

Visuality and Colonialism in the Congo:  
From the 'Arab War' to Patrice Lumumba, 1880s to 1961

by  
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## Introduction

Among the letters, reports, and photographs in a Belgian archive of the Scheutist order of missionaries is a curious photograph of a donkey tethered to a post.<sup>1</sup> Photographed with its profile to the camera, and flanked on its far side by an African man looking straight at the camera, this image, also an artifact, carried the caption “Historical Donkey.” The back of the print reads in Dutch: “Historical donkey. Given by Ngongo Lutete to Kasongo Fwamba in 1891, who in turn gave it to Father Cambier in 1892 or 1893.”<sup>2</sup>

The comment goes on to provide a terse narration of key events in the history of 1880s and 1890s Congo. It stages actors like Chief Kalamba Mukenge; Ngongo Leteta, the fearsome ivory and slave raider known in the 1890s as leader of the Batetela;<sup>3</sup> and the

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<sup>1</sup> The official name of the Scheutist order is The Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM in French). In addition to their work in Congo, the Scheutists were also very active in China during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Catholic Documentation Center at Leuven in Belgium holds most of the Belgian Catholic missionary archives. However, the African Archives at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Brussels has the former colonial government’s archives dealing with missionaries.

<sup>2</sup> The full caption reads: “Historical donkey. Given by Ngongo Lutete to Kasongo Fwamba in 1891, who in turn gave it to Father Cambier in 1892 or 1893. Its guardian is Mankoyi. Sitting on this donkey, Ngongo Lutete conducted slave raids against the Baluba in the dry season of 1891. Later he wanted to make friends with the Bena Lulua and gave his donkey as a present to Fwamba. Kalamba didn’t want friendship with the Arabs, which forced Ngongo Lutete to turn back. S. Kalamba threatened him with war if he ever set foot on the left bank of the Lubi.” Thank you to Bram Cleys for sending me this image and translating the caption.

<sup>3</sup> In contemporary Congo Ngongo Leteta is connected with the Tetela. Leteta is the spelling and pronunciation preferred by Tetela.

Belgian missionary Emery Cambier,<sup>4</sup> to whom the donkey had been offered as a gift and a token. In central Africa, the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s were decades of transition, and brought empire into the area. In the western part of the region, this shift followed earlier periods of an expanding slave and ivory raiding frontier in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by lusoafican *pombeiros*, and other “specialist” groups such as the Chokwe.<sup>5</sup> In the east, similar dynamics were at work. Zanzibari slave and ivory merchants had been expanding their operations westward from eastern Africa, arriving on the eastern shore of Lake Tanganyika by the 1860s. Conquest by the Congo Free State, in the early 1890s, followed very closely the arrival of the Zanzibari traders as far west as the banks of the Lomami river.

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<sup>4</sup> Under the leadership of Emery Cambier in the 1880s, the Scheutists were the first specifically Belgian order of missionaries to operate in the Congo. Theirs would become a well-established and powerful order in the colony. See, Jean-Luc Vellut, “Emery Cambier (1865-1943), fondateur de la mission Kasai. La production d’un missionnaire de légende,” *Textyles. Revue des Lettres Belges de Langue Française*, Images de l’Afrique et du Congo/Zaire dans les lettres belges de langue française et alentour. Actes du colloque international de Louvain-la-Neuve (1993), <http://www.textyles.be/HSafrique.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> *Pombeiros* were the descendants of African women and Portuguese sailors and merchants. As a social group, they had been specialists in acquiring slaves and ivory since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The history of the expanding slaving frontier, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, and its political, social, and human consequences, as described by Miller, falls outside of the temporal and geographic purview of this dissertation, yet these dynamics formed some of the background and preamble to empire in central Africa. When European imperial travelers and later conquerors arrived in Angola and southwestern Congo, they found a world where African politics were articulated to the dynamics of raiding for slaves and trading for ivory. See, Joseph C Miller, “The Paradoxes of Impoverishment in the Atlantic Zone,” in *History of Central Africa, Vol. 1*, ed. David Birmingham and Phyllis M Martin (London ; New York: Longman, 1983), 118–159; Joseph C Miller, “Chokwe Trade and Conquest,” in *Pre-Colonial African Trade: Essays on Trade in Central and Eastern Africa Before 1900*, ed. Richard Gray and David Birmingham (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1970), 175–80.



**Figure 1: "Slave Trade Map of Equatorial Africa," *Kiunangi: or, Story and History from Central Africa* (London, UK: George Bell and Sons, 1887), NYPL. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture / General Research and Reference Division.**

The events narrated on the back of the photograph took place in an area of open savanna bordering on Portuguese Angola in the southwest, and known as Kasai. To the east lay the “Arab Zone” where Zanzibari slave raiding and ivory trading was most intense in the 1880s and early 1890s, and where the so-called Arab War (1892-1895) took place. This entire region encompassed parts of what would be known, from 1988 to 2006 as the Maniema, Orientale, Equateur and Kivu provinces of eastern and central Congo.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Léon de Saint-Moulin, “Histoire de l’organisation administrative au Zaïre,” *Zaire-Afrique* 224, no. April (1988): 197–222.

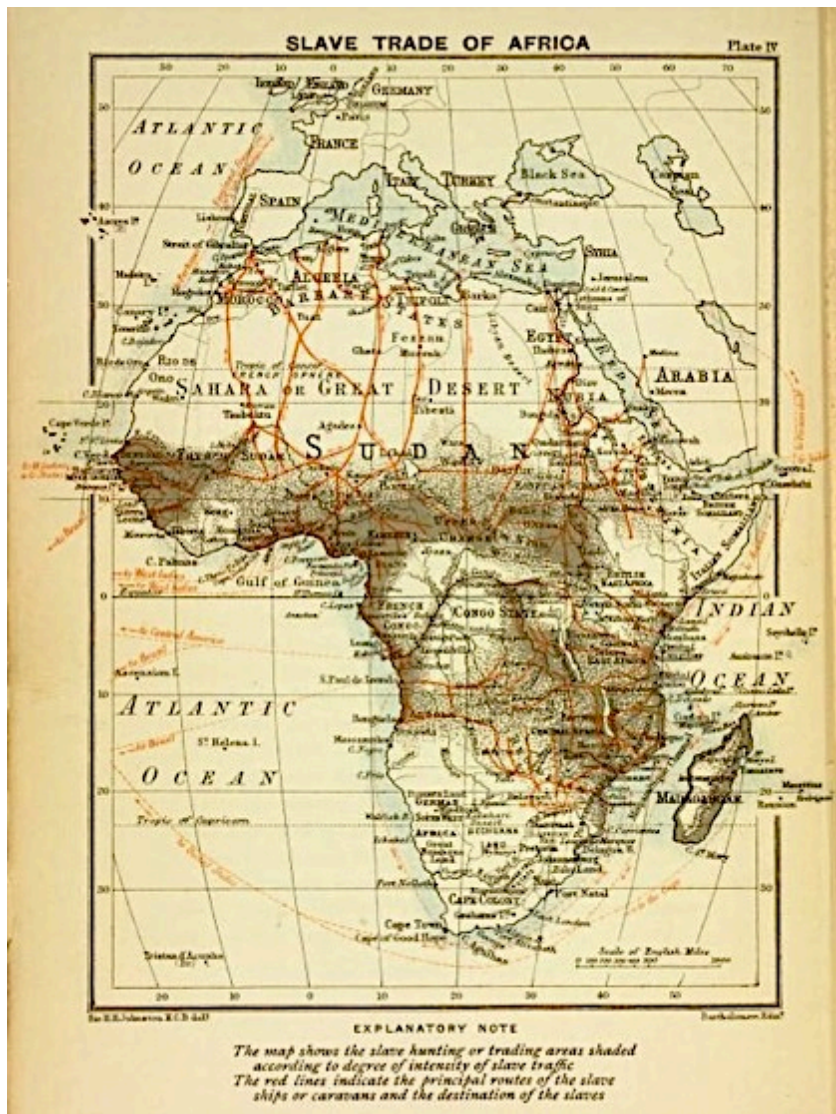


Figure 2: “John George Bartholomew, “Slave Trade of Africa,” A History of the Colonization of Africa by Alien Races, by Sir Harry H. Johnston ... With Eight Maps by the Author and J.G. Bartholomew. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1899), NYPL. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture / General Research and Reference Division”<sup>7</sup>

From 1885 for about a decade, King Leopold II’s Free State expanded from west to east: from bases in Kasai, through an area later known as Sankuru, and then beyond to the Lomami and Lualaba Rivers.



Sankuru is the main locus of this dissertation. It took shape as a borderland and a buffer zone before and during these early colonial years, and between the lands of European imperialists to the west and those of Zanzibari slave and ivory traders in the east. Sankuru, from the 1890s also became the heartland of the Tetela.<sup>8</sup> Its geographical position, between Europeans and Zanzibari in the 1880s and early 1890s was also the position of the Batetela in those years.

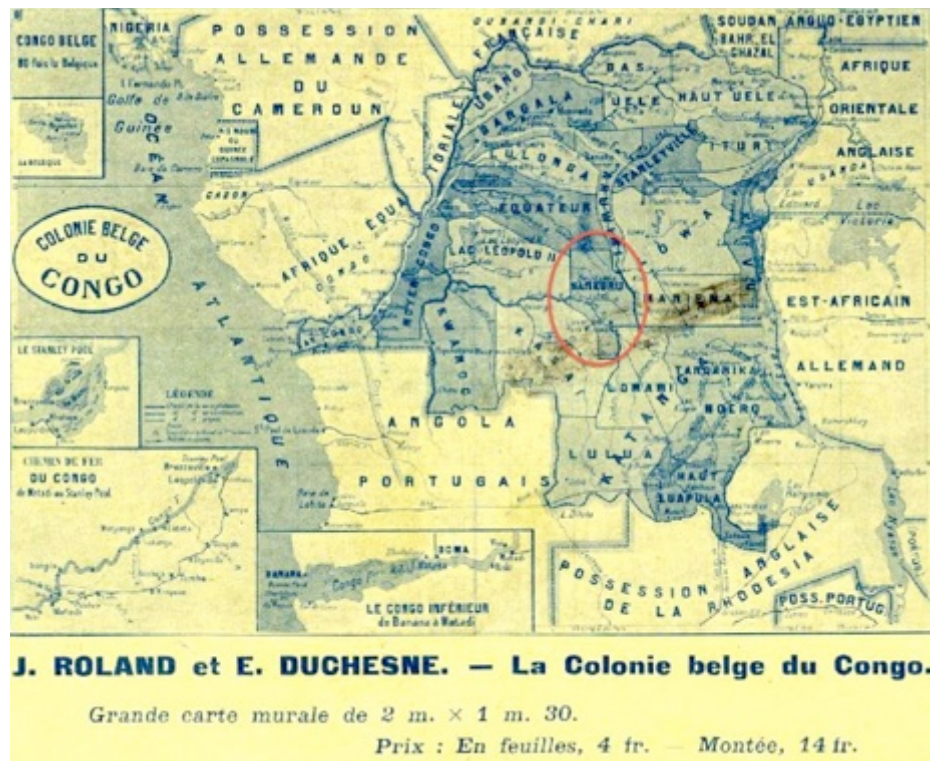


Figure 3: J. Roland and E. Duchesne, “La Colonie Belge Du Congo”, 1914, Rutgers University Library, <http://www.zum.de/whkmla/histatlas/africa/rolduch1914-2.jpg>.

The region of Sankuru became an official district within the Province of Eastern Kasai in 1912; in 2006, Sankuru became a Province of the Democratic Republic of

<sup>7</sup> The explanatory note on the map reads as follows: “The map shows the slave hunting or trading areas shaded according to degree of intensity of slave traffic. The red lines indicate the principal routes of the slave ships or caravans and the destination of the slaves.”

Congo in its own right.<sup>9</sup> Since 1912, it has been divided into six territories.<sup>10</sup> Roughly bounded on its east by the Lomami, to the west are the large savanna villages of Katako Kombe, Tshumbe, Wembo Nyama, and Lubefu. To the south and west, the province is bounded by the Sankuru River, where Lusambo, its current capital, is located. Its northern reaches are densely forested from Lodja and Kole on the Lukenie river, and Lomela on the same river, farther north. The Tshuapa River, which runs through the Equateur region to the north, crosses the eastern edge of Lomela territory. The Lubefu plain and the forest of Lusambo represent two of its southernmost points.<sup>11</sup>

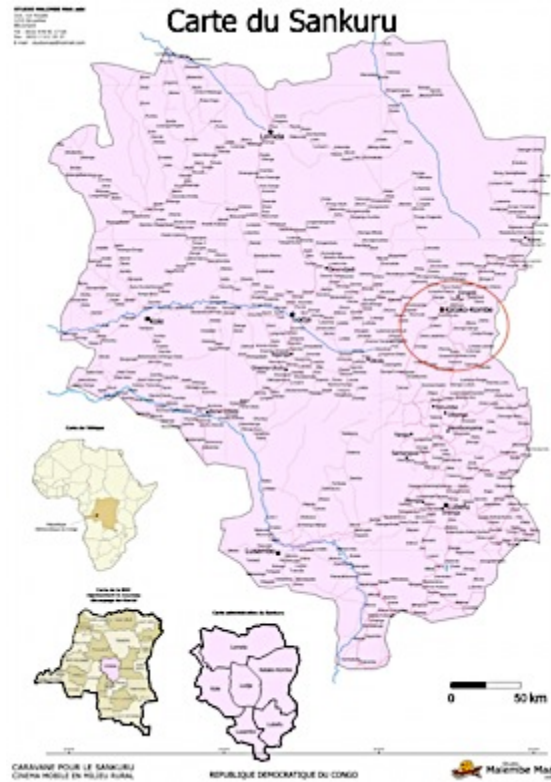
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<sup>8</sup> The Tetela were known as Batetela during the colonial era.

<sup>9</sup> It took until 2010 for this law to go into effect. For colonial era administrative organization, see Saint-Moulin, "Histoire de l'organisation administrative au Zaïre." His article is a *sine qua non* resource for understanding administrative territorial reorganizations in the Congo, from the Free State era to 1988.

<sup>10</sup> These territories are, from north to south, Lomela, Kole, Lodja, Katako Kombe, Lubefu, and Lusambo.

<sup>11</sup> After 1955, Sankuru district became more linguistically homogenous than before, containing most of the Congo's Otetela speakers. The one exception within Sankuru was Lusambo territory, which contained Thiluba, Bakuba, and Otetela-speakers. Saint-Moulin, "Histoire de l'organisation administrative au Zaïre," 214.



**Figure 4: Map of Sankuru with Katakoto territory circled. Courtesy of Jean-Michel Kibushi. Studio Malembe Maa. © 2008.**

Geographically and administratively, Sankuru has long been affected by east-west dynamics, often key to changes from the 1880s onward. In the late nineteenth century it was also a launching stage for expeditions into copper rich Katanga. Much later, when it became Patrice Lumumba’s home district, Sankuru was situated between the national capital of Leopoldville (Kinshasa), and one of the regions that became a heartlands of the Mulelist rebellion of the mid-1960s.<sup>12</sup> In 1997, Sankuru lay along the path of Laurent Désiré Kabila’s “rebels,” alongside Paul Kagame’s Rwandan soldiers as they marched toward Kinshasa. Today Sankuru is known by people in and out of the region, according

<sup>12</sup> Pierre Mulele’s failed 1964 anti-Mobutu rebellion is beyond the scope of this dissertation. I mention it because it shows the continuity of Sankuru’s geographic position in Congo, from the late precolonial to the postcolonial eras.



to the categories of modern African politics, as the homeland of the Tetela “tribe” or “ethnic group.”



Figure 5: “Democratic Republic of the Congo Proposed Provinces 2006.”  
<http://www.worldstatesmen.org/Congo-Kinshasa.html>

But let us return to the photograph of the donkey in Kasai. Kalamba Mukenge was paramount chief of the Lulua people.<sup>13</sup> With the help of Chokwe ivory hunters who had reached Kasai from the west, and friendship rituals anchored in gathering to smoke hemp

together, Kalamba was briefly able, in about 1870, to unite and protect the Kasai region and its populations against the raids and incursions of Lusoafrikan slave and ivory hunters.<sup>14</sup> In the 1880s, he chose to ally himself with the Free State, as did Kasongo Fwamba, another chief of the Lulua.<sup>15</sup> When a critical historical figure in the pages of this dissertation, the slave and ivory raider Ngongo Leteta, came calling, Kalamba rebuffed him.



**Figure 6: “Historical Donkey” 1890s, Kadoc Documentation and Research centre for Religion, Culture and Society. Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven**

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<sup>13</sup> Also called Bena Lulua or Bashilange in colonial sources.

<sup>14</sup> Jan Vansina, *Being Colonized: The Kuba Experience in Rural Congo, 1880-1960*, Africa and the Diaspora (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 14.

<sup>15</sup> Vellut, “Emeri Cambier (1865-1943), fondateur de la mission Kasai. La production d’un missionnaire de légende,” 47. Also see, “Cambier, Emeri,” *Bulletin De La Société Royale De Géographie d’Anvers* 35 (1911): 56.

The photograph, “Historical Donkey,” prompts a number of questions. Why did the Scheutist missionaries think a donkey worthy of photography? What did this animal and this image mean to them? Why was photography chosen over drawing or watercolor painting, both imaging methods popular with imperial travelers? These Scheutist missionaries were not travelers or explorers, and theirs was not a “romantic” sensibility of earlier “gentlemen-explorers.” The Belgian crown had, from the beginning of its imperial project in the Congo, sought to associate Catholic missionary orders to the enterprise. The Belgian order of Scheut was among the most powerful in Belgium. Its hierarchy responded directly to the Royal call and sent its missionary priests to the Congo Free State early on.<sup>16</sup> While these missionaries were undoubtedly key members of the Free State’s colonial apparatus, their relations with the military hierarchy, as shown by the numerous recriminations sent to and from Luluabourg (Kasai) the Free State capital at Boma, and Brussels, were often fraught and contentious.<sup>17</sup>

Historical photographs circulated in networks through time within shifting discursive frameworks. In this case, the photograph shows an animal put forward as “historical” by some Belgian missionaries, as in some way fundamental to the unfolding of events in a time and place. At the turn of the nineteenth century, this donkey circulated as a “gift,” a token of goodwill and friendship among Congolese and European players,

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<sup>16</sup> Daniel Verhelst, *Scheut, hier et aujourd’hui, 1862-1987: Histoire de la congrégation du Coeur Immaculé de Marie, C.I.C.M.*, Ancorae; v. 12 (Leuven, Belgium: Presses universitaires de Louvain, 1993); François Bontinck, *Les missionnaires de Scheut au Zaïre, 1888-1988* (Limete-Kinshasa: Epiphanie, 1988); Léon Dieu, *Dans la brousse congolaise (les origines des missions de Scheut au Congo)* (Liège, Belgium: Maréchal, 1946); Leo van den Berg, *Livre d’or: missionnaires de Scheut (C.I.C.M.) du Zaïre, 1888-1988* (Limete-Kinshasa: Missionnaires de Scheut, 1989); Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, *The Belgian Missionaries of Scheut (Brussels)* (London: Arden Press, 1917).

<sup>17</sup> “Missions et Cultes. Missionnaires Scheut,” A 5 Missions. Liasse 571 (49-58), Archives Africaines. Ministère des Affaires Etrangères. Brussels, Belgium.

and notably Belgian Catholic missionaries. All were struggling to fortify their positions in a dangerous environment, as well as acquire ivory and followers in the form of slaves or redeemed slaves.<sup>18</sup> This photograph indexes “history” in its most concrete materiality; it indexes exchange “items” that drove and motivated people and relationships. In this abbreviated, metonymic manner, donkey and photograph stood for wealth, prestige, and power in 1880s and 1890s Kasai. Both spoke to notions of “valuation.”<sup>19</sup>

For the Scheutist missionary who took or commissioned the photograph, it functioned as a memento and trophy; it gathered into its visual and discursive fields the echoes and traces of past and ongoing events of war and conquest, evoking for those who produced and kept the photograph memories of adventures in the pursuit of exciting political, personal, and even spiritual goals. In addition to being a mnemonic object triggering emotions and perhaps nostalgia, the photograph possessed a discursive aspect: it mediated meanings about who had power over whom in this historical situation of turmoil and conquest. One aspect of this visual-power economy was the ability to “show” images, whether in Congo itself or in the Belgian metropole; another was the ability to “see” these images.

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<sup>18</sup> Wahis, Gouverneur Général, “A Monsieur le Commissaire de District,” December 24, 1894, Missions et Cultes. Missionnaires Scheut. Liasse 571, Archives Africaines. Ministère des Affaires Étrangères. Brussels, Belgium. Wahis, The military Governor General of the Congo demanded that the missionaries stop “meddling,” and especially stop trying to usurp State authority with the populations in the district of Lualaba by taking prisoners after skirmishes in which they partook. “[These] natives cannot be permitted to move about without the acquiescence of the Commissaire de District. They are to continue fulfilling all the obligations imposed on other natives in the territory.”

<sup>19</sup> For discussions of the changing notion of “valuation” in Africa at the start of the colonial era, see Jane Guyer, “Wealth in People, Wealth in Things - Introduction,” *The Journal of African History* 36, no. 1 (1995): 83–90; Jane Guyer, “Wealth in People and Self-Realization in Equatorial Africa,” *Man (New Series)* 28, no. 2 (1993): 243–265.

A question lingers when we, as historians and readers, consider such photographs: Who, if anyone, among the colonized or soon to be colonized, saw a particular image or artifact? In 1890s Kasai, a quite dangerous area until the 1910s,<sup>20</sup> it is likely that, even at the missions, no Congolese had visual access to photographs produced by Europeans in their finished, printed forms.

As the “historical donkey” image makes evident, photography arrived with the Free State in Kasai, as early as the 1880s or early 1890s. Many among the soon to be colonized – chiefs, notables, and also perhaps less connected individuals and slaves – glimpsed the social and scopic relations that constituted “photography” as a capacious, and often capricious, multivalent technology of representation. As I show in my dissertation, and as others have argued,<sup>21</sup> Congolese were aware of photography’s power to “show” and of its economies of seeing and being seen, and they knew about the significance of images as artifacts. Bogumil Jewsiewicki has proposed that early colonial Zande wall paintings were ways of engaging in political and aesthetic relationships with newly arrived Europeans. These aesthetic and political articulations were also factors of technological innovation—paints, brushes, and photographic apparatuses—and they were mediated by seeing. Zande saw white newcomers photographing their dwellings, and

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<sup>20</sup> Bogumil Jewsiewicki, “The Formation of the Political Culture of Ethnicity in the Belgian Congo, 1920-1959,” in *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 324–349; Vellut, “Eméri Cambier (1865-1943), fondateur de la mission Kasai. La production d’un missionnaire de légende.”

<sup>21</sup> Bogumil Jewsiewicki, “Peintres de cases, imagiers et savants populaires du Congo, 1900-1960. Un essai d’histoire de l’esthétique indigène (Wall-Painters, Folk Scholars and Image-Makers in the Congo, 1900-1960: An Essay on the History of Native Aesthetics),” *Cahiers d’Études Africaines* 31, no. 123 (1991): 307–326; Christraud M Geary, *In and Out of Focus: Images from Central Africa, 1885-1960* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, National Museum of African Art, 2003); Enid Schildkrout, “The Spectacle of Africa Through the Lens of Herbert Lang: Belgian Congo Photographs 1909-1915,” *African Arts* 24, no. 4 (October 1991): 70; John Mack,

then saw the resulting images, which visiting American scientists Herbert Lang and James Chapin developed in the field.<sup>22</sup> Seeing the images in turn allowed the Zande to know what was selected, as well as the material results of these selections. These visual practices, where photography interfaced with other visual media, opened possibilities for both sides to connect political alliance with taste and prestige.<sup>23</sup>

### Sources and locations

This dissertation narrows its scope specifically on the Tetela, once a colonial “tribe” known as the Batetela, and today a loosely configured “community”<sup>24</sup> whose members think of themselves, according to the terms of modern African politics, including cultural politics, as belonging to a larger Mongo “ethnicity.”<sup>25</sup> Part of my purpose in this

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“Documenting the Cultures of Southern Zaire: The Photographs of the Torday Expeditions 1900-1909,” *African Arts* 24, no. 4 (October 1, 1991): 60–100.

<sup>22</sup> Herbert Lang, a mammalogist and photographer with New York’s American Museum of Natural History, and James Chapin, a young ornithology student at Columbia University, spent 6 years on a collecting mission in the Belgian Congo. See [http://diglib1.amnh.org/intro/intro\\_swf.html](http://diglib1.amnh.org/intro/intro_swf.html)

<sup>23</sup> Jewsiewicki, “Peintres de cases, imagiers et savants populaires du Congo, 1900-1960. Un essai d’histoire de l’esthétique indigène (Wall-Painters, Folk Scholars and Image-Makers in the Congo, 1900-1960,” 316. Wall paintings, according to Jewsiewicki, were themselves the predecessors of the “popular painting” genre in the Congo.

<sup>24</sup> “Community” is a somewhat weak and vague contemporary term that masks its own avoidance of difficult politics. Yet, there is a communitarian aspect to how Tetela have constituted their collective selves today in relation to one another and in regard to the State. In its diasporic expression, the Tetela community interacts on listservs, and in blogs. This Tetela community also comes together to plan and implement projects in Sankuru, as well as across cities in the DRC, where Tetela, as I learned in Lubumbashi, get together to finance asphaltting and electrifying their neighborhoods. Gaston Kepoke and Héléne Sheka, “Interview,” Cassette tape recording, January 29, 2009.

