cit.*, p.311. In this letter co-signed by Raoul Vaneigem, Debord mentions "notre brochure sur le Congo" and evokes a chapter in the booklet entitled *Les sentiers extérieurs de la rébellion congolaise* ("The foreign paths of the Congolese rebellion"), noting that it could include a passage that would summarize the criticism of "benbellisme" which the Situationists were developing for a separate booklet on Algeria. The mention of "chapters" in the booklet on Congo suggests that Debord envisioned at first a longer project than the text that he finally wrote on the Congo.

the Congo. When I asked his friend, Kititutu Oleontwa, about Lungela's activities in Paris, he said Lungela was rather private about it: "We were worried. Sometimes Simon disappeared for days. When we then asked him where he had been, he would only answer: 'I was with my friends, the Situationists.'"<sup>375</sup>

In 1965, the French Situationists started to meet with Anicet Kashamura, a former minister in Lumumba's government who was a refugee in Paris. Kashamura was one of the most radical and original characters in the Congolese political scene. A strong critic of missionary Christianity, Kashamura was probably the only Congolese intellectual who promoted and theorized the issue of "sexual liberation" in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>376</sup> At the time of his contacts with the Situationists, Kashamura was working on a book project on Lumumba with Buchet-Chastel, a publishing house that also edited Debord and others of his comrades. The Situationists were interested at first in integrating Kashamura in the group, but the project did not succeed. Joseph Mbelolo, who was present during one of the meetings, commented on the gap between Kashamura whose approach was anecdotal and Debord, who was interested in theorizing. In a letter to Khayati, Debord briefly alluded to another meeting with Kashamura, where Lungela was present:

We saw Kashamura again. He believes that we are joking when we are describing oppositions inside European and American societies, as well as the possibility of great class struggles in the future. However, he seems to admit that they could exist in Russia, and even in China in the short term. Ndjangani, whom I brought to Kashamura's, made a strong impression on him. It was like two different

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<sup>375</sup> Kitutu Oleontwa, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 25 Nov. 2010.

<sup>376</sup> See Anicet Kashamura, *Culture et aliénation en Afrique: Essai sur la vie quotidienne dans une société aliénée* (Paris: Editions du Cercle, 1971), p.107-134 and Anicet Kashamura, *Famille, sexualité et culture: Essai sur les mœurs sexuelles et les cultures des peuples des Grands Lacs africains* (Paris: Payot, 1973), p.81-140.

centuries meeting each other! But I am not sure if we can expect a profound modernization of Kashamura.<sup>377</sup>

Debord continued to work on his project of a booklet on the Congo. The final text, twenty-one theses on the "Conditions of the Congolese Revolutionary Movement," was completed in July 1966, just before Lungela's return to Kinshasa; it was never published, however, and this might be related to Lungela's apparent rapid distancing from the S.I., as well as to the decline of the Congolese armed struggle.

From the get-go, the theses stressed the Congolese movement's universal ontology, and it concluded with a lyrical cry that shamelessly hijacked the Mulelist rebellion into an anarchist teleology:

The Congolese revolutionary movement of today does not place itself in the history of negritude, but it enters universal history. It is a part of the revolutionary proletariat that is going to rise towards all countries' surface. As such, it must combat Johnson and Mao. It must avenge Lumumba and Liebknecht, Babeuf and Durruti.<sup>378</sup>

This was a *détournement* of sorts, seeking to introduce a Situationist germ in a foreign environment in order to reroute it. Yet, it was also the product of the intellectual work and imagination of young Congolese students like Lungela and Mbelolo, who discussed the theses and, in the case of Lungela, might have directly co-authored them. Despite the more prescriptive than analytical nature of the text, the theses show perspicacity in reading the Congolese situation. The social iconoclasm of the Mulelist rebellion – the

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<sup>377</sup> Guy Debord, *Correspondance: Volume 3*, janvier 1965-décembre 1968 (Paris: Fayard, 2003), p.106. At the time, Kashamura publicly proclaimed that he had no intention to get involved in Congolese politics in the future: see Aimé Diakanoua, "Entretien avec Anicet Kashamura," in *Remarques Africaines* 275 (October 20, 1966), p.505-506.

<sup>378</sup> Guy Debord, "Conditions du mouvement révolutionnaire congolais." Debord wrote his twenty-one theses on the Congolese revolutionary movement probably around the end of 1966, but the text was only published posthumously in 2006: see Guy Debord, *Oeuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), p.692-698.

systematic attacks, at different moments in the rebellions, against symbols and remnants of colonialism in the freed zones – found surprising echoes in the Situationist negativity. The text pushes Congolese revolutionaries towards “the real abolition of all existing class divisions” (thesis one); a critique of “the real state of the world and of the revolutionary forces in the world” (thesis two); “tell[ing] the truth, or in other words: *abolish all power separated from society*,” and “denouncing and transforming the current reality of the world” (thesis six); worker’s self-management (theses thirteen and fourteen); refusing any forms of representative government or differences between manual and intellectual workers (thesis sixteen); and “total *de-christianization*” (thesis eighteen). In one of its many provocative and at the same time stellar formulas, the text claimed: “Socialism in Africa must certainly invent itself totally, not because *this is Africa*, but because it exists nowhere else!” (thesis seventeen). Another fragment seemed to identify the seeds of that invention in “the desire to change life” that had been “the revolutionary dimension of the struggle for independence.” Against discourses of development and industrialization, the revolutionary movement was developing this focus on the transformation of the everyday and claimed that “party (*la fête*), rest, dialogue and play are society’s main treasures.” The revolutionary movement therefore wanted “to develop such values” and offered “them as a model for the revolutionaries in technically advanced countries” (thesis nineteen).

Why dwell on a text that remained unpublished for decades and that unevenly accounted for the realities and subjectivities of actual Congolese actors in the “revolutionary movement”? The answer lies in the meanings of politics in the 1960s. It would be misplaced to tame the history of Congolese rebellions by tightly framing them



inside a national or regional mold. The rebellions should not be remembered only inside their distinctive space of rationality and shared experience. They made sense for direct participants and witnesses who understood their material and spiritual contexts and their longer histories of generational dynamics and local conflicts; distant observers who lived in very different worlds also invested meaning in the rebellions, even if many subtleties escaped them. The work of making Congolese politics global was not only a necessary tactic for Congolese actors interested in gaining international patronage; it was an end in itself. Those who participated in this work of globalization were not only foreign journalists and diplomats, but also Congolese themselves; and the students were probably the most important group among them. A text like Debord's establishes forgotten connections in the history of 1968. Its most surprising passages are ones in which Debord weaves together elements of the critique of the spectacle with his analysis of and prescriptions for the Congolese movement. "One must understand that *the colonizers themselves have been colonized*: at home, in their own life" Debord writes in the seventh thesis. In the same fragment, he claims:

One must also understand that *the liberators, of the Chinese kind, must themselves be liberated*. The real revolutionary movement in Africa, as in the rest of the world, will help them in that liberation. One must first admit that *there is nothing to respect in what exists*.<sup>379</sup>

My reading of the Congolese turn to the Left takes seriously the global dimension to Congolese politics in the 1960s: forgotten connections among ultra-Leftist critiques from advanced capitalist societies in the West, guerilla warfare in Kwilu and Kwango, and the skirmishes on Lovanium's campus. Crucial to understanding this web is to focus on students like Diangani Lungela, who travelled back and forth between Africa and

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<sup>379</sup> Guy Debord, *Œuvres*, p.694.

institutions of education in Europe or America, and crafted linkages among different universes while making their own journeys through the world.

### **Proletarian Fraternity**

Even though several actors shared with me their experiences, there are necessary blank spots in the history of Congolese students' flirtation with foreign avant-gardes. The exact contribution of Lungela to Debord's Congo theses is an example. "We were in reserve," Joseph Mbelolo ya Mpiku told me in a phone conversation when I asked if he published articles in the context of his companionship with the Situationists in the 1960s.



**Figure 24: "Black Studies faculty members. From Left to right: Dr. & Prof. Karefa-Smart, Prof. Mbelolo ya Mpiku, and Prof. William Scott." In *Africana Studies Department Commemorative Magazine: Celebrating 32 years of African legacy in Wellesley College* (2005), p.31**

What Professor Mbelolo meant by “reserve” was that a whole set of circumstances, mostly the pressures of police control, acted to push Congolese students in Europe toward self-censorship with regards to their militant publications. Mbelolo ya Mpiku mentioned the role of the *police des étrangers* in Belgium, but he also gave an example of his time in the United States. From 1970 and 1974, he taught classes on “black literature in French” and similar topics in the brand new post-1968 Black Studies Department at Wellesley College, an all-female liberal arts college near Boston. Conditional to his hiring was signing a letter that stated that he would not militate for the Communist Party. Professor Mbelolo mentioned to me his current project to publish the political texts that he wrote in the 1960s but did not feel comfortable publicizing back then. Many other unpublished texts – letters, articles, and book manuscripts – written by Congolese avant-gardists of the 1960s have probably already disappeared.

This only renders more precious the text published by the Parisian editor François Maspero in 1972 under the title *Les Fleurs du Congo* (The Flowers of Congo). The book was created from a document sent from Kinshasa on July 3, 1969 – a utopist manifesto about “the salvation of the men of the black race” and the real guarantee of Peace and Happiness for the whole of humanity – and the long analysis of this document by French anthropologist Gérard Althabe. The author or, more probably, authors of the original document remained anonymous, even though one name was mentioned at the end of the text.<sup>380</sup> No sender’s address was featured on the large envelope that François Maspero

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<sup>380</sup> This was the name of the head of the group that claimed to be at the origin of the text. When Maspero finally published the book, he removed the name for reasons of safety. Unfortunately, the original manuscript did not feature in Maspero’s archives at the French Institut Mémoires de l’Edition Contemporaine and has probably been lost. My attempts to recover the name of that person and of other contributors to the text have not been successful.

received; it contained four notebooks in which the document was written down. Maspero was unable to contact the authors when the book was finally published a couple of years later.<sup>381</sup> The original document was entitled *The Manifesto of Proletarian Fraternity of Conscious and Revolutionary Peasants, Workers, Intellectuals, and Students of the Congo (le Manifeste de la Fraternité Proletarienne des Paysans, Ouvriers, Intellectuels et Etudiants Congolais Conscients et Révolutionnaires)*. Bogumil Jewsiewicki enthusiastically read the Manifesto with some of his Congolese students at Lubumbashi in 1972, and edited a new version of the book in the 1990s. He has made reference to elements in the text to suggest the authors were former seminarians of the White Fathers in Eastern Congo.<sup>382</sup> The authors announced in the letter to Maspero that they composed the original version of the text in Swahili, the lingua franca of Eastern Congo. The Manifesto claimed that the Kivu would become the new center of the world in a future of “peace and happiness.” In the opinion of historian Wamba dia Wamba, who read the Manifesto when teaching at Harvard University – and who, like all readers I talked to, was deeply impressed by the text, despite “some of its failures” –, the Manifesto emerged from one group of Leftist guerilla fighters of the mid-1960s’ rebellions (the focus of Chapter Seven): “Was it written by the people of Kabila? Was it written by the group around Mukwidi, who was intellectually more interesting? Or was it written by the group around Mulele? I don’t know, but there was a group of people who thought behind the text.”<sup>383</sup> It might also well be that the authors of the Manifesto, writing from Kinshasa, were connected to Lovanium. Probably not well known in the rest of the city, François

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<sup>381</sup> François Maspero, e-mail message to author, 5 Aug. 2011.

<sup>382</sup> Bogumil Jewsiewicki, “Postface de l’édition de 1997,” in Gérard Althabe, *Les Fleurs du Congo: Une utopie du Lumumbisme* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1997), p.397.

<sup>383</sup> Ernest Wamba dia Wamba, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 7 Nov. 2010.

Maspero was a household name on campus, and this could explain why he was the addressee of the Manifesto. The publishing house to which Maspero gave his name was the lighthouse of the French Left in the 1960s. Maspero published books from Althusser, Balibar, Lipietz, Badiou, Fanon, Guérin, and many other Marxist and radical intellectuals; militant texts from all the chapels of the French Left – with the exception of the Situationists who denounced him as a Stalinist – as well as translations and key texts in the library of third-worldism.<sup>384</sup> Two fragments from my conversations with two Congolese professors active in the student Left at Lovanium at the end of the 1960s display Maspero as a strong marker in student politics. The first one is from a conversation with Professor Célestin Kabuya:

Célestin Kabuya: I remember an anecdote: we were discussing in a small informal group after dinner, we were talking about things and others, and then someone dared to ask: “By the way, who is François Maspero?” Everybody burst out laughing: “But you are a total ignorant! You don’t know who François Maspero is? You are not one of us!” [At me:] Do you know François Maspero?

Me: Yes, I do.

CK: He was a great publisher who produced so many books of people who conveyed the Left thinking: Althusser, at the time...

Me: Frantz Fanon...

CK: Frantz Fanon of course! Not knowing these big names of literature or of political engagement at the Left, well... “Move away, please!”<sup>385</sup>

The second fragment comes from Médard Kayamba, a historian at the University of Lubumbashi and a former comrade of Kabuya at Lovanium from 1968 to 1971. About radicalism of student politics at the end of the 1960s, he offered the following answer:

I must say that there was a strong basis that supported the mixing of ideas at Lovanium. When I arrived on the campus, there was on one side IRES, a research center with young professors like Benoît Verhaegen or Comélieu – most of them

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<sup>384</sup> See Julien Hage, “Une brève histoire des libraires et des éditions Maspero 1955-1982,” in Bruno Guichard, Julien Hage, and Alain Léger (eds.), *François Maspero et les paysages humains* (Paris: La Fosse aux Ours, 2009), p.93-160.

<sup>385</sup> Célestin Kabuya Lumuna Sando, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, Oct. 2007.

were Christians, but Christians who situated themselves on the Left; Verhaegen even defined himself as a Marxist Christian. These people were ordering books for the university library. And it was the time of Maspero. Maspero was then publishing the books of Frantz Fanon and Che Guevara – to the point that, for us, when we were buying these books in 1968, we did not even know that these people were dead. We believed they were still alive. And then, it was 1968. And there was May 1968 of course.<sup>386</sup>

These two fragments demonstrate how Maspero's name acted as a memory device in former student activists' attempts to make sense of their experiences, as well as the role that his name played at the time in constructing a sense of belonging in the world of the Left and transnational youth protest besides.

For the authors of the Manifesto, sending a text to Maspero was a “return to sender” typical of the postal politics of decolonization and the radicalization of youth politics in the 1960s. It marked a willingness to talk to the entire world, as the letter that introduced the Manifesto claimed. The letter announced that a “government of the Fraternity formed by our revolutionary party” already existed and it introduced the Manifesto as the party's program. The authors asked Maspero to publish both a French and an English version of the text, so the Fraternity could enter into contact with “all the revolutionary forces in Europe and America” and with “the governments of the socialist countries.” The letter called for the creation of a “Bank of the Peace” that would finance the Fraternity. Finally, the authors asked Maspero to print out letterheads with the name of the Fraternity's government and party.<sup>387</sup>

In their letter to Maspero, the Manifesto authors clearly situated their political program on the Left, defining it as “a correct and fair adaptation of the Marxism-Leninism of Mao Tse-Toung.” However, the richness of the text lay in its utter originality

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<sup>386</sup> Médard Kayamba, personal interview, recorded, Lubumbashi, 27 Sept. 2007.

<sup>387</sup> Gérard Althabe, *Les fleurs du Congo*, p.7-9.

and non-conformity to any ideological canon. In some respects, the Manifesto was the ending point of the Congolese Leftward trajectory of the 1960s. It combined socialist and Christian principles with a determination that exceeded the theoretical constructions of Marxist Christian professors at Lovanium. The Manifesto was a unique collage of anti-imperialist, socialist, Christian, Pan-Africanist, Afrocentrist, Fanonian, and Gandhian references. It was not devoid of contradictions, calling for a “pacific and non-violent armed revolution” to overthrow a regime ruled by the “national bourgeoisie” and “imperialist American devils.” The authors called for the creation of a popular army to overthrow Mobutu's regime. At the same time they affirmed that no one should be killed in the process and that the national bourgeoisie could be persuaded of the revolution's soundness and necessity. In some passages, Americans, white South Africans, Belgians, Portuguese or Israelis became “demoniac creatures.” In other passages, it promised that white proletarians would be allowed again in Congo after the revolution, that the country would welcome tourists and that the Congolese would “caress” them. As was repeated in its sixty pages, the Proletarian Fraternity was seeking to create through the revolution a society inclusive of all. The authors also developed themes rarely present in the rest of the Congolese Left literature of the time: friendship, relationships with nature, sexuality, and non-violence.

The Manifesto's intended audiences were multiple: François Maspero, the readers of the book he would publish who would financially support the Fraternity, and Congolese “students and intellectuals,” the only addressees explicitly mentioned in the text. The first part detailed the utopian program of the Manifesto, the paradise-like society that it desired to establish and the “peaceful armed struggle” and “great march”

that it would conduct to realize it; the second part directly called out to students and intellectuals. Quite contrary to the hazing ceremonies and the campus subculture that constructed a student esprit de corps at Lovanium, the Manifesto invited educated readers not to distance themselves from the people: “We are all coming from poor families of similarly oppressed and humiliated peasants and workers.” It asked officers in the army to remember their childhood: “We grew up together in the misery and humiliation of white colonialism and sucked at the same black breast.”<sup>388</sup> The Manifesto warned students about the reign of “whisky and dollar” and the “decadence” of foreign universities, notably in North America. The United States figured prominently at the top of a list of “imperialist devils.” This was coherent with Maoist literature that certainly inspired the authors, but it was also in line with an older imagination of “the Americans” in the 1930s, as African Americans were mentioned several times in the text as natural allies of the Proletarian Fraternity. The discourse of the Manifesto to students was double. On the one hand, the authors announced to the students and the intellectuals that the revolution was ineluctable and that they would be annihilated by the peasants and workers if they did not join. Students should leave “the books that are coming from abroad;” learn from nature and the everyday life of the “popular masses;” dress with “blue jeans and blue and white working jackets” and go back to villages. On the other hand, students were an avant-garde that needed to guide the masses in “the long march.” The text finished by calling students and intellectuals to form revolutionary cells in which they would study the Manifesto in groups and prepare for the revolution. It finally asked “the groups of revolutionary and aware students and intellectuals” to send a letter to the head of the Fraternity – whose name was deleted by Maspero at the time of publication:

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<sup>388</sup> *Idem*, p.72.



The subject of the letter will be the group's opinions and comments on the Manifesto. The letter will be signed by all the comrades of the group and countersigned by at least 100 signatures of peasants, workers, and soldiers. Curriculum Vitae will be attached to the letter. Candidates will suggest the responsibilities that they want to take in the Fraternity and will demonstrate why they are a good fit. The letter will be written in French or Swahili.<sup>389</sup>

As Maspero mentioned in the original preface, the Manifesto ran the risk of irritating “rationalist and rationalizing revolutionaries.” Yet, he added, he had received encouragements to publish the book by “comrades as diverse as” the anti-colonialist activist and historian Yves Bénot, the physicist and former leader of the Federation of Black African Students in France (FEANF) Abdou Moumouni, and Chris Marker, the filmmaker of *La Jetée* and *Le joli mai*.<sup>390</sup>

In a couple of years, the book was sold out, but as Maspero mentioned, there was “a *total* absence of reactions, criticisms, or comments” following its publication.<sup>391</sup> The Manifesto remained puzzling and difficult to grasp, despite the beauty and transparency of its writing. It found a few enthusiastic readers in Boston, Brazzaville, or Lubumbashi. Others might not have clearly understood the text's inscription in the longer history of ideological poetics as well as its “postal subjectivity” – its attempt to engage distant people and ideas, both through a work of creative reinterpretation of a variety of traditions of thought and in its ambition to find readers globally. As we will see in later chapters, many Congolese students on the Left in the 1960s adhered to orthodox forms of political thinking, in line with canons of African socialism or Marxism. Yet, at a basic level, the Manifesto spoke to them and all other young Congolese who construed and experienced the world through travels, access to books, and exchanges of letters.

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<sup>389</sup> *Idem*, p.78.

<sup>390</sup> *Idem*, p.10.

<sup>391</sup> François Maspero, e-mail message to author, 5 Aug. 2011.

## Textual Exchanges

Let's remember: an increase in global textual exchanges defined the 1960s. As Mike Sell, a scholar of avant-gardes, writes: "[P]rinting presses, text workers such as editors and translators, and the textualized body (the holder of theory, the performer, the witness) challenge[d] the status quo in all kinds of economic and cultural situations."<sup>392</sup> Congolese student politics and their reliance on the "materialized word" support this statement. Printed texts, Sell notes, served as material support for "diachronic, historical relationships," meaning that they helped perpetuate militant and intellectual traditions through time. Printed texts, and particularly in the 1960s, also supported "synchronic continuity," and the spreading of ideas through space. "Even an absurdly incomplete list of texts and writers widely exchanged in the 1960s suggests how vital and diverse global radicalism as a textual phenomenon was," Sell writes. "The written texts of Jean-Paul Sartre, Frantz Fanon, Jean Genet, Che Guevara, Simone de Beauvoir, Arthur Miller, Patrice Lumumba, Guy Debord, Malcolm X, Ho Chi Minh – all enjoyed broad circulation in printed form by 1968, and all looked back into the radical past."<sup>393</sup>

Through the figure of Lumumba, the Congo was ubiquitous in 1960s anthologies of the Left. Of more interest here, traces of European political avant-gardes, the new Left, and global Maoism, forcefully appear in Congolese readings of politics. Yet, an important qualification of the global is necessary here. Sell formulates it in the following terms: "It would be absurd to see the circulation of objects as clear evidence of global

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<sup>392</sup>Mike Sell, "Vectors of the Radical: Textual Exchange and Global Political Struggle in the 1960s," in *Works and Days 39/40*, vol.20, 1-2 (2002), p.9.

<sup>393</sup> *Idem*, p.14.

coalition and community. To do so would be to fall into fetishism; that is to say, into mistaking things for deep, considered, coherently democratic social relations.”<sup>394</sup>

The chapters that follow eschew that risk by not exclusively focusing on analyses of textual exchange. Instead, the chapters alternate between close-ups on events in campus micropolitics (like the crisis over student baptism in 1962) and poetic constructions, utopias, and fantasies that young Congolese elaborated in and through intimate relationships with pen, paper, and typewriter. While keeping a sense of the intrinsic limits of global engagements, I look at the history of political passions in the 1960s as a series of mediations among individual and collective experiences, situated understandings of the world, as well as imagined and effective interlinking of foreign intellectual and militant resources.

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<sup>394</sup> *Idem*, p.15.

## Chapter 6

### Student Politics after Lumumba

In the 1990s, the term “dinosaur” came to designate the barons of the Second Republic who had survived three decades of Mobutu’s whimsical and unpredictable dictatorial regime and were negotiating the turn to “democratization”.<sup>395</sup> Joseph N’Singa Udjuu Ongwabeki Untube could certainly be considered as one of the most illustrious of these “political animals”: he was a co-founder of the Popular Movement for the Revolution (MPR), Mobutu’s “state-party”; several times minister (*commissaire d’Etat*) in charge of justice, interior, and transport; and Mobutu’s prime minister (*premier commissaire d’Etat*) in 1981 and 1982. In 2010, when I visited him at his house near the *Grand-Hotel* in Kinshasa, the former *Mobutiste* was a deputy (*honorable*) in the Congolese parliament and the president of the *Union Chrétienne pour le Renouveau et la Justice*, one of the several hundreds of political parties registered in the country. During our conversation, he talked to me at great length about his long companionship with Mobutu. The general had first noticed him in 1961, as a young law student at Lovanium

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<sup>395</sup> In one of her many chronicles of Congo-Zaire’s political jolts, the Belgian journalist Colette Braeckman applied the term dinosaur to Mobutu himself, who had become an anarchic and cumbersome vestige of the Cold War in the 1990s: see Colette Braeckman, *Le Dinosaur: Le Zaïre de Mobutu* (Paris: Fayard, 1992). The “political bestiary” and popular lexicon used to designate power in the Congo was particularly rich under Mobutu. He himself cultivated his association with the leopard: see Gauthiers de Villers, *De Mobutu à Mobutu: Trente ans de relations Belgique-Zaïre* (Brussels: De Boeck, 1995) p.227-236.

and the hot-headed president of the student government on campus.<sup>396</sup> Like other collaborators of Mobutu, and despite their occasional criticisms of his failures and shortcomings, N'Singa prided himself on his close acquaintance with the *Président-Fondateur*.<sup>397</sup> However, when I asked him about Lumumba, the tone of his voice gave way to a sense of excitement, which was absent from his memories of Mobutu. My question was about the ceremony of independence on June 30, 1960, and the famous anti-Belgian speech that Lumumba pronounced that day at the face of king Baudouin. “On June 30, we came down to the *Palais de la Nation* here,” N'Singa started. “Yes, we came down, a delegation of students. Of course, as you know, we were what we called the revolutionary spirit. So, for us, Lumumba’s speech: this is what politics must be!” Later in the conversation, as I mentioned Mobutu’s surprising decision to proclaim Lumumba a national hero in June 1966, the former *Commissaire d’Etat* interrupted me with a genuine exclamation: “Oh, it was such a joy!” Decades later, it seemed to me, his student passion for Lumumba still outshined years of close collaboration with Mobutu.<sup>398</sup>

This chapter explores the Lumumbist bias of the student movement, but also argues against the natural-born “revolutionary spirit” of the students. Congolese student politics had already started to move towards the Left at the end of the 1950s. However,

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<sup>396</sup> Born in a family of village chiefs in 1934 in the district of Lake Leopold II (Maï-Ndombe), Joseph N'Singa nearly did not attend colonial school. His maternal family opposed the idea of sending him to school, as threatening to his chiefly status. Yet his father insisted that he should receive a Catholic education and walked with him the hundred kilometers that separated them from the closest central primary school. He then followed the typical trajectory: attending the minor seminar of Bokoro, and then the first cycle at the major seminar of Kabwe, in rural Kasai, before joining Lovanium in 1958.

<sup>397</sup> For a whole set of reasons, the former dignitaries of the regime have been particularly prone to the expressions of nostalgia for Mobutu that have emerged in the 2000s. Bob White has analyzed this issue and the complexity of Mobutu’s legacies in Joseph Kabila’s Congo: see Bob W. White, “The Political Undead: Is it Possible to Mourn for Mobutu’s Zaire?,” in *African Studies Review* 48-2 (2005), p.62-85.

<sup>398</sup> Joseph N'Singa Ujjuu, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 2 Dec. 2010.

the students' sympathy for socialism, the revolution, or the "proletarian fraternity" was not immediately obvious. It developed with the radicalization of a generation of students globally and through cumulated experiences of militancy and continued ideological discussions in the Congo and abroad. Throughout the whole period, Congolese students expressed a variety of political identities. Yet, only in the mid and late 1960s did the student intelligentsia entrench itself in the language of the Left. This was not the case in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The turning point was the assassination of Congo's first prime minister. In the following pages, I attend to the role of Lumumba and the memory of Lumumba in the leftward trajectory of student politics in the 1960s.

### **A Second Algeria**

The lawn between student dorms at Lovanium, which was periodically used as a space for the meetings of AGEL, had already been nicknamed the "Red Square" by 1958, but this appellation "did not mean anything. It was just to pester the academic authorities who were scared to death of communism."<sup>399</sup> Still, the opening of Lovanium in the mid-1950s partly turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy. As Paul Salkin predicted, the university produced a class of intellectuals who opposed the colonial regime. However, students who joined the nationalist ranks did so in a context that Salkin and other opponents of African higher education could not have imagined. By the mid-1950s, the Catholic Church and the Catholic professors who had lobbied for the opening of Lovanium sought to dissociate themselves from the colonial regime. Figures like Marzorati, Van Bilsen, Malengreau, and other promoters of the Congolese university,

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<sup>399</sup> Joseph Kabemba Biabululu wa Mayombo, *Le destin de Biabululu, l'enfant de la patience* (Kinshasa: Editions Universitaires Africaines, s.d.), p.55.

called for an advanced reformist agenda regarding Belgian Congo. The students from Lovanium who participated in the creation of the MNC, claimed political rights for the colonized, and opposed racial discrimination in the administration did not need to take a stand against their professors – quite the opposite. More importantly, these students did not need to step outside of the Catholic matrix – particularly, after the creation of a local branch of the International Movement of Catholic Students, also known as Pax Romana, in 1957. Of course, when the nationalist movement started to become more confident, more vocal, more pressing and threatening to a vast ensemble of interests, several Belgian faculty and administrators at Lovanium complained about students who had become too radicalized in their opinion.<sup>400</sup>

In his efforts to overthrow the reticence of colonial authorities regarding the creation of Lovanium, Guy Malengreau articulated a conservative vision of African higher education to which most Congolese students in the 1950s remained true. Students, Malengreau often repeated in substance, would counter the “half-intellectuals” and agitators among the *évolués* and their plans to conduct the country towards chaos. According to Malengreau, academic virtues – respect for truth, critical faculty, awareness of the world’s complexity – would oppose and moderate political action.<sup>401</sup> However,

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<sup>400</sup> In May 1957, “nationalist agitators” disturbed a conference on the future of the Congo, organized by the association of Leuven’s alumni, at Lovanium. A year later, in February 1958, students published a pamphlet under the title “Another colonialist gone [*Encore un colonialiste moins*],” and the Vice-General Governor of the colony summoned the rector Gillon to explain the incident. See Reuben Mantels, *Geleerd in the tropen: Leuven, Congo, en de wetenschap, 1885-1960* (Leuven: Universitaire Pers, 2007), p.256-258.

<sup>401</sup> See citation in Charles Tshimanga, *Jeunesse, formation et société au Congo-Kinshasa, 1890-1960* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2001), p.169.

Malengreau's vision seemed to collapse in April 1958 when students joined labor activists in writing a letter on salary equality between blacks and whites.<sup>402</sup>

The students' letter about salary equality in 1958 resulted directly from debates started over Thomas Kanza's salary two years earlier. Kanza's return to the Congo in 1956 as the first Congolese lay university graduate had forced the issue of status equality between black and white state employees.<sup>403</sup> Prominent *évolués* in Leopoldville intervened and protested when the colonial state did not offer Kanza the same treatment that Belgian employees with similar qualifications received. Ultimately, Kanza resigned from his position in the state administration, but the debate continued. Lovanium students were of course directly interested in the issue. Their letter in 1958 marked their collective entry into politics. Several of the letter's initiators then became major national figure in politics, such as Albert Ndele and August Mabika Kalanda.<sup>404</sup>

"If blacks and whites are not made to enjoy equal advantages, we are ready to make the Congo a second Algeria."<sup>405</sup> That sentence captured the spirit of Lovanium students' letter. It directly touched the core of Belgian colonial anxieties. The promise of a second Algeria – i.e. the recourse to armed violence in the anticolonial struggle – totally crossed the line of acceptable public expression in the colony. Newspapers refused to publish the letter. It finally circulated as a pamphlet in the African neighborhoods of Leopoldville.

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<sup>402</sup> Crawford Young, *Introduction à la politique congolaise*, p. 63. Young, who visited Lovanium in July 1958, notes that salary discriminations between whites and blacks remained the major worry for students, seeming more important than the question of the political structure of the Congolese state (Young, p.63, n.68).

<sup>403</sup> Thomas Kanza, *The Rise and Fall of Patrice Lumumba: Conflict in the Congo* (London: Rex Collings, 1978), p.18-19.

<sup>404</sup> Joseph Kabemba Biabululu wa Mayombo, *Le destin de Biabululu, l'enfant de la patience* (Kinshasa: Editions Universitaires Africaines, s.d.), p.49

<sup>405</sup> Charles Tshimanga, *Jeunesse, formation et société*, p.245.



General Governor Petillon threatened to shut down the University after he found out about the letter. Rector Gillon gathered all the students and delivered a very embittered warning on the dangers of student political activities.<sup>406</sup> Malengrau made the trip from Belgium and imposed preemptive censorship on all students and faculty publications.<sup>407</sup> This was the tensest moment in the relationship between students and academic authorities during the eventful couple of years that led to the Congo's independence.

To Belgians' great relief, students on the campus "did not move" on January 4, 1959, when Leopoldville entered a week of agitation, riots, and anti-colonial iconoclasm.<sup>408</sup> Until the very last days of the colonial regime, key Belgian actors were convinced that students were to be cultivated, for they could reason with irrational politicians like Lumumba by channeling the good advice that they had themselves received from their Belgian professors.

The political expression of students *as students* in the late 1950s translated firstly as a corporatist agenda, as in the case of the April 1958 letter. Their opposition to the

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<sup>406</sup> Joseph Kabemba Biabululu wa Mayombo, *Le destin de Biabululu, l'enfant de la patience*, p.49.

<sup>407</sup> Reuben Mantels, *Geleerd in the tropen*, p.258.

<sup>408</sup> Luc Gillon, *Servir en actes et en vérités* (Paris: Duculot, 1988), p.150-151. In the same passage of his memoirs, Gillon also notes the resonances in the campus of the Algerian War, the Bandung conference, the Suez crisis and the independence of Ghana. On the riots of January 1959, Jean-Marie Mutamba notes a student strike at Lovanium on January 8 to protest against the state repression, which Gillon either forget about or deemed insignificant: Jean-Marie Mutamba Makombo Kitatshima, p.382. Nestor Mpeye, a student at the time at Lovanium, confirmed Gillon's memory in discussions I had with him in 2010. However, Paul Kabayidi, another of my interviewees, remembered that some Lovanium students witnessed and maybe participated in the riots: "It was a Sunday. Those who had spent the weekend in the city, when they came back on campus, they started... a bit... to make the campus bubble up. Among them, there was Tshisekedi... who else?... José Alidor Kabeya.... There was Malimba Paul; the Takizalas... Well you see... I still remember: we met on the Red Square. This is when I started to call Tshisekedi master. So, this was then the nucleus, the leaders, the elders. *Et voilà.*" Paul Kabayidi, personal interview, recorded, Brussels, 12 Feb. 2011.

racial organization of the labor market would soon give way to a diffuse hostility towards the political class and its appropriation of the positions in the administration that students considered their own preserve. As an anonymous author wrote in the Catholic students' journal *Presence Africaine* in April 1960, "[R]eal patriotic politicians understand that their civic duty is to use university students' technical skills by letting them occupy the important positions for which their education has prepared them."<sup>409</sup> In secondary schools, Belgian professors used young students' aspirations to positions of power within a future independent Congolese technocracy to alienate them from anticolonial activists. Guillaume Sampassa, for example, remembered in his memoir how his Belgian professor of mathematics at the Collège de la Karavia in Elisabethville talked to him and his peers around 1958: "Your politicians, Kasa-Vubu and Lumumba, demand independence because they are afraid of your generation. They accelerate the process only to prevent you from ousting them with your diplomas."<sup>410</sup> These kinds of warnings were often counterproductive and alienated Congolese students from their Belgian teachers. In interviews, many former student activists remembered moments of epiphanies during their secondary schooling as crucial starting points in trajectories of politicization: realizing the hidden agendas of their Belgian teachers, as well as discrepancies between colonial education's worldviews and the world experienced outside of classrooms, were crucial in developing students' curiosity for the Left and anticolonial activism. Yet, this was not always the case, and some students were very receptive to criticisms of politicians' lack of education. For example, in an interview that I conducted with him in 2010, Augustin Awaka, a former *Frère Joséphite* and the author of a doctoral dissertation

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<sup>409</sup> "Politiciens contre universitaires?" in *Présence Universitaire* n.3 (April 1960), p.67.

<sup>410</sup> Sampassa Kaweta Milombe G-M, *Conscience et politique au Congo-Zaïre: De l'engagement aux responsabilités* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003), p.18.

submitted at Laval University in 1965 on “the use of the first and second persons in the indirect style of Cicero’s *Catiline Orations and Philippics*,” shared the following judgment on the first Congolese government: “In the Congolese government, there were only four university graduates. [...] And we used to say: ‘stupid like a Congolese minister,’ because these people had not any notions of philosophy, economy, chemistry, physics, and they listened to some words as if they were coming down from heaven.”<sup>411</sup>

Tensions between students and politicians were not only defined by elitism, however. The same logic that explained the mutiny of the army and the “clerks’ revolt” in the public administration in July 1960 was at the basis of students’ unease with politicians’ appropriation of power. The students, like the soldiers and the state employees, considered themselves as the legitimate beneficiaries of Africanization and then independence. The bitterness of some of them came from the fact that politicians seemed willing to capture the material advantages of independence.<sup>412</sup>

Students also occupied the political sphere as ethnic subjects, writing letters to the authorities on behalf of ethnic constituencies or hailed by the state as pacifiers in ethnic strifes. However, Lovanium gathered students from the whole colony and as such pushed them to adhere to a nationalist discourse that transcended ethnicity. Student political expression during the first part of the decolonization process focused on the issue of national unity and critiques of tribalism. The student press at Lovanium used the register of social Catholicism to promote a vision of students as educators of the masses, encouraging local and concrete initiatives like the free classes that students gave to the

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<sup>411</sup> Augustin Awaka, collective interview (with Cécile Michel and Daniel Tödt), recorded, Kinshasa, 17 Aug. 2010.

<sup>412</sup> On the “clerks’ revolt,” see J. Gérard-Libois and Benoît Verhaegen, *Congo 1960* (Brussels: CRISP, 1961), t.2, p. 646.

University's blue-collar workers during lunchtime.<sup>413</sup> Similarly, students saw themselves as the educators of the nation: those who should teach national unity and virtue through example.

In an interview in 2011, Paul Kabayidi expressed that nationalist trope by referring to a speech pronounced in 1959 by Paul Malimba, at the time the president of AGEL, and Henri Takizala:

They said this: if, in this moment, people do not get along, are scattered because of ethnic and clan tendencies, we the elite, we should... We know each other, we can complement each other to make the junction, the union, in order to create the nation of tomorrow.<sup>414</sup>

Despite these intentions, students failed to have their voices heard during the country's transition to independence. This failure came partly from a willingness to conform to the virtues of reason and dispassionate debate at a time of great turmoil and passionate engagements.

While many students embraced a discourse of "responsibility," which they contrasted with the "dirty" work of populist and electoral politics, not all students were indifferent to the passion of protest. In the months that preceded June 30, students at Lovanium organized an important march. Quite tellingly, the march targeted the South African consulate in Leopoldville. The demonstration followed the infamous Sharpeville massacre of March 21, 1960. It expressed a Pan-African and internationalist consciousness at a moment of nationalist struggle, even if of course denouncing apartheid also constituted an attack against colonialism in the Congo. Yet, students were proving

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<sup>413</sup> "Editorial," in *Présence Universitaire* n.2 (December 1959), p.4.

<sup>414</sup> Paul Kabayidi, personal interview, recorded, Brussels, 12 Feb. 2011. The reason why Kabayidi still remembered that speech decades later was because of an irony of history: Paul Malimba was indeed a close friend of Moïse Tshombe. A few months after that speech, he supported the latter's secession of Katanga from the central state. Tshombe also participated in granting Malimba a scholarship for the United States.

again the importance of international comparisons as one of their contributions to Congolese politics, as they had already done with the “Algerian letter” of 1958. Nestor Mpeye who participated in the march also remembers it as a formative experience of police repression: “It was quite amusing: they dispersed us with water cannons. It was a first for us.”<sup>415</sup> Oswald Ndeshyo, who also marched against apartheid on that day, remembered that only the minority of students at Lovanium who, like him, were “every inch Lumumbist” (*Lumumbiste jusqu’au bout des ongles*) attended the demonstration.<sup>416</sup>

### **Negotiating Independence**

No local branch of Lumumba’s MNC or any other political parties existed on the campus. Furthermore, there was no organization that united students in Lovanium, Elisabethville and other newly created institutions of higher education. This probably explained the absence of a student voice in the political turmoil in 1959 and 1960. The only association that gathered students from different schools was not based in Africa: it was the General Union of Students from the Belgian Congo and Ruanda-Urundi, created in Liège in March 1958 under the presidency of Justin-Marie Bomboko. The association united colonial students in Belgium. As we will see, these students were able to weigh much more in the political process from Louvain, Liège and Brussels, than their peers in Lovanium and Elisabethville.

Important decisions concerning Congolese politics were not taken in Leopoldville, but in Brussels. The colonial administration in the Congo remained significantly more conservative than politicians in Belgium and did not have significant

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<sup>415</sup> Nestor Mpeye, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 6 April 2010.

<sup>416</sup> Oswald Ndeshyo, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 7 June 2010.

decision-making power. It is therefore not surprising that Brussels also became the center of Congolese student politics and of Congolese students' influence, even though, out of a total of 542 Congolese students in 1960, 466 studied in the colony and less than 50 in Belgium.<sup>417</sup> The students in Belgium notably played a crucial role during the penultimate scene in the history of Belgian colonialism: the roundtable conference of January and February 1960, when more than eighty delegates from all political parties and traditional chiefs came to negotiate the terms of independence with members of the Belgian government and delegates from the Senate and the House.<sup>418</sup> Students acted as cicerones for politicians for whom the roundtable was often their first visit outside of the Congo. Some of them also served as official advisors for political parties' delegations during the conference. However, the students' most important contribution was the organization of a working session on the eve of the conference with the majority of the Congolese political delegates. During the working session, Marcel Lihau, the president of the student association, pleaded for a "common front" of all Congolese political parties in negotiations with the Belgians. The decision to let only one voice speak was then adopted

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<sup>417</sup> Jean-Marie Mutamba Makombo Kitatshima, *Du Congo Belge au Congo indépendant, 1940-1960: Emergence des "évolués" et genèse du nationalisme* (Kinshasa: Publications de l'Institut de Formation et d'Etudes Politiques, 1998), p.154. In his memoir, Thomas Kanza estimates that the Association of Congolese Students counted 80 members in January 1960: Thomas Kanza, *The Rise and Fall of Patrice Lumumba: Conflict in the Congo* (London: Rex Collings, 1978), p.75. The difference in the estimations might come from the fact that young Congolese who had already graduated still considered themselves and were still seen as students, and might have therefore stayed members of the association.

<sup>418</sup> Quite tellingly, Lovanium students had also tried to orient the action of Congolese politicians who were going to participate in the roundtable, but they did not meet the same success as their colleagues in Belgium: "Before the Round Table, AGEL tried in vain to enter in contact with political parties' leaders, in order to inquire about how they intended to carry the discussions [with Belgian authorities] in Brussels. The contacts were only superficial. Our leaders shied away. On our side, we worried about the lack of cadres among all these politicians and about their inexperience. In 1960, there were less than five Congolese holders of university degrees in the colonial administration. No cohesion existed between political parties, which were mostly tribal and under the influence of foreign advisors." Joseph Kabemba Biabululu, *Le destin de Biabululu*, p.57.

the next day.<sup>419</sup> The common front allowed for the liberation of Patrice Lumumba from Jadotville's prison and his urgent transfer to Brussels. It also successfully forced the Belgians to accept the date of June 30 as the day of the Congo's accession to full sovereignty.<sup>420</sup>

Belgians' acceptance of the June 30 deadline surprised everybody, and especially the Congolese delegates who had expected more resistance from the colonizer. With independence coming in less than five months, students and university graduates saw their political value rise suddenly. After the departure of the Belgians – even though nobody expected the exodus that would empty the Congo's white population in a few weeks during the summer – politicians would need a national technocratic elite to rule the state. In this context, Lumumba encouraged the efforts of Luis Alvarez Lopez, his Spanish friend who was setting up an *Institut Congolais* in Brazzaville, where three hundred Congolese “of all origins” (meaning Congo-Kinshasa, the Portuguese enclave of Cabinda and Northern Angola, Congo-Brazzaville, and the Ubangi-Shari territories) would soon receive an accelerated training in economics, political sciences, and social sciences.<sup>421</sup> Young Congolese were also sent to Belgium as interns, such as Albert Ndele, one of the first Congolese graduates of Leuven in 1958 who went back to Belgium to further familiarize himself with the Belgian Ministry of Finances.<sup>422</sup> Several students also

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<sup>419</sup> Jean-Marie Mutamba Makombo Kitatshima, *Du Congo belge au Congo indépendant*, p.437.

<sup>420</sup> Cléophas Kamitatu, one of the leaders of the PSA, did not mention the role of the students in the creation of the Common Front, but that of “Belgian friends.” Kamitatu instead remembered that students were kept out of the meetings of the Common Front, as rumors spread that “most students and trainees belonged to Belgian secret services.” Cléophas Kamitatu, *La grande mystification du Congo-Kinshasa: Les crimes de Mobutu* (Paris: Maspero, 1971), p.33.

<sup>421</sup> Luis Lopez Alvarez, *Lumumba ou l'Afrique frustrée* (Paris: Cujas, 1964), p.43.

<sup>422</sup> See Charles Tshimanga, “La jeunesse étudiante dans l'évolution socio-politique du Congo-Kinshasa, 1954-1973,” in Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch et al. (eds), *Histoire et*

joined the Economic, Financial and Social Round-Table Conference in Brussels from April 26 to May 16. That conference followed the “Political” Round-Table of January-February. Most Congolese politicians, busy campaigning throughout the colony, did not attend the conference, convinced that the conference would not make decisions that would bind the future independent state. Facing squads of experts from Belgian ministries, parliament and private sectors, the Congolese delegation was composed primarily of students (which by then meant both young Congolese still pursuing their degrees and recent graduates),<sup>423</sup> including Marcel Liahau, Evariste Loliki, Andre Mandi, Joseph Mbeka, Paul Mushiete, Mario Cardoso and Albert Ndele.<sup>424</sup>

In his opening article that celebrated the coming of independence, Etienne Tshisekedi, then a student in law at Lovanium and the editor of *Présence Universitaire*, expressed the pride of Congolese for their recovered freedom, their accession to the status of “authentic men,” their liberation from inferiority complexes and alienated personalities. Tshisekedi also expressed the students’ critique of the politicians’ game and of the excesses of the electoral campaign, “from the most savage assassinations to the most shameless rapes, and to the feelings of envy, jealousy and hatred.” To prevent these disorders, Tshisekedi argued, the Congo needed a “strong authority” that only a presidential regime would be able to bring.<sup>425</sup> Tshisekedi did not clearly situate the

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*devenir de l’Afrique noire au vingtième siècle: travaux en cours* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2001), p.62.

<sup>423</sup> Thomas Kanza, the “first Congolese graduate” and at the time an employee at the European Economic Community in Brussels, was for example elected as vice-president of the Association of Congolese Students in Belgium in 1959: Thomas Kanza, *The Rise and Fall of Patrice Lumumba: Conflict in the Congo* (London: Rex Collings, 1978), p.74.

<sup>424</sup> Jean-Marie Mutamba Makombo, *Du Congo belge au Congo indépendant*, p.450.

<sup>425</sup> Etienne Tshisekedi, “Editorial,” in *Présence Universitaire* n.4 (July 1960), p.4-5. Etienne Tshisekedi wa Mulumba would later become a very close collaborator of President Mobutu, before becoming his main opponent in the 1980s and 1990s. The leader of the oppositional



respective roles that students and politicians should play in the process. However, the transition period from February to June 1960 distributed the roles in a clear fashion: the contact with the masses and the executive power went to a small group of politicians with charisma and regional followers; the technical discussions with Belgian experts were assigned to students and university graduates, often trained by their Belgian partners in the negotiations.<sup>426</sup> That connection was not lost on the politicians, though. Gabriel Yumbu, the vice-president of the PSA – the party of Gizenga, Mulele and Kamitatu – accused the students of being “crypto-colonialists,” because of their supposed collusion with their professors.<sup>427</sup> Regardless, the economic roundtable pursued its work. Its conclusion suggested the organization of future Belgian assistance to the Congo through the sending of development experts and the gift of scholarships for Congolese students and interns. The roundtable also solidly inscribed liberalism and the safeguard of private capital as the future independent country’s economic policy.<sup>428</sup> The conference also ratified a mechanism that allowed colonial private companies to repatriate the totality of their capital to Belgium on June 30. That measure in particular undermined the financial stability of the new independent state and created a thirty-year dispute between Belgium

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party UDPS, Tshisekedi officially arrived second in the presidential election of 2011, losing to Joseph Kabila. Denouncing electoral frauds, Tshisekedi proclaimed himself president of the Congo.

<sup>426</sup> Kanza writes about his own political “neutrality” in the eyes of the numerous Congolese politicians who paid him visits in Brussels in 1959 and 1960 and which, in a way, he turned into a specific form of “unpolitical political” capital: “[G]iven the years I had spent in Europe and my links with the outside world and though I represented therefore a kind of symbol they could boast of, something precious, whose help and advice, moreover, they sought whenever they needed it, they never associated me with the political race in their discussions” (Thomas Kanza, *The Rise and Fall*, p.93).

<sup>427</sup> Jean-Marie Mutamba Makombo, *Du Congo belge au Congo indépendant*, p.450; J. Gérard-Libois and Benoît Verhaegen, *Congo 1960* (Brussels: CRISP, 1961), volume 1, p.99.

<sup>428</sup> Mutamba, *Du Congo belge au Congo indépendant*, p.452-453.

and its former colony. It was adopted, some observers argued, with the full realization and approval of the students who represented the Congolese side.<sup>429</sup>

Brussels' political *volte-face* in February 1960 opened a large avenue for the Belgian legal scholars, sociologists, and political scientists who had preached, often in vain, for political reforms in the Congo since the beginning of the 1950s.<sup>430</sup> As we saw in Chapter Two, some of them would later capitalize on their support for Congolese nationalism to conduct research and collect archives in independent Congo. Congolese students also joined their professors and took the role of advisors. Several key figures among the students adhered to the camp of Patrice Lumumba and participated in the exercise of power at his side after independence: Thomas Kanza became a minister in the government and the Congo's ambassador at the United Nations; André Mandi, a graduate from Kisantu and from the Université Libre de Bruxelles, occupied the position of secretary of state for foreign affairs; Pierre Elegensa, a student in the USSR, came back to Leopoldville and became Lumumba's special advisor.<sup>431</sup> However, Congolese students and Belgian academics occupied a more prominent position as adversaries to Lumumba in the last months of the colonial regime and in the short period that followed when Lumumba acted as prime minister.

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<sup>429</sup> Thomas Kanza, *The Rise and Fall*, p.84.

<sup>430</sup> As Gillon notes in his memoirs, the real first opening into colonial politics for Belgian academics, and Lovanium's increasing participation in the Congo's governance, started with the riots of June 1959: Gillon, p.152.

<sup>431</sup> Thomas Kanza, *The Rise and Fall*, p.98-99 and 114; Jean-Claude Willame, *Patrice Lumumba: La crise congolaise revisitée* (Paris : Karthala, 1990), p.220.

## Original Sins

In April 1960, Benoit Verhaegen, a professor at Lovanium, and his colleagues at the Center for Socio-Political Research and Information (CRISP) established the Congolese Political Institute in Léopoldville – the IPC that we encountered at the beginning of Chapter Two, together with two of his members, Louis Mandala and Pierre Wangata. With the financial help of the Ford Foundation, Verhaegen planned to organize evening classes on politics and economics. Patrice Lumumba quickly became suspicious of the Institute and its board, which gathered his most rabid political adversaries among the “moderate nationalists”: Joseph Ileo, Cyrille Adoula, Joseph Ngalula, Martin Nguete, Damien Kandolo, Cléophas Kamitatu, and others. For Lumumba, the Institute was the “occult meeting place” of his adversaries.<sup>432</sup> After his accession to power, Lumumba continued to distrust Verhaegen.<sup>433</sup>

The church also opposed the prime minister, reading his politics as pro-communist and opposed to Catholic interests. Lumumba’s entourage saw Lovanium’s professors as the agents, inside the state apparatus, of the church’s plot against their champion.<sup>434</sup> Verhaegen indeed became the advisor of Alphonse Nguvulu, as the secretary of state for economic planning; and Hugues Leclerq, a colleague of Verhaegen on Mount Amba, occupied a similar position at the Ministry of Finance, where André Tshibangu, a recent graduate of Lovanium, was a deputy minister and Albert Ndele, a special advisor. During the intense international crisis and national disintegration of the Congo in July and August, Verhaegen and Leclerq participated in what Jean-Claude Willame calls the “managerial logic” of a minority inside the Congolese government,

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<sup>432</sup> Jean-Claude Wilame, *Patrice Lumumba*, p.375-376.

<sup>433</sup> Luis Alavarez Lopez, *Lumumba ou l’Afrique*, p.76.

<sup>434</sup> Thomas Kanza, *The Rise and Fall*, p.169.

which entered into conflict with Lumumba's "nationalist logic."<sup>435</sup> Lumumba also counted adversaries that came from the non-Catholic academic world. Justin-Marie Bomboko, a graduate from the Université Libre de Bruxelles, was his minister of foreign affairs, and one of the first personalities to separate himself from Lumumba's positions during the crisis. Kasa-Vubu had imposed Bomboko in the government and his political career had been launched with the help of Arthur Doucy, his professor at ULB and the power director of the Solvay Institute of Sociology.<sup>436</sup> Finally, Lumumba accused Jef Van Bilsen, a professor in Leuven and an advisor of Kasa-Vubu, of working against him.<sup>437</sup>

While Lumumba repeatedly denounced Belgian plots against him during the month of July, his minister of information – and Guy Debord's future interlocutor in Paris – Anicet Kashamura, explicitly cited Lovanium and Monsignors Gillon and Malula as the centers of anti-Lumumba's subversion.<sup>438</sup> These accusations, as well as the fact

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<sup>435</sup> Jean-Claude Willame, *Patrice Lumumba*, p.218-219.

<sup>436</sup> Thomas Kanza, *The Rise and Fall*, p.96 and 106-107. Bomboko started his political career during summer vacations in 1959. Back in the Congo for the holidays, he organized a series of conferences in Coquilatville, in the Equateur province, in order to prevent the creation of a local section of Lumumba's MNC. A Belgian student from Lovanium who happened to visit Coquilhatville during Bomboko's conference recalled the "anti-demagogic" dimension of Bomboko's political happenings, who warned the local population "against the ideas of democracy, elections, and independence." Paulus, "Réflexions d'un voyageur," in *Présence Universitaire* n.2 (December 1959), p.10.

<sup>437</sup> Thomas Kanza, *The Rise and Fall*, p.146.

<sup>438</sup> Anicet Kashamura, *De Lumumba aux colonels*, p.101. See also: "A Congo Bishop Accused," in *Catholic Herald* (29 July 1960) and "Communist Sympathisers in Congolese Cabinet: Threat to Catholic University," in *Catholic Herald* (5 August 1960), p.8; Lovanium students denounced the accusations against their university on July 22: see Joseph Kabemba, *Le destin de Biabululu*, p.65; J. Gérard-Libois and Benoît Verhaegen, *Congo 1960* (Brussels: CRISP, 1961), t.2, p.693-696. It seems that the idea of an anti-Lumumba plot orchestrated from Lovanium appeared first in a letter sent to the Congolese Parliament by a group called the *Association de la Jeunesse Intellectuelle*. On July 20, the speaker of the Parliament read the letter in session and then on the radio. It denounced a secret meeting held by Gillon at Lovanium with the former General Janssens of the Force Publique, Cardinal Malula and a whole host of anti-Lumumbist politicians (including Ileo, Adoula, Bolikanga and Kalonji.

that Katanga's secession de facto deprived the national government of Elisabethville's state university, contributed to Minister of Education Pierre Mulele's plan to nationalize Lovanium. Tensions between Lovanium and the government increased when it appeared that Lumumba was willing to back Mulele on nationalization.<sup>439</sup> This was a major threat for the Congolese church, whose hierarchy was still largely dominated by Belgian missionary bishops at that point, and for Leuven. Gillon was determined not to let the nationalization happen. In July, he struggled to organize the exam sessions in the middle of the army's mutiny; and in early August he made a rapid trip to New York where he secured \$500,000 from the Rockefeller and Ford foundations.<sup>440</sup> On his return to the Congo, the rector was determined to take care of the nationalization threat, even more so as his position was directly compromised. Since mid-July, people in Rome, Brussels, Leuven, and Leopoldville discussed the possibility of selecting a new rector for Lovanium: a non-Belgian priest who would save the Catholic character of the institution and avoid criticism regarding the colonial character of Lovanium. Cardinal Agagianian, the Armenian prefect for the propagation of the faith in the Vatican, suggested replacing Gillon with an Italian prelate. In Leuven, the rector, Monsignor Van Wayenbergh, who had been totally alienated by Lumumba after attending the independence ceremony in Leopoldville, opposed Agagianian's suggestion. Van Wayenbergh interpreted the

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According to the letter, the goal of the meeting was to organize the fall of the Prime Minister: see J. Gérard-Libois and Benoît Verhaegen, *Congo 1960* (Brussels: CRISP, 1961), vol.2, p.693-694.

<sup>439</sup> Lopez summarizes Lumumba's program for education in the following terms: "Patrice gave himself five years to eradicate analphabetism in the Congo. He was also willing to send abroad interns and students by the thousands. He wanted to nationalize Lovanium University and to turn it into a training center for the elite of all African countries, while developing Elisabethville University into black Africa's best center for technical training; and he also wanted to see new universities opening as soon as possible in the other provinces." Luis Alvarez Lopez, *Lumumba ou l'Afrique*, p.148.

<sup>440</sup> Luc Gillon, *Servir en actes et vérités*, p.156-161.

possible nomination of an Italian prelate as another episode in the struggle between the Vatican and Louvain, the latter accusing the former of deviance with regards to Catholic traditionalism. Baron Poswick, the Belgian ambassador to the Vatican, supported the Italian option, arguing that it would give Lovanium “an international appearance” while actually preserving most of its Belgian character. Poswick wrote repeatedly to Brussels that Gillon and professors at Lovanium also supported the idea, worried about finding a non-Belgian rector who would not be American, English, or French. Gillon makes clear in his memoir that he was determined to keep his position, but the Belgian government gave its agreement for his replacement. Cardinal Sigismondi, the secretary for the congregation of the propagation of the faith, welcomed the Belgian support. The Cardinal held “Lumumba with the uttermost scorn.” His willingness to replace Gillon and save the Catholic character of Lovanium was linked to his belief that the church needed to act as an oppositional power with regard to the regime in the Congo.<sup>441</sup>

In August, Gillon felt he needed to act to save his position. He paid a visit to Lumumba and tried to convince the prime minister and an apparently very hostile Mulele of the technical impossibility of nationalizing Lovanium. However, the Catholic strategy was to use Lovanium’s “friends” inside the regime. It also focused on Kasa-Vubu. Church dignitaries – Gillon, Monsignor Kimbondi, Monsignor Scalais, the papal nuncio – paid regular visits to the president in August, trying to convince him of the importance of opposing Lovanium’s nationalization and more generally to counter Lumumba’s so-called communist tendencies.<sup>442</sup> Catholic efforts joined the pressure that Belgian, American, British and French emissaries exerted on Kasa-Vubu and that resulted in the

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<sup>441</sup> See the following diplomatic cables: Poswick to Wigny, 13 July 1960; 29 July 29, 1960; 3 Aug. 1960; 4 Aug. 1960; Consular correspondence, AD, Brussels.