<sup>25</sup> Mongo is known as the first ancestor who engendered most of the different populations of the Congo basin. In ways that are neither simple, nor entirely part of this dissertation, colonial “ethno-history” connected the Tetela to the ancestor Mongo. Among others, see, Léon Delcourt, *Les Mongo du Sankuru* (Elisabethville, Revue juridique du Congo belge, 1949); Georges Van der Kerken, *L’ethnie Mongo: histoire, groupements, sousgroupements, origines; visions, représentations et explications du monde; sociologie, économie, ergologie, langues et arts des peuples mongo, politique indigène, contacts avec peuples voisins*, Institut royal colonial belge. Section des sciences morales et politiques. (Bruxelles: G. van Campenhout, 1944); Luc de

dissertation is to show how Tetela histories, historical consciousness, and even collective subjectivities have been connected, from the earliest moments of the colonial conquest, to key events and spaces in Congo's colonial history. More specifically, my dissertation locates how ways of knowing, seeing, and being Tetela emerged and shifted in visual worlds from the late 1880s to 1960.

As my project was to write a visual history, my archival research needed to cover oral and written sources (the classic archives of African history), as well as visual sources. The written sources were important ways of situating and sometimes anchoring the visual sources that are the center of this dissertation.

The "Archives Africaines," (African Archives) housed at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Brussels contain all (insofar as we can make such a claim) of the colonial state's records. At the Royal Museum for Central Africa (hereafter RMCA), located in Tervuren outside of Brussels, I consulted some archives housed in the "History of the Colonial Period and the Period of Decolonization" section; these were mostly the personal papers of colonial figures, such as Baron Francis Dhanis,<sup>26</sup> for instance, whose personal papers collection is quite voluminous. I consulted the archives of the "KADOC Documentation and Research centre for Religion, Culture and Society" a private archive at the Catholic University of Leuven at the University of Leuven documenting Flemish Catholicism. These contained letters and articles by Belgian, mostly Flemish, colonial-era missionaries.

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Heusch, *Vie quotidienne des Mongo du Kasai*, Exploration du Monde (Exploration du Monde and I.R.S.A.C., 1956); Armand Odimba Ghenda, "Eléments D'ethno-Histoire Des Anamongo Selon Les Sources Ethno-Orales Et écrites" (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1985).

<sup>26</sup> I return to this key colonial personage in chapter 1. In Belgium, and in much Belgian historiography, he was considered *the* hero of the colonial conquest – a Belgian Charles Gordon, Jean-Baptiste Marchand, or Hubert Lyautey.

In this dissertation, I make use of a variety of visual sources – mainly photographs – which, together with my ethnographic work in the field, make up my visual archive. In Belgium, my main archival sources for visual materials were the extensive photographic and film collections in the “History” and “Ethnography” sections at the RMCA;<sup>27</sup> and the photographic and film holdings of the KADOC archive. Shortly after my arrival in Belgium in the summer of 2007, the Kadoc archive received a significant donation of photographic albums belonging to Passionist priests who had lived and worked among Tetela in Sankuru from about 1935 to the early 1970s. Chapter 3 of this dissertation is largely based on this photographic archive.

Many of the photographs I found in the RMCA archives were also published in colonial magazines and books. Chapter 2 discusses the role of the former “Congo Museum” in producing and disseminating colonial knowledge as, specifically, ethnographic knowledge. While there were a fair number of visual sources portraying Tetela, I found no colonial films that took up the Tetela or Sankuru as their main subject matter. The exception, of course, was Luc de Heusch’s 1954 film, *Fête chez les Hamba*, which I analyze in detail in chapter 4.

My third set of source materials were the interviews I conducted in Congo and in Belgium. In 2006, I spoke with Luc de Heusch on two separate occasions at his Brussels apartment. In Belgium also, in 2007, I conducted two interviews with Father Isidore Maes at the Passionist House in Wezembeek Oppem, outside of Brussels. In early 2008, the scholar of Congolese cinema, Guido Convents, introduced me to Jean-Michel Kibushi, a Tetela animator and filmmaker based in Brussels. Through my friendship with

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<sup>27</sup> These photographic collections are among the most extensive in any European colonial archive.



Kibushi I met a few Tetela in Brussels, and, most importantly, gained access to the Sankuru region, where I conducted fieldwork in 2008.

This study in ethnographic history has engaged with and tried to problematize “memory” and work with “oral history” methodologies. From June to August 2008, and from February to March 2009, I did such work with Tetela in and outside the Sankuru region. I collected Tetela histories and personal life memories, and I presented different Tetela interlocutors with images I had brought from the colonial archive. This evidence added important layers to the relationships of visibility to memory, knowledge, and subject formation. Sankuru suffered from war and destruction from 1998 until about 2004. These traumas were still recent and informed many conversations in the region. I found that seeing was intensely connected to narratives and experiences of violence. People I met often narrated distant events in the past and interpreted them through the perspective of more recent ones, and visibility appeared as a key component of historical narrative, bearing associations, in particular, with stories of violence, the telling of which may require strongly visual or even imaginary forms of employment.

### **Fieldwork**

My goal in Sankuru, in Kinshasa, and in Lubumbashi – was to conduct a form of visual historical ethnography that sought to interrogate individual Tetela subjects’ ways of seeing and knowing history, and also their ways of being Tetela visual subjects. The main element of my fieldwork, as I had conceptualized it, was to bring a set of photographs and some drawings from the Belgian archives to the Congo and into conversations with Congolese Tetela men and women of various ages and circumstances.

It had been my intention to use a two-phase approach to engage Tetela interlocutors about history and visuality. In the first phase, I planned to collect Tetela life histories, and interview people about their understandings of events and personages in the history of Free State and Belgian Congo. My key purpose in these initial conversations was to gain an understanding of how Congolese evoked their past and their spatial memories as we traveled to memory sites together. Then, I planned to return to the same people and the same places with selections of my visual archive with the intent of revisiting my earlier conversations and asking interlocutors to view and speak with me about the visual materials I had brought. The idea was to “test” a metropolitan visual archive by asking Congolese to challenge my assumptions and share their memories with me. I had hoped that this approach to fieldwork could enable Congolese informants to intervene intellectually without, at first, being “led” or their memories “contaminated” by me or the images I carried; the process was meant to enable my understanding of how memories changed or deepened, receded or intensified, in the presence of a researcher's agenda and archive.



**Figure 7: Kiomi. July 2008. Photograph by author.**

However, I was not able to implement this methodology systematically or at all times. The logistical challenges were many. The Democratic Republic of Congo covers an enormous geographical territory, and the Sankuru region is almost completely devoid of infrastructure.<sup>28</sup> Travel and research in landlocked, isolated, Sankuru district is quite difficult. The best way to travel into Sankuru is to fly in a four or five-seat propeller airplane from Kananga to Lodja or Tshumbe, and the only efficient way to travel within Sankuru is by motorcycle. Given the difficulties and expense of travel, it was not always possible to revisit people and places as I had intended.

Through Kibushi I was able to arrange the services of a research assistant to take me around the region and facilitate my contacts. Rudolphe Lonyembo, also known as

“The Inspector”<sup>29</sup> and “Papa Rudolphe,” drove me around Sankuru on his motorcycle, facilitated contacts for me, and, together with his wife handled all logistical aspects of our travel. More than that, he was a wonderful storyteller and an incredible source of Sankuru history and knowledge. A man in his mid-fifties in 2008, he also remembered the end of the colonial era and the troubles that followed.<sup>30</sup>

Because the roads are nearly impracticable for trucks, the goods that can be bought in Sankuru are very limited: small things like tins of sardines, powdered milk, soap, some paper goods, candles, cigarettes, candy, those unfortunate ubiquitous “lightening creams,” and other similar items. There is of course the possibility of buying local agricultural produce: rice, manioc, fruit sometimes, peanuts, as well as fish, game, chickens and goats. Peanuts are a local industry of sorts and get “exported” out of the area by bicycle. Young men travel hundreds of miles on impossible roads, pushing bicycles loaded with enormous sacks of peanuts or bins of palm oil to sell at markets in Mbuji Mai, Kananga, or at Kindu across the Lomami river to the east. Beer and soda bottles come by cargo plane to Lodja and can only be found there.

The motorcycle is the fastest and most economical means of transport over short distances (100-200 km) in Sankuru, and in much of Congo. When Kibushi and others in Belgium told me there were no roads in Sankuru, that it was isolated and “*enclavé*,” or boxed-in, I had not fully realized what they meant. What remains of the colonial roads are now sandy paths of varying widths, regularly interrupted by sink holes and erosion

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<sup>28</sup> 905, 568 square miles.

<sup>29</sup> His official title is “Inspector of Education.” As such, he has traveled to every corner of Sankuru.

<sup>30</sup> In addition to Pierre Mulele’s 1964 rebellion (see above), Sankuru experienced an “intra-ethnic” conflict in 1963 that pitted “savanna” against “forest” Tetela. I will return to the significance of these designations in this dissertation.

craters. These paths sometimes turn into deep rivers of sand that try to pull down motorcycles as they fish-tail their way through. But Papa Rudolphe was a remarkable driver, and we never crashed. Sometimes the old Belgian road, once carefully engineered to avoid wherever possible steep grades or rivers and streams, and now mostly in disrepair, is now neglected by the women, men, and children who go for miles on foot, bicycle, and motorcycle. Instead, travelers favor shortcuts, more direct footpaths, and makeshift bridges over streams.

Central Congo's post-conflict context of poverty and isolation, its landscape of postcolonial "ruination" overdetermined my position as a researcher from the moment of my arrival in Sankuru.<sup>31</sup> In Lodja, Tshumbe, Wembo-Nyama, Katako-Kombe, Lubefu, Ngandu, Kiomi, Onalua, educated Sankurois wanted to know and evaluate my research agenda. Some were concerned that I, a white researcher from the North, may have been appropriating their history and cultural heritage, their intellectual property. Others associated me with a global power structure, assuming that any foreigner who turns up is affiliated with the NGO world of development and relief organizations. Their assumptions were not incorrect. Through experiences in the field, I came to realize that when they invoked the NGOs operating in Sankuru, such as "Catholic Relief Services" or "Caritas," my interlocutors were using shortcuts for talking about the power, technology and resources that brought me to Sankuru, and into contact with its inhabitants. I was sometimes interpellated as a white researcher connected to a world of privilege, and sometimes also solicited as a representative of those with the power and means to provide

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<sup>31</sup> "Ruination" is Ann Laura Stoler's analytic, which I deploy in this dissertation, and which assists my understanding of contemporary Congo and my experiences there. See her article, "Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination," *Cultural Anthropology* 23, no. 2 (2008): 191-219.

badly needed material assistance. As I show in chapter 4, Luc de Heusch, in 1954, had a similar experience. In the course of some interviews, it was as if time had twisted back on itself, as Sankurois reminisced about the Belgian era to me as if, somehow, I had become its postcolonial representative. In a number of conversations, evoking the “historical past” became a way of addressing other, more immediate, concerns, and at times, I did not feel control of my research agenda.

Although at times difficult, fieldwork was immensely rewarding intellectually and on a human level. If at times they felt pressured to say “something” about the images I presented, my interlocutors were always keen to see them. On many occasions, conversations were held in public spaces. They sparked debates among interlocutors, spectators and bystanders, and produced confrontations, at times emotional tussles, involving images, texts, knowledge, and memories. The photographs I brought from Belgian archives had mnemonic functions. They and the ways in which they were seen and spoken of in the field generated an additional visual archive of its own composed of images, their oral and narrative evocation, and of seeing – as a way of being a subject and a historical actor.

## **Methods and Theory**

Visual histories prompt their own historical and visual questions, and require their own methodologies. The anthropologist Christopher Pinney has called for more nuanced readings of the “affinities between particular discursive formations and the image worlds that parallel them.”<sup>32</sup> In one sense the “visual archive,” operates, conceptually, as a

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<sup>32</sup> Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson, eds., *Photography's Other Histories*, Objects/histories (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 3.

parallel reality to written or oral sources. And in my dissertation, I consider images in terms of their visuality and in terms of their “intervisuality,” rather than only through semiotic analyses of “representations,” and of the visual as text.<sup>33</sup> The visuality of images also exists in tension with the written and the oral. Photographs “tell” their own histories; they convey their social histories as artifacts; but they also give their own versions of history. This dissertation explores the role of visuality in the production of Congolese colonial history and reflects on the kinds of histories it can yield. A thread connecting the chapters of this dissertation is the question of subjectivity and experience. The questions are: how does the analysis of a photographic archive give access to experiences of subjecthood, and how does the constitution of a visual archive, from the position of a postcolonial moment, reveal aspects of subjecthood. Placing these visual archives – the colonial archive, the archive constituted in the field – in tension with one another, leads to possible understandings of collective subjecthood. Other questions are: How are and were collective subjectivities manifested in the ways Tetela used photography and saw photographs at different moments in history, and, secondly, how did Tetela see colonial-era photographs in 2008 and 2009?

Methodologically, the study begins with photography’s advent in the nineteenth century. The invention of the daguerreotype, the first photographic technique in the 1840s, coincided with the beginnings of true global industrial capitalism and empire. Patricia Hayes speaks of photography springing from and emerging into global mercantile exchanges, which carried persons, goods, and technologies across seas, and fueled the European industrial revolution. In many ways, photography and the camera

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<sup>33</sup> This is not to say that, in my dissertation, I throw out semiotic analysis entirely. It is an important tool for image analysis.

were the technologies of nineteenth century globalization, which engendered, and this is key, new ways of seeing.<sup>34</sup> An “imperial turn” in the history of European photography and visuality still needs to take place in order for the modernity of photography, as a factor of empire and as a new way of seeing, to be fully understood and historicized.<sup>35</sup>

In my dissertation’s first chapter especially, I seek to problematize “seeing” by articulating it to empire, conquest, but also to new epistemological spaces opened by radical and sometimes violent exchanges. From the latter half of the nineteenth century photography became increasingly the new standard of evidence and empirical proof, as well as the privileged material expression of eyewitnessing. In 1902-03 it was the publication and circulation of a series of photographs, as iconic as they were shocking, that drove the international scandal caused by the revelation of the atrocities committed by armed men in the service of Leopold II’s Congo Free State or its concessionary companies.<sup>36</sup> By seeking to locate and demonstrate how visuality became embedded in narrative, and how historical narrative inhabited the visual, I aim to show the ways in which visuality is at work in images and written texts, and how it produces historical meanings.

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<sup>34</sup> Patricia Hayes, “Power, Secrecy, Proximity: A Short History of South African Photography,” *Kronos*, no. 33 (November 1, 2007): 139.

<sup>35</sup> The historical profession is experiencing, it seems, “turn fatigue,” yet the history of European visuality remains incomplete. “AHR Forum on Historiographical Turns,” *American Historical Review* 117, no. 3 (June 2012). The work of James R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire* (University of Chicago Press, 1997) takes important steps in the direction of decentering Europe from the constitution of modern photographic visuality. Also, see Patricia Hayes, “‘Cocky’ Hahn and the ‘Black Venus’: The Making of a Native Commissioner in South West Africa,” *Gender & History* 8, no. 3 (1996): 364–392.

<sup>36</sup> Sharon Sliwinski, “The Childhood of Human Rights: The Kodak on the Congo,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 5, no. 3 (December 1, 2006): 333–363; Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998); Nancy Rose Hunt, “An Acoustic Register, Tenacious Images and Congolese Scenes of Rape and Repetition,” *Cultural Anthropology* 23, no. 2 (May 2008): 220–253.



On the other hand, for all of its technological and empirical hard edges, photography also possessed the potential for “magic,” that is for re-enchantment, for self-expression, and self-creation. From the moment Louis Daguerre created the image “Boulevard du Temple, Paris” in 1838, photography was already a poetic technology of “the everyday.”<sup>37</sup> As Hayes has also suggested, photography as a practice and a new form of visibility created new rituals, and new traditions.<sup>38</sup> In my dissertation’s third chapter, I engage with how photography was imbricated with the practices of late colonial daily life.<sup>39</sup>

The invention of halftone printing, a technique that allowed the easy integration of text and image in mass publications, propelled photography to a dominant position in the world of mass culture. As the halftone superseded the engraving, expectations of a scientific empiricism in visibility took the place of artistic renderings. In 1888, George Eastman introduced the first Kodak camera, soon opening photography to amateurs.<sup>40</sup> It is significant that the halftone and other technological advances in the field of photography emerged in the two decades that cemented European empire in most of Africa. Much has been made of photography as a “tool of empire,”<sup>41</sup> and of the camera as

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<sup>37</sup> Patricia Hayes, “Seeing and Being Seen: Politics, Art and the Everyday in Omar Badsha’s Durban Photography, 1960s-1980s,” *Africa* 81, no. 4 (2011): 544–566; Hayes, “Power, Secrecy, Proximity.”

<sup>38</sup> Hayes, “Power, Secrecy, Proximity,” 143.

<sup>39</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). De Certeau provides me with a way into this aspect of photography in a late colonial situation.

<sup>40</sup> Kathryn T. Long, “ ‘Cameras ‘Never Lie:’ The Role of Photography in Telling the Story of American Evangelical Missions,” *Church History* 72, no. 4 (December 2003): 830.

<sup>41</sup> Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1981).

a technology that, like the gun (another key tool of empire) points and shoots.<sup>42</sup> Although Paul Landau, who engaged with imperial visuality and photography in some of his work, accepts the idea of a “two-way traffic” in colonial encounters, supported by photography, he writes that being a means of representation and a tool of empire akin to the firearm, photography positioned the European as the observer of the African. While it is part of the story of colonialism, it seems reductive, or incomplete. Landau’s frame of “representational encounter” is not sufficient for fully attending to the visual histories of colonial Africa.<sup>43</sup> With her recent work on individual African photographers in the twentieth century, Hayes takes us beyond models of imperial scopic regimes that are dictated by European ideologies of sight and seeing. I will return to the assumptions behind the idea of “European” ways of seeing.

In conversations with Sankurois in the field, held often around photographs and other images, I learned that ways of seeing and reasons for seeing formed visual economies, and were part of what I have come to call a “visual archive” (see above). During the dramatic events that preceded the arrival of the Free State and during the colonial conquest itself, Europeans and Africans experienced new ways of seeing, driven perhaps by new reasons for seeing: others, the environment, and eventually oneself as a subject who is aware of being seen, and is aware of the ways in which he or she is being seen.

From the moment of its availability, Africans incorporated photography as technology, and as sets of social relations, and photographs as both material and visual

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<sup>42</sup> Paul S. Landau, “Empires of the Visual: Photography and Colonial Administration in Africa,” in *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 141–171.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

artifacts, within registers of prestige. In central Africa, photographs have from the beginning been part of an economy of valuation and self-realization.<sup>44</sup> In my second chapter, I consider the ways Tetela engaged with colonial photography as ways of manifesting both modernity and prestige. I also consider how colonial photography, creating ethnographic registers and meanings, later denied Tetela prestige and modernity. To be clear, while the colonial state sought to withhold the kinds of prestige and modernities that Tetela had fashioned for themselves in the earliest years of the Free State era, Tetela held on to both prestige and sense of modernity. A dual visual history is at work.

Photographic images are directly connected to notions of self-fashioning and subjectivity. Almost simultaneous with the modern state in Africa – first colonial, later postcolonial – photographs have been terrains of struggle for controlling and creating subjects, that is, significantly collective and individual subjects. Photographs of people, with their intense focus on the individual embed him or her within larger social relations, including to collective subjectivities. Photography is also an art of composition.<sup>45</sup> As a keyword of art history, composition is the process of arraying objects and persons, in a harmonious or visually meaningful manner, within a bounded frame. At another level, composition is *bricolage* and works as a particular means of presentation, where the choices of how to place people and things inside frames can be ways of manifesting, for

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<sup>44</sup> Guyer, “Wealth in People and Self-Realization in Equatorial Africa.”

<sup>45</sup> Jane I. Guyer and Samuel M. Eno Belinga, “Wealth in People as Wealth in Knowledge: Accumulation and Composition in Equatorial Africa,” *The Journal of African History* 36, no. 01 (1995): 91–120; Guyer, “Wealth in People and Self-Realization in Equatorial Africa.” Guyer argues that in Central African societies, wealth was acquired through specific connections and arrangements between people, skills, and things (a “synergistic” process), rather than a simple process of addition. Knowledge was the most valued “good,” as it was that which conferred power.

instance, wealth and prestige. During the “Arab War,” photography drew European Free State officers into economies of collective but also personal valuation. These, in turn, produced particular early colonial visualities, which Chapter 1 considers in detail.

There has been significant scholarly discussion of “visuality,” a key term in the relatively new field of “visual culture studies.”<sup>46</sup> As a flexible, but capacious term, “visuality” moves scholarship beyond notions of “representation,” a word that implies a rather fixed division of labor between agents who represent, objects who are represented, and “representations” as stable and identifiable artifacts. In the preface to the now canonical 1988 edited volume, *Vision and Visuality*,<sup>47</sup> Hal Foster, while carefully avoiding dichotomous nature/culture tropes, distinguishes between *vision* and *visuality* as two distinct but intimately connected processes. While vision points to physical yet historically and culturally located processes of seeing, *visuality* denotes a “social fact,” which is also inescapably bound to physiology. “[T]he difference between the terms

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<sup>46</sup> Since the middle of the 1990s, “visual culture” has emerged as a somewhat vague term that points to interdisciplinarity. It allows for the use of multiple methodologies and the kind of intellectual wiggle room that poststructuralist approaches in history, anthropology, and critical studies require. See especially, Svetlana Alpers et al., “Visual Culture Questionnaire,” *October* 77 (July 1, 1996): 25–70. As a keyword, “visuality” does the work of reframing the object-bound orientation of western art historical criticism, in order to refocus analysis on seeing subjects, and the manner of their seeing. “Visuality” points to processes of seeing. The term has been associated with W.J.T. Mitchell, who, as editor of the journal *Critical Theory* in the late 1970s, offered early challenges to the established canons of art history. His work includes, W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); W. J. T. (William John Thomas) Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); W. J.T. Mitchell, “Showing Seeing: a Critique of Visual Culture,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 1, no. 2 (2002): 165 – 181; W. J. T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). In Hal Foster, ed., *Vision and Visuality* (New York: Dia Art Foundation and the New Press, 1988), Foster sets down some conceptual definitions of “visuality.” This term was later taken up again by the *October* journal group of post-structuralist writers, Rosalind Krauss, Hal Foster, Annette Michelson, among others. The journal’s Summer 1996 issue engages explicitly with the possibilities of “visual culture studies.” See in particular, W. J. T. Mitchell, “What Do Pictures ‘Really’ Want?,” *October* 77 (Summer 1996): 71–82.

<sup>47</sup> Foster, *Vision and Visuality*, ix–xiv.

signals a difference within the visual [...] a difference, many differences, among how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see, and how we see this seeing or the unseen therein.”<sup>48</sup> Foster’s remarks about the contingent, relational, positioned, and culturally determined processes of seeing open the way for stretching “visuality” beyond ocular-centrism. While the arrival of photography in Africa from the middle to the late nineteenth century created new visualities (in Europe, in Africa, and globally) it is important to “provincialize” western approaches to visuality, with their scopic models centering on sight as “that master sense of western thought.”<sup>49</sup> A visual history centering exclusively on sight bypasses and misses much in terms of perceptual epistemologies in Africa, and in other non-western cultural spaces. Sight may be the privileged sense in western thought and culture. But even the separation of processes of knowing, feeling, and perceiving into five senses belongs to a modern western epistemology.<sup>50</sup>

Nicholas Mirzoeff and others, have positioned “visuality” as a modern scopic regime which primarily characterizes the subject, Mirzoeff implies, as western and imperial. This western subject is a subject because of his/her ability to see.<sup>51</sup> In his intellectual history of French thought on visuality, Martin Jay argues that with Descartes,

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., ix.

<sup>49</sup> Jessica Dubow, “From a View on the World to a Point of View in It’: Rethinking Sight, Space and the Colonial Subject,” *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (2000): 91.

<sup>50</sup> Much new work is arguing for expanded notions of sensory experiences, and in particular against the compartmentalization of “the five senses,” among which vision has been assumed universally dominant. See, Kathryn Linn Geurts, *Culture and the Senses: Bodily Ways of Knowing in an African Community* (University of California Press, 2002); Elizabeth Edwards and Kaushik. Bhaumik, *Visual Sense: a Cultural Reader*, Sensory Formations, 1741-4725 (Oxford, U.K.: Berg, 2008). Also, Hunt, “An Acoustic Register, Tenacious Images and Congolese Scenes of Rape and Repetition.” Rudolf Mrázek has discussed Le Corbusier’s notion of “visual acoustics” in *A Certain Age: Colonial Jakarta Through the Memories of Its Intellectuals* (Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>51</sup> Nicholas Mirzoeff, “On Visuality,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 5, no. 1 (April 1, 2006): 53 –79.

language, or “utterance” as the primary act of subjecthood displaced seeing.<sup>52</sup> The strict division between a spiritual subject who sees objects, and a mechanistic body that simply obeys the commands of the spirit, together with the primacy of language as that which structures knowledge, has been the legacy of the Greek and Judeo-Christian intellectual traditions, which form the bases of the western intellectual tradition.

Christopher Pinney has been at the forefront of theoretical efforts in the field of “other” or non-western photography and visibility. Pinney asks that we “break free from the model of a sovereign ‘Western’ consciousness.”<sup>53</sup> In distinguishing between colonial practices of “depth” in photography, which sought to fix identities and present “chronotopic certainties,”<sup>54</sup> and postcolonial uses of “surface” as ways of refuting colonial modes of representation, Pinney reintroduces a notion of materiality to the image as, not just an object that can be held in one’s hands, but as the visual element that is unfixed on the surface of a photograph. In my dissertation’s second and third chapters, I attend to the surface of photographic images as the chosen discursive space of colonized individuals as they go about presenting themselves as particular colonial and late-colonial subjects. Just as Dipesh Chakrabarty’s argument that “Europe” operates as a hidden, yet hegemonic and fully operative referent that must be revealed,<sup>55</sup> so it is that “seeing” as a purely scopic, eye-bound phenomenon should be questioned and problematized. Sumathi Ramaswamy’s work on the gendered embodiment of India’s nationalist visual

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<sup>52</sup> Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>53</sup> Christopher Pinney, “Notes from the Surface of the Image. Photography, Postcolonialism and Vernacular Modernism,” in *Photography’s Other Histories* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2003), 202.

<sup>54</sup> The certainties that give credence to the existence of known and assumed relationships between particular temporalities and spatialities.

imaginary,<sup>56</sup> and Pinney's notion of "corporetics," a corporeal aesthetics he opposes to "disinterested' representation, which over-cerebralizes and textualizes the image"<sup>57</sup> provide new avenues of thinking about visuality. While these works present intriguing ways of considering non-western visuality, they also present new possibilities for looking at the visual practices of the west. While in Africa, where objects more than images are the material sites that collect bits of "personhood,"<sup>58</sup> it is the distancing operations assumed by Western visual theory and practice that we should revisit. And indeed, why *should* the production of an image necessarily be a distancing mechanism, and a purely scopical and disembodied practice? We must also go beyond the ways that language and semiotics has dominated historians' discussions of visuality, particularly through the vocabulary of "representation" and "contextualization."

Visual history is new to African history. With important and growing exceptions historians of Africa have not embraced visual history in the ways that South and Southeast Asianists have done.<sup>59</sup> Paul Landau and Deborah Kaspin edited a wonderful collection of essays on visual history in Africa. Colonial visuality, in the book's essays, is never cast as simple as a set of representations that oppressed those who, for many

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<sup>55</sup> Dipesh. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton Studies in Culture/power/history (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>56</sup> Sumathi Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>57</sup> Christopher Pinney, "*Photos of the Gods*": *The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India* (London: Reaktion, 2004), 8.

<sup>58</sup> Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford : New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1998); David T. Doris, "Symptoms and Strangeness in Yoruba anti-Aesthetics," *African Arts* 38 (Winter), no. 4 (2005): 24–31 (notes, 92).

<sup>59</sup> See Pinney, et. al above.

reasons, appeared in front of a camera.<sup>60</sup> Rather, its proper study involves looking at photographs and analyzing how they produced history by shaping memories, experiences, knowledge, and what Reinhart Koselleck has called “horizons of expectation.”<sup>61</sup> Such an approach extends the interpretive possibilities of visual history by pointing to photographic visuality as constitutive of collective identity and personhood as well as multilayered objects and artifacts.

Among the historians of Africa who work with visual sources, Patricia Hayes is one of the few whose work engages with visuality on its own terms, showing that history and its narratives have visualities in addition to contexts, and that knowledge can be visual, rather than stemming only from context and rhetoric. Hayes’ work engages with photographs as photographs, rather than as supplemental artifacts that explain, introduce or otherwise serve the worlds of print, text, context, and rhetoric.<sup>62</sup> A limited number of scholars have engaged with visuality in Congolese history. Among them, Bogumil Jewsiewicki is the only historian of Congo who has worked almost exclusively on visual subjects since the early 1990s.<sup>63</sup> Jewsiewicki’s discussions of visuality in Congo are

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<sup>60</sup> Paul S. Landau and Deborah D. Kaspin, eds., *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). In particular, see Landau’s introduction.

<sup>61</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past on the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

<sup>62</sup> In particular: Hayes, “Seeing and being seen”; Patricia Hayes, “Santu Mofokeng Photographs: The Violence Is in the Knowing,” *History and Theory* 48, no. 4 (2009): 34–51; Hayes, “‘Cocky’ Hahn and the ‘Black Venus’”; Wolfram Hartmann, Jeremy Silvester, and Patricia Hayes, *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History* (Juta and Company Ltd, 1998).

<sup>63</sup> Bogumil Jewsiewicki, “Residing in Kinshasa: Between Colonial Modernization and Globalization,” trans. Pim Higginson, *Research in African Literatures* 39, no. 4 (2008): 105–116; Bogumil Jewsiewicki, *Mami Wata. La peinture urbaine au Congo* (Editions Gallimard, 2003); Bogumil Jewsiewicki, *A Congo Chronicle: Patrice Lumumba in Urban Art* (New York, NY: Museum for African Art, 1999); Bogumil Jewsiewicki and Cheri Samba, *Cheri Samba: The Hybridity of Art*, First ed. (Galerie Amrad African Art Publications, 1995); Jewsiewicki, “Peintres



based on Congolese visual categories, rather than only on Euro-American theories, and his work has been in part an ethnography of seeing in postcolonial Zaire and Congo.

While not her primary research focus, Nancy Rose Hunt's work on visuality is complex and suggestive, particularly in the ways that it stretches the notion of the visual beyond seeing eyes, juggling and distributing images and seeing among persons and objects, past and present, and categories of memory and knowledge. Hunt's use of visuality destabilizes conventional notions of subalternity, subjectivity, and temporality.<sup>64</sup>

Christraud Geary and Enid Schildkrout have shown how Mangbetu chiefs utilized European visual interest in their people and objects to put forward meanings they preferred; they *perceived* – this visual metaphor of understanding is apt – the ethnographic interests and aesthetic preferences of European colonial travelers and manipulated them to suit their own ends.<sup>65</sup> However, analysis should unsettle the element of fixity that still inhabits Geary's and Schildkrout's mode; for what the Mangbetu determined were “their own ends” was surely relational, which they were apt to reevaluate and reposition at any given moment. There was never *one* point of encounter, as if the gaze of a photographer met the agency of a photographed subject, but rather many possible meeting points, all dependent on situation. The pictures of Mangbetu

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de cases, imagiers et savants populaires du Congo, 1900-1960. Un essai d'histoire de l'esthétique indigène (Wall-Painters, Folk Scholars and Image-Makers in the Congo, 1900-1960.”

<sup>64</sup> Hunt, “An Acoustic Register, Tenacious Images and Congolese Scenes of Rape and Repetition”; Nancy Rose Hunt, “Tintin and the Interruptions of Congolese Comics,” in *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 90–123.

<sup>65</sup> The Mangbetu were a group, then labeled “tribe,” in the forest of northern Congo, who were much photographed in the colonial era, due especially to the very “abstract” design of women's hairstyles. See, Geary, *In and Out of Focus*; Schildkrout, “The Spectacle of Africa Through the Lens of Herbert Lang”; Enid Schildkrout and Curtis A. Keim, *African Reflections: Art from Northeastern Zaire* (University of Washington Press, 1990); Enid Schildkrout, “Revisiting Emil Torday's Congo. ‘Images of Africa’ at the British Museum,” *African Arts* 25, no. 1 (1992): 60–100.

rulers, taken by the American Museum of Natural History scientist Herbert Lang, depict a people who consciously constructed an image of themselves for outsiders that relied on their perception of these outsiders' perceptions of them. Foucault's notion of the "heterotopia" seems useful: in the case of Lang's photographs especially, many of which are rich and thoughtful portraits, the mirror as a "joint experience" offering a bridge between that which is located "nowhere," the unreal – the utopia – and the radically other – the heterotopia – seems like the right site for images that were ethnographic and colonial, and yet not really either of these things.<sup>66</sup>

In important ways, as I mentioned earlier, visibility writes its own histories, which exceed textual and contextual frames. Between the time of the colonial conquest and decolonization the Tetela were not mentioned *as such* with much frequency in textual colonial sources. Nonetheless, a process of Tetela subject formation, historical and subject to historicization, took place. Partly it occurred through specific historical events and in relation to colonial legal, cultural, and political interventions. There was a visual aspect to such collective building processes: they also took place in the aggregation and circulation of certain images in space and in time, and through the constitution of visual identities away from, or against, the written identifications that sought to frame and impose colonial semantic and semiotic structures on images. Belgian colonial photographs circulated in ever wider circles from the 1920s, as Belgium settled into its role of imperial nation-state, as a number of publications began to reach wider audiences,

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<sup>66</sup> That which dwells in the mirror, a counter-space that is "not there" yet is undeniably and visibly "there." On heterotopias: "Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias. I believe that between utopias and these quite other sites, these heterotopias, there might be a sort of mixed, joint experience, which would be the mirror." The mirror, Foucault theorizes, is "itself

and as metropolitan literacy increased. By the end of the 1950s, Congolese within and sometimes across colonial hierarchies discussed ideas of modernity and development. More and more, photographs, films and other kinds of images, such as “comics” or “graphic novels” circulated across multiple locations in the colony.<sup>67</sup> Photographic images crossed racial and hierarchical boundaries even as they appeared to be visual and literal expressions of ideas of “difference.” Colonial photographs and other images appeared in exhibitions, museums, books, and magazines, and they also traveled as personal keepsakes between metropole and colony. In the process, visual objects, as well as experiences of seeing, viewing, photographing and being photographed, produced individual and collective subjects in colonial locations; if photographs reinforced racial and social hierarchies, they also moved along and across these.

Visual analysis is refractory and complex. The notion of appropriation, while insufficient in itself, is useful for setting-up “subjectivity” as a key concept linking selves, others, individualities, and collectivities, as well as empire and visibility, with history and its discourses. Conceptually, appropriation needs invention and innovation. Different interpretations are possible when we use photographs to interrogate the “spaces of experience”<sup>68</sup> of individual and collective subjects of history. Yet, for all that photographs are material evidence of time and place, they are not facts, and their empirical friendliness is misleading. As refractory sources, photographs easily impart a false sense of clarity, since they seem “true” and timeless, ever reiterating a historical

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a heterotopia in so far as the mirror *does* exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy.” Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 24.

<sup>67</sup> See Hunt, “Tintin and the Interruptions of Congolese Comics.” As a word, “comics” does a poor job of translating the French term, *bandes dessinées*. Also see Rachael Langford, “Photography, Belgian Colonialism and Hergé’s Tintin Au Congo,” *The Journal of Romance Studies* 8, no. 1 (2008): 77–89.

moment or acting as sure windows onto remote times and places. In paradoxical ways, analyzing the conditions and contexts of production and circulation of photographs reveals their opacity as sources, and indeed reinforces their untrustworthiness as historical facts.

Although historians have always engaged with images, it is only since the discipline began to question social history's hegemonic narratives, and to problematize "truth" and "experience," that images have ceased being just illustrations of what one already knew from reading textual sources, and have become, instead, the objects of historical problematization. Still, some historians stop at conventional methods of social historicization, placing particular images in social contexts, and embracing economic, intellectual, and cultural dimensions of particular times and places.<sup>69</sup> This dissertation seeks to discover what realities lie beyond contextualization. By themselves, social historicization and contextualization run the risk of perpetuating the idea of images as types of illustration. In this approach, images continue to be tethered to non-visual content, to the acceptance of "experience," for instance, as an unmediated record of the past.<sup>70</sup>

This dissertation argues against the idea of any singular visibility imposed by colonizing persons, states, missions, or institutions, and also against the notion of a singular reception by consuming, rejecting, or accommodating colonized subjects. It demonstrates how a colonial visual field, with specific images, viewing practices,

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<sup>68</sup> Koselleck, *Futures Past on the Semantics of Historical Time*.

<sup>69</sup> Contextualization remains important, of course, and I do not suggest that it should be thrown out.

<sup>70</sup> Julia Adeney Thomas, "The Evidence of Sight," *History and Theory* 48, no. 4 (December 2009): 151–168; Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (July 1, 1991): 773–797.

techniques and technologies, owed more to subtle relationships and dialectical processes in a colony, region, “tribe,” or imagined communities, as so many complex and ever changing spaces, rather than any simple division of labor between colonizer and colonized would suggest. Transfer and imposition are unhelpful words. Agency is not. The agency of subjects—colonizing, colonized, and differently ranked or construed--can be found in and through the careful study of colonial photographs, through a descriptive, deconstructive process that leads readers to see what is inside a photographic framing, whether through contextualization, and through documenting their reproduction, repetition, recycling, and manipulation.

### **Collectivities, Identities, Subjectivities and Selves.**

The notion of collective “identities” leads us down the paths of antiquated socio-psychological theories. Especially because it evokes fixity, “identity” is a sufficiently contested term without our collectivizing it. A far better term is “collective subjects.” Here, the emphasis is on the subject, a bounded individual who can also, when it suits him or her, express and perform a collective consciousness. Collective subjects are always in a process of formation; they do not exist in any kind of positivist sense. The collective is an elusive and intangible concept, which cannot, due to its fragility, be made to do significant analytical work in history or politics. There are normativities, shared histories and cultural attitudes, and “structures of feeling.”<sup>71</sup> The literature on the creation of ethnicity in twentieth century Africa, which I briefly address below, speaks to processes of constituting collective spaces and consciousnesses. On the level of the

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<sup>71</sup> Raymond. Williams, “Structures of Feeling,” in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

individual, the imagined collective generates frameworks – to be adopted, discarded, modified, etc. – for self-definition.

For colonized or subaltern subjects collective subjectivities carry greater stakes and are subject to debates, and are continuously and self-consciously performed and constructed. “Construction,” in its sense closer to the French literal meaning of "building," seems apt to think about collective subjecthood. In my dissertation I engage with this topic of subjectivity and ethnicity by considering how versions of collective identities emerged, circulated and changed, over time, and as a result of different processes of constitution, dismantlement, reconstitution, between different actors in colonial situations and within many different public forums, spheres, arenas, and across metropole and colony. Individual Tetela subjects existed in relation to what was “proposed” – by elders, parents, teachers, priests, peers, employers, etc. – but also in relationship to who they wanted to be in the eyes of the state, the village, friends, relatives, and so forth. Individual identity works as a relationship to imagined histories, communities, and also to imagined futures.

The principal concern of this dissertation, however, is not to discover the ways Tetela “identities” emerged and shifted from the Zanzibari era, to the colonial conquest, and then through colonialism and decolonization, to the present day. Instead, this dissertation considers visibility, and photography in particular, as creating moments of opportunity, and of points engagement among subjects, imperial, subaltern, and all those in between, within shifting epistemological and historical contexts. Portrait photography, which began as a nineteenth-century bourgeois genre that grew out of the aristocratic commissioned portrait painting, became its own genre in colonial situations, which I

would argue, even included “ethnographic” photographs that deal in the objectification of people as “types.” Similarly, it includes “mug shots,” that is portraits of “criminals.”<sup>72</sup> The more conventional photographic portrait, however, works relationally, addressing perhaps not only the individual gazes of viewers, but also the figurative gaze of “an entire society.” The portrait adjudicates “notions of the body politic through mimicry, gesture and pose [...] a game of theater and masquerade, premised on the artifice of self-construction.”<sup>73</sup>

### **The Tetela**

Tetela histories, plural and contested as they have been written, told, imagined and imaged, are firmly connected with the beginning and the end of colonialism in the Congo: first with the so-called Arab War of the early 1890s, which cemented imperial rule in the Congo. European imperial travelers, explorers, and later military officers initially inscribed the Tetela into the historical record as having been the African auxiliaries of the Zanzibari slave and ivory traders, and later as having assisted the colonial Free State’s wars against the Zanzibari.

In work published in 2002, Luc de Heusch, an early Tetela specialist among academic anthropologists, synthesized his own ethnographic and historical research conducted in the early 1950s, with work by historian Jean-Luc Vellut, ethno-historian Jan Vansina, and political scientist Thomas Turner, and showed that “Tetela” or “Batetela” was a late nineteenth-century term, and therefore a historical category located in the

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<sup>72</sup> Forthcoming work by Lorena Rizzo explores the connections between ethnographic portraiture and the “mug shot” as a visual documentation practice of the state in colonial and pre-Apartheid South Africa.

social and political dynamics of the nineteenth century.<sup>74</sup> Oral tradition in the region of Sankuru, as it was told in various forms to colonial administrators, anthropologists, political scientists, and historians largely confirms this view. While I was in the field, I also heard versions of the foundational oral traditions, which go back to a mythical era, and which Tetela are able to blend with the more recent events of the late nineteenth century.<sup>75</sup>

The German explorer Herman von Wissmann, who traveled through central and eastern Congo in the 1880s, transmitted the word “Batetela” to the historical record. Wissmann got his information from the people he encountered as he journeyed through a very troubled region. “Batetela,” it is conceivable, before the word, was a potential, or latent, social identity in central Congo in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>76</sup> Once the word “Batetela” emerged in text as a tribal-ethnic category contemporaneous with accelerating European colonial conquest and its visual practices – the most important of which would be photography – additional processes of conceptualization followed. As a word, as a concept, and as an idea, “Batetela” then began to attract and generate meanings, which changed over time. An unstable and multivalent term Batetela/Tetela has been associated loosely or closely, and by different people at different

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<sup>73</sup> Okwui. Enwezor, *Events of the Self: Portraiture and Social Identity: Contemporary African Photography from The Walther Collection* (Göttingen, Germany: The Walther Collection, 2010), 25–26.

<sup>74</sup> Luc de Heusch, *Du pouvoir: anthropologie politique des sociétés d’Afrique Centrale*, Sociétés africaines (Nanterre: Société d’ethnologie, 2002).

<sup>75</sup> There are a few versions of the Tetela oral tradition. All of them, however, claim Mongo as their first and most ancient ancestor, and Ankutshu and his three sons as more immediate and specifically Tetela forebears. At the same time, many Tetela say that their people came from east of the Lomami river in the late nineteenth century.

<sup>76</sup> I write “Batetela” instead of Atetela, which I was told in 2008 was the correct pluralisation of Tetela, because that word itself was a colonial designation, something of an imperial neologism or linguistic invention. When Europeans began to produce knowledge about Africa in the late



times, with a number of other terms and designations. These have included the term “Bakusu” as late nineteenth-century roving bands raiding for ivory and slaves under the authority of African and Zanzibari warlords or merchants, in eastern and central Congo. While I am in no way equating them, other terms in the semantic constellation that included “Batetela” were also “Wangwana,” and later the more colonial “*Arabisé*.” The latter continues as a social and ethnic identity in the present.<sup>77</sup>

In some scholarly estimations, the Batetela were those who had gained the trust of the Zanzibari slave and ivory traders, and become gun-toting “elites” among motleys of refugees, slaves and adventurers, joining or fleeing from the slave raiders. These armed clients of the Zanzibari also conducted slave and ivory raids at the latter’s behest.<sup>78</sup>

Batetela also became some of the infamous sentries – the overseers– of the violent rubber collecting imposed in the Free State’s concessionary zones.<sup>79</sup> Letters and reports by colonial administrators allude to this history in more or less direct ways. And likewise in Sankuru, many interlocutors suggested this “difficult history” to me. This history is also one of the reasons for the tensions between savanna and forest Tetela. Chapter two of my dissertation engages with the historical significance, for the Tetela, of the Leopoldian era’s rubber collection.

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nineteenth century, they applied the prefix “ba” (which marks a plural) indiscriminately to all “tribes” they considered “Bantu.”

<sup>77</sup> In Sankuru, I had occasion to spend a night in an *Arabisé* village. *Arabisé* is a French word that connects certain Congolese with the Zanzibari, whom Europeans in the late nineteenth century called “Arabs.” But *Arabisé* connotes a “not quite-ness,” the idea of influence.

<sup>78</sup> Melvin E. Page, “Manyema Hordes of Tippu Tip: A Case Study in Social Stratification and the Slave Trade in Eastern Africa,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 7, no. 1 (1974): 69–84; Jean-Luc Vellut, “La violence armée dans l’Etat Indépendant du Congo,” *Cultures et Développement* XVI, no. (3–4) (1984): 671–707.

<sup>79</sup> Edmond Boelaert, Honoré Vinck, and Charles Lonkama, “Enquête sur l’arrivée des blancs sur les bords des rivières équatoriales (partie II et fin),” *Annales Aequatoria* (1996).

By the early 1890s the term Batetela also designated the auxiliaries and early soldiers, both loyal and mutinous, of the Congo Free State. As Batetela, the Tetela in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries experienced a militarily-based, early colonial modernity partly constituted and expressed in texts and in images. From 1895, immediately after the Free State's victory against the Zanzibari, to about 1900 the Batetela appear in Belgian sources as mutineers and anti-colonial rebels, finally suppressed after a five-year guerilla war in central Congo, and, simultaneously, as still the most trustworthy armed guards of the white men of the Congo. In Sankuru, I heard a number of stories narrating the ways in which Tetela protected Whites, especially against the Zanzibari. And many colonial texts from this era connected the Batetela to the imperial project of the Free State and its allegedly "progressive" character. Contemporary Tetela know themselves as the descendants of the Batetela, a fiery and independent group, skilled in warfare and leadership; some Tetela even see a straight line of descent from the Batetela Force Publique rebels of 1895 who killed their white officers, and Patrice Lumumba. Over the decades of Belgian rule, the name Tetela also came to include populations who fell prey to the attacks of the so-called Batetela raiders and conquerors. These populations, all Tetela in some sense, span a large area: from the upper Lukenie river in the northern equatorial forest to the Sankuru and Lomami rivers in, respectively, the southwest and east.

Leroy Vail wrote that ethnicity was something new in colonialism; it became a novel form of consciousness "that could encapsulate all other forms of consciousness."<sup>80</sup> Bogumil Jewsiewicki, writing about "tribalism" in the Belgian Congo, made a similar set

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<sup>80</sup> Leroy Vail, *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 10.

of observations. Taking the example of the Luba, he gave an account of how the Belgian colonial administration, in order to serve the needs of capital, created the conditions for “inventing” a Luba ethnicity in Kasai and Katanga.<sup>81</sup> According to this model, to which much Africanist scholarship on ethnicity has subscribed, “tribes” and “ethnicities” emerged in colonial Africa in conjunction with, but especially *in reaction to* the policies of colonial administrators and practices of labor recruitment and relocation.<sup>82</sup> In other words, given the realities of the “colonial situation,” ethnicity, a series of responses and coping strategies could not help but emerge. Jonathon Glassman makes the case that Africanist scholarship in the second half of the twentieth century may have overstated the role of colonial policies in shaping the kinds of violent ethnic or racial thinking that emerged in postcolonial Africa.”<sup>83</sup> Glassman prefers the conceptual notion of “entanglement” to “buying into,” whereby colonized persons “agreed” with and took on the sociological and historical models proposed by colonial knowledge production. Jean-François Bayart makes a similar argument, stressing the role of African middlemen, in the processes of creating a colonial ‘imagination’ of ethnicity.<sup>84</sup>

In Belgian Congo’s Kasai and Sankuru regions, the 1920s and 1930s were important decades for constituting more powerful ethnic identifications as “tribes.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Jewsiewicki, “The Formation of the Political Culture of Ethnicity in the Belgian Congo, 1920-1959,” 327–28. This process of colonial formation included the conceptualization by missionaries, of a Luba “language” and the selection of certain cultural traits that would become “Luba.”

<sup>82</sup> Ranger, T. O, “The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 211–262.

<sup>83</sup> Jonathon Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones: Racial Thought and Violence in Colonial Zanzibar* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), x.

<sup>84</sup> Jean-François Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 30, n. 57. One of Bayart’s keywords is “imaginaire.”

<sup>85</sup> While I do not entirely throw out the idea of identities as constituted, positioned, and constantly reevaluated, I follow Cooper’s use of “identification,” which “invites us to specify the

Chapter Two discusses legislation in 1910 that directed colonial administrators in the field to organize Congolese within in their areas into “chefferies,” or chiefdoms based on “tribal” coherence. To do this, the administrators were to ascertain, through the use of ethnographic surveys and inquests, the unity of “tribes.” Subsequent colonial legislation in 1931 created and sanctioned “non-customary” spaces in reaction to the *fait accompli* of so many Congolese leaving their rural areas for cities. The law of 1933 reinforced the tribal rural model by adding “Secteurs,” which grouped smaller rural populations, again on the basis of “ethnicity,” to the “Chefferies.”

Within the semantic constellation formed by “ethnicity” “autochtony” and “identity,” the latter is most often problematized in relation to crises of violence or exclusion.<sup>86</sup> Cooper’s intervention on the topic of identity leaves no room for this idea-concept to stretch, and fails to introduce the critical variable of a situation.<sup>87</sup> What is needed, it seems to me, is a situationist approach to identity. The “squirmy details of Tetela ethnicity,”<sup>88</sup> as Allen Roberts has so aptly put it, lead us down complex paths to the many possible productions of plural histories. The term “Tetela” serves as the marker of historical, cultural, and ethnic identities, but is also an umbrella term that unites a

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agents that do the identifying, while staying clear of cultural reifications. ”Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (University of California Press, 2005), 70–71. Also see Jewsiewicki, “The Formation of the Political Culture of Ethnicity in the Belgian Congo, 1920-1959.”