<sup>442</sup> Luc Gillon, *Servir en actes et vérités*, p.163-164.

president's revocation of his prime minister on September 5.<sup>443</sup> Quite tellingly, two days later, during his long allocution in front of the parliament during which he contested the legality of his revocation by Kasa-Vubu, Lumumba mentioned again his desire to nationalize higher education and implied that, in reaction, Lovanium's students had orchestrated the campaign of propaganda and intoxication against him and in favor of the president.<sup>444</sup>

Student participation in the crisis took yet another turn a few days later, when Mobutu organized, with the backing of the CIA, a coup that "neutralized" both Kasa-Vubu and Lumumba on September 13.<sup>445</sup> Back in July, after the beginning of the army's mutiny on July 5, senior students at Lovanium had held a crisis meeting of their "reflexion group," known as the "old wolves," during which they had debated the idea of taking the power out of politicians' hands in order to save the Congo from chaos.<sup>446</sup> Mobutu's coup gave the students an actual opportunity to realize that plan. The young Colonel asked Congolese students to help him save the country from the hands of the politicians. Initially, his call was directed at Congolese students in Europe:

They must come back home as soon as possible to take care of the country's management. They are the ones who will hire technicians and other foreign specialists to help them in their task. After that small revolutionary period, and with the agreement of our young students, we will hand back the power to the politicians.<sup>447</sup>

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<sup>443</sup> Jean-Claude Willame, *Patrice Lumumba*, p.388-396.

<sup>444</sup> Jean Van Lierde (ed.), *La Pensée politique de Patrice Lumumba* (Paris: Présence Universitaire, 1963), p.361.

<sup>445</sup> Larry Devlin, *Chief of Station, Congo: A Memoir of 1960-67* (New York: Public Affairs, 2007), p.76-83.

<sup>446</sup> Joseph Kabemba Biabululu, *Le destin de Biabululu*, p.65-66.

<sup>447</sup> Cited in J. Gérard-Libois and Benoît Verhaegen, *Congo 1960* (Brussels: CRISP, 1961), t.2, p.869.

Before his sudden accession to the head of the army after the mutiny of July, Mobutu had himself been part of the student group. After his seven-year military service in the 1950s, and a short career as a journalist in Leopoldville, during which he also worked as an informant for the colonial *sûreté*, the 28-year old Mobutu had joined in Brussels the growing number of Congolese trainees and students in 1958. Mobutu remained in Brussels until the Congo's independence, following journalism classes and becoming one of Lumumba's relays in the Belgian capital and among the local colony of Congolese students.<sup>448</sup> Mobutu had first joined Lumumba's government as a private secretary to the prime minister, a "non-political" position that fitted his status as a young intellectual. His appeal to students after his coup was therefore not totally surprising.

The new government that followed Mobutu's coup was known as the Board of General Commissioners, le *Collège des Commissaires Généraux*.<sup>449</sup> Justin-Marie Bomboko, the first Congolese graduate from the Free University of Brussels and the minister of foreign affairs at independence, presided over the board. The commissioners were either recent university graduates – like Manuel Cardoso, Ernest Kashemwa, Ferdinand Kazadi, Auguste Mabika Kalanda, Joseph Mbeka, Aubert Mukendi, Paul Mushiete, Albert Ndele, Martin Ngwete– or students who were still pursuing their degrees – like Marcel Lihau, Albert Mpase, Jonas Mukamba, José Nussbaumer, Henri

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<sup>448</sup> Willame, 408-410; Kanza, 112-113; Luis Alavarez Lopez, *Lumumba ou l'Afrique*, 60.

<sup>449</sup> Devlin, the CIA chief of station in Leopoldville, reported that the State Department complained that "the College of Commissars was an unfortunate name; it sounded too Russian, too communist." Larry Devlin, *Chief of Station*, p.87. Devlin mentioned that he convinced Mobutu to change the name from "commissars" to "commissioners" (p.88). However, this is not corroborated in other sources, and the two terms both translate as *commissaires* in French. In his memoirs, Devlin denies acting on orders received from CIA headquarters to assassinate Lumumba. However, he mentioned pressuring the commissioners into arresting Lumumba (p.107) and the important support of the US for the commissioners was based on the "neutralization" of Lumumba (see also p.125).



Takizala, Marcel Tshibamba, and Etienne Tshisekedi. Lovanium's so-called elders, the more advanced students who had been the visible leaders of student politics after 1958, were well represented inside the new government.

The commissioners emerged from the network that Mobutu had built among young Congolese educated in Brussels and Leopoldville. Aubert Mukendi, commissioner for transport in the *Collège*, shared a revealing anecdote, during an interview in 2011, about his first encounter with Mobutu in Brussels in 1959. Mukendi had then decided to drop out of his mathematical studies at the University of Louvain, after a racist episode during which a professor questioned his intellectual ability as a black man. Jonas Mukamba, who would himself also be part of the *Collège* in September 1960, brought Mukendi to see Mobutu when he learned that the latter was ready to go back to the Congo without getting his degree. Here is how Aubert Mukendi remembered Mobutu's words to him: "I know who you are. I have followed your results at the University. You have to get your degree. You can't go back to the Congo without your degree. The colonialists would crush you." Under the advice of Mobutu, Mukendi stayed in Belgium and transferred from the University of Louvain to the University of Liège.<sup>450</sup>

Several of the 37 commissioners were Congolese graduates from Belgian universities, but Lovanium was also well represented in this new government.<sup>451</sup> Several professors from the Catholic University – Benoît Verhaegen, Hugues Leclerq and Fernand Herman – participated in the *Collège* as advisors and took care of organizing the

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<sup>450</sup> Aubert Mukendi, personal interview, recorded, Paris, 15 Jan. 2011.

<sup>451</sup> There were initially 24 commissioners, but new positions were created to accommodate other students who had interrupted their studies to answer Mobutu's call, as well as to establish a balance in the representation of the country's different regions and ethnic constituencies: see Jean-Claude Willame, "The Congo," in Donald K. Emerson, ed. *Students and Politics in Developing Nations* (New York: Praeger, 1968), p.41.

recruitment of experts in Belgium.<sup>452</sup> Enjoying timid support from Belgium, the US and the UN, the *Collège* did not accomplish much during the six months it acted as the de-facto ruling government in Leopoldville. Its professed major raisons d'être were to contain "communist colonialism" and "'Marxist-Leninist imperialism," to deliver the country "from its present ruin," and to maintain its administration during the period of reconciliation among politicians. The *Collège* linked anti-communism with a nationalist rhetoric: "Our goal is the total and definitive elimination of colonialism under all its Western or Eastern, White or Black forms, as well as the preservation of goods and persons, and the rigorous preservation of public order."<sup>453</sup> Despite the rhetoric, the *Collège* prepared Congo's reconciliation with Belgium, as well as the adoption of a more conciliatory tone with regards to the seceded provinces of South Kasai and Katanga.<sup>454</sup> In our first meeting in November 2009, Justin-Marie Bomboko defended the action of "his" commissioners:

I believe that the general commissioners recreated the embryo of a new administration. And they succeeded. And then, there was the neutralization of Kasa-Vubu and Lumumba. Until this day, people, and mostly the so-called historians of our country, misunderstand the neutralization. We simply prevented Mobutu from seizing power. We, the general commissioners made Mobutu understand that we were stuck in a difficult situation where Kasa-Vubu's authority was contested by the Lumumba wing, with Gizenga who was supported by the communists and who had created a government in Kisangani. We had to have a certain legitimacy. [...] We did not want not to create an illegal structure that would have been ignored by the United Nations. [...] We convinced Kasa-

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<sup>452</sup> Jean-Claude Willame, *Patrice Lumumba*, p.426.

<sup>453</sup> Press communication of September 19, 1960, reproduced in J. Gérard-Libois and Benoît Verhaegen, *Congo 1960* (Brussels: CRISP, 1960), t.2., p.871-872.

<sup>454</sup> It is quite remarkable, for example, that Aubert Mukendi, entered the *Collège* hours after returning from a mission to South Africa where he had tried to negotiate weapons contracts in favor of Kalonji's South Kasai. Furthermore, his friend and fellow member in the *Collège*, Jonas Mukamba, was the former chief of cabinet of Kalonji. (Aubert Mukendi, personal interview, recorded, Paris, 15 Jan. 2011).

Vubu to legitimate our action. By doing so, we prevented Mobutu from capturing the entirety of power in our country.<sup>455</sup>

The entanglement of conflicting political logics in the creation and the action of the commissioners' government remain difficult to sort out to this day. The *Collège's* main achievement, however, remains the final "neutralization" of Patrice Lumumba, through his "transfer" to the secessionist Katanga where he was killed on the night of his arrival on January 17, 1961.<sup>456</sup>

Replaced on February 9, 1961 by a new government led by Cyrille Adoula, the *Collège des Commissaires* left Leopoldville on a systematic hunt of nationalist politicians. One of the last executive acts of some of the commissioners was the transfer to the seceded province of South Kasai of eight political prisoners and allies of Lumumba, including Jean-Pierre Finant, the president of the Province Oriental. A few hours after their arrival in South Kasai, all of the Lumumbist prisoners were executed in the presence of secessionist politicians.<sup>457</sup>

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<sup>455</sup> Justin Bomboko, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 2 May 2010.

<sup>456</sup> Among the *commissaires*, Bomboko, Mukamba, Kazadi and Ndele seemed to have played the most important role in the plan that led to Lumumba's assassination. Yet, at the occasion of a Congolese commission that investigated the political crimes of the first and second republic in 1991, these former *commissaires* testified and refused to acknowledge a personal responsibility in the death of Lumumba: *Rapports sur les assassinats et violations des droits de l'homme*, Livre I, p.44-45. Albert Mpase, an assistant at Lovanium and the commissioner for youth, contested the collective responsibility of the commissaires in the assassination: Albert Mpase Nselenge Mpeti, *Au service d'un Congo aux milles visages*. Jean Omasombo Tshonda, who had access to the archives of the *Collège des Commissaires* in the context of the Belgian parliamentary commission on the assassination of Lumumba, writes that all the commissioners without any exceptions were opposed to Lumumba: Jean Omasombo Tshonda, "Lumumba, drame sans fin et deuil inachevé de la commission", in *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 173-174 (2004), p.221-261. See also, Luc de Vos, et al., *Les secrets de l'affaire Lumumba* (Brussels: Racine, 2005).

<sup>457</sup> Kabamba Mbwebwe K. and Kasulula Djuma Lokali, *Rapport sur les assassinats et violations des droits de l'homme* (Kinshasa: Yerodia Abdoulaye Ndombasi, 2004), p.75-80; Benoit Verhaegen, *Congo 1961* (Brussels: Crisp, sd), p.122-125.

Regardless of several commissioners' nationalist professions of faith, the period during which they ruled over the Congo was marked by the repression of the progressive camp. Yet, in Joseph N'Singa's words, students at Lovanium were generally supportive of the commissioners: "As they were university students, we thought that at least they were not just anybody. They were like us, university educated. Better people like them than these old people who had only completed primary school."<sup>458</sup>

Albert Mpase, the general commissioner for youth and sports, was instrumental in creating support among students. Maurice Mpolo, who had been in charge of that ministry in Lumumba's government – and who was brought to Katanga and assassinated together with the prime minister – was Mpase's brother-in-law. However, the young general commissioner decided to opt for a different approach than that of his relative. In Mpase eyes, Mpolo had been manipulative and partisan vis-à-vis youth associations; Mpase, instead, decided to organize a large congress in which he freely let youth associations decide on their future organization. His goal was to avoid "any Marxist hijacking."<sup>459</sup> Still, the *Conseil National de la Jeunesse* that emerged from the congress served during a few crucial weeks of anti-Lumumbist repression as a shelter for radical young activists.<sup>460</sup>

Despite relative support for the commissioners among Lovanium students and in the youth associations, known figures in the nationalist camp severely condemned their

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<sup>458</sup> N'Singa Udjuu, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 2 Dec. 2010.

<sup>459</sup> Albert Mpase Nselenge Mpeti, "Vivre le devenir de l'université comme étudiant, responsable universitaire et ministre," in Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem (ed.), *Les années Lovanium: La première université francophone d'Afrique subsaharienne (Congo-Meuse, 10)* (Paris: L'Harmattan 2010), vol.1, p.259.

<sup>460</sup> Notably Albert Kisonga, then a close collaborator of Kashamura, André Ilunga Kabongo, a student at Lovanium, and several radicalized militants of Kasa-Vubu's Abako see Albert Kisonga Mazakala, *45 ans d'Histoire Congolaise: L'expérience d'un Lumumbiste* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005), p.29.

action. Anicet Kashamura, Lumumba's minister of information and a committed anti-clerical, wrote that the commissioners "were under the ascendancy of Lovanium University's missionaries. With them, the Congo became like a young girl at the hands of sexual offenders."<sup>461</sup> Cléophas Kamitatu, one of the leaders of the PSA and the governor of Leopoldville in 1960, was not less critical: "Never have students in the history of a third world country inspired so many feelings of scorn and shame toward the population than the Congolese university students did in 1960."<sup>462</sup> Luis Lopez Alvarez, Lumumba's Spanish friend, underlined the apparent paradox of "reactionary students" offered by the commissioners: "I could not but think of the Congo's strange destiny, where university students, which belonged to anti-conformist or even revolutionary minorities in the rest of Africa, had participated here in an ultra-conservative experience."<sup>463</sup>

The commissioners denied their responsibility and participation in Lumumba's death, including Bomboko and Mukendi in interviews with me. However, archival evidence implicates several of them individually. Furthermore, the commissioners were collectively responsible for creating conditions that made the murder of Lumumba possible and for conducting a politics that opposed the independence's popular fervor for emancipation. These student ministers, at a very basic level, acted as police commissioners. However, the commissioners also participated in creating the "dead

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<sup>461</sup> Anicet Kashamura, *De Lumumba aux Colonels* (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1966), p.156.

<sup>462</sup> Cléophas Kamitatu, *La grande mystification du Congo-Kinshasa: les crimes de Mobutu* (Paris: Maspero, 1971), p.74. In his book, Kamitatu repetedly defended the political class against the students. He insisted that independence had been brought up by these politicians and that "it was not the work of soldiers or of university graduates" (p.68). For Kamitatu, the economic roundtable in Brussels in March 1960 created a bond among the future general commissioners and between them and "Belgian powerful interests" (p.72).

<sup>463</sup> Luis Alavarez Lopez, *Lumumba ou l'Afrique*, p.126.

Lumumba,” the mythic construction described by Jean-Paul Sartre.<sup>464</sup> In that sense, they helped reconfigure the Congolese political landscape and made space for the emergence of a student Left.

### **The Dead Lumumba**

Lumumba’s radical nationalism appealed to large sectors of Congolese youth, including many students at Lovanium, even before his “neutralization” in the Fall of 1960 and his assassination in January 17. As we saw with the memories of Joseph N’Singa, the speech of June 30, 1960, was a major moment in the construction of Lumumba’s stature. That day – the day of independence – the charismatic prime minister seized the stage at the *Palais de la Nation* in Leopoldville, despite the fact that the official program only listed speeches from King Baudouin and President Kasa-Vubu. To Baudouin’s paternalistic address and to Kasa-Vubu’s tedious allocution, Lumumba replied with a passionate denunciation of 80 years of humiliation under Belgian colonialism and a tribute to Congolese independence fighters. The speech created a diplomatic incident with the Belgian delegation. Yet, Lumumba’s impassioned words resonated with many Congolese who experienced a collective sense of pride and excitement at the idea of seeing the end of Belgian colonialism. The speech marked the Congolese who attended the ceremony: the official guests, but also the young people who had succeeded in sneaking inside or gathered outside of the *Palais*, like Nestor Mpeye, Joseph Kabemba, and many other Lovanium students.<sup>465</sup> The speech was also aired on the radio. This is how Mathias Nzanda-Bwana, who was 15 at the time, heard it in Mikalayi. During one of

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<sup>464</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, “La pensée politique de Patrice Lumumba,” in Jean Van Lierde (ed.), *La pensée politique de Patrice Lumumba* (Paris: *Présence Africaine*, 1963), p.I-XLV.

<sup>465</sup> Joseph Kabemba, *Le destin de Biabilulul*, p.59.

our encounters in his office at the University of Kinshasa in 2010, Professor Nzanda-Bwana shared with me his memory of “that great speech” and the excitement of the moment, when “the head of protocol announced” that Lumumba was “exceptionally going to talk” and that “even the people who didn’t know a word of French started to come closer” to the radio. Professor Nzanda-Bwana continued: “Everybody, even those who didn’t know French, understood that Lumumba said important things: *We are not independent because of your will, but because we demanded it. We were not your equals: we were your slaves. You flogged us: you put us in jail. You...* Everybody understood that. It was just fantastic!”<sup>466</sup>

Despite the power of Lumumba’s words, the Prime Minister remained a divisive figure for Congolese youth. Jacques Mangalaboyi, who was 10 at the time of independence, shared the memory with me, for example, that Kasa-Vubu’s light skin made him more popular than Lumumba among young Leopoldvillois. Mangalaboyi also remembered that Belgian priests scared their students by telling them that, with “the communist” Lumumba, their mothers would become the wives of all the men in their neighborhoods.<sup>467</sup> As we have seen, some young men in Leopoldville understood communism as the possibility to marry white women, but the threatening anti-Lumumbist definition of communism as the “sexual socialization” of mothers was also given credit in the city. This induced a form of popular anti-communism among the young ABAKO militants of Leopoldville who organized, with the financial support and incentive of the CIA, a series of violent demonstrations against Lumumba at the end of August 1960.<sup>468</sup>

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<sup>466</sup> Mathieu Nzanda-Bwana, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 8 March 2010.

<sup>467</sup> Jacques Mangalaboyi, personal interview, unrecorded, Lille, 3 June 2011.

<sup>468</sup> Anti-communists not only understood communism as a form of radical sexual politics, which would challenge both the Christian model of the family and customary forms of

Lumumba's death transformed the way Congolese youth perceived him. However, Lumumba's martyrdom did not immediately assure his heroic status, as Anastase Nzeza conveyed to me when remembering how the news of the prime minister's assassination reached him and fellow students at the Jesuit Collège of Mbanza Boma:

On the day of his death, the Fathers announced it to us in the Collège. Imagine that... Students obviously adhered to the ideology of the fathers... of the whites... of the Belgians. For them, Lumumba was Satan... the devil... a communist! "Finally, we got him! We killed him!" They announced his death like a victory. And students had no political consciousness, I must say. I still hear the cry of joy that burst out of the students. "Lumumba is dead!" We celebrated that news as a joyful event. This is awful. This is how politically unconscious we were.<sup>469</sup>

The vast majority of students at Mbanza Boma were ethnic BaKongo. They therefore tended to support ABAKO, which reinforced again the influence of Catholic anti-Lumumbism on them. Still, the death of Lumumba affected some of them, even if retrospectively, as Nzeza's story shows.

In February 1960, Michel-Ange Mupapa was a student in another Jesuit collège, Saint-François Xavier in Kikwit. There, students related to Lumumba's death immediately, and Mupapa convinced his peers to remain in mourning for the dead prime

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control over women. Communism was also associated with the idea of dictatorship, which paradoxically translated into slogans denouncing Lumumba as a fascist ruler. On the anti-Lumumba demonstrations of August 1960, see J. Gérard-Libois and Benoît Verhaegen, *Congo 1960, t.2*, p.668. Lumumba repeatedly denied any communist influence. Yet, his opponents deployed impressive efforts at propaganda to claim the opposite, and the beginning of Soviet logistic support to the Congolese government during the summer of 1960 seemed to support their thesis. See Jean-Claude Willame, *Patrice Lumumba*, p.275-313. The CIA contact with the youth branch of ABAKO was a man that Larry Devlin, the chief of the CIA station in Leopoldville, names "Jacques" in his memoirs. A Belgian planter, Jacques worked for the CIA throughout the Congo crisis. He worked with the ABAKO to organize demonstrations against Lumumba, publish anti-Lumumbist articles in the Congolese press, and gather information in Parliament and the presidency: Larry Devlin, *Chief of Station*, p.58 and 66.

<sup>469</sup> Anastase Nzeza, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 10 Oct. 2010.



minister by adding a black patch to their uniforms. “This was totally scandalous for the Fathers, who were anticommunists, but people in town applauded us.” Having heard of the mourning initiative, one priest apparently proclaimed that he would not put a foot in the school as long as the Blessed Virgin had not appeared to him:

It happened that this priest was a student in Belgium. He was preparing his bachelor degree and he had to come to the Congo for his research, to conduct tests in schools, and he came to our collège. So, I was among those who convinced the students not to answer his questionnaire, but instead to only write down on it: “Have you seen the Blessed Virgin that you now dare to put a foot in the Saint-François-Xavier Institute?” Everybody handed out the questionnaire with that one answer.<sup>470</sup>

In Mupapa’s recollection, the assassination of Lumumba was a marker in his longer trajectory of political awakening. As several other student leaders of the 1960s – Nzeza, Miatudidi, Ghenda, Wamba, Kabuya and many others – Mupapa explained his politicization in part by the influence of an older family member who was involved in anticolonial party politics in the very late 1950s and early 1960s.<sup>471</sup> In several narratives of former student activists from the 1960s, Lumumba appeared as a familiar, and nearly familial figure, and affective bonds were particularly strengthened through mourning for his death.

The passion *of* Lumumba generated passion *for* Lumumba. Young Congolese imagined personal connections with the deceased prime minister through their own

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<sup>470</sup> Michel-Ange Mupapa, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 6 Sept. 2010.

<sup>471</sup> In the case of Mupapa, it was an older brother who was an activist inside the Parti Solidaire Africain (PSA) of Gizenga and Mulele. Another source of inspiration for the young Mupapa was the pamphlets and anticolonial happenings of Jean Marteau – the pseudonym of Cléophas Kamitatu, another member of the PSA. Mupapa notably remembered that Kamitatu succeeded to turn at night the head of Leopold II’s statue in Kikwit, indicating the direction of the return journey to the colonizer. On Kamitatu and the PSA at the time of independence, see Herbert F. Weiss and Benoît Verhaegen, *Parti Solidaire Africain (PSA): Documents 1959-1960* (Brussels: CRISP, 1963) and Herbert F. Weiss, *Radicalisme rural et lutte pour l’indépendance au Congo-Zaïre: Le Parti solidaire africaine, 1959-1960* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1994).

experience of suffering, exclusion, and injustice. Célestin Kabuya exposed that parentage through suffering with Lumumba during one of our first encounters in 2007. Professor Kabuya's family originated from Northern Katanga, the region of Jason Sendwe and his BALUBAKAT, one of the allies of Lumumba's MNC. However, Kabuya grew up in Southern Katanga, a child of *Union Minière*. His father worked first at the uranium mine of Shinkolobwe and then at the copper mine of Kipushi, where the young Célestin attended primary school before joining the Benedictine Collège de la Karavia in Elisabethville. During Southern Katanga's secession under Moïse Tshombe, Célestin Kabuya belonged to the camp of the enemy. Here is how he talked about the presence of Lumumba and of politics at the Collège:

I was a very curious little boy and I was already at the time hanging out with a friend of my older brothers, who was in the senior section, Pierre. He was older, but he was also from Kipushi. He acted a bit like my protector, and I was always in his group. He constantly talked about politics and he was crazy about Lumumba.

At this point in our conversation, my mobile phone rang, interrupting briefly the conversation, and shifting my interlocutor's tone from reminiscence to retrospection. "I know one thing with certitude," he directly said after the interruption. "My own adherence to the character – to the myth, I was going to say – of Lumumba is strongly anchored in a moment of resistance. Because we were persecuted."<sup>472</sup>

Asked about what triggered his political consciousness, another student leader of the late 1960s, François Kandolo, also evoked the name of Lumumba as a figure whose fate paralleled his own, when he was still a student at the collège in Luluabourg in 1959. Priests at the collège kept saying that Lumumba was a communist. By extension, "all the students who supported independence were treated as communists." In Kandolo's

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<sup>472</sup> Célestin Kabuya, personal interview, Kinshasa, 3 November 2009.

memory, the priests' anti-Lumumbism was directly linked to the context of ethnic violence between the "indigenous" Lulua and "immigrant" Baluba in Luluabourg.

One day, I replied to a Father who excited the tribes against each other and said: "You, the Baluba, you came here to Luluabourg, you occupy all the positions, and the *originaires* are left without anything." The priest basically said that we the Balubas were foreigners. And I said: "We are not foreigners, we are Congolese. Luluabourg is the Congo." So, he threw me out of school and told me: "You are a communist." It was my first year in high school and I did not even know what communism meant.<sup>473</sup>

Confrontations between Congolese teenagers and Belgian missionaries and teachers paralleled the drama of the country's independence. But Congolese children also learned politics outside of schools. Raphael Ghenda evoked the games that children played by imitating famous politicians in the independence struggle in Leopoldville. Raphael's father presided over the Federation of BaTetela in Leopoldville, the FEDEBAT; he was a personal friend of Lumumba, himself a Tetela, but he joined the opposing Parti National du Progrès and then the Parti des Progressistes Congolais, under the banner of which he was elected in the senate in 1960. The young Ghenda remembered his father's speeches on the radio and the visits of Lumumba to the family's house. He also evoked how children in Leopoldville played "ngembo" (the bat), by gathering outside of bars to eavesdrop on the performances of famous musicians and politicians.

The influence of Lumumba and of his death mostly played out as memory for Ghenda, Mupapa, Nzeza, Kabuya, Kandolo or Mangalaboyi. Lumumba's death appeared as an autobiographical milestone in their life after they themselves became active in the student movement during the mid or late 1960s. By remembering how their coming of age intersected with the death of Lumumba and other "martyrs of Congo's independence," they disposed themselves to reenact the unfinished dreams of Congolese

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<sup>473</sup> François Kandolo, personal interview, Kinshasa, 12 Oct. 2007.

nationalism. The martyrdom of Lumumba also directly affected the generation that was studying in universities at the time of his death.

Professor Mpeye, for example, remembered that “political correctness” at Lovanium at the time of independence was to present oneself as a progressive, “and this was really not difficult.” There was already a sense of Left and Right among students, and progressives were mapping it onto a sense of right and wrong. Nationalist students defined their peers who expressed doubts about the pace of decolonization as the Right; and they ostracized the supporters of Kasa-Vubu and Tshombe as traitors to the nation. Yet, in 1959 and 1960, the student Left was not all in support of Lumumba: “Many considered that Lumumba was a parvenu, barely literate, and other things like that, while people like Kalonji Albert of Kamitatu were also progressives, but they were really intellectuals.” Sharing this memory with me, Professor Mpeye immediately realized that this initial anti-Lumumbism contradicted the self-image of the student movement: “It is... I must say... It is probably now time to acknowledge some things from the past... Lumumbism and Lumumba’s aura really came along after his assassination. Before that, not really...” Nestor Mpeye linked Lumumba’s rising aura among students to his martyrdom: “It is like any other myth: Lumumba had to be killed, otherwise he would have shown his incapacity to govern. And his adversaries acted clumsily. It was really the caricature of a drama. And from there, UGEC [the Congolese Student Union] embarked on a Lumumbist trajectory and took up the whole vocabulary of the time.”<sup>474</sup>

A clear shift appears regarding Lumumba’s influence on Congolese educated youth with his death. Different motives played out in making Lumumba a nearly undisputed postmortem tutelary figure for students, while only a minority of them

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<sup>474</sup> Nestor Mpeye, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 10 April 2010.

supported him during his life. Lumumba's martyrdom worked as a revelation of the stakes of decolonization in the Congo and radicalized scores of "moderates." It became the mirror in which young Congolese saw the reflection of their own trials and projected imagined connections between self and nation. Dead, Lumumba also became a much more tractable uniting reference, gathering around his memory some of those who had opposed him, including former student commissioners. Finally, the internationalization of Lumumba, as we have seen, could not but impress Congolese students, the cosmopolitan "avant-garde" in the new nation and the most important group of Congolese established abroad.

Professor Mpeye's own trajectory is interesting to consider here, as it illuminates the Lumumbist turn in the student movement. After a couple of years at Lovanium, Mpeye arrived in Belgium at the end of the summer of 1960, to continue his studies of mathematics at the University of Liège. Mpeye was part of the cohort of several thousand young Congolese who took the opportunity of abundant fellowships in the early 1960s – fellowships from the Congolese state, foreign countries, political parties and labor unions – to study in universities abroad.<sup>475</sup> Belgium, despite the turbulent relationship with its former colony after July 1960, was the first destination of Congolese students and trainees, and the country therefore emerged as a major scene of the Congolese student

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<sup>475</sup> That sudden profusion of fellowships challenged the status of Lovanium as the most prestigious and favored institution of higher education for Congolese. Gillon soon realized the danger of the new concurrence of foreign universities. He attempted to convince the Congolese government as well as foreign backers, such as the U.S. government for example, that their money would be better spent by supporting Congolese students in the Congo than by bringing them abroad. Gillon also resorted to the old argument that Congolese students in foreign universities were "given over to the propaganda of extremist organizations," an argument that certainly played in the red scare context of the early 1960s: see "Procès-verbal de la 66e reunion du Conseil d'Administration," October 30, 1961, p.5-6. Archives Vanderschuren.

movement. Former students I interviewed often remembered fondly their time in Belgian universities.<sup>476</sup> However, those who stayed in Belgium through the “Congo crisis” also sometimes remembered moments of tension.<sup>477</sup> Daniel Gambembo, a former seminarian at Kinzambi and a philosophy student in Belgium in 1960, told me, for example, how he decided to transfer to the University of Fribourg in Switzerland as a result of these tensions.<sup>478</sup> In Liège also, Nestor Mpeye remembered tensions. The university, through its Rector Dubuisson and professors like René Clémens, was closely associated with Moïse Tshombe’s secession in Southern Katanga.<sup>479</sup> Professor Mpeye remembered Liège as a “Katangese fiefdom,” where students from other parts of the Congo were

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<sup>476</sup> They seemed to conform to a narrative trope, already used by Lumumba after his trip to Brussels in 1956, which emphasized the friendliness and comradeship of Belgians in the metropole, only to underline the racism of Belgians in the colony. In the part of some informants, and certainly Professor Mpeye, the nostalgia for their student life in Belgium in the early 1960s also participated in establishing a distinction between their generation of so-called *Belgicains* and more recent Congolese migrants to Europe.

<sup>477</sup> In a survey conducted in 1963 with 84 Congolese students about their life in Belgium, respondents also complained about Belgian “racists” and “wicked right-wingers” (*droitiers malfaisants*). Some respondents “also regret old people’s exaggerated curiosity and one of the students regret Congolese lack of freedom of speech”: Henri Hockins-Kadibo, “Quelques recherches sur le rôle de l’U.G.E.C. et sur ce que pensent de son action des étudiants Congolais effectuant des études en Belgique,” unpublished thesis, Ecole Supérieure Ouvrière, Brussels, 1964, p.29.

<sup>478</sup> Daniel Gambembo, who would become the major theoretician of Mobutism in the 1970s, spent 48 hours at a police station after a fight with a quarrelsome and racist Belgian “returnee” who provoked him and one of his friends in a café in Louvain. Daniel Gambembo, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 2 Oct. 2010.

<sup>479</sup> Liège had contributed a great deal to developing the *Université Officielle* in Elisabethville after 1956 and this partly explains the collusion with Tshombe and the secession. René Clémens and several of his collaborators were instrumental in developing the secessionist state, by writing its constitution and by helping its daily administration. Another professor from Liège, Joachim Frenkiel, played an important role by becoming the new rector of the university at Elisabethville and an influent informal advisor to Tshombe: Roger Lallemand and Jacques-Henri Michel, “L’Université officielle du Congo à Elisabethville,” in *Etudes Congolaises* 8 (1963), p.6-29; Donatien Dibwe dia Mwembu (ed.), *Le rôle social de l’Université de Lubumbashi* (Lubumbashi: Presses Universitaires de Lubumbashi, 2004); Donatien Dibwe dia Mwembu and Marcel Ngandu Mutombo, “De l’université officielle du Congo belge et du Ruanda-Urundi à l’Université de Lubumbashi: La mémoire d’un peuple,” in Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem (ed.), *L’Université dans le devenir de l’Afrique: Un demi-siècle de présence au Congo-Kinshasa* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2007), p.165-185.

discriminated against in terms of access to university housings and social services. Regardless of his otherwise positive memory of his six years in Liège, this initial experience of discrimination marked the Congolese mathematician.<sup>480</sup> The University of Liège's involvement with Katanga also motivated his participation in the demonstrations that followed the assassination of Lumumba in Brussels.<sup>481</sup>

Paul-Henri Kabayidi also transferred from Lovanium to a Belgian university in 1960. In our interview, he claimed to be at the origin of the demonstration in Brussels that followed the announcement of Lumumba's death and that echoed similar protests in front of Belgian embassies throughout the world. In Brussels, Kabayidi encountered young Belgian socialists during the spontaneous gathering that immediately followed the news about Lumumba's death. Together, they decided to organize a large demonstration very rapidly. Kabayidi and a young Belgian female student drove to Antwerp, Louvain and Liège to mobilize Congolese. The following day, a large demonstration was organized in front of the Katangese mission in Brussels.

The protests that followed the news of Lumumba's death moved Kabayidi increasingly towards political action. He dropped out of the University of Brussels at the

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<sup>480</sup> Professor Mpeye did not remember encountering the hostility of Belgian returnees, like Professor Gambembo. He mentioned insults from former mercenaries and people from the far Right. However, former Belgian colonials usually expressed sympathy for Congolese students. Mpeye also mentioned the general ignorance in the Belgian public of the Congo, which he linked to a common reaction from Belgians in "red circles" in Liège: "These people said: 'These are colonialists' and capitalists' misdeeds. You must have suffered at their hands.' And when you said you had not suffered, they did not even listen" Nestor Mpeye, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 10 April 2010.

<sup>481</sup> In his autobiography, the poet Matala Mukadi, who arrived in Liège in 1961 to finish his secondary education, mentions a long list of racist incidents, from episodes at his school where he was discriminated against by several professors, to altercations in the streets, to a bomb attack against a Congolese dance club in Brussels: Tshiakatumba Matala Mukadi, *Dans la tourmente de la dictature (autobiographie d'un Poète)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000), p.65-80.

end of the academic year, went back to Kinshasa, launched the *Afro-Negro Magazine*, created the *Amicale Lipopo*, and was elected in Leopoldville's municipal assembly in 1964. Besides Kabayidi, the news of Lumumba's death brought a great number of Congolese university students into the streets and towards organized politics. Lumumba's death created a shift in the face of Congolese nationalism. The youth branch of MNC and other political parties throughout the struggle for independence had been mainly composed of unemployed young men and, in some cases, high school students. The dead Lumumba mobilized university students, attracting them from campuses and places of power into the street and oppositional politics. The shift is marked visually in the photographs of protests published by news agencies in 1960 and 1961, in which one directly perceives the changes from the pro-Lumumba supporters in September 1960 in Leopoldville to the students who protested his death in February 1961 in Paris and Brussels. As Isabelle de Rezende writes, images of Lumumba in the 1960s "had the power to mobilize and radicalize political actors; they catalyzed anger, anchored demonstrations and protests, and generated new political visualities."<sup>482</sup>

In his study of third world student politics in Germany, Quinn Slobodian suggests that "the global protest wave following the death of Lumumba in 1961 would be a more appropriate starting point than the Berkeley Free Speech Movement of 1964 for historical narratives of the global 1960s." The protests captured the attention of Congolese students, and strongly imprinted their politics, visions of the world and visibility in the world. The journal of the International Union of Students (IUS) encouraged its readers to send cables and letters of protest to the United Nations and Belgian diplomatic missions.

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<sup>482</sup> Isabelle de Rezende, "Visuality and Colonialism in the Congo: From the 'Arab War' to Patrice Lumumba, 1880s to 1961," Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Michigan, 2012, p.396.



It also listed, in the following order and maybe not exhaustively, the countries in which students had reacted by taking to the streets after the news of Lumumba's death:

Belgium, England, the United Arab Republic, the Soviet Union, Pakistan, France, China, the United States, Venezuela, West Germany, Sudan, Ghana, Morocco, Nigeria, Guinea, the Netherlands, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Italy, Czechoslovakia and the GDR. IUS argued that "millions of students" had taken to the streets in February to denounce "the maneuvers of the imperialists" and to demand "the condemnation of "the Kasa-Vubu-Mobutu-Tshombe gang."<sup>483</sup> Rudolph Mrazek was in the crowd that marched to the Belgian embassy in Prague. As he told me, students had no choice but to take part in demonstrations decided by the communist bureaucracy, yet protesting against the death of Lumumba felt different. Professor Mrazek remembered the protest as a unique moment that disrupted the usual apathy of constrained protests in Czechoslovakia.<sup>484</sup> The repetition of demonstrations throughout the world and the expression of similar feelings of empathy and outrage expressed at the occasion of the death of Lumumba transformed Congolese subjectivities through postal politics as we saw in Chapter 2. The global mourning for Lumumba had also a direct, and more visible, impact on Congolese students who participated in protests abroad: it groomed these young Congolese to reorient their politics in line with the cosmopolitan Left.

The dead Lumumba served as a bridge connecting people over racial, national and political divides. A good example is the Lumumba Club (*Cercle d'Etudes Africaines "Patrice Lumumba"*) created in Brussels just a few days after the news of the assassination, with the probable support of Belgian communists. In one month the club

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<sup>483</sup> "Students firmly on side of Congo," in *World Student News* 15, special number 2 (March 1961), p.4.

<sup>484</sup> Rudolph Mrazek, personal interview, unrecorded, Ann Arbor, 2 May 2013.

attracted 150 members. It appealed to the youth to continue Lumumba's work and help the "great revolution that is breaking out everywhere in Africa." The name of Lumumba served to symbolize "Africa in struggle," bring "together our true comrades," and unite European and African youth "in the frontline" of "the march of history."<sup>485</sup> A Rwandese student in Belgium explained why he joined the club:

"Not so long ago many Africans, and I was one of them, still lived under the fatal hypnosis of colonialism and imperialism. Since the tragic death of Patrice Lumumba, all these illusions vanished and my eyes opened. I understood that from now on we can no longer rely on others to make a free Africa."<sup>486</sup>

The student's words announced the emerging theme of alienation, which was becoming central in postcolonial African politics. The dead Lumumba, he implied, helped African students to recognize and acknowledge an oppression to which they had been blind. At the same time, it universalized African trials and gathered "throughout continents" the "peoples in struggle for common ideals, to recover their ridiculed dignity!"

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<sup>485</sup> "Appel!," in *Cercle d'Etudes Africaines "Patrice Lumumba," Bulletin Intérieur* 1 (March 1961), p.2

<sup>486</sup> JM, "Pourquoi je suis devenu un membre actif du club P. Lumumba," *Cercle d'Etudes Africaines "Patrice Lumumba," Bulletin Intérieur* 1 (March 1961), p.4.



**Figure 25: “Lumumba supporters in Leopoldville – Marchers carry signs, including one with photo of ousted premier Patrice Lumumba, during demonstration in Leopoldville, the Congo, Sunday. Today President Joseph Kasa-Vubu officially recognized Col. Joseph Mobutu’s Council of Government Commissioners as provisional government of the Congo. Lumumba remained virtual prisoner in premier’s official residence protected by Ghanaian troops of the U.N. force.” Sept. 1960. Associated Press Wire photo.**



**Figure 26: “Black students demonstrate against Lumumba’s slaying: Negro students with a sprinkling of white Leftists demonstrated before the Belgian embassy in Paris this**

afternoon. Ops: Demonstrators waving arms and shouting anti-Belgian slogans.” Feb. 1961. Photo Keystone, Paris.



**Figure: 27** “February 17, 1961, the Cercle du Libre Examen of ULB and the Association des Etudiants africains de Belgique organized a protest demonstration against the death of Patrice Lumumba. This picture shows the protesters in front of the Brussels’ headquarters of the Katanga’s government.” *Les Cahiers du Libre-Examen*, s.d.

A new segment of the Congolese youth, more educated and more well-travelled, occupied the front rows of nationalist politics after Lumumba’s death. Let us consider again the case of Paul-Henri Kabayidi. In the late 1950s, one of his closest friends in Kinshasa had been Emmanuel Nzuzi, a young high school student from Luluabourg that the Kabayidis welcomed into their home and with whom Paul-Henri shared the same bed. When Kabayidi moved to Lovanium in 1958, Nzuzi became involved in nationalist politics, becoming first the president of UJEKO, a platform of youth branches of political parties, and then of the youth section of Lumumba’s MNC. Nzuzi regularly came to the university campus, driving the car that he received from the MNC, to consult with Kabayidi. The latter therefore served as his unofficial advisor, overseeing the writing of

statements and pamphlets for UJEKO and JMNC. Yet, Kabayidi remained outside of militancy. He did not participate in youth movements' meetings, and he did not attend the Stanleyville congress of October 1959 during which Nzuzi was arrested and imprisoned together with Lumumba. Furthermore, Kabayidi reported to me that he did not condone his friend's methods at the time. For example, he "seriously scolded" Nzuzi after the latter chased and threatened with a gun the Belgian director of the Sainte-Anne school where he was still a high school student. After Kabayidi moved to Brussels in 1960, Nzuzi remained in Leopoldville. One of the closest collaborators of Lumumba, Nzuzi organized illegal protests after the prime minister's "neutralization" in September.<sup>487</sup> He was arrested after machete attacks against three general commissioners in October 1960.<sup>488</sup> Ultimately, the government of the general commissioners transferred him to the secessionist province of Kasai, together with Pierre Elegensa, the student who came back from Moscow in July 1960 to join Lumumba's office, and four other Lumumbists. As we saw earlier, the secessionist authorities of Kasai assassinated the group of nationalist leaders a few hours after their arrival in Bakwanga in February 1961. This group killing beheaded the camp of the Lumumbists, and particularly the youth branch of MNC.<sup>489</sup> When Kabayidi started to mobilize his fellow Congolese students in Belgium after the assassination of Lumumba, he was also moved by the news of the death of his "brother" Nzuzi and of another of Bakwanga's martyrs, Christophe Muzungu, the uncle of his wife and Lumumba's head of security.<sup>490</sup>

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<sup>487</sup> Pierre Houart, *La pénétration communiste au Congo* (Brussels: 1960), p.95.

<sup>488</sup> *Congo 1960: annexes et biographies* (Brussels: Centre de Recherche et d'Information Socio-politiques, 1961), p.123; Cléophas Kamitatu, *La grande mystification du Congo-Kinshasa*, p.74.

<sup>489</sup> Ludo De Witte, *L'assassinat de Lumumba* (Paris: Karthala, 2000), p.324-330.

<sup>490</sup> Paul-Henri Kabayidi, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 12 Feb. 2011.

The famous political assassinations of January and February 1961, but also the army's use of intimidation, rape, torture and kidnapping, depopulated the nationalist ranks by making leaders disappear and by scaring away militants.<sup>491</sup> The reconfiguration of the Left happened on different fronts, and Stanleyville was probably the most important site in the processes of radicalization. Quickly after the "neutralization" of Lumumba in September 1960, Stanleyville became the new headquarters of his sympathizers and his allies among nationalist politicians, while Anicet Kashamira took control of Bukavu and the Kivu province. After the assassination of Lumumba, Antoine Gizenga was proclaimed the head of state of a Popular Republic of Congo and claimed that his Stanleyville-based government was the only legitimate embodiment of national sovereignty. At the end of 1960 and in 1961, Lumumbists were increasingly drawn into Cold War geopolitics, and increased their relations with non-aligned nations as well as countries in the Eastern bloc. Lumumba's former minister of education, Pierre Mulele, before travelling to China for military training, became Gizenga's ambassador in Cairo. Tens of activists who joined Gizenga in Stanleyville were sent abroad as students and trainees. In Leopoldville, however, nationalists were in total retreat, and students were tempted to fill the void.

## UGEC

Attempts to create a national union of students in the Congo dated back to 1956 and the participation of two students from Lovanium at the Seventh International Student Conference at Ibadan. Congolese understood that they needed a national structure in

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<sup>491</sup> P. Julien Dema, "Comment la guerre civile faillit éclater à Léopoldville en fin d'année 1960," in *Remarques Congolaises* 4, 9-10 (1962), p.82-84. Cléophas Kamitatu, *La grande mystification du Congo-Kinshasa*, p.86-91.

order to be recognized by international federations. Lovanium students suggested establishing the *Union Nationale des Etudiants du Congo et du Ruanda-Urundi* (UNECRU), but students in Elisabethville objected to the idea of a *national* union, considering the Congo was a colony of Belgium. Only in March 1960, with the perspective of independence quickly coming up, did Elisabethville students agree to join their peers at Lovanium to officially launch UNECRU.<sup>492</sup> While the association of Congolese students in Belgium influenced the independence process with its action at the roundtable conference in Brussels, UNECRU's action was not very visible. Mostly, Henri Takizala and Ferdinand Kayukwa, respectively UNECRU's president and vice-president, travelled during four months, attending workshops and conferences in Sweden, Switzerland, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Irak, and England.<sup>493</sup> Back in the Congo, Takizala became part of the general commissioners and Kayukwa, originally from Katanga, was arrested and put in prison by Tshombe in Elisabethville for having travelled in the Eastern bloc.

From May 4 to 7, 1961, Takizala organized a congress at Lovanium to create a new national union, UGEC. The new union did not include at this time students from Rwanda and Burundi, but it was the first association to gather both students in Congolese universities and the staggering number of Congolese who studied abroad.<sup>494</sup> As Jean-Claude Willame wrote, "The failure of their elders in the *Collège des Commissaires* and

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<sup>492</sup> Jean-Claude Willame, "The Congo," p.42-43; Charles Tshimanga, "La jeunesse étudiante dans l'évolution socio-politique du Congo-Kinshasa, 1954-1973," in *Histoire et devenir de l'Afrique noire au vingtième siècle: travaux en cours* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001), p.57-58.

<sup>493</sup> Henri Hockins-Kadiébo, "Quelques recherches sur le rôle de l'Ugéc et sur ce que pensent de son action des étudiants congolais effectuant des études en Belgique." Thesis. Brussels, Ecole Ouvrière Supérieure, 1964, p.1-2.

<sup>494</sup> On UGEC's genesis, see Anicet Mobe Fansiama, "Les intellectualités estudiantines congolaises revisitées: 1954-1965," in *Aspects de la culture à l'époque coloniale en Afrique: Presse-Archives* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007), p.115-144.

an awareness of their growing numbers led the students to confront their responsibilities in the new, rapidly (but only partially) decolonized Congo.”<sup>495</sup> Willame did not insist on this, but Congolese students’ relationship with international associations was another factor that determined the organization of the congress.<sup>496</sup> Takizala listed the actions organized by students in Latin America, Algeria, France, Turkey, Japan, and England as sources of inspiration for the Congo. Encounters with other student organizations and politics in international colloquia nurtured the desire to build a student movement in the Congo that could have its voice heard at home and abroad. In the meetings that Takizala, Kayukwa and others attended abroad, their delegations were “at the center of all the other delegations’ attention” because of “the tragic events that unfolded in the Congo.”<sup>497</sup> International connections also meant access to more sources of support. The first UGEC congress of May 1961 was, for example, entirely funded by COSEC, the executive body of the International Student Conference, an organization itself secretly financed by the CIA.<sup>498</sup> UGEC, like other national unions in third world countries, joined both COSEC and the soviet-backed International Union of Students. Both blocs, obviously with diverging aspirations, considered it was in their interest to see a more organized and more developed Congolese student movement and they both reinforced UGEC’s orientation towards progressive nationalism. Takizala conveyed to the participants of the founding

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<sup>495</sup> Willame, “The Congo,” p.45.

<sup>496</sup> Charles Tshimanga mentions the importance of student travels and lists a series of Congolese participants in international meetings around independence: Charles Tshimanga, “La jeunesse étudiante dans l’évolution socio-politique du Congo-Kinshasa, 1954-1973,” p.61.

<sup>497</sup> Hockiens-Kadiebo, “Quelques recherches sur le rôle de l’Ugec,” p.2.

<sup>498</sup> See for example the work of Joel Kotek on international youth associations during the Cold War. Kotek’s analyses are tainted by a militant anticommunism, but his work introduces the different underground and financial connections and allegiances of youth associations in the Cold War: see Joel Kotek, *Students and the Cold War* (London: MacMillan, 1996), p.1-10; 86-106; 210-224.



congress the importance of interiorizing the global stakes of Congolese student activism: “Prove to our African friends and to the entire world that you are definitively men of your times.” And he added: “Do not forget that students throughout the entire world are looking at you. Do not disappoint the trust they put in you. Show also to our populations that far from being bourgeois university students, you are on their side to share their sorrows and joys.”<sup>499</sup>

The bylaws produced during the congress established an executive committee composed of a president, a vice-president, a treasurer, and three secretaries. Based in Leopoldville, this committee represented UGEC at the national level, and it was locally replicated in the different sections of the country and in the sections established abroad. The committee members were the face of the student movement, but most of them were no more than students themselves. The congress formally decided, for example, that the president would be chosen among recent graduates, and that he would receive a salary. One of the ambiguities of the creation of UGEC was that Takizala was its first elected president. As a former commissioner, he seemed a rather counterintuitive choice to embody change in student politics. Yet, different factions had coexisted inside the commissioners and Takizala had not been as compromised by the most contested actions of some of his fellow commissioners. Another reason behind the choice of a former commissioner is also probably the fact that UGEC at its origin expected to continue the previous discourse of expertise and responsibility that had sought to secure students’ superiority over politicians. UGEC also shied away from direct opposition to the government, seeking to preserve proximity with political power and decision makers.

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<sup>499</sup> Henri Hockins-Kadiebo, “Quelques recherches sur le rôle de l’Ugec,” p.5.

UGEC radicalized gradually after its creation in 1961. This radicalization put its militants in an awkward position vis-à-vis political authorities. However, opposition gave more visibility and identity to the union than influence did, and it created the legitimacy of UGEC in the face of competing associations, such as *Union Syndicale des Etudiants Congolais* (USEC) and the Catholic group *Pax Romana*. Willame considered that UGEC remained in a state of lethargy between its creation in 1961 and its second congress in 1963.<sup>500</sup> This is only partly true, as those years saw the actual entrenchment of the Union at Lovanium and abroad.

The Congo crisis continued to develop after UGEC's first Congress. During the summer of 1961, the United Nations requisitioned Lovanium to literally confine the members of parliament and major politicians. In June, Lovanium students, guided by Joseph N'Singa, had demonstrated in Leopoldville, in front of the offices of Cyrille Adoula, then the minister of interior in the government of Joseph Iléo. With the rallying cry of "Death to Adoula" (*Adoula, au poteau*), students voiced their opposition to the temporary transfer of the Parliament on their campus, but to no avail.<sup>501</sup> The United

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<sup>500</sup> Willame, "The Congo," p.44.

<sup>501</sup> See Joseph Kabemba, *op. cit.*, p.78. Lovanium authorities, starting with Rector Gillon who had mixed feelings about the United Nations agenda in the Congo, shared the students' opposition to the organization of the parliament's session on campus. Gillon was worried that the occupation would interfere with the opening of the academic year, and asked Belgium to protest at the United Nations. It is quite revealing to note the reaction of the chief of the Belgian diplomatic representation in Leopoldville to Gillon's request (a new ambassador had still not been sent and the representation was known as *mission de liaison belge*). In a telegram to the Belgian minister of foreign affairs, the chief of mission suggested to decline the request, as Lovanium authorities kept "proclaiming their total independence with regard to Belgium." He also recalled the recent "unacceptable vexation," when no Belgian diplomatic agents and no directors of Belgian companies had been invited to the graduation ceremony for the first cohort of Congolese engineers and physicians (Telegramme 482, 24 July 1961, Mission Liaison Leo to Belext Bru, AD, Brussels). Tensions between Lovanium authorities and the Belgian diplomatic mission appeared through other cables in the period, even though, in the long run, both groups continued to realize that they shared similar interests.

Nations erected fences around the inspired hill and soldiers assured that nobody came in or out of Lovanium. The idea was to force the reconciliation between the different camps in the crisis – the so-called Binza group of Mobutu, Bomboko, and Nendaka which were the real power in Leopoldville, the nationalists which held the majority in the parliament and controlled Stanleyville, and the secessionists of Kasai and Katanga. The UN intended to keep the politicians secluded at Lovanium until they would agree on a political way out of the crisis. At the last minute, Tshombe decided not to participate, but the stakes were still high in putting an end to the Stanleyville government and in reconciling the parliament and the Binza group. In just a few days, the different parties agreed on a new coalition government with Cyrille Adoula as prime minister. Adoula was a member of the Binza group, but he was also a former labor organizer and an acceptable candidate for many Lumumbists. Adoula was also the U.S. candidate for the position of prime minister. American diplomats believed that the non-aligned African countries would rather easily accept an Adoula cabinet; and after the commotion caused by the murder of Lumumba, the U.S. could not take the risk of further alienating these countries. The CIA in Leopoldville mobilized large amounts of money to buy parliamentarians' votes and helped finalize the support for Adoula. Several nationalist figures entered Adoula's government and Gizenga was appointed as vice-premier. The Adoula government halted the most brutal repression of nationalist activists in Leopoldville, but the balance between Lumumbists and the Binza group remained delicate. Gizenga, who was never officially established in his new function, was arrested in January 1962 and imprisoned on the island of Mbula-Bemba, at the mouth of the Congo River.

Initially, students supported Adoula, and he himself used funds to finance UGEC sections, notably in Belgium.<sup>502</sup> However, the government's inability to reduce Tshombe's secession contributed to the growth of student discontent. On December 8, 1961, hundreds of students from Lovanium marched in the streets of Leopoldville, "chanting anti-Tshombe, anti-English, anti-French, anti-Portuguese, and anti-Youlou slogans." The students claimed they supported Adoula, as well as the United States and the United Nations, who had taken clear positions against the secession. However, after having broken windows at the French, British and Portuguese embassies, they marched to Adoula's residence to put pressure on him.<sup>503</sup> At the end of 1961, student support for the regime was clearly taking more menacing and antagonistic tones.

The arrest of Gizenga in January 1962 and his banishment to the island prison of Bula-Mbemba, as well as renewed exactions against nationalist activists in Leopoldville, gave another push for students' critiques of Adoula. In February, March and April 1962, UGEC expressed its support for the strikes and social movements launched by several labor unions in protest of salary policies and the government's inability to reform public administrations.<sup>504</sup> Student spokesmen at Lovanium still expressed themselves as Congo's elite and future leaders, but their tone also became more critical of the power, criticizing the dependence of Adoula's regime on the United States, and calling fellow

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<sup>502</sup> Henri Hockins-Kadiebo, "Quelques recherches sur le rôle de l'Ugec," p.23. Adoula was partly motivated by his desire to see students support his newly created Democrat Party: see Dikonda wa Lumanyisha and Daniel Mulomba, "L'arrestation du ministre des affaires étrangères du Congo M. Mabika Kalanda," in *Remarques Congolaises* 5-29 (December 14, 1963), p. 472.

<sup>503</sup> "Xylophones et balafongs," in *Présence Universitaire* 8.(January 1962), p.56.

<sup>504</sup> Gassana Muhirwa, *Le syndicalisme et ses incidences socio-politiques en Afrique: Le cas de l'UNTZA* (Kinshasa: Presses Universitaires du Zaïre, 1982), p.85-88.

students to stand on the side of the people.<sup>505</sup> The tone used to address the government, despite general accusations of incompetence and corruption towards the political class, remained rather moderate and respectful, but other voices also emerged.

One article in *Echos de Lovanium* complained about the lack of restraint of students and their inability to behave like an elite when watching movies at Lovanium's *cine-forum*. The author of the article expressed incomprehension at the loud of reactions of students in the audience, the clapping or booing of political figures during the news section, the "shameless moans" at an embrace in a movie, the laughs "when a woman is beaten up or molested on the screen" or when an actor has just been shot down. Finally, the author asked, "Why rant and rave at the images by shouting: 'dirty priest,' 'what an old shit,' 'putain,' 'imperialist,' etc?"<sup>506</sup> As these cries and insults reveal, Lovanium's subculture had evolved by 1962 to turn a loaded political reference – *Imperialist!* – into a household word, and to make nationalism into a marker of student defiance and anti-conformist identity next to male chauvinism and anticlericalism. What this anecdote reveals is that, despite the fact that UGEC always remained a minority group on campus, its politics and radicalism permeated Lovanium's subculture and dialectic.

### **Revolutionary Intellectual Nationalism**

While there was a certain degree of debates and disagreements that were expressed during UGEC's congresses, consensus always emerged on the Left. Yet, UGEC was, by its very nature as a transnational union, a decentralized organization. Not

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<sup>505</sup> See for example I.R.A. "Quitte ou Double" and "Editorial" in *Echos de Lovanium* (April 1962), p.1, 5 and 7.

<sup>506</sup> Cléo Tshibangu, "Lettre ouverte à M. le Président des Etudiants de Lovanium," in *Echos de Lovanium* (April 1962), p.6.

all the sections adhered equally to the official discourses of radicalism. In the first part of the 1960s, the Belgian section, for example, often appeared more moderate in its public expressions. On the occasion of the seventh congress of the International Union of Students in Leningrad in August 1962, Ferdinand Kayukwa, who had become the president of UGEC's Belgian section after his imprisonment by Tshombe in Elisabethville, pronounced a speech in the name of the Congolese student union that denounced Congo's "imperialist cancer," the corruption in the parliament, and the ministers' "ruthless ambition, fraud, muddle, [and] graft."<sup>507</sup> Kayukwa's speech in Leningrad made veiled allusions to the history of imperial Russia. More importantly, it expressed a certain distance with regard to communism: "As Africans, we will at most use capitalism and communism as simple materials in the construction of our own system. I believe that no one will object to that right."

That definition of an African third way served to define UGEC in Belgium at that time. Auguste Makanda, UGEC-Belgium's secretary for foreign affairs, repeated it, for example, during UGEC's first European colloquium in Brussels, from February 22 to 24, 1963. Makanda felt the urge to justify the legitimacy of Congolese student activism in Belgium:

A part of Belgian youth, driven by mysterious motives, still consider that our strictly student activities are offensive to Belgium. We believe they are wrong. Do we, Congolese, consider that the monuments, the mounts, the hills, the towns that, in the Congo, carry the names of Belgian "heroes" are offensive to the Congolese nation?<sup>508</sup>

Later in the speech, Makanda proclaimed:

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<sup>507</sup> Kayukwa, 7e congress of the IUS, Draft Resolutions, p.6, IUS Papers, IISH, Amsterdam.

<sup>508</sup> *Séminaire de l'UGEC sur la réorganisation de l'UGEC, la lutte contre l'analphabétisme, les institutions politiques, la réforme et la démocratisation de l'enseignement, Bruxelles, 22-24 février 1963* (Brussels: COSEC, 1963), p. III.

The Black, even when he embraces Communism of Western Democracy, does not support ideologies; he is looking to use tools for his own ends, and he keeps a distance with these tools and ideologies.<sup>509</sup>

He further belabored the point:

Let me repeat myself, what we are attempting is the construction of a singular doctrine fit for our situation by freely drawing from each system, East and West, the necessary materials in the make-up of our system.<sup>510</sup>

Makanda not only felt the need to justify the position of UGEC with regard to communism, he also took the pain to qualify the union's Lumumbism by saying that it referred to the students' attachment to Congolese unity and not to any anti-Belgian feeling.

Around 50 Congolese students attended the symposium in Brussels, including three female students.<sup>511</sup> UGEC activists from Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union had been impeached, but some of their comrades from Switzerland, France, the Netherlands and Germany attended, as well as delegates from Burundi, Rwanda and Tunisia, and delegates from COSEC and IUS. The tone of the deliberation resembled that of Makanda's speech and displayed a form of "moderate radicalism": delegates mostly continued to adhere to a language of expertise and responsibility; they advocated for Congo's national unity and against federalism; they gave their opinions on the reform of the state, the police and the army; and they articulated demands about the democratization of education – a motto of the international student movement – that were

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<sup>509</sup> *Idem*, p.IV.

<sup>510</sup> *Idem*, p.V.

<sup>511</sup> Hockins gives the following numbers of Congolese students in Belgium in his 1963 survey: 329 male and 3 female students at the University level; for 223 male and 138 female students at the secondary school level.

limited to equality of access to schools for everybody and equity in the allocation of state scholarships.<sup>512</sup>

Between 1961 and 1963, UGEC made its presence felt in Belgium, developed several local sections in Brussels, Liège, Louvain and Mons, organized debates about “mixed marriages,” and sent reports to the Congolese government on national issues. The Union was highly political, and the World Association of Youth, for example, refused to support it for that reason, but some students doubted that UGEC in Belgium was as revolutionary as it proclaimed, with some questioning the sincerity and commitment of the leadership.<sup>513</sup>

In contrast to the cautiousness of authorized student expressions, radicalism erupted in the streets of Leopoldville in January 1963 when students left Lovanium to protest once again against Western interventions in favor of Katanga. The local section of UGEC in the capital city, led by Joseph Kabemba, Serge Kaloni and André Ilunga, organized a demonstration that specifically targeted the British embassy, lodged downtown, together with the Liberian embassy, inside the building of the Barkley bank on *Avenue de l'Equateur*. Some protesters forced their way into the building and to the floor occupied by the British embassy; they broke windows and threw out to the streets what they could grab: piles of papers, chairs and other furniture, films and movie cameras.<sup>514</sup> The memorandum released by students after the sack betrayed the more combative tone sought by UGEC's grassroots: “From now on, the English must know

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<sup>512</sup> *Séminaire de l'UGEC*, p.12.

<sup>513</sup> Hockins-Kadiebo, “Quelques recherches sur le rôle de l'U.G.E.C.,” p.22, and 31-38.

<sup>514</sup> “Congo Students Sack Embassy,” in *The Daily Reporter* (January 15 1963), p.3.



that they will find in front of their barbarous path, young people committed to relentlessly fight them, with all the ardor and the dynamism of youth.”<sup>515</sup>

A good indicator of intellectual dominance of the Left at Lovanium was the spreading of the revolutionary rhetoric to the Catholic student journal *Présence Univeritaire*.<sup>516</sup> Among other similar pieces with a similar tone, one article, for example, called the students to liberate themselves from any forms of cultural subjugation. To be African intellectuals, Lovanium students should immerse themselves in African culture, be in permanent contact with the people, and adopt revolutionary intellectual nationalism as their ideology. For the author of the article, this meant liberation from the colonized mind, but also participation in a revolution that would sweep out all the politicians who did not live up to the expectations of African nationalism.<sup>517</sup>

The more aggressive tone of student politics informed the second general congress of UGEC, originally planned in May 1963 but ultimately rescheduled for

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<sup>515</sup> Joseph Kabemba, *Le destin de Biabululu*, p.72-74.

<sup>516</sup> *P.U.* was created in 1959 by students affiliated with the Catholic group *Pax Romana*. It included contributions by students, including in the first years by Father Tshibangu (the successor of Gillon as rector of Lovanium in 1967), Etienne Tshisekedi (as we saw earlier, one of the Congo’s major political figures; an early ally of Mobutu, and later his principal opponent with UDPS in the 1980s and 1990s; since the election of 2011, the self-proclaimed president of the Congo in dissidence with Joseph Kabila) and V.-Y. Mudimbe (philosopher, linguist, and novelist; today Professor of Literature at Duke University). Congolese and Belgian professors, notably Benoît Verhaegen, also regularly wrote in the journal. The tone of the articles was often academic, but many contributions dealt with student politics, both in general terms and with regards to particular issues and struggles on the campus. See Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem, “La Première écriture de l’élite universitaire du Zaïre. *Présence Universitaire* (1959-1971),” in Marc Quaghebeur (ed.), *Papier blanc, encre noire: Cent ans de culture francophone en Afrique Centrale (Zaïre, Rwanda et Burundi)* (Brussels: Labor, 1992), vol.2, p.401-431.

<sup>517</sup> C.M., “Le rôle national de l’esprit universitaire africaine,” in *Présence Universitaire* 11 (January 1963), p.11-16. At stake in these debates, and one of the reasons behind the leftward turn of *Présence Universitaire*, was the question of communism. The more radical tone adopted by the author of the article allowed him – for example, in a reference to Richard Wright’s *Black Power* – to make the case that nationalism, because “it was a struggle for cultural hegemony,” was superior and preferable to communism, which represented the interests of a foreign power (p.13-14).

August 4<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> of that year. The congress was an important event, attended by labor organizers, politicians, as well as foreign diplomats and visitors. UGEC delegates travelled from Belgium, France, the United States and Canada, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and also from the newly created section of Elisabethville, established with the help of Lovanium students sent to Katanga by Adoula directly after the end of the secession. André Bo-Boliko, the leader of the Catholic labor union UTC, was one of the main guest speakers to the congress. A graduate of the social school of Heverlee in Belgium, Bo-Boliko was considered an intellectual and, as such, he took part in the student government of the general commissioners. Since 1961, Bo-Boliko had returned to labor activism; and in 1962, he gained an image of intransigence when Adoula kept him during forty-five days at Makala, Leopoldville's ill-famed central prison, in retaliation against UTC's strike actions. In 1963, Bo-Boliko denounced the small ruling class that had privatized the benefits of independence. In his address to the congress, he announced a Congo "à la Castro" in place of Adoula's Congo "à la Battista."<sup>518</sup>

Another anecdote illustrates the willingness of UGEC to break away from the discourse of expertise and influence of earlier students and to use the congress as a moment of rupture and radicalization. Albert Ndele, a member of the Binza group, yet another former general commissioner, and the governor of the Central Bank, organized a dinner in the city's most expensive restaurant, *La Devinière*. Ndele had invited all the participants of the congress to attend, paying in advance for the preparation of a large buffet, and even organizing transportation between the Cultrana Hall, the meeting place of the congress, and *La Devinière*. At the last minute, and in a deliberate attempt to create a scandal, UGEC leaders unilaterally decided that no one would attend Ndele's dinner

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<sup>518</sup>Muhirwa Gassana, *Le syndicalisme et ses incidences socio-politiques*, p.89.

and his buses departed with not one delegate on board. “The reason” for the refusal of the congress organizers was that “Mister the Governor had made university students and alumni (*les universitaires*) feel ashamed of his management of the country.”<sup>519</sup>

The second congress reiterated UGEC’s *raison d’être* as the defender of Congolese national unity and the link between scattered Congolese students throughout the world. A series of statements recalled the first congress, such as the call for support for a presidential regime within a united and strong central state, calls for pan-African construction and neutralism in the Cold War, demands regarding the democratization of education. Still, several of the final motions and statements adopted in 1963 testified of the shift in leadership and militancy happening among UGEC’s ranks. Despite careful reminders about the necessity for Africans to remain independent of both camps in the Cold War, the congress still called for *planification* and socialization of the economy in the Congo as well as large measures of nationalization, starting with the hated *Union Minière*. The ideological option of UGEC remained within the rather “moderate” idiom of African socialism, yet students also called for the eradication of “alienation and exploitation.”<sup>520</sup>

Next to South African apartheid and Portuguese colonialism, the U.S. was at the center of the students’ international commentaries. Nkanza-Dolomingu, a delegate of the North American branch of UGEC, shared that he suffered from racism when at Princeton, and the congress expressed supports for African American civil rights activists. The students denounced the Peace Corps as a new proof of U.S. imperialism and criticized Adoula’s government for its reliance on U.S. support. Students identified the U.S.

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<sup>519</sup> Joseph Kabemba, *Le destin de Biabululu*, p.93.

<sup>520</sup> “Le deuxième congrès des étudiants congolais tenu à Léopoldville du 4 au 11 août,” in *Remarques Congolaises* 5-22 (September 1963), p.309.

embassy as the main source of neocolonialism, and they accused Kennedy's administration of transplanting its Latin American policies in the Congo.<sup>521</sup>

In a rather surprising statement, UGEC expressed its total opposition to sending Congolese students abroad before the university level, and it asked the government to immediately recall all the children in foreign primary and secondary schools. UGEC also took harsh positions vis-à-vis the army, and therefore vis-à-vis Mobutu: students considered the army was still the same institution that colonizers had created to "maintain their regime of oppression," that it only served "to bully the Congolese people," and that it should be totally transformed by establishing a mandatory military service.<sup>522</sup> "All for the people and its revolution" became UGEC's new motto. Students criticized the politicians in power who had taken advantage of independence and betrayed Congolese workers; they called for the end of Gizenga's imprisonment, itself the result of "the imperialists' occult forces that have alienated Adoula's government;" and they demanded an official commission on the murder of Lumumba, the condemnation of his assassins, the erection of a large monument to his memory, as well as an official proclamation of him as a national hero.

The single most important statement at the congress with regards to UGEC's turn to the Left was the "motion stigmatizing the general commissioners' political action." More than two years after the end of the commissioners' rule, the motion spoke to the internal struggle inside the student movement. The motion recalled the commissioners' rule as that of an illegal government that had worsened the Congo crisis, served the interests of foreign powers, and was "partly responsible" for the assassination of

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<sup>521</sup> Idem, p.318.

<sup>522</sup> Idem, p.305.

Lumumba. The commissioners had discredited the entirety of Congolese students and youth, and UGEC felt obliged to finally “denounce, in front of the national and international opinions, their ill-fated action” and to “invite Congolese youth and more specifically the students not to imitate their example.”<sup>523</sup> In the light of that motion, students’ refusal to attend the Ndele’s banquet seems less surprising.

### **Embodying the Left**

The second congress did not mark a total rupture of the student movement with its past.<sup>524</sup> Yet, it symbolized the crystallization of a new student identity, clearly distinct from that of the general commissioners, and anchored on the Left. Zénon Mibamba, a student at the Plekanov Institute of rural development in Moscow from 1961 to 1963, presided over the ultimate session of the congress. During one of my many visits to his office at the Ministry for Women, Children, and Gender, I shared with Zénon my surprise that conservative students had not opposed the vote of the most radical resolutions on the last day of UGEC’s second congress, when he acted as president of session. “You know,” Mibamba replied to me, “the 1960s were a time when people talked about revolution, the Left, not like today when everybody wants to become bourgeois and build a house for themselves.”<sup>525</sup>

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<sup>523</sup> Idem, p.317.

<sup>524</sup> Jean-Claude Willame argues the opposite: Willame, “The Congo,” p.46.

<sup>525</sup> Zénon Mibamba, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 15 June 2010. One of the two delegates from the Soviet Union, Zénon had been denounced in the press as the instigator of the communist infiltration of the congress. The critique of the United States was high on his agenda, which he developed from the very beginning of the congress by asking for a clearly ironical one-minute silence in homage to Patrick Bouvier Kennedy, the US president’s recently deceased premature child. Despite his clear anti-American tendencies, U.S. agents approached Mibamba during the congress. They offered him a fellowship to study

More than most people, Zénon had proved his commitment to the revolution. As we will see in more detail in the following chapter, he was part of the small group of student activists who attempted a concrete application of the radical rhetoric of UGEC. A few weeks after the congress, he joined exiled politicians in Brazzaville and soon participated in the armed struggle to overthrow the government in Leopoldville. In October 1968, Zénon was part of the group of five revolutionary militants who were forced by Brazzaville's authorities to return to Kinshasa, as President Mobutu had renamed the city in 1966. Within days of their return, soldiers tortured the most well known person in this group, Pierre Mulele, dismembered parts of his body while he was still alive, and disposed of his corpse in the Congo River.<sup>526</sup> Zénon was not tortured and he survived the return to Kinshasa. However, he remained imprisoned for years – first in the dungeon of the secret police in Kinshasa, where student activists from Lovanium found him in 1971; then at Mbula Mbemba, the famous prison island at the meeting point of the Atlantic Ocean and the Congo River; and finally at Belingo, one of the four *colonies agricoles pour relégués dangereux* established by the Belgians during the colonial period. Zénon Mibamba could have easily died, forgotten in any of these places of relegation, and many of his former comrades thought that this had indeed been the case. Yet, in 1973, he was freed, together with the group of students from Lovanium, as Mobutu's gesture of goodwill before his first visit to Mao's China. "Freed but not free," Mibamba had a difficult time to find employment. Former friends from UGEC were able in the end to find him a position as a civil servant. After the overthrow of Mobutu in

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Sovietology, promising to make him the future head of the Soviet studies department they planned to open at the University of Lubumbashi.

<sup>526</sup> Ludo Martens, *Pierre Mulele ou la seconde vie de Patrice Lumumba* (Antwerp: EPO, 1985), p.331-333.

1997, Zénon Mibamba was included in Laurent-Désiré Kabila's transition parliament. Yet, after the assassination of Kabila in 2001, the old guard of 1960s revolutionaries was quickly marginalized. Ten years later, Zénon was still working in the realm of power, but very far from the palaces of the republic. He did not own a car and still lived in Masina, a district of Kinshasa closed to the airport and kilometers away from the city center, a place that *Kinois* call "China's Peoples' Republic," not out of any particular political inclination but more in reference to the district's overpopulation. An ascetic man, whose goatee, baldness and half-laughing eyes called to mind some photographs of Lenin, Zénon Mibamba expressed a strong loyalty to the commitments of his youth. Decades after UGEC's congress at Lovanium, his political opinions had not changed much.

Patrice Lumumba changed Zénon Mibamba's life several times. In 1959, the latter was a young and promising accountant, working for Unilever in the plantation town of Astrida, in the *Oriental Province*. In his mid-twenties, he was happily married, owned a car, and had access to the facilities, stores, and leisure activities reserved for the company's white employees. Yet, as soon as he discovered Patrice Lumumba, he enthusiastically joined the MNC, using his car for propaganda, selling the party's member cards, distributing newspapers, and irremediably compromising his position in the company. Two years later, after Lumumba's death, he completely quit his position with Unilever, joined the partisans of the assassinated prime minister in Stanleyville, accepted a scholarship from Pierre Mulele and left alone, without his wife and young son, for Moscow. He was now a university student, but also a revolutionary, and his later involvement with the armed struggle was not a break from his militant activities in UGEC. Zénon Mibamba embodied a crucial moment of transition in the history of the

Congolese student movement: its final departure from the episode of the general commissioners, its participation in the emergence of a revolutionary and insurrectionary struggle, and the growing influence of socialism on the movement. In conducting these moves, Zénon Mibamba and his comrades also changed the (after)lives of Patrice Lumumba.



## Chapter 7

### The Student Guerilla

“It is true that in the aftermath of independence, the Congolese intellectual elite has been the object of the people’s distrust, because of the negative role it was forced to play against the nationalists and against Patrice Lumumba. The College of the General Commissioners, inspired and guided by Joseph Mobutu, compromised itself in the coup against Lumumba and in his transfer to Katanga where he was vilely assassinated.

The disastrous management of the res publica that characterized the College of Commissioners produced a great distrust among the Congolese people. But that time is over and the dynamics of the Congolese intellectual youth has changed wonderfully, as it forms now an avant-garde force in the urban anti-imperialist struggle.”<sup>527</sup>

*Il sangue dei Leoni* is a peculiar object, published in Milano at the beginning of 1969 by Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, the “Italian Maspero.” The book is a collection of four texts.<sup>528</sup> The first three of these were authored by Edouard-Marcel Sumbu, a young Congolese exiled in Havana. Originally written in French, these texts had been translated

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<sup>527</sup> Edouard-Marcel Sumbu, *Il sangue dei Leoni; Appello politico a tutto il popolo congolese per una riscossa in massa contre la reazonie Kinshasa; Discorso al Congresso Cultural dell’Avana: Cultural e indipendenza nazionale di E.M. Sumbu; manual delle Special Forces* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1969), p.61-62. On the connections and parallels between Feltrinelli and Maspero, see Julien Hage, “Les éditeurs de gauche et la lutte armée en Italie (1966-1979),” in Marc Lazar and Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci, *L’Italie des années de plomb* (Paris: Autrement, 2010), p.98-111.

<sup>528</sup> Carlo, the son of Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, estimated that, among the hundred or so “militant” books published by his father and usually pressed at around 4,000 copies each, *Il Sangue dei Leoni* was the most popular, together with *La Scuola Agli Studenti*, an attack against class education collectively authored by the radical group Potere Operaio di Pisa: Carlo Feltrinelli, *Feltrinelli* (New York: Harcourt, 2001), p.232. A central figure of the Italian *sessantotto*, Giangiacomo Feltrinelli died tragically in a mysterious bombing in March 1972.

into Italian for the purpose of Feltrinelli's publication. The first text was an eponym narrative of the armed struggle in Eastern Congo, in which Sumbu had participated before taking refuge in the Sudan, Egypt, and finally Cuba.<sup>529</sup> The second text was "a call to the Congolese people," previously unpublished, and written by Sumbu only weeks before the Italian publication. Sumbu's last contribution to the volume was his speech at Havana's Culture Congress from the previous year, also previously unpublished. These three sections on the Congo were followed by a much longer part, presented as the manual of the U.S. army's special forces. Dated from Fort Bragg on January 1, 1965, it appeared as the reproduction of a teaching guide used to train the American soldiers who served in secret counter-insurgency operations in South-East Asia and elsewhere. Reportedly, the book ended up on the bedside table of every Red Brigade member, and Israeli Forces found copies of its translation in Arabic on the dead bodies of Palestinian fighters of Al Fatah in 1970.<sup>530</sup>

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<sup>529</sup> The Centro de Tabajedores de Cuba had already published a Spanish translation of a much shorter text written by Sumbu on the armed struggle and in which he rehearsed the ideas developed in *Il Sangue*: Edouard M. Sumbu, *El Congo: Revolucion Armada* (Havana: CTCR, s.d.).

<sup>530</sup> See Omero Folti, "Feltrinelli," in Ornella Volta (ed.), *La piste rouge (Italia 69-72)* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1973), p.375. In more recent years, a few Italian journalists and commenters have singled out the book as a symbol of the excesses of the country's Left around 1968 and a cause for Italy's so-called "years of lead" that started only a month after its publication. "Nobody obviously cared" about Sumbu, writes the journalist Michele Brambilla, and nobody cared about his "pale texts" on the Congo. These were only the literal cover for the real stuff, a way to divert censorship's attention from the much more "explosive" American Special Forces' manual. The manual included indeed a whole section about the making of bombs, of diverse shape and force: Michele Brambilla, *Dieci anni di illusioni. Storia del Sessantotto* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1994); see also Stella Gian Antonio, "La Città delli cattivi maestri," in *Corriere della Serra* (August 24, 2001), p.2. The argument that Sumbu's texts were a simple façade does not hold, as the indication of the manual appeared on the very cover of the book, and Sumbu himself mentions the inclusion of the manual in one of the first texts (yet, the possibility should not be excluded that the mention was an addition of the translators). The supposed "obvious" absence of interest in Sumbu's texts for an Italian readership is also a rather unconvincing argument; the apparent lack of interest more probably reflects contemporary incapacity to recognize the importance of the Third

Among many intriguing dimensions in *Il sangue dei Leoni*, the most striking may be Sumbu's focus on Congolese students' leading role in the revolution. "Our intellectual elite," he wrote again, "has appropriated from now a magnificent mission, that is, to serve as a catalyst for the silenced working class, gagged and openly repressed by the regime in power in Kinshasa"<sup>531</sup> Phrases like these, written a few months before the student march of June 4, 1969, acquire, retrospectively, a particular resonance. Later in his "message to the Congolese people," Sumbu insisted on the criminal history of Mobutu and his cruel repression of Lumumbists. He concluded this passage in this way:

General Mobutu's dictatorial regime will certainly accomplish other crimes in the future, and maybe even immense fratricides, but it will not be able to kill the entirety of the people. The more the infernal machine is bringing death, the more the people is awakening, becomes aware of the danger that is coming in its direction, and automatically reacts for its self-defense, for its very survival.<sup>532</sup>

Parts of the book looked particularly intuitive and, at the same time, extremely naive, if viewed from the perspective of the later repression of the student movement. Sumbu imagined, for example, that officers in the army, trained abroad and politically aware, would join the student avant-garde in case of a movement against the regime. The authors of the *Manifesto of the Proletarian Fraternity*, who composed their text in Kinshasa probably around the same time than Sumbu wrote his book in Havana, shared a similar optimism with regards to the solidarity between soldiers in the army and the

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World in the Italian Sixties. After all, *Il Sangue dei Leoni* was only one volume in a collection called *Africa in Lotta* (Fighting Africa), and that included several volumes on Angola and Mozambique. For other publications that testified of the Italian Left's interest in the Congolese revolution: see *Il Congo di Lumumba e di Mulele* (Milan: Jaca book, 1969) and Luciano Ferraresi, *Storia politica del Congo (Zaire): Dall'indipendenza alla rivoluzione di Mulele* (Milan: Jaca book, 1973).

<sup>531</sup> Sumbu, *Il sangue dei leoni*, p.62.

<sup>532</sup> *Idem*, p.69.

revolutionary movement.<sup>533</sup> While this optimism was based on actual episodes when soldiers defected to join the ranks of Lumumbist rebels in the mid-1960s, it was blatantly invalidated by the repression of the student movement at the end of the decade.

We will come back to the events of June 4, 1969 in the next chapter. For the time being, Sumbu helps unpack another historiographical issue regarding the Congolese student movement, namely its relation to the armed struggle of the mid-1960s.

At the end of July 1963, just a few days before UGEC's second Congress, a small group of militants led by Pierre Mulele disappeared into the forest of Idiofa, in the province of Kwilu. In this rather densely populated region, dotted with Jesuit missions and palm plantations, they planned to ignite the fire of the Congolese revolution. Indeed, they soon started an armed struggle that took over a very large area, directly east of the triangle formed by Kiniati, Kikwit, and Kizambi, which, as we saw in Chapters 4 and 5, had yielded such an important portion of the late colonial intellectual elite.

Despite its early successes, Mulele's *maquis* failed to capture any significant urban centers and remained enclosed in the Kwilu until its ultimate demise in 1968. However, emulators of Mulele opened other military fronts elsewhere in the country, notably in Eastern Congo, as soon as January 1964. Their advance was extremely rapid. Soldiers from the national army refused to fight against guerilla fighters who partook of Mulele's magical powers. "*Mulele mayi*," the combat cry that expressed the insurgents' assurance that their opponents' bullets would turn into water, became the symbol of a movement that, at its highest point in October 1965, controlled two thirds of the country and major cities like Stanleyville.

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<sup>533</sup> Gérard Althabe, *Les fleurs du Congo : Une utopie du Lumumbisme* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), p.25-32.

Rebellion (sometimes in the plural) is the most common term used to designate the insurrection of the mid-1960s in the Congo, and it accordingly appears many times in these pages. That term, however, reinforces the legitimacy of the regime in place in Leopoldville that the Simbas, as the fighters were called, wanted to replace. Scholars more sympathetic towards the insurgents' struggle coined the phrase "second independence," which captured well the movement's deep motivation and its attachment to Patrice Lumumba's unfinished struggle. Yet, for Mulele and many of his followers, the armed struggle was first and foremost a revolutionary movement. The memory of the insurrection has been determined by the issue of violence, with diverging perceptions of the respective responsibilities of the Mulelists and their opponents in the many murders and crimes that plunged thousands of families into mourning and despair. However, as the issue of naming should make clear, the insurrection was not only fought in military operations and pacification campaigns. Besides the engagements of Simbas with soldiers from the national army and foreign mercenaries, the struggle was also waged at the level of communication and discourse.

The following pages discuss the different ways that students and the student movement interacted with this revolution. This is one of the themes that Sumbu addressed in his "call to the people." He wrote that:

Congolese intellectuals had been replying for a long time to the patriotic call, and became part of the guerilla [movement under different forms. Some came back to the Congo and lived the reality of the Simba fighters by becoming *maquisards*; others opened a real war on another front: that of ideological education, teaching patriotism to the Congolese people, without forgetting to attract the attention of the world's opinion to the Congolese drama, searching in this way a sincere solidarity of global progressive circles. Our faithful comrades, our revolutionary comrades of UGEC, the honest compatriots remained in the Congo, all dared to fight in a way or another to make the national cause and our armed revolt against the reaction win.<sup>534</sup>

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<sup>534</sup> *Idem*, p.61.

As we will see, other observers departed from the point of view developed by Sumbu about the importance of students' involvement in the rebellions. Regardless, Sumbu was perceptive in identifying the different fronts in which students participated in the struggle: in combat zones, through "ideological education," abroad in relation with the "progressive international," and at home by writing articles and criticizing the government.

The Mulelist rebellion radicalized Congolese nationalists, including student activists. Yet, some actors in the Congolese crisis did not take seriously the more radical discourse of the country's Left. In June 1964, a confidential note from "Soapy" Williams, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, to Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs W. Averell Harriman, compiled a short list of "Left" politicians in the Congo who could "cause us difficulties in varying degrees." That list singled out Mulele – then in the *maquis* – and Kashamura – already in France and focused on his publication projects – as "the most dangerous men from our point of view." The memo denied any real meaning to the Congolese Left, presenting Congolese politicians as "materialistic" and only interested in their personal positions. "It seems like that there are few if any doctrinaire Congolese Communists," Williams wrote. "This would require an intellectual sophistication and discipline that is lacking in the Congo."<sup>535</sup>

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<sup>535</sup> G. Mennen Williams, memo to Governor Harriman, 3 June 1964, RG 59 General Records of the Department of State / Records of the Bureau of African Affairs, 1958-1966 / Congo Kinshasa 1965-1966 / Box 23, Nara, College Park, MD. For echoes of this mode of reasoning, see the memoirs of former CIA agent Richard Holm, where he asserts that because the Congolese Simba rebels were "a ragtag bunch of illiterate dissidents," they "certainly weren't communists." (Richard L. Holm, *The Craft We Chose: My Life in the CIA* (Mountain Lake Park, Md: Mountain Lake Press, 2011), p.176).

Regardless of this insider's point of view and other "intelligence" suggesting the absence of "any rigid ideological beliefs" in the Congolese rebellion, the U.S. government publicly entertained the idea that the Mulelists represented a menacing red threat over Central Africa. On their side, Congolese nationalists sometimes felt the need to stress the remoteness of their politics from the Right and Left divide, while in other circumstances, they were more willing to pledge allegiance to specific camps. Students, who would have probably felt outraged and hurt by Williams's offhand comment about their intellectual capacities, did not usually share this fluctuating approach to ideological self-presentation. This chapter will argue that the most significant student contribution to a "second independence" was in the hot and cold wars of words.

### **The Revolution (I): From the Kwilu to Brazzaville**

"Independence is our noble goal. It is not obtained easily or without sacrifices, including losses in the dearest human lives. For a total and real independence, a heroic and implacable struggle of the colonized is needed. Real independence requires a radical change. It comes after a systematic decolonization, a long and difficult process."<sup>536</sup>

The participation of students in the movement for the second independence has never been developed in the historiography. The most prominent representation of the rebellion conveyed an image of violent *Jacquerie* led by uneducated and rudimentarily armed young guerilla fighters who systematically targeted everything and everyone associated with Western modernity. This representation made the participation of students in the rebellion nearly unthinkable. From Leopoldville, many people assumed

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<sup>536</sup> [Théodore Bengila], "Message du Parti Solidaire Africain au Peuple," June 9, 1963, cited in Ludo Martens, *Pierre Mulele ou la seconde vie de Patrice Lumumba* (Antwerp: EPO, 1985), p.136.

that the Mulelists systematically assassinated all “intellectuals” that they encountered: priests, primary school teachers, people with a high school education, or those wearing glasses.

Assassinations of intellectuals did occur on all fronts of the rebellions, and the Simbas, sometimes acting independently of revolutionary cadres, committed many assassinations that served to support the theory of an anti-elite insurrection. Yet, even as the revolutionaries challenged the Catholic and colonial order that produced Lovanium and granted students their elite status, they did not systematically target intellectuals for assassination in the liberated areas: on the contrary. The rhetoric developed by Mulele and other activists divided the world into three categories: the exploited (the people), exploiters (the former colonizers), and reactionaries (Congolese who served as collaborators of the exploiters). Rebels repeatedly targeted “reactionaries,” including traditional chiefs, priests, teachers, and territorial administrators.<sup>537</sup> Yet, Lumumbist insurgents often tried to recruit local intellectuals as partners, and students were present at every turn in the history of the movement.<sup>538</sup>

The two initiators of the armed struggle, Pierre Mulele and his friend, Théodore Bengila, were themselves alumni of Kinzambi, the iconic cradle of late colonial Congolese intellectuals created by Monsignor Guffens. Between the overthrow of Lumumba by Mobutu in September 1960 and his assassination in Katanga in January 1961, Mulele – who had served as Lumumba’s Minister of Education – fled to Egypt. In Cairo, he acted as the ambassador for Antoine Gizenga and the Lumumbist legitimists

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<sup>537</sup> For example during the first general offensive launched by Mulele in January 1964 that “liberated” an area of 36.000 square kilometers, chiefs and missionaries that were considered to be supporters of the state were systematically murdered.

<sup>538</sup> Ludo Martens, *Pierre Mulele*, p.144-145.



who had established their own government in Stanleyville. The Lovanium Conclave of July 1961 and the establishment of Cyrille Adoula's government marked the political capitulation of Gizenga. Mulele, however, refused to abandon the opposition to Leopoldville. Together with Bengila, he travelled to China to study Marxism and guerilla warfare, convinced that the nationalist cause could only be won through an armed struggle.

In March 1963, Bengila returned to Leopoldville, organized the importation of revolutionary pamphlets and books, and met secretly with young political activists. These meetings resulted in the publication of a manifesto, which announced the necessity of the armed struggle and articulated a radical critique of the regime which would be reflected, a few months later, in the discussions of UGEC's second Congress at Lovanium.

Entering the country under a false identity, Mulele joined Bengila in Leopoldville in June or July 1963 and directly started the preparations for the insurrection. Mulele met several times with Auguste Mabika Kalanda, the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Adoula's government.<sup>539</sup> Originally from Mikalayi, a Catholic district in Kasai province, Mabika Kalanda had been among the very first cohort of students to graduate from Lovanium in 1958 and had been one of the General Commissioners in September 1960.<sup>540</sup> Despite his participation in the government, Mabika was open to helping Mulele acquire firearms for his future *maquis*. Members of Makiba's ministerial staff also worked with Bengila and Mulele during this period. Emmanuel Lonji and Leonard Mitudidi were two of them. Lonji was among the founding members of the *Parti National de la Convention du Peuple* (PNCP), created the year before by labor activists and radicalized young militants

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<sup>539</sup> *Idem*, p.137-140.

<sup>540</sup> Mabika Kalanda, *La remise en question: Base de la décolonisation mentale* (Brussels: Remarques Africaines, 1967).

of Kasa-Vubu's ABAKO who were disappointed by the president's alliance with the Binza group. The PNCP was an attempt to reorganize the nationalist camp that followed Lovanium's conclave and that paved the way for the insurrection. Jean-Baptiste Mulemba, a member of the youth branch of the PNCP in 1963, shared with me his memories of the discussions in party meetings, which focused on readings of Lenin, Marx, Engels, and, more oddly, Georgi Dimitrov, the deceased prime minister of Bulgaria and last General Secretary of the Komintern.<sup>541</sup>

Leonard Mitudidi was the second member of Mabika's cabinet who became closely associated with Bengila and Mulele at an early stage of the insurrection. Mitudidi had studied in France where he had been active in the FEANF.<sup>542</sup> He returned to the Congo in 1961 and co-founded the *Jeunesse Nationaliste Lumumbiste* with future rebel activists like Placide Kitungwa and Laurent-Désiré Kabila.<sup>543</sup> Imprisoned with Gizenga during a few months, Mitudidi had joined Mabika's cabinet as a translator, a position he used to enter into contact with potential allies of the revolution in "progressive" countries in Africa.

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<sup>541</sup> Jean-Baptiste Mulemba, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 2 August 2011.

<sup>542</sup> Verhaegen and his collaborators in the CRISP's publications on Congolese politics mentioned that Mitudidi studied at Sorbonne and then in Moscow: see Benoît Verhagen, *Rébellions au Congo* (Brussels: CRISP, 1966), vol.1, p.176; Benoît Verhagen et al., *Mulele et la révolution populaire au Kwilu (République démocratique du Congo)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006), p.342. However, in a conversation with me, Abdoulaye Yerodia, who knew Mitudidi in France, affirmed that he graduated from the University of Nancy. This is also the version given by Albert Kisonga Mazakala, who befriended Mitudidi during the revolution. In his memoir, Kisonga specifies that Mitudidi graduated with a degree in Natural Sciences from Nancy; and that he taught physics and mathematics to high school students when he joined Gizenga and the Lumumbists in Stanleyville in 1961. For Kisonga, Mitudidi was "a pure revolutionary, who brought an intellectualist dimension to Mulele's insurrection": see Albert Kisonga Mazakala, *45 ans d'Histoire Congolaise: L'expérience d'un Lumumbiste* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005), p. 53.

<sup>543</sup> Erik Kennes and Munakana N'Gee, *Essai biographique sur Laurent Désiré Kabila* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003), p.90-91.

The entourage of Mulele in July 1963 also included several activists from the pro-Gizenga wing of the Parti Solidaire Africain au Peuple (PSA): Gabriel Yumbu and Thomas Mukwidi, both members of the Parliament, and Felix Mukulubundu, a former non-commissioned officer in the national army. At the end of July, a convoy comprising Bengila, Mulele, Mitudidi, Mukwidi, Mukulubundu, Yumbu and a couple of other militants left Leopoldville for the Kwilu district, on the other side of the Kwilu River, to establish a secret base and prepare the insurrection. Mulele appealed to local chiefs and the militant network of the PSA to recruit people into the rebellion. At the end of August, over 500 young men and women had already joined the camp. There, they attended classes on political education and military training, even though the group did not own any firearms at that point.<sup>544</sup> Mulele, who greatly needed cadres to deliver these lessons, had already focused on integrating teachers, priests, and other intellectuals in the *maquis*. Three primary school teachers as well as a former Josephite brother joined in the very first day of the *maquis*, soon to be followed by many more. The former Catholic brother Florentin Ngolo became one of the main Marxist “ideologues” in Mulele’s headquarter.<sup>545</sup>

In the very first days of the insurrection, Mulele sent Mukwidi and Mitudidi back to Leopoldville. In the city, the two militants attended UGEC’s congress. Their mission was to create a broad alliance with other nationalists to expand the armed struggle. From Leopoldville, Thomas Mukwidi and Léonard Mitudidi then travelled to Ghana, Guinea and China to secure the help of the governments of these countries.

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<sup>544</sup> Benoît Verhagen, *Mulele et la révolution populaire au Kwilu*, p.55-72.

<sup>545</sup> Ludo Martens, *Pierre Mulele*, p.139.

While Mukwidi and Mitudidi were away, crucial events unfolded in Brazzaville and played in favor of their cause. A strong opposition to President Fulbert Youlou had developed in June on the occasion of Sekou Toure's visit to the capital of the former French Equatorial Africa. The trade unions called for a general strike on August 13. Two days later, Youlou left the country, having failed to obtain the support of the army against the labor activists.<sup>546</sup> A new government was formed with Alphonse Massamba-Débat as president and Pascal Lissouba as prime minister. Youlou had been a strong opponent of Lumumba and a supporter of Kasa-Vubu and Tshombe. With Massamba-Débat as president, the Left came to power in Brazzaville, even though the regime did not break the country's alliance with France. Activists from Leopoldville also participated in the overthrow of Youlou; one of these was Paul Kabongo, the teenager who had left his *évolué* family and school life in Luluabourg to follow Lumumba in 1960 before relocating to Brazzaville.<sup>547</sup> Political, familial, and ethnic contacts were strong among inhabitants of Leopoldville and Brazzaville, and the departure of Youlou came as a timely development for political opponents on the other side of the river, and as they were ready to start a struggle of their own.

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<sup>546</sup> Rémy Bazenguissa-Ganga, *Les voies du politique au Congo: Essai de sociologie historique* (Paris: Karthala, 1997), p.91ff.

<sup>547</sup> Paul Kabongo, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 8 July 2011. As we saw earlier, Lumumba had entrusted Paul, his "spiritual son," to his Spanish friend Luis Alvarez Lopez. Kabongo became a student in the first cohort of the Institut d'Etudes Congolaises created by Lopez in Brazzaville, as a training center for independent Africa's cadres and civil servants and as an alternative to Leopoldville's Institut d'Etudes Politiques. At the institute, Kabongo made contacts with nationalist activists in Brazzaville. The figure of Lumumba was very popular in Brazzaville and his assassination was the object of many popular protests in the city. For Lopez, the same Brazzavillois youths who had demonstrated their support for Lumumba in 1961 overthrew Youlou in 1963 by taking to the streets. Luis Alvarez Lopez, *Lumumba ou l'Afrique frustrée* (Paris: Cujas, 1964), 135-136.

Around the same time in the Kwilu, the police conducted a violent repression in villages suspected of supporting Mulele. The direct result of the repression was to send more young people into the *maquis*. Similarly, authoritarian measures and a repression in Leopoldville pushed more political activists to go underground and join the burgeoning armed struggle. In September, Kasa-Vubu suspended the Parliament and proclaimed the state of exception; the police arrested and detained several opponents, as well as labor union activists like Kithima, Bo-Boliko and Siwa.<sup>548</sup> Meanwhile, discussions initiated by Mukwidi and Mitudidi in August finally led to the creation of a large nationalist platform, the *Conseil National de Libération* (CNL), officially established in Leopoldville on October 3, 1963, and directly transferred to Brazzaville.

### **Students and the Conseil National de Libération**

Many nationalists crossed the river to join the CNL. Others arrived in Brazzaville after long journeys that had taken them to many parts of the Congo and abroad. For example, Laurent-Désiré Kabila – the future successor to President Mobutu in 1997 – had fought against Tshombe in his native North Katanga in 1960, briefly studied in Belgrade

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<sup>548</sup> The repression of labor organizers followed a strike of teachers that had lasted for six months earlier in the provinces and that reached to Leopoldville and to civil servants. The *sureté*, the state political police, also accused Kithima and the other union leaders to have prepared an insurrection in the capital city, by condemning the suspension of the parliament in September and more generally the “antisocial” policies of the government (decades later, Papa Kithima remembered this episode as an example of the power of Belgian private interests on the Congolese government: A.R. Kithima, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 2 November 2009). On October 2 and October 9, 1963, union leaders issued common statements calling for a “*gouvernement de salut public*.” They criticized the suspension of the parliament and the constitutional process launched by Kasa-Vubu, in which corrupted politicians and white big business were accused to feature. The second declaration made an allusion to the recent UGEC congress and complained that the journalists who had opposed the student gathering as a communist-inspired initiative were now throwing the same allegations to the labor movement: see Bo-Boliko et al., “Prise de position des syndicats congolais,” 2 and 9 Oct. 1963, ICFTU Papers, IISH, Amsterdam.

in 1961, and worked as a journalist in Albertville in 1962 before finally becoming an important figure in the rebellion in Brazzaville.<sup>549</sup> At the time of the creation of the CNL, Kabila was 23. Many other members of the nationalist platform, who accessed military and political responsibilities in the revolution, were of his generation. Like Kabila, many of these nationalist cadres had not graduated from a secondary school. Nonetheless, they were considered intellectuals because they had taken part, at least for a few years, in the late colonial educational path that produced Congolese elites, letter-writers, and *évolués*. Placide Kitungwa, to take another example among the group of young cadres in the CNL, quit the Interracial Athénée of Bagira, outside Bukavu in the Kivu, in January 1961, only months before graduating. He quit because he was a young militant in the CERECA, and Kashamura, the leader of the party – and at the time, before his exile to France, the ruler of South Kivu – sent him to an international meeting in Addis Ababa.<sup>550</sup> At the end of 1965, Kitungwa and his friend Albert Kisonga, another dropout of the Athénée of Bagira –as we saw in chapter four –, decided to abandon the armed struggle. At that point, they were both based in Cairo, which had become the CNL’s informal headquarters. Kitungwa and Kisonga negotiated university fellowships for themselves at the East German embassy. In the end, they never went to Berlin: Kitungwa agreed to travel to Cuba on a mission for CNL and Kisonga joined the Eastern Front of the rebellion.<sup>551</sup>

While they never pursued their dreams of university education, Kitungwa and Kisonga’s attempts to secure East German fellowships demonstrate the porousness between the world of the rebel and the world of the student.

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<sup>549</sup> Erik Kennes, *Essai biographique*, p.89-92.

<sup>550</sup> Placide Kitungwa, “Les Lumumbistes ne voulaient plus être sous l’emprise du colonialisme,” Interview Radio Okapi, 26 June 2012.

<sup>551</sup> Albert Kisonga Mazakala, *45 ans d’histoire congolaise: L’expérience d’un Lumumbiste* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2005), p.100.

Other fighters followed the strategy of Kisonga and Kitungwa. In June 1968, for example, Joseph Sébastien Ramazani sent a letter together with a curriculum vitae to Belgian Maoist activists in the *Comité de Solidarité avec la Résistance Congolaise de Belgique*, asking for “a fellowship to study political sociology or international relations.” Ramazani was then a refugee in Khartoum. He was a former employee in the colonial post service in Bukavu who had served as Patrice Lumumba’s chief of protocol in July and August 1960. A relatively important figure during the more vibrant period of the rebellion in Eastern Congo in 1964, he had served as Minister of External Affairs in the first rebel government formed in Bujumbura in May, then as a “commissioner of state” in the Kivu, and finally as the “extraordinary commissioner for the liberated areas.”<sup>552</sup> As Ramazani stated in his letter to the Belgian Maoists in 1968, he was motivated to “do everything to strengthen my political knowledge” because the Congo needed educated militants. He clarified that his demand for a fellowship was not a sign of the “failure of Congolese revolutionary patriots’ armed struggle,” but instead “a new phase in the struggle against American imperialism in the Congo.”<sup>553</sup> When he wrote his letter asking for a scholarship, Ramazani was 43 years old. He had lived as an exile in Karthoum for three years and had the charge of 5 children. He might well have been sincere in explaining the reasons for his request. Yet, sincerity mattered less than efficiency. Ramazani, the former postman, was certainly aware of that nuance and of the politics of international letter writing.

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<sup>552</sup> In contrast with other rebel cadres, Ramazani developed a strong reputation of incorruptibility and led the struggle against abuses of power inside the rebel ranks: see Benoît Verhaegen, *Rebellions au Congo* (Brussels: CRISP, 1966), p. 435-441.

<sup>553</sup> Joseph Sébastien Ramazani, letter to Camarade Secrétaire du Comité de Solidarité avec la Résistance Congolaise de Belgique, 19 June 1968, Jacques Grippa Papers, CARCOB, Brussels.

Let us just consider a last example to bring a little more nuance to rebel activists' use of education as an exit strategy. In July 1965, Mario Tshabo Mukuna, trying to be as discreet as possible, visited the American embassy in Brazzaville on a few occasions. Tchabo (whose name the Embassy misspelled as Tshaibu) was a young Congolese, born in Luluabourg in 1938 (the Embassy's document stated 1941). He had travelled quite a lot in his childhood, followed his father, a Congolese medical assistant, to South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, where he studied in a missionary school managed by New Zealanders. In 1960, he moved to Leopoldville to finish his secondary school education. Taking the opportunity of a fellowship offered by the Soviet Union's Embassy, he became a student at the Patrice Lumumba University of Moscow in 1963. He stayed only one year in the Soviet Union before joining the CNL in Brazzaville in 1964. To the employees at the American Embassy, he claimed that he had left Moscow because of the racism of the Soviets and the "contradictions of the Soviet regime." He added that he only joined the CNL because he was afraid of being imprisoned if he returned to Leopoldville.

A year after joining the CNL, Tchabo was visiting American diplomats, trying to find a way out. Here again, postal efficiency – Tchabo wrote a letter to summarize his oral statement at the Embassy – trumped sincerity. At a first interview, he asked for scholarships for himself and four other students, fellow member of CNS, to study "in Washington or in New York." They all wanted to avoid going back to the Eastern block. Yet, when Tchabo came back for a second interview, his comrades had already left for China and Czechoslovakia. There was some urgency in taking a decision about Tchabo's case, as Gregory Gay, the acting public affairs officer who had interviewed him, wrote to



Washington. Gay's own opinion on the case was not very clear. He wrote that Tchabo's request "appears to be an eleventh-hour effort to extricate himself from communist clutches" and "that the question, therefore, can legitimately be raised whether the United States Government has any interest in extending a scholarship to a person who has strung along for so long with forces inimical to the interests of the US." Yet, the American diplomat added, it should be pointed out that Tchabo had "a considerably more varied and sophisticated background than most African students," that he appeared "to have grown up in an educated family," and that "in general, he gives the impression of being several cuts above the average."

This, however, did not convince Washington to offer a scholarship to the young Congolese. Or maybe, it was Tchabo's letter to the Department of State that failed him: It did contain a line about his patriotic ambitions – "after my qualification in the States, I may return home freely to help my nation and my people" – but no trace of a formal renunciation of his past revolutionary engagements and socialist leanings, in contrast to his reported conversations with Gregory Gay. The fact remains that, after that point, we find no trace of Mario Tchabo in U.S. diplomatic archives.<sup>554</sup> Like his comrades, he later left Brazzaville for the Eastern bloc, as socialist countries were convinced that the Congolese revolution needed more educated cadres. He studied Economics in East Berlin. As many other African students, he made extra money during the summer vacations by taking student jobs in West Berlin. There, in 1968, he met another young Congolese who studied Law in Poland and spent the summer in a student commune in

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<sup>554</sup> The copy of Mario Tchabo's letter as well as Gregory Gay's comments on his case, figure as a single document in U.S. diplomatic archives: "Request for US scholarship by Mario August Tshaibu, disaffected CNL member and former student at Patrice Lumumba University, Moscow," 1 Aug 1965, Central Foreign Policy Files 1964-1966, Box 375, NARA, College Park, MD.

Charlottenburg. They became very good friends, sharing a common passion for Lumumba and, despite some critiques on the strategy, the same attachment for the Mulelist revolution. At times when it was too late to cross back to East Berlin after a day of work and discussion, Tchabo slept over in his friend's commune in Charlottenburg. A few years later, he moved to Cologne and started a career as an accountant in a Ford factory.<sup>555</sup>

Universities served as exit destinations from the revolution. Yet, as we just saw with Mario Tchabo, students also travelled the other direction, leaving their studies to join the rebels. Most of them came from the Eastern bloc, where they studied with fellowships obtained in Stanleyville in 1960 and 1961. After the creation of the CNL, they moved back to Africa, growing the ranks of political exiles in Brazzaville. Etienne Mbala, a student at Charles University in Prague, became one of the main writers of the CNL's first manifesto. Jules-César Bombolo studied in Czechoslovakia, joined the CNL, and later became a rebel leader in Juba, when thousands of Congolese crossed to the Sudan at the end of 1964.

Zenon Mibamba also joined the nationalists, as we saw in the preceding chapter. After attending UGEC's second congress in Leopoldville, Mibamba was on his way back to Moscow, connecting through Western Europe, when Chinese agents were able to get in touch with him to inform him that he was expected in Brazzaville. From Brazzaville, Mibamba participated in several military operations on the other side of the river. He also worked as an ambassador for the revolution, travelling to China, North Korea, Cuba,

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<sup>555</sup> I exchanged a few emails and phone calls with Mario Tchabo in 2011. Unfortunately, we were never able to meet in person and conduct the interview that we had planned. He passed away on November 18, 2012. I am indebted to my uncle and Tchabo's friend in West Berlin, Grégoire Mukengechay, for information on Mario's travels and trajectory: Grégoire Mukengechay, personal interview, recorded, Berlin, 6 April 2011.

Egypt, and Algeria. Mibamba often accompanied Aboulaye Yerodia, a graduate of the Sorbonne and a former member of FEANF.

Finally, Antoine Mandungu (better known under his pseudonym, Tony Nyatti) and Thomas Kanza served as close collaborators to Christophe Gbenye, one of the politicians who fought over the leadership of the CNL. Mandungu was the former president of the Congolese Student Association in the Soviet Union, and Kanza – whom we met in previous chapters – was famous for having been the first (non-religious) Congolese university graduate in 1956.

These students and university graduates contributed to shaping CNL's orientation. It began with the ambition to profoundly alter the tactics of the nationalist opposition.

“We believe that either you are a revolutionary or you are not, but there is no intermediate formula,” wrote Thomas Mukwidi in a letter to Antoine Gizenga about the creation of the CNL. “The seriousness of the present situation demands concrete acts and not empty speeches. The time of armchair revolutionaries is over,” he continued. Exiled nationalists in Brazzaville acknowledged the “lack of political maturity” of their own movement. Their goal was to stop looking “ridiculous in the eyes of the whole world.”<sup>556</sup>

This entailed showing determination in the armed struggle, but also their mastery of the correct political vocabulary. As tutored cosmopolitans and, for some, as seasoned travelers, students weighed in on the ideological *aggiornamento* that the CNL ought to

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<sup>556</sup> Thomas Mukwidi, letter to Antoine Gizenga, 29 Aug. 1964, Gérard-Libois Papers, MRAC, Tervuren. When Mukwidi wrote his letter, Gizenga had then just been released from the prison island of Mbula-Bemba and he was soon to take the road of exile, to Egypt and the Soviet Union. Yet, directly after his release from prison, Gizenga had first announced the creation of a new party, the PALU or Unified Lumumbist Party, and his willingness to revive the opposition from Leopoldville. That position constituted an implicit disavowal of the CNL and armed struggle. Mukwidi's letter to Gizenga was a respectful but firm critique of the decision to stay in Leopoldville, as well as a defense of the CNL.

accomplish. They already announced the more radically poetic agenda of the Proletarian Fraternity that called for the construction of a “palace for the human family” and a revolutionary Eden in the Kivu, from where Congolese would show to “all the men of the black race” and to their “white and yellow brothers” the proletarian road to salvation.<sup>557</sup>

### *Dipanda*

While Mulele’s *maquis* in the Kwilu remained self-sufficient and survived without any foreign help, international connections became vital for Congolese exiles in Brazzaville. The very name of their platform, *Comité National de Libération*, deliberately referred to the Algerian FLN, and they soon became dependent on Cuban and Chinese support. In Brazzaville, the Lumumbists also benefited from the collaboration of local allies. The newspaper *Dipanda* (Independence), the self-proclaimed weekly of Congo-Brazza’s revolution, became the most visible source of support for Lumumbist refugees on the northern shore of the river. *Dipanda*’s founders – Ernest N’Dalla, Ange Diawara and Jean-Baptiste Lounda – formed the forefront of Brazzaville’s radical Left. N’Dalla, in particular, was close to the Lumumbists.<sup>558</sup>

*Dipanda* was the Marxist bridgehead in Brazzaville, attacking the Catholic Church, pushing for the new regime’s ideological radicalization, warning against counter-

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<sup>557</sup> Gérard Althabe, *Les fleurs du Congo*, p.66-71.

<sup>558</sup> After studying for several years first in Toulouse, where he had been an active member of the FEANF, and then in Moscow, N’Dalla returned to Brazzaville at the end of August 1963, two weeks after Youlou’s departure. He became one of the architects of the single party, the Revolutionary National Movement, and its youth branch. In Moscow, N’Dalla had become friends with many students from the former Belgian Congo. The speech that he delivered in the auditorium of the Lomonosov State University in February 1961, after the death of Lumumba, was one of the most memorable moments of his time in Moscow. After the speech, N’Dalla led the demonstration of African and Russian students to the Belgian embassy, where they burnt two cars: Etienne N’Dalla, personal interview, recorded, Brazzaville, 31 March 2010.

revolutionary threats, and publishing pieces on the African revolution, communist China, Vietnam, and racism in the United States. From October 1963 to December 1964, *Dipanda* released a great number of articles about the Congo-Leopoldville. N'Dalla often signed these texts, which always linked together the revolution that had overthrown Youlou in Brazzaville with the contest for power in Leopoldville. The articles attacked Kasa-Vubu, Tshombe, Mobutu, Nendaka, and Adoula. N'Dalla was not exactly sparing with criticisms. He used the metaphors of global Maoism, but also came up with his own calumnies, which illustrated the appetite for linguistic innovations on the two sides of the Congo River. He called Leopoldville's rulers lackeys, paper tigers, running dogs of imperialism, but also dollarized Africans, and anti-people crocodiles. *Dipanda* denounced the U.S. domination in Leopoldville. The newspaper praised Gizenga and Mulele as Lumumba's successors; and announced the coming solution to Congo's contradictions between its corrupted leadership and exploited workers through the purifying power of armed struggle.<sup>559</sup>

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<sup>559</sup> Articles about the rebellions and politics in the Congo-Leo published by *Dipanda* in 1963 and 1964 include: "Bas les mains devant le Congo-Leo" n.2, 2 November 1963, p.1 and 6; N'Dalla Graille, "Editorial: ne pas répondre à la courtoisie, par une courtoisie, c'est manquer de courtoisie" n.3, 9 November 1963, p.1 and 6; "Prise de position des partis nationalistes lumumbistes", n.4, 16 November 1963, p.5 and 6; N'Dalla Graille, "Le "Progrès" s'en va-t-en guerre" n.6, 30 November 1963, p.5 and "Libérer Gizenga" p.6; N'Dalla Graille, "Editorial: Vive le 4 janvier" n.11, 4 January 1964, p.2 and 6; N'Dalla Graille, "Editorial: Lumumba vécut, Lumumba vit, Lumumba vivra toujours" n.13, 18 January 1964, p.2 and N'Tary Balossa, "Sur les traces de Patrice-Emery..." p.6; "Les colonialistes anciens et nouveaux se disputent le Congo-Léo", n.15, 1 February 1964, p.4 and 5; N'Dalla Graille, "Editorial: Les temps sont durs" n.19, 7 March 1964, p.2; N'Dalla Graille "Editorial: Le 'Progrès' a une drole de logique" n.25, 18 April 1964, p.2-4; "Le peuple vaincra" n.26, 25 April 1964, p.3; "Le Prix d'un Empire" n.27, 2 May 1964, p.5-6; Jean-Baptiste Lounda, "Editorial: Illusions perdues" n.28, 9 May 1964, p.2 and N'Dalla Graille, "Kwilu, Kivu: Adoula, K.O." p.3; N'Dalla Graille, "Editorial: Ce qui est caduque doit disparaître" n.30, 20 May 1964, p.2-5 and "Le Congo de Kasavubu est-il en mesure de poursuivre les criminels?" p.5-7; N'Dalla Graille, "La contradiction Adoula-peuple congolais" n.31, 6 June 1964, p.2-4; August Ngampio "Un lecteur nous écrit de Banningville" n.33, 20 June 1964, p.3-5; N'Dalla Graille, "Sous le sigle de la révolution africaine," n.34, June 27, 1964, p.2-5; N'Dalla Graille, "Tshombe en échec"

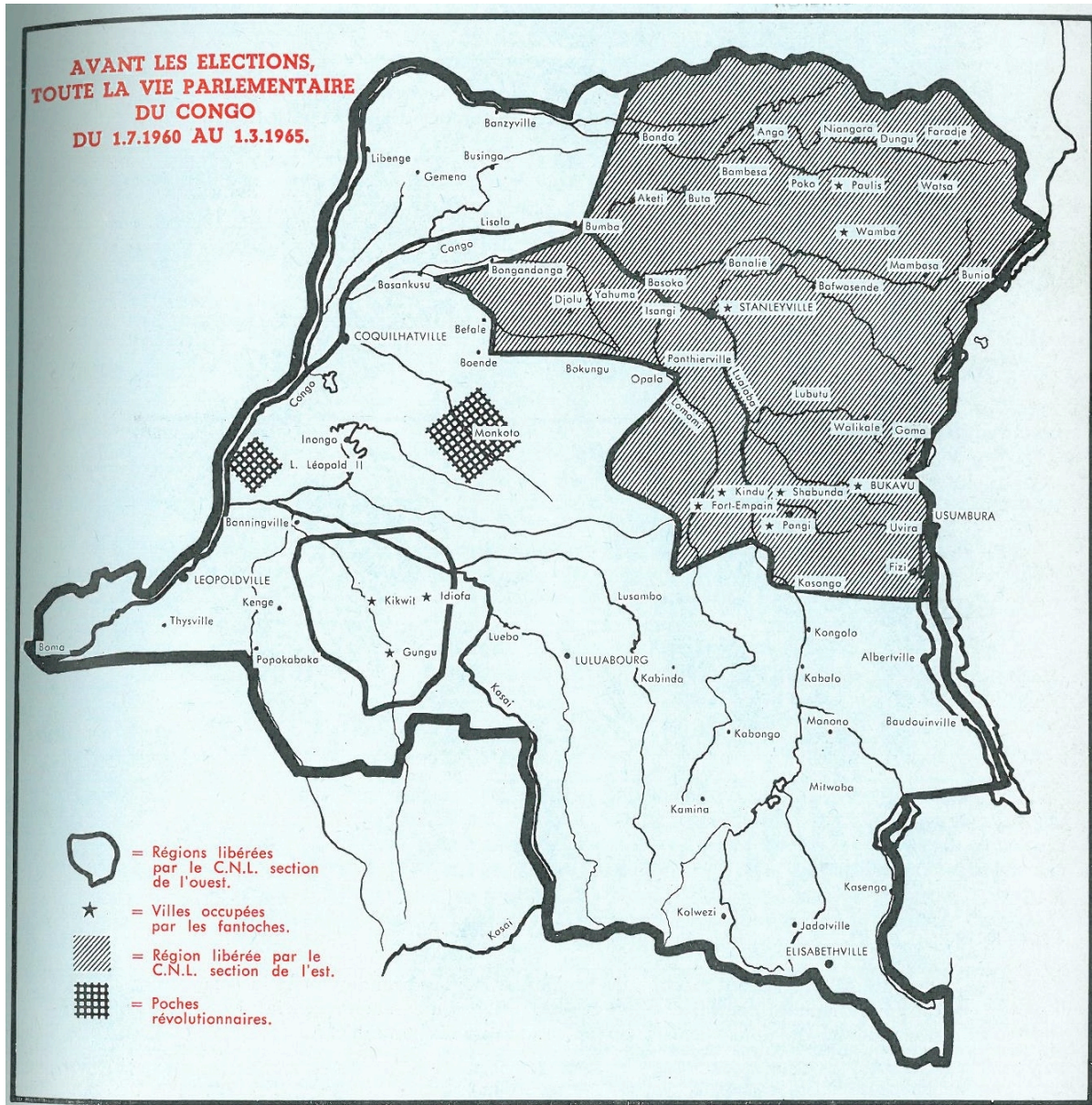
*Dipanda* was written by youth for youth, and clearly assumed an educational function. The newspaper published several longer pieces that attempted to mobilize young people in Brazzaville, and also in Leopoldville where it circulated clandestinely. These pieces included an article from the future Congo-Brazza president Pascal Lissouba on “the role of the intellectual in the avant-garde party” and a long speech by the country’s future prime minister and great novelist Henri Lopès on the decolonization of education and the question of cultural authenticity.<sup>560</sup> Abdoulaye Yerodia, the former FEANF activist and member of the CNL, also published several long articles that fulfilled the newspaper’s mission of political education. Yerodia wrote about the Berlin Wall, the Catholic Church’s social policies, underdevelopment, political economy, Fanon and Sartre, the role of ideas in the revolution, and “total liberation from social moral, and spiritual alienation.”<sup>561</sup>

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n.37, 18 July 1964, p.2-3; “Le chien Tshombe aboie, mais le peuple veille” n.42, 22 August 1964, p.1 and 4, and N’Dalla Graille, “Eh, Tshombe! Tu dérailles”, p.6; Tamango “Le Congo: Un nouveau Sud-Vietnam”, n.45, 12 September 1964, p.2 and 5; R.A., “Stanleyville ou une victoire à la Pyrrhus,” 12 December 1964, p.3.