<sup>86</sup> This is where the interests of Geshiere, Vail, Jewsiewicki, and Bayart lie. See, Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*; Peter. Geschiere, *The Perils of Belonging: Autochthony, Citizenship, and Exclusion in Africa and Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Vail, *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*; Jewsiewicki, “The Formation of the Political Culture of Ethnicity in the Belgian Congo, 1920-1959.”

<sup>87</sup> Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*. See the chapter on Identity.

<sup>88</sup> Allen F Roberts, “OBJECTS. Signs of Africa. Review,” *African Arts* 30, no. 2 (April 1, 1997): 85–96. Tetela ethnic identities are multiple, situated, and hard to grasp. As I mentioned earlier, oral traditions going back to “time immemorial” co-exists with a modern history of “origins” going back to the nineteenth century. That Tetela is a word most often used in combination with

diverse, and often antagonistic, set of sub-groups and communities, encompassing a number of historical and contemporary identities.

## **Chapter Overview**

This dissertation consists of five chapters. The first chapter considers the visuality of the 1880s and 1890s in eastern and central Congo, and the beginning of a specifically Tetela visuality in an era marked by the Zanzibari slave and ivory trade and by the Free State's colonial conquest. The chapter begins by reviewing a largely pre-photographic archive mainly composed of engravings, and a body of evidence both visual and textual. It then addresses the arrival and uses of photography in the colonial field, particularly in connection with the "Arab War," as the European imperial war against Zanzibari competitors was glossed. A significant aspect of this chapter is its consideration of the ways in which visuality inhabits texts; this allows me to locate that new ways of seeing and new preoccupations with seeing, which emerged between early imperial travelers and conquerors, and the Africans who encountered them, in spaces of violence, constant raiding, and famine.

Chapter 2 considers the Tetela's "ethnographic" interwar visual archive. A significant shift occurred after Belgium took over the Congo from its king, Leopold II. The new colonial government repudiated the earlier era of Free State violence in favor of policies that promoted mining and industry, and policies of "*mise en valeur*" (colonial territorial development and resource extraction), or "pacification" rather than actual peace. Along with these new political and economic imperatives, the colonial state and its

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another (savanna Tetela, or Forest-Tetela, or Tetela-Hamba) attests to its complex "grammars" to use Gerd Baumann's term, cited in Geschiere, *The Perils of Belonging*, 32.

academics elaborated a politics of “tribalization”<sup>89</sup> through the promulgation of “customary” legislation, which sought to settle and control colonized populations within defined ethnic spaces. In order to meet the demands of the Colonial Ministry, there ensued a proliferation of “ethnographic” inquests conducted by administrative personnel in every corner of the colony. These processes of “tribalizing” Congolese also involved the constitution and circulation of a visual ethnographic register, overseen and managed by the Ethnographic section of the Congo Museum at Tervuren. This chapter considers the kinds of “Tetela” visual meanings the colonial state and its museum put forth, through the circulation of certain kinds of images, and the recycling over two or three decades of early colonial images. Using 1890s images in the 1920s was a way of maintaining the fiction of a timeless Africa. In addition, this chapter also tracks Tetela meanings in the State’s efforts at recasting, through visualized memorialization, the 1890s as the glorious pre-history of the Belgian Congo. As chapter 2 describes, a bifurcation of Tetela visual meanings took place during the interwar period. For Tetela, they continued being the Free State’s elite troops, as well as those who “would not back down.” For the colonial knowledge producers Tetela were members of a Congo tribe, whose most distinctive element was a unique kind of drum.

Chapter 3 takes up the photographic archive of the Passionist missionary priests and Franciscan nuns who lived with Tetela in Sankuru. It focuses on the 1950s as the last decade Belgian colonialism, and as the decade that saw the growth of a welfarist, development oriented, “social” colonial state. Through Michel de Certeau’s analytic of “the practices everyday life,” this chapter connects the visibility of state-generated

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<sup>89</sup> In certain ways the idea of “detrribalization,” which caused whites and colonial authorities a great deal of anxiety from the 1920s and 1930s, is an after-effect of the policies of “tribalization”

development discourses with intimacies in peripheral mission spaces. In addition, it also considers a series of photographs taken by the Franciscan nuns who worked alongside the fathers, in the ways that the nuns visually inscribed late colonial biopolitics into images narrating their medical and social interventions into women's and children's health. The surface of *évolué* respectability, as a way making political claims and as a manner of being in the world, was an important value for elite Congolese in the 1950s. Chapter 3 locates this figurative surface on the conceptual surface of some of the mission photographs.

Chapter 4 considers Luc de Heusch's 1954 unique film, *Fête chez les Hamba*. Unusual for its time, it attempted to shock colonial and bourgeois sensibilities, as well as emulate the work of American social and ethnographic documentary filmmaker, Robert Flaherty; and, most importantly, educate metropolitan Belgians about the Tetela. Chapter 4 analyzes *Fête chez les Hamba* as an opportunity for knowledge creation, a many-layered performance, and a collaboration between customary colonial subjects and a rebellious anti-colonial ethnographer. I also analyze the film in terms of the uncontrolled excesses of image spaces, and their political-aesthetic implications.

Chapter 5 considers the visuality of Patrice Lumumba as historical spectacle. At the moment of the Congo's sudden and chaotic decolonization Patrice Lumumba emerged as a nationalist leader and was quickly framed as the West's arch-Cold War enemy. The visuality of Lumumba shifted from the world of the late colonial *évolué* and family man, to that of head of government, victim, and finally, for many and on a more global scale, to icon and hero. By the summer of 1960, the sensationalist Cold War visuality of Euroamerican news media reduced the Congo to "crisis."

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of the early twentieth century.

Chapter 1  
Part I

*The Eyes of Ngongo Leteta*

Over uncertainties and conflicting information about transportation, and through luck and a series of fortuitous encounters, I was able to make my way to Lodja in the Sankuru district via Kananga. Flying on commercial airplanes in the Congo continues to be an stressful experience, a practice best kept to a minimum. Congolese are well aware of the dangers of flying in the country, yet if given the opportunity, most people will travel – to another city to visit relatives for instance – as travel is an undeniable luxury for many Congolese living in poverty. From Kinshasa, I made my way to Kananga, expecting to stay in the capital of Western Kasai for a few days and, from there, buy a seat on a small plane to Lodja.<sup>1</sup> On the plane to Kananga, I began talking to a Congolese man sitting next to me, who, I found out, worked for Catholic Relief Services (CRS). He and others in the group were en route to Lodja, the starting point of their medical evaluation tour of Sankuru. The group had chartered a 5-seat propeller craft to fly them to Sankuru out of Kananga, and my new acquaintance, once he had found out I was headed to Lodja, offered me a ride on the spot. A young African-American woman led the group. She seemed a bit surprised at all this informality but was happy to take me on as well. I arrived in Lodja, therefore, not fully expecting to have gotten there so quickly or so



easily. My research assistant, whom I'd been able to contact by cell phone in Kananga, was waiting for me at the airport. That Monday Papa Rudolphe and I went to register my presence at the local immigration office, the "DGM."<sup>2</sup> The official in charge wanted to charge me a \$120 "registration fee," which I would not pay. After a bit of arguing and a bit of sitting there, we agreed that Papa Rudolphe, very much in his quality as The Inspector, would bring the DGM a photocopy of my passport the next day. Papa Rudolphe took credit for the fact my passport was returned to me without my having to pay the fee, thanks to the fact that, *administratively*, he is the superior of these DGM gentlemen.<sup>3</sup>

In Sankuru the colonial violences and dislocations that also produced the infrastructure left to crumble and rot through thirty years of Mobutu's dictatorship; the, after all, somewhat feeble extortionary practices of a phantom civil service and police force, whose members at lower echelons engage in performances of authority; the "ethnic" and other inter- or intra-community conflicts that no one among my interlocutors was quite able to justify or even understand clearly; the excessive violences of thuggish police and armies appear as so many inter-linked manifestations of imperial ruination. As Stoler suggests, the literal reality of crumbling walls, of looted and never rebuilt schools, hospitals, or churches, of rotting pipes and eroded roadways, project themselves onto the hearts of Congolese women, men, and children, who are simply "left with" such

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<sup>1</sup> Kananga is the capital of Western Kasai province. Luluabourg in colonial times, it was home to a sizeable Force Publique garrison, as well as the center of the Scheutist Vicariate in Kasai.

<sup>2</sup> It is known as the Direction Générale de la Migration, which everyone calls DGM.

<sup>3</sup> As we walked in town after photocopying my passport, Papa Rudolphe told me that DGM agents received no salaries from the government, and made ends meet as they could. In the end, as is so often the case in the D.R.C., the modest sum of \$20 exchanged hands.

“ruination.”<sup>4</sup> The violence of corruption, decay, isolation and underdevelopment that Sankurois feel so keenly today are so many ruinous symptoms.

The DGM agent took a break from our arguing to mention that he had once written a *mémoire* (long academic paper or thesis) about how Batetela helped “the Belgians” oppress forest people. Lodja is in the forest, on the Lukenie river. In the estimation of forest Tetela, it “belongs” to them. It is also the most economically important town in Sankuru, and a place where a sizeable savanna Tetela population lives and works. In 1963, at the time of the “Eswe-Ekonda” conflict, the former violently expelled the latter from Lodja.<sup>5</sup> The tensions between the two groups, which persist in this day, go back to the 1890s. My conversation with the DGM agent was an introduction, in the field, to the “difficult,” painful and complex, history of turn-of-the-twentieth-century Sankuru.

### **Seeing like a “civilizer”**

I met Albine Kabange Kabangu Pungu, somewhat fortuitously, when I attended a “postcolonial development party” in a village named Kiomi in the forest region of Sankuru’s Katako Kombe territory. The project being celebrated was the building of a road through the equatorial forest all the way to the upper Congo at Pole Pole. It involved money and effort from the NGO *Caritas*, the U.S. State Department, UNOPS (*United Nations Office for Project Services*), and many Congolese in various towns and villages along the (planned future) road employed as skilled builders, accountants, and diggers. The evening also featured the solemn attendance of a number of local customary chiefs

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<sup>4</sup> Stoler, “Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination,” 194.

<sup>5</sup> This was an early postcolonial conflict between forest and savanna Tetela. Eswe means “millet eater,” while Ekonda means “manioc eater.” It is interesting that the distinction in French (or

and government administrators, who walked or rode in on motorcycles. The party took place in the semi-ruined veranda of the *paroisse*, formerly the living quarters, work spaces, and stores (*procure*) of Belgian missionaries in colonial days, and now the lodgings of Congolese priests and occasional travelers.<sup>6</sup> The *paroisse* is the center of most public activity in Kiomi.<sup>7</sup>

The pig was carved and along with palm wine, beer, and fizzy drinks, it was distributed to the seated notables (including the foreigners and the “white collar” project personnel), who all sat on plastic chairs in a wide circle around a long rectangular table. There were insiders and outsiders, some who partook of the meal, and some, on the periphery, who were given instead the spectacle of privilege, hierarchy, and technology to consume. This is what goes on in remote and isolated corners of the world: the spectacle of technology and the spectacle of the *bestowment* of technology upon the south by the north. It is the only game in town. Brian Larkin writes about the “colonial sublime”<sup>8</sup> as a form of colonial governmentality. Colonial public manifestations, Larkin writes, “celebrated the completion of long, complex projects and focused on the object at hand – a power plant, a bridge, or a railroad.”<sup>9</sup> It was a tiny, almost insignificant, yet dense example Larkin’s “colonial sublime,”<sup>10</sup> but in postcolonial guise. After those who were to be fed ate, and as the children yelled, unsuccessfully, for the French-Senegalese

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English) is made between two ecosystems, that of savanna vs. forest, while in Otetela it is between two types of diets.

<sup>6</sup> Much of Kiomi has not been rebuilt since the destructions and depredations of the most recent Congo war of 1998-2002. Many of its brick and cement structures lie in ruins.

<sup>7</sup> When I write about my field experiences in 2008 and 2009, I will use the present tense to distinguish those moments from historical time.

<sup>8</sup> Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (Duke University Press, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 16–47.

animated film, *Kirikou*,<sup>11</sup> there was the digital projection of Congolese pop music videos and of the French project leader's "home videos" of another party. This other party, footage of which the project leader shared with us, took place at the French Embassy in Kinshasa in celebration of the July 14 national holiday; it featured the well-liked musician Papa Wemba who was also a guest of the French Embassy. Wemba is a Tetela born musician who grew up in Kinshasa. It seemed unbelievable to me that the project leader considered that these extremely boring home videos of herself dancing next to Papa Wemba could possibly be of interest to anyone. In a twist on Larkin's argument, that the spectacle of technology itself was the thing being presented and consumed, the Kiomi party was an instance where the hoped-for pageantry fell flat, and where the display of technology was neither "a visual spectacle" nor "a political ritual."<sup>12</sup> Rather it was a performance of the project leader's own neocolonial practices.

Kabangu was in 2008, and perhaps still is, a Hamba Customary Chief from the village of Pungu Djuke in Katako-Kombe territory, where the Belgian anthropologist Luc de Heusch filmed *Fête chez les Hamba* sometime around 1953.<sup>13</sup> The Hamba consider themselves related to the Tetela; they are also known, in large part due to Luc de Heusch's ethnographic work, as "forest Tetela." That evening in July 2008, Kabangu said to me:

Because of his environment, the *forest-dweller can only see obstacles*. The forest-dweller is also a carnivore who eats other meat-eaters. He is therefore influenced by the aggressive blood of the carnivores he consumes. He is a fisherman and a hunter. He is aggressive and nervous. In this context, the role of the state is to enforce, to dominate. *In the savanna, on the other hand, one can see very far. The eye sees no obstacles*. The savanna dweller can plan and have long-term goals. He can dream

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<sup>11</sup> Michel Ocelot, *Kirikou et la sorcière (Kirikou and the sorceress)* (London: BFI, 2003). This animated film was a big hit in francophone countries.

<sup>12</sup> Larkin, *Signal and Noise*, 19.

<sup>13</sup> See Chapter 4.

on a grander scale. The savanna-dweller consumes herbivores, and is, as a result calmer, gentler. In order to rule such people, one must be eloquent. Savanna-dwellers are talkative people.<sup>14</sup>

He then went on to name a string of Congolese military leaders, who during the upheavals of independence and the 1964 Mulelistrebellion were savanna Tetela.<sup>15</sup>

The village of Kiomi is located in an area where much early colonial history was made. During the Free State era it was part of Leopold II's "Domaine de la Couronne," or his personal colony.<sup>16</sup> In Katako-Kombe, in the stories of Tetela intellectuals such as Kabangu or Abbé Antoine, who is Kiomi's historian and village priest, the legacy the late nineteenth century is still relevant. The ruinous and violent social legacies of the Zanzibari slave and ivory trade, and the colonial conquest that closely followed it, are held up by persisting colonial discourses of "civilization" and "backwardness." Resentments go back to the early twentieth century when Catholic as well as American Protestant missionaries neglected the difficult environment of the forest, where they did not readily settle, in favor of a healthier, easier, life in the savanna. These resentments are transferred to contemporary NGOs and development aid organizations, which are at times accused of neglecting the poorest or most isolated forest dwellers. Hamba, Sambala, Arabisés, "Savanna Tetela," Mbole:<sup>17</sup> all have somewhat differing relationships to this early history, and all have their own stories to tell. While these groups intermarry and trade with one another, there are tensions below the surface and often potential for

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<sup>14</sup> Albine Kabanga Kabangu Pungu, "Regarding Hamba, Tetela, forest, savanna, and Luc de Heusch," interview by de Rezende, Isabelle, Digital Recording, July 25, 2008, Kiomi, DRC.

<sup>15</sup> See the introduction about the Mulele rebellion.

<sup>16</sup> "Crown Domain." During the Leopoldian era, the Congo was divided between various concessionary companies, but some portion of the territory was owned directly by Leopold II.

<sup>17</sup> These consider themselves Tetela sub-groups.

conflict. Significantly, these groups consider themselves to be different “families” under the Tetela umbrella.

Kabangu was also Assistant Territorial Agent in 2008, thus holding both “customary” and civil administrative positions. He knew I was a historian and spoke to me of politics. But I was struck by the mixture of European, colonial, and Congolese knowledge registers in what he said about seeing. Here, it seemed to me, was an ambiguous, multi-leveled discourse about power, pulling together natural environment and diet, and structured by what appeared as an imperative of “seeing” combined with a more traditional idiom of “eating.” Traditional political authority in Central Africa made use of visibility: an economy of seeing and being seen was at work in many African conceptualizations of chiefship, and both power and visibility were centered on the body of the ruler and the bodies of the ruled, rather than on objects in the world outside one’s consciousness, which could be defined, owned, surveyed and apprehended.<sup>18</sup> For instance there were sometimes prohibitions of eye contact between chief and subject. The savanna/forest dichotomy was new in the early twentieth century. It can be traced to the ethnographic interventions of Emil Torday, and the fact that missionaries did not come to the region before the postwar era, causing its underdevelopment.<sup>19</sup> In Kabangu’s

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<sup>18</sup> Gell, *Art and Agency*.

<sup>19</sup> Among early anthropologists, Emil Torday was a key architect of this ecological-cultural division (see chapter 2 of this dissertation). Luc de Heusch and Jan Vansina reproduced and worked with similar categories. Catholic and Protestant Missionaries, who long privileged the savanna environment over that of the forest in Sankuru, further confirmed this division, strengthening its modern cultural aspect. For sources concerning this particular dichotomy, see, E. Torday, “Culture and Environment: Cultural Differences Among the Various Branches of the Batetela,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 51 (July 1, 1921): 370–384; Emil Torday and Thomas Athol Joyce, *Notes ethnographiques sur des populations habitant les bassins du Kasai et du Kwango Oriental: I. Peuplades de la forêt. 2. Peuplades des prairies* (Brussels, Belgium: Musée royal de l’Afrique centrale, 1922); Jan Vansina, *Kingdoms of the Savanna* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966); Luc de

comment, specifically, seeing into the distance, having a long perspective on the landscape is a practice of power, and the natural environment itself is connected to a rhetoric of difference. If one were to reverse Kabangu's rhetorical terms, what characterizes the forest-dweller in the passage above is the savanna-dweller's inability to see, his unfamiliarity with the visual world of the forest, and the fact that the Tetela forest-dweller can see obstacles. These obstacles may be impediments to speed and ease of circulation, but are also important objects in the environment. Kabangu's words are about a different *kind* of seeing: overcoming obstacles allows inhabitants of the forest to hunt and fish, plant and harvest manioc in challenging circumstances, and sustain themselves. The Tetela forest-dweller sees his way around the environment. Moreover, the structural opposition between forest and savanna-dwellers is, as I describe below, historically close to one of subaltern-hegemon. The "savanna-dweller" is positioned in close proximity, in an almost metonymic relationship to "the white man," and thus is associated with a discourse of "civilization."<sup>20</sup> The savanna-dweller is also connected with the diet that suits Europeans – consumption of herbivores, rather than forest animals – and with the activities that the colonial and postcolonial state has always promoted: cash-crop agriculture and animal raising. And, as Kabangu emphasized in the passage above, the savanna-dweller is also connected with a need to see far away, to take in a long perspective. During a conversation with savanna Tetela in Lodja, which is itself in the forest, I heard a description of what differentiates Forest and Savanna Tetela. The two main elements were what they ate, and how they organized marriage. The savanna people

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Heusch, "Nkumi et Nkumu: La sacralisation du pouvoir chez Les Mongo (Zaire)," *Systèmes de pensée en Afrique noire* 10 (1987): 169–185.

<sup>20</sup> This discourse of binaries is consistent with a historical colonial context that favored, in a hierarchical-evolutionary system, savanna over forest.

I spoke with thought of themselves more civilized because they did not eat frogs, or snails, or monkeys, and because two people who wished to marry asked for their families' assent, rather than absconding together into the wild.

For over a century the different “families” or clans under the umbrella term Tetela have coexisted with one another, whether in conflict or in peace. They have lived side by side in hierarchies and with resentments that have continued to be meaningful. This has been so, from the time of the Zanzibari slave and ivory trade through the colonial conquest; from the arrival of missionaries, the establishment of colonial administrative structures, to the end of colonialism and the postcolonial breakdowns that followed.<sup>21</sup> Not only do different Tetela clans in Katako Kombe territory continue to understand themselves and one another in relation to this history, but Katako's topography and eco-systems have been marshaled into an economy of difference and hierarchy, beginning with the Free State's use of the Zanzibari's former Tetela auxiliaries.<sup>22</sup> The land itself has been inscribed with the social relations that were created on it. In their historical, political and cultural reckonings Tetela, sometimes speak of Sankuru in terms of “savanna” and “forest” areas. The two are rhetorically constructed as distinct, and even discontinuous. This dichotomous political discourse has its origins in the early colonial period, a time

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<sup>21</sup> Or since about the 1880s, when Zanzibari raiding for ivory and slaves extended into an area of the Congo between the Lualaba (upper Congo) and Lomami rivers. Ngongo Leteta (to whom I return subsequently), operating on behalf of Tippu Tip and his son, Sefu, extended slave and ivory raids into Sankuru, west of the Lomami river.

<sup>22</sup> Turner has done a great deal of work on the issue of Tetela and Sambala “sub-imperialism.” See for instance, Thomas Turner, *Ethnogenèse et nationalisme en Afrique centrale: aux racines de Patrice Lumumba* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000); Thomas Turner, *Batetela, Baluba, Basonge: Ethnogenesis in Zaire*, 1993; Thomas Turner, “L'insurrection de 1964 au Sankuru : stratégie militaire, mobilisation de masse, justice révolutionnaire,” in *Rébellions-Révolution au Zaïre 1963-1965*, ed. Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, Forest, Alain, and Weiss, H. (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1987), 105–119; Thomas Turner, “L'ethnie Tetela et le MNC Lumumba,” *Etudes Congolaises* 12, no. 4 (1969); Emizet F. Kisangani and F. Scott Bobb, *Historical Dictionary of the Democratic*



when Ngongo Leteta's men were raiding forest populations for slaves, and when these same men with guns enforced the Free State's forced rubber collection regime. In 2008, much Tetela postcolonial critique revolved around the fact that Katako Kombe, where the colonial state settled many of its former auxiliaries, and where Kabangu's Hamba also live, was, in an obvious and visible sense, partly of the forest and partly of the savanna. This is a region where open grasslands, and the creeks and small rivers that run through them, alternate with thick copses and forests, and where equatorial forest and humid savanna graciously give way to one another.

In the mid-1960s, and then through the late 1990s the local conflicts that erupted in Sankuru and in Katako-Kombe came out of the legacy of the end of the nineteenth century. It is possible to interpret recent local "Mai-Mai" activity of the 2000s as a temporal ripple effect where forest people reacted against what they still perceived at the turn of the twenty-first century as on-going oppression by those whom the Zanzibari, the Belgians, and later the central government left to watch and rule over them. Mai Mai violence in the forest zone of Katako Kombe was also a reaction against the perceived on-going neglect of those with the power to *bestow*: the state, the Church, and now especially the NGOs. Let me return to Kabangu once again:

When the Belgians bought the Congo [sic], they found the Asambala to be brighter (*éveillés*) than the rest. Those who were prepared to exercise state or administrative functions were the Batetela and Basambala. Ultimately, the Europeans regretted placing Batetela at these posts.<sup>23</sup>

Zanzibari and Free State both exploited local resources ruthlessly in the forest areas of Sankuru. In both cases, there was a rhetoric of "civilization" of "civilizing," and of

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*Republic of the Congo* (Scarecrow Press, 2010). For the latter, see entries for "Kusu" and "Sambala."

<sup>23</sup> Kabange Kabangu Pungu, "Regarding Hamba, Tetela, forest, savanna, and Luc de Heusch."

“who was and is more civilized.” The armed men on whom the Belgians came to rely during and after wars of conquest, the Asambala and *Arabisés* thought of themselves as “civilized,” while they tended to regard the rest as “Basenji” (“Osenji,” “Wasenji”), that is to say, “savage.”<sup>24</sup> In 2008, there was a similar parsing of who came to civilize whom and why. People called this kind of discussion “history.” As I mentioned in the introduction, there are *Arabisé* administrative “sectors” in contemporary Sankuru. The *Arabisé* see themselves as the descendants of the Zanzibari merchant Tippu Tip, left by him to “watch” the area’s inhabitants, whereas the Asambala consider themselves the descendants, and the children and heirs, of Ngongo Leteta and the lieutenants he left in charge of monitoring the local populations.