<sup>560</sup> Pascal Lissouba, “Le role de l’intellectuel dans un parti d’avant-garde,” n.36, 11 July 1964, p. 2-5 and n.37, 18 July 1964, p.4-5; and in the same issue, Henir Lopès, “L’enseignement est notre alienation nationale,” p.6-8.

<sup>561</sup> Yerodia, “Conscience nationale et revolution,” n.16, February 1964, p.3-5 and n.17, p.5-7; “Idéologie et Révolution” n.31, 6 June 1964, p.5-7 and n.32, 15 June 1964, p.3.



**Figure 28: Map of the Congo. *Remarques Congolaises et Africaines* 238 (March 1965)<sup>562</sup>**

<sup>562</sup> The map represents, and slightly exaggerates, the state of the rebellion at the time. The zone at the South West of the country circled by a thick black line is the Kwilu; the description in the key reads: "Regions liberated by the CNL-West section." The grey area in the Eastern sector covers the Kivus, Maniema, Uele, the Oriental Province, and a part of the Equator; it was described as "Regions liberated by the CNL-East section." Several cities in that area, included Stanleyville, Paulis, Bukavu, Shabunda, Kindu and Shabunda, are represented by a star, and described as "Cities occupied by the puppets." The two smaller squared areas, described as "revolutionary pockets," were the zones of Bolobo and of Lake éLeopold II where CNL militants based in Brazzille tried to start a new *maquis* in support of Mulele.

## **The Revolution (II): From Stanleyville to Cairo**

“The leadership of the Congolese people’s struggle is presently studying its own inadequacies with the goal to surpass them and adapt to the new conditions. Divergences are at the center of these preoccupations, as well as the organization of the movement, internally and externally.”<sup>563</sup>

Brazzaville’s ferment of revolutionary ideas nurtured the CNL. Yet, ultimately the movement of opposition needed concrete victories on the ground in order to sustain itself. In January 1964, while Mulele was pushing his first major military offensive in the Kwilu, he sent Félix Mukulubundu to Brazzaville, with the goal of putting pressure on the CNL to join the armed struggle. By then the Lumumbists had broken into two camps, and Mukulunbu stayed to train the militants of the so-called Bocheley group, who were more attached to Mulele’s radicalism.

After two months of training, Mukulubundu coordinated several missions to open new fronts of the rebellion in different regions of the Congo. With the exception of an urban guerilla campaign that resulted in several bombings in Leopoldville in May 1964, these first missions all dramatically failed.<sup>564</sup> The CNL-Bocheley then established, with the help of Cameroonian and Angolan instructors, a second training camp, in Gamboma. In July, the group launched another short-lived attempt to launch a new front around Bolobo, in Equateur. The following month, they were a bit more successful in the area around Lake Leopold II, where they were able to maintain the embryo of an insurrection

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<sup>563</sup> I. Lukale, “Le développement de la lutte de libération nationale au Congo,” in *L’Eclair* 1 (June 1965), p.11.

<sup>564</sup> Ludo Martens, *Pierre Mulele*, p.305-308.



until June 1965, under the leadership of Thomas Mukwidi and Zénon Mibamba, among others.<sup>565</sup>

The Mulelists in Brazzaville considered Christophe Gbenye, the leader of a dissident wing of the CNL, a compromised character. They were particularly upset after Gbenye sent envoys to meet and negotiate an alliance with Tshombe in Spain, where the former president of Katanga had taken refuge after the failure of his secession.<sup>566</sup> The alliance never materialized: Belgium and the U.S. convinced Kasa-Vubu that Tshombe would be more efficient than Adoula in fighting the rebellion, and the former secessionist leader became the Congo's new prime minister in July 1964.<sup>567</sup> Meanwhile, Kabila, Soumialot, and other military operatives nominally associated with Gbenye launched the armed rebellion in Eastern Congo, recruiting numerous Simba fighters in areas where people had accumulated grievances against the state and its local representatives. Their success was phenomenal. Between February and August 1964, they conquered nearly two thirds of the country, including Northern Katanga, the Kivu and Maniema, and the

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<sup>565</sup> *Idem*, p.311-314.

<sup>566</sup> Gbenye and Tshombe signed an agreement to join forces. The terms of the agreement were quite surprising, considering Tshombe's reputation as Africa's conservative arch-villain. The two leaders based their collaboration on the struggle against neocolonialism and for African socialism, and they both swore to promote the nationalist principles defined at the second congress of UGEC. Archives Tervuren, and *Congo 1964: Political Documents of a Developing Nation, Compiled by CRISP* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p.137.

<sup>567</sup> Another secret meeting, which also later leaked and infuriated the radical wing of the CNL, was the meeting of Gbenye with the Belgian Premier Paul-Henri Spaak at the end of August 1964, just before Gbenye's arrival in Stanleyville. In the memorandum that Gbenye handed over to Spaak on the day of the meeting, the rebel leader appeared more than ready to accommodate Belgian interests and susceptibility, notably through praises for the Belgian colonial system. Gbenye assured Spaak that the CNL planned "not to destroy anything in order to rebuild" but instead "intends to improve what already exists. In this Belgium should have no fears." Moreover: "All possible guarantees will be given to foreign investors": "Draft Translation [of Christophe Gbenye's Memorandum to Paul Henri Spaak]," 22 Aug. 1964, RG 59 General Records of the Department of State / Records of the Bureau of Africans Affairs, 1958-1966 / Congo Kinshasa 1965-1966 / Box 23, NARA, College Park, MD.

former *Province Orientale*. In June, Mitudidi joined Kabila in Northern Katanga, hoping to bring more political orthodoxy to the Eastern rebellion. A turn in the Eastern offensive happened in September, when Gbenye moved to Stanleyville, which had been “liberated” by the troops of Soumialot a few weeks before, and he proclaimed himself president of the Popular Republic of Congo. Thomas Kanza acted as de facto itinerant ambassador for the new regime.

The flickering Popular Republic took the time, as we saw in chapter two, to produce stamps, letterhead papers, and a whole bureaucratic apparatus. The bureaucratic archive from the Popular Republic is composed of meeting minutes, inventories of office furniture and material, audience requests, money transfer orders, cv’s, and acknowledgments of reception. Officers in the Popular Army of Liberation (APL), ministers in the government, and a new nomenclature of civil servants wrote to each other cursive notes and typed letters on letterhead. They issued passes, regulations, and bylaws. Much more than in Mulele’s *maquis*, rebel authorities in Stanleyville played the card of legitimacy, respectability and hierarchy. They did so based on Gbenye’s strategy to secure international support among progressive African countries, and out of his ambition to reach, through negotiation and show of force, a prime position for himself in Leopoldville.

The Popular Republic’s focus on legalism and bureaucracy also betrayed its deep weaknesses. Mulele had theorized an armed struggle that would last for years and develop organically out of profound relationships with the masses. In the East, the revolution had spread like a bush fire. People in command only enjoyed a loose control over the Simba fighters. Rebel leaders constantly opposed each other. Corruption and

indiscipline were rampant. The paper trail of the Popular Republic served as a protection for some revolutionaries who felt threatened by the regime of arbitrariness and decentered violence in which they participated. It failed to bring about efficiency, but it sometimes succeeded in creating order.<sup>568</sup>

Despite the diplomatic success of Gbenye and the military advances of Kabila and Soumialot, the Popular Republic was short-lived. In order to prevent the collapse of Leopoldville and to liberate the thousands of whites who considered themselves hostages in the rebel territory, the U.S. authorities convinced the Belgian government to take the lead in two military operations – operation Red Dragon and operation Ommegang – that sought to take over Stanleyville and then “cleanse” the rebel areas.<sup>569</sup> On November 1964, the Congolese national army, together with Belgian officers and mercenaries of diverse origins entered Stanleyville. In a few weeks, nearly all of the Eastern front was wiped out, sending numerous Simbas into exile in Sudan, Uganda, and Burundi. Kabila’s *maquis* around Fizi, on Lake Tanganyika, remained one of the last rebel enclaves in Eastern Congo. As for Mulele, he was suffering from dissensions among his troops and losing a great number of insurgents who started to leave the forest camps en masse

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<sup>568</sup> The archive of the rebellion, and especially in Eastern Congo, often presents itself as the losing battle of the world of paper and order, on one part, and the world of brutality and disorder, on the other part. For examples of attempts by rebel officials in the Maniema province to tackle the issues of corruption, thefts, murders, sexual violence and rape, see Benoit Verhaegen *Rebellions au Congo* (Brussels: Crisp, 1966), t.2, p.405-460, 577-588, and 599-645.

<sup>569</sup> Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), p.70-75; Philippe Borel, “La politique belge à l’égard du Congo pendant la période des insurrections (1963-1964)” in Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, Alain Forest and Herbert Weiss (eds.), *Rébellions-Révolutions au Zaïre, 1963-1965* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1987), t.2, p.7-35; Frédéric Vandewalle, *L’Ommegang: Odysée et reconquête de Stanleyville, 1964* (Brussels: Témoignage africains, 1969).

because of unbearable material and sanitary deprivations and because of mounting pressure from the counter-insurgency.

The initial split between the Bocheley and Gbenye wings evolved into a multiplicity of competing groups, and foreign backers of the Congolese revolution were becoming increasingly vocal about the necessity to solve personal antagonisms. At the beginning of 1965, in a long letter later published in several foreign newspapers, a student who had joined the Eastern front – R.I. Lukale – launched an appeal to unify all the “patriotic forces” and called for a “meeting of revolutionary leaders, delegates from nationalist and democratic movements as well as delegates from the students.”<sup>570</sup> A conference was organized in April 1965. Close to 40 CNL activists gathered in Cairo in order to create unity among the nationalists.

As Sumbu noted, the conference had several goals: (1) To understand the mistakes that had been made before the fall of Stanleyville (Sumbu listed the absence of a real strategy of guerilla and revolutionary warfare, the missed opportunity to use the radio for the “education, mobilization, and orientation of the masses,” a general demagoguery in the chief revolutionary leader, and the weakness of the political training of the Simbas); (2) to incorporate the nationalist and anti-reactionary intellectual elite in the struggle, “without any ideological, ethnic or social consideration;” and (3) to unite the revolutionary forces and coordinate the guerilla troops at the national level.<sup>571</sup>

Not all the factions of the CNL were willing to participate in the Cairo conference, but financial pressures from foreign backers helped reach an agreement.<sup>572</sup>

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<sup>570</sup> “Les progrès du peuple congolais en armes,” signé par R.I. Lukale, n.82, 3 July 1965, p.2-5.

<sup>571</sup> Edouard-Marcel Sumbu, *Il sangue dei leoni*, p.60-61.

<sup>572</sup> Nasser was obviously well placed to influence the Congolese rebels’ discussion, but so was the Chinese embassy in Cairo which had given 50,000 dollars to Casimir Mbagira,

The conference mostly resulted in the creation of the CSR, or Supreme Council of the Revolution. The general presidency of the council was given to Soumialot; Mulele and Kabila were both named vice-presidents; and Abdoulaye Yerodia became the executive president of the council.

In the months that followed, the rebels on Lake Tanganyika received Chinese and Cuban material support. Ernesto Che Guevara and a group of highly trained Cubans joined the *maquis*. However, the rebels remained handicapped by organizational failures. During the six months that Guevara spent in Eastern Congo, Kabila remained most of the time in Tanzania, and Mitudidi, considered by Che as the most capable leader in the rebellion, drowned in Lake Tanganyika.<sup>573</sup> Meanwhile, in Cairo, the Lumumbists were once again fighting each other.

### **Upheaval in Cairo**

Paul Indongo was a direct witness of the CNL's self-destruction. In 1965, Indongo had been in Cairo for nearly three years. From Leopoldville, after a first year at Lovanium, he had obtained a scholarship to study in the United Arab Republic. Unaware that university education in Egypt would require a good command of Arabic, his only choice had been to opt for the study of Romance Languages once he arrived in Cairo. Indongo formed a local section of UGEC that united the small group of Congolese students in the city. Most of them became acquainted with Pauline Opango, Patrice

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Albert Kisonga, and Placide Kitungwa to organize the conference. The Vietnamese, Algerian, Moroccan and Angolan representatives in Egypt also put pressure on the Congolese for a reconciliation among the different factions within the CNL: see Albert Kisonga Mazakala, *45 d'histoire congolaise*, p.98-100.

<sup>573</sup> See Carlos Moore, *Castro, the Blacks and Africa* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1988), p.165-230; Erik Kennes, *Essai biographique*, p.158-186; William Galvez, *Che in Africa: Che's Congo Diary* (New York: Ocean Press, 1999).

Lumumba's widow, and her children. The Egyptian government housed the family in Zamalek, an affluent district of the city. Maman Pauline enjoyed the presence of the students and her house became a regular meeting point.<sup>574</sup>

Like many of his comrades, Indongo had chosen to study in Cairo for political reasons. He had been a self-proclaimed nationalist since 1958 when, still a student at the school of the *Frères des Ecoles Chrétiennes* in Coquilhatville, he distributed pamphlets for the MNC in Coquilhatville. When more members of the CNL started to arrive in Egypt after the fall of Stanleyville, Indongo and several other students diligently offered to help them, showing them around and assisting them in their militant activities by typing and correcting articles, letters, and minutes of meetings.<sup>575</sup>

A large number of Lumumbists remained in Cairo after the conference that created the CSR in April 1965. Strong enmities persisted between different personalities inside the rebels. The group around Soumialot gathered the factions that were still fighting in Kivu and from Brazzaville, and the group around Gbenye still had a great influence on the large number of Simba refugees in Sudan but was not engaged any more in active operations of armed resistance in Congo. While the tensions and accusations of betrayal persisted from both sides, all the rebels socialized with the Congolese students, and drank in the same places: the Lumumbas' villa, the apartment of a Congolese speaker at Radio Cairo, and the house of the Angolan MPLA delegation.

On September 1<sup>st</sup>, during a *matanga*, a ceremony of mourning, Martin Kasongo, a close ally of Soumialot, started to rail at Etienne Mbaya, a student from Gbenye's group.

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<sup>574</sup> Paul Indongo-Imbanga Isseewanga, personal interview, recorded, Berlin, 5 April 2011.

<sup>575</sup> According to the Congolese Army intelligence, there were 16 Congolese students in Cairo in 1965: *Armée Nationale Congolaise, Bulletin de Renseignements* 19 (7 September 1965), p.2, Gérard-Libois Papers, MRAC, Tervuren.

The argument developed into a fight and another rebel leader, Colonel Pakassa, stabbed Kasongo with a knife. The revenge came on the following day. Ali Jumaini, another member of the Soumialot's group, shot Pakassa dead and killed Michel Botike, a student who was not a member of either of the two major factions.

In a letter to Jules Chomé, the Belgian communist lawyer and editor of *Remarques Africaines*, Paul Indongo claimed that, just before the assassination, he was working with Pakassa on a call to all Congolese revolutionaries that sought to find another way out of the splits within the CNL.<sup>576</sup> The double murder produced, however, the reverse effect. The opposing factions were more divided than ever and the Egyptian government ordered the expulsion of most Congolese activists. Suspicious of the atmosphere of vendetta that continued to haunt the small Congolese community, Indongo left Cairo for Belgrade before finally settling in West Berlin in 1966.

After Mobutu's coup at the end of November 1965, many Simba refugees seized the opportunity of an amnesty to return to the Congo, and the leadership of the CNL remained totally divided. In June 1966, Thomas Mukwidi was in Havana to participate in the First Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America (also

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<sup>576</sup> See Paul Fernand [Indongo], letter to Jules Chomé, 18 Oct. 1965 and UGEC-RAU, letter to UGEC-Belgique, 10 Sept. 1965, Gérard-Libois Papers, MRAC, Tervuren. See also: Jules Chomé, "La mort du Colonel Pakassa," in *Remarques Africaines* 252 (November 1965), p. 16-19. Pakassa had been among the Congolese officers who remained faithful to Lumumba in September 1960 and then to Gizenga. In November 1961, he was in charge of the Lumumbist troops that killed nineteen European priests in Kongolo, in Northern Katanga. The episode was one of the most publicized moments of the Congolese crisis, but Pakassa was not held personally responsible for the massacre. Soon after, however, he was briefly imprisoned as a supporter of Gizenga. A member of the CNL, Pakassa was part of the Bocheley-Davidson wing, supposedly more in line with Mulele's radicalism. In 1964, he had been imprisoned during several months in France with Emmanuel Lonji. Before joining Cairo in the summer of 1965, he had been established in Sudan with other refugees from Stanleyville.

known as the Tricontinental Conference).<sup>577</sup> The strong celebration of armed struggle at the conference and the voluntarism of the Cuban leadership still probably stayed with Mukwidi when he conducted an auto-critique of the revolution, published as a short booklet in Brussels a few weeks after his departure from Cuba.<sup>578</sup>

Mukwidi listed the many mistakes of the past three years, with the hope that a stronger movement would emerge from the critique. The text condemned bourgeois tendencies among the leaders of CNL and a preference for international “revolutionary tourism” over actual engagement with popular classes on the ground; it also denounced a collective failure in mobilizing the masses and training a substantial number of cadres. Organization, through the mobilization of the masses and the creation of an avant-garde party, was presented as the most pressing issue. For Mukwidi, the CNL had neglected urban action in the past. Organizing workers and students was the only way to penetrate cities. “The avant-garde of mass struggle in cities,” students could open a new front in the struggle against the regime and infuse new blood in the revolution.<sup>579</sup>

Results on the ground did not really follow Mukwidi’s new action plan, even if new political formations emerged and attempted to embrace Mukwidi’s principles.<sup>580</sup> Small rebel pockets were able to maintain themselves in the East, including the ones controlled by Kabila, but all the fronts were nearly wiped out. A series of well-known rebel leaders, including Mukwidi and Bocheley, were killed in combat in 1967 and 1968. Forced to leave the Kwilu, Mulele resolved to travel clandestinely to Brazzaville in 1968.

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<sup>577</sup> On the conference, see Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007), p. 120-130.

<sup>578</sup> *L’An 3 de la Révolution Congolaise: Analyse des expériences et perspectives de la Révolution Congolaise* (Brussels: Livre International, 1966).

<sup>579</sup> *Idem*, p.22-23.

<sup>580</sup> Another impact of Mukwidi’s text can be seen, of course, in Edouard-Marcel Sumbu’s own reflections about the revolution: see Edouard-Marcel Sumbu, *Il sangue dei leoni*.



Leaving the *maquis* for the first time since its creation in 1964, he hoped to come back from Brazzaville with new fighters. After a few days in the city, Brazzaville's authorities convinced Mulele to return to Kinshasa. Mobutu had publicly promised to extend the amnesty to Mulele. However, Mulele and the militants that had crossed with him from Brazzaville, including Mibamba, were directly imprisoned and tortured on their arrival in Kinshasa. While Mibamba spent years forgotten in Mobutu's jails, Mulele was assassinated, together with Bengila, within hours of his return to the Congo.

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In May 1966, Thomas Kanza had decided to exit the revolution for which he had served as an ambassador in Kenya and elsewhere since 1964. His resignation letter to Gbenye mentioned personal grounds as the main motivation for his resignation. Kanza had decided to join Harvard University, where he planned a doctoral dissertation in Economics. However, Kanza also shared a political reason for his resignation in his letter to Gbenye. "The international context, and the African context in particular, has totally changed since 1964," wrote Kanza. The new international configurations condemned the chances of the armed insurrection in the Congo.<sup>581</sup> Several external events had indeed had repercussions on the Lumumbist camp in the last eighteen months, from the assassination of Malcolm X on February 21, 1965, to the overthrow of Ben Bella in Algeria four months later, and the coup against Nkrumah in Ghana on February 24, 1966.<sup>582</sup>

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<sup>581</sup> See: Thomas R. Kanza, "Congo, pays de surprises," in *Remarques Africaines*, n. 271 (25 August 1966), p.398-401.

<sup>582</sup> Algiers and Accra had been two leading powers that had organized the support of the Congolese rebels among African progressive nations. Malcolm X was not directly involved with the CNL. The Cuban author Carlos Moore's claim that Malcolm X was organizing an African-American brigade that would join the Congolese armed struggle seems quite dubious. Yet, his speeches confirm that the charismatic American was obsessed with Congo in the last months of his life. With his death, the Congolese lost someone who had greatly

Kanza was quite a divisive element in the CNL, accused by radical Lumumbists to be Gbenye's henchman, a spy for the West, a boastful university alumnus, and compared to a "contagious disease" that could only be resisted through an "intense ideological hygiene and political daily exercises."<sup>583</sup> Despite these attacks, the first Congolese university graduate continued to command the respect of many in the student movement. In March 1966, *L'Avant-Garde*, UGEC-Belgium's journal, still praised him as "a tireless, hardworking man who had never stopped sharing his opinion with the world and suggesting solutions to problems, either in Louvain, London, New York or even in the Congolese jungle." Kanza, *L'Avant-Garde* added, was "an example that our university students, and all our national intellectual elite in general, should follow in order to serve the nation in everything and everywhere."<sup>584</sup>

Kanza's resignation was therefore significant with regard to students' involvement in the revolution. It is not surprising that it had been motivated by changes in the international context, as students had been at the forefront in helping the Congolese rebels access a transnational militant sphere. Although many foreign observers claimed that the CNL had "no political program" and "vague slogans," Congolese rebels nonetheless made their struggle significant in Africa and globally.<sup>585</sup>

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contributed to shaping the international discourse on the significance of the Lumumbist struggle: see Carlos Moore, *Castro, the Blacks and Africa*, p.204; and Maning Marable, *A Life of Reinvention* (New York: Viking, 2011), p.36-37, 386-387, 394-396, and 401.

<sup>583</sup> "Le Conseil Suprême de la Révolution, le Général Olenga et le groupe Gbenye-Kanza," in *L'Eclair* 6 (November-December 1965), p.1-4 ; J.R. Benza "Jeunesse, A Toi le Dernier Mot," in *L'Eclair* 8 (February 1966), p.4-6; N'Zevu Zebula, "Les positions de l'UJRC. Faire la Révolution ou souffrir de la folie des grandeurs," in *L'Eclair* 9 (April 1966), p.3

<sup>584</sup> Justin-Marie Mbemba, "L'Universitaire Congolais," in *L'Avant-Garde* (March 1966), p.36-37.

<sup>585</sup> For American and British diplomats' judgments on the ideological confusion of the Congolese rebels and on their total reliance on "primitive African superstition," see Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p.62-65.

However, in its international relations, the CNL was the victim of repeated mismatches between needs on the ground and the type of support that foreign backers were ready to provide. Progressive African countries only really got behind the Lumumbists after they had lost their most important strategic position, after the fall of Stanleyville, and because of the spectacle of military operations which included American planes, anti-Castroist Cuban pilots, Belgian paratroopers, and white Rhodesian and South African mercenaries. The CNL was able to capitalize to a certain measure on the memory of Lumumba and on the Congo's geostrategic position in Africa and within the Cold War<sup>586</sup>. Che Guevara, not least, came to hold the conviction that the success of the Congolese rebels would open the entire continent to socialism. He was, however, not able to convince Southern Africa's liberation movements that their interest was to put all their efforts in the Congolese struggle.<sup>587</sup>

The failure of the secret Cuban "Patrice Lumumba Column" that Guevara led on the Eastern Front for more than six months in 1965 illustrated the weak connection, at that point, between the rebellion on the ground and the discourse that its publicists circulated abroad. Guevara's criticisms of Kabila's absences from the front are well known, but his Congolese diary revealed a general sense of alienation: strained oscillations in Guevara's own relationship with his Cuban volunteers, incommunicability with the Simbas, tensions between Rwandese and Congolese fighters, and finally the relative isolation of the Congolese leaders like Mitudidi.<sup>588</sup> The junction between

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<sup>586</sup> For the inclusion of the Congolese rebellion in a larger narrative about the Cold War, see Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.141-143.

<sup>587</sup> Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p.82-88.

<sup>588</sup> Ernesto Guevara, *Congo Diary: The Story of Che Guevara's Lost Year in Africa* (New York: Ocean Press, 2011), p.88-90.

intellectuals, politicians, rebel soldiers, and insurgent peasants remained imperfect. Together with the change in the rebellion's international support and the increased efficiency of the counter-insurrection, the growing distance between the intellectual construction of the movement from abroad and the reality of its deployment on the ground was one of the main reasons for the dislocation of the CNL in 1968. Regardless, the role of students and intellectuals remained a central feature in one of the greatest African upheavals of the 1960s.

### **The Avant-Garde**

“If the rebels are little more than unrelated bandit gangs hopped up with hashish and promises of loot with no one leader in control, why have they been able to pre-empt the word “nationalist” by which the rebels and their sympathizers are generally known in the Congo?”<sup>589</sup>

From Tony Nyaty to Abdoulaye Yerodia, and from Thomas Kanza to Zenon Mibamba and Leonard Mitudidi, students (in the then expansive understanding of that category) occupied front positions in the Congolese revolution. A few of them remade themselves into guerilla fighters, in the words that Edouard-Marcel Sumbu would later use in *Il Sangue dei Leoni*. They travelled on motor canoes, walked down forest paths, lived in temporary camps, learned arms drills, staged ambushes, suffered from privations, endured attacks from mercenaries and the national army, tended to the injured and the dead. They sometimes tried to teach rudiments of Marxism to local peasants, often became involved in infighting, and always witnessed the limits of theory, the

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<sup>589</sup> Curtis C. Strong, “United States Government Memorandum: Report on Trip to Congo, August 25-September 1964,” p.2, RG 59 General Records of the Department of State / Records of the Bureau of African Affairs, 1958-1966 / Congo Kinshasa 1965-1966 / Box 24, NARA, College Park, MD.

organizational weaknesses of the CNL, the lack of discipline and organization. These student fighters were revolutionaries in the full sense. By joining the *maquis*, they transcended their social class or, at least, renounced the promise of social elevation that was so central to their status as the nation's student fighters were revolutionaries in the full

Roger Imani Lukale was very much like the ideal revolutionary intellectuals sketched by Sumbu. A Congolese student in Belgium who joined the Simbas at the end of 1964, Lukale sent several articles from the Eastern front of the rebellion that were published in progressive newspapers in Belgium. His articles made the apology for revolutionary violence. Lukale opposed the image of the Simbas as “savages drugged by witches.” In his eyes, “superstitions” had been necessary at the beginning of the struggle when the Simbas were fighting with hardly any firearms against a modern army. Yet, Lukale announced, “rational and methodic use of the gun will chase the ignorance in the spirits of our fighting peasants.” This was where the importance of cadres in the popular army lay.

For Lukale, the long war that awaited the Congolese people was to be a transformative and educative experience from which all the aspects of the new society would emerge. “The concrete practice of the war opens new horizons to thousands of patriots who had never considered them. In the war, all have to make their brain work and imagine everything that can help the victory,” wrote Lukale. He continued his romantic representation of the experience of the front: “A frank collaboration develops and cements a real fraternity among the fighters. So many fighters died to allow others to keep fighting. From the smiling mouths of dying comrades, many have heard expressions of contempt for death, as well as testimonies of burning love for their brothers in arms

and for their people.”<sup>590</sup> In another article, Lukale praised the masses that had decided “to cast off the chains of slavery” as “thousands of patriots, adults, youth, old people, women and children who stand as the fingers of the same hand ready to strike hard.” The revolutionary war was noble, Lukale added, and it called for the intellectuals’ “humble supervision.” “With Lumumba’s thought as a basis and the revolutionary theory as a guide for our action,” Lukale wrote in one of his lyrical formulas, “we – as the sons of the Congolese people – will certainly overcome.”<sup>591</sup>

In his personal narrative of the rebel conquest and of the fall of Stanleyville, Edouard-Marcel Sumbu also praised the heroism of the Simbas through an exaltation of the struggle. Sumbu described several attacks of the Simbas with their machetes, bike chains and spears, as well as the clinches (*les corps à corps*) and close combat with the soldiers of the national army. He developed a circular logic, in which the blood of the lions (in the title of his book) asked for more blood and revenge. The text also explored the theme of martyrdom:

One of us said, “Nothing is more beautiful than dying like Lumumba and his comrades died by contribution to the elimination of the dictator in Leopoldville.” And this comrade died in the first hours of the battle that we fought on the next day. His name was Manala Gerard. He was a magnificent fighter, a brother in arms, with a sensitive heart, a lot of humanity, and the sense of duty.<sup>592</sup>

Not all students joined the front like Lukale and experienced the bonding of violence like Sumbu; others supported the revolution in a different capacity. They kept

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<sup>590</sup> R. Imani Lukale, “Plus que jamais, aujourd’hui le peuple congolais est déterminé à vaincre,” in *Remarques Congolaises et Africaines* 235 (3 February 1965), p.6-9.

<sup>591</sup> R. Imani-Lukale, “Message du front,” in *Remarques Congolaises et Africaines* 239 (31 March 1965), p.8-9. See also R. I. Lukale, “Le développement de la lutte de libération nationale au Congo,” in *L’Eclair* 1 (1 June 1965), p.3; and “Le peuple congolais lute pour le socialisme et le progres” in *L’Eclair* 3 (August 1965), p.5-13.

<sup>592</sup> Edouard-Marcel Sumbu, *Il sangue dei leoni*, p.39-40.

away from the blood and the mud. Very much the "revolutionary tourists" of Mukwidi's auto-critique, they acted as go-betweens and envoys of the CNL throughout the world. Take for instance Albert Onawelo, presented as Lumumba's brother (in fact, his nephew), and Daniel Roger Dykoka-Ngolo, both students in Moscow, who travelled to Rome in August 1964 at the invitation of Italian Christian Democrat activists, and gave a conference in support of the rebellion. The following day, their attack on Tshombe made the cover of three Left newspapers and gave way to a four-page confidential note by the first secretary at the US embassy in Rome.<sup>593</sup>

Yerodia is another good illustration of an intellectual who served the CNL as a "revolutionary tourist." During his two years as a "professional revolutionary," he travelled, to Cuba, North Korea, Algeria, Egypt, among other places, and one his last actions as a rebel leader was an interview with Mao Zedong in Beijing. Yerodia's involvement in the revolution did not demand a break from his status as a Western-educated university graduate. His contribution to the political struggle was just the continuation of his years of militancy in the Federation of African Students in France (FEANF).<sup>594</sup>

Many students, most of them based abroad, similarly served the rebellion in capacity of mediators. They did not rub shoulders with world revolutionary leaders, but they took part in public meetings, wrote letters, animated the revolutionary press, and

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<sup>593</sup> Alan Ford, "News Conference of Patrice Lumumba's Brother (Airgram to Department of State)," 12 Aug. 1964, RG 59 General Records of the Department of State / Records of the Bureau of Africans Affairs, 1958-1966 / Congo Kinshasa 1965-1966 / Box 24, NARA, College Park, MD. See also: Mario Galletti, "Sulla stiuazione nel Congo: Conferenza stampa di Albert Lumumba," in *L'Unità* 204 (30 July 1964), p.1.

<sup>594</sup> Aboulaye Yerodia, personal interviews, recorded, Kinshasa, 3 Dec. 2010 and 5 Aug. 2011.

fashioned themselves as the ambassadors of the revolution. Meanwhile, UGEC became involved, even if in complicated ways, with the CNL and the armed struggle.

After its second Congress, UGEC had consistently criticized Leopoldville's government and its repression of political dissent and uprisings. Early on, students criticized the state of exception, the criminalization of labor activism, and the hunting of nationalist politicians. "Arrests follow arrests at such a pace that we are all going to be picked up one after the other and the government will only face a lifeless mass," wrote UGEC activists in December 1963.<sup>595</sup> They were specifically reacting to the recent deposition and imprisonment of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Mabika Kalanda and to the dismissal of Henri Takizala, UGEC's honorary president, as vice-rector of the State University of Lubumbashi.<sup>596</sup>

For months, however, UGEC leadership failed to adopt a clear position vis-à-vis the armed struggle. The National Executive of UGEC published a first analysis of the rebellion on March, 2, 1964. The joint signers, André N'kanza Ndolumingu and Anatole Malu, presented the rebellion as a dramatic development that needed to be solved. However, their text focused almost exclusively on the negative role of the government in the events. N'kanza and Malu blamed local and national authorities for the rebellion, condemning again the ban on nationalist parties, the state of exception, the armed

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<sup>595</sup> "Communiqué de l'U.G.E.C./Belgique face aux derniers événements de Léopoldville," *Remarques Congolaises* 5-29 (14 Dec. 1963), p.475-476.

<sup>596</sup> As a graduate of Lovanium, Mabika Kalanda was acclaimed as a member of the student movement. As we saw, he had secretly met with Mulele in July 1963 and discussed with him different ways through which the rebellion could acquire firearms. His dismissal and short imprisonment did not happen because of these meetings with Mulele, but because of his alleged misappropriation of diamonds from Bakwanga and his deliverance of a passport to Moïse Tshombe: see Dikonda wa Lumanyisha and Daniel Mulomba, "L'arrestation du ministre des affaires étrangères du Congo M. Mabika Kalanda," in *Remarques Congolaises* 5-29 (14 Dec. 1963), p. 471-473.



repression against Mulelist insurgents and the “massacres of poor citizens.” UGEC leaders demanded the restoration of public liberties and reiterated their demand for the replacement of Adoula’s team by a government of public safety.<sup>597</sup>

The Lumumbists themselves repeatedly appealed for the support of the students. For example, the CNL manifesto of April 1964, written by Mitudidi and Mukwidi, made many references to the role of intellectuals in the revolution and praised the Congolese student movement, noting UGEC authorities for the rebellion, condemning the reputation of Congolese intellectuals by the General Commissioners in 1960, and publicly denouncing the repression of the revolution by Adoula’s government.

At the time, the CNL was in close contact with UGEC activists in Belgium, through Grégoire Dikonda wa Lumanyisha, the president of the Central Committee of UGEC/Belgium, who had travelled to Brazzaville early in 1964. Dikonda had been involved with the General Commissioners as the principal private secretary of the Commissioner for Public Works in 1960. In Brazzaville, he secretly helped Christophe Gbenye’s contacts with foreign supporters.<sup>598</sup> Back in Belgium, he continued to support the CNL, both publicly and covertly. In February 1964, Dikonda and other student activists organized to obtain the release of Emmanuel Lonji and Colonel Pakassa, two members of the CNL who had been arrested in France. Bocheley and Yumbu, from the more radical wing of the CNL, wrote to Dikonda to thank UGEC for this action, but they

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<sup>597</sup> André Nkzana-Dolomingu and Anatole Malu, “L’ugec et les événements du Kwilu,” 2 March 1964, Gérard-Libois Papers, MRAC, Tervuren.

<sup>598</sup> In their correspondances, Gbenye and Dikonda used pseudonyms and coded words, which prevents a clear understanding of who was the third party that Dikonda helped to connect with Gbenye. At the time, Gbenye was engaged in complex secret communications with Tshombe, as well as the Belgian and Soviet governments.

also pressed the students to take a stronger stand in favor of the CNL, and to consider joining the rebels in Africa.<sup>599</sup>

In April, Gbenye also wrote to Dikunda, asking him to share his letter to “all Congolese students abroad.” His message gave a brief history of the CNL, its creation in the context of state repression of the nationalist opposition, and its analysis of U.S. neocolonialism in the Congo. Like his rivals Bocheley and Yumbu, Gbenye tried to strike a sensitive chord with students by insisting on the patriotic dimension of CNL’s struggle. “Because of their high sense of Congolese nationalism,” Gbenye wrote, “students will relentlessly follow the noble mission in which we are currently engaged until we reach the total independence of our dear country.” In a gesture that obviously mimicked Mobutu’s call to intellectuals and the establishment of the General Commissioners’ government in 1960, Gbenye wrote that, once in power, he would put “all our national institutions’ controller levers into the hands of Congolese technicians, notably the students who are now slogging over school benches.” Gbenye added that this was the only way the Congo would finally gain its independence; that the students had showed their sense of responsibility at UGEC congress; and that the capitalist and bourgeois regime in place in Leopoldville was deliberately keeping the young intellectual elite at a distance from power.<sup>600</sup>

Student activists did not always meet the expectations of CNL’s leaders in terms of support and allegiance. They did not always abide by the CNL’s strategy and they

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<sup>599</sup> Bocheley and Yumbu to “Dear President” (president of UGEC a Bruxelles), 26 March 1964, Gérard-Libois Papers, MRAC, Tervuren.

<sup>600</sup> Christophe Gbenye, letter to Grégoire Dikonda wa Lumanyisha, 20 April 1964, Gérard-Libois Papers, MRAC, Tervuren.

criticized the use of violence in the rebellion.<sup>601</sup> However, the return of Tshombe in June 1964 and his replacement of Adoula as prime minister in July challenged UGEC's leaders to clarify their positions on the armed struggle. The new prime minister hired Ferdinand Kayukwa, UGEC's president, as one of his main advisors. The decision was quite surprising because Kayukwa was a former opponent of Tshombe and a former political prisoner in Katanga. Challenging Tshombe had led to Kayukwa's dismissal and replacement by N'Kanza Dolomingu at the presidency of UGEC.<sup>602</sup> After his surprising comeback, Tshombe courted other activists in the student movement. He promised to institute a technical council made of students and intellectuals. The role of the council would be to determine and orient the action of the government.<sup>603</sup> Yet few student activists followed Kayukwa and succumbed to the Katanguese siren's song. Quite the opposite. UGEC expressed its opposition to the return of Tshombe. The Union was particularly upset at his use of mercenaries in the repression of the rebellion. In July, *L'Avant-Garde*, UGEC's new journal, announced the radicalization of the movement and called for the purge of conservative and reactionary students.<sup>604</sup> In a press conference on August 26, N'Kanza publicly denounced Tshombe's politics of repression and collaboration with Belgium and the United States. A few days later, the government carried out the arrest of N'Kanza and of two members of Lovanium's student assembly:

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<sup>601</sup> Ludo Martens, a Belgian Maoist activist and historian of Mulelism, expressed very harsh, and slightly excessive, criticisms against Congolese students' lack of support for the rebellions. Martens denounced the students' hypocrisy: UGEC adopted the motto "all for the people and its revolution," but its position regarding the rebellion was a "critical support for some factions of the pro-imperialist bourgeoisie and hostility for the insurgent masses." Martens, p.293 and ff.

<sup>602</sup> Jean-Claude Willame, "The Congo," p.46-47.

<sup>603</sup> *Congo 1964: Political Documents of a Developing Nation, Compiled by CRISP* (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 1966), p.176.

<sup>604</sup> Jean Van Lièrde, "Union Generale des Etudiants Congolais," in J. Gerad-Libois (dir.), *Congo 1966* (Brussels: CRISP, 1967), p.86-87.

Hubert Makanda and Gerard Kamanda.<sup>605</sup> The three students were released after a few days in prison, but UGEC remained subject to censorship. To thwart that measure, the national executive council of the student union was transferred to the Belgian section of UGEC, where radicals had just taken control.

### **The Limitations of Student Activism**

The new leadership of UGEC in Belgium was determined to capitalize on the student union and its capacity to serve as a material and intellectual channel of communication between Congolese students in the Congo and abroad. These activists were willing to put the strengths of the student union more directly at the service of the Congolese revolution. Many of the new leaders of the Belgian section in September 1964 were part of a secret group called the Front of Congolese Patriots (FPC). The FPC had been created a few months earlier by Left students and supporters of the armed struggle and aimed at coordinating a strategy of entryism inside UGEC. Luc Dupire, a Belgian student at the Free University of Brussels, played a central role in the creation of the FPC. Dupire had befriended Congolese students with whom he shared a house during his first year at the University. The symbiosis with his Congolese friends was such that Dupire became a member of the local section of UGEC. In the summer of 1963, he travelled to the Congo, attended UGEC's second congress in Leopoldville, visited his friends' relatives in the Kwilu, and met several figures in the Congolese Left including future CNL leader Gaston Soumialot. After the creation of the FPC, Dupire became acquainted with Jacques Grippa, the leader of the pro-Chinese split of the Belgian Communist Party (BCP). In those years, Grippa was an important sponsor of the Congolese Left, including

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<sup>605</sup> *Congo 1964*, p.438-439.

UGEC and the CNL, and he offered his help to the FPC. Dupire soon started to write in the BCP's newspaper *La Voix du Peuple*, becoming a member of the party's Central Committee in 1967.<sup>606</sup> Dupire also became involved with the Committee of Solidarity with the Congolese Resistance (CSRC), presided by the old Baron Allard, the private secretary of Queen Elisabeth of Belgium, and composed of labor activists, members of the Communist Party, and figures of the resistance against German occupation.

Most of the students in the newly elected committee of UGEC-Belgium in September 1964 belonged to the FPC, including the new president Oswald Ndeshyo, Pontien Tshilenge, Francois Beltchika, and Theo Tango. In November, at the moment of the military operation against Stanleyville, Ndeshyo, Thilenge, Beltchika and Tango organized a public meeting in Brussels to denounce Belgian participation in Congolese affairs. They circulated a long text that detailed their recriminations, which was then distributed as a pamphlet by the pro-Chinese Belgian Communist Party.<sup>607</sup> The language of the text was rather harsh, denouncing the racism and the violence of Belgian-American military operation and of the foreign mercenaries. The student activists totally supported the legitimacy of the rebellion, arguing that the Congolese revolted against the corruption and misery of the four previous years and were not following orders from China. They

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<sup>606</sup> At the time, the pro-Chinese CP was itself the object of conflicts and dissensions between Grippa, recently disavowed by Mao, and the supporters of the cultural revolution, who ended up creating their own groups. Dupire remained faithful to Grippa through the different splits, until his own withdrawal from active politics around 1970. Throughout his political activities in the 1960s, Dupire carefully wrote down notes on a great number of people, including many Congolese, and he accumulated a very large collection of letters, pamphlets and books linked to his political activities in the 1960s. In recent years, he has put most of that collection up for sale on different websites, using his notes to write long descriptions of each item. Grippa

<sup>607</sup> Published under the title: "Un courageux communiqué de presse de l'Union des Etudiants Congolais;" Nov. 1964, Georges Pétré Papers, CARCOB, Brussels.

also questioned the real motives in Belgian participation in the counter-insurgency and suggested that the operation endangered the white population that it claimed to rescue.

Under the pressure of Tshombe, and also in an attempt to answer the increasing radicalization of Congolese students in Belgium, the Belgian government of Paul-Henri Spaak decided to suspend its fellowships to UGEC activists and arrest Ndeshyo and Tshilenge, with the intent to deport them to the Congo. Belgian students organized protests to avoid that measure, and the government finally agreed to expel the two Congolese student activists to Algiers instead of Leopoldville. Ben Bella greeted Tshilenge and Ndeshyo in Algeria and the National Union of Algerian Students offered them support to continue their university education in that country.<sup>608</sup>

The Belgian and American military intervention was a global media event, making the headlines in newspapers throughout the world. The Congo was a main point discussed by the International Union of Students (IUS) during its eighth congress. Held in Sofia from November 28 to December 7, 1964, the Congress voted several resolutions on the Congo and hailed UGEC activists as part of the Congolese patriots who “are carrying an active struggle against American aggression.”<sup>609</sup> The Chinese delegation introduced a “statement of protest against the imperialists’ armed aggression against the Congo (L)”; and the delegation of the Flemish student association added a couple of sentences about

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<sup>608</sup> Oswald Ndeshyo, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 7 June 2010; and “UGEC discusses the Congo,” in *World Student News* 19, 1-2 (1965), p.10-12.

<sup>609</sup> “Report of the Executive Committee of the IUS on the experiences and the development of the international student movement in the fight for world peace, against imperialism, colonial and neocolonialism, for national independence, democracy and world student unity,” 7 Dec. 1964, p.25, IUS Papers, IISH, Amsterdam.

the fate of Tshilenge and Ndeshyo.<sup>610</sup> Several African delegations introduced separate statements that strongly insisted on the continuity between Lumumba and the CNL.<sup>611</sup>

In December 1964, UGEC-Belgium released another statement to the press that basically repeated the arguments that had been defended by Ndeshyo and Tshilenge in November.<sup>612</sup> In the months that followed, the student union continued to voice its opposition to the regime of Moïse Tshombe. However, the student union's action was greatly affected by tensions and infighting. In Belgium and France, factions appeared inside UGEC that contested the radicalism of the previous months and claimed a more conciliatory tone vis-à-vis Tshombe.<sup>613</sup> In East Germany, tensions occurred between students who preferred to adopt a more distant approach to the rebellion and others who urged a direct and intense collaboration with the CNL and the armed struggle.<sup>614</sup>

The Executive Committee of UGEC-Belgium, still representing the whole movement after the censorship of the Congolese branch, proclaimed its commitment to the creation of "a Congolese youth, freed from colonialist depersonalization, and independent from any religious, tribal or philosophical dependency that would not account for the affective Congolese realities."<sup>615</sup> However, the signs of an internal crisis appeared half-veiled in these statements, with references to "cowardly students' panic

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<sup>610</sup> "Amendments to be inserted into the statement of protest of the 8<sup>th</sup> IUS Congress against U.S. Imperialists' armed aggression against the Congo (L)," Dec. 1964, IUS Papers, IISH, Amsterdam.

<sup>611</sup> "Draft Resolution on Congo Leopoldville," Dec. 1964, IUS Papers, IISH, Amsterdam.

<sup>612</sup> "Communiqué à la presse des étudiants congolais devant l'aggravation de la situation au Congo" in *Dipanda*, n.56, 12 December 1964, p.8

<sup>613</sup> See "Informations de l'U.G.E.C.," in *Remarques Congolaises et Africaines* 236 (17 February 1965), p.5-9.

<sup>614</sup> "U.G.E.C.-R.D.A., A la bonne attention de tous étudiantes et étudiants congolais membres de l'Union Générale des Etudiants Congolais," in *Remarques Congolaises et Africaines* 241 (28 April 1965), p.21-22.

<sup>615</sup> "L'U.G.E.C. continue...," in *Remarques Congolaises et Africaines* 241 (28 April 1965), p.11.

after the deportation of Ndeshyo and Tshilenge,” the continuous censorship in Leopoldville, and the “alienation of some of our comrades to the cause of neocolonialism.”<sup>616</sup>

François Beltchika avoided deportation in 1964 and then became one of the main animators of UGEC-Belgium. He belonged to the radical wing of the student association.<sup>617</sup> As the chief editor of *L'Avant-Garde*, UGEC-Belgium's journal, Beltchika published articles criticizing the denial of African-Americans' civil rights or calling for a real African unity. Yet, the revolutionary war in the Congo was much less present in UGEC's discussions.<sup>618</sup> UGEC remained attached to political radicalism throughout 1965, but it increasingly turned inwards and focused on the organization of its own movement, notably in preparation of its upcoming third Congress, rescheduled for the beginning of 1966. Gérard Buakasa, a sociology student and the former president of UGEC at the University of Louvain, attempted to review the problems of the Congolese students:

Those who yesterday were on the Left are today on the Right; those who were on the Right say they underwent a conversion and are now on the Center... To make fun of us, European “Africanologists” mention “bantu logic” as the reason for these confusions and changes.<sup>619</sup>

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<sup>616</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>617</sup> François Beltchika was the son of Liévin Kalubi, the former seminarian who had been accused of masterminding the so-called conspiracy of 1944 in Elisabethville. The family had been forced to relocate several times because of the repressive measures taken by the colonial administration against Kalubi. After the independence, Kalubi became a top civil servant in the ministry for Foreign Affairs, and send his children to Belgium. A university student, Beltchika was in charge of taking care of his younger siblings who were studying in secondary schools there: François Beltchika Kalubye, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 22 July 2011.

<sup>618</sup> See François Beltchika Kalubye, “Allocution d’ouverture aux journées d’études de l’Union Générale des Etudiants Congolais – section Belgique,” 27 March 1965, Grippa Papers, CARCOB, Brussels.

<sup>619</sup> Gérard Buakasa Tulu Kia Mpansu, “Plan pour l’organisation et l’éducation au sein de l’U.G.E.C.,” in *Remarques Africaines* 254 (Dec. 1965), p.18-22.



Buakasa who, as a scholar, worked on the question of cultural authenticity, condemned the “mental alienation” of Congolese students, reduced to become “the rot of a vulgar and bourgeois materialism.”<sup>620</sup> Inside UGEC, “reactionary forces threatened to overthrow the ruling active and progressive nucleus.” It was urgent then to reinforce the political and ideological capacities of progressive students and to isolate the reactionaries in the movement. Buakasa advocated for the creation of “central schools” to train the student cadres inside UGEC, and he gave some guidelines about the possible curriculum – a focus on Congolese society and its contradictions, the African and avant-garde political doctrines, and the history of the international student movement. His conclusion advocated for the withdrawal of the student movement until the end of the training period of its cadres: “I suggest that during three years,” he wrote,

We focus exclusively on the organization and reinforcement of our movement through the education and persuasion of our members. To do only that during three years, and nothing about any problem external to the movement. Let’s build first a strong UGEC before involving ourselves in political adventures. No more inconsiderate public statements, but action inside the movement. After three years, we will be able, thanks to our cohesion and our progressivism, to take care confidently of our society’s problems.

Buakasa’s militant moratorium was a rather audacious suggestion. Yet, the most radical critique of the student union was pronounced by Kalixte Mukendi wa Nsanga, the president of UGEC-FRG. In April 1965, Mukendi hosted Congolese students from all over Europe in Cologne, where he was a student at the Institute for Geography.<sup>621</sup> The

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<sup>620</sup> *Idem*. Buakasa published the result of his research on alienation and authenticity much later: see Gérard Buakasa, *Réinventer l’Afrique: De la tradition à la modernité au Congo-Zaïre* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1996).

<sup>621</sup> Mukendi wa Nsanga had started his university education at Lovanium in 1958. In Leopoldville, he became involved in the youth movement of Lumumba’s MNC. Introduced to Belgian communists by Antoine Tshimanga, Mukendi secured two fellowships: one to study in West Germany and another for East Germany. He chose the former and moved to Cologne

gathering was yet another meeting in preparation for the upcoming UGEC's congress. Mukendi's opening intervention was harsh.<sup>622</sup> He accused the student organization of having been unable to accomplish anything of service to the Congolese people. "How could the Congolese people trust our movement," Mukendi asked, "when the latter seem only seem to care about the former through writing a few articles meant to help their authors sleep at night and that have for unique effect to contribute to the general slumber."

For Mukendi, several reasons explained UGEC's ineptitude to reflect on its principles: the poor political formation of its members; their naiveté with regards to the ravages of US imperialism in Congo, Vietnam, and elsewhere; their individualism and "mad quest for pleasures." Another UGEC problem was that it officially adopted socialism as its favored political option, but failed to qualify it.<sup>623</sup> "We all know," Mukendi noted, "some 'socialisms' that commend and enforce capitalist exploitation and

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in 1960. It is Cologne that he defended his dissertation on Katanga's mining towns and obtaining his Ph.D. After working briefly for GECAMINES in Katanga in 1969 and 1970, Mukendi wa Nsanga moved to the United States, working as a visiting professor in different universities, including the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, Hampshire college, and Frisk University: Mukendi wa Nsanga, phone conversation, unrecorded, 14 Sept. 2013.

<sup>622</sup> Mukendi wa Nsanga, "L'U.G.E.C. porte-t-elle l'espoir du peuple congolais déçu? Nos principes et méthodes de travail" in *Remarques Africaines* 244 (9 June 1965), p.23-28.

<sup>623</sup> As a matter of fact, the type of socialism needed in the Congo had been widely discussed in student circles. Several Catholic students became proponents of "African socialism," while their comrades on the Left denounced it as a "reactionary ideology," see for example: Benoît Verhaen, "Socialisme, mais lequel?" in *Présence Universitaire* 7 (1961), p.19-24 and B. Kalonji, "Conscience nationale et développement," in *Présence Universitaire* 11 (1963), p.17-22. At the occasion of a conference organized by the Jesuits in Louvain on the topic in 1963, Gérard Buakasa, one of the leaders of UGEC in Belgium, formulated a definition of African socialism as the extension of the clan system to the level of the nation and as the end of all oppression. His definition also deeply linked the issue of socialism with Christianity, as other participants in the conference had done, but his formulation suggested a slightly more radical Africanization of theology: Gérard Buakasa, "Nation Congolaise et responsabilités de l'indépendance," in René Beckmans (ed.), *Voies Africaines du Socialisme* (Léopoldville: Bibliothèque de l'Etoile, 1963), p.148-158. In 1966, Guy Debord also took a position on the issue in his theses on the Congolese revolution. His point of view was rather iconoclastic, however.

its consequence, imperialist expansion.”<sup>624</sup> The members of UGEC should turn towards the study of Marxism and make sure that the Union was not accepting any members who did not adhere to its principles. What was preventing any significant action, Mukendi argued, was UGEC’s “ultra-democratism,” which he defined as the search for consensus, neutralism, and the fear to offend political opponents.

The reform suggested by Mukendi was as unrealistic as Buakasa’s years of political abstinence. At the same time Mukendi organized the Cologne gathering, he came to the conclusion that it would be impossible to reform UGEC. Under the pseudonym of N’Zevu Zebula, he was busy organizing a distinct, underground group, the Congolese Revolutionary Youth Union (UJRC), which was to become the more combative and militant organization he called for in Cologne.

### **Frontline Intellectuals**

“There are universities in Léopoldville, Dakar and Algiers, where we could pursue our education in an African context, but, in their project to create a class of traitors, imperialists want to cut us from our African brothers”<sup>625</sup>

The idea for a more radical group outside of UGEC emerged when Dupire got acquainted with Mukendi in the summer of 1964. The Belgian member of UGEC was then in Cologne to learn German, but he spent most of his time discussing Congolese politics with his new friend. In January 1965, the two comrades travelled to Algiers to share their project with Ndeshyo and Tshilenge. On their return to Western Europe, they started to develop the organization. The Congolese Revolutionary Youth Union( UJRC)

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<sup>624</sup> Mukendi wa Nsanga, “L’U.G.E.C. porte-t-elle l’espoir du peuple congolais déçu?” in *Remarques Africaines* 244 (9 June 9 1965), p.26.

<sup>625</sup> “La vie des étudiants en Belgique,” in *L’Eclair* 9 (April 1966), p5-6.

was a clandestine group, subsidized by the pro-Chinese Belgian Communist Party of Jacques Grippa, and unambiguously supporting the armed struggle in the Congo.

Mukendi wa Nsanga served as the secretary of the union's central committee.

Segmentation and secrecy impeded the growth of UJRC beyond a disparate set of a few loosely connected cells. The total number of actual members is difficult to assess, but it certainly did not exceed a few hundred young Congolese spread over Europe and Central Africa. Yet, the group had, in the mid-1960s, a much deeper and stronger impact than UGEC and its thousands of members. Working underground, UJRC was not restrained by censorship or self-censorship. It fully embraced the cause of the Congolese revolution, which was impossible for groups operating in the open in Leopoldville or Brussels. UJRC enjoyed regular exchanges and claimed the memberships of CNL activists on the front and in exile, such as Roger Lukale and Zenon Mibamba. Constantin-Marie Kibwe, a prominent member of the CNL and the editor of its newspaper *La Revolution* was another regular correspondent of UJRC. Two members of the group, J.R. Benza and Symphorien N'Kita-Kabongo, both of them students in Economics at Humboldt University, travelled to Cairo just before the assassination of Colonel Pakassa, and then, through Tanzania, they reached the Eastern Front of the rebellion where they stayed for six weeks.

The mutual impregnation of UJRC and CNL activists culminated in February 1967, when Luc-Daniel Dupire and Théo Tango of the Belgian section of the underground student group travelled to Rome in the company of Jacques Grippa. The trio had arranged a meeting with Kibwe, Mukwidi, and Emmanuel-Willem Kabasubabo, another member of the CNL, who were all in transit in Italy after a visit to Tirana. The

stopover in Rome served to further discuss with the UJRC activists the creation of a Congolese Communist Party that the Albanians were interested in helping to emerge. Tango and other radical students were determined to join the party and move to the front. However, the plan never concretized. Instead, UJRC and the rebellion both disintegrated by the end of 1967.<sup>626</sup>

UJRC was less a united organization than a label. By compartmentalizing its different cells, UJRC remained simply a name, freely appropriated by small radical study groups in the Congo and, more significantly, in Europe. A group of Congolese progressive students in Lyon, for example, adopted the name and decided to create a local cell of the organization. Members of the group included Elikia M'Bokolo, Jean-Marie Mutamba, Michel-Ange Mupapa, Jean-Patchounga, Albert Mbeti, and Raphael Ntiwisi. Mupapa was corresponding with other cells of UJRC. Yet, with the use of pseudonyms, he was quite unsure of the real identity of the people he was writing to.<sup>627</sup> The cell in Lyon was foremost a group of friends. Talking about the apartment that Mupapa, Mutamba and Mbeti shared and that became a gathering place, Elikia M'Bokolo evoked a “student commune.”<sup>628</sup>

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<sup>626</sup> Tango ultimately returned to Kinshasa in 1969 and joined Mobutu's MPR. He died the following year in a car accident. Mukwidi was killed in June 1967 while he was leading the “Patrice Lumumba column” of the Congolese Communist Party that attempted to join Mulele's *maquis* from its base in Congo-Brazzaville. Kibwe and Kabasubabo continued to operate armed operations in Eastern Congo (notably on the Congo-Angola border, around Beni and Butembo). In 1977, they joined Laurent Désiré Kabila's Party of the Popular Revolution. Captured by Mobutu's troops in 1978, Kibwe died at the Luzumu prison in the Bas-Congo in 1982. See: Erik Kennes, *Essai biographique sur Laurent Désiré Kabila*, p.234-235; and Benoît Verhaegen, *Mulele et la révolution populaire au Kwilu*, p.344-345.

<sup>627</sup> Michel-Ange Mupapa, personal interview, recoded, Kinshasa, 11 July 2011. To furthermore illustrate the tenuous character of the links between UJRC's “cells,” Luc-Daniel Dupire, who was at the center of the group, had no recollection of the Mupapa's group: Luc-Daniel Dupire, personal interview, unrecorded, Brussels, 17 Aug. 2012.

<sup>628</sup> Elikia M'Bokolo, personal interview, unrecorded, Kinshasa, 12 July 2010.

UJRC was a rather loose marker for the group. Its members were socialized in several other venues. Mupapa, to take one example, was very active in the FEANF and had several close friends in the French Youth. However, the elusive affiliation with UJRC was no less important. It helped these young men, most of whom had left the Congo when they were teenagers, to experience a strong connection with the Congo and its growing diaspora. More specifically, while they were progressively evolving towards French Maoism, UJRC allowed these young Congolese to imagine themselves as part of the nationalist armed struggle. When Elikia M'Bokolo was admitted to the prestigious Ecole Normale Supérieure, the group's center of gravity moved to Paris. There, they entered in contact with Abdoulaye Yerodia, back in France after the failure of the Mulelist rebellion. The direct contact with Yerodia and with radicalized French and foreign students at the Ecole Normale and the Cités Universitaires of Paris, and the events of 1968, strongly molded the politics of Mupapa, M'Bokolo and their comrades. Still, a few years before, UJRC had been pivotal in placing them on a leftward trajectory.

The significance of UJRC lay in its impact on the imagination of young Congolese, in the country and in the "student diaspora." *L'Eclair*, the group's journal that Dupire edited under the pseudonym of Musenga-Banza, was the main vehicle for this work of imagination. The propaganda of the journal was at the origin of the spontaneous creation of UJRC's local chapters by young Congolese students like Mupapa and his friends. Dupire and Mukendi conceived *L'Eclair* as UJRC's fighting newspaper (*organe de combat*). The journal created a community that reached beyond the clandestine cells and was the material support that allowed remote students to project themselves into the struggle for the second independence.

## **L'Eclair**

At the level of work in print, UJRC flourished. From June 1965 to April 1967, Dupire and Mukendi published twelve issues of *L'Eclair*, between 30 to 50 pages each, with a distribution of several thousand. The journal had a fictive address in Northern Katanga but invited its readers to send their communications to a PO box in Italy. Italian communist activists were in charge of collecting the postal dispatches and of rerouting them to Dupire, who used the maiden name of his maternal grandmother for his own PO box. The journal requested contributions from its readers. "Your articles, your information, all your news about every aspect of our revolutionary struggle," the editors enthusiastically declared, "must pile up on our desk."<sup>629</sup> URJC assigned a personal identification number to each of its correspondents and the journal used that number, instead of pseudonym, when publishing letters from its readers. Allies of the Congolese struggle, communist and third-worldist activists, wrote to express their support from Albania, Belgium, Mali, Togo, Cameroun, Burundi or Sierra Leone. Most of the published letters, however, came from young Congolese – including, rare in the written archive of the Congolese Left, two letters in Lingala.

The majority of letter-writers were students, but a few labor activists were also published. They were writing from different cities in the country and from a multiplicity of foreign locations in Belgium, France, Italy, Poland, East and West Germany, Hungary, the Soviet Union, Algeria, Congo-Brazza, and Tanzania. With a couple of exceptions, *L'Eclair* published only short extracts from the letters it received. These bits of correspondence were expressions of support for the journal and professions of faith in the

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<sup>629</sup> "Editorial," in *L'Eclair* 3 (August 1965), p.1.

struggle. “We will explain to the masses the teachings that we will read in *L’Eclair*,” a student from Lubumbashi wrote. “And we ourselves will become the books in which these popular masses will learn many things.”<sup>630</sup>

Published letters mapped out an otherwise invisible and transnational space of protest. Readers at home and in the diaspora were able to see the reflection of their political inclinations in the writings of others from both sides of the divide. *L’Eclair*, its editors claimed, was also the junction between “studying comrades and comrades at the front.”<sup>631</sup> The journal did indeed count many pages of “news in brief” about the different fronts of the armed struggles, as well as a section called “On the side of the Puppets” (*Du côté des fantoches*) that detailed the most recent political intrigues in Leopoldville.



Figure 29: *L’Eclair* 10 (May-June 1966), cover

<sup>630</sup> “Le Courrier,” in *L’Eclair* 10 (May-June 1966), p.3.

<sup>631</sup> “Editorial,” in *L’Eclair* 3 (August 1965), p.1.



*L'Eclair* operated in a bi-directional mode. Information was moving from the front to Europe in the form of letters, statements, photographs, and manuscripts.<sup>632</sup> It came back to Africa in the form of the printed journal. That type of circulation between people at the front and people at the rear was crucial in UJRC's self-perception. Yet, the journal's significance was even more evident in the autonomous role that it occupied, as Edouard-Marcel Sumbu, the CNL representative in Cuba, intuited when he envisioned the importance of the students' contributions to the global front of propaganda and communication with international allies, an insight with which we opened this chapter. As the editors wrote in a "note to our readers," whom they described as "fighting young revolutionaries, soldiers, workers, students and schoolchildren," *L'Eclair* was "fighting on the front of information."<sup>633</sup> With its journal, UJRC extended the combat zone of the revolution. The group therefore situated itself as an equal and not subaltern vis-à-vis the CNL.<sup>634</sup>

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<sup>632</sup> Featured articles from the front notably included pieces by Roger Imani Lukale from Uviar and travel narratives from Benza and N'Kita-Kabongo: I. Lukale, "Le développement de la lutte de libération nationale au Congo," in *L'Eclair* 1 (June 1965), p.3; Imani Lukale, "Le peuple congolais lute pour le socialisme et le progrès sous la conduite du conseil suprême de la révolution" in *L'Eclair* 3 (August 1965), p.5-13; "Deux Etudiants Révolutionnaires visitant un Territoire Libéré," in *L'Eclair* 5 (October 1965), p.1-3; J.R. Benza, "Jeunesse, à Toi le Dernier Mot," in *L'Eclair* 8 (February 1966), p.4-6.

<sup>633</sup> "Aux lecteurs de *L'Eclair*," in *L'Eclair* 5 (October 1965), p.4.

<sup>634</sup> During its two years of publication, *L'Eclair* successfully eulogized several leaders of the rebellion, including Soumialot, Olenga. Kabila, Massengo, Mulele, Kitungwa, Kisonga, and Kibwe. However, turns of phrases repeatedly reminded one that UJRC intended to preserve its autonomy and not totally blend with existing factions inside the CNL. Consider the following sentence in an article of Mudendi for example: "The duty of the Congolese Revolutionary Youth Union, in close collaboration with the CNL and the CSR, is not only to relentlessly conduct the armed struggle, but also to attend, together with the people in the liberated villages and regions, to the destruction and the replacement of the old regime's structures." (N'Zevu Zebula, "Les positions de l'UJRC: La nature révolutionnaire de l'engagement dans la lutte armée," in *L'Eclair* 8 (February 1966), p.3). In organizational terms, the UJRC initially called its readers to create "anti-imperialist small groups" that would later unite "when the time has come" ("Les positions de l'UJRC: L'impérialisme américain, ennemi n.1 de notre Peuple," in *L'Eclair* 10 (May-June 1966), p.2. The watchword

The transnational and diasporic space of the newspaper was strongly affective. *L'Eclair* was dangerous material in the Congo; and deliberately inflammatory in the diaspora. In Belgium, it appeared “miraculously” in the common areas of African student centers in Brussels or Liège. As the then Situationist sympathizer Mbelolo ya Mpiku told me, *L'Eclair* was always available in these places, but nobody ever saw who placed the newspaper there.<sup>635</sup> In the Congo, *L'Eclair* circulated from hand to hand, from one comrade to the other.<sup>636</sup> The secrecy and intimacy of these exchanges induced conspiracy and performed fraternity.

*Name the enemy* was UJRC's first injunction to its readers. A strong binary was at the basis of the emerging militant community. Writing from the front, Lukale designated the enemy as “all these Congolese petit-bourgeois and corrupt bureaucrats who submit themselves to the imperialist monopolies.”<sup>637</sup> As “intellectuals,” the students occupied a social position that could easily put them in the camp of the “reactionaries.” “The time has come to CHOOSE, to decide once and for all where to go,” wrote Mukendi. Young Congolese could either be with the oppressors or at the side of the oppressed, but there was not a third option.<sup>638</sup> “We can either,” Mukendi wrote in another piece, “embark on the puppets' absurd dead end or we can become fighters and put ourselves at the service

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finally shifted slightly with the last issue of *L'Eclair*, in April 1967, and a solemn call for the creation of “real, avant-garde, and Marxist-Leninist Party,” notably through the multiplication of UJRC's cells in Congolese cities and villages: “En avant vers la creation d'un veritable Parti d'avant-garde, marxiste-léniniste!” in *L'Eclair* 12 (April 1967), p.3-5.

<sup>635</sup> Professor Mbelolo ya Mpiku, personal interview, unrecorded phone conversation, 5 July 2013.

<sup>636</sup> For example, in a letter from a student in Brazzaville: « One day, a close friend gave me by chance *L'Eclair*. To my own surprise, I experienced an inexpressible joy to read such objective articles. Directly, the desire to read the journal regularly took me » (« Le Courrier » in *L'Eclair* 11 (January 1967), p.16.

<sup>637</sup> Imani Lukale, “Le peuple congolais lute pour le socialisme et le progrès sous la conduite du conseil suprême de la révolution” in *L'Eclair* 3 (August 1965), p.11.

<sup>638</sup> “Editorial,” in *L'Eclair* 3 (August 1965), p.2.

of the people who will judge, in total sovereignty, whether it is appropriate to accept us in the ranks of the Revolution.”<sup>639</sup> Mukendi came back to that central question in another article. He wrote:

The very same people who buy off a part of the intellectuals with promises of high positions and big salaries and induce them to rule over the working people and support an antinational politics, these very same people use hypocritical notions like “pacifism”, “humanitarianism,” “love for humanity” to blur in our mind the distinction between friend and enemy.<sup>640</sup>

Drawing the line between brother and traitor meant taking control over the definition of politics. At a basic level, *L’Eclair* appeared as a speaking method.

The awareness of belonging to an enlightened minority defined the affective and intellectual experience of reading a newspaper such as *L’Eclair*. As a correspondent from Kinshasa explained in a letter, it was within the mass of students that the readers had to wage their first battle. The task, he wrote, “is to decolonize our compatriots’ mentality, to win thousands of undecided comrades to our cause, and to put an end to the arrogance of our *pseudo-universitaires* who are a shame to the Congolese elite.”<sup>641</sup> The lingering question then was: when were students the enemy?

Radical elements in the revolution developed a “general tendency to call all Congolese students ‘agents of imperialism,’ ‘reactionaries,’ ‘thieves,’ and to criticize them for ‘living like bourgeois’.”<sup>642</sup> This accusation, formulated by the Belgian lawyer and activist Jules Chomé after the assassination of Colonel Pakassa targeted the corner of the revolutionary field occupied by UJRC activists and their allies. *L’Eclair* replied to

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<sup>639</sup> N’Zevu Zebula, “De l’audace, encore de l’audace, toujours de l’audace!” in *L’Eclair* 4 (September 1965), p.3.

<sup>640</sup> “Editorial,” in *L’Eclair* 2 (July 1965), p.1.

<sup>641</sup> “Le Courrier,” in *L’Eclair* 12 (April 1967), p.39.

<sup>642</sup> Jules Chomé, “La mort du Colonel Pakassa,” in in *Remarques Africaines* 252 (3 November 1965), p.16.

Chomé's accusation by denouncing it as a manipulation that tried to alienate the students from Soumialot's wing of the CNL.<sup>643</sup> Yet, *L'Eclair* worked by alternating praise for radical student potential in the revolution, with reminders of the corruption of the intellectual elite. Furthermore, the journal maintained an unsolved tension with regards to the place of the students in the struggle. A call to students from Yumbu and Soumialot developed the idea that what "the people asked for" was students' "know how and active contribution, by all means possible, to our noble liberation struggle."<sup>644</sup> Another message sent by Placide Kitungwa clarified what the CNL expected from the students. "The present struggle does not have any sense," Kitungwa wrote, "if, tomorrow, when the victory has been realized, the intellectual youth does not take over and start in the Congo an economic, social and scientific revolution."<sup>645</sup> All contributors to the journal did not share this vision of the students as actors of a later phase in the struggle. Instead, *L'Eclair* gradually promoted the idea that the distinction between fighters and students should be abolished. As Theo Tango wrote, "The Congolese youth intellectuals must be able to combine the pen and the gun by participating in the Revolution, arms in hands, in the ranks of the Congolese Revolutionary Youth Union."<sup>646</sup>

Several articles repeated this point. After his visit to Uvira and the Eastern Front, N'Kita Kabongo wrote that the Simbas had nothing against intellectuals, "On the contrary, they want to be with intellectuals. But revolutionary intellectuals, of course, and not petit-bourgeois reactionaries who only think about growing rich." Kabongo continued

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<sup>643</sup> "Le Conseil Suprême de la Révolution, le Général Olenga et le groupe Gbenye-Kanza," in *L'Eclair* 6 (November-December 1965), p.2. The article gave the example of Yerodia, and his leadership position within the CSR, as an example of the futility of Chomé's critique.

<sup>644</sup> "Nouvelles du Congo en lutte," in *L'Eclair* 4 (September 1965), p.4.

<sup>645</sup> "Message de Placide Kitungwa," in *L'Eclair* 7 (January 1966), p.14.

<sup>646</sup> Gongo Musengere, "La violence révolutionnaire, arme essentielle du peuple congolais," in *L'Eclair* 10 (May-June 1966), p.31.

by referring to a conversation he shared with the chief of the Eastern Front: “Kabila told me that comrades who don’t want to directly commit themselves in the Revolution by coming to the front are maybe nationalists, but they are not revolutionaries.” Kabila’s Guevarist tone might be explained by Che’s presence in the area at the time. “There is a need for comrades who are able to take care of representation, develop information, do the secretarial work, give classes, etc,” Kabongo concluded. “When will those who are outside of the country take this revolution seriously?”<sup>647</sup>

The perspective of joining the fighting zone was real enough for several students inside UJRC. Yet, *L’Eclair* also developed its combat rhetoric as a posture in order to create a Left split in the student movement. In 1966 and 1967, the journal articulated a more explicit and harsher critique of UGEC. The Belgian section in particular was targeted, as Theo Tango was part of a small group that was expelled from the union by the new direction in 1967. In the journal, articles accused members of this new direction of being suspiciously “*Americanophiles*.”<sup>648</sup> The national direction of UGEC in Kinshasa also came under attack from Dupire and Mukendi. They accused N’Kanza and his comrades of knowingly “produc[ing] a subtle political confusion” among the students. Citing Zenon Mibamba, the article acknowledged that several “revolutionary elements” inside UJRC had emerged from UGEC, but it condemned the disappearance, among UGEC’s cadres, of any real adhesion to the movement’s own motto of “all for the people and its revolution,” with the exception of “some local sections in Eastern Europe.”<sup>649</sup>

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<sup>647</sup> Deux Etudiants Révolutionnaires visitant un Territoire Libéré,” in *L’Eclair* 5 (October 1965), p.3.

<sup>648</sup> “Qu’est-ce que la C.I.A. (Central Intelligence Agency),” in *L’Eclair* 10 (May-June 1966), p.22-24.

<sup>649</sup> “Du côté des fantoches,” in *L’Eclair* 9 (April 1966), p.28. *L’Eclair* also criticized UGEC’s third congress. Held in Kinshasa six months after Mobutu’s coup, the congress opted for a

Explicitly and implicitly, UJRC attempted to distance itself from UGEC. Mukendi struggled against the “excessive vanity of certain university graduates” by unifying “revolutionary theory and practice of all its militants.”<sup>650</sup> In another critique, a former UGEC leader writing from Brazzaville (probably Zenon Mibamba) deplored, “the general impression is Congolese students refuse to understand their own people’s misery.” For this writer, it was urgent for Congolese to take inspiration from the experience of student activism in other fighting countries like Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, Korea, and Algeria. Leonard Mitudidi was another positive counter-model of student activism frequently mentioned in the pages of *L’Eclair*. The journal proclaimed Mitudidi a “national hero,” a second Patrice Lumumba as it were, but one who spoke more directly to the student experience. In 1966, the UJRC established June 7<sup>th</sup>, the anniversary of Mitudidi’s death on Lake Tanganyika, as “the day of the Congolese revolutionary youth.”<sup>651</sup>

Serving the community of readers and provoking discussions about students in the revolution were the two lines of force in UJRC’s ideological field. Attacking U.S. imperialism and supporting the second independence were two other invariables. As for the rest, *L’Eclair* expressed quickly shifting positions. At first, the word socialism was absent. Writers summoned phrases like “democratic liberation” and “the heroic struggle to liberate us all and liberate our national wealth.”<sup>652</sup> They praised the war as “popular”

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strong Left line. However, for *L’Eclair*, that political line was contradicted by UGEC leaders’ apparent support for Mobutu: “A propos du Congrès de l’UGEC: Les tonneaux vides fond beaucoup de bruit...” in *L’Eclair* 11 (January 1967), p.12-13.

<sup>650</sup> N’Zevu Zebula, “Les positions de l’UJRC. Faire la Révolution ou souffrir de la folie des grandeurs,” in *L’Eclair* (April 1966), p.3.

<sup>651</sup> “7 Juin 1965, Mort de Léonard Mitudidi” *L’Eclair* 10, mai-juin 1966, p.5.

<sup>652</sup> “Le Peuple Congolais Triomphera!” in *L’Eclair* 3 (August 1965), p.3-4.

and “revolutionary,” and “always more deadly for the enemies than for the people.”<sup>653</sup>

Then, in later issues, the theme of “socialist construction” appeared. Finally, in February 1966, Mukendi theorized the connection between Marxism (by then a clear marker of UJRC) and nationalism. This inspired the first articulations of political watchwords in *L’Eclair*. Using Lumumba to connect the two aspects, Mukendi wrote:

Lumumba himself was aware that the Lumumbist revolutionary theory, which was at the basis of the struggle for political independence, could only be a springboard towards another scientific and truly revolutionary theory, capable of leading us to the construction of a national, independent and powerful economy.<sup>654</sup>

The author added, as if there could be any ambiguity, “Lumumba was well en route towards the science of Marxism-Leninism.”<sup>655</sup> Despite this teleological and – with Lumumba always the Messiah – theological approach to Congolese nationalism, the figure of the martyr-primer minister gradually faded away in the last few issues of *L’Eclair*. These issues were suddenly embracing the Maoist and pro-Chinese principles of UJRC. Articles focused on the socialist experience in Albania, Vietnam and China, while critiques of “modern revisionism” (read the Soviet Union) abounded. At the end of the journey, Mao seemed to be replacing Lumumba. An article in the last issue fleshed this out: “at the risk of their own lives,” people in Kinshasa were hiding photographs of President Mao in their houses, some were travelling to Brazzaville only to acquire his published words, many studied them with diligence and had their radio set tuned towards *Radio-Péking*. It was not stated explicitly, but the article seemed to suggest that *L’Eclair*’s work was done. It cited the case of Congolese exiles in Cairo and Cuba, for

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<sup>653</sup> “Aux lecteurs” *L’Eclair* 6 (November-December 1965), p.10.

<sup>654</sup> “Du Lumumbisme à la Science du Marxisme-Léninisme”, in *L’Eclair* 8 (February 1966), p.9.

<sup>655</sup> *Idem*.

whom the shared ownership of Mao's collected works was the most meaningful binding experience.<sup>656</sup> Even more significantly perhaps, Maoist autonomous cells were already in place, as testified in the following extract from the letter of a high school student in Kinshasa: "We have created a revolutionary group among students. We read and heatedly discuss Mao Tse-Toung's works. There are sometimes harsh debates in class, with our professors who are foreign priests and depreciate these books. Yet, for us, these are great and exciting works."<sup>657</sup>

### **Visualizing Violence**

Photographs and illustrations occupied an important place in *L'Eclair*, much more than in other Congolese militant publications. Inclusion of images in the journal might have been made possible through Belgian Communists' financial support, which gave the UJRC the liberty to produce more elaborate publications. Regardless, the publishers of *L'Eclair* made good use of that possibility. Illustrations served and extended UJRC's message in several directions. Recurrent photographs of Congolese revolutionary leaders gave consistency and flesh to names that, for some, had only surfaced with the rebellion.

Not less momentous in the articulation of the insurgent rhetoric of *L'Eclair* were representations of Simbas and simple fighters, often featured in situations that stressed their connections with the student and intellectual public of the journal. While some images displayed a discourse about martyrdom, many more photographs of dead bodies served to suggest the barbarity of the counter-insurgency, and most particularly of the Red Dragon and Ommegang operations. Mukendi and Dupire went on to publish an

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<sup>656</sup> "Le Rayonnement de la Pensée de Mao Tse-Toung," in *L'Eclair* 12 (April 1967), p.8-9.

<sup>657</sup> *Idem*, p.9.



entire book on the “Belgian-American armed aggression in Stanleyville and Paulis.”<sup>658</sup>

The book used a series of written testimonies on the counter-insurgency’s atrocities to denounce the Belgians and Americans as fascist murders. It also listed and reproduced the many official condemnations issued by progressive African and socialist countries. Finally, UJRC compiled at the end of the volume tens of photographs of dead and tortured bodies, some of them also published in *L’Eclair*. Other photographs showed US military airplanes, white mercenaries, and Belgian paratroopers. The combination of these images and their captions constituted the antagonistic project of UJRC. These photographs shifted the blame for savagery and cruelty from the rebels towards the “white aggressors” and their “black puppets.” They also strongly reinforced the calls for revenge and violence so strongly articulated by Edouard-Marcel Sumbu.

Young Congolese Maoists were not the only ones to use the violent images of the atrocities of American and Belgian counter-insurgency. The infamous Italian film *Africa Addio* – one of the first “exploitation documentaries” in the *Monde Cane* series – also used footage as well as still images from Eastern Congo. The most controversial passage of the movie was a scene in which the film showed the execution of a Congolese rebel by white mercenaries. Quinn Slobodian mentions the reception of the film in Germany. African and German students staged protests in movie theaters and publicly attacked the film for encouraging violence and for presenting a degrading image of Africans. At the same time, as Slobodian shows, third-worldist Left activists used “corpse polemics” and similar images of tortured and mutilated bodies – notably in the context of the campaign

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<sup>658</sup> Union des Jeunesses Révolutionnaires Congolaises, *Mémorandum: L’Agression Armée de l’Impérialisme Américano-Belge à Stanleyville et Paulis* (Brussels: Le livre international, 1966).

against the war in Vietnam – to provoke the West German government, and suggest parallels between Nazi terror and U.S. imperialism in the 1960s.<sup>659</sup>

Mukendi and several other writers in *L'Eclair* studied in Germany and were familiar with these corpse polemics. Their own take on the question was certainly related to the reception of *Africa Addio*. However, the visions of images of sacrificial victims certainly evoked a diversity of responses and affects among the Congolese readers of the newspapers, drawing from memories and visions of Lumumba and, maybe, older episodes in colonial atrocities, “tethering the past to the present,” to use Nancy Hunt’s vocabulary.<sup>660</sup>

### **Silence is Crime**

“The struggle for national liberation holds the Congolese People in an embrace. The banks of the powerful Congo River resound with our heroic people’s call to arms. The blood of Patrice Lumumba was not shed in vain. Neither was the blood of the patriots in Stanleyville. [...] Americans in the Congo will be defeated.”<sup>661</sup>

Violence stood out particularly strongly in the photographs and texts of *L'Eclair*, and in the discourse of the Congolese revolution more generally. Violence was a central issue for young Congolese who had been fed Fanon’s writings for years. Violence was also the symbol of the part of revolution that escaped control by its intellectual cadres. It was a chosen path to power and the achievement of the revolution, as well as a stigma that needed to be reversed and re-appropriated.

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<sup>659</sup> Quinn Slobodian, *Foreign Front: Third World Politics in Sixties West Germany* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), p.135-169.

<sup>660</sup> Nancy Rose Hunt, “An Acoustic Register, Tenacious Images, and Congolese Scenes of Rape and Repetition,” in *Cultural Anthropology* 23-2 (2008), p.220-253.

<sup>661</sup> Lettre from “A Congolese patriot in Kigoma (Tanzania)”: “Le courrier,” in *L'Eclair* 11 (January 1967), p.17.

Sumbu's prose went a step further in that direction. In the opening chapter to *The Blood of the Lions*, Sumbu went from evocations of the traumatic sound of mercenaries' machine-guns, of comrades' lifeless and mutilated bodies and of the killing fields of the counter-rebellion, to a call for terrorist actions. With maybe *Africa Addio* in mind, Sumbu stated: "Cinemas, where we are intoxicated psychologically, cannot be anything else than the most immediate targets of our powdermen's explosives and bombs."<sup>662</sup> Then, in the same vein: "The time for revolution has passed; action and sacrifice at the level of the people are now necessary." And finally: "The time for tyranny has come and the African man must show his power and knowledge to the eyes of the whole world."<sup>663</sup> The paragraph where Sumbu mentions the bombing of cinemas and the necessity to set fire to "all the places where the enemy could be present" sits oddly in the text. It comes rather abruptly, without any rhetoric or logical connection with what precedes it. Calls to direct action and terrorist violence are very unusual in the Congolese register of political struggle. Without access to the manuscript, we cannot rule out the hypothesis that this paragraph was not original in Sumbu's text. Still, calls to appropriate and own violence, even if strongly dramatized in *Il Sangue*, were a strong component in the rebellion discourse.

The centrality of violence in the revolutionary discourse was not an all-encompassing feature. The Gandhian voice in the Manifesto of Proletarian Fraternity comes to mind, of course, but it was hardly heard at the time in the Congo. The poems of Matala Mukadi, on the other hand, constituted a serious challenge to the acceptance of violence by Sumbu and *L'Eclair*. Matala was a Congolese student in Belgium and an

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<sup>662</sup> *Idem*, p.51-52.

<sup>663</sup> *Idem*.

active member of UGEC. His poems, like his life, were a reflection on the Congolese 1960s.<sup>664</sup> They enjoyed great success at the end of the decade and in the 1970s. One of them, *Manzambi*, became “like a national hymn.”<sup>665</sup> It was the portrait of a dying rebel fighter in Bukavu, compared successively to “the man from across the Atlantic in 1776,” “*le sans-culotte* in 1789,” “the mujik in 1917,” “the man from the long march in 1949,” “the *guajiro* of the Sierra Maestra in 1953,” and “the peasant of Fouta-Djallon in 1958.”<sup>666</sup> Matala did not write off violence, but he offered a broader range of colors and emotions to translate the aesthetic experience of Congolese revolutionary politics.

Published in 1969 by the prestigious Parisian publisher Seghers, Matala’s collection was made of poems that had already circulated in the worlds of Congolese students in previous years. The volume was dedicated to Matala’s parents; to Kalubye-Belchika, the leader of the “Elisabethville plot” in 1944; and to the “fighters of the tricontinental.” The second poem in the collection, *Faux Anathème*, was written in

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<sup>664</sup> A few years before his death in 2003, Matala was able to publish a beautiful autobiographical book that he had written in 1992 after the expulsion of *BaLuba* from Katanga and the return to his native Kassai. The book covers his childhood between the mining town of Bakwanga and the *colonie scolaire* of Boma in the Bas-Congo. It then mentions his difficult and complicated discovery of Belgium, where he arrived at the beginning of the 1960s to finish his secondary education. A student at the University of Liège and then University of Brussels, Matala experienced (post)colonial racism in Belgium, but he also enthusiastically participated in the political life of third world students, as well as with UGEC activities. A friend of the Situationist activist Mbelolo ya Mpiku, he worked with him on UGEC’s newspaper in the mid-1960s. Matala’s autobiography also narrates his travels to Paris, Barcelona, Ibiza, and Jerusalem, as well as his romance with the African American comedian Thelma Oliver. Radicalized by the events of 1968 and by the repercussions of June 4, 1969, Matala tells the experience of police harassment in Belgium, and evokes the world of marginality and recreational drugs. The rest of the book narrates Matala’s exile from Belgium to Algeria to Burundi and finally his forced repatriation to the Congo and the experience of torture, imprisonment, and absurdity in the jail of the *Sûreté* in Kinshasa: Tshikatumba Matala Mukadi, *Dans la tourmente de la dictature (autobiographie d’un Poète)* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2000).

<sup>665</sup> See Silvia Riva, *Nouvelle histoire de la littérature du Congo-Kinshasa* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2006), p.116.

<sup>666</sup> Matala Mukadi Tshikatumba, *Réveil dans un nid de flammes (la foudre et le feu)* (Paris: Seghers, 1969), p.25-26.

homage to Ndesho [sic] and Tshilenge, the two leaders of UGEC expelled from Belgium in 1964. Another, *J'entends encore ta voix*, celebrated the memory of Lumumba and his global stature, placing him at the side of George Padmore, Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X, Um N'Yobe, Ben Barka, Demba Diop, Nguyen Van Troi, Javier Heraud and Camilo Cienfuegos.

The poems of Matala conveyed a dimension not directly apparent in other venues like *L'Eclair*: the gendered, intimate, and nearly existential dimensions of revolutionary politics. Matala's lyricism equally embraced and closely associated revolutionary fervor and African nationalism to ruminations on romantic love. *Echo du Maquisard*, for example, was constructed on such a tension. The first part of the poem dwelled on the issue of revolutionary dignity:

combattant dans les montagnes	fighting in the mountains
embourbé dans les marécages	bogged down in the swamps
ami des abeilles visité des mouches tsé-tsé	friend of the bees visited by tsetse flies
je quête la dignité mon vin éternel	I am seeking dignity my eternal wine
je veux régenter ma terre	I want to rule my land
gousse d'or sandale de cuivre	clove of gold copper sandal
nid d'uranium réceptacle d'étain	uranium nest tin recipient
nid d'intrigues nid embrasé	nest of intrigues nest set ablaze
terre de lacs aux flots de misère	land of lakes with their streams of misery
ma lute est un démenti à ceux qui se réjouissent de mes lamentations	my struggle is a denial for those who rejoiced at my lamentations

The next stanza further established the soundness of the struggle – *la famine vrillait mon ventre* (famine pierced my belly). And finally the poem ended with a suspended interpellation – of a female companion left behind, and of fellow countrymen who stay out of the struggle. Poems like this one did not carry a lot of documentary value on the rebellions. Matala's gendered imagination of the struggle – the lonely male fighter in the

forest and his longing female lover left in the village – was belied by the important presence of women in Mulelele’s maquis for example. His poems instead testified to the fantasy of the struggle from afar and its interlacing with other visions of the world and of the self. The succession of poems expressed beautifully the subjectivity of migration and international student mobility in the postcolonial period – the experience of thousands of Congolese youth in the 1960s – as well the outsized place of politics in the molding of that subjectivity. The poems lamented the suffering of Congolese people, and those who listed the natural beauties of the country adopted the same points of view: nostalgia and the relative powerlessness of the student in distant Europe. As Matala expressed it in “Poète, ton silence est crime,” writing the poetics of revolution was the only way to transcend that powerlessness. In that text, he staged himself in Koksijde, a Belgian resort on the Channel, meditating about the “explosive shells” that “are yelling” in the Congo. The text is constructed around a tension between the quietness of the Belgian seaside and the suffering of those living “over there” (*là-bas*):

Aimer, rêver, danser  
Etreindre un corps de femme  
Se noyer dans les absinthes de la vie,  
Deviennent pour ces enfants de là-bas  
Et d'autres cioux...  
A jamais des mythes

Love, dream, dance  
Embrace the body of a woman  
Drown oneself in the absinthes of life  
Become for these children over there  
And in other climes  
Forever myths

And then the poem concludes:

Plus forte que le brouhaha de la mer;  
La voix de la conscience me dit:  
Poète, ton silence est crime.

Stronger than the hubbub of the sea;  
The voice of consciousness tells me:  
Poet, your silence is crime

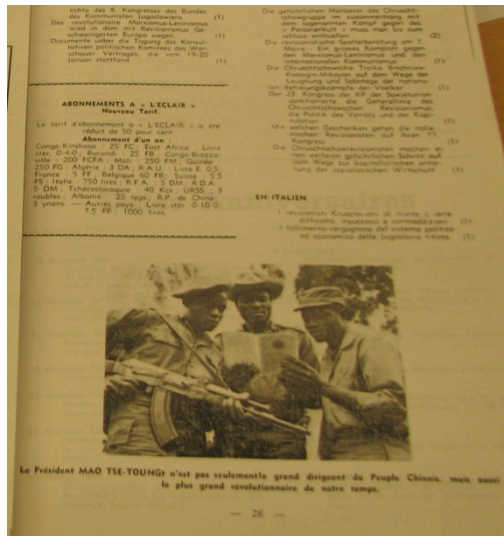


Figure 29: “Chairman MAO-TSE-TOUNG is not only the great leader of the Chinese people, he is also the greatest revolutionary of or time”. *L’Eclair* 11 (Jan.1967)



## Chapter 8

### The Dialectics of Revolution and Counter-Revolution

“When I asked a former student of mine how he planned his return trip from New York to the Congo, he said he was flying on Sabena Airlines, which would cost more and take longer. When I asked why, he simply said that he was more familiar with the Belgians and felt most comfortable on their airline. Another example of the Belgian-Congolese relationship occurred at a convention of the National Students Association in Madison, Wisconsin, in 1965, when the delegate from the Congo apologized for addressing the conference in French, stating that French was his first language and English his second, never mentioning his native language. Even the Senegalese, well known for their admiration of France, were shocked by this total identification with the ex-colonial establishment.”<sup>667</sup>

Tamar Golan arrived for the first time in Leopoldville in October 1962. She was not even 30 years old, but she had already lived several interesting lives: as a militant in the socialist Hachomer Hatzair movement, as a member of the leftist kibbutz Lahav in the Negev, as a teacher in an Arab school in Haifa, and as an instructor at the Teachers Training College of Haile Sellassie University in Ethiopia.<sup>668</sup> In Leopoldville, she had

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<sup>667</sup> Tamar Golan, *Educating the Bureaucracy in a New Polity: A Case Study of L'Ecole Nationale de Droit et d'Administration, Kinshasa, Congo* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1968), p.44.

<sup>668</sup> In her later lives, Golan continued her involvement with Africa, first as a journalist, then as Israel's first ambassador to Angola, and finally as the director of the African Studies department at Ben-Gurion University. See Avi Cohen, “The Ambassador of All,” in *Focus Review* (January 1, 2011), p. 35-37; Patricia Golan, “Tamar Golan, Diplomat and Africa Expert, to be Buried Today,” in *The Jerusalem Post*, April 4, 2011 (<http://www.jpost.com/National-News/Tamar-Golan-diplomat-and-Africa-expert-to-be-buried-today>); Gideon Levy, “Tamar Golan, Israel's Queen of Africa, Dies at 76,” in *Haaretz*,

been hired to teach at the *Ecole Nationale de Droit et d'Administration* (ENDA). The turnover was rather rapid at the school, and Golan stayed for only one year. She then moved to New York City, where she attended Columbia University as a graduate student in Government. Her masters' essay at Columbia focused on her experience at ENDA. Before returning to Africa in 1967 as a journalist, Golan worked as a research assistant in the Center for Education in Africa at Teachers College, Columbia University, where she revised and published her manuscript on ENDA.

The following pages address the issue of student political activities and opinions in the Congo. The leftward orientation of Congolese students in the diaspora seems to be acknowledged by all. The question is more debatable regarding their peers who remained in the country. By its symbolic status as Congo's most prestigious school and by the sheer impact of its size (the Inspired Hill, Benoit Verhaegen noted in 1964, was the country's second biggest enterprise, behind Union Minière du Haut Katanga), Lovanium strongly captures the attention, and this chapter focuses mostly on its students. Yet, there are good reasons to start with ENDA, and with Tamar Golan's analysis of student conservatism. By its proximity with the government and with political circles more generally, ENDA saw quite vividly the emerging issue of students' position vis-à-vis power that will be discussed in this chapter.

An important institution of higher education in the Congo, ENDA had emerged out of contacts, just before independence, between Patrice Lumumba and the Ford Foundation. It was, however, the General Commissioners who brought the project to its

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March 31, 2011 (<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/tamar-golan-israel-s-queen-of-africa-dies-at-76-1.353188>).

completion. The school opened in February 1961.<sup>669</sup> The Ford Foundation appointed James T. Harris, of the American Society for African Culture, to become ENDA's first director. The goal of the school was to train the Congo's civil servants and magistrates in order to quickly replace the positions left empty by former Belgian colonials. Tensions arose with Lovanium about the type of degrees that ENDA was entitled to deliver, but there was also collaboration, as some professors taught at both institutions simultaneously. However, ENDA's faculty, while smaller, was much more diverse than Lovanium's.

ENDA was staffed with a certain number of Belgian and French faculty members, which Golan described as colonial in their mentality, rigid in their pedagogy, and obtuse and parochial in their relationship to anything African. Then, there was the "international brigade" of professors from diverse origins, in which Golan counted herself.<sup>670</sup>

According to the Israeli scholar, reasons for the presence in the Congo of these African American, Chinese, Syrian, Haitian, or Swiss professors "ranged from idealism to neuroses."<sup>671</sup> Still, most of them were progressive in their politics. They wanted to Africanize their teaching and engage their students outside of rigid authoritarian models. Yet, as Golan noted in her study, Congolese students sometimes found that approach suspect: "They felt it lacked dignity, and dignity, to these students, was synonymous with

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<sup>669</sup> The school, which delivered a degree after four years of theoretical classes and training courses, opened with a first cohort of 176 students in 1961. In 1964, it counted a total of 488 students: see Tamar Golan, *Educating the Bureaucracy*, p.37.

<sup>670</sup> Two Congolese graduates of Lovanium were associated early on with ENDA: Mabika Kalanda as a professor and Etienne Tshisekedi as the second director of the school

<sup>671</sup> Tamar Golan, *Educating the Bureaucracy*, p.xi.

formality. They had learned to over-appreciate authority and felt the symbols of authority to be impersonality and distance.”<sup>672</sup>

In her study of ENDA, Golan gave a general portrait of Congolese students that stressed their dependence on Belgian paternalism and their apparent inability to break away from “colonial subjugation.”<sup>673</sup> What Golan did not mention was that young Congolese intellectuals themselves, including some at ENDA, were developing and problematizing this theme of “student alienation.” In 1963, Anatole Malu, later a leader in UGEC, was the editor of *Génération Nouvelle*, the student journal at ENDA. The tone of *Génération Nouvelle* did not evoke the timidity and conservatism that Golan noticed as a professor at ENDA; a sign, perhaps, that student expressions varied in written versus oral, and in discussions with professors versus conversations between peers. At the close of the academic year in July 1963, for example, Malu’s editorial column in *Génération Nouvelle* was a real ode to Lumumba, “the man that all Africa is grieving for,” and to the

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<sup>672</sup> *Idem*, p.44.

<sup>673</sup> At the end of the 1960s, when she returned to Africa as a journalist, Golan’s vision of Congolese student politics had significantly shifted. In 1969, Golan was one of only two journalists, together with François Cros of Reuters, who covered the trial of the Congolese students following the demonstration of June 4<sup>th</sup>. She was impressed by the courage of the students. She became very close to their leader, François Kandolo, and was expelled from the Congo because of that. Kandolo believed that Golan had saved his life and that of the other student leaders in July 1969 by publicizing their trial, which might not have received any press otherwise. Two years later, Golan was the BBC correspondent in Paris when once again students confronted the violence of the regime in Kinshasa. Kandolo was also in the French capital as a trainee at the time. Golan traveled with the former student leader to London for two weeks, organized press conferences and interviews for him, and attempted to interest the British media in the heroism of the Congolese students. As we saw in Chapter One, I exchanged several emails in 2010 and 2011 with Tamar Golan and she expressed the same enthusiasm and admiration for the Congolese student movement. “These were real heroes, who deserve to be remembered!” she wrote in one message. In another message, she wrote, “I’d do anything I can to tell the story of this courageous group of students!” Unfortunately, our plan to meet in Paris at the beginning of 2011 had to be cancelled, and she died a few months later in Israel. François Kandolo, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 12 Oct. 2007; François Cros, personal interview, unrecorded, Paris, 12 Feb. 2011; correspondence with Tamar Golan, 2010-2011.

memory of his “voice full of emotion” during his anticolonial speech of June 30, 1960. Far from any signs of deference for the former colonizers, Malu’s text was a combative call for real independence and against “corrupted ministers” who were repressing democracy and nationalism “under the pressure of foreigners.”<sup>674</sup> Other articles in the same issue targeted Belgian interests in the Congo and the power of Union Minière in Katanga. One piece attacked the “current class in power *embourgeoisée* through and through,” announcing that it would soon disappear and be replaced by the students. The unsigned article noted the disastrous image of the “incompetent and powerless” General Commissioners “who only had the time to line their own pockets, reinforce the crisis more than ever, and then discreetly withdraw from the political scene, compromising in this way the whole student youth.”<sup>675</sup> To regain the trust of the masses, a real union of all the students was necessary: “Between the national bourgeoisie and the suffering Congolese people, students must choose. Both appeal to them, the one to bribe them, and the other for their defense. Without any hesitation, Congolese students have taken the side of the weakest.”<sup>676</sup> As an illustration, the article mentioned the presence of the students at the side of “the proletarians” at the last May Day in Leopoldville, but it called for more concrete acts from the students: citing examples such as the organization of a campaign of alphabetization, classes on *éducation civique*, and “accessible” theater plays.<sup>677</sup>

Another sign of the progressive inclinations of ENDA students was the popularity of Mabika Kalenda, who held concurrently his ministerial position in Adoula’s

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<sup>674</sup> “Editorial: République du Congo, An III,” in *Génération Nouvelle*, 1-4 (July 1963), p.4-7.

<sup>675</sup> “Les dirigeants de demain,” in *Génération Nouvelle*, 1-4 (July 1963), p.14-15.

<sup>676</sup> *Idem*, p.15.

<sup>677</sup> *Idem*, p.16.

government and his teaching obligations at ENDA. In July 1963, at the moment when he was secretly negotiating with Mulele his possible participation in the armed struggle, Mabika invited a large number of students for a reception at his house. Different topics were discussed with regards to African unity and different projects of the Congolese government. But Mabika also entertained the students about the issue of “mental decolonization,” about which he was writing a treatise.<sup>678</sup> According to the account of the reception published by ENDA students, Mabika insisted on the importance of reforming education and the necessity “to shield our children from the influence of foreigners who often present a distorted image of Africa.” The minister gave the example of a student in a reputed secondary school in Leopoldville who was asked to prepare a talk on Jomo Kenyatta and who used as his only source “an issue of the Reader’s Digest in which the great nationalist was presented as a barbaric and bloodthirsty sorcerer.” Mabika concluded: “When we will be able to control the consciousness of our young people (there is no hope with the old), we will have accomplished something.”<sup>679</sup>

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<sup>678</sup> Mabika Kalanda, *La remise en question: Base de la décolonisation mentale* (Brussels: Remarques Africaines, 1967). Jean-Paul Kabeya became acquainted with Mabika Kalanda just before independence, when the latter was a colonial administrator in Kasai, and later collaborated with him on publication projects. According to Kabeya, *La remise en question* and Mabika’s thinking about mental decolonization emerged from his reading of the work of the Belgian Catholic missionary August De Clerq, who he considered to be a promoter of Luba authenticity and “incultured Christianity” in Kasai in the 1930s: Jean-Paul Kabeya, personal interview, unrecorded, 28 March 2010. This reading of De Clerq’s position vis-à-vis missionary work and African cultures is not easily supported by his written production: see Baudouin Mwamba Mputu, *Le Congo-Kasai (1865-1950): De l’exploration allemande à la consécration de Luluabourg* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2011), p.188-189. However, Kabeya’s explanation is interesting because it provides a genealogy of Mobutu’s politics of authenticity (to which Mabika Kalanda greatly contributed intellectually) that goes to Christianity. As we will see in Chapter 9, other sources suggest the influence of another Catholic dignitary, Monsignor Malula, on Mobutu’s ideological maturation.

<sup>679</sup> “Chronique de l’ENDA: Les étudiants chez Monsieur Mabika-Kalanda,” in *Génération Nouvelle* 1-4 (July 1963), p.38-40.

The academic year 1963-1964, which directly followed the period during which Tamar Golan taught at ENDA, was the occasion of intensified critiques by ENDA students of the unrealized promises of independence. That year, Delphin Banza was elected vice-president of the school's student general assembly, AGENDA.<sup>680</sup> Banza, who would also be elected to the national committee of UGEC in 1966, sat openly in the revolutionary camp, and he was sympathetic to the armed struggle, in which his childhood friend Laurent-Désiré Kabila was a leader. The November issue of *Génération Nouvelle* reflected the more radical outlook of student politics at ENDA, denouncing the recent state of exception in Leopoldville as well as the censorship of the state against student organizations and trade unions.<sup>681</sup> Two years later, Banza would open one of his articles in *Génération Nouvelle* with a reference to the “great genius Karl Marx” and then formulate radical demands on a “pan-African reform” of higher education.<sup>682</sup>

The student press suggests a different picture from the image of conservatism depicted by Tamar Golan in her study of ENDA. Not all students at ENDA shared the political passions of the leaders of their campus association. However, the student Left, and notably UGEC, was hegemonic. As we will see in a moment, the situation was

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<sup>680</sup> Born in Northern Katanga, in the village of Ankoro, Banza had been friend with Laurent-Désiré Kabila since primary school. In the mid 1950s Banza left Katanga for the Kivu and the secondary school of Bukavu, where he was a member of the group of young activists around Anicet Kashamura. After independence, Banza moved back to Northern Katanga. Together with Kabila, he became involved in the youth branch of the Balubakat in Manono, where the Lumumbists had established the new province of Lualaba. Many of these young militants turned themselves into a local militia that notably opposed the secessionist government of Moïse Tshombe. In Manono, Kabila worked as the adviser of the Minister of Information, while Banza was the secretary of Prosper Mwamba Ilunga, the provincial president. The following year, Banza was moving to Leopoldville: Delphin Banza Hangakolwa, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 1 Aug. 2011; and Erik Kennes and Munkana N'Gee, *Essai biographique sur Laurent-Désiré Kabila* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003), p.72-82.

<sup>681</sup> “Editorial,” in *Génération Nouvelle* 2-1 (November 1963), p.2-4.

<sup>682</sup> Delphin S.R. Banza, “Considérations sur la philosophie de l'éducation,” in *Génération Nouvelle* 4-1 (1965), p.12-22.

similar at Lovanium. Yet, despite the hegemony of the Left, student conservatism remains an important issue to be considered, not least because students themselves debated the question.

An important question in African revolutionary circles in the 1960s was the configuration of classes in independent Africa. Giovanni Arrighi and John S. Paul analyzed, for example, the Congolese rebellions of the mid-1960s as a “populist movement” which hesitated between a “backward tribalism” and a forward progressive class struggle. This later option only emerged after the mediation of the revolutionary cadres that successfully articulated the second independence as the struggle of the impoverished class of peasants against the new class of oppressors.<sup>683</sup> The issue of students’ class position became, therefore, an important question, as we saw in *L’éclair* and that Arrighi and Paul also discussed. The two scholars noted the radicalism of African students “in the metropolises” (and they cited FEANF). Yet, they also noted that, “with education classically so prominent a factor in recruitment into the labor aristocracy, the intelligentsia has tended to be a central prop to the unbalanced African power structure.”<sup>684</sup> Similar observations in the Congolese context have pushed commenters to disregard student protests as merely rhetorical or manipulative. Yet, as Arrighi and Paul wrote themselves, class positions were moving fast in independent Africa. They predicted, with the massification of education and the reduction of “the easy opportunities inherent in replacing the European colonial establishment,” students might either turn, at best, into “a genuinely revolutionary vanguard” or, at worst, “use the

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<sup>683</sup> See Giovanni Arrighi and John S. Saul (eds.), *Essays on the Political Economy of Africa* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), p.82-83 and 161-163.

<sup>684</sup> *Idem*, p.84-85.



masses in the service of intra-elite struggles.”<sup>685</sup> Discussions about the allegiance of students in a dual class system remained frustrated – later, scholars like Ali Mazrui would instead attempt to define an autonomous “educated class” produced by the “new literate culture” of colonial education.<sup>686</sup> These discussions obscured the productivity of Left rhetoric among student circles. Student radical slogans were never only the “mere postures” deplored by analysts of class politics. Discourse produced effects first inside and then outside of campus microcosms.

The following section analyzes Lovanium’s engagement with the rebellions. The lack of support for the rebellions has been presented as a proof of Lovanium’s conservative tendencies. This section indeed focuses on student participation in the “counter-revolutionary” project of governmental pacification. Yet, the rest of the chapter argues that the lack of direct engagement at the side of the Mulelists did not prevent a form of osmosis around the motto of revolution, between students on the campus and activists in the CNL.

### **Pacification**

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<sup>685</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>686</sup> Mazrui was not interested in discussing “African modes of production.” Instead his discussion of the “educated class” was based on culture and the importance of colonial education in the emergence of a new group, which he discusses both as an avant-garde in the struggle for liberation and as a receptacle of “cultural captives of the west.” It is particularly striking how Mazrui envisions Mobutu’s 1970s’ politics of authenticity in this context. Authenticity directly emerged from Congolese students’ debates in the 1960s. Far from acknowledging that genealogy, Mazrui mentions authenticity as “Mobutu’s own non-intellectual and sometimes inconsistent way.” Yet, in his eyes, Mobutu’s authenticity was superior to Senghor’s negritude as an instrument of “cultural emancipation.” Mazrui situated his analysis outside of a context of class struggle, and instead considered that, by saving itself from cultural alienation, the “educated class” would also save Africa. See Ali A. Mazrui, *Political Values and the Educated Class in Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p.1-20.

“Pacification” was the favored appellation for Congolese authorities’ counter-insurgency policies in the mid-1960s. These policies consisted mostly of violent military campaigns of “cleansing,” increasingly entrusted to foreign mercenaries after Tshombe’s access to power in July 1964 and until their own rebellion against Mobutu in 1967.<sup>687</sup> The violence of the counter-insurgency, from the re-conquest of Stanleyville at the end of November 1964 to the uprising of the “foreign volunteers” led by Bob Denard and Jean Schramme in July 1967, certainly matched and maybe surpassed the murders and crimes of the Simbas. “Pacification” meant the forced relocation of whole villages and the resettlement of Belgian private interests through the recourse to forced labor. In Stanleyville, Victor Nendaka, the chief of the secret police, organized mass trials, where thousands of people suspected of belonging to the rebellion were judged simultaneously in the city’s stadium. Mass executions were numerous, and the white mercenaries often showed the most abject cruelty in hunting the Simbas, producing images of violence that would later circulate throughout the world in films like *Africa Addio* and militant publications like *L’éclair*.<sup>688</sup> Yet, there were also non-military and non-violent aspects to pacification, and students took care of them.

American diplomats inspired the inclusion of students in pacifications operations. Some of them were quite worried about the consequences of the violent pacification

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<sup>687</sup> Memoirs by mercenaries include: Mike Hoare, *Congo Mercenary* (London: Robert Hale, 1967); Jean Schramme, *Le bataillon Léopard: Souvenirs d’un Africain blanc* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1969); and Siegfried Müller, *Les nouveaux mercenaires* (Paris: Editions France-Empire, 1965).

<sup>688</sup> See Gérard Althabe, *Les fleurs du Congo: Une utopie du Lumumbisme* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1997), p.297-302; Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), p70-75.

conducted in the former rebel areas.<sup>689</sup> As one diplomat put it in a communication to the Department of State:

The GOC [government of Congo] must do more than put down the rebellions physically. There must be an across-the-board approach which will give the liberated Congolese hope for a prosperous, tranquil, and noncommunist future.

The memorandum advised notably a focus on education, the organization of sport activities, and the reopening of schools, to “keep young boys who often supported rebel jeunesse [youth movements] off the streets and out of trouble.”<sup>690</sup>

The first American initiative towards Lovanium with regards to the rebellion targeted Rector Luc Gillon. In October 1964, Dean Rusk, Lyndon Johnson’s Secretary of State, asked the rector to intervene as a go-between with rebel leaders like Gbenye and Kanza. The goal was to reach an agreement about the repatriation of Stanleyville’s white population. Gillon refused. “Using Cartesian arguments and appealing to humanitarian feelings in front of these rebels was losing one’s time,” Gillon explained in his memoirs. “Only force would frighten them and make them give way.”<sup>691</sup>

At the time of the rebellion, the U.S. embassy in Leopoldville was particularly attentive to the educated youth in the city. Jay Katzen, a young diplomat, and Robert Decker, the general secretary of ENDA and president of the newly created Protestant *Université Libre du Congo*, collaborated to create a “youth center” where Americans and Congolese could meet freely around a small library, drinks, music, games and movies.

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<sup>689</sup> Nevertheless, the CIA was closely associated with the action of the mercenaries during the period of counter-insurgency: see for example Larry Devlin, *op. cit.*, p.249-268 and Richard L. Holm, *Chief of Station, Congo: Fighting the Cold War in a Hot Zone* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009), p.162-216.

<sup>690</sup> T.W. McElhiney, “Confidential Memorandum: Administration of Liberated Areas,” October 8, 1964, p.1 and 8, RG 59 General Records of the Department of State / Records of the Bureau of Africans Affairs, 1958-1966 / Congo Kinshasa 1965-1966 / Box 25, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park, MD.

<sup>691</sup> Luc Gillon, *Servir en actes et vérité* (Gembloux: Duculot, 1988), p.216-217.

The embassy was also sponsoring a series of social activities organized by university students. It is therefore not surprising that American diplomats were involved with the participation of students in a pacification operation. Minutes of meetings of the embassy's Youth Committee mentioned the operation as "a Congolese Peace-Corps type project."<sup>692</sup> *Pax Romana*, Lovanium's Catholic association and the coordinator of the project, named the operation "*Debout Stan.*"

Isidore Ndaywel, a student in Romance Languages and the president of *Pax Romana*, led that humanitarian relief missions that brought at least eighty students to the capital of the Oriental Province.<sup>693</sup> There are two different versions about the origin of the operation. None of them mentions the US embassy, but American archives show that US diplomats were very active behind the scene in the logistics. According to Albert Mpase, Lovanium's General Secretary for Academic Affairs, the initiative came from Prime Minister Moïse Tshombe and was an attempt to gain the sympathy of the students.<sup>694</sup> Ndaywel, on his part, mentioned that Benoit Verhaegen had initiated the operation. In any case, the idea was to send students from Lovanium to assist civilians affected by months of privation under the rebellion as well as by the violence of the counter-insurgency. The operation was conducted in July and August 1965, where three

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<sup>692</sup> "Minutes of the country team Youth Committee Meeting," July 9, 1965. Box 27.