When I asked Kinshasa residents what they knew about Tetela, they often laughed before saying “the Batetela... they are fierce.” Or “scary,” or “warlike and temperamental.” “Polygamous” might be another trait that described them. Joking aside, they were likely to mention the much beloved popular musician Papa Wemba, or Patrice Lumumba. And if I asked about Ngongo Leteta, many directed me to the Avenue “Rois [sic] Ngongo Leteta,” or talked about the Avenue des Batetela, as related names of personages and anti-colonial heroes, once consecrated and inscribed in modern dreams of concrete, in postcolonial capital cities throughout Africa, and what is now left of ruined

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<sup>24</sup> There is a longer history connecting the armed groups in central Congo with the Swahili universe. Africans, from present-day Tanzania to Congo, who entered into the service of the Zanzibari from the 1860s to the mid-1890s were keen to call themselves *Waungwana*. In Congo this meant a freeborn and civilized person and referred to the armed retinue of Zanzibari merchants, often specifically to men who possessed firearms and dressed in robes and turbans or caps, or also fezzes. Dress and accessories were central to the self-fashioning of these *Waungwana* persons in the Congo. The Batetela were part of this world.

nationalist historiographies.<sup>25</sup> Kinois would tell me that Ngongo Leteta was a Batetela chief at the beginning of the colonial era. They might add: “in Kasai.” Many Congolese in Kinshasa, Sankuru, or elsewhere said that Ngongo hunted for slaves and ivory, and killed people, many people, that he committed “barbaric acts,”<sup>26</sup> and that Belgians or Whites executed him at the time of the Congo Free State. Tetela do not always agree about whether Ngongo’s execution was justified. This reputation of the Tetela, that they are somehow more militarily adept or that they “know” military modernity has been remarkably tenacious; it even appears in the barely postcolonial (1967) writings of one of Belgium’s most famous historians, Benoit Verhaegen. He writes that the Bakusu-Batetela were the only important ethnic group in the Congo to possess traditionally the qualities of initiative, intelligence, courage, and the tribal pride necessary for leading a rebel movement.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Guy Tillim, *Avenue Patrice Lumumba* (Cambridge, MA: Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 2008).

<sup>26</sup> People used the word “barbare” at times to describe Ngongo Leteta.

<sup>27</sup> Benoît Verhaegen, “Les rébellions populaires au Congo en 1964,” *Cahiers d’Études Africaines* 7, no. 26 (January 1, 1967): 357.



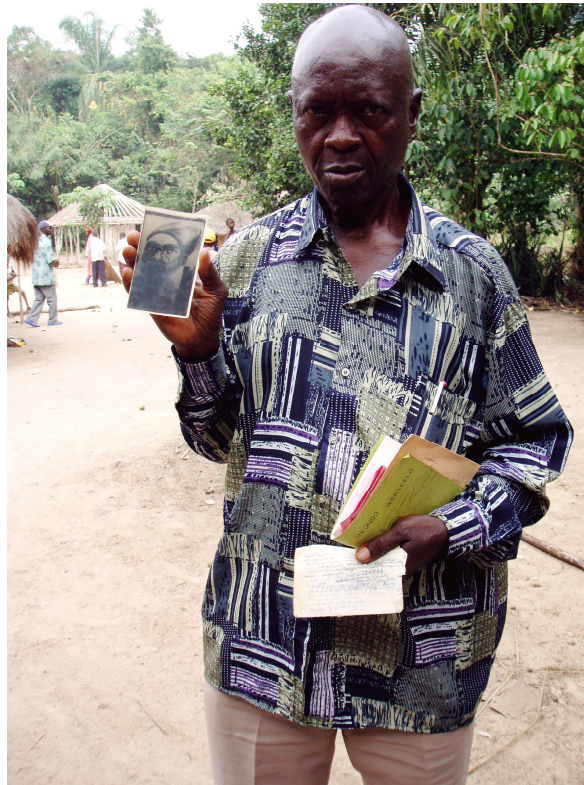
**Figure 8: *No Caption*, b&w photograph, n.d., Labaere photographic archive, Kadoc Documentation and Research centre for Religion, Culture and Society, Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven. [Missionary on a tipoy.]**

When Papa Rudolphe saw the photograph of the missionary on a litter (Figure 8), he commented, “This is how they transported Ngongo Leteta. On a ‘tipoy’.” In certain places in Africa, lifting chiefs up on chairs was “traditional,” and Tetela associate this practice with paramount chiefship. The tipoy remains strongly associated with colonialism. That Papa Rudolph associated the photograph of a missionary being carried on a chair-like contraption held up by logs and hoisted by Africans with Ngongo Leteta, is interesting. There are many photographs from different colonial situations in Africa that show white men, women, and children being transported by Africans in this fashion. It is curious that Europeans had such a fondness for representing such clear instances of colonial oppression. Perhaps taking and circulating such photographs helped Europeans

externalize the nagging feelings of guilt they may have experienced as “colonizers” in Africa. Yet this sort of visual catharsis was possible only once Europeans had appropriated expressions of political power and authority in Africa. It was a way perhaps of “going native” while staying colonial. Photographs of whites being carried on tipoyos were only one genre of image expressing the violence of colonialism. Yet, beyond such representational conspicuousness, there may be psychic connections between violence and visuality.

In Sankuru during the few weeks I spent there in 2008, I felt the presence of Ngongo Leteta in a very immediate way. In his home region, Ngongo is a quasi-mythical personage. Whether the stories about him are grim, heroic or mystical, elders have transmitted them to children through the twentieth century within Tetela families. In July 2008, I attended another celebration near the village of Menga Otete Commemorating the founding of the Catholic mission in Sankuru. It took place where the first Belgian Catholic missionaries priests came to live. After a mass and several speeches, a Tetela man showed me a picture of Ngongo Leteta he produced from a little notebook crammed with papers, letters, and handwritten notes. My research assistant had his digital camera ready and wanted to take a photograph of the picture of Ngongo for my benefit. The man with the notebook refused rather vehemently. Perhaps his sense of who he was connected to who Ngongo Leteta was or might have been; the picture connected this man to his place of origin, and to who he felt himself to be as a Tetela and as a member of one of the chiefly lineages in the “savanna.” The man finally agreed to be photographed *with* the picture in his hand. Later, Papa Rudolphe, said he was disappointed by the man’s attitude, saying that he refused because he feared that I, the white researcher, would “profit” from

his property. I had seen the exact same picture before. It has a virtual, diasporic and presence that circulates on the internet among well-to-do Tetela, from New Jersey to Belgium.<sup>28</sup> Both in and outside Sankuru, for older Tetela men, and in particular, Savanna elites who trace their ancestry to Ngongo or his lieutenants, Ngongo Leteta is important. His legacy endures. Yet his figure is by no means uncontested.



**Figure 9: Man holding a picture of Ngongo Leteta. (photograph by author).**

In Sankuru, Ngongo often seemed to be present with us. The various people Papa Rudolphe and I sought out or encountered would bring up his name. For the most part they debated not his role as an anti-colonial hero but rather his depravities and the horrors

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<sup>28</sup> There is an oil painting of this very image at the Royal Museum for Central Africa. It was featured in a recent exhibition. See, [http://lubumarts.africamuseum.be/index\\_html](http://lubumarts.africamuseum.be/index_html)

he visited upon populations in central and eastern Congo. If they mentioned his historical merits, they would say that he attempted to unify the lineage-based Tetela clans. These conversations, mostly with persons who identified as Tetela, were also like political balance sheets. They became ways of discussing different pasts and making arguments about the present, and about what is and what should be. During my conversations in 2008 and 2009, Tetela men and women suggested Ngongo was a key originator of modern political change. He was also key to wide mnemonic processes. Many remembered him as the one who attempted to unify Tetela politically and put an end to internecine lineage conflicts. They set this history on a background of colonial conquest and sweeping change, but also resifted Ngongo's figure through colonial and postcolonial knowledge and politics.

There is a Janus-like quality to the symbolism of political authority in Central Africa: "The relation of violence to other values is quite complex [...] Discussing the role of the Tetela lineage head, De Heusch notes that although the ritual characterizes chiefship as violent, in fact the candidate chief must be generous with his gifts if he is to be allowed, once in his lifetime, to wear the leopardskin [...] Among the Shona in Zimbabwe, 'it is through [chiefs'] violence that the fertility of the earth is made available to their descendants'."<sup>29</sup> Ngongo had the necessary capacity and the willingness to "eat" the land, destroy and kill enemies, as well as protect his own people and followers, insuring them rainfall and plenty. "Positive" appraisals of Ngongo Leteta also operated as a performance of Tetela masculinity. By expressing admiration for his ability to rule, lead, and unite through words like "He was a real chief" and "Killing is an expected part

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<sup>29</sup>Wyatt MacGaffey, "Aesthetics and Politics of Violence in Central Africa," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 13, no. 1 (June 2000): 73. Citing Luc de Heusch and David Lan.

of leadership or chiefship,” Tetela men especially located Ngongo as a catalyst of political modernity, and as a leader betrayed by the “white man” after having helped him. The ally and victim of the Belgians, he was, by most Tetela accounts, all at once a ruthless, violent tyrant, the possessor of powerful magic, and, above all, someone worthy of chiefship. His exact origins remained unclear to my interlocutors, as is also the case in scholarly debates among Congolese.<sup>30</sup> Ngongo’s figure stands between the Zanzibari, the Europeans, and a newly emergent “Tetela” social identity.<sup>31</sup> As such, the meanings around Ngongo’s figure remain composite. The historical Ngongo, as revealed by primary source texts and the memories I collected in 2008-09, was multifaceted, combining characteristics associated with chiefship, with Zanzibari practices and attitudes, and with the rapacious extraction of eastern and central Congo’s human and ivory resources.<sup>32</sup> That he was all those things during a time of violence and war reduces and overdetermines how he remains in memory.

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<sup>30</sup> The main debates concern whether Ngongo was a Tetela or a Songye, a neighboring group. Dimandja considers Ngongo a Tetela. A number of Tetela and Songye students wrote theses on Ngongo Leteta in the 1970s and 1980s and debated these issues. Okito was among the first Congolese to have written a biography of Ngongo Leteta. He situates him as neither Tetela nor Songye. See, Antoine Roger Dimandja, “Débat sur Ngongo Leteta,” *Sankurufoundation.org*, 2006; Lohaka-Omana, “Ngongo Leteta,” in *Likundoli - Enquêtes d’Histoire Zaïroise* (Lubumbashi: CERDAC, 1974), 53–62; “Ngongo Leteta. Pénétration arabe chez les Tetela du Sankuru” (Université Nationale du Zaïre, Campus de Lubumbashi, Faculté des sciences sociales, administratives et politiques, 1972); Pierre-Tharcisse Olungu Ekanda, *Gongo-Leteta* (Bruxelles: s.n., 1976); Joseph Okito, “Notes historiques sur la vie de Ngongo Leteta,” *Communauté* (March 1957).

<sup>31</sup> The Tetela, known as Batetela during most of the colonial era, did not appear in colonial sources until the 1890s. The Zanzibari trader Tippu Tip, who controlled much of the region between the Lualaba (Upper Congo river) and the Lomami (a tributary of the Congo), refers to a “Watetera” people, in his autobiography, whose chief was Kasongo, and whose region was named “Utetera.” There is controversy about whether these Watetera were in fact Tetela. See François Bontinck ed., *L’Autobiographie de Hamed Ben Mohammed El-Murjebi Tippu Tip (ca. 1840-1905)* (Bruxelles: Académie royale des sciences d’outre-mer, 1974); Tippu Tip, *Maisha Ya Hamed Bin Muhammed El Murjebi, Yaani Tippu Tip, Kwa Maneno Yake Mwenyewe*. (Nairobi, Kenya: East African Literature Bureau, 1966).

<sup>32</sup> Much of this was expressed in dress, and in the handling of firearms.



I mentioned Ngongo Leteta when I first arrived in the forest town of Lodja from Kinshasa. I was staying at a former missionary residence, then lived in and operated by Congolese Catholic priests and nuns. Sœur Jeanne, a nun who worked with the Catholic Relief Services organization, seemed visibly disturbed at the thought of Ngongo Leteta. She said: “I am not a historian,” and ended the conversation. As I was to realize again and again, Ngongo could be an unpleasant topic of conversation, conjuring up violences experienced personally and recently by many people. The topic of Ngongo was often gendered, as were many of the stories about atrocities he committed. I return to this below.

In the village of Okudi near Wembo Nyama, where Papa Rudolphe and I paused on our motorcycle trip through the region, we spoke with the elderly Ngongo Raphael, village chief from 1948 to 1965. Of course, we asked about Ngongo Leteta. He said:

We know the story of Ngongo because he came through all of these villages. In the course of his rounds, whenever he *expressed the desire to observe* the fetus inside a woman, he had no problem opening her belly *in order to see it*.<sup>33</sup>

He added: “deciding to hold Ngongo’s *stare* was tantamount to a personal suicide.”<sup>34</sup> I told him I had heard that if one stares at a leopard, death will follow. He explained: : “When a leopard’s stare fixes *you*, it is only to kill you.”<sup>35</sup> I heard such stories about Ngongo Leteta many times. All were given as examples of his monstrosity, and usually they spoke of acts of violence perpetrated because of a need to see. Such acts of violence and their associated narratives expressed vivid phantasmagorias of

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<sup>33</sup> Ngongo Raphael, July 30, 2008. Ngongo Raphael told me that his father, late chief Wembo-Nyama who was a well-known lieutenant of Ngongo Leteta and who became the foremost protector and friend of the American Southern Methodists who settled in the region, named his son in honor of his friend. [Italics added]

<sup>34</sup> Ngongo Raphael, “Interview,” Digital Recording, August 1, 2008.

dismemberment. In particular, people told me stories about Ngongo ordering pregnant women to be disemboweled, as an expected part of “what he did,” in rather formulaic fashion. In the next section of this chapter, we will see how these same stories became inscribed into the archive.

In Sankuru, I often asked my interlocutors: What is your history; who *are* the Tetela? was an underlying question; what is the history of this region? Two main responses emerged. One was an oral tradition narrating the arrival into this region of those who became the ancestors of the Tetela; they were descendants of the ancient ancestor Mongo, who originated in the forest to the north.<sup>36</sup> The second was a *modern* history, beginning in the 1870s, of turbulence, conquest, and violent change, and centering on Ngongo Leteta. This history was characterized by two interlacing sets of elements. On one hand, there was a Congolese sense of modernity, beginning sometime in the 1880s, and constituted by fragments of Swahili-Zanzibari influences in the area, including language, religion, dress, and ways of seeing selves in relationship to others, and a more “*longue durée*” sense of regional cultures with deeper temporal and cultural roots. On the other hand, there was a Belgian imperial modernity, connected with Leopold II’s Congo Free State, and later a Belgian and still very violent bureaucratic colonialism in the Congo.

The social, cultural, and political reorganizations, which were an effect of the global demand for ivory and the slave raiding that accompanied it, operated as common threads and contexts for these two emergent colonial modernities. In Sankuru, as well as in a

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<sup>35</sup> The leopard is a particularly significant animal in equatorial Africa. It is the symbol of chiefship and leadership. Its qualities are said to be: cunning, intelligence, and lethality.

much wider region from the Angolan border among the southeastern Lunda, where Ngongo Leteta tried unsuccessfully to buy firearms; in Maniema; from the Lualaba river in the east to the banks of Congo's northern tributaries; and as far north as the forest, this Free State modernity was largely militarized. As some of Congo's first "moderns," key to the elaboration of early colonial modernity, and as soldiers and for a time icons, the "Batetela" were among those who ushered the Congo into its colonial era.<sup>37</sup>

Papa Rudolphe and Jean Tshondo (born in 1936) discussed Ngongo Leteta in this manner in Patrice Lumumba's native village of Onalua:

PR: Do you have an opinion about Ngongo Leteta?

JT : I did not see him.

PR: Who was he exactly?

JT : *We know him as a criminal, capable of disemboweling pregnant women*

PR: Did he pass through this area?

JT: Ngongo has in fact been through here.

PR: Was he without an objective in coming through here?

JT: He is the very person who introduced us to fighting with firearms.

PR: How did he bring warfare ?

JT: We do not know how this all started. History is what reveals all these details.<sup>38</sup>

At Lodja I had a longer conversation with Papa Paul Diambulu, born in the late 1920s. He said the following about Ngongo:

Our parents told us that there was once a chief who ruled here before the arrival of the Europeans. He mistreated the population. When the whites arrived, they needed someone to protect them. In the meantime, the population came to them and denounced the Ngongo's acts of cruelty. Faced with this situation, the whites then fought against anyone who acted outside the law.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> The story one hears about Mongo as the ancestor of the Tetela: Mongo's son Membele's son, Akutshu was the direct ancestor of the Tetela. He had three sons, Watambulu, Ngandu, and Djovu each of whom generated a main line of the Tetela family.

<sup>37</sup> Chapter 2 takes up this visual construction in greater detail.

<sup>38</sup> Tshondo Jean, "Conversation About Colonial-Era Photographs," interview by Rudolphe Lonyembo, Digital Recording, August 3, 2008, Tshumbe, Democratic Republic of Congo. [emphasis added]

<sup>39</sup> Papa Paul Diambulu, "About the Batetela Rebellion of 1895," Digital Recording, July 22, 2008, Lodja, DRC.

Antoine Roger Dimandja, a former professor at the University of Zaire, Lubumbashi, is an ardent proponent of Ngongo Leteta. He considers the man to have been a great Tetela chief, whom the Belgians unfairly executed. In a web publication devoted to debating Tetela history, Dimandja wrote:

This author's maternal grandfather, Utshudi A Koy, who had been Ngongo's slave at Ngandu and an Usumba blacksmith at Wembo Nyama, often told us that Ngongo was a light-skinned man of medium height. *His teeth were filed, according to the fashion of the time. He dressed in white and wore sandals, as well, sometimes as a red fez or a multicolored parrot-feather headdress.* Another former slave from Ikela in Lomela, Nsenga Iyoko, who had been taken as a young man, told us that he had been an eyewitness to Ngongo's life at Ngandu. He told us, in his village of Kitambala, near the State Post of Katakoma-Kombe in 1970, that Ngongo always rested his feet on leopard and lion skins, that he held in his hands the rifle that the whites gave him. He spoke the Songye more than the Tetela language.<sup>40</sup>

Ngongo's look and style were always important. The narrative visuality of Dimandja's writing, where he reproduces the words of his grandfather is striking. The knowledge one could have of Ngongo Leteta was through the visualization of certain specific elements. Knowing meant seeing particular things, and these objects extend to the entire "Arab"/Wangwana universe. They were characteristic of the Zanzibari slave and ivory trade. In his description of Ngongo, Dimandja privileges visualization and "fashion" over the fixed cultural attributes of colonial "ethnography."

### **Imagining Ngongo through colonial texts**

Alexandre Delcommune, an early colonial Belgian administrator, traveled to Ngongo's camp at Kitenge Ngandu in about 1891. He described a well-fortified enclosure. On its landing, there was a long and wide area, entirely paved by human skulls, which he and his party were forced to walk upon, and at which they felt revulsion.

Delcommune goes on to describe that a number of spikes bore decapitated heads. In his 1922 text he used a rhetorical “palette” of red and black to evoke death.

The landing outside the door is about 25 by 5 meters in length and width. It is entirely paved with human skulls stuck into the ground and upon which we were forced to walk. In addition, left and right of the door, one can see two trellises, about one meter from the ground, and loaded with more skulls. Some desiccated, and others, from more recent executions, still covered in bloody, already blackened flesh.<sup>41</sup>

In the early 1950s, the historian and Scheutist missionary, Aimé van Zandijcke wrote:

Blacks who got close to Ngongo Lutete [sic] in 1892-93, say that he was light skinned and of medium height, that he wore a *little goatee*, that his lips were always tightly shut, that his *gaze was petrifying*, and that all shook before him. It was only *furtively that one would dare to look at him, for fear of meeting his gaze*.<sup>42</sup>

And in 1892, Sidney Langford Hinde traveled to Ngongo’s residence at Kitenge Ngandu in 1892 with Belgium’s most prominent colonial hero of the “Arab War,”

Lieutenant Baron Francis Dhanis. Some five years later, in his memoirs, Hinde wrote; :

At this time, Gongo Lutete [sic] was perhaps thirty years of age. He was a well-built intelligent looking man of about 5 ft. 9 in height, with brown skin, large brown eyes with very long lashes, a small mouth with thin lips, and a straight, comparatively narrow, nose. His hands were his most remarkable characteristic; they were curiously supple, with long narrow fingers which when outstretched had always the top joint slightly turned back. One or both hands were in constant movement opening and shutting restlessly, especially when he was under any strong influence.<sup>43</sup>

As for Kitenge Ngandu, Ngongo’s fortified camp on the Lomami, Hinde wrote:

The village – containing from ten to fifteen thousand inhabitants – was oval in form and strongly fortified by a double ditch and loop-holed earthwork, the whole being surrounded by a palisade. The top of every tree in this palisade was crowned with a human skull. Six gateways defended the village [...] The approach to each of these six

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<sup>40</sup> Dimandja, “Débat sur Ngongo Leteta.”

<sup>41</sup> Alexandre Delcommune, *Vingt années de vie africaine: récits de voyages, d’aventures et d’exploration au Congo belge, 1874-1893* (Bruxelles: Larcier, 1922), 64. Italics added.

<sup>42</sup> Aimé Van Zandijcke, *Pages d’histoire du Kasayi*, Collection Lavigerie 50 (Namur, 1953), 127.

<sup>43</sup> Sidney Langford Hinde, *The Fall of the Congo Arabs*. (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1897), 44.

gates was ornamented by a pavement of human skulls, the bregma being the only part that showed above the ground.<sup>44</sup>

Other accounts of Ngongo Leteta's stronghold at Ngandu, which Tetela often call his “capital,” speak of a floor entirely composed of carefully and frequently polished tops of human skulls. Professor Djundu Lunge, the Dean of the new Université Patrice Emery Lumumba in Wembo Nyama,<sup>45</sup> told me that these were the skulls of the all the chiefs whom Ngongo either defeated and killed in battle or had executed afterward. According Djungu, Ngongo had slaves constantly cleaning and polishing the skull tops. If they failed to care for them properly they would be put to death. He also added a macabre detail: Ngongo knew each skull by name, and would call out to each one as he trod upon it.

A strong visual and perceptual connection exists among the whiteness of the polished skulls, the white glow of death, and ivory. Hinde made the association himself: “This pavement was of a snowy whiteness, and *polished to the smoothness of ivory*<sup>46</sup> by the daily passage of hundreds of naked feet. I counted more than two thousand skulls in the pavements of the gates alone”<sup>47</sup> Djungu’s remarks echoed what I often heard about Ngongo, that he was gifted at handling people; that he tolerated no one looking at him in the eye, under pain of death; that he was “ugly” and this is why he refused to be looked at; and that he was a cannibal with pointed teeth.

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<sup>44</sup> Hinde, *The Fall of the Congo Arabs*, 90–91. The “bregma” is the top part of the human skull

<sup>45</sup> Djungu completed his PhD in 1991 at the Université Laval, Quebec, on the Protestant Evangelization of Sankuru. See, Lunge Djundu, “Analyse Socio-culturelle Et Spirituelle De L’oeuvre Missionnaire De l’Église Méthodiste Unie Parmi Les Tetela Du Zaïre Central: La Contextualisation De l’Évangile Pour Une Inculturation De La Foi Chrétienne” (Université Laval, 1991).

<sup>46</sup> Italics added.



**Figure 10: Ngongo's residence at Ngandu. Henri De Cort, b&w slide. 1890s-1904, reproduced in Antoine Roger Dimandja, "Débat sur Ngongo Leteta," *Sankurufoundation.org*, 2006.**

According to Professor Dimandja, Figure 10 shows a relatively typical "large" house, the kind first introduced by Zanzibari into eastern Congo in the nineteenth century, and that the colonial state built later built everywhere in the colony out of brick or cement. Below is the caption that Dimandja offered for this image:

Residence of Ngongo Leteta at Ngandu until his execution in September 1893. His son Lupungu lived there until his eviction and departure from Nyangwe to his exile in Stanleyville in 1896. Ngongo Luhaka, who was called back by the CFS whites from where he was staying with the Kondo at Lodja to be Ngongo Leteta's legitimate successor, occupied this residence until the Ngandu State Post was destroyed by sub-Lieutenant Henry De Cort (Bwana Toto) in 1904. *He was in fact the one who took this photograph* in the village of Ngandu on the left bank of the Lomami, and forced Luhaka and the other chiefs to move immediately and settle on the edge of the equatorial forest near the State Post of Katako-Kombe, which he had recently created in May of 1904. He invited the Asambala to collect wild rubber. So *you see* how Asambala dressed in the Arab fashion, as opposed to the natives of the savanna and the forest.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Hinde, *The Fall of the Congo Arabs.*, 44.

<sup>48</sup> Dimandja, "Débat sur Ngongo Leteta." The white-clad men lined up on the verandah are the Asambala.

These texts from the 1880s and 1890s are similar to the descriptions given by to me Tetela in 2008, and by Professor Dimandja. Their similarity is so strong that separating them would be artificial. Even though these descriptions were made decades apart their meanings inhabit the same temporal universe. Together, these descriptions comprise much of the knowledge about Ngongo Leteta that began to circulate after his death, and that continues to do so. Descriptions from each period are consistent with visual renditions of Ngongo Leteta by painters like Tshibumba Kanda Matulu, Mutanda wa Mutanda, and others who were working in Lubumbashi in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>49</sup>



Figure 11: Mizalizi, *Ngongo Leteta in 1908*, Oil painting, n.d.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Johannes Fabian, *Remembering the Present: Painting and Popular History in Zaire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

<sup>50</sup> This date is “incorrect” since Ngongo was executed in 1893. Yet this is the official date of the Congo’s takeover (from Leopold II) by Belgium. Ngongo is here, therefore, associated with the atrocities of the Congo Free State. Beyond that, this allegorical figure is associated with the oppression of the “State” – as a general principle of Congolese political life. Analyses along these



Figure 11 contains many of the visual elements that we have come to expect regarding Ngongo Leteta: a red fez, a leopard skin, a leopard teeth necklace; a floor littered with skulls, more skulls on a palisade, a parrot feather, a gun leaned against the hut, and a knife being wielded by the assistant. Other elements evoke stories about Ngongo: a woman about to be cut open, and another one behind her who perhaps will be next. By comparing this image to early colonial photograph we see that the hairdo of the woman in the foreground encodes her as a Basongo-Meno or Akutshu woman from the forest. The other woman 's head is shaved, identifying her as a slave; she has scarification marks characteristic of forest peoples. A second painting, foregrounds “cannibalism” as an aspect of Ngongo Leteta. Here too, the gun and the knife figure prominently, suggesting the theme of “dismemberment” associated with Ngongo.



Figure 12: *Matanda wa Matanda, Ngongo Lutete*, Oil painting, n.d.

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same lines about this genre of history painting are proposed by Fabian and Jewsiewicki. See in particular: *Ibid.*; and Jewsiewicki, *A Congo Chronicle*.

## A Visual Absence

There are no photographs of Ngongo Leteta. Ironically, and unlike all of the other figures in the history of the Free State's conquest, such as Dhanis, Tippu Tip, Rachid, Sefu, Luhaka, or Pania Mutombo, Ngongo Leteta, the central figure standing at the threshold of Sankuru's and the Tetela's modern history, remains undepicted by the most modern and scientific technology of representation at the time. Imagined as someone who was eminently an "agent of sight" and an object of "visuality,"<sup>51</sup> as someone who saw and wanted to control the right to see, to use the gaze as a weapon and assertion of power, Ngongo Leteta was erased from the visual records of the colonial state. To follow the textual meanings around the *reasons for* his seeing, there is "curiosity." In story after story, the reason invoked for why Ngongo Leteta wanted to open the bellies of pregnant women, was to *see* how the baby lay inside. In Congo I often heard the term "opérer" (to operate) to talk about cutting with an intent to kill, as well as heal.

Ngongo continues to exist in the memories of those who write and speak about him. These memories are specifically visual. His person, body, and style are at the center of the stories told about him and their meanings. The Belgian colonial sources remain visual and they become intensely visual again in the hands of Tetela scholars. Congolese retellings also acquire a strong visual quality, especially when telling stories of violence. In Tetela stories about Ngongo Leteta and conquest, the visuality is about power. In these particular narratives, subjective acts of seeing, as well as characterizations of what was and could be seen remain ways of negotiating power.

One day in Lodja, Papa Rudolphe and I went to the home of a very elderly man. I

asked of his relatives about the origin of the term “Tetela.” They said that the name “Tetela” perhaps came from “*têtu*,” the French word for “stubborn” or “headstrong.” They added that it might also come from *Otete*, the Otetela word for basket. These *Otete* baskets I saw everywhere in Sankuru and especially on the back racks of bicycles, are made from strong thick grasses braided together. Tetela have also “braided together” many meanings about themselves. This bricolage of composite meanings points to the plaiting of a modern collective subjects. Tetela have imagined who they are, while continuing to hold on to ideas of being brave, warlike, fierce, and fearsome. We turn to how this set of meanings came into being now.

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<sup>51</sup> Mirzoeff, “On Visuality,” 54.

Chapter 1  
Part II

*Violence and Visuality*

The beginning of colonialism in eastern and central Congo took place over a long era, from the 1880s to about 1910, of sustained violence. It was marked by the forcible extraction of natural and human resources, initially in ivory and slaves, and later in wild rubber; by disease, starvation and population displacements; and by war and conquest. It was also strongly marked by the emergence of the “Batetela” and a related idea of “Tetelanness.”

The metropolitan colonial archive is saturated with visuality, with images and intensely descriptive textual accounts. This section addresses connections between early colonial violence and visuality. As we have seen, Congolese stories about Ngongo Leteta evoke these connections. During conquest, associations between violence and visuality occurred concomitantly with photography as a new scopic and sometimes fragmenting technology, invested with “modern” aspirations of documentation and representation of selves, others, the natural environment, and relationships in the world. It was also a technology of emotion whose products could express longing and nostalgia. Although photography was conceived as a technology capable of revealing “objective realities,” it also revealed itself as an uncontrollable, an empirically unstable and volatile technology of representation. What can Congolese “seeing” mean in this context? Seeing can be

accessed through memory, as that which is passed down or experienced directly, through retold stories and histories.

### **Visual Preamble**

The 1870s was a decade of preamble to empire in eastern and central Congo. Much of the proto-imperial visuality that accompanied this era was still “romantic,” that is characterized by naïve, harmoniously composed engravings, drawings, and watercolors. Although the scenes depicted include, for instance, slave caravans, the style harkens back to an earlier era of travel and exploration. Consider the two romantic, bucolic, images below. “Looking Back over Makata Swamp” (Figure 13) celebrates nature and “landscape.” Two majestic trees dominate the entire scene. For the scholar of visuality, W.J.T. Mitchell “landscape” was a mediating device; it was “the language of western imperialism,” an agent for the deployment of cultural power.<sup>1</sup> This genre in Africa expressed European travelers’ desire for a “nature” unmarred by industry and civilization. The early or pre- imperial era marked a moment in the European search for a so-called authenticity in Africa; it contributed to a growing body of texts and images that created an Africa of beauty, harmony, tradition, timelessness, and a savagery that both repelled and tantalized the European and North American audiences of books and memoirs by explorers such as Verney Lovett Cameron, Hermann von Wissmann, and of course,

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<sup>1</sup> According to W.J.T Mitchell in, the “landscape” genre operated discursively as a field highly charged with relations of power, where power was made manifest and transformative; this was a discourse that contributed to the production of a modern Britain through a re-ordering of the natural environment in the context of a developing industrial capitalism, as well as in the creation of empire Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, 2.

Henry Stanley and David Livingstone.<sup>2</sup> Yet these early memoirs of travel and exploration were transitional. In Central Africa, they announced conquest.

In Figure 13, from Cameron's *Across Africa* book, all the human and animal figures are very small, and the white traveler is depicted as a peaceful guest among an equally peaceful people. All figures are shown as either engaged in meaningful interactions, or in quiet contemplation. Cameron's tents are placed in the center of the small human space, overshadowed by the two large trees.



LOOKING BACK OVER MAKATA SWAMP. From a sketch by Dr. Dillon.

Figure 13: Dr. Dillon, *Looking Back over Makata Swamp*, Fascimile based on a sketch, 1877 in Verney Lovett Cameron, *Across Africa. Volume I* (London: Daldy, Isbister & Co., 1877), frontispiece.

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, Hermann von Wissmann, *My Second Journey Through Equatorial Africa. From the Congo to the Zambezi* (Chatto & Windus, 1891); Verney Lovett Cameron, *Across Africa. Volume I* (London: Daldy, Isbister & Co., 1877); Verney Lovett Cameron, *Across Africa., Landmarks in Anthropology* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1971), [http://hdl.handle.net/2027/\[u\]: mdp.39015027024234](http://hdl.handle.net/2027/[u]: mdp.39015027024234); David Livingstone, *The Last Journals of David Livingstone in Central Africa, from 1865 to His Death, 1874*; David Livingstone, *Livingstone Letters, 1843 to 1872* (Brenthurst Press, 1985).





CAMP AT MSUWAH. From a sketch by Dr. Dillon.

Figure 14: Dr. W. E. Dillon, *Camp at Msuwah*, Engraving based on a sketch, 1877.<sup>3</sup>

In Figure 14, "Camp at Msuwah," the viewer is presented with what may first appear as ordered and traditional village life. The mountains in the background look like clouds, or as though they are covered in snow; they form the overarching background, the dominant frame of the entire human and natural world. The tiny figures are in fact Cameron's porters, and two of them are his guards, dressed as "Wangwana," that is freeborn "civilized" men who wore long white tunics, white caps, and carried firearms. Their dress suggested they were "Arabs" or Muslims.<sup>4</sup> Their subject position was one of prestige, partly signified by their clothing and guns. In contrast, The bare-chested porters are carrying bundles, probably of ivory. The white men's tents are in the middle. This

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<sup>3</sup> Cameron, *Across Africa. Volume I*, 46.

image combines the idyllic and the bucolic mode with subtle suggestions of violence. The economy of ivory, slaves, and guns in which these European travelers, Zanzibari traders, Luso-African middlemen, and African chiefs participated, produced the slave raids, massacres, and burning villages characteristic of regions of east and central Africa since the middle of the nineteenth century. This economy of death, enslavement, and extraction characterized the last three decades of the nineteenth century, as well as the first decade of the twentieth.

The following section teases out the visual economies at work in photographs, drawings, and texts from this period, which speak of travel, exploration, conquest. The “Tetela,” “Batetela,” and related groups, especially Kusu (Bakussu, Wakussu), Onkutshu (Ankutshu), and Hamba (Bahamba), emerged as entangled groups during the Zanzibari era of slave and ivory raiding. They remained entangled during the subsequent years of conquest. Rhetorically and discursively, these names and their meanings coalesced many times around violence and visibility.

The visibility of text, image, story, memory in turn of the twentieth century Congo is best understood as multifaceted. To make sense of this visibility, it is not enough to locate, combine, or contextualize it by using categories like prestige, competition, or chiefship. Nor does it work to enumerate the many ways that European epistemology privileges eyes, the gaze, the point of view, and seeing over other ways of knowing and understanding.<sup>5</sup> Nor can this visibility only result from the complexities of nineteenth-century Zanzibari worlds. Rather it is, at least, all of these things and the ways in which they mix and overlap.

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<sup>4</sup> In the specific context of Free State and Belgian Congo, these armed men would also be named “Arabisés,” “Batambatamba,” as well as “Batetela” or “Basambala.”



## The “Congo Arabs”

In 1876, Henry Morton Stanley, the Anglo-American explorer-journalist and proponent of empire in Africa, met the Zanzibari ivory and slave trader Tippu Tip at the latter’s stronghold of Kasongo just east of the Lualaba or upper Congo river. The Zanzibari were already well established in this part of eastern Congo as ivory and slave merchants.<sup>6</sup> Both men were famous in 1876. Stanley was known in Europe and in the United States as the one who “found David Livingstone,” the missionary explorer who had vanished in the African hinterland. Tippu Tip was the wealthiest of Zanzibari ivory and slave traders. He had already met and given much needed assistance to several European explorers, including Verney Lovett Cameron, Herman von Wissmann, and David Livingstone, and appeared in all of their memoirs and travel accounts.<sup>7</sup> Before Hermann von Wissmann and Paul Le Marinel opened the west-east inland route through Kasai, and before the Congo Free State expelled Tippu Tip and the Zanzibari from Stanley Falls, most European exploratory expeditions originated in Zanzibar or at Bagamoyo on the coast. It was there that they hired porters, guides, and guards, and purchased food and equipment. European exploration, moreover, proceeded along the

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<sup>5</sup> Jay, *Downcast Eyes*.

<sup>6</sup> François Renault, *Tippu Tip: Un potentat arabe en Afrique centrale au XIXe siècle* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1987), 74.

<sup>7</sup> Cameron, *Across Africa. Volume I*; Livingstone, *The Last Journals of David Livingstone in Central Africa, from 1865 to His Death*; Wissmann, *My Second Journey Through Equatorial Africa*; Henry Morton Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent, or, The Sources of the Nile Around the Great Lakes of Equatorial Africa and down the Livingstone River to the Atlantic Ocean* (London, UK: Courier Dover Publications, 1988); Heinrich Brode, *Tippoo Tib, the Story of His Career in Central Africa* (Arnold, 1907).

Zanzibari caravan paths, which themselves trod on paths already established by African short and long-distance trade over centuries.<sup>8</sup>

From as early as the 1860s and until the middle of the 1890s, in an area of the Congo, stretching roughly from the western bank of Lake Tanganyika to the Kasai river in the west, Zanzibari merchants, Africans from the interior, and Europeans connected themselves to global ivory markets linking Africa, Europe, south and east Asia, and the Americas. Political struggles in the hinterland of Africa had been, for decades, tied to the trade in slaves and ivory.<sup>9</sup> In eastern Congo, by the 1870s, there was continuous warfare, where alliances were made and broken between new and old chiefs, and between powerful individuals who could gather followers and encroaching Europeans and Zanzibari.<sup>10</sup> The latter two groups had direct access to firearms, which they introduced into central Africa in this period, and which became a key determinant in who would prevail in contests and power bids. This was an era when armed bands roamed the countryside, These unstructured groups of refugees and adventurers plundered alongside or behind Zanzibari and later the European caravans. who themselves stole and bought ivory and human beings from communities they encountered; it was already, in the 1860s and 1870s, an era of heavily fortified villages, empty spaces, and ubiquitous human

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<sup>8</sup> For a detailed analysis of nineteenth-century European exploration texts, see Johannes Fabian, *Out of Our Minds: Reason and Madness in the Exploration of Central Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> For east and central Africa, see Steven Feierman, “A Century of Ironies in East Africa (c. 1780-1890),” in *African History: From Earliest Times to Independence* (London, UK: Longman, 1995); Steven Feierman, *The Shambaa Kingdom: a History*. (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974).

<sup>10</sup> Vellut, “La violence armée dans l’Etat Indépendant du Congo,” 672. Vellut likens European and Zanzibari ivory chasers to “condottieri,” or “warlords.” In his recollections, Tippu Tip describes the process by which he manipulated local conflicts and ambitions to his advantage.

remains.<sup>11</sup> Explorers and military officers who wrote memoirs about traveling in Maniema and Sankuru in the 1880s and 1890s recounted scenes of abandoned villages, of dead left to wild animals, and of general destruction.<sup>12</sup> Firearms made their appearance around Lake Tanganyika in 1860s and 1870s as new technologies of conquest and death. These were technological means toward a new kind of wealth accumulation, achieved by hunting elephants with guns, by raiding and trading for ivory and slaves, and by waging war against competitors and would-be challengers. Those not killed outright, including women and children, were taken away and often used as means of exchange. The photographic camera and the images it produced arrived toward the end of the Zanzibari era, as early as the 1880s, together with new visual objects of imperial power like flags, uniforms, hats, and medals.<sup>13</sup>

Tippu Tip's caravans traveling into eastern and central Congo, and the violent disruptions that accompanied them, set the stage, as early as the 1870s for the emergence of African warriors, competitors, assistants or enforcers of the Zanzibari merchants. In this history, the Tetela became the subjects of chief Kasongo Lushie, east of the Lomami river in Maniema. Many were groups of young men, somewhat gang-like, who made their living handling firearms on behalf of warlords. Conquest, first by Zanzibari then by the Congo Free State, was geared toward extraction. Rather than claiming territory it was oriented to taking resources and displacing competitors.

Journeying far into central Africa and establishing market towns and trading posts at Stanley Falls on the Congo, and Nyangwe and Kasongo on the Lualaba, Tippu Tip and

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<sup>11</sup> Also see for example, Vellut, "La violence armée dans l'Etat Indépendant du Congo"; Page, "Manyema Hordes of Tippu Tip."

<sup>12</sup> Wissmann, *My Second Journey Through Equatorial Africa*, 203.

members of his family established a zone of influence known as “Maniema” between lake Tanganyika and the Lomami river.<sup>14</sup> Mainly interested in receiving tribute in ivory, people, and provisions, and sometimes in forming alliances through marriage, the Zanzibari enforced their rule by using armed auxiliaries. Zanzibari manipulated political contests to their advantage, but liked to work with local authorities. When the latter failed, they staged military interventions of great ferocity.<sup>15</sup> Some have interpreted Tippu Tip’s activities in east and central Congo as “state building.” In the vicinity of Kasongo and Nyangwe, this was perhaps the case, although “state building” may be an overstatement. The market town of Kasongo, in particular, served as Tippu Tip’s base in central Congo, and a steady supply of food along with peaceful conditions were key to the smooth progress of his commercial endeavors. On the other hand, it seems true, as Nathaniel Matthews has argued, that Tippu Tip’s commercial and political strategies in Central Africa combined “traditional” or kin-based forms of power, with the gun, itself key to a modern politics in Africa.<sup>16</sup> Vansina, however, argues that by the 1870s, local alliances between Zanzibari and Central African chiefs – a sort of “balance of power politics” achieved through marriage and negotiations – had given way to simpler

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<sup>13</sup> The earliest photographic images available in the Belgian archives date from the late 1880s and early 1890s. Geary.

<sup>14</sup> This area is to be equated with the current Maniema province in the DRC.

<sup>15</sup> Tippu Tip’s autobiography suggests this much. Also, Jensen, “Mission Jensen. Rapport général. I/ But de la mission”, 1924, 5, 33, *Papiers Antoine Roger Dimandja, Archives Africaines*. Ministère des Affaires Etrangères. Brussels, Belgium; Boelaert, Vinck, and Lonkama, “Enquête sur l’arrivée des blancs sur les bords des rivières équatoriales (partie II et fin),” 247. “Before the arrival of the whites, Arabs had come to this area from where the river takes its source. They are the ones who gave guns to the Batetela.”

<sup>16</sup> Nathaniel Matthews, “Trade, Kinship, and Firearms in Central Africa: The State of Tippu Tip, 1860-1895” (Evanston, IL, n.d.).

strategies of force. “The [Zanzibari raiding] parties were bigger, raids were made on their own, and Arab merchants influenced local politics to a very great extent.”<sup>17</sup>

Because of central Africa’s position in the global economy, opportunities for acquiring wealth seemed limitless for a time if one had guns, followers, and allies. Wealth was followers – clients, wives, children, slaves – but also cloth, clothes, guns and other prestige objects. This economy connected “prestige” with objects and persons that passed back and forth between those who detained and desired such power and prestige. During the course of the nineteenth century, the ivory economy, a luxury byproduct of the Euro-American industrial revolution, became monetized in Zanzibar, such that Zanzibari like Tippu Tip were, by the 1880s and 1890s, operating in two different, yet overlapping, economic registers: a monetized economy at the coast and on Zanzibar, which were points of contact with global capital, and an economy of “wealth in people,” of meaningful objects, and of prestige. The latter had also become an economy of war and slavery.

The first translation, by the German consular attaché Heinrich Brode, from Swahili to German of Tippu Tip’s autobiography, the *Maisha* or narrative of his life, was published in 1901.<sup>18</sup> In the *Maisha*, Tippu Tip a region, “Utetera,” located between the Lualaba and Lomami rivers where a people called the “Watetera” lived under a chief named Kasongo Rushie.<sup>19</sup> François Bontinck suggests that the “Watetera” were the “Batetela” or Tetela. Tippu Tip recounted being informed about “Utetera” and its plentiful ivory by a traveler

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<sup>17</sup> Vansina, *Kingdoms of the Savanna*, 236.

<sup>18</sup> Tippu Tip, *Maisha Ya Hamed Bin Muhammed El Murjebi, Yaani Tippu Tip, Kwa Maneno Yake Mwenyewe*. Tippu Tip died of malaria in Zanzibar in 1905.

<sup>19</sup> Bontinck, *L’Autobiographie de Hamed Ben Mohammed El-Murjebi Tippu Tip (ca. 1840-1905)*, 96; Pierre de Maret and Hugues Legros, “Tippu Tip à Mulongo. Nouvelles données sur le début

met on the road. Ironically, in light of the Tetela's later reputation, this man also said that "the inhabitants of Utetera are very numerous but stupid. When they are attacked they become terrified. Every time they were attacked they were beaten, and this has made them more cowardly still."<sup>20</sup> Sometime in 1874, by means of a ruse, Tippu Tip recruited Kasongo Rushie as his ally.<sup>21</sup> He recalled having "convinced" Kasongo that he, Tippu Tip, was related to him by blood, being the son of a woman in Kasongo's family who had been taken away as a slave and made the wife of a Zanzibari merchant in a region Tippu called "Urua." In his text, Tippu Tip often downplayed or ignored the strategies and agendas of Africans trying to deal with powerful outsiders and acquire wealth and power. Tippu Tip's account of "tricking" Kasongo appears self-serving. Once "convinced," or perhaps threatened, Kasongo abdicated in favor of Tippu Tip. The latter took over Kasongo's settlement (named Kasongo, after its chief) and proclaimed himself its "Sultan." Kasongo (the village) would become Tippu Tip's main base of operation for his push into central Congo.

Tippu Tip's entry into the historical record went with the arrival of Europeans into east and central Africa. The memoirs of many explorers, such as Livingstone, Stanley, Cameron, describe him at length. In his autobiographical work, Tippu Tip took great care to emphasize his role as "friend" to white men, and an equal partner in the economic exploitation of central Africa. His desire was to emphasize this legacy. Tippu Tip's biography is a narrative of political strategies following conventions connected to

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de la pénétration arabo-swahili au Zaire," *Civilisations* 41 (1993): 380. Maret and Legros believe that Tippu Tip arrived among the "Tetela" (Watetera) in the course of 1872.

<sup>20</sup> Tippu Tip, *Maisha Ya Hamed Bin Muhammed El Murjebi, Yaani Tippu Tip, Kwa Maneno Yake Mwenyewe.*, 83.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 80; Bontinck, *L'Autobiographie de Hamed Ben Mohammed El-Murjebi Tippu Tip (ca. 1840-1905)*.

histories of Zanzibar and eastern Africa, but especially of eastern Congo. Because it highlights his prowess and triumphs over African others whom he often cast as inferiors and as vassals. Tippu Tip's biography, written in Swahili, claims its place among a genre of mostly European memoirs of African travel and exploration.<sup>22</sup>

The name "Tippu Tip" was an African praise name, and its interpretations have been diverse. According to David Livingstone's servant, a man named Susi, Tippu Tip had named himself, and his name meant "gatherer of wealth."<sup>23</sup> Others claimed it referred to his facial tick, a rapid blinking of the eyes. According to Bontinck, Tippu Tip preferred the onomatopoeic explanation: the sound of gunshots.<sup>24</sup> This constellation of meanings gathers around this key personage notions of visibility, violence, and wealth. How Tippu Tip and his actions have been known and remembered comes through this conjugation: the wealth brought by ivory; a focus on his eyes and their rapid fluttering like guns firing.

In the *Maisha*, Tippu Tip downplayed, in a blatant and *visible* way, the role of the slave trade in his commercial and political dealings. Yet, he described raiding, burning villages, and killing and capturing villagers. "We set fire to the village and captured about 400 women. Around 3 pm, we arrived at the lake, but all the coastal villages had been abandoned [...] All had fled."<sup>25</sup> The lake in question appears to have been a relatively small body of water south and west of Lake Tanganyika, in present day Katanga.

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<sup>22</sup> Tippu Tip, *Maisha Ya Hamed Bin Muhammed El Murjebi, Yaani Tippu Tip, Kwa Maneno Yake Mwenyewe.*; Brode, *Tippoo Tib, the Story of His Career in Central Africa.*

<sup>23</sup> Livingstone, *The Last Journals of David Livingstone in Central Africa, from 1865 to His Death*, 230.

<sup>24</sup> François Bontinck ed., *L'Autobiographie de Hamed Ben Mohammed El-Murjebi Tippu Tip (ca. 1840-1905)*, Mémoires in-8o (Académie royale des sciences d'outre-mer. Classe des sciences morales et politiques); nouv. sér., t. 42, fasc. 4. (Bruxelles: Académie royale des sciences d'outre-mer, 1974) 200 (n. 95)

Between 1860 and 1886, Tippu Tip took four trips into what he called “the African hinterland.” The third one lasted some twelve years, from 1870 to 1882. During this journey he established his authority over Maniema. In this region, Zanzibari hegemony went with a high degree of destruction and violent extraction. It also allowed the emergence of structures for involving local chiefs and youth as allies. In Central Congo, the Wangwana – later sometimes called *Arabisés* – began as young men who entered into Zanzibari service. Serving as the “muscle” in an economy of gangsterism, they played significant roles as well in the aftermath of the Congo Free State’s “Arab War” as the new local cadres, this time as soldiers conscripted into the Force Publique by the Belgians.<sup>26</sup>

The Zanzibari also introduced Kiswahili and rice. The first became the *lingua franca* between Lake Tanganyika and the Lomami river, and rice remains a basic staple in Maniema and Sankuru. When I traveled through Sankuru in 2008-09, people pointed to architectural styles and village layouts of towns as the results of Zanzibari influence: houses are rectangular, and villages are laid out in grids with wide avenues and smaller side streets. Islam also made some inroads into Maniema. Many of those who consider themselves “*Arabisés*” in Sankuru today say they are Muslim. While felt in Sankuru, the

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<sup>25</sup> “Nous mîmes le feu au village et nous capturâmes dans les 400 femmes. Vers 3h de l’après-midi nous arrivâmes au lac mais tous les villages de la rive étaient abandonnés [...] Tous avaient pris la fuite.” Ibid., 83.

<sup>26</sup> Melvin E. Page, “Manyema Hordes of Tippu Tip: A Case Study in Social Stratification and the Slave Trade in Eastern Africa,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 7, no. 1 (1974): 69–84; and Jean-Luc Vellut, “La Violence armée dans l’Etat Indépendant du Congo,” *Cultures et Développement* XVI, no. (3–4) (1984): 671–707 Both articles offer a clear description of the processes by which hinterland Africans, displaced by the slave and ivory trade, joined the ranks of Tippu Tip’s Wangwana, or simply followed in the wakes of caravans, and how many of them also joined the Belgian conquerors in their bid to oust the Zanzibari.



Zanzibari influence remains strongest in Maniema, where Kingwana, the name for Swahili in much of eastern Congo, is the main spoken language.