<sup>693</sup> Some students were very critical of *Pax Romana*, accusing the group, which enjoyed the favors of academic authorities, of being the campus's far Right. This was not how students inside the group saw themselves. As Professor Ndaywel told me, for example, he became involved with *Pax Romana* a bit by chance, and not out of any specific ideological bent. He was coming from a Jesuit high school and interested in social activism, and this is what motivated his participation in *Pax Romana*: Isidore Ndaywel, personal interview, unrecorded, Kinshasa, 13 Oct. 2010.

<sup>694</sup> Albert Mpase Nselenge Mpeti, "Vivre le devenir de l'université comme étudiant, responsable universitaire et ministre," in Isidore Ndaywel à Nziem (ed.), *Les années Lovanium: La première université francophone d'Afrique subsaharienne* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010), vol.1, p.265-268.

teams of volunteers from Lovanium worked on agricultural, medical, and education projects in Stanleyville. General Mobutu covered the costs of the operation and labeled the check that he handed out to Ndaywel with the mention of “psychological actions of the National Army.”<sup>695</sup> Directly after *Debout Stan*, Lovanium collaborated with the government by sending students for one year to Stanleyville as secondary school teachers.<sup>696</sup>

A second operation, *Debout Idiofa*, took place in the Kwilu, during vacation time in 1966. Many more students choose to take part in the “holiday military service” that was organized at the same time in different military bases in Kinshasa and the Lower Congo.<sup>697</sup> Yet, Pax Romana still enrolled around 100 volunteers, including students from the Jesuit *Collège Albert*. During *Debout Idiofa*, Pierre Mulele reportedly spread the word, from the recesses of his *maquis*, that people in the area should warmly greet these students from Kinshasa as “comrades” and “brothers” who had come to help them.<sup>698</sup> This came as a surprise to Pax Romana students who had assumed the “intellectual iconoclasm” of the Mulelists.

Not all revolutionaries welcomed Pax Romana’s initiatives. After “*Debout Stan*,” *L’éclair* accused the students of having participated in an operation that only tried to “reinforce the counter-revolutionary movement,” and that they had “attempted to bribe”

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<sup>695</sup> Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem, “La vie quotidienne à Lovanium,” in Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem (ed.), *Les années Lovanium: La première université francophone d’Afrique subsaharienne* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2010), vol.2, p.58. Upon their return to Leopoldville, the Prime Minister, Moise Tshombe at the time, organized a celebration at his residence to congratulate the volunteers of *Debout Stan*.

<sup>696</sup> *Idem*, p.61.

<sup>697</sup> Albert Mpase, “Rapport aux membres du Conseil d’Administration sur la situation des étudiants pendant l’année académique 1965-1966,” 7 July 1966, p.14, Van Der Schueren Papers, LUA, Leuven.

<sup>698</sup> Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem, “La vie quotidienne à Lovanium,” p.67.

the poor population of Stanleyville “by distributing ‘food products’ of American origins, namely canned meat for dogs as well as meat and bone flour from Yankee surplus.”<sup>699</sup>

In conversations with former *Lovaniards*, some of them mentioned Pax Romana as the student Right, and even, in one case, as the student extreme Right. What these qualifiers mostly meant was that students in this Catholic group were close to clerical and academic authorities. As opposed to AGEL or UGEC, Pax Romana was not a totally autonomous association. Its organic connection with the Church gave it a near institutional character. Yet, for Ndaywel, the operations *Debout Idiofa* and *Debout Stan* were a way to change the nature of the group. As he told me in 2011, he found himself at the head of Pax Romana a bit by chance: “I am coming from a Jesuit secondary school and I was asked to enter in the group.” One of his goals was to change the Rightist image of Pax Romana, by giving it a more social character. In this turn to the (Christian) Left, Ndaywel was inspired by the Belgian sociologist Paul Raymaekers.<sup>700</sup> Like many other students, Ndaywel had participated in Raymaekers’ activities during vacations, which situated themselves in-between scouting and military training.<sup>701</sup> These activities, under

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<sup>699</sup>“Nouvelles de Kinshasa,” in *L’éclair* 5 (October 1965), p.21.

<sup>700</sup> Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem, personal interview, unrecorded, Kinshasa, 5 Aug. 2011.

<sup>701</sup> At that time, Raymaekers was something of an anomaly at Lovanium. Officially, he was attached to IRES, the economic and social research institute, but he organized his activities in a so-called Office for the Organization of Rural Programs, which academic authorities had nicknamed Office for the Organization of Revolutionary Programs. In the 1950s, Raymaekers was working in the private sector in Leopoldville, where he was associated with the Boy Scout movement and the Catholic Working Youth (JOC). Frustrated by his professional activities, he decided to write a doctoral dissertation on urban dynamics in the city. He received the authorization to live in a black district, Matete, where he stayed for three years. His doctoral research, which he defined as applied economic and social science, dealt with Leopoldville’s squatting zone. He also focused on the issues of unemployment and youth delinquency. His work was ethnographic, but also strongly normative, and attached to the idea of change. After the riots of 1959, he organized camps for “idle youth,” transferring them to the countryside and away from the “immoral” living conditions of the city. He later moved to Lovanium, where he occupied a room in one of the student dorms: Paul Raymaekers, personal interview, unrecorded, Rhode-St-Genèse, 17 Sept. 2009; Paul

the terms of “development camps” and “community development,” mobilized students and unemployed youth; they focused on a diversity of missions, from the draining of swamps to the archeological research; and their goal was to overcome the “disastrous dualism between traditional academic training and the idea of development.”<sup>702</sup> The same willingness to go beyond the traditional limitations of academic education was behind Pax Romana’s willingness to participate in the pacification in Stanleyville and in the Kwilu. And in the words of Ndaywel, the goal was to render Pax Romana “less clerical” and “more respectable” in the eyes of AGEL and UGEC.<sup>703</sup> In this regard, the operation was successful, and in 1968, Hubert Tshimpumpu, a member of Pax Romana and Ndaywel’s second in command in *Debout Stan* and *Debout Idiofa*, was elected at the head of Lovanium’s student government.<sup>704</sup>

In 1965 and 1966, Catholic students at Lovanium felt moved to take a stand against the violence of the rebellion. Several of them originated from the regions that had

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Raymaekers, *L'organisation des zones de squatting: Eléments de résorption du chômage structurel dans les milieux urbains des pays en voie de développement: Application au milieu urbain de Léopoldville* (Paris: Editions Universitaires), 1964; Paul Raymaekers, *Nzala: Autobiographie d'un coopérant en Afrique Centrale* (Braine-l'Alleud: J.M. Collet, 1993); Paul Raymaekers, *Histoires de là-bas, Nzala* (2007).

<sup>702</sup> Paul Raymaekers, *Villages en développement, Congo-Kinshasa* (Kinshasa : Bureau des programmes ruraux, 1969), p.36.

<sup>703</sup> Isidore Ndaywel, personal interview, unrecorded, 5 Aug. 2011.

<sup>704</sup> Pax Romana’s operations, as well as Paul Raymaekers’ initiatives, inspired later a project called the university extension (*l'extension universitaire*). The extension was funded by the University and managed, at the end of the 1960s, by Isidore Ndaywel and Joseph Ndundu. The two of them had just graduated from the University. At the extension, they were in charge of connecting Lovanium to Congolese society. Joseph Ndundu, who had developed theater on campus during his student years at Lovanium, focused on cultural activities, while Isidore Ndaywel organized cycles of conferences with Lovanium professors throughout the country. The extension did not receive great support from academic authorities at Lovanium – and its marginality was embodied in the small space it was allocated next to the university hospital’s mortuary. Yet, the fact that it existed illustrated the power of institutional critique at the end of the 1960s, and the fact that academic authorities were forced to justify and develop the rooting of the university in society: Isidore Ndaywel, personal interview, unrecorded, Kinshasa, 5 Aug. 2011; Joseph Ndundu, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 10 June 2010.

been devastated by the struggle and they worried about dear ones at the mercy of youth revolutionary militants, soldiers of the national army, and white mercenaries of mixed provenance. Yet, as alumni of Catholic elite schools, they also reacted strongly against a social order marked by the Church. In the words of Daniel Palambwa, an older alumnus of the elite school system in the Kwilu, the rebellions had been the result of “the collapse of moral values” and the disintegration of “friendships molded by schooling” and “industriousness stimulated by joint labor.”<sup>705</sup> In the ethnic kaleidoscope of the Kwilu particularly, the revolution marked the unraveling of a community born through Catholic missionary education and solidified by the struggle for independence.<sup>706</sup> *Debout Stan* and *Debout Idiofa* were partly programs that attempted to mend social fabrics whose flaws had been clearly exposed in the rebellions.

### **The Black Pudding Revolution**

Despite denunciations of Lovanium students’ “counter-revolutionary tendencies,” the Inspired Hill partook of the same spirit of radicalism that triggered other students’ enthusiasm for the armed struggle. As Gillon himself did not fail to notice, the turmoil of Congolese politics influenced the climate on the campus. Students, even without the development of actual tangible connections with Lumumbist rebels, provided a resonance chamber to talks about nationalism, revolution, and the second independence. The leftward dynamic at Lovanium remained self-centered and focused on campus politics for

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<sup>705</sup> Daniel Palambwa, “L’école de mon patelin: Notes autobiographique présentées par Kiangu Sindani,” unpublished manuscript, p.102.

<sup>706</sup> Kiangu Sindani, *Le Kwilu à l’épreuve du pluralisme identitaire 1948-1968* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2009).



years. Still, it transformed the university deeply and ultimately produced effects that could be felt well beyond the Inspired Hill.

As we saw in Chapter Five, relationships on campus became strained at the end of 1962. After the clash around the hazing of English-speaking students, AGEL's failed strike, and the dismissal of Mateene and his replacement with Makanda, the sensitivity of students on the campus was high. A couple of days before New Year's Eve, the University established a commission in charge of inspecting "student problems" (*les problèmes estudiantins*). Monsignor Bakole, the head of the commission, was one of the two Congolese members of the commission – the other was Vincent Mulago, a priest, professor of theology and early promoter of African philosophy and Africanist humanities on the campus.<sup>707</sup> All the other members were Belgian professors and deans dispatched by the different departments of the University. The commission met during one month. Father Plevoets, the University's administrative secretary, wrote a report following the conclusion of the commission and it was discussed during a subsequent meeting of the Board of Directors. The commission did not seize the extent of student's increasing alienation from the institution. It claimed, for example, that the university should be less shy about its "Christian vocation," while the student Left was already criticizing Lovanium's "clericalism." It suggested revising Lovanium curriculum to make it more suited to its African context, but it did not come with any concrete lead on how to reach that goal. The commission's only developed suggestion was to create contacts between current students and the alumni. The latter would serve as advisors for the

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<sup>707</sup> On Mulago's intellectual magister on Congolese Africanists, see Nyunda Ya Rubango, "Omushi Wasomire, l'abbé Vincent Mulago face à l'avenir de la colonie et à l'africanisme," in Marc Quaghebeur, *Figures et Paradoxes de l'Histoire au Burundi, au Congo et au Rwanda (Congo-Meuse, 5)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002), vol. 2, p.508-529.

younger generation. Other ideas in the report seemed less relevant or fully developed: the commission suggested to “search for a myth, a main idea, capable of filling the students with enthusiasm,” to put the students in contact with the people, to create another commission in charge of the contact between students and professors, to increase the order and cleanliness in student dorms, and to develop green spaces on the campus.<sup>708</sup>

The “student problems” were obviously not solved. In July 1963, a group of finishing students submitted a long memorandum to the Board of Directors, presenting the strong “colonialist spirit” of Lovanium as the “root cause of the malaise.”<sup>709</sup>

Lovanium was just another Belgian university for these students, “a Belgian enclave in the Congo, a happy oasis of colonialism.” A passage in the memorandum alluded to the riots of January 4, 1959 in Leopoldville that precipitated decolonization:

In three years since 1960, we have had the time to disillusion ourselves; we have had the time to come to believe that we will also have to conquer our independence, the independence of this university, if needed through a “January 4” that will also have its victims and martyrs, but that will show to the world that these beautiful concrete buildings – a solid opium supplied by foreign capitalists – have not been erected to make the happiness and fulfill the aspirations of a youth, a people that what to be free.<sup>710</sup>

These demands were nearly totally ignored by the board. One Congolese member, however, Aloïs Kabangi, then minister of public administration, raised the question of the

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<sup>708</sup> Maurice Plevoets, “Conclusions de la commission chargée d’étudier les problèmes estudiantins” 28 May 1963, Van Der Schueren Papers, LUA, Leuven.

<sup>709</sup> “Mémoire des étudiants aux membres du Conseil d’Administration,” reproduced in A.R. Ilunga Kabongo, *Crise à Lovanium (1964)* (Brussels: CRISP, 1964), p.19-28.

<sup>710</sup> *Idem*, p.21. The Memorandum contained most of the demands that remained on students’ agenda in the years that followed: the very small number of Congolese among the faculty and the difference in salary between expatriate and local employees of the university; the lack of interest of foreign professors in Africa; the necessity to institutionalize the participation of students in the administration of the university; improvement in the comfort of student dorms; enhancement of student grants, notably in the case of married students.

relationship with students during the meeting.<sup>711</sup> In the eyes of the politician, a climate of confidence was still lacking on the campus because professors were too distant from their students. In the words of Kabangi, a real university was dependent on a real university community. If efforts were not made, the risk was to see students totally drift apart from academic authorities and professors. The third Congress of UGEC was scheduled to begin only two weeks later, and it is quite clear that Kabangi was alluding to the leftist group when he mentioned the dangerous shores where academic authorities could lose the students.<sup>712</sup> However, the university did not adopt any clear measure that would have created a new climate on campus, and academic authorities were more concerned by internal tensions between different members of the Board of Directors. The truth was that the ship of harmony among students, professors and academic authorities had already sailed. Furthermore, the revolutionary armed struggle started in the Kwilu by Pierre Mulele in August 1963 affected the campus and did not help to ease the tensions at Lovanium.

Gillon did not seem to be ready to accommodate the criticisms of students, professors, and members of the Board that his management of the university was overtly

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<sup>711</sup> A former civil servant in Kasai, Kabangi had taken part in Lumumba's government in 1960 as minister of planning; Lovanium's professor Benoît Verhaegen had served as his advisor. In September 1960, Kabangi joined the group of ministers who opposed Lumumba. Kabangi was then able to obtain the creation of a new province, the Lomami, which included different districts inhabited by his ethnic group, the BaSongye. Kabangi nearly directly managed the province from Kinshasa, while also serving as a minister in the central government; in doing so, he used his connections with Lovanium, and the university's Institute for Social and Economic Research designed a program of government for the new province: see Jean-Claude Willame, *Patrimonialism and Political Change in the Congo* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), p.51-52.

<sup>712</sup> "Procès-Verbal de la 74<sup>e</sup> réunion du Conseil d'Administration," 30 July 1963, p.12, Van Der Schueren Papers, LUA, Leuven.

and excessively authoritarian.<sup>713</sup> Accusations of paternalism formulated against the rector held together convincingly. Gillon was a dynamic entrepreneur, obsessed by the physical expansion of his campus. His style of human management reminded somehow the social politics of Union Minière. Gillon attempted to take care of the material and consumption needs of the university community, with the hope that it would buy peace on the Inspired Hill. Through a special partnership with SABENA, Gillon established *Air Lovanium* (Lovanium Airlines) to transport back and forth biannually the professors and their families between Belgium and the Congo. *Air Lovanium* also allowed the rector to import all kinds of commodities – in his memoirs, he mentions for example once buying three tons of Ardennes ham from a butcher in Belgium or one thousand costumes at a clearance sale in Italy.<sup>714</sup> All these commodities were then made available to students and professors through a system of ration coupons.

As Lovanium's tenth anniversary was coming up in 1964, Gillon decided to organize a grandiose celebration. For the occasion, *Air Lovanium* chartered two planes. A host of Belgian academic, religious and political figures made the trip and joined a vast number of Congolese dignitaries, led by President Kasa-Vubu, to enjoy the festivities. An anonymous pamphlet shared the lack of enthusiasm of some students for an event that had not attempted to really include them:

What a splendor! We have never seen a tenth anniversary celebrated in such a way. When Union Minère celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 1956, Monsignor Gillon was one of the illustrious guests among so many other capitalists. No wonder then that there are so many similarities in the two celebrations: same splendor, same colonial atmosphere, while millions are spent to charter planes and transport visitors, family members, and fireworks. All and sundry Congolese personalities stream in, and a few crumbs are distributed to students and workers through the setting up of *fancy fairs* and colonial dances. This has nothing to do

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<sup>713</sup> See Luc Gillon, *Servir en actes et vérité*, p.218.

<sup>714</sup> *Idem*, p.181.

with students; they don't even know what is happening. Why all this *bluff*? What does this profusion of energy and money mean? Ten years of existence and not even a thousand students! Ten years and 172 alumni! Including 43 trainee doctors from Louvain who came to specialize in tropical medicine. [...] This is called an African and even a Congolese university: 43% of the graduates are non-Africans. [...] 129 alumni in ten years! Out of a total of 4,535 registered students since 1954, namely 3%. Waste: 97%. [...] So out of 100 students, only 3 succeed, while the lack of cadres is complained about everywhere... Unless you say that all Congolese are stupid... [...]<sup>715</sup>

Student frustrations at least produced some effects: the fireworks were cancelled.

In the meeting of the Board that preceded the festivities, Albert Ndele, the director of the National Bank and member of the Binza group, attempted to play down the critiques raised by the anonymous pamphlet. The minutes of the meeting have Ndele proclaim that these were “groundless ideas” and “mere excuses for a few bad spirits who always believe they have to express their discontent.” The problem was not with the institution, but with immature students who were manipulated by some politicians.<sup>716</sup> If some members of the Board entertained the idea that the anonymous pamphlet's recriminations had not found a deep echo among the students, they were clearly deluding themselves. On the day of the ceremony, students welcomed Gillon's distinguished guests with insults and jibes, to the great sorrow of Kasa-Vubu.<sup>717</sup> Students were undoubtedly

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<sup>715</sup> Cited in Mabika Kalanda, *La remise en question: Base de la décolonisation mentale* (Brussels: Remarques Africaines, 1967), p.61-63. Mabika Kalanda's reproduction of the pamphlet in his book seems to be exhaustive. However, André Ilunga, who was one of the student activists in 1964, cites a paragraph that is not reproduced by Kalanda: “It is a crime in this university to talk about African unity; you are suspect if you talk about real and effective independence; and talking about authentically African leaders like Lumumba, Sékou Touré, N'Krumah, Ben Bella is nearly a sin. It is therefore not surprising that Lovanium trained such a great number of General Commissioners and *Yesmen*” (cited in A.R. Ilunga Kabongo, *Crise à Lovanium*, p.7). The fact that Mabika Kalanda had himself been one of the General Commissioners in 1960 is probably not unrelated to his omission of this paragraph in his book.

<sup>716</sup> “Procès-Verbal de la 73<sup>e</sup> réunion du Conseil d'Administration,” 31 Jan. 1964, p.7, Van Der Schueren Papers, LUA, Leuven.

<sup>717</sup> Luc Gillon, *Servir*, p.219.

developing a taste for protest. Shortly after the anniversary's celebrations, Professor Verhaegen, who had developed a critique of the university's alienation from Congolese society, gave a talk, during which he attacked the institution and condemned its inability to remake itself in the postcolonial context.<sup>718</sup> The talk, like other similar interventions from Verhaegen, was not only critical of Lovanium – “not African,” “not democratic,” and “not a real university” – but also of its students. Because of the “conditioning” of primary and secondary education, Congolese students are “at 20, the age of entering the University, totally sterilized culturally and intellectually, and therefore totally aseptic to revolutionary ideas.” (p.28) “Students are therefore unable to oppose the western model offered and imposed by him. With this model, he is forced to accept the western myths that are justifying colonial oppression as well as the Eurocentric perspective of foreign professors. Students are all the more unable to build up a liberating dialectic synthesis. Which tool would they use? On which reality would they lean? With nothing personal or authentic left to express, we cannot even say that Lovanium students are denied their freedom of expression.”<sup>719</sup>

This talk, as usual with Verhaegen, was well attended and it certainly impressed the students.<sup>720</sup> One month after booing the anniversary's guests, they paralyzed the whole campus in Lovanium's first major student strike. During an extraordinary general

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<sup>718</sup> The text of the talk is reproduced in Benoît Verhaegen, *L'enseignement universitaire au Zaïre: De Lovanium à l'Unaza 1958-1978* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1978), p.27-33.

<sup>719</sup> *Idem*, p.29.

<sup>720</sup> I would not support however the hypothesis that was formulated by some members of the board, and that seems to be condoned by Jan Vansina in his memoirs, that student protests at Lovanium were orchestrated by Verhaegen: Jan Vansina, *Living with Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), p.165. The role of Verhaegen as a self-professed Catholic Marxist was very important among the group of research assistants that worked under his direction. Verhaegen had also a certain influence on student activists, and probably at the occasion provided advice to some of them. Verhaegen and the group of progressive professors and assistants who revolved around him offered a window to a corpus of ideas and a new political vocabulary to many students, but that influence did not trump the autonomy of student politics and the organic nature of student political passions.

assembly of AGEL on Sunday March 8, its president Hubert Makanda proclaimed that “the time of dialogue” with academic authorities “had passed and that as soon as this Monday March 9, the time of resistance and violence starts.”<sup>721</sup>

On the first day of the strike, Father Liétard, the head of student dorms and restaurants drove his Volkswagen around the campus, saw that students had blocked all the exits, and went directly to report to Gillon: “The rector directly saw the seriousness of the matter. Myself, I did not know what to think, but he immediately felt that it was serious. I remember it very well. I was quite struck by his reaction.”<sup>722</sup> Students were indeed quite determined and they were on their way to the rector’s office, on the last floor of the monumental Administrative building at the center of campus. This is how Yvon Bongoy, who was the president of AGEL’s parliament at the time, described that moment to me in 2010:

At that time, Pierre Lenoir was the assistant of Monsignor Gillon, and he was the brother in law of *Maitre* Nimy [a law student and one of the main figures in the student government in 1964 who became the chief of staff of President Mobutu in the late 1970s]. Lenoir tried to stop us as we were on our way up towards Gillon’s office. One of us, Max Munga – he later became the general director of SNEL [the state electric company], but at the time he was a student in physics – Munga head-butted Lenoir who started to bleed. Nimy was there too, and Lenoir was already married to his older sister then. Nimy got upset at Munga: “No, not this way!” We started to argue and the whole thing nearly overturned. So in the end, we said: “We are not going up there. There are too many of us. If we go to the office, what are we going to do? Arrest Gillon? Let’s all go down.” I still have photographs of that: Makanda and I arrived at the entrance of the building and the square was full of students. We said: “We are not going to catch Gillon. We are going to negotiate.”<sup>723</sup>

The rest of the day was rather troubled. The police arrived on campus, together with Minister of Education Anany. However the idea of a negotiation was accepted on all

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<sup>721</sup> A.R. Ilunga Kabongo, *Crise à Lovanium*, p.8.

<sup>722</sup> Father Liétard, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 17 Aug. 2010.

<sup>723</sup> Yvon Bongoy, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 12 Dec. 2010.

parts ,and Gillon cabled Louvain to ask Professor Malengreau to come immediately to Leopoldville.

In his allocution to the students on the first day of the strike, Hubert Makanda was extremely firm. He accused Lovanium university of having ignored all the demands of the students: the co-management of the institution (*la co-gestion*), better living conditions on the campus, a better judgment in the selection of the faculty, and a democratization of the university. The last words of Makanda's speech were: "To wait any longer? No! Resistance and violence? Yes!"<sup>724</sup>

The strike lasted for seven days, until the beginning of a tripartite commission on March 16. During the week of strike, UGEC leaders in Leopoldville of course supported the movement on the campus. They issued a statement threatening to extend the strike to all the schools of the city if an agreeable solution was not reached at Lovanium. Inside AGEL, students were referring to their action as a revolution: the leaders of the movement all swore an oath to the revolution; and "revolutionary generals" were designated to coordinate the blockade of the campus, marches and occupations of administrative buildings. As Ilunga Kabongo argued, the students made two mistakes: they agreed to end the strike at the beginning of the tripartite commission and they also agreed that the result of the commission would not be binding for academic authorities. Eighteen delegates comprised the commission: eight students (including Makanda, Bongoy, Ilunga Kabongo, and the former AGEL president Gérard Kamanda); eight members of the Board (including Gillon, Kabangi, Malengreau and Ndele); and eleven professors.<sup>725</sup> The commission carried on its discussions for a week, but the students

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<sup>724</sup> A.R. Ilunga Kabongo, *Crise à Lovanium*, p.30-32.

<sup>725</sup> *Idem*, p.11-16.



finally walked out when they saw that one of their key demands – the intervention of students in the selection of the board’s members – would not be accepted.<sup>726</sup> AGEL leaders did not revive the blockade, however.<sup>727</sup>

In the short term, the strike failed, but in the long term it succeeded in imposing the issue of *co-gestion* and africanization as central themes of conversation on the campus.<sup>728</sup> During the first meeting of the Board that followed the strike, several members insisted on the impossibility of following on the student demands. Former Prime Minister Joseph Iléo was particularly vocal, even stating that the Board did not have the right “to abandon power” to the students, and that it was better to shut down the university than to accept the student agenda. Ileo’s point of view strongly reinforced Gillon. It is worth citing the minutes of the meeting, as they state very clearly the opinion of Lovanium authorities’ on the student movement that prevailed until the early 1970s:

The Rector replaced the events of the last few months in the more general context of global student movements. He notices that student associations, in particular those who are still inexperienced and therefore more easily influenced by foreign trends, have the desire to take the power in three steps: first, they try to dominate

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<sup>726</sup> On the commission, see also Bernadette Lacroix, *Pouvoirs et structures de l’Université Lovanium (Cahiers du CEDAF)* (Brussels: CEDAF, 1972), p.67-70.

<sup>727</sup> Gillon was probably grateful to the students for that. In his memoir, he praised their sense of responsibility, at the same time that he dismissed the validity of their demands. He also did not oppose the later academic career of some of them. In 1965, Lovanium sent Bongoy and Ilunga Kabongo to the University of California-Berkley as graduate students, while Hubert Makanda went to the University of Pittsburgh.

<sup>728</sup> Furthermore, the mass adhesion of students for the strike was a success in itself, as was the authorities’ willingness to address student demands in the tripartite commission. Professor Bongoy expressed what these negotiations represented for him and the other AGEL activists: “I must say, it was for me a trigger moment that allowed me to gain confidence in my life. I was born during the colonial period, all of us there, and there was still this automatism of the respect due to older people and, more importantly still, the respect due to Monsignor Gillon and other *eminences grises* like him... So being able to be more or less on an equal footing with him and being able to say: “you are wrong, you did this...” “We did that for a week and this was very important in my life. You know, later, when I was at the United Nations, I had maybe one hundred persons under me, and that experience helped me.” Yvon Bongoy, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 12 Dec. 2010.

student life; second, they try to dominate the whole university; third, they try to dominate the government of their country. AGEL showed that it wanted to make its mark during the hazing of English speaking students in 1962. Now, it is the second step, they want to dominate the whole University. Students think that they are the only ones to understand the university's problems and that they should manage it themselves. Furthermore they are haunted by the idea of decolonization and want to further Africanize the university. They think that the present authorities are preventing Africanization. This sort of discontent is common in other African universities: in Ibadan, Nsukka, Khartoum, Kampala. We can notice a similar trend in nearly all these universities: student demands, revolutions, closing of the university. Will Lovanium be able to escape this evolution?<sup>729</sup>

In the months that followed, Monsignor Malula became the new president of the board, replacing the Belgian Monsignor Scalais. In his first meeting as president, Malula talked extensively about the unsolved problem of the tensions between the students and teaching and research assistants on one side and the professors and academic authorities, on the other side. Gillon's response sounded a bit defensive. He replied with what he had said in May, but he also warned the Board about the "subversive ideas" that were behind some of the demands of the students, as well as about the influence of the troubles inside the country on the campus atmosphere. In his eyes, the tensions would persist as "student activism became widespread in the world" and as in Lovanium "student masses were passively following the directives of their leaders." The conclusion of the Board of that day was to follow a "moderate" politics of *co-gestion* and Africanization and to insist on the respect for authority.<sup>730</sup> An immediate consequence of the strike was the hiring of Albert Mpase, an alumnus of the Lovanium University Center in Kisantu and of the University of Louvain and the former General Commissioner for the Youth in 1960.

Mpase joined Lovanium as General Secretary for Student Affairs. Despite reticence from

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<sup>729</sup> "Procès-Verbal de la 75<sup>e</sup> réunion du Conseil d'Administration," 25 May 1964, p.2-3, Van Der Schueren Papers, LUA, Leuven.

<sup>730</sup> "Procès-Verbal da la séance du 24 octobre 1964 du Conseil d'Administration," p.7-10, Van Der Schueren Papers, LUA, Leuven.

Hubert Makanda, Mpase was able to establish a dialogue with AGEL that prevented any major student strike in the first part of 1965.<sup>731</sup> However, students continued to follow their road of radicalization, and in February 1965, AGEL organized a month-long colloquium on *The University, the student and the people*. The colloquium produced a “charter of the student” that not only repeated the demands of the previous year but also adopted a leftist lexicon directly inspired by UGEC. The first article in the charter defined the student “as a young intellectual worker animated by the faith and desire to free himself and his country from any kind of alienation.”<sup>732</sup>

Paradoxically, many former students remember today AGEL as a non-political association, which they contrast with UGEC, often remembered as a quasi-political party. Despite this vision, AGEL’s activism in 1964 and 1965 was one of the most important moments in student politics during the decade. Similarly, former students sometimes debate the nature of the strike of 1964: was it political or was it not? That question is coming from the fact that what triggered the strike was, before the other demands that became part of AGEL’s negotiation points, a problem with the food served at the university restaurant.<sup>733</sup>

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<sup>731</sup> Albert Mpase Nselenge Mpeti, “Vivre le devenir de l’université comme étudiant, responsable universitaire et ministre,” p.261-264.

<sup>732</sup> “AGEL: Feuille de route n.91,” s.d., AGEL Papers, UNIKIN, Kinshasa. See also Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem, “La première écriture de l’élite universitaire du Zaïre: Présence Universitaire, 1959-1971,” in Marc Quaghebeur et al., eds, *Papier blanc encore noire* Brussels: Labor, 1992, p.423.

<sup>733</sup> Food was a sensitive question at Lovanium, as well as in other schools in the Congo. On the Inspired Hill, the restaurant was quite reputed. As many former students remember, people from Leopoldville enjoyed coming to the campus to eat at the restaurant. If students still often complained about the quantity and quality of the food, it was because it was such a marker of social status. In a Central African context, food was also closely associated to ideas of power, hierarchies, and justice; and it provided a language that allowed people to personalize their understanding and experiences of politics: see Michael G. Schatzberg, *Political Legitimacy in Middle Africa: Father, Family, Food* (Bloomington: Indiana University

It was a point that Makanda had included in his speech in front of the students on the first day of the strike, saying “we can no longer accept a diet that is not even worthy of dogs.”<sup>734</sup> The object of students’ wrath, which had allowed the mobilization for the strike and the development of other demands, was the serving of black pudding at the restaurant. Every time this point has been raised during interviews, it provoked laughs and smiles, a reaction that might be explained by the fact that the memory of the black pudding, maybe more than any others, directly evoked the feeling of the past, the texture of student politics, but also a form of politics that no longer seemed to make complete sense to the persons who were articulating the memories. A dominant narrative in the memory of Lovanium during my fieldwork was indeed that “we ate well” and that “the food was abundant.” The students who lived through the strike of 1964 also adhered to that narrative and they sometimes expressed their own wonder at their critique of the restaurant at the time. However, while many don’t quite remember it, protests about food were quite frequent in the 1960s. And no one seemed to be able to bear the taste and the sight of *boudin*, the Flemish blood sausages or black pudding. José Ndundu, a first-year student in Romance languages in 1964 who remembered the experience of the strike as a liberating moment, had a typical reaction when his narrative moved to the issue of food in the conflict: “We didn’t like *boudin*. We didn’t like it. I don’t know why, but we didn’t like *boudin*. We liked all the rest, even the scrambled eggs ... But later, I think, ten years later, we came to regret the food at Lovanium: it was really well organized.”<sup>735</sup>

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Press, 2001); Jean-François Bayart, *L’Etat en Afrique: la politique du ventre* (Paris: Fayard, 1989); Johannes Fabian, *Power and Performance: Ethnographic Explorations through Proverbial Wisdom and Theater in Shaba, Zaire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

<sup>734</sup> A.R. Ilunga Kabongo, *Crise à Lovanium*, p.32.

<sup>735</sup> José Ndundu, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 10 June 2010.

Food particularly embodied the work of social differentiation that students expected from their access to higher education. The postcolonial promises of development and of social mobility could be assessed through the quality of food offered on campuses. Complaints about food expressed students' anger at the discrepancy they perceived between their real social status and the hopes they had invested in education. The loathing of black pudding created unity and cohesion among Congolese students who came from all the parts of the continent-country and liked to tease each other about culinary oddities and taboos. The importance of food in the student movement cannot be overestimated because it brought together the personal and the political in a way that few questions were able to. Mundanely, at a time when the presence of female students was still very limited, many *Lovaniards* rode the university buses for their weekly visits to the *cités*, and used their food tickets – and negotiated their access to university dinners – to win over women they were meeting there.

### **Re-enter the General**

It was no sinecure being student president at Lovanium. In November 1965, Tharcisse Mwamba replaced Hubert Makanda, whose two years as president of AGEL had set new standards of rigorous, vigorous, and radical leadership. Only a few days after his election, Mwamba faced a major crisis that nearly brought a premature end to his young presidency. Some students had decided to conduct a part of hazing rituals in the *zando*, Leopoldville's largest market, in the city center. The expedition to the *zando* crossed the fragile line of acceptable cruelty for several first-year students that the torturers forced to drink from the market's wastewater. Back at Lovanium, the freshmen

decided to take revenge on the torturers and on the Cameroonian student who occupied the position of minister of interior in Mwamba's cabinet. When the campus police intervened, vindictive greenhorns had already seriously harmed three of their torturers. This distressing reversal of hierarchical order jeopardized the whole hazing process. Academic authorities intervened. They pressured Mwamba to select a new team of torturers. However, the discarded team was determined to sabotage the work of their successors. The situation was blocked and threatened to completely ruin Mwamba's legitimacy and authority. In an unprecedented and bold move, the young president declared all first-year students initiated (*baptisés*), including those who had not taken part in the hazing rituals before the incident at the market.<sup>736</sup> Mwamba's unorthodox decision risked alienating those among the students who were attached to the letter of the hazing. At the same time, it respected the spirit of the ritual by formally welcoming incoming students to the community of their peers. Mwamba's urgency to get out of the deadlock in November 1965 certainly came from memories of the 1962 crisis. Yet, as in the case of Mateene, Mwamba was discharged before the end of his term.

In his report to the Board at the end of the academic year in June 1965, Albert Mpase had shared his belief that the following year would be quiet on the front of rmined to sabotage<sup>737</sup> He was proven quite wrong, and 1965-1966 instead entered the annals of student protest as a great vintage. It must be said that the year 1965-1966 was particularly eventful on the front of "student affairs" at Lovanium. Married students complained repeatedly about the lack of electricity and absence of furniture in the half-finished

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<sup>736</sup> "Rapport aux membres du conseil d'administration sur la situation des étudiants pendant l'année 1965-1966," 7 July 1966, Van Der Schueren Papers, LUA, Leuven.

<sup>737</sup> Albert Mpase, "Rapport sur les étudiants et leurs problèmes," n.d., p.12, Van Der Schueren Papers, LUA, Leuven.

houses of the “camp” that Gillon had built for them and their families in the nearby new district of Lemba. On the campus, many voices lamented the burden of *Article 9*, a regulation that restricted the presence of female visitors in student dorms to the parlors. Complaints about the lack of diversity at the restaurant, with their aftertaste of black pudding, particularly distressed Lovanium authorities. Albert Mpase also had to deal with recriminations about the choices of movies that were shown on the campus: students demanded to be able to see the movies of their liking and not those chosen by paternalistic and bigoted overseers. Finally, during the year, Benoit Verhaegen offered his resignation as director of the Political Studies Center of the Institute for Economic and Social Research (IRES), a semi-independent research center affiliated with Lovanium and financially supported by the Ford Foundation. Verhaegen did not renounce his professorship at the university, but his resignation as director of the center aimed at creating scandal after the Board shilly-shallied for months over the nomination of one of his assistants, Jean-Claude Willame, to the position of “Qualified Researcher.” Verhaegen reportedly announced that he could only resume his directorship once the university would be decolonized and democratized. Students in the faculty of Political Sciences, Sociology, and Economics expressed their support for his position, and against the board’s supposed opposition to progressive researchers.<sup>738</sup>

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<sup>738</sup> Albert Mpase, “Rapport aux membres du Conseil d’Administration sur la situation des étudiants pendant l’année académique 1965-1966,” 7 July 1966, Van Der Schueren Papers, LUA, Leuven. A few months before his resignation, Verhaegen had a letter from Cardinal Malula, letting him know that the Board of Directors was officially reprimanding him for his article about the strike of 1964 in *Présence Africaine*, as well as more generally for his attitude vis-à-vis the university: Cardinal Malula, letter to B. Verhaegen, 9 April 1965, Lovanium Papers, Monsignor Plevoets private archives, Kinshasa. The letter from the Board followed a petition signed by 30 professors and assistants that demanded sanctions against Verhaegen. The latter’s response came in an open letter, dated April 10, in which he

During the year of Mwamba's presidential tenure, and maybe even more than usually, Lovanium was affected by the events that unfolded on the national political scene. In the night of November 24 to 25, 1965, a coalition of military officers seized power, suspended the working of all major political institutions, dismissed Joseph Kasa-Vubu from the presidency and replaced him with their leader, General Joseph-Désiré Mobutu. The officers justified their coup by pointing to the anarchy and political chaos that had defined the previous period: the armed rebellion of Lumumba's successors, the incapacities of politicians to get along, and the conflict between Kasa-Vubu, Tshombe and Kimba that risked paralyzing the country.<sup>739</sup>

Less than three weeks after the coup, on December 14, Lovanium students and professors welcomed the new president during an official ceremony in the university's *salle académique*. Four speeches were presented, including one by Mwamba. The president of the student government's first words were, "Let us roll up our sleeves Congo, great country," which was the slogan officially adopted by Mobutu in his first public speech as new head of state in Leopoldville's stadium a few days before.

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attacked "my colleagues alienated in their western heaviness." See Benoît Verhaegen, *L'enseignement universitaire au Zaïre*, p.50-54.

<sup>739</sup> In July 1964, Moïse Tshombe had replaced Cyrille Adoula as Prime Minister (as we will see with more details in the following chapter). A year later, Tshombe showed his incredible political savoir-faire and maneuvering talents by winning a large victory for his political coalition at the parliamentary elections. Yet, Kasa-Vubu who felt threatened by Tshombe's obvious ambitions for the coming presidential elections decided to dismiss him as prime minister and replaced him with Evariste Kimba. The latter, who was a Luba from Katanga, had been Tshombe's minister through the secession. Yet, in 1965, he had joined the camp of his opponent in the *Front Démocratique Congolais (F.D.C.)*. The F.D.C. claimed to represent a turn to the Left and enjoyed the support of some progressive forces, notably among student activists. A Kimba cabinet could seem potentially threatening to Belgian interests. For example, on November 1965, Cléophas Kamitatu, who was a supporter of Kimba, organized a demonstration against imperialism in Leopoldville, high point of which was an "attack" against the monument to Leopold II in front of the central station. Some observers, including Kamitatu himself, have claimed that Kimba's turn to the Left featured among the reasons for Mobutu's coup: see Cléophas Kamitatu, *La grande mystification du Congo-Kinshasa: Les crimes de Mobutu* (Paris: Maspero, 1971), p. 141-145.



Parenthetically, that slogan, the first of a long series of Mobutist incantations, was soon after immortalized in a series of stamps that celebrated the Congolese army's self-sacrifice for the nation. The rest of Mwamba's speech was in keeping with his congenial greetings. It was the first time that the students were welcoming a political leader with such enthusiasm. In the name of AGEL, Mwamba expressed his official support for the program announced by the General. He insisted in particular on the necessity to bring about economic independence for the country, taking Mobutu at his word. Going a step further, his speech encouraged the new leader to go even further in the nationalist program announced in the aftermath of the coup.

"It is necessary," Mwamba said, "to replace the old semi-colonial structures by well fitted, authentically democratic and more efficient structures." Rector Gillon, who was sharing the stage with Mwamba and Mobutu, certainly raised an eyebrow when AGEL president called for a reform of education, with an increased involvement of the state to insure that schools and universities were adequately serving the nation.<sup>740</sup>

Mwamba concluded by promising Mobutu that he would not be disappointed if he appealed to the intellectual elite to help him in his program of national renewal and mobilization of the people.<sup>741</sup>

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<sup>740</sup> Gillon was on friendly terms with Mobutu. The two men knew each other well from their shared interest for flying: see Luc Gillon, *Servir en actes et vérité*, p.186-200. In the speech that he presented before Mwamba, the Rector similarly extended his warmest greetings to the General-President, even mentioning the "rolled-up sleeves" of Lovanium's professors, students and academic authorities. The rector's speech was mostly a call for the president to use the services of university graduates, as well as to improve public funding for Lovanium: see Luc Gillon, *Allocution de bienvenue prononcée par Mgr L. Gillon, Recteur de l'Université Lovanium à l'occasion de la première visite officielle du Lieutenant-General Joseph-Desire Mobutu, Président de la République Démocratique du Congo, le 14 décembre 1965* (Leopoldville: Université de Lovanium, 1965).

<sup>741</sup> Tharcisse Mwamba; "Discours prononcé par le président de l'association générale des étudiants de l'Université Lovanium," in *Echos de Lovanium* 1 (March 1966), p.24-25

Photographs of Mobutu's visit to campus published in the student journal show the president in a short-sleeved army shirt, Gillon in full academic regalia, while Makanda, and his assistant Martin Belinga, can be seen wearing plain shirts without any tie.<sup>742</sup> Makanda's outfit in particular seems to announce the *abacost* (abbreviation for *à bas le costume*), the Mao suit-like national costume that Mobutu would promote in the 1970s and 1980s after having strictly banned the wearing of suits and ties. Makanda and Belinga's decision to abandon the tie was a noticeable break in the campus dress code; and the clearest affirmation of their commitment to African nationalism and the decolonization of Lovanium. After the speeches in the academic hall, AGEL leaders escorted the president and his suite to the "Place of Revolution," the center of student life, where Mobutu signed AGEL's visitor book. Not recorded in that day's printed accounts, but evoked in oral communications by a couple of former students, Makanda would also have offered to Mobutu a *penne*, the distinct cap conferred to Lovanium students after the hazing rituals. Maybe apocryphal, that memory still renders the meaning of Mobutu's visit at Lovanium on December 14, 1965: the president had been welcomed as an honorary student.

### **Mutual Interests**

As we will see in the following chapter, President Mobutu promoted a resolutely nationalist political agenda that assured a certain support in student circles during the first few years after his coup. In the previous years, many students had directly supported the

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<sup>742</sup> A former seminarian from Cameroon, Belinga was a law student at Lovanium. He later became a diplomat for his country of origin, notably as the head of Cameroon's representation at the United Nations. More recently, he has served as President Paul Biya's chief of staff.

different governments of Joseph Ileo, Cyrille Adoula, Moïse Tshombé and Evariste Kimba. Yet, the opposition of the students to the government had emerged strongly in the footsteps of the rebellions and even more so after the accession of Tshombé to the position of prime minister in 1964. After Mobutu's coup, the students seemed instead to become a collective force that engaged the state with a spirit of collaboration instead of its previous opposition. This alliance was sealed in the summer of 1966.

As a result of Mobutu's politics of tension with the Congo's former colonizers at the time, the Belgian government suspended a great part of its technical assistance to the Congo, which meant that more than a thousand Belgian teachers employed in Congolese secondary schools – more than 20 percent of teachers in that sector – did not return to work in September of that year. To compensate, the government of President Mobutu established a mandatory “civic service” (*service civique obligatoire*), a system conceived as a mix between the national military service and colonial forms of forced labor in the maintenance of roads and other community services. The new civic service drafted thousands of students and recent graduates. Most of these so-called *miliciens*, subjected to military discipline, were sent for a year to secondary schools throughout the country as a replacement of the missing Belgian teachers. Yet, some of them were also appointed to the judiciary and the health system, where the needs were also very important. Despite the very authoritarian overtones of the draft, students accepted the measure without much resistance. In the first few years, there was even a certain enthusiasm on the part of the student-teachers, who saw the civic service and the temporary interruption of their studies as a just compensation for the state's investment in their own education and a patriotic

sacrifice in support of the regime's economic nationalism and apparent rupture with the former colonizer.<sup>743</sup>

Campus politics were profoundly altered by Mobutu's presidency. A few weeks after the new leader's visit to Lovanium, Tharcisse Mwamba came to the realization that his early support had been a mistake. Taking a more critical stance vis-à-vis the new regime, Mwamba was contested inside AGEL and was dismissed as a president at the beginning of 1966. He then became an active member of UGEC, both on campus and at the national level. At that point, tensions increased between the national union and Lovanium student government. As many students who originated from Katanga, Kasai, and Eastern Congo, followed Mwamba, UGEC at Lovanium was accused to be a tribalist organization. It lost some of its attraction from some students. In November 1966, Mathias Nzanda-Bwana became the new president of AGEL, defeating a Swahili-speaking opponent supported by Mwamba. During his tenure, Nzanda-Bwana resumed the critique of Lovanium's colonial character and attempted to force a reform of the institution by organizing a new strike on campus.<sup>744</sup>

Conflict erupted several times during the academic year, including violent skirmishes between students and Lovanium police at the University hospital, and several attempts by AGEL to block the campus. Mobutu took the opportunity of the crisis to increase his influence with Congolese intellectuals. He seemed to support academic authorities at first, but when Gillon decided to expel Nzanda-Bwana and a few other

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<sup>743</sup> Ghislain Bitoma and Julien Ntil, *Enquête sur les professeurs miliciens en République Démocratique du Congo, année scolaire: 1968-1969* (Kinshasa: Office National de la Recherche et du Développement, 1970), p.5-9. As Bitoma and Ntil's survey shows, the enthusiasm of the first few years did not last. By 1968, the majority of *miliciens* that they surveyed expressed negative opinions about the draft: Idem, p.32.

<sup>744</sup> Mathias Nzanda-Bwana, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 8 March 2010.

activists in AGEL, Mobutu intervened and forced the Rector to reintegrate them. The manoeuver clearly undermined Gillon's authority, and at the academic year, he decided to resign as a rector. He was succeeded by a Congolese priest, Tharcisse Tshibangu. That very visible measure of Africanization at the top of Lovanium hierarchy certainly contented Congolese students and faculty on campus. Yet, it marked the beginning of the regime's control on Lovanium. And, a few years later, after the romance between Mobutu and the students ended, Tshibangu one of the targets of student discontent.

Part IV  
Violence, Authenticity, and the Student Massacre

## Chapter 9

### Passions in the Congolese 1968

Question: *I am harassed by young girls who fall in love with me even when I don't show them any interest. On the other hand, the ones I love have strict parents and our relationships become impossible.*

Answer: This is indeed the great problem of the relationships between boys and girls. Is it conceivable that boys and girls keep company to each other? (...) Contacts between the sexes prepare the way for a good understanding between future fathers and mothers. But the dangers are numerous. (...) So many boys, considering that girls are simple objects of conquest, take advantage of these encounters; besides, some girls underestimate so much their feminine dignity that they don't respect their own person and that they give themselves stupidly to the uncontrolled and uncontrollable passions of some boys.<sup>745</sup>

One tends to think of students as grown up but in fact they remain children. [...] Certainly we are aware that idealism and turbulence are student characteristics throughout the world. Dealing as they do with books, theses, hypotheses and histories, students are largely unaware of the realities of life. Many operate under the illusion that a few Marxist principles can save humanity and the Congo along with it. This is a monumental error, because human nature is inherently imperfect but it is also excusable.<sup>746</sup>

Betty was like the Congolese Dolly.<sup>747</sup> Like the popular “Dear Dolly” in the English-speaking *Drum* magazine, “Betty et ses amies” was a column, published in the

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<sup>745</sup> Betty Mweya, “Garçons et filles,” in *Afrique Chrétienne* 6-13 (1967), p.29.

<sup>746</sup> “Editorial blast at University Student,” airgram from the American Embassy in Kinshasa to the Department of State, 8 Feb. 1968, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Box 356, NARA, College Park. The document provides the summary of an editorial of *La Tribune Africaine* denouncing an anonymous student pamphlet that called Mobutu an American sell-out.

<sup>747</sup> See Kenda Mutongi, “Dear Dolly’s Advice: Representations of Youth, Courtship, and Sexualities in Africa, 1960-1980,” in *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 33-1 (2000), p.1-23. See also Deborah Kallman, “Projected Moralities, Engaged Anxieties: Northern Rhodesia’s Reading Publics, 1953-1964,” in *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 32-1 (1999), p.71-117.

Congolese Catholic weekly *Afrique Chrétienne*, which provided answers to letters from young readers on relationships, marriage, and love. Unlike in *Drum*, anonymous redactors did not ghostwrite these answers. Instead, a real Betty, Elisabeth Mweya, animated the column. She was a high school student in Kinshasa as well as a postulant, an aspiring religious sister, in the new female order of *Soeurs Thérésiennes*. Monsignor Malula, the bishop of Kinshasa and president of Lovanium's Board of Administrators, had established this order and personally watched over its development. His goal was to create religious sisters who would be truly Christian and African at the same time.

Betty Mweya loved to write and perform poetry. At the end of secondary school, she won the first prize in the Lyons Club's contest of eloquence. The theme was: "As soon as one makes a step outside of mediocrity, one saves oneself." Mweya was a poet. She read Rimbaud, Verlaine and the Negritude writers. In the convent, at sunset, she often went to the little wood at the back of a courtyard to recite texts of her own composition. Malula called her affectionately *la Senghorine*.<sup>748</sup> Elisabeth Mweya first entered into contact with the editors of *Afrique Chrétienne* as a reader. They liked her letters and asked her to become a contributor at the end of 1966. Her poems and articles appeared regularly in the magazine over the following couple of years, but her name was associated with the advice column. The young postulant became a celebrity. Betty was known not only in Kinshasa, but throughout the whole Congo, as *Afrique Chrétienne* reached every corner of the country where the Catholic Church had established one of its parishes.

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<sup>748</sup> Malula considered that "the art of storytelling, of improvising and of reading poetry" was part of the aspect of the "Bantu soul" that his religious sisters should develop, next to the use of dance in prayers, and the "Africanization" of the sisters' diet, dress, and living conditions: see Léon de Saint-Moulin, *Oeuvres complètes du Cardinal Malula* (Kinshasa: Facultés Catholiques de Kinshasa, 1997), vol.5, p.88.



Strangely enough, neither Malula nor Mweya's spiritual advisor, a French Jesuit Father, opposed her column. They did not seem to worry that she was receiving more and more letters from young men and women, and that she was turning herself into a specialist in sentimental education and engagement etiquette – and that most of her columns preached the superiority of feelings, of love, over traditions and parental pressures in issues of marriage. Would their opposition have mattered anyway? A Catholic nun was already in charge of reading all the correspondence that was addressed to Betty and of preemptively screening out any letter that she deemed inappropriate. Yet, the fact is that Betty's life was writing itself as a love story, a true and irrepressible romance.

To a young male reader of *Afrique Chrétienne* who asked her why Congolese girls did not like to correspond with boys, Betty had answered that written correspondence between the sexes was “in no way scandalous” and that it “contributes to broaden young people's views of the world.” Yet, she had also warned her readers about “the deception of some men of today” who attempted to get more out of their postal exchanges with young women.<sup>749</sup> Doctors make the worst patients, and Mweya let herself “slip in a risqué exchange” with one of her male correspondents.

This chapter focuses on the dramatic turn of Congolese students' political passions at the end of the 1960s. Academic and state authorities tended to respond to the activism of Congolese students with criticisms of their imitation of their peers in Europe and elsewhere, but also with condescending sentiments on the universality and inevitability of youth protests, presented as a form of generational atavism, a fact of

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<sup>749</sup> Elisabeth Mweya, “Courrier d'Elisabeth,” in *Afrique Chrétienne* 6-9 (1967), p.22.

nature and biology. Their disparaging views of power and the excessive sentimentality of student politics urge us to look at the passions of the Congo in 1968.

This chapter about the political fervor of students embraces a postal courtship and the worldly passion of a young religious postulant. With the increasing intensity of student protest and the threatening face of state repression, the political largely colonized the personal. Friendship, love, revolution: they mixed in the Congolese 1968 confusion of feelings and remaking of the selves. We will return to Betty and her romantic correspondence in a moment. First, we begin with Mobutu and the student movement and how they “fell in love” with each other.

### **A Special Relationship**

We have seen how Mobutu’s coup turned the tables in student politics at the end of 1965. From a dynamic of opposition to power, vocal under the tenure of Tshombe as prime minister in 1964 and 1965, students became backers of the new regime. This was particularly true at Lovanium, even if the first effect of the coup was to destabilize the student government and create tensions between different groups of student activists. On the other hand, the student diaspora, which was still largely connected to the kinetic energy of the Congolese revolution, was less affected by the new deal in Leopoldville. As for UGEC cadres in the Congo, they found themselves in between the enthusiasm for the new regime expressed by Mathieu Nzanda-Buana – the Lovanium student president who pushed Monsignor Gillon out in 1967 – and its sheer rejection by a Mukendi wa Nsanga – the leader of UJRC, the Maoist underground organization that published *L’éclair*.

Student activists who revolved around André N'kanza Ndolumingo and the modest headquarters of UGEC – the General Union of Congolese Students – in the popular district of Dendale adopted a rather ambivalent attitude towards Mobutu. Perceptions of a honeymoon between UGEC and the regime are frequent in the memories of the student movement. Yet, this is partly a distortion, produced by the ambiguity of the identity of UGEC as a group. In the immediate aftermath of the coup, several individual members of UGEC joined the regime, to occupy key positions in government and around the president. The group did not, however, collectively swear allegiance to Mobutu. No doubt, some students and recent graduates were attracted to his power. They believed in the capacity to orient the politics of the regime, while also pursuing individual strategies of social advancement. This was not true of the student movement as a collective entity.<sup>750</sup> Furthermore, N'kanza Ndolumingo and a few others were careful to maintain the independence of the student union throughout the period of nationalist open support for the new regime.

The strong reliance of Mobutu on university graduates was formalized in November 1966, with the official formation of the General Secretariat of the Presidency

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<sup>750</sup> Cléophas Kamitatu's portrait of Mobutu is quite illuminating in that regard. It appeared in the book that Kamitatu published while in exile in Paris, and that the French authorities banned at the request of Zaire. Like many opponents, Kamitatu later joined Mobutu's regime and served several times as minister in the 1980s and 1990s. However, in 1971, Kamitatu's book was one of the first widely publicized attacks on Mobutu's stature. Kamitatu "demystified" the vision of Mobutu as an all-powerful leader. Instead, he showed how the "Leopard" was only a player among others, who had been dependent on the support of diverse groups at different moments of his struggle for power. Kamitatu's analysis notably allows a re-evaluation of the balance of power in Mobutu's relationship with the students: Cléophas Kamitatu, *La grande mystification du Congo-Kinshasa: Les crimes de Mobutu* (Paris: Maspero, 1971), p.155-160.

headed by Gérard Kamanda, a former student activist in UGEC and AGEL.<sup>751</sup> All the other members of the secretariat were university graduates, several of them were formerly associated with UGEC. These men – Ferdinand Kayukwa, Joseph Baokonde, Barthélémy Bisengimana, Jacques Bongoma, Stéphane Nkashama-Nkoy, Philippe Mutamba, and later, Hubert Tshimumpu, Anasthase Nzeza, Léon Lobitsh, Jean Umba-di-Lutete, José Patrick Nimy and others – engineered Mobutu’s voluntarist politics of national renewal during his first five years in power.<sup>752</sup> The new regime promoted the expertise of Congolese universities in the conduct and planning of the economy, which culminated in the 1973 and 1974 with the economy’s “Zaïrianization” – the expropriation of businesses, factories, and plantations owned by foreigners and their redistribution to Congolese/Zaïrian nationals. The promotion of national expertise was manifest in the government’s establishment of the Office National de la Recherche et du Développement (ONRD), as well as in measures of state support for the development of literary and scientific publications. The General Secretariat of the Presidency was pivotal in creating a dynamic that reinforced national sovereignty and sought to break from nearly a decade of dependence on foreign “technical assistance” in the government of Congolese affairs.

Many of the members of the General Secretariat were already part of Mobutu’s cabinet before November 1966. Jacques Bongoma, for example, was in Mobutu’s office at 8:30 am on November 25, 1965, the first day that followed the coup against Kasa-

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<sup>751</sup> The secretariat was later renamed *Bureau de la Présidence*, under the leadership of Jacques Bisengimana. For several years, the secretariat-bureau was the real center of command and planning of the Congo. The most important decisions were taken there, notably with regard to the large development projects that the regime was then still able to undertake, thanks to the still relatively high price of copper. Yet, after a few years, the Bureau was suspended and more autonomy was given to the different *commissariats d’Etat*.

<sup>752</sup> See José Patrick Nimy Mayidika Ngimbi, *Je ne renie rien, je raconte...: L’histoire d’un parcours sur un parcours d’histoire* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2006), p.151-152.

Vubu. Mobutu had spotted Bongoma a few months before during one of his trips to Europe. Bongoma was finishing a specialized degree at the London School of Economics. At the request of his friend Elizabeth Bagaaya Nyabongo – a Ugandan royal who had a law degree from Cambridge and was one of the first black models in England – Bongoma went to a press conference organized for Mobutu in London. Mobutu inquired to know who was this man accompanying the Ugandan princess and, when told that it was one of his fellow countrymen, asked to meet him. The two men discussed politics and the state of the Congo. Months later, when the coup had just been announced on the radio, Mobutu summoned the young Bongoma – who had come back to Leopoldville and was working as a free-lance journalist – in order to ask him to work at his side: “You know the situation. I want to work with new men and I want you to take charge of commerce, industry and finances, here, in my office.” When Bongoma asked for some time to give his answer, the new president replied: “You have fifteen minutes to think about it.”<sup>753</sup> Bongoma accepted the offer. Mobutu put him in Kasa-Vubu’s former office. Even if he came to suspect that he had inherited the former president’s quarters out of Mobutu’s fear of his predecessors’ “fetishes,” he was still proud of his new responsibilities. “It was quite moving,” the former presidential advisor told me in one of our interviews in 2011. “I was 27 years old!”<sup>754</sup>

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<sup>753</sup> Jacques Bongoma, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 5 July 2011.