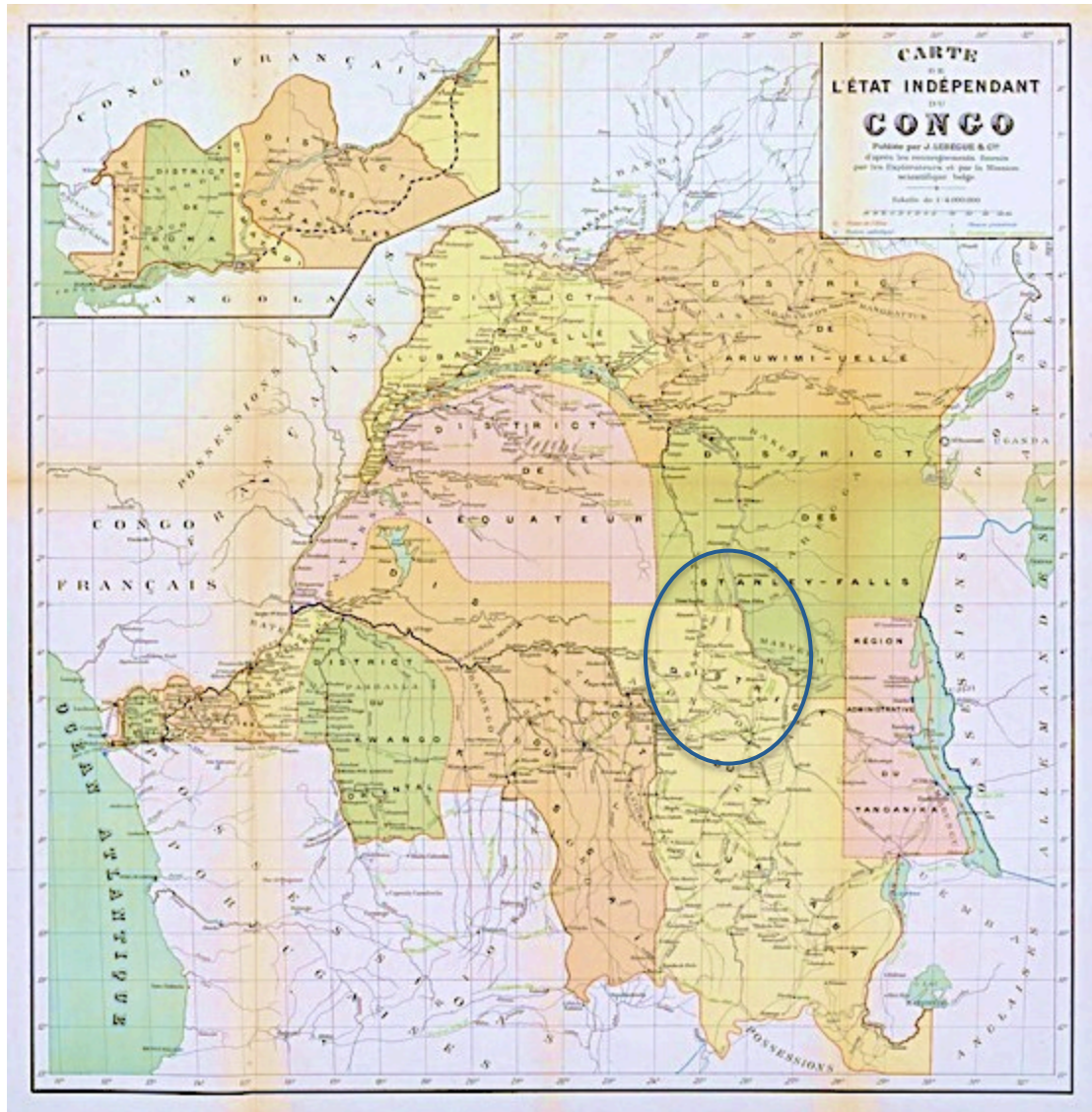


Figure 15: “Carte De l’Etat Indépendant Du Congo” (Brussels, Belgium: J. Lebègue and Co, n.d.), Archives Jules van den Heuvel, no. 93., NAB.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> The broad area in question is circled.

## Verney Lovett Cameron: Some early elements of a “Batetela” visuality

In his *Slavery in Africa, the Disease and the Remedy*, Cameron suggests that Tippu Tip was a slave raider and that the Batetela were his “cannibal” troops. He quotes a text by Wissman describing a visit to a Batetela camp:

A scaffolding of beams at its entrance was ornamented with fifty hewn off right hands. Musket shots later on proclaimed that the leader of this gang was practising musketry at his prisoners. Some of my men told me that the victims of this cruelty had been cut up immediately to furnish a cannibal feast.”<sup>28</sup>

Published in 1877 and chronicling Cameron’s nearly three-year crossing of the African continent, beginning at Zanzibar in 1873 and ending in Luanda, where he and his party arrived in 1875, Cameron’s memoir *Across Africa, Volumes I and II*, contains no mention of the Batetela. His observations echo Tippu Tip’s story about how chief Kasongo Rushie and his Watetera became the Zanzibari merchant’s allies.

West of Lake Tanganyika, Cameron crossed areas devastated by the slave trade. In 1874 he wrote about an “Arab” settlement near Nyangwe.<sup>29</sup> Cameron first met Tippu Tip at Nyangwe in September 1874 and later that year was his guest at Kasongo. Tippu Tip treated Cameron extremely well, always wishing to make allies and friends of the Europeans. The Kasongo settlement, which Tippu Tip had made his base of operations for the area between the Lomami and Lualaba rivers, was named after the same “Watetera” chief, Kasongo Rushie. The association between Tippu Tip and Kasongo’s people is a likely origin of a set of associations that became mixed up with, first the “Batetela,” and later the “Tetela.” Figure 16, Figure 17, and Figure 18 below, which

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<sup>28</sup> Verney Lovett Cameron, *Slavery in Africa, the Disease and the Remedy* (s.n., 1888), 3. The Wissmann quote appears in *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography* (London, UK: Edward Stanford, 1888), 529.

<sup>29</sup> Verney Lovett Cameron, *Across Africa. Volume 2* (London: Daldy, Isbister & Co., 1877), 277.

accompanied Cameron's text, provided an early visual catalog, whose features by the middle of the 1890s would become iconic of the Tetela.

Cameron wrote that Kasongo came to greet him in "a jacket and kilt of red and yellow woolen cloth trimmed with long haired monkey skins and with a greasy handkerchief tied round his head."<sup>30</sup>



**Figure 16: "King Kasongo," wood-cut, 1877. Verney Lovett Cameron, *Across Africa. Volume 2* (London: Daldy, Isbister & Co., 1877), 277.**

In 1874, Kasongo appeared before his assembled guests – Cameron as well as Tippu Tip and his Zanzibari retinue – in a combination of European and central African styles, in a jacket trimmed with monkey skins, and the type of cotton skirt that appears in later colonial ethnographic photographs of men, variously captioned Luba, Kuba, or Batetela. While Cameron wrote that Kasongo's kilt was yellow and red, the black and white photographs of later years only show a light – maybe white – color. Like the

“Muslim” garb of Zanzibari traders and slave raiders, items of European clothing combined with African elements, as early as the mid-1870s and as far inland as the Lomami river.

As Cameron proceeded toward Katanga and Kasai on his way to the Atlantic coast, he wrote about another, decidedly more active, Kasongo. This was the paramount chief of “Urua,” located in today’s southern Maniema and northern Katanga provinces. This Kasongo cooperated with with Luso-African *pombeiros* who raided areas close to the Lomami river in Maniema.<sup>31</sup> Unlike the previous chief Kasongo who was more of a figurehead,<sup>32</sup> this Kasongo collected tribute from neighboring areas and hunted for slaves and ivory on behalf of the Zanzibari, as well as for his own benefit. He ruled an area “worked by his own slaves and retainers.”<sup>33</sup> Although chiefs like this Kasongo were able to impose their rule on weaker neighbors, the Zanzibari were the most powerful actors in eastern Congo. Cameron, Wissmann, Stanley, and even Livingstone ran into difficulties on occasions, and in almost every instance they relied on the Zanzibari for porters and guards to intimidate area people to grant them passage through their territories, and provide them with guides, porters, and provisions.<sup>34</sup>

Through Cameron’s writing, the name “Kasongo” became one of the earliest associations between Tippu Tip’s client chiefs, usually “Kasongo,” and the “Batetela.” The engravings and fascimiles that Cameron used to represent his stay in this chief

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>32</sup> Such are the characterizations of Cameron and Tippu Tip both; the latter boasts to have tricked Kasongo his autobiography.

<sup>33</sup> Cameron, *Across Africa. Volume 2*, 52, 68.

<sup>34</sup> Cameron, *Across Africa. Volume 2*. Cameron’s greatest benefactor, during this particular portion of his trip, was the Zanzibari trader known as “Jumah Merikani,” thus named because he specialized in the trade of American cotton cloths.

Kasongo's territory provide visual clues about the kind of images that would be associated with the Tetela in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Three visual identifiers in Cameron's book later became Belgian representations of Batetela; they remain Tetela self-presentations today.<sup>35</sup> First, Cameron wrote that the people of "Urua," fashioned headgears with red plumes from the tails of gray parrots. Secondly, the image of "talking drums" (Figure 17) appear in Cameron's book; the same type of drum became *the* quintessential image of Tetela identity during the Belgian Congo era. Thirdly, the rectangular house in Figure 18, the kind Zanzibari liked to build for themselves, became a hallmark of Tetela house construction in Sankuru villages. From the 1880s perhaps it becomes the model for "modern" native houses in much of early colonial Congo.<sup>36</sup>



Figure 17: *Kasongo's Band*, wood-cut, 1877 in Cameron, *Across Africa*, Vol. 2, 94.

<sup>35</sup> See chapter 2.

<sup>36</sup> Interlocutors in Sankuru always mentioned rectangular architectural styles when discussing Zanzibari influence in Sankuru. Rice cultivation is the other most mentioned item.



KASONGO'S HOUSE.

**Figure 18: *Kasongo's House*, wood-cut, 1877 in *Cameron, Across Africa*, Vol. 2, 115.**

As Cameron and other European travelers described, chiefs in the service of Zanzibari employed mutilation as a punishment.<sup>37</sup> Wissmann associated such practices with Zanzibari and Congolese slave and ivory hunters; the same practices later signified “Batetela” through the writings of Sidney Hinde and Belgians who participated in the Arab War. Cameron also recorded a number of stories about Kasongo’s cruelty. Cameron does not tell his readers whether he witnessed or heard these stories.

Under the combined influence of immoderate drinking and smoking bhang [hemp], Kasongo acts like a demon, ordering death and mutilation, indiscriminately and behaving in the most barbarous manner to any who may be near him.<sup>38</sup>

Such stories were similar to tales I heard about Ngongo Leteta in 2008. Indeed, stories of atrocities against populations, lurid descriptions of mutilation, dismemberment, and

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<sup>37</sup> Cameron, *Across Africa*. Volume 2, 68.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.



cannibalism, are common threads through early European sources and Congolese testimonies recorded by Europeans.<sup>39</sup>

### **Hermann von Wissmann: Visuality and the early formation of “Batetela” semantic fields**

In his book, *My Second Journey Through Equatorial Africa*, the German traveler Hermann von Wissmann recounts stories of deliberate, arbitrary violence perpetrated by a young man named Saïd, the leader of a group of Wangwana slave hunters in Kasai.<sup>40</sup> Seeing and visuality often mediated early European experiences in Central Africa. They were also African ways of knowing, recognizing, and categorizing strangers in times of rapid change and turmoil. In his biography of Ngongo Leteta, Joseph Okito wrote that Tippu Tip had once purchased food and ivory from the Bena Kilembue chief. When he was finished, he told the chief, “I am going back to Kasongo, but I promise that as soon as I get there I will send you a robe and a red fez. Give me a man to carry these items back.”<sup>41</sup> The man, according to this particular story, was Ngongo Leteta. In writing about Luso-African activity in central Africa, Cameron said that traders who had come to a nearby lake “*were described*” to him “as wearing hats and trousers, and having boats with two trees (masts) in them.”<sup>42</sup> The cloths they traded were “quite different in kind and

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<sup>39</sup> Walter Russell Lambuth, “How We Found Wembo Niama”, 1914, Walter Russel Lambuth Collection. (contains 1907-1924), CGAH, Madison, NJ. Mudimbe, a Tetela catechist who was helping Lambuth establish the Wembo Nyama mission, tells of his time as a slave in Ngongo Leteta’s service. “Ngonga [sic] addicted to strong drink, became so ferocious that he fell into the habit of cutting off the noses and lips of those slaves and attendants who chanced to incur his displeasure.” Also, see Boelaert, Vinck, and Lonkama, “Enquête sur l’arrivée des blancs sur les bords des rivières équatoriales (partie II et fin).”

<sup>40</sup> Wissmann, *My Second Journey Through Equatorial Africa*.

<sup>41</sup> Joseph Okito, “Notes historiques sur la vie de Ngongo Leteta.” *Communauté*, September 1957-March 1958 (n.d.): 308.

<sup>42</sup> Cameron, *Across Africa. Volume 2*, 25.

quality from any coming from Zanzibar.”<sup>43</sup> Cloth and clothing were integral parts of a nineteenth-century economy in central Africa. It also included ivory and slaves, and involved Zanzibari, Africans, Luso-African, and increasingly Europeans. Cloth and clothing were therefore, key to central African visual economies in times of violence and trauma. When the Belgian priest and historian François Bontinck translated Tippu Tip’s autobiography into French, he quoted Wissmann’s first volume of recollections, *Unter Deutscher Flagge (Under the German Flag)*, about his first trip to Congo from 1880 to 1883.<sup>44</sup>

In January 1882, Wissman found Mona Katschitsch, an elderly blind chief in Koto country, living on the left bank of the Lubilash. To the east, his territory had shrunk due to the Arab advance. The Koto chief *knew* that from the Lomami came people dressed in *long white robes and turbans*; they had guns, captured people and set fire to their villages.<sup>45</sup>

Both writers positioned the visuality of this information, as ominous. The knowledge of an elderly blind leader was intensely visual because what marked and defined these new brigands from the east was their dress and guns. The novelty of cotton-cloth and the violence of firearms were new visualities leaving their marks on the inhabitants of Central Africa. This blind man’s visual knowledge reveals the visuality at work in colonial texts that lend voice to African experiences was conceptual, and also connected to processes of perception beyond ocular.

Wissmann explored much of Kasai and Maniema over the course of two African crossings, in 1880-83 and 1886-87, and another more localized expedition within Kasai

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Wissmann, Hermann von and Paul Pogge, *Unter Deutscher Flagge Quer Durch Afrika Von West Nach Ost: Von 1880 Bis 1883 Ausgeföhrt Von Paul Pogge Und Hermann Wissmann* (Berlin: Walther & Apolant, 1889). This was the first edition.

<sup>45</sup> Bontinck, *L’Autobiographie de Hamed Ben Mohammed El-Murjebi Tippu Tip (ca. 1840-1905)*, 323 ; note 240, quoting Wissmann, *Unter Deutsche Flagge*. [emphasis added]



in 1883-84. As was the case for many European travelers and explorers, part of Wissmann's concern was to stay alive. Like his European predecessors, he depended on his African and Zanzibari connections. Another of his concerns was to produce knowledge for science and empire. Wissmann's texts are filled with a concern for visibility, key to both science and empire.<sup>46</sup> And just as was the case for Cameron, the violence of the ivory and slave trade set the stage for Wissmann's interactions with everyone he met.

I once bought an elephant's tusk for which the salesmen asked clothing materials. Wishing to make an impression upon them I suddenly unfolded before their eyes a piece of glaring red stuff. With a shriek of terror the Bakuba jumped up covered their eyes and fled for a short distance. The effect seemed to me the same as the report of a gun as this sudden and unknown noise startles the ear, so the eye is surprised by the sudden appearance of a strange colour.<sup>47</sup>

Wissmann, associates the presentation of color with intimidation, and the new violence of the gun with the unexpected *seeing* of a "new" color. Thus, the sudden appearance of the color red is to the eye what the gunshot is to the ear: frightening and life-threatening assertions of European imperial supremacy. Later, Wissmann, in his subjective capacity as explorer, wrote: "We had been informed by Pogge that between the Lulua and the Cassai [rivers] we should for days *see nothing but huge forests.*"<sup>48</sup> Such a statement operated rhetorically as the obverse of what Kabangu told me when we met in July 2008, that a savanna dweller cannot see his way around the forest, implying that the

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<sup>46</sup> The Belgian Free State era publication, the Mouvement Géographique, published large numbers of Congo maps beginning in 1884. The Kasai region rapidly "filled in" in the middle and late 1880s thanks to Wissmann's explorations of Kasai. Moreover, the knowledge explorers like Wissmann and others produced about the people they encountered made its way into "scientific" publications, and was the basis of much early ethnographic knowledge. See, Marc Poncelet, *L'invention des sciences coloniales belges* (Paris: Karthala, 2008).

<sup>47</sup> Wissmann, *My Second Journey Through Equatorial Africa*, 42-43.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 75. Paul Pogge was Wissmann's older traveling companion in his early 1880s' exploration of the Kasai river basin, and a fellow German citizen. Emphasis added

deficiency lay not with the forest but with the savanna inhabitant.<sup>49</sup> The implication, for Wissmann and other Europeans, of seeing the “jungle,” was equivalent to *not* seeing at all, to being blind and powerless. Although in this passage Pogge was rhetorically the one doing the work of “informing,” of mediating information, the nature and provenance of this knowledge could only have come from Africans who knew the area and who, while “informing,” were also cognizant of what the European wished to hear and to know. Wissmann showed an anxious concern for his ability or inability to see “natives.”

Throughout Joseph Conrad’s novella, *Heart of Darkness*,<sup>50</sup> there is a persistent preoccupation with seeing, with the unresolved state between being able and not being able to see, and the nightmarish hallucinations that take place in this interstitial visual space. What can induce madness in an imperial European subject is a fantasy of a precipice between his desire and his inability to see the “native,” who can see the white man and is able to appear and vanish at will. The inability to see is tantamount to dispossession, to rendering powerless. It is the white man’s “space of abjection,” where “meaning collapses.”<sup>51</sup> The problem for the European traveler seems to have been a frustrated need to take in large quantities of visual information, to feed an eye that voraciously demanded perspective. Conrad’s text pinpoints a visual-psychic structure to imperial European travel, conquest and exploration in Africa. *Heart of Darkness*, first available to the public in serialized form in 1899, remains one of colonial modernity’s meta-texts, a literary psychoanalysis of European imperialism in Central Africa.

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<sup>49</sup> See previous chapter. Kabange Kabangu Pungu, “Regarding Hamba, Tetela, forest, savanna, and Luc de Heusch.”

<sup>50</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin, 2007).

<sup>51</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (Columbia University Press, 1982), 2.

Upon coming to the banks of the Lukenye river, where much rubber collection took place in a few short years hence, Wissmann wrote:

The natives called it Lukenja a word that with the Bassongo tribes evidently means river as in their country we know several water courses of that name. The banks rose to a height of 200 metres and were richly wooded. Natives were nowhere to be seen only twice were some discovered on trees but they timidly fled when they were approached. For three days the journey was continued until some warriors on the right bank who called themselves Basselle-Kungo and named the river Laethshu could be questioned. The left bank, they *supposed*, was inhabited by the Batetela the western branch of a large tribe the eastern members of which once lived near the Middle Lomami.<sup>52</sup>

The passage above was the first time Wissmann mentioned the “Batetela.” He located them east of the Lomami, where Zanzibari activity had been most intense in the 1880s. Later colonial maps placed them west of the Lomami, in the Sankuru region. Wissmann was the first European to speak and write about the “Batetela” in 1888. Ngongo Leteta appears in his first volume, *Unter Deutscher Flagge*, but not in the second. In Wissmann’s memoirs, the Batetela and Ngongo Leteta are not related to one another. By the time he wrote about the Batetela as a branch of a tribe on the Middle Lomami, Wissmann had already traveled in Congo three times. He and Paul Pogge had founded the post of Luluabourg in 1884 on behalf of King Leopold II’s International African Association, soon to become the Congo Free State.<sup>53</sup> In 1886 Wissmann returned to Congo and traveled once more through Kasai, crossing the continent “from the Congo to the Zambezi.”<sup>54</sup> This time, he operated on behalf of Leopold II’s Congo Free State.

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<sup>52</sup> Wissmann, *My Second Journey Through Equatorial Africa*, 51.

<sup>53</sup> From there, in 1890, Free State officer Paul Le Marinel set up the State Post of Lusambo on the Sankuru river, perhaps two hundred miles from Ngongo Leteta’s stronghold at Ngandu on the right bank of the Lomami

<sup>54</sup> Wissmann, *My Second Journey Through Equatorial Africa*.



**Figure 19: Klein-Chevalier, *Portrait of Major Von Wissmann*, Drawing, 1891 in Wissmann, *My Second Journey Through Equatorial Africa*, frontispiece.**

The cover, especially, of Wissmann’s book about this second journey announced to potential readers that it was about the “horrors of slavery” in Africa, a topic popular in nineteenth-century Europe, especially Britain.<sup>55</sup> While it describes events in 1886 and 1887, *My Second Journey through Equatorial Africa* appeared in 1891 in London, after the 1888 creation of Belgium’s Société Anti-Esclavagiste, an imperial-humanitarian initiative proposed by the French Cardinal Lavignerie and readily taken up by King Leopold II.<sup>56</sup> The British public tended to take an activist stance since the 1860s about

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<sup>55</sup> See the work of Patrick Brantlinger, for instance. Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Cornell University Press, 1990); Patrick Brantlinger, *Taming Cannibals: Race and the Victorians* (Cornell University Press, 2011).

<sup>56</sup> See Alexis Marie Gochet and Jean Baptiste Gochet, *Soldats Et Missionnaires Au Congo De 1891 à 1894* (Société de Saint-Augustin, 1899).

ending slave raiding in Central Africa.<sup>57</sup> British imperial politics accommodated itself to abolitionist humanitarian sentiments about ending slave labor in Belgian and Portuguese-ruled Central Africa.

Ngongo Leteta's warriors handled firearms in the slave and ivory trade; after 1890 they became known among Belgians as the "Batetela." The gun, an important aural and visual object, began to take center stage in stories, images, memories, and recollections. Before they "became" Batetela, or armed raiders who wore white robes and tunics and plundered the countryside for their Zanzibari patrons, these same persons were known in Belgian texts as "Wakussu," or sometimes earlier, "Wangwana."<sup>58</sup> By 1891, the term Batetela had entered the consciousness of Europeans familiar with Congolese fields. By 1891, to those who read *Le Congo Illustré*, *Le Mouvement Géographique*, or *La Belgique Coloniale*, Batetela were the people of Ngongo Leteta, as well as the auxiliaries of the Free State in its fight against the Zanzibari.<sup>59</sup> In 1891, Wissmann wrote that the "Batetela, [were] notorious everywhere for their fierceness."<sup>60</sup> He added:

We ascertained here that the mouth of the Lomami was north of the territory of the Lussambo, who only lived along the river, while the country farther inland was said to be nothing but uninhabited primeval forests. Beyond the Lomami lived the Bassongo Mino and to the east the savage Batetela.<sup>61</sup>

As he traveled through the region for the third time, between the Lomami and Sankuru rivers with the Free State officer Lieutenant Paul Le Marinel, Wissmann

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<sup>57</sup> British and Foreign Anti-slavery Society, *The Anti-slavery Reporter* (The Society, 1884), 12. "Livingstone [estimates] that half a million of human lives are sacrificed every year in this all devouring Moloch."

<sup>58</sup> Wissmann, Hermann von and Pogge, *Unter Deutscher Flagge Quer Durch Afrika Von West Nach Ost*.

<sup>59</sup> From the diary of Paul Le Marinel, in *Le Mouvement Géographique*, June 24, 1891, "Bakussu est le nom que donnent les Arabes à ces populations. Batetela, celui que les Basongo leur donnent ; enfin ils se nomment eux-mêmes Wafulukaka."

<sup>60</sup> Wissmann, *My Second Journey Through Equatorial Africa*, 53.

encountered a band of slave hunters. They called themselves “Arabs” because they were clients of Tippu Tip, under the leadership of a young man called “Saïd.” Wissmann then described Saïd’s depredations, which were very similar those recounted in stories about Ngongo Leteta. Figures like Ngongo or Saïd carried the histories of this era of violence and upheaval. But Wissmann did not associate the “Batetela” with any of this violence. In his eyes, at that point in time, they were only a “fierce“ “tribe.”

### “Saïd”

During his 1886-87 crossing Wissmann witnessed a great deal of devastation due to slave raiding. As was the common practice at that time, he used clothing and appearance as categories of classification and identification. While European writers often attempted to qualify the denomination “Arab,” through categories of race and with remarks about individuals’ features and color, in Africa slave-hunting “Arabs” remained men wearing cotton shirts, tunics, caps, and men bearing guns.

“[Saïd], an Arab mongrel scarcely twenty years old, accompanied by some people clad in Arab shirts came to meet me promising with exquisite politeness, by which the Arab swears until he takes up arms, that he would do all I wished. Saïd [to whom Wissmann refers as “one of Tibbu Tib’s favorite slaves] was in his manner almost boyish. His companions were equally civil and modest they did not as yet know my power sufficiently and wanted to learn what had brought me here.”<sup>62</sup>

Wissmann’s book contains “92 illustrations after R. Hellgrewe and Klein Chevalier.” These illustrations are of two kinds. The ones by Klein Chevalier, meant to illustrate Wissmann’s accounts of slaving atrocities, are cartoonish; they tend toward the

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 157. Emphasis added

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 199.