<sup>754</sup> Bongoma studied at the Catholic Institute of High Commercial Studies (ICHEC) of Brussels from 1958 to 1961. He attended the Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Rome in 1959. In Belgium, he was closely involved with the Left: attending open classes offered by the Trotskyist economist Ernest Mandel, befriending the progressive and third-worldist lawyer Jules Chomé, and regularly saw militants of the youth branch of the Belgian Communist Party like Eddy Poncelet. In 1961, Bongoma had participated in the first Congress of UGEC. He had then worked briefly at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, before resuming his education at the London School of Economics. He was close to several members of the Belgian Communist Party and to the progressive lawyer Jules Chomé.

The recordings of my conversations with Jacques Bongoma run for over five hours. Besides the loss of his personal library, which counted thousands of volumes accumulated over the years (he told me that people, knowing he would not accept bribe money during his time at the presidency, brought him books, which he never refused), one of the moments in our conversation that most animated him was Mobutu's decision to make Lumumba a national hero in 1966:

This happened like this. One day, it must have been June 12, a Sunday, Mobutu arrived at my place. At that time, I was writing 80 percent of his speeches. He arrived around 5 pm. His house was nearby; it overlooked the river and Brazzaville on the other side. We had free conversations like that all the time. And he tells me: *"I came, Jacques, because June 30 is coming soon and I want to make a great speech."* So, I say: "Well, do you have a special message for the people?" *"No, I don't have a special message, but I want a great speech. You know the score: write a draft and we'll discuss it."* And he left. So, I prayed a lot. And, in the morning, I started to read the presidential speeches for June 30 from the previous year, and then I went back in time until the speeches from June 30, 1960. This is how I went to Mobutu and told him: "Well, I have looked at the different speeches for June 30 since independence, and when I arrived at Lumumba's speech, it really struck me. There is in it a whole program of government that was never realized as he suggested. And I would like to take inspiration from that speech. Do you have objections to that?" He says: *"No, no, no!"* Then I ask him a question and he replies: *"Come over home Sunday morning and I will tell you what I think of Lumumba."* I knew he was an earlier riser, so I was there at 7:30 am on the Sunday. I was in the living room with the minister of information Jean-Jacques Kande, a journalist, a former member of UGEC, who had studied in Prague, and who had initiated Mobutu to journalism [in the 1950s]. I sat next to Jean-Jacques and we started to talk. At 7:50 am, he [Mobutu] invited me and Jean-Jacques to have breakfast with him and his wife. Then, he took me by the hand – he often had affectionate gestures – and asked Jean-Jacques to follow us, telling him: *"Jacques asked me some questions and I would like you to be there as a witness when I answer him."* We walked down until the end of the garden. He, first, sat down in the grass. And then, me. Like in the movie *Breakfast at Tiffany's!* *"We are here because Jacques asked me what I think of Lumumba. I am going to tell you the truth about Lumumba: I have a lot of admiration for the man, because if I am the president today it is thanks to him. He was someone who had a lot of trust in the intellectual youth like I have trust in you. For example, at the time of the economic roundtable, he made the list of his representatives and designated me and Mario Cardoso, a sign that he trusted the youth."* And then he started to explain what Lumumba was telling him at the time. And then he started to become very sentimental: *"Lumumba, the first time I met him, I was*

*participating in a public meeting and when he asked me to work with him,” he told me, “it was like love at first sight, a coup de foudre.” And then he said, because he was reading the bible a lot and making a lot of biblical references, “I did like the first Christians, Matthew and all the others: I said yes directly and I went to be his private secretary.” Mais c’était un homme tout à fait fantastique, Mobutu!*<sup>755</sup>

Bongoma continued to explain how he had worked with Mobutu on the speech:

He told me that Lumumba knew that he was going to die because of his extremist nationalist politics. Mobutu tells me: “*I warned Patrice about it*” – he always said simply “Patrice” – “*and Patrice answered, like in the Bible, like Jesus said: ‘There is no greater love than giving one’s life for the others.’*” And so, he told me that Lumumba had accepted to die for his country’s independence [and] his people’s freedom. And at this moment when he said that Lumumba accepted to die for the freedom of the Congo, I told him: “He was like a national hero who died for the fatherland.” So Mobutu said: “*Write that down in the speech.*” So I put that down in the *draft* and he told me: “*Here is what we are going to do: we are going to proclaim him a national hero.*”<sup>756</sup>

There was a series of captivating *mises en abyme* in that moment: from the configuration of my interview with the older Bongoma, just out of the small room that he occupied in the popular district of Lemba, in a courtyard where shoemakers were turning old leather jackets into fancy smart shoes; to his recollection of his intimate conversation on the grass with Mobutu in the pastoral and majestic surroundings of the presidential garden in 1966; to Mobutu’s story-inside-the-story about his youthful sentimental epiphany with Lumumba at the end of the 1950s. A few elements were lost in that game of mirrors, like Mobutu’s involvement in the assassination of Lumumba or the fact that UGEC had explicitly demanded the proclamation of the dead prime minister as a national

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<sup>755</sup> Jacques Bongoma, personal interview, recorded, 22 July 2011.

<sup>756</sup> Besides his proclamation as a national hero, Lumumba’s name was given to Kinshasa’s longest boulevard and his face put on banknotes when the Congo adopted its new currency, the Zaire – not yet the name of the country – in 1967. Furthermore, Mobutu also announced the erection of a large monument to the national hero and the mandatory installing of busts of Lumumba in all Congolese towns.

hero already in 1963.<sup>757</sup> What these fragments of nostalgic memory suggest are, first, Mobutu's powers of seduction over a young intellectual; and, second, the high emotional capital associated with the memory of Lumumba.<sup>758</sup>

The young Bongoma remembered his work at the presidency as an exhilarating experience. He was a young progressive intellectual, committed to the Congo's full independence, and he helped the new regime take the road of economic decolonization with a year-long trial of strength with Union Minière, which resulted in a measure of nationalization in 1967. The rehabilitation of Lumumba was no less important, as were the first measures of "mental decolonization," such as changes in cities' names. The older Bongoma insisted on his proximity to Mobutu. As he told me, the two were always seen together, and it created hostility on the part of other members of Mobutu's first circle: "They even tried to know if I had special relationships with Mobutu, if we were homosexuals. He just had a total trust in me... that was it. It was misplaced jealousy."

The cabal against Bongoma ran its course: in 1970, he was arrested by agents of the sûreté and put in jail for attacking the state. In prison, Bongoma met Zénon Mibamba,

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<sup>757</sup> Multiple stories circulate about the circumstances of Lumumba's ascension to the status of national hero. Paul-Henri Kabayidi remembered that the idea for the proclamation of Lumumba as a national hero had emerged from the political *bureau* of the CVR (see below). Cléophas Kamitatu, on the other hand, claimed for example that it was one of the suggestions made by American diplomats in a report that they handed over to Mobutu after a secret survey conducted around the country: see Cléophas Kamitatu, *La grande mystification du Congo-Kinshasa*, p.177. The US embassy did not mention such a genealogy in its analysis of Mobutu's speech on June 30, 1966. Yet, American diplomats approved of the decision: "In making Lumumba a national hero Mobutu attempted to don the mantle." ("United States Government Memorandum," 5 July 1966, Records of the Bureau of African Affairs, 1958-1966, Box 27, NARA, College Park).

<sup>758</sup> The novels of Sony Labou Tansi and the work of Achille Mbembe have contributed to widespread views of African autocrats as priapic despots: see Sony Labou Tansi, *La vie et demie* (Paris: Seuil, 1979) and Achille Mbembe, *De la postcolonie: Essai sur l'imagination politique dans l'Afrique contemporaine* (Paris: Karthala, 2000). Mobutu provided an important source of inspiration to both Sony Labou Tansi and Achille Mbembe, but memories attached to him are more complex than the image of priapic despot, as shown by Jacques Bongoma.



the former UGEC leader and CNL activist who had been arrested together with Mulele in 1968, as well as a few Belgian businessmen arrested in the Socobanque case, a corruption scandal that made the headlines for months at the time. Bongoma's enemies used as evidence of his crime a book that he had published the year before that suggested radical ways out of underdevelopment. Mobutu had him released after a short time, but he had to let him go. Bongoma went back to his studies and completed a doctoral dissertation in demography at Australian National University.

Bongoma's arrest provided a good example of the sense of absurd already cultivated by the dictatorship's instruments of repression at this point. President Mobutu himself had signed the preface of Bongoma's "subversive" book. However, it is very possible that Bongoma himself ghost-wrote the presidential preface to his own work. The book, *Indépendance économique et Révolution*, sought to invalidate the development of an orthodox support for scientific socialism among the Congolese intellectual youth and instead returned to the of "mental decolonization," state planning, and nationalization measures expressed at the beginnings of the student movement. It summarized what had been the official ideology of the regime – namely that African countries did not have to choose between socialism and liberal democracy, that both were irrelevant to the situation of postcolonial economies, and that, instead, countries like the Congo should follow the principles of authentic nationalism and freely choose tools and policies from the two dominant models to advance their own struggle against underdevelopment. Mobutu's preface expressed the president's trust in Bongoma and supported the point of

view of the book – “It is no longer time for a war of ideologies but for a global struggle against misery.”<sup>759</sup>

We can date from the day of Bongoma’s arrest the validity date of the first ideological outer layer of “Mobutism.” The dismissal of Bongoma happened in the context of the arrival of new advisors around the president and their promotion of the “recourse to authenticity” as the new motto of the regime.

### **New Catechisms**

In 1966, despite his infatuation for Mobutu and his work at the presidency, the young advisor did not delude himself with what UGEC activists thought of as the new regime. Bongoma was making new friends, but he was still connected with the activists in the student movement like N’kanza Ndolumingu and he was well aware that they did not trust the president.

N’kanza and his comrades at first acknowledged that the new regime was showing promising signs. After all, the government was implementing a large part of UGEC’s political program. Their relative openness to the new regime was apparent in their participation in the *Corps des Volontaires de la République* (the Republic’s Volunteer Corps, CVR). Gaston Sengi-Biembe, a former journalist, was involved in the origin of the CVR, but Paul-Henri Kabayidi, the general secretary of the Corps, was its true kingpin. As we saw in Chapter Seven, Kabayidi had returned to the Congo after

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<sup>759</sup> In a partly premonitory passage, Mobutu wrote: “We must confess that the title of this book frightened us a little and that it will frighten many readers. Yet, on the other hand, the tone and vocabulary of the book will seem quite moderate to many. In this way, the author rightly showed that one can be a revolutionary, and deal constructively with revolutionary questions, without necessarily lapsing into verbal excesses and violence.” J.D. Mobutu, “Préface,” in Jacques-Daniel Bongoma, *Indépendance économique et Révolution* (Kinshasa: Editions du Léopard, 1969), p.16.

organizing the demonstration in Brussels that denounced the assassination of Patrice Lumumba in 1961. In Leopoldville, he had tried his luck in the press by creating the short-lived *Afro-Negro* magazine, and then he invested in local politics and became *premier échevin* (deputy mayor).

Kabayidi started the CVR in January 1966; the goal was to create a mass movement behind Mobutu. The model was clearly Lumumba's MNC as well as the mass movements of Congo-Brazzaville.<sup>760</sup> Kabayidi gathered around him a group of friends, people whom he selected "because of our sympathies and their avowed sympathies for the Left." The action plan of the group, drafted at the end of January 1966, insisted on the "education of the masses" and the "diffusion of patriotic slogans in schools, factories and on the radio." The CVR notably publicized its "prayer to the god of the Bantus" and its catechism, which was composed of a credo in Africa, "Lumumba's thought," and General Mobutu. It praised "the Great Leopard who is the living barricade that the Congo has erected against the Congolese people's exploiters and suckers." The catechism also insisted on the CVR's necessity to struggle against the "people's innumerable enemies: interior and exterior, declared or hidden, lucid or unconscious."<sup>761</sup> The document also mentioned the necessity to organize a *retour à la terre* and create pilot revolutionary rural

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<sup>760</sup> The importance of Brazzaville as a source of inspiration in the construction of the ideological apparatus during the first years of Mobutu in power is manifest, not less in the naming of the new state and partisan institutions created by the General. However, few interviewees agreed on that statement, including Kabayidi who mentioned an official visit to Brazzaville as CVR's general secretary, but did not remember that it was particularly instrumental in shaping his organization. On the other hand, Kabayidi remembered the visit in the Congo of a delegation of the Parti Socialiste Destourien of Habib Bourguiba, which was the successor to the old anticolonial Destour of the 1930s and had become Tunisia's single party in 1964. The Tunisian delegation participated in the transition of the CVR to the MPR, which ultimately became Mobutu's state-party, the vertebral column of the regime until the "democratization" of 1990: Paul-Henri Kabayidi, personal interview, recorded, Brussels, 12 Feb. 2011.

<sup>761</sup> "Catéchisme du CVR", January 1966, Gérard-Libois Papers, MRAC, Tervuren.

communities. Yet, the bulk of the text focused on the organization of the movement with the goal to “protect the nation” and maintain a permanent “vigilance.” The action program listed different types of “services” to establish within the CVR: a service of information in charge of documenting the activities of any “shady individual;” a service of investigation in charge of detecting the suspects; and a service of liaison, “composed of agents of so-called spying, who are placed in camps of non-aligned vis-à-vis the regime in order to take away any interesting information. They are in charge of conducting a constant opinion poll to prevent any danger.” Finally, the last service was the storm troop (*troupe d’assaut*), which would intervene anytime necessary: “This is the force that engages in action and intimidation if necessary.”<sup>762</sup>

At the start of the movement, the CVR listed André N’Kanza Ndolumingu as the “political director” of its board of directors and as the local leader of one of Kinshasa’s sections, but N’kanza denied any involvement with the group.<sup>763</sup> Yet, N’kanza was again mentioned as an advisor a few months later, and he participated, together with Delphin Banza, another UGEC activist, in the CVR’s national Congress of December 1966 that

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<sup>762</sup> “Programme d’action du CVR,” 27 Jan. 1968, Gérard-Libois Papers, MRAC, Tervuren. Paul-Henri Kabayidi described the CVR as an organization of intellectuals and responsible men who had serious discussions about the orientation of the regime. However, Congolese usually remembered the organization in its grassroots emanation. In contrast to Kabayidi’s talks about regulated cadres, they remember groups of young men who often took advantage of their small positions of power to control their neighborhoods. Raphael Ghenda, for example, remembered joining the CVR because it gave him the opportunity to go out after the curfew: Raphaël Ghenda, personal interview, unrecorded, Kinshasa, 30 June 2011. Paul-Henri Kabayidi argued that these grassroots groups were not direct emanations of the CVR but of the *Jeunesse Pionnière Nationale*, a group controlled by Nendaka. Yet, the action program of the CVR seems to indicate that the group served to initiate the type of parallel police and information work that became typical of the Mobutu regime and that destroyed the student movement.

<sup>763</sup> “CVR, Notes biographiques,” s.d., Gérard-Libois Papers, MRAC, Tervuren.

called for the creation of the new state party, the Popular Movement for the Revolution (MPR), which Mobutu would serve as a “president and founder.”<sup>764</sup>

Besides the CVR, the strongest case for UGEC’s connivance with Mobutu was the funding by the president of its third Congress, from October 8 to 16, 1966, in Kinshasa.<sup>765</sup> UGEC did take the money, but the Congress did not pander to the General. It called for a single state party, but insisted that this party should be socialist, and that the Congo should officially opt for scientific socialism.<sup>766</sup> The Congress adopted a series of resolutions against imperialism, and was unsparing in its criticisms of the United States’ government, Mobutu’s first source of support. Student activists did not directly attack the new regime in Kinshasa, probably to avoid a direct rupture, but the Congress gave the impression that UGEC was preparing a future without Mobutu and adopting Marxism as a counter-catechism to the embryonic politics of authenticity.

N’kanza was cautious enough not to cross the line of directly criticizing Mobutu. This is particularly apparent in the report written by Robert LaGamma, the US assistant public affairs officer in Lubumbashi, after a conference with N’kanza in the copper

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<sup>764</sup> A report on UGEC published in 1968 by the Belgian research center CRISP commented: “It is beyond doubt that N’kanza Ndolumingu was consulted many times since the creation of the CVR in 1966; it is also obvious that he never accepted any position in this organization or later in the MPR”: “L’UGEC et le Nouveau Régime,” *Courrier Africain T.A.* 77 (March 1968), p.2.

<sup>765</sup> Jean-Claude Willame also mentions the fact that, just after the Congress, the government replaced the Belgian director of Kinshasa’s school of architecture and civil engineering (INBTP) with a Congolese director and that it selected Anatole Malu, one of UGEC’s leaders, to serve on the school’s board of directors: Jean-Claude Willame, “The Congo,” in Donald K. Emerson, ed. *Students and Politics in Developing Nations* (New York: Praeger, 1968), p.48.

<sup>766</sup> One of the participants in the Congress, Guillaume Sampassa, noted that several delegations of Congolese from the USSR and other countries in the Eastern bloc opposed the adoption of scientific socialism out of their disappointment with “real socialism” in their host countries. They were joined in the camp of the moderates by the delegations from Belgium and Switzerland: G.M. Sampassa Kaweta Milombe, *Conscience et politique au Congo-Zaire: De l’engagement aux responsabilités* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2003), p.40-41.

capital in December 1966. N'kanza had travelled to Katanga to directly inform UGEC students at the Congo's official state university (Université Officielle) in Lubumbashi of the decisions taken during the last Congress in Kinshasa. LaGamma's report notes that "the main thrust of Princeton graduate N'kanza's impressive two-hour oration was to inculcate student activists in the Marxist-Leninist tenets advocated by the Congress for the Congo." The audience, which LaGamma estimated at 300, was particularly receptive to N'kanza's speech. Despite its very radical tone, LaGamma also noted that N'kanza was cautious about acknowledging that the new regime deserved the students' support "as it is a necessary historical stage in Congolese development to socialism." Commenting on the students' enthusiastic reactions to N'kanza's speech, the American diplomat suggested that it might be explained by the inferiority complex of students at Lubumbashi, who felt isolated and provincial and therefore were always ready to "imitate" the latest radical trends from their peers in Kinshasa and in Europe.<sup>767</sup>

At the time, along with Jean-Baptiste Mulemba who had left the Congo in 1964 and was involved in the radical wing of UGEC in Brussels, N'kanza had created an underground embryonic organization, called the "Congolese Communist Youth," which aimed at helping the emergence of the Congolese Communist Party that *L'éclair* and Thomas Mukwidi wished for.<sup>768</sup>

By demanding the unification of the student movement and the transformation of campus student assemblies into local sections of UGEC, the Congress created tensions with AGEL and confirmed the divisions in two opposing camps on the Inspired Hill. All

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<sup>767</sup> Robert LaGamma, "Report on the meeting of the Union Générale des Etudiants Congolais," 9 Dec 1966, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1944-1966, Box 375, NARA, College Park.

<sup>768</sup> Jean-Baptiste Mulemba, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 2 Aug. 2011.

the talk about scientific socialism similarly irked a great number of people. René Beeckmans, a Jesuit missionary who attended the Congress, wrote a long commentary on the students' Marxist option, published initially in the Jesuit monthly *Congo-Afrique* and reprinted in April and May 1967 as a series of articles in *Afrique Chrétienne*.<sup>769</sup> Beeckmans had been a proponent of Christian socialism and of African socialisms in the past. His engagement with UGEC's resolutions tried to be balanced. His article appreciated, for example, the fact that UGEC planned to reach socialism stage by stage and not through a violent revolution. Furthermore, in his reading, UGEC's scientific socialism was pragmatic, appearing as a method for change more than a philosophy. Yet, despite his professed progressive affinities, Beeckmans rejected Marxism and advanced a few reasons: scientific socialism had not been adopted by any progressive African countries but Congo-Brazzaville; communists were opposed to intellectuals; and UGEC's position regarding religion was at best ambiguous: "The exclusively Marxist point of departure and the repeated adhesion to Marxism-Leninism create a certain uneasiness for the believer who read the texts of the third Congress" Beeckmans wrote.<sup>770</sup>

Justin-Marie Bomboko was another critic of UGEC. Mobutu's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Bomboko personified the generation of the General Commissioners who had accessed power in 1960 and had kept away from the trajectory of the student movement toward radicalism and the Left. He was also, together with Victor Nendaka and Joseph Mobutu, one of the most important faces of the so-called Binza group that had acted as the back-seat driver of Congolese politics since independence. During an

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<sup>769</sup> René Beeckmans, "Que faut-il penser du socialisme scientifique de l'UGEC ?," in *Afrique Chrétienne* 6-15 (1967), p.24-25 ; 6-16 (1967), p.25 ; 6-17 (1967), p.24-25 ; 6-20 (1967), p.22.

<sup>770</sup> René Beeckmans, "Que faut-il penser du socialisme scientifique de l'UGEC ?," in *Afrique Chrétienne* 6-16 (1967), p.25.

interview in 2009, Bomboko shared with me his regret that both Lumumba and Mobutu had subjected themselves to the “harmful effects of leftism” and the rejection of Western values. In 1966, and even more so in 1967, when the MPR claimed that the Congolese Revolution of Mobutu did not share anything with the revolutionary regimes in China, the USSR, or Cuba, Bomboko waged a successful struggle against the most radical tendencies inside the new regime, only to also find himself moved away from power, together with Nendaka, at the beginning of the 1970s. Bomboko was a bit alone when he started to publicly criticize the Congolese Left in 1966.<sup>771</sup> Yet, at the time, foreign diplomats were maneuvering with the same goals. The former colonizers were worried about the turn of the new regime, and rightly so, as Mobutu was deliberately playing the American card against the Belgian card.<sup>772</sup> Their American colleagues were more hesitant about the approach to take with regards to Mobutu’s apparent embrace of the turn to the left. After June 30, 1960, the Embassy noted that Mobutu was probably hoping “to

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<sup>771</sup> The theme of the red threat reappeared in December 1966 with the announcement by Colonel Singa, the head of the *Suret *, of the ban of the CGTC and the arrest of its leaders because of their communist allegiance: Eug ne Banyaku Luape Epotu, *Chronologie, monographie et documentation sur l’histoire politique du Congo des ann es 60 aux ann es 90* (Kinshasa: CIEDOS, 2000), p.77. The CGTC was a small radical labor union that had been associated with the Parti National de la Convention du Peuple and the genesis of the CNL in 1963 (see Chapter 8).

<sup>772</sup> Belgian-Congolese relationships were particularly tense in 1967, after the nationalization of Union Mini re and the suspension of Belgian so-called technical support to the Congo, which meant that university students had to be mobilized to fill-in for Belgian expatriate teachers in secondary schools throughout the country. Documents from the US embassy in Kinshasa at the time expresses mild preoccupation about “Belgian disengagement” in the Congo and its possible “additional disruption to the Congo’s fragile socio-economic system” (American Embassy in Kinshasa, telegram to the Secretariat of State, 3 Sept.1967, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, box 357, NARA, College Park). The diplomatic dispute rose to dramatic proportions after the Belgian embassy was burnt down after a demonstration that denounced the “war of the mercenaries” in the East. Earlier in the year, American diplomats in Brussels had taken the defense of Kamanda and Bongoma in front of their Belgian interlocutors in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who suspected them of working for the communists (American Embassy in Brussels, telegrams to the Secretariat of State, 11 Feb. 1967 and 25 July 1967, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Box 357, NARA, College Park).



assume the leadership of the left without making demagogic appeals to the extreme left or issuing general amnesty to the Lumumbist rebels.”<sup>773</sup>

Another memo internal to the Bureau of African Affairs from the same period seem to give more attention to the recent public hanging of former Prime Minister Evariste Kimba and three other politicians, Emmanuel Bamba, Alexandre Mahamba and Jérôme Anany (remembered as *les Martyrs de la Pentecôte*), who had been accused of a plot to overthrow Mobutu. The memo did not express many worries regarding the Left and Mobutu’s attempts “to win the support of young intellectuals who must necessarily play a key role in Congolese development and who tend to speak the language of Marxism and of militant “neutralism”.” The conclusion was that neither Mobutu nor his advisors were “ideologues”:

At this point, Mobutu’s gestures to the left may be viewed as part of a developing nationalism which is reckless insofar as it may damage irreparably Belgium’s constructive commitment to Congolese development and may inadvertently introduce forces into Congolese political life which are potentially subversive of the stability Mobutu seeks.<sup>774</sup>

Six months later, Herman Jay Cohen, who had just moved to Kinshasa as a labor attaché wrote a memo to Roy T. Haverkamp at the Congo desk in Washington, DC in which he exposed his first impressions:

The young left wing intellectuals in UGEC who apparently are allying themselves with the unemployed thugs of the CVR will probably make more noise than engage in substantive activities until such time as they can subvert the rising young army officers returning from training overseas. Once this alliance comes into being – and this appears still a long way off – then we are in trouble.<sup>775</sup>

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<sup>773</sup> “United States Government Memorandum,” 5 July 1966, Records of the Bureau of African Affairs, 1958-1966, Box 27, NARA, College Park.

<sup>774</sup> L. Dean Brown, “A possible leftward drift in the Congo (Kinshasa),” 21 July 1966, Records of the Bureau of African affairs, 1958-1966, Box 27, NARA, College Park.

<sup>775</sup> Herman J. Cohen, letter to Roy T. Haverkamp, 23 Dec. 1966, Records of the Bureau of African affairs, 1958-1966, Box 27, NARA, College Park. Herman J. Cohen would later be rather instrumental in American politics vis-à-vis the Congo, notably as the U.S. Assistant

Joined to Cohen's memo was a longer report, which adopted a more threatening tone. John Mowinckel, the embassy's public affairs officer at the time, was the author of the report.<sup>776</sup> In his eyes, the intellectuals in Mobutu's entourage might be "well-meaning," but they were "irresponsible." Mowinckel thought Mobutu was wrong in believing he could control Congo's "leftward trend":

I think this is a very dangerous belief. I am, in fact, convinced that there are subversive elements operating in the Congo who have access to high levels of government – possibly even to Mobutu himself --, who have thoroughly infiltrated the information networks (particularly radio and television) and mass "youth" movements.

The UGEC resolutions went too far and was [sic] stupid for their craziness, but the fact that they were written at all in that form is symptomatic of some sort of direction from the extreme Left. The recent CVR resolutions also have a distinct extreme Left undertone – for example, they take a crack at the American Cultural Center and some of our Nouveaux Horizons book series.

The only individual whom I think I could put the finger on if there is indeed subversion, is the Rwandan lawyer Lidoni Rwubusisi. He is a sly, unscrupulous but intelligent individual who is constantly roaming around in the company of such presidential cohorts as Bongoma, Kamanda and Mushiete. I would not be surprised if he were to be one of the channels either the Soviets or the Chinese are using.

It is more than likely that Communist propaganda will be stepped up within the next six months or so. A dangerous turning point will have been reached the day that three individuals come back to the Congo to work: Dikonda, Diakanoua and Diop. The former is the Progress editor who resigned to write the UGEC

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Secretary of State for African Affairs from 1989 to 1993 and after that as a lobbyist. In his interview from 1996 for the "Foreign Affairs Oral History Project," this is how Cohen described his arrival to Kinshasa in 1966: "The United States had jumped in and become virtually a proconsul there. We had a big AID machine, a big military machine. We had people in virtually every ministry telling them what to do. We had a major CIA operation that was even running its own airline. It was a totally different thing from anything I had ever seen before. The labor union was an important element in our overall strategy." Charles Stuart Kennedy, *Ambassador Herman J. Cohen* (Washington, DC: The Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, 1996), p.24.  
<sup>776</sup>Mowinckel was a veteran of the Office of Strategic Services who had participated in the liberation of Paris during the Second World War: see "Obituary: John Mowinckel, Diplomat," in *The New York Times*, June 16, 2003 ([http://www.nytimes.com/2003/06/16/news/16iht-obits\\_ed3\\_4.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2003/06/16/news/16iht-obits_ed3_4.html)).

Congress resolutions and is now in Brussels being trained for his future job as managing editor of Jean-Jacques Kande's new monthly magazine-to-be, "Zaire." The other two are a couple of very intelligent rascals, accomplished newspapermen and who are heavily indoctrinated with Communist philosophy and propaganda techniques. They are currently "studying in Paris".<sup>777</sup>

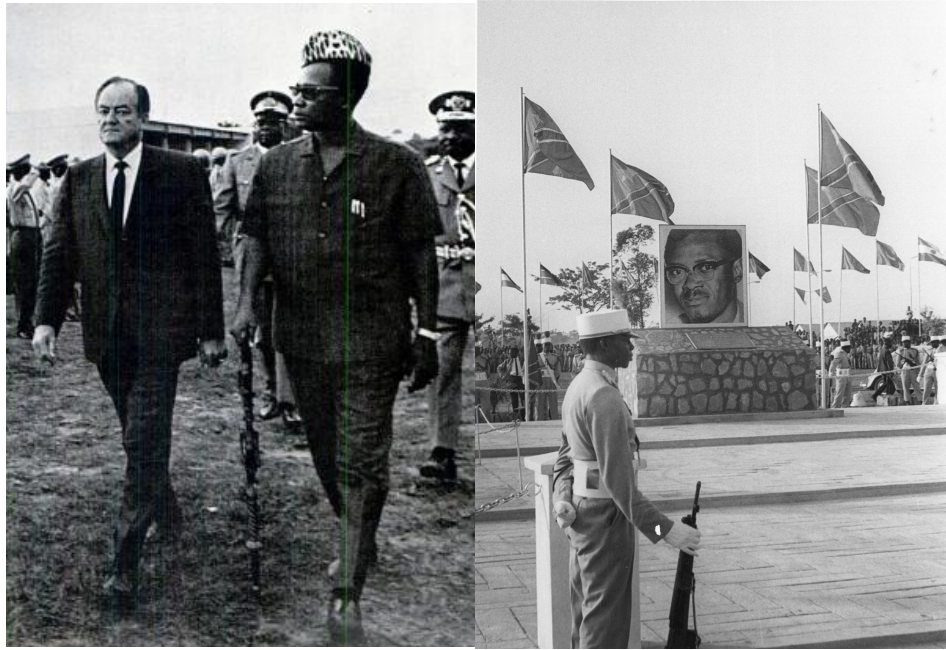
Mowinckel's conclusion was that Mobutu was "no Kenyatta", and communist infiltration of intellectual circles was a major issue to be considered by the United States. All Americans did not share this opinion about Mobutu's lack of "stature," but Mowinckel noted that Paul Henri Kabayidi pointed to the introduction of McCarthyism in the Congo.<sup>778</sup>

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<sup>777</sup> John W. Mowinckel, "Random thoughts on Congo," 21 Dec. 1966, Records of the Bureau of African affairs, 1958-1966, Box 27, NARA, College Park.

<sup>778</sup> Kabayidi, who had become a member of the executive committee of the MPR after the dissolution of the CVR inside the State-Party in 1967, considered himself a victim of that McCarthyism. In 1969, he was arrested, as he told me, "like everybody." He had arranged the paper work for the entrance into the country of the Polish wife of one of his collaborators. That was the pretext which was used for his arrest and he was accused of having helped a foreign spy. He remained in prison throughout the whole year 1970, on the Island of Bula Mbemba, where he overlapped with Zénon Mibamba, who had been displaced from the dungeon of the Sûreté in Kinshasa: Paul-Henri Kabayidi, personal interview, recorded, Brussels, 12 Feb. 2011.

## The Happy Warrior in Kinshasa



U.S. Vice-President Hubert Horatio Humphrey has a place of honor in the history of 1960s youth protests. While he was invested as the Democratic presidential candidate at his party's national convention in Chicago, Mayor Richard Daley's police were clubbing thousands of antiwar and rioting students and youth in the streets of the city.<sup>779</sup> Humphrey's travels around the world in 1967 and 1968 also ignited and spread the fire of student ire. His visit to Berlin in April 1967 gave unprecedented publicity to the members of the radical Kommune 1 arrested after planning to "assassinate" Humphrey with bombs made of "blancmange, quark, and cakes."<sup>780</sup> Demonstrations against Humphrey served as repetition for German students in an uproar during the visit of the Iranian Shah in June,

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<sup>779</sup> Carl Solberg, *Hubert Humphrey: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), p. 355-375.

<sup>780</sup> Nick Thomas, *Protest Movements in 1960s West Germany: A Social History of Dissent and Democracy* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), p.99-100.

and inaugurated a long season of protest in Berlin and elsewhere in the country. In February 1968, Humphrey's visit to Ethiopia produced similar effects. Students demonstrated in public, burning U.S. dollars and portraits of the American "Happy Warrior". The event has been held by some as a starting point in a radicalization process that ultimately brought the monarchical regime to an end.<sup>781</sup> Humphrey's visit to Kinshasa in January 1968, a few weeks before Addis, was similarly disrupted. Students organized public protests and spectacularly put an end to the fiction of their "romance" with the government of General Mobutu.

Humphrey's visit is important in the history of Congo's student protests, because, more generally, the struggle against imperialism was a key element to African participation in the moment of global youth uprisings in 1968. In Paris, the Federation of Students from Black Africa in France (FEANF) explicitly articulated this connection in a pamphlet circulated at the height of the occupation of the Latin Quarter in May 1968. The pamphlet connected the French events with the repression of the student movement that happened at the same time in Senegal and Ivory Coast, noticing that in all these cases, the respective governments accused foreign students of being at the origin of the protests. For the FEANF, the violent methods of the French police in Paris were a reminder of the "the massacres that colonialist and neo-colonialist powers have perpetrated in our countries against popular masses and African students in their struggles against pro-imperialist regimes established by French neo-colonialists." Quite interestingly, the pamphlet made also a connection between the academic stakes of protests in France and Africa, claiming that in both cases, students fought against "neo-colonialist education" that served as "the

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<sup>781</sup> Barhu Zwede (ed.), *Documenting the Ethiopian Student Movement: An Exercise in Oral History* (Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies, 2010), p.40-41.

cultural support for imperialist domination.”<sup>782</sup> In January 1968, demonstrating against Humphrey, students in Kinshasa made similar connections.

Signs of growing tensions between UGEC and the regime appeared repeatedly in 1967. The year had started with a great number of student strikes in January and February throughout the country. As such, the strikes did not target the government – and at Lovanium, Mobutu had weighed in in favor of the students – but they established an atmosphere that threatened public order. In March, N’kanza-Dolomingu travelled to Mongolia to attend the Ninth Congress of the International Union of Students. No traces of the amity for Mobutu appeared in the documents produced during the conference.<sup>783</sup> A few months later, when Lubumbashi-based UGEC member Guillaume Sampassa agreed to join Mobutu’s MPR as a member of the Political Bureau –becoming, quickly after that, head of the youth branch of the party, the JMPR (Jeunesse du Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution) –, his comrades at the national headquarters in Kinshasa shared with him their opinion that there was no hope for the regime.<sup>784</sup> The year finished with a

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<sup>782</sup> “Communiqué de la FEANF,” 11 May 1968, Foccart Papers, CARAN, Paris. Later in the months, FEANF, together with the General Association of Guadeloupean Students, organized a large public meeting on Vietnam at the Mutualité hall in Paris, articulating one more time the anti-imperialist dimension of the French student commune.

<sup>783</sup> An intermediary report noted for example: “The UGEC-Congo (K) is waging a courageous fight in a country where the imperialists are systematically pillaging its resources and massacring its peaceful populations. The change of regime – for American imperialists are doing everything in their power to take the place of the Belgian colonialists, through the intermediary of Mobutu, their lackey, – does not in any way mystify progressive international opinion.” “Ninth Congress of the International Union of Students, Ulan Bator, Mongolia, Report on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Point of the Agenda,” 5 April 1967, IUS Papers, IISH, Amsterdam. The final resolution of the Congress on the Congo was written in the same line. It mentioned Mobutu as an anti-African American lackey and condemned “the measures of intimidation now being inflicted on the General Union of Congolese students”: *Resolutions of the 9<sup>th</sup> IUS Congress, Ulan-Bator, Mongolia, 26 March-8 April 1967* (Prague: IUS, 1967), p.67-68.

<sup>784</sup> Sampassa was persuaded to join the MPR by Kibassa Maliba, a labor activist who told him he had tried to recruit other members of UGEC in Kinshasa, but in vain. The day Kibassa travelled to Lubumbashi to discuss his cooptation in the Political Bureau, Sampassa was

declaration from Mobutu, on December 20, which, while not explicitly citing UGEC, chastised “the sentiments of some personalities who would like to see the Congo taking the direction of scientific socialism.”<sup>785</sup> Finally, on December 30, the Minister of Education, Bernardin Mungul-Diaka, went to Lovanium to attend a play by a French theater company and was welcomed by the students with whistles, hisses, and chants about the necessity to increase the amount of state scholarships.<sup>786</sup> The situation was ripe for the tumultuous visit of Hubert Humphrey in Kinshasa.

The American vice-president was only briefly in Kinshasa. He was on a tour that included eight other countries on the continent.<sup>787</sup> During the Kinshasa stop, Mobutu invited Humphrey to pay homage at the temporary monument to Patrice Lumumba on the road to the airport. A few months before, at the occasion of a meeting of the Organization of African Unity in Kinshasa, Mobutu and the presidents of Zambia and Congo-Brazzaville, Kenneth Kaunda and Alphonse Massamba-Débat, had officially inaugurated the monument.<sup>788</sup> The setting was only a “first stone” surmounted with a large reproduction of a photograph of Lumumba, but it had become a sacred place for

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giving a conference at the University about Leninism. As the news quickly spread that the young activist might join the MPR, students at the conference explicitly asked him to decline. Sampassa reported that what finally persuaded him to accept was Kibassa’s argument for the need of more *Katangais* in power. Yet, he also wanted to get the blessing of the UGEC leadership in Kinshasa before totally committing himself. Reportedly, N’Kanza told him that he was free to join the Bureau, but that the regime could not be changed from within and that it was not any different than the regimes of Tshombe or Adoula: Sampassa, *Conscience et politique au Congo-Zaïre*, p.44-45.

<sup>785</sup> “L’UGEC et le nouveau régime,” p.11.

<sup>786</sup> “University Student Discontent in Kinshasa,” 19 Jan. 1968, p.1, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Box 356, NARA, College Park.

<sup>787</sup> Simeon Booker, “Humphrey’s African Safari: Nine country tour reveals score of respect for U.S., but smoldering resentment in some places,” in *Ebony* 23-5 (March 1968), p.50-54.

<sup>788</sup> “Hommage à Patrice Lumumba,” in *Afrique Chrétienne* 6-35 (September 1967), p.10.

Congolese nationalists. Humphrey's visit to the monument added insult to injury for many students.

UGEC had taken the Vietnam War and the struggle against American imperialism in the Congo as its main motto, but more generally many in the Congo thought the U.S. government had played an important role in the assassination of their national hero. It was not difficult for activists to mobilize students at Lovanium on the day of Humphrey's visit. Activists, probably affiliated with UGEC, distributed anti-American pamphlets on campus and spontaneously hundreds of students started putting together placards with "US go home" and pro-Vietnam slogans and decided to go share their anger at the US vice-president.<sup>789</sup> They reportedly tore apart the American flag and pelted vegetables at Humphrey's caravan.<sup>790</sup> Fifteen students were arrested on the spot, "beaten with butts of rifles" and taken away to a prison in Ndjili. A few hours later, the police also arrested fifty other students who were on a Lovanium bus, transferred them to the central prison of Makala, and beat them up. Thanks to the intervention of Professor Elungu, the university's vice-rector, the authorities released most of the students the following day.<sup>791</sup>

UGEC-Lovanium published a pamphlet congratulating the students who had protested and endured the police repression. The pamphlet called Humphrey "one of the greatest criminals of our times," who dared "to lay flowers with his hands covered in blood on the Monument to the great African and national hero Patrice Lumumba." The

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<sup>789</sup> Francois Kandolo, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 12 Oct. 2007.

<sup>790</sup> Kamitatu claimed that Mobutu then offered a Congolese diamond to Ms. Humphrey to make up for the tomatoes that students thrown at her husband: Kamitatu, *La grande mystification du Congo-Kinshasa*, p.238-239.

<sup>791</sup> H.A. Ryan, "Lovanium Student Participation in Anti-American Demonstration, U.S. Information Agency Memorandum of Conversation," 9 Jan. 1968, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Box 356, NARA, College Park.



text concluded by hoping the demonstration would be followed by other events which would “elevate” the “students’ political consciousness.”<sup>792</sup>

In the following weeks, a series of events followed that created a profound crisis between the students and the State. At ENDA, several students were expelled and AGENDA, the student government, was dissolved; and similar decisions were taken at the Université Libre in Kisangani and the Université Officielle in Lubumbashi, as well as at the Institut d’Etudes Médicales and at the Centre de Formation Météorologiques in Kinshasa. Anonymous pamphlets denouncing Mobutu’s American connections continued to circulate, and some students started to denounce agents provocateurs. On January 16<sup>th</sup>, the eve of the anniversary of Lumumba’s assassination, the President accused UGEC leaders of being dangerous agitators and Lovanium as “a nest of subversion.” On the same day, the police arrested N’kanza as well as Augustin Kayembe, both UGEC activists. The student union released a long statement following the arrests, demanding the immediate release of its militants, but also denying the criticisms expressed by Mobutu about student subversion. Instead the statement claimed that UGEC had been acting as a constructive force in the Congo and the guarantor of nationalism. The text also returned to Humphrey’s visit:

Throughout the whole world, democratic and progressive movements openly express their opposition to the criminal actions of American imperialism in Vietnam. UGEC, a revolutionary force by definition, could not miss its internationalist duty, and even more so because of the degree of American “presence” in our country. Besides, compared to what he experienced in some other African countries, Humphrey’s misadventures in our country were not very serious. By condemning this action that the whole Congolese people support, does

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<sup>792</sup> “A l’adresse des camarades qui ont manifesté le 4 janvier 1968,” Kinshasa, 6 Jan. 1968, Gérard-Libois Papers, MRAC, Tervuren.

one want to appear more American than the Americans themselves, who violently disapprove of their own government's politics?<sup>793</sup>

UGEC's response to Mobutu referred to the two registers that made up the student union's legitimacy and explained the reasons why the new regime had put up with their half-veiled criticisms in the past few years: UGEC had become one of the more credible voices of Lumumbism, a force that Mobutu decided to use to his own benefit; and the students dominated networks of postcolonial postal politics that the power hoped to penetrate. In different ways, UGEC attempted to remind the government of the mutual benefits of student radicalism, by alluding to tacit support of the regime in past student struggles against academic authorities at Lovanium and elsewhere. From their first petition following N'kanza's arrest, students attempted to engage Mobutu on the nationalist and Lumumbist terms he claimed for himself, but they failed to stop the mechanisms of repression. On February 22, the *Sûreté* arrested François Tshiabola Kalonji, a student at Lovanium. The government announced that a search of his bedroom in the university dorms revealed that Tshiabola was the Kinshasa correspondent of *L'éclair*, UJRC's journal. Maoist pamphlets were also found during the search and Tshiabola was presented as the head of "a subversive network."<sup>794</sup> The same day, following the arrest, the Political Bureau of MPR announced that the national executive committee of UGEC was dissolved. A few weeks later, Sampassa announced that UGEC

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<sup>793</sup> "L'UGEC et le nouveau régime" in *Courrier Africain (Travaux Africains du CRISP)* 77 (March 1968), p.15.

<sup>794</sup> Paul Demunter, "Les relations entre le mouvement étudiant et le régime politique congolais : le colloque de Goma," in *Courrier Africain (Travaux Africains du CRISP)* 126 (April 1971), p.7. During my conversations with former student activists, several of them mentioned the arrest of François Tshiabola Kalonji, the fact that he was heavily tortured in the hands of the *Sûreté* and then brought to the President's yacht and introduced to him as the "evidence" for a Maoist "plot" among students. Doctor Mayengo was one of the persons who mentioned that story and he added that Kalonji was actually a "moderate student."

was “integrated” inside the youth branch of the state party, the JMPR. From then on, in the eyes of Congolese authorities, UGEC ceased to exist.

A direct consequence was to increase tensions between Congolese students in Europe and their embassies. While the authorities could easily implement the ban of UGEC in the Congo, they could not do so in the different foreign countries where the Congolese student union was established. In order to convince students in the diaspora to abandon UGEC and join the JMPR, Congolese diplomatic agents did not hesitate to withhold financial support for the objectors and to deny them all other privileges, like attendance at concerts of Congolese music organized in some embassies, for example. Students’ refusal to enroll in the JMPR was particularly strong in France and Belgium. To curb the resistance in France, the Congolese Ambassador André Mandi (himself a former union activist who studied in Belgium just before independence and evolved in Left circles at the time) named students who were known for their progressive tendencies to serve at the head of the local section of JMPR. Two of them, Paul Kabongo and Jean-Pierre Kabongo-Kongo had previously studied in Albania and the USSR, and their association with the JMPR was an attempt to rally the Lumumbist students in France.<sup>795</sup> However, both in Belgium and France, the ban on UGEC radicalized groups of students and pushed them to develop the opposition to Mobutu through the creation of new student associations and political parties, which turned the diaspora into a source of inspiration for the students in Congo who were dissatisfied with the regime.<sup>796</sup>

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<sup>795</sup> “Note de la Préfecture de Police de Paris,” 8 November 1969, Foccart Papers (Papiers des Chefs de l’Etat, Archives du Secrétariat pour les Affaires Africaines et Malgaches) 5AGFPU 2737, CARAN, Paris.

<sup>796</sup> Radicalization among Congolese students in Europe increased even more after the massacre of June 4, 1969, and the event features prominently in the memories of the activists of the student diaspora who later resumed the armed struggle against the regime

### **Authenticity and Love at Lovanium**

Forms of dialogue between President Mobutu and student activists were full of ambiguity, carried out through pamphlets, editorials in newspapers and on the radio, speeches in public meetings, parades, official ceremonies, and protest demonstrations. Most obviously, students seemed unsure about the posture they could allow themselves to adopt vis-à-vis the regime, and they kept moving back and forth between radical rejection and critical engagement. Other ambiguities included the content of the dialogue, notably the issue of national culture. UGEC's adoption of scientific socialism in 1966 framed the debate. Advocates for the regime claimed that, as a foreign and non-African ideology, Marxism was not appropriate for the Congo. Students answered by claiming that this critique was a folding screen that led to complacency before Western imperialism. Yet, UGEC did not confront the cultural dimension of the new regime's opposition to scientific socialism.

The primary doctrinal documents of the Mobutu regime were the Nsele Manifesto published in 1967 as the charter of the state party and a "Little Green Book" of presidential quotations with 100,000 copies printed in November 1968. Both drew abundantly from ideas developed as part of the student movement.<sup>797</sup> The two texts focused on economic independence, national unity, development, the emancipation of

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through the FLNC and similar movements: Célestin Lwangi, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 6 Oct. 2010; Jean-Baptiste Mulemba, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 27 July 2010; Emile Ilunga, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 18 July 2011; Ambroise Kalabela Misombo, personal interview, unrecorded, Liège, 27 Aug. 2009.

<sup>797</sup> Joseph-Désiré Mobutu, *Manifeste du Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution* (Kinshasa: MPR, 1967) and Joseph-Désiré Mobutu, *Paroles du Président* (Kinshasa: Editions du Léopard, 1968).

women, and the promotion of the youth. Themes included African humanism, cultural pride, fraternity, traditional solidarity, respect for ancestors and traditional chiefs, and the necessity for measured recourse to traditions. Tensions over the question of scientific socialism pushed Mobutu toward a stronger affirmation of cultural nationalism, thereby depriving students of one their favorite themes. Yet, times were not yet ready for the regime's total preemption of cultural politics.



**Miriam Makeba at Lovanium in 1968, photograph by Alexandre Luba.**

Discussions about culture developed in other circles as well. In 1966, when Simon Lungela, the situationist activist, and his colleagues came back from training at the Office of Radio Cooperation in Paris, they decided to use the example of their West African colleagues who impressed them so much in Paris with “purely African” names. Back in Kinshasa, the news anchors on the national radio also opted for “authentic” names”: Lungela abandoned Simon for Diangani; Kitutu abandoned Stephane for Oleontwa; Lunkunku abandoned Benoit for Sampu. The public reacted with enthusiasm.<sup>798</sup>

Another important promoter of authenticity at the time was Archbishop Malula. His reflections followed from debates on *inculturation* and African theology initiated by Belgian missionaries like Placide Tempels in the 1940s as well as, more recently, deliberations at the second Vatican Council from 1962-1965, in which he had participated, focusing on liturgical reform. Malula had been a champion of African nationalism since the 1950s, even while joining early the ranks of anti-Lumumbists. In 1959, his call for “a Congolese Church in a Congolese State” was revolutionary at a time when missionaries occupied nearly all the positions of church power in the Congo. At first, Malula’s focus was the question of African elites, a focus which certainly increased with his involvement on Lovanium’s Board of Directors. His most important realizations in the 1960s were establishing the Congregation of Sainte-Thérèse, the “apple of his eyes”, according to one biographer.<sup>799</sup>

After independence, Malula continued to challenge mission conservatism. He also attempted to curb the “crisis of vocations.” Aware that the Church appeared as a Western

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<sup>798</sup> Stéphane Kitutu Oleontwa, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 25 Nov. 2010 and phone conversation 8 July 2013.

<sup>799</sup> “Introduction Générale,” in Léon de Saint Moulin (ed.), *Œuvres complètes du Cardinal Malula* (Kinshasa: Facultés Catholiques de Kinshasa, 1997), vol. 1, p.12.

institution to many, Malula had immediately supported and continued to amplify the theme of a “return to sources” developed by Mobutu from 1965. Attentive to Kinshasa and its “mixing of tribes and mentalities,” it was Malula who prepared the intellectual foundations for the politics of authenticity. Like Mobutu, he targeted women and the youth, and he articulated a critique about “moral crisis” and “materialist” excesses in Congolese society. Malula was not blind to the radicalism of the students. In an interview for Jean-Jacques Kande’s monthly *Zaire*, the archbishop preached in favor of a pastoral directed to the “protesting elite”: “We need priests who are open to protest in order to arm this elite, enrich its religious knowledge and help it to suppress the dichotomy between its life and its faith.”<sup>800</sup> Malula aimed to redirect student radicalism towards a politics of authenticity at the service of moral recovery and religious proselytism.<sup>801</sup>

Betty Mweya – whom we met at the beginning of this chapter – was one of the worker bees in Malula’s politics of authenticity and reconquering of educated youth. Malula had sent the first group of future *Thérésiennes*, the predecessors of Betty, to Belgium at the beginning of the 1960s. In the former metropole, they completed their

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<sup>800</sup> “Pourquoi je suis chrétien: Dialogue-vérité avec Joseph Malula,” in Léon de Saint Moulin (ed.), *Œuvres complètes du Cardinal Malula* (Kinshasa: Facultés Catholiques de Kinshasa, 1997), vol.2, p.78.

<sup>801</sup> Malula publicly opposed Mobutu in the 1970s – following the regime’s ban on Christian names, the attempt to impose JMPR in seminaries, and finally the nationalization of all Catholic secondary schools. The Cardinal feared for his life and went to exile in Rome for a few years. These events have blurred memories of his intellectual contribution to authenticity in the 1960s. Connections were numerous among Catholic intellectuals, radical activists, and Mobutu’s regime. Another example is Hubert Makanda Kabobi. In 1964, Makanda had led AGEL’s strike at Lovanium, and contributed to radicalize the student organization in a very strong way. Later in the decade, he became a collaborator of Mobutu, writing some of speeches, until his untimely death in the early 1970s. According to his widow Alice, Makanda suggested a motto to Mobutu that became ubiquitous and was used as the MPR’s definition: “servir, et non se servir” (“helping, not helping oneself”). Alice Makanda explains her late husbands’ political ideas – and contribution to MPR’s ideology through slogans and speeches – from his youthful unrealized religious vocation, as he seriously considered becoming a Catholic priest before finally joining Lovanium: Alice Makanda Kuseke, personal interview, recorded, Brussels, 28 Jan. 2011.



secondary education and returned to the Congo in 1966, officially beginning the novitiate. Antoinette Da Silva (later Antoinette Bwanga Zinga), among the first young women sent to Belgium, became the first *Thérésienne*.<sup>802</sup> Soeur Antoinette, later known as *Koko* or Grandmother in the congregation, became a student in theology at Lovanium, together with another member of the congregation.<sup>803</sup>

The presence of the *Thérésiennes* on Lovanium's campus fulfilled two goals: the education of religious sisters, but also connecting them with the worlds of the intellectual elite and protest. Betty Mweya joined the campus only in 1970, as a student in Romance Languages. Yet, in 1967, she was already fulfilling her calling as witness in the pages of *Afrique Chrétienne*, joining other contributors who insisted on "the necessity for students to value their Congolese characteristics."<sup>804</sup> In one of her first articles, she expressed the dangers of "mass-media" corrupting Congolese youth:

We all know that by accepting all the global means of dissemination and broadcasting, the world has entered our home. Therefore, we are now living in the world. This world in a two-headed monster, it contains good and bad. Yet, frankly speaking, the twentieth century is hyper-sensual and full of corruption.<sup>805</sup>

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<sup>802</sup> Soeur Antoinette helped Malula establish *kikumbi*, a religious "rite of passage" inspired by African traditions. It included an initiation for the young postulants, a period of reclusion, a series of retreats, and a blood pact that sealed their determination to remain faithful to the Lord until their death: Antoinette Bwanga Zinga, "Historique de la congrégation des Soeurs de Sainte-Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus de Kinshasa," in Léon de Saint Moulin, *Oeuvres complètes du Cardinal Malula* (Kinshasa: Facultés Catholiques de Kinshasa, 1997), vol.5, p.18.

<sup>803</sup> Sister Antoinette Da Silva, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 15 Oct. 2007.

<sup>804</sup> *Afrique Chrétienne* published an occasional column written by a group of high school students in Kinshasa, called the *Cercle Saint-Joseph*. In their articles, they called regularly for a reconnection of the Congolese "intellectual elite" with its traditional roots, suggesting for example that annual "internships" in villages should be made mandatory for young students in cities: see "Rendez-vous des jeunes," in *Afrique Chrétienne* 6-39 (November 1967), p.31-32.

<sup>805</sup> Betty Mweya, "Le courrier d'Elisabeth," in *Afrique Chrétienne* 6-8 (February 1967), p.21.

In her articles, Betty Mweya promoted a struggle against indecency and immorality featured in the cultural politics agenda in other African countries at the time.<sup>806</sup> In Kinshasa, where the CVR and JMPR still seemed uninterested in the issue of national dress, it was people like Betty who began to fight the mini-skirt war.<sup>807</sup> The young postulant discussed the issue in one article written like a conversation between different young men and women. André, one participant in her conversation, reported on research he conducted on young Kinshais' perception of the "mini," which recently "invaded" the city. His answer was not nuanced: "Well, all those I talked with were in favor of miniskirts because, according to them, Congo enters modernism, so why would they be an exception? *C'est la mode, non?*" Betty's intervention in the conversation condemned the mini and reminded the young women that, regardless of their intentions, miniskirts aroused men. A male participant in the conversation added: "Our habit to imitate Westerners in everything must stop." A girl named Joséphine followed by specifying that opposition to miniskirts was not an imitation of the campaign that made the headlines in the (conservative) French press, but rather it only happened that these French opinions matched ours." Another girl, Valentine, concluded that if young Congolese women wanted to be fashionable, "we suggest to them our beautiful national costume, emblem of the black woman, the loincloth."<sup>808</sup> *Le pagne de la maman africaine* (the loincloth of the African mother) was also the costume of the *Thérésienne* sisters. Betty wrote an article defending sartorial innovation in her congregation. It troubled many Congolese. She

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<sup>806</sup> On Tanzania, see Andrew Ivaska, *Cultured States: Youth, Gender, and Modern Style in 1960s Dar Es Salaam* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>807</sup> *Idem*, p.60-68 and 86-123.

<sup>808</sup> "Betty et ses amies: Les jeunes femmes et la mode," in *Afrique Chrétienne* 6-35 (November 1967), p.28-30.

argued for the modernity of authenticity, which in this case marked a rupture with the “traditional” habit wore by Catholic nuns.<sup>809</sup>

Female students at Lovanium did not wear mini-skirts, but they were also rarely seen in loincloths. As a student, who was the only girl in a class of thirty-five students in a secondary school in Kinshasa, told anthropologist Suzanne Sylvain in 1967, “I like to wear *le pagne*, but as I am the only girl in my school, I always wear dresses to go to class. I don’t want other students to take me for a “mama”; this would get me in trouble. I have *pagnes* to go to the market and that I put on during holidays.”<sup>810</sup> Forms of clothing that were encouraged in some spaces became dangerous in others, and female students made sure not to convey association with maternity and “traditional” images of femininity in schools. At Lovanium, several female students were former *Belgicaines*, young Congolese who had studied in Belgium for their secondary education and whom the newspapers in Kinshasa regularly denounced for their supposed arrogance, snobbery, and rejection of everything African.<sup>811</sup> These students probably did not feel a great personal desire to wear loincloths on campus. What was common was a blouse and long skirt, though the South African singer Miriam Makeba was also an influence.

At the end of 1968, Makeba, the icon of African liberation gave a concert at Lovanium, in front of the faculty of medicine. AGEL organized the concert, and it was probably the most memorable event at the university that year. Even Malula attended. Makeba, recently married to former Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee activist Stokely Carmichael, embodied many student aspirations. The success on campus of

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<sup>809</sup> Elizabeth Mweya, “Des religieuses en pagne, pourquoi?,” in *Afrique Chrétienne* 37 (November 1967), p.30.

<sup>810</sup> Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, *Femmes de Kinshasa: Hier et aujourd’hui* (Paris: Mouton, 1968), p.307.

<sup>811</sup> *Idem*, p.249-251.

tunics à la Makeba demonstrated Congolese female student participation in the political passions of the time, as well as their attachment to dress that indexed both cultural nationalism and African cosmopolitanism.

There were few women at Lovanium in the 1960s – less than 200 for about 3000 students at the end of the decade – and most were foreigners, from Biafra, Angola, Southern Africa, Rwanda, and elsewhere. A few more Congolese women arrived on campus in 1968. Even more than their male comrades, female students were an elitist group. Independence clearly marked progress in female education and ended the colonizer’s prejudice against the intellectual capacities of Congolese women, but girls rarely finished secondary education, usually dropping out of school after a few years of post-primary education. For example, while Leopoldville counted 1,813 girls in secondary schools in 1964, only twenty-six of them were in the graduating year.<sup>812</sup> Female students at Lovanium had therefore followed an extremely selective path to school. They had grown up in the emerging middle class of the 1950s and 1960s. Some of them came from families connected to politics. Wivine Nlandu, for example, was the daughter of ABAKO founder Edmond Nzeza-Nlandu; Anne Ngandu’s father was the general secretary at the Ministry of Health, as well as a former medical assistant and well-known *évolué* in Luluabourg who had been disciplined by colonial authorities after writing a memorandum of grievances after the mutiny of March 1944.

Some of the women students had completed secondary education in Belgium, like sister Antoinette Da Silva or Yvonne Nsansa, the first Congolese female student in medicine. Others were coming from the few prestigious schools for girls in Kinshasa or Lubumbashi. Several women in the incoming class of 1968 were graduates of the *Collège*

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<sup>812</sup> Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, *Femmes de Kinshasa*, p.243.

*du Sacré-Coeur*, like Elisabeth Mboyi and Josette Shaje. Because of the lack of teachers during the diplomatic crisis between Congo and Belgium, the sisters in charge of the *Sacré-Coeur* persuaded the Jesuit fathers of the all-male *Collège Albert* to group their respective finishing students in one class, together with students from Bukavu who had taken refuge in the capital following their city's capture by rebel mercenaries.

The seven female students from the *Sacré-Coeur* were under scrutiny permanently: every morning, the mother superior checked their outfits and reminded them not to bother the boys. In class, the Jesuit fathers had the girls sit at the back of the classroom, and prevented them from going out in the schoolyard during the morning and afternoon breaks. Yet, the girls became friends with their male counterparts, and some became part of the activist group of students at Lovanium.

In 2010, Josette Shaje expressed well the challenges of young women who accessed higher education in the 1960s. At the same time, she conveyed the obvious attraction of the university: her brother, Valentin Mudimbe, was already teaching on the campus at the time, and her father had always encouraged her to progress in her own education, encouraging her during her childhood to take classical dance lessons and to follow theater classes. She also mentioned the influence of Mobutism and authenticity which had been marked by the emergence of a few female leaders. Shaje's mother herself was a member of the CVR and Sophie Kanza, the sister of Thomas Kanza, a graduate of Genève herself and the first Congolese woman to own a university degree, was also a minister in Mobutu's government. "I believe that, in the imagination of our parents, Sophie Kanza's success set an example. She was a model," Josette Shaje told me. "I

remember very well when I first learned that Sophie Kanza was a minister. We even made a speech at school on Sophie Kanza and the Congolese woman.”<sup>813</sup>

Kanza regularly contributed articles to the press to encourage young girls to pursue an education. Yet Mobutu’s minister of social affairs warned educated Congolese women against the temptation to look down on sisters who did not have a long education or to pretend to speak only European languages.<sup>814</sup> In her column, Betty Mweya pushed her young female readers to “be bold”, “to dare to speak French in student circles” and in front of their male comrades.<sup>815</sup> The shyness of girls was a regular topic in the journal. But, as Kanza’s article emphasized, educated women had to defend themselves against a reputation of pretention. This complicated the public expressions of many women on the campus. If Josette Shaje felt included in the political discussions about Marxism and negritude on campus, and if Yvonne Nsansa never felt discriminated against during her years on campus, other female students remembered constant taunts and some marks of intolerance from male students. Marie-Thérèse Mulanga remembered that educated women were often seen as unsuited for marriage by their male fellow students. She mentioned that very few couples showed themselves on campus. Doctor Sondji and Professor Kabuya told me that there was only one identified unmarried couple on campus in 1968 and that everybody called them *les amours célèbres*. In the memories of Sondji and Kabuya, modesty explained this situation. Yet, Mulanga mentioned that male students were not ready to accept educated female companions as future wives. She mentioned a rare couple, two students in Law:

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<sup>813</sup> Josette Shaje a Tshiluila, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 6 Dec. 2010.

<sup>814</sup> Sophie Kanza, “Responsabilité de la jeune fille étudiante,” in *Afrique Chrétienne* 6-4 (January 1967), p.21.

<sup>815</sup> Betty Mweya, “Courrier des lecteurs,” in *Afrique Chrétienne* 6-2 (January 1967), p.4.

Everybody admired them and thought that they were modern. They encouraged each other, and the boy helped the girl so she would have the same eloquence and know the readings. And we often teased them because they were reading the same books and their quarrels always happened when one had finished reading a novel and the other was behind.<sup>816</sup>

Sexuality was not often debated on the campus, even if students sometimes expressed a desire for more freedom. The university had inherited the atmosphere of sexual inhibition of Catholic boarding schools and seminaries, in which missionaries attempted to prevent all contacts between boys and girls and repressed, with diverging zeal, same-sex sexuality and “special relationships” between younger and older pupils.<sup>817</sup> At Lovanium, male students more often entertained relationships off the campus, meeting women during visits to bars. Similarly, a few female students had relationships with men in the city and, in a few cases, with men working for the regime. As the opposition to the regime increased in 1968, student activists developed a certain suspicion towards some of their female comrades. With the events of 1969, and later in 1971, students developed a very high sense of the presence of informers on campus. In interviews, the names of Edouard Mokolo wa Pombo and Jean Sėti appear very regularly as the principal secret agents of Mobutu at Lovanium.<sup>818</sup> Directly after graduating from the university, the two men joined the regime’s security services, and very quickly accessed managing positions within these services. Many former students came to realize that Mokolo and Seti had

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<sup>816</sup> Marie-Thérèse Mulanga, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 30 Nov. 2010.

<sup>817</sup> For autobiographical fragments on sexuality in boarding schools, see Pierre Erny, *Sur les sentiers de l’université: Autobiographies d’étudiants Zaïrois* (Paris: La Pensée Universelle, 1977), p.380-385.

<sup>818</sup> See also Daniel Monguya Mbenge, *Histoire secrète du Zaïre* (Brussels: Editions de l’Espérance, 1977), p.155-156. In his book about political violence in Congo, Pierre Kamba dates the cooptation of intellectuals inside the Mobutu’s secret and security services from the period of tensions between students and the regime at the end of the 1960s: Pierre Kamba, *Violence politique au Congo-Kinshasa* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2008), p.237-238.

been among the informers at Lovanium after the fact, when both men officially became heads of the state security services in 1970s. Yet, some interviewees claim that they were aware of the situation at the time.<sup>819</sup> François Kandolo, for example, told me that he knew that Mokolo was the one who carried accusations against him to Mobutu. Yet, he still considered Mokolo, who had been elected president of the student parliament in 1967, as his friend.<sup>820</sup> He might have been an informer to the regime, but Mokolo remained a fellow comrade in Lovanium students' developed sense of community and identity as a small elite. Student activists were a bit less generous with their female comrades that they suspected to be working with the regime. One of them, a *métisse* student from Katanga was suspected to be the girlfriend of Major Mika, a well-known agent in Mobutu's security services. During a political meeting on campus, she was reportedly spotted with "a communication device" hidden in her hair, and as a result, she was "slightly ill-treated."<sup>821</sup>

Despite the suspicions, rumors, mutual surveillance, and need for secrecy that added extra layers to the gendering of politics among the Congolese youth, men and women developed intense relationships in which they shared and discussed their views of the world. This is what happened to Betty Mweya. Soon after starting her column in *Afrique Chrétienne*, she received a letter from a young student at the Scheutist Saint-Joseph school in Kinshasa. His name was Symphorien Mwamba. Betty was receiving weekly piles of letters at the time – "communication was easy then" – but Symphorien's

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<sup>819</sup> In an interview, Professor Muteba, who was a first-year student at Lovanium in 1969, claim that AGEL used informants, who were in charge of reporting on the activities of the regime's spies on campus: Grégoire Muteba, personal interview, recorded, Lubumbashi, 28 Sept. 2007.

<sup>820</sup> François Kandolo, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 12 Oct. 2007.

<sup>821</sup> Alexandre Luba, personal interview, Lubumbashi, 14 Nov. 2010.



letter stood out. The letter had crossed the barrier of pre-emptive censorship operated by the director of the convent, so it was “inoffensive” in content:

But was it the style? Something in that letter overwhelmed me. I was responding to all the letters, but this one I kept in the convent, at my bedside. When I slept, I put it under my pillow; and when I was out, in my briefcase, because the *demoiselles* entered and searched our rooms when we were not there. This was the one letter that touched me and I wanted to see this young man. Every day, every night, I was telling myself that I wanted to see this young man.<sup>822</sup>

A few weeks later, during the school vacation of July and August, Symphorien finally came to find Betty at a rehearsal of the theater play “Pensez à Jésus,” in which she performed together with a couple other girls from Sainte-Thérèse and boys from Saint-Joseph. After that, they saw each other regularly, visiting each other families. When he came to Betty’s, Symphorien brought books with him, which somewhat won over Betty’s father. When the school year started again, Betty went back to the convent and Symphorien moved to Lovanium campus as a first-year student in Romance Languages. At Lovanium, Symphorien became part of the theater company of the campus and also engaged himself in student politics. Betty read Sartre and Camus, “a bit as a provocation for Cardinal Malula,” but Symphorien did not talk politics with her: “I think he was somewhat of a Marxist, but I think he believed, ‘Elisabeth is not able to understand that.’”<sup>823</sup> Instead, they communicated about poetry. At first, Betty’s dates with Symphorien looked like the world of chaste comradeship between boys and girls that she wrote about in her columns: “Our feelings were so limpid and so true, and he respected me, he knew I was a future nun. I had very strong feelings, but I was far from thinking about carnal love. So we were in a true atmosphere of limpidity and fraternity.” Yet, after a few months, Symphorien declared his love to Betty and proposed to her. She talked to

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<sup>822</sup> Elisabeth Mweya T’olande, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 13 July 2011.

<sup>823</sup> *Idem*.

her confessor about the tacky ring that she had accepted from Symphorien and the kiss that she had not refused to reciprocate. She was sent to a spiritual retreat for two weeks to reflect on her vocation, but instead wrote poems with verses like “You looked at me / And your look full of love smiled to me” and “Your look melted into my look / And your arms wrapped me into a long loincloth of hope.”

The matters of the heart at the time did not differ from the questions of politics. A love letter could compromise the destiny of a religious postulant and a Maoist pamphlet could jeopardize the safety of a chemistry student. Secrecy was important in militancy and love. Symphorien, who was a Luba from Kasai while Betty’s family was from Bandundu, preferred that his friend remained in the convent as long as possible – giving him time to get a situation and to “work” her family. He was afraid that, outside of the religious protection, Betty would be surrounded by other types of postulants and that her parents would pressure her to marry someone closer to home. As for Betty, her consciousness pushed her to be honest with the impossibility of her religious vocation. Yet in the end, the decision wasn’t hers. Another postulant who had a relationship “of a different genre” with a comrade of Symphorien at Lovanium confessed to Monsignor Malula, mentioning Betty’s secret as well. The two postulants were asked to pack their personal belongings and leave the convent for the “world.”

### **The March**

At Lovanium, Symphorien Mwamba soon gained a certain degree of fame. He was an ambitious young man, a student in Romance Languages but who also took courses in the Law department with the intention to graduate in the two disciplines.

Mwamba was involved in theater on campus, the most flourishing art in the Congo at the time, which united the low and the high, Christian “social action” and “return to authenticity,” avant-garde and pan-Africanism. In his second year, Mwamba was also elected the “mayor” of his dormitory, “Home XX.”<sup>824</sup> As one of the results of years of struggle for student co-gestation, each unit of student housing, called “home,” elected a mayor who served as a liaison with the “minister of interior” in the student government and with academic authorities. It was a real position of power and prestige and Mwamba’s election in his second year on campus was a sign of his charisma and entrepreneurship.

Mwamba became mayor of Home XX at a moment of transition at Lovanium. UGEC had been officially banned and the regime was attempting, with very little success, to implement membership in the JMPR. The elections for the student government were particularly disputed. The previous team, led by Hubert Tshimpumpu and Anastase Nzeza, had emerged from the ranks of the Catholic student group Pax Romana, which was still associated in the political geography of the campus with the camp of the moderates. In October 1968, student radicals wanted to take their revenge and gain control of AGEL. François Kandolo, a graduate of the Athénée of Kalina in Kinshasa was elected as president; and Valérien Milimgo, a radicalized seminarian who had been sent to Lovanium after organizing a protest at a major seminary in Northern Katanga, was his vice-president.<sup>825</sup>

The academic year started with a visit of the new Minister for Education and former labor organizer Alphonse-Roger Kithima. Students booed his speech and deflated

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<sup>824</sup> André Yoka, personal interview, recorded, 20 Sept. 2007.

<sup>825</sup> Valérien Milimgo, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 6 Oct. 2007.

the tires of his car. Consequently, the university was shut down for a few days until its Board was able to reach an agreement with the government. Then came the usual tensions around the initiation and hazing ceremonies. In December 1967, the university decided that “student christening” would only be authorized for a period of two days and that no excesses would be tolerated. At the initiative of the Ministry for Education, the measure had been reviewed in January 1968, stating that “christening ceremonies” would only be tolerated during one day during the first week of academic year. In negotiations with the university in July, AGEL had demanded a large extension of the initiation period to three weeks, but it was refused.<sup>826</sup> After the first day of hazing in October 1968, the situation seemed to get out of hand and escape the control of AGEL. After an extraordinary meeting, the Board issued a warning to the students announcing that the “christening” was cancelled and that any students who would not respect the measure would be expelled from the university.<sup>827</sup>

Another serious incident was the visit of Senegalese president Léopold Sédar Senghor at Lovanium on January 17, 1969 – on the eighth anniversary of Patrice Lumumba’s assassination. Specialists of negritude remember this visit for the speech that Senghor pronounced at the university (“De la négritude”) and in which he replied to some of his Anglophone critiques, like Wole Soyinka, by preaching for more communication between English-speaking and French-speaking African literatures. Yet, the visit was troubled. François Kandolo and AGEL wanted to protest. Senghor was not rejected for responsibility in the assassination of Lumumba. What upset the Congolese students was Senghor’s role in the repression of youth protests in Dakar in May 1968, when the police

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<sup>826</sup> “Project de Décision concernant le rite d’accueil des nouveaux étudiants,” 26 July 1968, Van Der Schueren Papers, LUA, Leuven.

<sup>827</sup> “Avis à messieurs les étudiants,” 31 Oct. 1968, AGEL Papers, UNIKIN, Kinshasa.

killed several students in an attempt to end a student strike and then shut down the university.<sup>828</sup> Students had gotten their fingers burnt at their protest against Humphrey the year before. This time, Kandolo decided that students would boycott the visit by staying in their dorms during the whole day. A few students more interested in poetry than politics, like Dieudonné Kadima Nzuji, took the risk of ignoring Kandolo's watchword.<sup>829</sup> Yet, Albert Mpanse, Lovanium's academic general secretary and one of the eyes of Mobutu on the campus, was forced to requisition the university's workers to fill the auditorium in which the Senegalese poet-president gave his allocution.<sup>830</sup>

In parallel, a new crisis between academic authorities and the students was reaching a climax. In July 1968, the Board of Directors had decided to create a working group in charge of reforming the university's status for good, and putting an end to the continuous tensions on the campus. AGEL and PASCOL (the association of Congolese professors and assistants) refused to integrate the working group unless it received voting rights and included a majority of Congolese participants. The crisis intensified during the first part of the academic year, and in January 1969, anonymous pamphlets invited students to refuse all dialogue with Lovanium's authorities.

A demonstration was planned for the end of the month, which provoked a reaction from Mobutu. He called a national conference in Goma to discuss the reform of universities. The delegates at the conference, presided over by the Minister Kithima agreed on "co-responsibility" as the principle that should transform the governance of all institutions of higher education. This did not meet the demands of the most radical

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<sup>828</sup> Françoise Blum, "Sénégal 1968: Révolte étudiante et grève générale," in *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 59-2 (2012), p.144-177.

<sup>829</sup> Dieudonné Kadima Nzuji, personal interview, recorded, Brazzaville, 22 Sept. 2010.

<sup>830</sup> Polydor Muboyayi Mubanga, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 25 July 2011.

student groups – and especially Lovanium's delegation – but it was at least a first step toward the universities' democratization. However, Lovanium authorities could not accept the principle of voting rights for students in all academic institutions and councils – which was the core of the co-responsibility model. Once the conference was over, they sent a memorandum to the government, making explicit that democratizing universities would ultimately threaten the authority of the government: “The natural form of the nation's organs risks then to be affected by the spirit of this reform, and one should be conscious of this risk.”<sup>831</sup> The memorandum probably played a role in the attitude of Mobutu. Soon after the end of the conference, the President dismissed Kithima. The former labor activist blamed the jealousy of some of his enemies inside the regime for his dismissal from the government in 1969.<sup>832</sup> Yet, it clearly appeared that the decision was motivated by the regime's discontent about the resolutions of the Goma conference. A few weeks after Kithima's dismissal, Mobutu adjourned Goma's decisions. This alienated the students from Kinshasa and pushed them to opt for a direct confrontation with the regime by organizing a mass demonstration in the city.

Kandolo and other student leaders in the city's other institutions of higher education – ENDA, INBTP, the Beaux-Arts, the Institut Pédagogique National, and the female-only Institut Régence – had created a group which they called the Kinshasa Student Circle (C.E.K.) to follow on the Goma conference and collaborate on a campaign to demand a rise in state scholarships. After Mobutu announced that the decisions taken

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<sup>831</sup> Cited in Bernadette Lacroix, *Pouvoirs et structures de l'université Lovanium* (Brussels: CEDAF, 1972). Academic authorities had previously handed a memo making the same argument to Kithima during the conference: see Paul Demunter, “Les Relations entre le mouvement étudiant et les régime politique congolais: le colloque de Goma,” in *Etudes Africaines du CRISP*, T.A. 126 (April 1971), p.23.

<sup>832</sup> A.R. Kithima Bin Ramazani, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 2 Nov. 2009.

at Goma were cancelled, the leaders of C.E.K. met clandestinely and started to work on the organization of the march. Without announcing the demonstration, the C.E.K. sent an ultimatum to the government on May 21<sup>st</sup>. The document notably declared the students' "right and duty" to defend their interests "by all means necessary, including revolutionary violence, with the same determination as our comrades from Africa, Latin America, Europe, and Asia."<sup>833</sup>

Most students did not hear about the planned demonstration until a few hours before its beginning. At Lovanium, Kandolo organized a general assembly of AGEL at the last minute on June 3 to announce the plan. Some students inside AGEL leadership had tried to oppose the march, arguing that it was too dangerous and not the way to go with Mobutu.<sup>834</sup> Kandolo and the other leaders were expecting a confrontation with the police, and students who had experienced the rebellions of the mid-1960s instructed others about how to react to a charge of the police and how to protect oneself from tear gas. Still, the general idea was that, because of the imminent opening of the international fair of Kinshasa, the regime would not be too brutal in its response to the demonstration. A few hours later, still in the middle of the night, students started to leave their dormitories en masse to get prepared for departure. The turn-out was impressive. Nearly all of Lovanium's three thousand students participated in the march. And nearly none of them would reach the city center and the Ministry of Education, where C.E.K. had planned to end the demonstration.

Informed of C.E.K.'s project, the authorities intended to stop the demonstration by any means possible before it reached the city center. Soldiers used tear gas to disperse

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<sup>833</sup> Bernadette Lacroix, *Pouvoirs et structures*, p.77.

<sup>834</sup> Miatudila Malonga, personal interview recorded, Rockville, Maryland, 3 April 2012.

the marchers, but the students seized the grenades and threw them back at the soldiers, as they had been instructed. The first military roadblock obliged students to get out of the university buses that they had seized on campus. Some students were hurt in the confrontation, others escaped towards the campus, but many were able to outflank the soldiers. As they were progressing towards the city, these groups of students met other soldiers who opened fire at them, notably at what is today called Yolo-Medical, and then at *rond-point* Victoire, in the very populous Matonge district. Hearing the shots, many students thought that soldiers were using blank bullets. Once it became obvious that this was not the case, and that several marchers were wounded by the soldiers' bullets, the demonstration broke down again. In the memories of many marchers, *rond-point* Victoire marked the end-point of the demonstration.

Nevertheless, a few did continue in the direction of the Ministry of Education and went as far as Kinshasa's Central Station, where they met students from other schools. Soldiers assaulted female students, and finally opened fire one more time on the marchers. Valérien Milimgo had just started to read the speech that contained student demands about living standards and the necessary reform of higher education. Later, during the confrontation, Major Mika – the regime's security agent who had been collected intelligence on the student movement through his student girlfriend at Lovanium – smashed Milimgo's mouth with the butt of his machine gun, as a way to punish his earlier "sinful" words against the regime.<sup>835</sup> As at *rond-point* Victoire, students were surprised by the violence they were facing. They tried to escape. First-year students who were not from Kinshasa and were unfamiliar with the city just randomly followed other runaways. This was the case of Célestin Kabuya, a young student in medicine

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<sup>835</sup> Valérien Milimgo, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 18 April 2010.



originally from Katanga. Following a group of students, he found himself inside the central post office, where some of them hoped to pass for postal employees behind the counters. All of them, like most of their peers who had fled in other directions were arrested and brutally handled in a military camp.<sup>836</sup> By noon, the demonstration was completely over, but soldiers and the police continued to patrol for some time. Some students were able to hide in private houses or to regain the campus. Yet 400 of them were arrested in the afternoon and joined their peers in the military camp.

### **“They Believe We Are Dead and Defeated”**

The drama of June 4th 1969 had been coming for a long time. American and Belgian diplomatic archives indicate that Mobutu had become obsessed with the idea of Maoist subversion. As for the students, they were strongly impressed by the many echoes of 1968 student protests, from Dakar to Paris and Chicago. As UGEC was banned in Kinshasa, students in the diaspora maintained the torch of radicalism. As they opposed the establishment of the JMPR, many Congolese students in Belgium, France and elsewhere lost their scholarships and entered the blacklist of their embassies. Postal politics played out stronger than ever in 1968 and 1969: students and researchers came in and out of Kinshasa, transporting letters, journals, books, and vinyl records.

The march occupied multiple arenas of politics. It happened in the physical space of the city and its streets that students invaded and occupied, but it also produced effects in the transnational spheres of Congolese politics. The decision to “take the streets” was

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<sup>836</sup> For a published autobiographical narrative mentioning the events in the city center, see Daniel Gabembo Fumu wa Utadi, *De Lovanium à l'Université de Kinshasa*, in Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem (ed.), *L'Université dans le devenir de l'Afrique*, ed. (Paris : L'Harmattan, 2007), 67-76; in the same volume, see also Nyando ya Rubango, *De Lovanium à la Kasapa via caserne: Mémoire d'un pèlerin métis*, p.97-124.

clearly an attempt to open up student politics, by following the precepts of Thomas Mukwidi and the example of the Brazzaville protesters who had overthrown President Fubert Youlou in 1963. This is how the regime interpreted the march, and it was also the analysis of a surviving underground Mulelist cell in Kinshasa, called CNL-Ville, which published a pamphlet that stressed the fact that students had been followed by many inhabitants of the city during the march and that workers had walked out of their jobs in the following days to express their solidarity with the students. There was always a great degree of exaggeration in the literature produced by Congolese revolutionaries, yet the fact that a few weeks after the march the government decided to raise salaries and to implement a series of social measures shows that the regime was worried about the general dissatisfaction and popular condemnation of the repression of the students.

The march was also a “postal happening.” It did not produce any photographic or moving images, but many letters, telegraphs, and newspaper articles. As a result, the Kinshasa march was followed by solidarity protests in Lubumbashi, Kisangani, Bukavu, MbujiMai, and Brussels. In the Congo, the march triggered another step in the lockdown of dissent, but it revived opposition abroad. Student politics had developed through regular trials of strength with academic authorities on campus, but rarely with the government. In 1969, the legitimacy of Mobutu’s regime was not strongly established and, even if all the participants in the march were not fully of aware of it, the demonstration had the potential to set off a process that could have strongly destabilized power. This did not happen because of the weaknesses of the links between students and other sectors of the society, but also because of the strong and violent response of the regime.

Repression was double-faced: it directly put an end to student protest in Kinshasa, but violence also strongly antagonized the students and all the Congolese who were shocked that the army had open fire on unarmed young people. Repression, tear gas, arrests and deportation were not new, but on June 4<sup>th</sup>, for the first time, soldiers killed students. In the hours and days that followed, President Mobutu, some of his ministers, and journalists deplored the violence by putting the responsibility on students – they had organized an insurrection, were carrying arms, threw Molotov cocktails at the soldiers and obliged them to open fire – and by playing down the number of victims and claiming that no more than six students died in the confrontation with the army. It was difficult to establish the exact number of victims, because the soldiers seized the bodies at the Victoire roundabout and captured other corpses in different hospitals.<sup>837</sup> There was no funeral for the victims of June 4<sup>th</sup>. They were buried anonymously and in secret in a mass grave outside of the city. The measure successfully prevented establishing the precise number of dead marchers, but at the same time, the unfinished and incomplete mourning for the dead contributed greatly to the political capital of the memory of June 4<sup>th</sup>.

Besides the proclamation of the government, other estimations circulated on the number of victims. A few months after the event, Lovanium established a list of thirteen dead students from the university as well as another document with the names of several

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<sup>837</sup> In the hours that followed the demonstration, the army established barriers throughout the city to control and arrest students: Comité de Solidarité avec le Peuple Congolais, “Les événements du 4 juin 1969 à Kinshasa, et leurs répercussions: chronologie, informations, témoignages,” p.11, Paul Demunter papers, private collection. Soldiers also patrolled throughout Kinshasa and inspected houses in search of protesters. Students like André Yoka remained hidden during days in the *cit*é, afraid to be arrested if they went out on the street: André Yoka personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 20 Sept. 2007. The body of at least one dead student, that his family had recuperated and was mourning in their home, was captured in these circumstances, as Léopold Mbuyi Kapuya, then a senior high school student, witnessed it: Léopold Mbuyi Kapuya, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 1 November 2010.

tens of students who had been injured and “traumatized.” There were also victims in other schools of Kinshasa, and possibly, among the groups of unemployed youth and workers who joined the march. Informed estimations at the time evoked between twenty and twenty-five victims in total. Other sources suggested numbers as high as 150. More than twenty years later, a commission of inquiry during the National Conference (CNS) that was supposed to organize the democratic transition in the Congo estimated that around forty people were killed on June 4<sup>th</sup> – this was notably the number that former general prosecutor Kengo-wa-Dondo (ex-Léon Lobotish) gave during his testimony in front of the commission.<sup>838</sup>

In my research and interviews with participants in the demonstration, I did not manage to recover the names of many more victims, besides those known in Lovanium archives and listed by the CNS inquiry commission. A few interviewees listed members of family or close friends who featured among the victims, but many other names sank into oblivion. However, nearly everybody spontaneously recalled the name of one victim: Symphorien Mwamba.

Several interviewees remembered vividly the assassination of Symphorien near Victoire, even though the content of the stories diverged. For some, Symphorien had been killed because he did not bend down and crawl, not hearing or not believing the warnings that some students had started to spread about the fact that soldiers, positioned in at a roadblock, were not shooting with blank cartridges as everybody had assumed at first. For others, Symphorien was standing because he was taking care of other students and notably a group of female students that he was chaperoning. These two versions had the

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<sup>838</sup> See Kabamba Mbwebwe K. and Kasulula Djuma Lokali, *Rapport sur les assassinats et violations des droits de l'homme* (Kinshasa: Yerodia Abdoulaye Ndombasi, 2004), p.87.

young man mown down by an anonymous burst of machine-gun fire. Another informant remembered that Symphorien was targeted and shot in the head at point-blank range by the adjutant who was in charge of the roadblock.

Symphorien became the iconic victim of the demonstration. Some people remembered him because they were close friends or because they were living under his leadership in Home XX. Yet what made Symphorien famous on campus, the reasons why so many people still remember him, was that he played in the theater company. Not long before the demonstration, he had played the leading role in *Montserrat*, the theater-play of the French writer Emmanuel Roblès about a Spanish officer who takes the side of Latin American revolutionaries in 1812 and preferred to die instead of betraying Simon Bolivar. The play, performed in the city center of Kinshasa, was a huge success, attracting a large public beyond the students. Symphorien's performance was particularly appreciated. The conflation of the memory of the march and of his performance in *Montserrat* made Symphorien into a powerful symbol of dramatic heroism and sacrifice.

The memorialization of Mwamba as the icon of June 4<sup>th</sup> was also the result of the literary work of André Yoka, one of his best friends on campus. Yoka was himself a well-known figure at Lovanium, as the former "Minister of Culture" under the presidency of Hubert Tshimpumpu in 1967 and 1968. Yoka was also an actor, and on the eve of the demonstration in June 1969, he had staged a performance of *Antigone*, which also became after the march a looking glass that shaped the memory of the tragedy of June 4<sup>th</sup>. After completing his studies at Lovanium, Yoka moved to Paris to complete a doctoral dissertation in French literature and later became an established writer himself. His first publication, originally issued in 1974, was a short story, entitled *Le Fossoyeur* (The

Gravedigger).<sup>839</sup> It narrated the story of a poor gravedigger, used to burying anonymous bodies nocturnally unloaded for military truck, but who one night recognizes his beloved and promising university student son among the corpses. As a tribute to his friend, Yoka named the son Mwamba. The short story paid homage to Congolese student idealism in 1969, but it also interrogated tensions between the students and their parents, as well as the social tensions between Kinshasa's proletariat and the student avant-garde.

Betty Mweya was devastated. Years later, she was still able to bring Symphorien to life in her animated memories of the young man, whom she once defined as "someone who was ambitious, who wrote poems, who was self-confident, who believed in freedom, in people's right to speech, who believed also in love and who loved, who was tender." In 1969, on the day of June 4<sup>th</sup>, Betty was waiting for the schoolbus when she saw a score of military trucks, "not one or two, but a whole arsenal of war." The bus never came, and Betty decided to walk towards Victoire. At some point, "it became impossible to progress. It was war, there were shots and explosions. I went home crying. I had a bad premonition. It was carnage: unarmed people in front of soldiers, and furthermore people from the city who didn't know how to fight." A state of disorganization followed the demonstration. The university was shut down, arrested students stayed in prison for days, whole groups were repatriated to their villages and towns of origins, while Kandolo, Milimgo, and a few other leaders were sentenced to jail. Thus it took a few weeks before confirmation of Mwamba's death reached his family and Betty. His father came from Kasai, trying in vain to use connections with people in power to get back the corpse of his son. With Mwamba's family, Betty suffered the impossible mourning of a death without

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<sup>839</sup> Yoka Lye Mudaba, *Le Fossoyeur, et sept autres nouvelles primées dans le cadre du Concours radiophonique de la Meilleure Nouvelle de Langue Française* (Paris: Hatier, 1986).

a body. She also wrote poems that she later published in a collection entitled *Remous de Feuilles*. Many poems were addressed to Symphorien. In 2011, she performed a few of them, she started with these lines – her dedication to Mwamba in *Remous de Feuilles*:

Nous nous taisons	We fall silent
On nous croit morts et vaincus	They believe we are dead and defeated
Tant Pis	So be it
Nos regards, eux,	But our looks
N'ont pas cessé de vivre. <sup>840</sup>	Never stopped to live.

### The Symbolic Burial

Betty Mweya and André Yoka were not the only ones who attempted to keep alive the memory of fallen students in 1969.<sup>841</sup> At Lovanium, student activists – former members of UGEC and, mostly, students who had been radicalized by the experience of violence during the march in 1969 – held to the memory of their “martyrs” in an attempt to cultivate student discontent towards the regime. Mobutu was continuing to use the strategy of the carrot and the stick. After the massacre, Mobutu had totally and irremediably lost the image of older brother and patron that he had cultivated collectively with the educated youth, as well as individually with Bongoma and the other university

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<sup>840</sup> Elisabeth Françoise Mweya, *Remous de feuilles* (Kinshasa: Edition du Mont Noir, 1972), p.4.

<sup>841</sup> The events are also the subject of an experimental novel by Pius Ngandu Nkashama, who was a student at Lovanium in 1969: see Pius Ngandu Nkashama, *La mort faite homme* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1986). Célestin Kabuya, a student leader who was imprisoned from 1971 and 1973, wrote a fictionalized memoir, *La Kasala du 4 Juin*, about the organization of the commemoration of the march in 1971. Originally published in 1982, the memoir has recently been reedited with a new title: see Célestin Kabuya Lumuna Sando, *Les prisonniers du président* (Paris: Société des écrivains, 2012). In the 1990s and 2000s, François Kandolo published several articles and interviews in the Congolese press at the moment of the march's anniversary. Among others who have kept the memory of 1969 alive, Anicet Mobe Fansiama has been one of the most active, publishing articles in newspapers and online about the history of the student movement: see also Anicet Mobe Fansiama, “Les intellectualités estudiantines congolaises revisitées: 1954-1965,” in *Aspects de la culture à l'époque coloniale en Afrique: Presse-Archives* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007), p.115-144.

graduates of his entourage. Yet, the president attempted to remake himself as the father of the nation. He used the event to affirm his new image of “father-chief.” Stressing the responsibilities of the students and of foreign subversive influences in the tragedy of June, Mobutu publicly claimed to be the protector of the Congolese youth. Later, in October 1969, on his birthday, the president pardoned all the student leaders, despite the fact that some been condemned to serve up to twenty years of imprisonment. Subsequently, Kandolo and Milimgo were able to leave the country for France. The presidential pardon contributed to normalizing the situation on campus. In Michael Schatzberg’s definition:

Father-chiefs must nourish and nurture. They may discipline and punish but most also forgive and pardon. And while they may eat with reason, they may not overindulge their appetite while the population, their political “children,” are suffering from hunger.<sup>842</sup>

After the massacre, Mobutu worked on what Schatzberg calls “the moral matrix of governance.” Students were back on campus, their scholarship was raised, and the paternalist university continued to feed, house, and educate them. As life went on, and no more student groups – besides the JMPR – were tolerated in institutions of higher education, many students accepted the defeat of their movement and made plans to move on with their lives, which often meant applying for state support to continue their education abroad or finding a position within the new regime. In this context, the memory of the victims of June 1969 served the small group of radical students in their attempt to disrupt the normalization. These students continued to organize clandestine discussion groups and to publish pamphlets against the regime. They celebrated the memory of their fallen comrades of 1969 in the same way that they praised the memory of Patrice

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<sup>842</sup> Michael G. Schatzberg, *Political Legitimacy in Middle Africa: Father, Family, Food* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), p.173.



Lumumba, which Mobutu had by then clearly abandoned. They had several successes. In 1970, at the occasion of the presidential elections, the only ballots against Mobutu's candidacy in Kinshasa were cast at precincts around the University, and later that year, the student activists succeeded in organizing a few incidents during the visit of Belgian king Baudouin at the university. On the first anniversary of June 4<sup>th</sup>, they also organized a commemorative mass in the university chapel that was well attended.

Different groups were reorganizing in the secrecy of nocturnal meetings. Despite the ban on UGEC and AGEL, some students were well known for their activism, like Jean Tshinkuela Musuayi that everybody called Mao on campus. Tshinkuela and others, like Moreno Kinkela (François Mayala's younger brother), helped connect the new underground groups at Lovanium with the older tradition of student activism represented by UGEC.<sup>843</sup> Yet, several of the activists in the new groups had not been previously connected to UGEC or the student Left. They had been radicalized by the experience of state repression and violence in June 1969. They completed their political education by taking part in clandestine meetings on campus and then later, for those of them who would be sent to prison, by educating each other in small study groups on Marxism and other issues.<sup>844</sup>

The source of inspiration for the organization of clandestine student groups at Lovanium was the Uruguayan urban guerillas of the Tupamaros National Liberation

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<sup>843</sup> Kinkela-vi-Kan'Sy, *Contestation et prison : Mémoire de baigne d'un étudiant sous Mobutu*, unpublished manuscript, 2003, p.37-40.

<sup>844</sup> Guy Yangu, personal interviews, recorded, Kinshasa, 1 June 2010 and 28 July 2010; Célestin Kabuya, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 3 Nov. 2009; Médard Kayamba, personal interview, recorded, Lubumbashi, 27 Sept. 2007; Jean-Baptiste Sondji, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 4 Oct. 2007; Tharcisse Kayembe, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 20 Nov. 2010; Alexandre Luba, personal interview, recorded, Lubumbahi, 14 Nov. 2010.

Movement.<sup>845</sup> One of the groups organized a small event to commemorate the centenary of the Parisian Commune, other students started to publish pamphlets, using the name of a satirical student journal of the 1960s, *Le Furet*. In May 1971, pamphlets and inscriptions on university buildings insulted Mobutu's recently deceased mother, publicly calling her a "whore" who did not deserve the national burial she just received, while the bodies of their comrades had never been given a proper grave. So when a commemoration of the killing was planned on June 4 1971 at Lovanium, the tension between students and the regime was at its highest. After a mass and the spontaneous building of a memorial to the dead students, the army invaded the campus and arrested the Belgian priest who had led the celebration. A group of students took Lovanium's rector hostage for a few hours, asking for the release of the priest. The army intervened again. Mobutu decided to close the university, and to draft all the 3.000 students from Lovanium into the army. Most students were allowed to return to school after a few months of military service, even if they still had to wear their uniform and participate in military exercises. Fifteen student activists were condemned to life-long sentences in prison.

The higher education system was totally transformed. A national university was created, incorporating Lovanium and Kisangani, the two private universities, as well as Lubumbashi, previously the only public institution. The creation of this new entity, Université Nationale du Zaïre (UNAZA), entailed many changes for academics, administrative employees, and students. Departments and faculties were split up and re-distributed throughout the country: pedagogy and psychology in Kisangani; humanities

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<sup>845</sup> Guy Yangu, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 1 June 2010.

and social sciences in Lubumbashi; medicine, engineering, sciences, and law in Kinshasa. Material, moral, and political conditions of university life were strongly affected.

By 1971, Mobutu had fully adopted the student movement's vocabulary and appropriated the themes of nationalism, Africanization, and decolonization. When he claimed that military service would reform syphilis-ridden students, he did not diverge from the accusation published by the radical student activists against the moral corruption of prostitution, dime novels, and pornographic movies that they saw plaguing their peers. When he reformed the universities, he seemed to apply the slogans that students proclaimed on June 4 before the army started to open fire against them. Mobutu's *tour de force* consisted of neutralizing most of the political vocabulary that the student movement had used against him.

Mobutu's nationalization and reform in several ways brought concrete answers to claims long defended by student activists. To some observers, the reform constituted a decisive step in decolonizing and democratizing universities. Nevertheless, the democratization supposedly brought by the reform – i.e. democratization as *massification* – was irreconcilable with the democratization asked for by the student movement – i.e. democratization as *co-gestion* (or joint management). Some people, like the French anthropologist Pierre Erny, praised the reform. For Erny, universities had to be authentically Congolese, which meant breaking their isolation from society. The particular status of students – their privileged access to state resources – therefore appeared as a legacy of colonialism. In this sense, the post-1971 decline of students' living standards and more generally the deterioration of the material conditions of teaching was not only inevitable, but welcome: “In a poor country, the poverty of the

university is nothing to be ashamed of. On the contrary, the university must be poor, and it is an act of realism to maintain it in a state of poverty.”<sup>846</sup>

The 1971 reform marked real turmoil for universities. It was a violent disruption of the institutions’ daily life. It displaced entire departments, libraries, and laboratories from one part of the country to the other. It politicized campuses and bracketed academic freedom. It undermined the student movement for years. More students were accepted every year, while less money was spent on education. The reform provoked a physical and intellectual decay in universities that put their survival into question many times and to this day.

With an ironic twist, Mobutu came near to applying the program defined by a radical advocate of the student movement in 1971, who held that Congolese universities, and the research conducted inside them, did not “serve the knowledge of real persons, real things, or real needs,” but fostered “the abstract speculation that creates a useful smoke-screen for imperialism.” The remedy was radical, and resembles slogans uttered against bourgeois universities by many other students around the globe: “The university should be neither reformed, neither rethought, nor adapted. The university should simply be destroyed.”<sup>847</sup>

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<sup>846</sup> Pierre Erny, *Sur les Sentiers de l'université: autobiographies d'étudiants*, p.104.

<sup>847</sup> E.W. Lamy, “Mort de Lovanium,” *Les Temps Modernes* 301-302 (1971), p. 374. Lamy was a pseudonym for Jean-Claude Willame, then a young political scientist with a recent PhD from Berkeley who was teaching at Lovanium and who was part of Benoît Verhaegen's circle of leftist intellectuals on the campus: Jean-Claude Willame, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 7 Nov. 2009.

## Chapter 10

### Conclusion: African Youth and Decolonization in Perspective

In the 1980s, historians and political scientists around the journal *Politique Africaine* developed theoretical arguments in favor of a complex form of populism in the approach to politics in Africa. Influenced by the Subaltern Studies, British cultural Marxism, *microstoria*, critical studies on the everyday and power, they looked at politics and the political *par le bas*, from the bottom up. Their work focused mostly on the autocratic regimes that covered most of the continent in the 1970s and 1980s; they argued that exclusive focus on “despots” and single-parties missed the fact that the subalterns shaped politics in critical ways in these regimes; and they showed the heuristic interest to take into account larger “registers of enunciation of the political” in religious movements, music, and *radio-trottoirs* (the realm of “public rumors”).<sup>848</sup>

Revisiting the history of decolonization in Ghana, Guinea, Tanzania, as well as in other countries in West and East Africa, several historians have contributed to the debates initiated by *Politique Africaine*. They question narratives focused on “fathers of independence,” seen as powerful heroes and villains, that overlooked the agency of

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<sup>848</sup> Jean-François Bayart, Achille Mbembe, and Comi Toulabor, *Le politique par le bas en Afrique noire* (Paris: Karthala, 2008 [1982]); Achille Mbembe, *Afriques indociles: Christianisme, pouvoir et Etat en société postcoloniale* (Paris: Karthala, 1988); Jean-François Bayart, *L'Etat en Afrique* (Paris: Fayard, 1989).

subaltern groups. Monographs detailed the importance of the labor question in the decolonization, and the role of women, peasants, and “social minors” in the struggle for independence.<sup>849</sup> My dissertation comes after a series of studies focused on youth in African nationalist projects. Several researchers have written about contested histories of youth politics in postcolonial Africa; and the more recent function of youth as an interstitial category of agency, innovation, and transgression, growing from the postcolonial crisis of development.<sup>850</sup>

The Congolese student movement in the 1960s points, of course, to a context that differs from the 1990s and 2000s and the emergence of street children and child soldiers as icons of African youth. In the Congo’s 1960s, youth embodied a different revolutionary role, more subservient to logics of state construction and national development. Despite the rhetoric of subversion associated with parts of the student Left, the dissertation recalls a time during which youth in general, and educated youth in particular, enjoyed a status of positive vanguard in new African nations. While this dissertation works to undermine the image of the 1960s as a golden age for students, higher education could then still tangibly pass as a potent tool of social elevation. Father

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<sup>849</sup> Jean Allman, *The Quills of the Porcupine: Asante Nationalism in an Emergent Ghana, 1954-1957* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993); Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: the Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Suzanne Geiger, *Tanu Women: Gender and Culture in the Making of Tanganyika Nationalism, 1955-1965* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1997); Elizabeth Schmidt, *Mobilizing the Masses: Gender, Ethnicity, and Class in the Nationalist Movement in Guinea, 1939-1958* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2005).

<sup>850</sup> See Achille Mbembe, *Les jeunes et l'ordre politique en Afrique noire* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1985); Mamadou Diouf and René Collignon (eds.), *Les jeunes: hantises de l'espace public dans les sociétés du Sud?* (Paris: Editions de l'Aube, 2001); Alcinda Honwana and Filip De Boeck (eds.), *Makers and Breakers: Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2005). For a critique on the recent scholarship about youth in Africa: see Jay Straker, *Youth, Nationalism, and the Guinean Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

Richard Mugaruka, a professor at the Catholic University of Kinshasa and a strong voice of Congolese nationalism often heard in the Congolese media today, summarized the memory of higher education as a vehicle of social elevation through one of his famous metaphors: “Every student the 1960s,” he told me, “was given three keys at the moment of graduation: a key for a house, a key for an office, and a key for a car.”<sup>851</sup> Such memories stand in strong contrast with the pauperization of students in Congo and in other African countries since the 1980s.<sup>852</sup> The crisis of education has led Congolese intellectuals like Professor Mugaruka to assert that the educational system no longer produces anything at all besides the myth of its social utility. One of the consequences of the contemporary crisis of education is the difficulty of making sense today of some aspects of student politics in the 1960s. A good example is my interviewees’ inability to remember fully their critiques of Lovanium’s cuisine: at the time, their rejection of blood sausages and their recrimination about the quality of food were an integral part of their politicization, articulating their sense of entitlement as Congo’s intellectual elite and their discontent with the Belgian character of the university. However, years later, with austerity and the end of student welfare, these memories were difficult to articulate for the former students themselves. Instead, former students often remembered everyday life at Lovanium, like other aspects of late colonial welfare, with a certain nostalgia that worked as a critique of a present marked by the dramatic decline of teaching quality and living standards.

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<sup>851</sup> Richard Mugaruka, personal interview, unrecorded, Kinshasa, 3 Nov. 2009.

<sup>852</sup> On the impact of pauperization on student politics in Senegal and Zimbabwe, see Leo Zeilig, *Revolt and Protest: Student Politics and Activism in Sub-Saharan Africa* (New York: Tauris, 2007).

There were already street children in Kinshasa in the 1960s, and the city still counts a great number (and actually a comparatively greater number) of university students today. Despite obvious differences, the idea of a filiation between the students of the post-independence years and the street children of the post-cold war years is productive. Both groups embody a paradigmatic status in enunciating politics in their respective historical contexts and more generally with an experience of the world that is articulated on a particular imagination of the global. Like street children in the 1990s and 2000s, university students were only a small minority of their age class in the 1960s, but their influence was incommensurate with their numbers.

The organized student movement in its different configurations – from campus student governments like AGEL to a national vanguard group like UGEC and to underground UJRC, always functioned with a minority of activists within the minority of students. Yet, its capacity to produce events like the demonstration of June 4, 1969, proved its reach far beyond the small group of activists. And the power of development discourse ensured its influence as a potent political force.

Besides the experience of actual students – in universities, specialized schools, major seminaries, secondary schools, graduates, and dropouts – this history of the student movement also has taken the institutional function of education as its object. Higher education was an object of aspiration, and paths to schools defined the experience of late colonial modernity even for those who could not continue their education. After independence and new opportunities to access schools and universities abroad, education featured even more at the center of young Congolese horizons of expectation.



The place of education in Congolese history is one of the major arguments of this dissertation. Another is centered on chronology. In a recent publication, elaborating on one of Frederick Cooper's critiques of colonial studies, Christopher Lee argued that the period of decolonization – late colonialism and the first few years of independence – has not been given its full place as a crucial period of articulation in the modern history of Africa.<sup>853</sup> This is particularly true in the case of the Congo, where political scientists, anthropologists, and historians often establish links between colonial history and the postcolonial period – and particularly later stages in the Mobutu regime – while overlooking the foundational period between the assassination of Patrice Lumumba and the ideological innovations of Joseph Mobutu a decade later. Despite the interest for the rebellions, that period appears as the blind spot of Congolese historiography. However, these were years of tremendous importance for the later evolution of the country, and they were years when the role of students on the national scene was most visible.

Congolese students the 1960s played a political role significantly different from that of the young “makers and breakers” of the 1990s and 2000s, but different also from that of the educated youths who engaged with the revolutionary projects of Sékou Touré or Julius Nyerere, to give two contemporary examples.<sup>854</sup> In contrast with their peers in Guinea or Tanzania, Congolese students did not face a rigid national-building project. Instead, they participated in its emergence. The end point of the history that I narrate is the confrontation between the regime of President Mobutu and the students – as such, the

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<sup>853</sup> Christopher J. Lee, “Introduction: Between a Moment and an Era: The Origins and Afterlives of Bandung,” in Christopher J. Lee (ed.), *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), p.1-42.

<sup>854</sup> Andrew Ivaska, *Cultured States: Youth, Gender, and Modern Style in 1960s Dar Es Salaam* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Jay Straker, *Youth, Nationalism, and the Guinean Revolution*.

demonstrations and their repression did not differ so much from similar episodes of generational conflicts between the educated youth and the new political classes in other African countries. Yet it is only during and after this confrontation that the “Zairian ideology” and cultural politics of President Mobutu emerged. In many regards, Mobutism was the product of the student Left. After the assassination of Patrice Lumumba in January 1961, the Congo found itself for several years without any clear political orientation. Willing to fill the void, Mobutu was deeply dependent on students and nationalist youth activists during the first period of his presidency. In the Congo, maybe more than in other countries that gained independence at the same time, the question of decolonization remained unanswered and pressing in the 1960s. This was particularly obvious for the students at Lovanium, who denounced their university as a Belgian island in the Congo. As they struggled to transform higher education, with demands about Africanization and democratization, students also transformed the state and pursued the project of decolonization. Students’ various engagements and conflicts with the state during the decade that followed independence shaped power relations and the post-colony as a particular mode of governance.

The nationalization of universities and the creation of UNAZA in 1971 in itself answered student demands about the decolonization of higher education. Foreign support – notably that of the Ford Foundation – remained crucial in allowing the functioning of the new institution, but UNAZA was organically linked to the nation-state in ways that Lovanium never was. Foreign professors continued to teach after the nationalization, but many of the most conservative ones left. In the social and human sciences, the professors who were committed to the study of Congo – including among others, Bogumil

Jewsiewicki, Johannes Fabian, Crawford Young and Benoit Verhaegen – felt validated in their research orientations. Furthermore, many former students and junior researchers of the 1960s accessed positions of responsibility within the new institution. For example, at the Lubumbashi campus of UNAZA, V.Y. Mudimbe became the Dean of the Faculty of Letters, and helped promote research in African studies at the same time that he was composing the first volume in the critique of the colonial library that he would conclude after moving to the United States.<sup>855</sup>

More crucially, beyond campuses, Mobutu's appropriation of student slogans about economic and cultural nationalism resulted in a profound revolution and decolonization of the everyday. The politics of authenticity that changed people's names and the names of the towns in which they lived was indebted to student visions of the world from their campuses in the Congo and in the foreign universities where they travelled. The Zairian ideology of the 1970s incorporated many elements of thought developed by Catholic thinkers like Cardinal Malula in the 1960s. It also appropriated the experience of migrant students who had struggled with racial objectification in Europe, and had changed their names and modified their dress in response to contact with people from diverse origins, and in the "tricontinental" atmosphere of progressive student circles.

With regard to student politics and contributions to decolonization in the 1960s, I argue three main points throughout the dissertation. The first one is that Congolese student politics in the 1960s was inscribed in, and reacted to, a longer institutional and political history that starts in the 1920s. Colonial education was marked by what I call

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<sup>855</sup> V.Y. Mudimbe, *L'odeur du père: Essai sur les limites de la science et de la vie en Afrique noire* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1982).

built-in mechanisms of enclosure: schooling sought to promote the access of the colonized to Western knowledge and their incorporation in intermediate spheres of the colonial economy; at the same time it also attempted to control and limit the extent of “evolution” and “Europeanization.” Education attempted to enclose Congolese in a constrained and necessary marginal position: outside of the rural realm of traditions, and outside of the urban sites of cultural métissage. Education was strongly linked to projects of conversion – to Christianity, the colonial economy, and Belgian middle class morality and respectability. At the same time, schooling attempted to maintain certain forms of cultural authenticity and to prevent demands for political emancipation. The dissertation shows how opponents to higher education like Salkin, but also its promoters like the creators of Lovanium, were influenced either by fantasies or dystopian visions of the future.

The colonial project of enclosure was never totally successful. Despite the importance of the discourse on cultural alienation that developed in the 1960s, the different generations of students before and after independence sat comfortably at the intersection of different worlds. Still, the history of the student movement remains a story of rupture with the colonial fantasy of enclosure and a complex detachment from the logic of missionary Christianity and elitism. It is also the gradual merger between the world of monastery-like schools and the world of cities, and their zones of cultural autonomy and homegrown understanding of colonial modernity. In this regard, the student Left’s turn to Maoism at the end of the 1960s is kindred to earlier projects of salvation, from the Kimbanguist movement in the 1920s to Elisabethville’s *évolués*’ faith in the Americans in the 1940s.

My second point concerns students' participation in the Congolese rebellions of the mid-1960s. Experiments to directly integrate students in the *maquis* nearly all failed. Yet, Left students played a crucial role in the revolution and its global mediation. My dissertation is the first sustained attempt to connect the students and the rebel. While, other cases on the continent illustrated clearly the bridges between student movements and armed rebellions, the specificity of the Congolese educational system – the colonial enclosure – and the powerful representations of students as a particular type of elite work has inhibited that type of connections in the historiography.<sup>856</sup>

The global imagination of student politics is the third point to which I would like to return in concluding. The desire for the global has been a strong marker of the post-cold war period.<sup>857</sup> That aspiration, as I show in the dissertation, has a longer history. Escapism was already present in the conversation of Suzanne Sylvain with Congolese children in Leopoldville in the 1940s. Two decades later, the role of the global as an instance of mediation, imagination, and experience was primordial for Congolese students. As G. Thomas Burgess has shown in his work with two political actors in 1960s' Zanzibar, international travels and multiculturalism were central to African revolutionary politics, even on an island where the concept of cosmopolitanism was loaded and contested.<sup>858</sup> For Congolese students, the Left was largely the result of a cosmopolitan experience. Being a student was a way to increase one's chances to travel

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<sup>856</sup> On student rebels in Africa, see Donald D. Donham, *Marxist Modern: An Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p.13-58. See also William Reno, *Warfare in Independent Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.1-36.

<sup>857</sup> See Charles Piot, *Nostalgia for the Future: West Africa After the Cold War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), p.77-95.

<sup>858</sup> G. Thomas Burgess, *Race, Revolution, and the Struggle for Human Rights in Zanzibar: The Memoirs of Ali Sultan Issa and Seif Sharif Hamad* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009), p.1-25.

abroad in the 1960s, and universities were unique places of encounters at the time. As an extension to travel, the post remained a central mode of experiencing the world for Congolese students in the 1960s, as well as a vehicle for the articulation of politics in general.

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The period of the draft of students into the army in 1971 and 1971 was a moment of tremendous changes. During their time in military barracks and after when they returned to school in their uniforms, students were subjected to military discipline and military tribunals. The everyday life on the campuses of the new National University created in July 1971 was marked by the shift from student comradeship and elitist spirit to a martial logic of subalternity and silent obedience. The shift was temporary, as all students were reintegrated to civilian life after 1973. However, the old self-image of students as an elite and avant-garde was seriously damaged, as the new system of higher education moved away from Lovanium's era. During their time in the military, students also witnessed the abandon of Congo and the adoption of Zaire. Soon after, the law forced them to change their name in accordance to "the return to authenticity;" and violently implemented usage banned the wearing of ties and conspicuous western clothing, and forced them to address each other by the revolutionary correct term of "citoyen" or "citoyenne."

For many students, the army was an experience of trivialization. Time in the army was marked by the mandatory use of Lingala, poorly considered by students, in opposition to the more cosmopolitan French. The soldiers' language was highly sexualized and not always subtle in its expression of the realities of bodily functions.

Some students were distressed by it, but other participated in the laughter and the aesthetics of vulgarity typical of the postcolony.<sup>859</sup> As a result, the army reformed the type of subjects that students embodied. Most of the female religious students renounced to their vocation after their time in the army. And it seemed that the draft had also totally wiped out student identification with the Left.<sup>860</sup> The death of the student Left in the Congo was therefore less the product of sheer repression like in 1969, but came after measures of *caporalisation*, and crucial interventions about the ways students spoke, dressed, and understood themselves.

Mobutu's maneuvers were not totally successful. Dormant revolutionary cells remained active in the Congo in and outside of campuses.<sup>861</sup> Furthermore, Lumumbism, Marxism, and Socialism remained potent discourses in the Congolese student diaspora. For students and political exiles in Europe, the Left was a structuring idea in their life that they could not abandon lightly. Ultimately, many of them would later return to the Congo in the footsteps of Laurent-Désiré Kabila in 1997, and at a moment during which the Congo seemed to take up with its 1960s'

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<sup>859</sup> See Achile Mbembe, *De la postcolonie*, Chapter 3.

<sup>860</sup> This was also a sign of the changing times. While the student Left never reemerged after the reform of 1971, student protests resumed a few years later. However, when a movement of strike developed on the different campuses of the national university in 1979 – following the exclusion from the university of a male student who had been found during the night in a female dorm, as well as the serious degradation of the living conditions on campus – one of the major leader of the protest was nicknamed Ayatollah, not Mao: On the events of 1979, see Jean Abemba Bulaimu and Hubert Ntumba Lukunga M., *Mouvement étudiants et evolution politique en République Démocratique du Congo* (Kinshasa: CEP, 2004), p.30-31. On the meaning of Tanzanian youth' appropriation of the names of global figures like Bill Clinton or Osama Bin in the late 1990s, see the work of Brad Weiss, *Street Dreams and Hip Hop Barbershops: Global Fantasy in Urban Tanzania* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), p.36-69

<sup>861</sup> Samy Badibanba, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 5 Aug. 2011; and Michel-Ange Mupapa, personal interview, recorded, Kinshasa, 11 July 2011.

political passions. However, the Left revival of the late 1990s was a short-lived parenthesis. Soon after, the country plunged back into war and far from ideology.



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CARAN (Archives Nationales de France), Paris.  
CEGES (Center for Historical Research and Documentation on War and Contemporary Society), Brussels.  
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