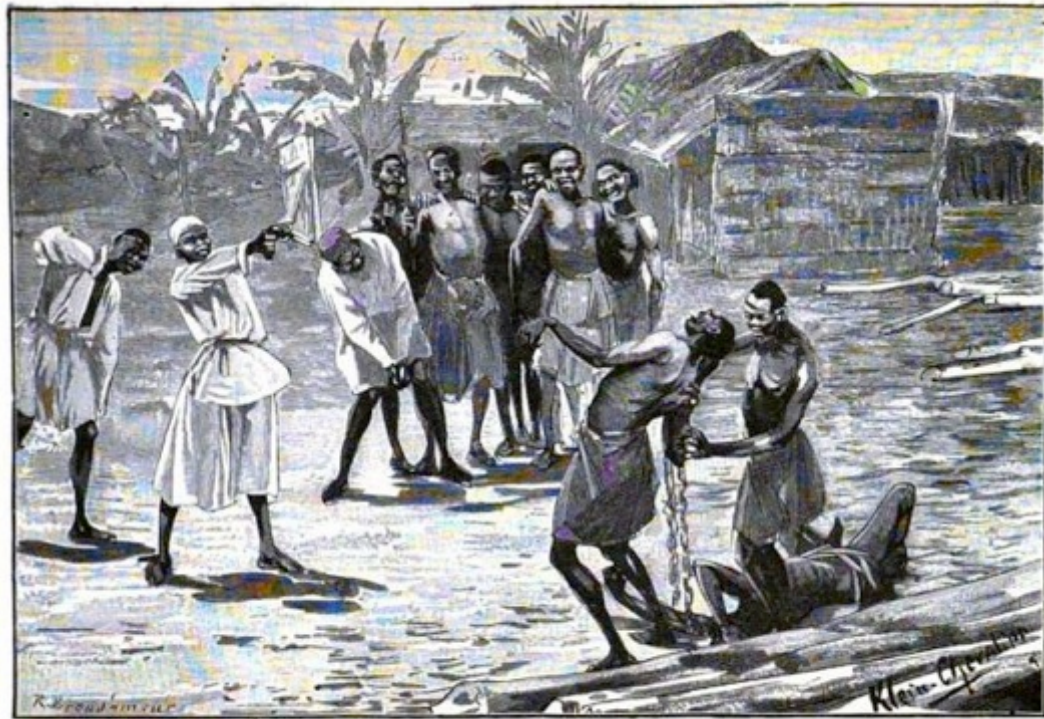
grotesque, lurid, and sensational. Consistent with the text, the visual markers that differentiate “Arabs” from “Africans” are clothing and guns.



THE ARABS AMONG THE BENECKI

Figure 20: Klein-Chevalier, *The Arabs Among the Benecki*, Drawing, 1891 in Wissmann, *My Second Journey*, 186.





SAID'S PISTOL PRACTICE

Figure 21: Klein-Chevalier, *Said's Pistol Practice*, Drawing, 1891 in Wissmann, *My Second Journey Through Equatorial Africa*, 202.

... Saïd the apparently irresolute boy had for a long time practised firing with a revolver making a target of the prisoners until they had dropped down after many shots.<sup>63</sup>

At Saïd's invitation we repaired to the camp which was surrounded by a close barricade of brushwood and thorns. At the entrance they had constructed a gate a kind of yoke formed of beams; on the horizontal beams were suspended about fifty chopped off hands mostly in a state of putrefaction which smelt terribly Saïd pointing to the hands merely uttered the word Cannibals.<sup>64</sup>

Wissmann's remarks, quoted above are consistent with descriptions of Ngongo Leteta and his Batetela fighters by Free State officers and administrators, including by Hinde, the civilian administrator Alexandre Delcommune, and the Free State officer Oscar Michaux. During Wissmann's travels In 1886-87, the Batetela had not yet been

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 200.



defined, as they would be from the 1890s through the events of the “Arab War.”

Wissmann only wrote that the Tetela had a reputation for being aggressive, and that he, like others, was frightened of them.

### **Ngongo Leteta**

In 1888 and 1889, Wissmann wrote little of the Batetela.<sup>65</sup> He reported having heard that “they went about naked; that they had enormous ears, which they wrapped around themselves to sleep in; that they used the distended skin of their bellies to cover their privates.”<sup>66</sup> Elsewhere, Wissmann mentioned them as Kasongo Lushie’s tribe, who had fallen under the leadership of Tippu Tip. He added: “everywhere they have the reputation of being very savage.”<sup>67</sup> Wissmann did, however, meet and travel with Ngongo Leteta in the early 1880s, when the latter was in his early twenties. Ngongo was then an armed retainer of three Zanzibari merchants, Abed, Saïd, and Tippu Tip.<sup>68</sup> Tippu Tip had detailed Ngongo and his men to serve as escorts to Wissmann. The “Arabs” considered Ngongo as their “slave,” Wissmann wrote, and had “given” Ngongo to him, along with power of life and death over the youth.<sup>69</sup> Wissmann at that time did not associate Ngongo with the Batetela. Rather, he wrote that Ngongo was “the leader of our Wakussu.” Wissmann further describes him as “an intelligent and extremely tall negro,” and added: “He seemed like a real scoundrel.” Wissmann had trouble maintaining control

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<sup>65</sup> Hermann Wissmann, *Im Innern Afrikas: Die Erforschung des Kassai während der Jahre 1883, 1884 and 1885* (Periodicals Service Company, 1888); Wissmann, Hermann von and Pogge, *Unter Deutscher Flagge Quer Durch Afrika Von West Nach Ost*.

<sup>66</sup> Wissmann, Hermann von and Pogge, *Unter Deutscher Flagge Quer Durch Afrika Von West Nach Ost*, 72.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>68</sup> Not the same “Saïd” Wissmann writes about in the book about his second crossing.

of Ngongo and his men, and, according to Wissmann, only the threat of punishment by the Zanzibari kept Ngongo from looting villages, brutalizing their inhabitants, and abandoning the white man's expedition.<sup>70</sup>

Ngongo was born around 1860, in the region that is today's Maniema Province, between the Lomami and the Lualaba rivers. Historians and commentators, including Joseph Okito, Jean-Luc Vellut, Jan Vansina, Mutamba Makombo, and others situate him as either Tetela-Kusu, Songye, or Hina.<sup>71</sup> The middle part of the Lomami river, flows from Katanga to the Congo, and passes through a mixed ecosystem of wooded and humid savanna. This part of the river now forms the eastern boundary of Sankuru Province. Many sources suggest that the populations who are today called Tetela and Kusu and who live on each side of the Lomami river are "the same people."<sup>72</sup> The Tetela are now in Sankuru, while the Kusu are in Maniema. The geo-political division between Tetela and Kusu is a part of the story about how new population groups emerged in the late nineteenth century. Ngongo Leteta has been associated with both groups. Wissmann labeled him as Kusu; Free State officers and administrators, Hinde, Dhanis, Delcommune, and Le Marinel called him Tetela. As for the Songye, neighbors of the Tetela, their leaders, Lumpungu, Mpania Mutombo, and Zappo Zap, became clients of Ngongo Leteta, and also allied themselves with the Free State in the 1890s.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Wissmann, Hermann von and Pogge, *Unter Deutscher Flagge Quer Durch Afrika Von West Nach Ost*, 199.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 198–99.

<sup>71</sup> Okito, "Notes historiques sur la vie de Ngongo Leteta." Lohaka-Omana, "Ngongo Leteta"; Olungu Ekanda, *Gongo-Leteta*. The Hina are fishermen on the Lomami river linked linguistically, economically, and culturally to their various neighbors.

<sup>72</sup> In 2008 and 2009, all my Tetela interlocutors said as much.

<sup>73</sup> In many of my conversations in the field, Ngongo's figure mediated narratives and discourses about the historical relationships between Songye and Tetela. Tetela, for instance, speak of Songye as possessing strong magic and fetishes, of which Ngongo availed himself often. The

The “Arab Zone” nominally came under the administration of the Free State according to the terms of the Berlin Treaty. In the late 1880s, a number of incidents exacerbated hostile relationships between Belgians and Zanzibari.<sup>74</sup> Tensions between Zanzibari merchants, who more or less recognized Tippu Tip’s representative authority, and the Free State were fast reaching their breaking point. In the 1880s also, Tippu Tip gave Ngongo free rein west of Kasongo to raid for slaves and ivory.<sup>75</sup> Successful in bringing ivory and slaves to Tippu Tip, Ngongo later extended his incursions to the western bank of the Lomami into Sankuru. Nominally still a client of Tippu Tip and his son Sefu, by 1890-91, Ngongo together with a group of “Batetela” may have decided to create a commercial and political empire of his own on the left bank on the Lomami river.<sup>76</sup> He had learned his tactics from his Zanzibari masters: exploit local conflicts, demand ivory and porters, take hostages when people balked, terrorize, burn and loot villages, enslave those not killed outright, and take away or destroy all crops and livestock. In addition, in every conquered village, Ngongo left one of his men to “watch” the conquered and make sure subject populations paid their tribute. These also became

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Songye speak a different language from the Tetela, but because the two communities are close neighbors in southeast Sankuru and in Lobao district (province of Kabinda), they are very closely connected through marriage. Ngongo Leteta’s tomb and the site of his former capital are located, today, in Kabinda, a Songye area.

<sup>74</sup> Free State officers increasingly “confiscated” ivory from Zanzibari traders they encountered; the latter retaliated by massacring European Société du Haut-Congo and Compagnie du Katanga agents, such as the Hodister party. Finally, in 1890, after the failed Emin Pasha rescue operation, which Stanley blamed on Tippu Tip, the latter resigned from his post as governor of Stanley Falls. The following year, war broke out between Free State and Zanzibari. P. Ceulemans, *La question arabe et le Congo*, vol. XXII (Brussels: Académie Royale des Sciences Coloniales, 1959), 331.

<sup>75</sup> Henrich Brode, *Tippoo Tib, the Story of His Career in Central Africa* (Chicago, Afro-American Press, 1907 [1969]); a thoroughly annotated French translation by François Bontinck, *L'autobiographie De Hamed Ben Mohammed El-Murjebi Tippu Tip (ca. 1840-1905)* (Brussels: Académie royale des sciences d'outre-mer, 1974) is worth consulting.

the tactics of the Free State. The lure of ivory, a fabulously profitable commodity, exerted itself on all who pursued it.

Sometime in the late 1880s, Ngongo set up a fortified capital at Kitenge Ngandu about two or three miles inland on the western bank of the Lomami. Ngongo then began fulfilling his ambitions while remaining a Zanzibari client. He raided to the north, as far the equatorial forest at Lomela and Ikela. He conquered a good part of Sankuru and extended raids into southern Kasai and northern Katanga. He even made contact with Chokwe in Angola, trying to procure guns and powder from them; they turned him down. In 1891, he marched on the Free State post of Lusambo, where he was defeated by Free State officers, Commandant Gillain and Lieutenant Michaux. These and other Free State officers were also themselves embroiled in politics connected with the traffic in ivory.<sup>77</sup> Ngongo launched a second expedition against the Free State in April 1892; again, he was defeated. He then sued for peace and became a Free State ally. Personal antipathy between Ngongo and Tippu Tip's son Sefu, according to Belgian histories of the conquest, was the catalyst for launching hostilities in the "Arab campaign" from 1892 to 1894.<sup>78</sup> On March 4, 1893, Lieutenant Francis Dhanis, with the help of Ngongo Leteta and the Songye chief Lumpungu, took Nyangwe. On April 22, they took Kasongo.

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<sup>76</sup> Lohaka-Omana, "Ngongo Leteta"; Okito, "Notes historiques sur la vie de Ngongo Leteta." Many vernacular histories told to me in Sankuru see Ngongo as a chief who had the ability of uniting all the Tetela clans.

<sup>77</sup> Dhanis recommended that, as the new "lords," the Belgians should continue to demand 50% of all captured ivory points. "...the collection ivory constituted, after all, the only mark of sovereignty." The Belgians substituted themselves for the Zanzibari in the areas they conquered. Marie Louise Comelieu, *Dhanis*, Collection "Etudes Coloniales"; (Bruxelles, Editions Libris, 1943), 133.

<sup>78</sup> Ceulemans, *La question arabe et le Congo*, XXII:; Van Zandijcke, *Pages d'histoire du Kasayi*; Olungu Ekanda, *Gongo-Leteta*; Club africain d'Anvers, *Le Baron Francis Dhanis Au Kwango: Et Pendant La Campagne Arabe* (Anvers: J.-B. Van Caneghem, 1910); Lohaka-Omana, "Ngongo Leteta"; "Ngongo Leteta. Pénétration arabe chez les Tetela du Sankuru"; Hinde, *The Fall of the*

The circumstances of Ngongo's death are well known. Formally accused of sedition and atrocity, Ngongo Leteta was executed by firing squad on the orders of Free State officers Lieutenants Scheerlinck and Duchesne in his capital of Kitenge Ngandu, early on the morning of September 15, 1893.<sup>79</sup> While there is evidence that Ngongo's conduct had been extremely brutal, he was executed not because this, it seems, but because he became too powerful, influential, independent, and capable of standing in the way of State authority.<sup>80</sup> And immediately following Ngongo's execution, the Free State decided to sideline his direct descendants, removing their political inheritance in favor of Ngongo's former lieutenant, Ngongo Luhaka.<sup>81</sup> In 1904, several years after Force Publique Tetela soldiers mutinied and killed their white officers, in what became known as the Batetela Rebellion of 1895, and to which I will return, the State closed its post at Ngandu.<sup>82</sup> This was the end of Ngongo's former stronghold.

As I suggested earlier, since the 1890s Ngongo Leteta has been a key figure in Congolese colonial and Tetela history, as well as in Congolese nationalist

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*Congo Arabs*; François Bontinck, "La campagne arabe: notes marginales," *Civilisations* 41, no. 1–2 (1993): 361–375.

<sup>79</sup> See the documents and letters between Free State officers in Philippe Marechal, *De "Arabische" Campagne in Het Maniema-Gebied (1892-1894): Situering Binnen Het Kolonisatieproces in De Onafhankelijke Kongostaat* (Tervuren, Belgique: Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale, 1992). Also, A. Verbeken, *A Propos de l'exécution du chef Gongo-Lutete En 1893*, (Brussels, Belgium: Académie royale des Sciences coloniales, 1957); Hinde, *The Fall of the Congo Arabs*; Dimandja, "Débat sur Ngongo Leteta"; Lohaka-Omana, "Ngongo Leteta"; Okito, "Notes historiques sur la vie de Ngongo Leteta." At the time he was somewhere in his thirties

<sup>80</sup> Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem, *Histoire générale du Congo. De l'héritage ancien à l'âge contemporain* (Brussels: Editions Duculot, 1998).

<sup>81</sup> Olela Engombe, *L'administration coloniale et la question de la succession de Ngongo Leteta au Sankuru (1893-1956)* (Brussels: Les Cahiers du CEDAF, 1991.)

<sup>82</sup> The Batetela were known in Belgium and in the Congo as having been the auxiliary troops of the Free State under Ngongo Leteta's command. At the end of the Arab campaign, many joined the colonial army. In 1895 and again in 1897, these Batetela mutinied against their officers. Chapter 2 discusses the Batetela rebellion of 1895 in more detail.

historiography.<sup>83</sup> He remains relevant for contemporary Tetela understandings of themselves, their past, and for some, their political aspirations. In 2008 and 2009 Ngongo appeared a hegemonic figure, once associated with Zanzibari exploitation, and more recently associated with the abuse of forest Tetela by savanna Tetela. Yet Ngongo also figures as a martyr, culture hero, as and the first in a long line of Congolese used and later betrayed by the Belgians.

Meanings connecting violence and visibility coalesced around the figure of Ngongo Leteta from the 1890s, and these have been passed down through time and various channels into the twenty-first century. The first part of this chapter presented accounts of European travelers and imperialists; these texts also contained and expressed African subjectivities by revealing the ways they saw and characterized people and events around them.<sup>84</sup> These accounts made explicit associations between Zanzibari and Ngongo Leteta. These associations were both generic and specific. They brought together violence and visibility with lurid, hallucinatory tales of cannibalism and dismemberment. It was through the emergence of Ngongo Leteta in imperial sources from about 1890-91 that the Batetela first appeared as a tribe, one associated with specific violences and transgressions. Ngongo Leteta's appearance, closely followed by his presence during the so-called Arab War, brought together Batetela "fierceness" with their early links to Tippu Tip, and with the violence of slave and ivory raiding.

As one of the Free State's most important allies for some two years, Ngongo was a key actor in the early wars of conquest in eastern Congo. While an important number of

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<sup>83</sup> I. Ndaywel è Nziem, *Histoire générale du Congo*.

<sup>84</sup> Fabian's book, *Out of Our Minds*, provides a framework for thinking about the various subject-positions of Europeans and Africans during the late nineteenth-century era of exploration. "Out" of whose "minds" is one question. "In" whose minds in another.

facts about Ngongo are known and verifiable, he remains surrounded by mystery and legend. There are no photographs of this important figure, and this absence casts a shadow.

### **The “Arab War” in Sankuru and Maniema**

By the end of the 1890s, Leopold II’s Congo Free State had pushed the Zanzibari traders, their competitors on the ivory market, to the eastern shore of Lake Tanganyika during the so-called “Arab War.” In the early 1890s, the Free State was in a process of slowly acquiring a monopoly on ivory. A February 1891 decree fixed the ivory export tax at a steep 25%. Stanley Falls and the areas east and north of the Upper Congo were part of the so-called Arab Zone in the 1880s. This was the area of Zanzibari hegemony in politics and trade and the region most productive of high quality ivory.<sup>85</sup> Stanley Falls was a coveted post on the Congo river. Although war seemed inevitable, the beginning of an armed European-Zanzibari conflict in November 1892 began as contrary to Leopoldian policy in the region.<sup>86</sup>

The outbreak of military hostilities was largely due to Ngongo Leteta leaving his Zanzibari patrons to forge an alliance with Free State officers. Ngongo had made overtures to the Free State in September 1892 and accepted its authority on the condition that it offer him protection.<sup>87</sup> Ngongo’s defection precipitated a retaliatory attack by Tippu Tip’s son Sefu, and was the spark for the War in eastern Congo. By 1895-96, the

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<sup>85</sup> Ceulemans, *La question arabe et le Congo*, XXII: 308.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, XXII: 320.

<sup>87</sup> Oscar Michaux, *Au Congo: Carnet de campagne: épisodes & impressions de 1888 à 1897* (Bruxelles: Librairie Falk, 1907); Ceulemans, *La question arabe et le Congo*.

Congo Free State had acquired an enormous territory from the Atlantic Ocean to the Great Lakes of Africa.

Compared to the later “Batetela campaigns” the “Arab War” was a comparatively “easy” operation for the Free State. Thanks to Ngongo Leteta and his Batetela troops, the Free State won a succession of decisive victories, extending its authority throughout the Congo basin. Lieutenant Francis Dhanis, became *the* Belgian “hero” of this war and received a promotion and a barony from the crown in gratitude.<sup>88</sup> The “Arab War” marked the moment of the clearest historical visibility of the Batetela. For Belgian and other European officers who took part in the “Arab War,” it was the occasion for the military “glory” of imperial masculinity before the First World War. Photographic cameras accompanied the Arab campaign, which became a kind of “photo opportunity,” both commemorative and touristic. These photographs were also a means of displaying power and prestige in a thoroughly militarized field. The photographic record includes group portraits of European officers together with Zanzibari or *Arabisés*, soldiers, servants, and sometimes with an unnamed entourage of children and young women. These photographs occupy a register different from textual accounts and descriptions, which have a strong focus on warfare and tactics. Military “amiability” among Europeans and “Arabs” in these photographs connect with texts like Hinde’s memoirs.

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<sup>88</sup> Michaux, *Au Congo*; Ceulemans, *La question arabe et le Congo*.





**Figure 22: "Photo taken in Boma during Dhanis' return trip to Belgium in 1894" in Marechal, *De "Arabische" Campagne in Het Maniema-Gebied (1892-1894)*, 294.**

This private photograph (Figure 22) shows Dhanis with his “Arab War” companions: the Free State officer Oscar Michaux and the English doctor Hinde. All are wearing civilian clothes. Seated from left to right: a Tetela named Piani Senga, an “Arab” named Said bin Abedi, Dhanis is in the center, holding a child, the “small Nzige, who might have been his hostage.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Muhammed bin Said (Bwana Nzige) was a trusted agent and confidant of Tippu Tip. See, Mathews, “Trade, Kinship, and Firearms in Central Africa: The State of Tippu Tip, 1860-1895,” 25.



Figure 23: "Photo taken at Kasongo c. June or July 1893" in Marechal, *De "Arabische" Campagne in Het Maniema-Gebied (1892-1894)*, 187.



**Figure 24: "Dhanis (on the donkey) in the company of Gillain (right) and Hinde in Marechal, *De "Arabische" Campagne in Het Maniema-Gebied (1892-1894), 187.***

In 1895 Hinde gave a presentation entitled "Three Years' Travel in the Congo Free State" before the Royal Geographic Society in London. He made the following statement:

Despite their slave-raiding propensities during the forty years of their domination, the Arabs have converted the Manyema and Malela country into one of the most prosperous in Central Africa. The landscape, as seen from high hills in the neighborhood of Nyangwe and Kasongo, reminds one strangely of an ordinary English arable country. There is nothing similar that I am aware of, in any other part of the Congo basin; and yet the Arabs have left the Malela people the most inveterate cannibals on the face of the globe.<sup>90</sup>

Simultaneous with collegiality toward their "Arab" foes,<sup>91</sup> the Europeans who participated in the "Arab Campaign" wrote at length about the "barbarism" of their

<sup>90</sup> Hinde, *The Fall of the Congo Arabs.*, 6–7.

<sup>91</sup> This was also expressed in articles in *Le Congo Illustré*, for instance, that profile the "Congo Arabs," presenting them in intelligible "orientalist" terms to Belgian publics. See, "Les chef arabes du Haut-Congo," *Le Congo Illustré*, February 11, 1894.

African auxiliary troops, and especially about the Batetela. Stories of mutilation, dismemberment and cannibalism, have haunted Tetela meanings ever since they became associated with slave and ivory raiding in the late nineteenth -century. Hinde, Michaux and Delcommune met Ngongo Leteta, and they all wrote lurid tales of Batetela cannibalism.

“Through the whole Batetela country, extending from Lubefu to Luiki, and from the Lurimbi northwards for some five days’ march, one sees neither gray hairs, nor halt, nor blind. Even parents are eaten by their children on the first sign of approaching decrepitude. It is easy to understand that under these circumstance, the Batetela have the appearance of a splendid race. These cannibals do not, as a rule, file their front teeth, nor do they tattoo the face.”<sup>92</sup>

### **Batetela as “bad people.” The infamous sentries of the Congo Free State**

Armed men who, in the 1890s, became known as *Arabisés*, Wangwana, Asambala, but also especially “Batetela,” were also active in the forests where rubber became the new product of the day from the late 1890s. In a 1911 letter to the Governor General written on behalf of the Société Commerciale et Financière, Minister of the Congo Jules Renkin expressed concerns of about relocating Batetela *chefferies* south of a large stretch of forest between the right bank of the Lubefu and western side of Lake Leopold II (now Mai Ndombe), where they had been active since the time of the Zanzibari. The letter also discusses the need to “free the native populations from the yoke of Batetela chiefs, who are not accepted by custom, but who have been imposed *under various pretexts* [sic].”<sup>93</sup> The Société Commerciale et Financière feared insecurity in an area where they had become used to exploiting labor with the help of armed Batetela. Thus, Batetela were

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<sup>92</sup> Hinde, *The Fall of the Congo Arabs.*, 90.

operating as sentries for a rubber company in an area in western Lake Leopold II district, including Lukolela, Yumbi, and Bolobo.

The Minister went on to write that in Kasai, “local” populations had been eager to throw off their Batetela yokes, but as a result of their sudden freedom, they had been utterly unable to get organized. The writer feared that the removal of Batetela as sentries and overseers would produce unrest in the area, a threat to Europeans. Casting the Batetela as protectors of European authority in the region, Renkin’s letter suggests that the danger did not come from the Batetela themselves, but from the “disorganized native populations” removed from their authority.

In the early 1950s, the Catholic missionary scholar-priests Edmond Boelaert and Honoré Vinck initiated a writing contest to collect “Congolese memories of Europeans and rubber violence in the Free State period.”<sup>94</sup> Writing in their Lomongo language, contest participants shared in writing memories of Free State abuses at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>95</sup> These essays were translated into French by Charles Lonkama, and only made available to readers in the journal *Annales Aequatoria*, under the rubric “Arrival of Whites on the Banks of Equatorial Rivers,” in the mid-1990s.<sup>96</sup> The published testimonies tell story after story of atrocities, perpetrated by white men and the African enforcers of European concessionary companies. The stories also clearly narrate the violent genealogies of Zanzibari-“Arab” slave and ivory merchants, who for a while

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<sup>93</sup> Jules Renkin, “Minister of the Colony to the Governor-General of the Belgian Congo”, November 23, 1911, AIMO A 34 bis. Divers 1911-1915/1669, Archives Africaines. Ministère des Affaires Etrangères. Brussels, Belgium.

<sup>94</sup> Hunt, “An Acoustic Register, Tenacious Images and Congolese Scenes of Rape and Repetition,” 226.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. “Some 170 teachers, students, clerks, and chiefs wrote about the violence, death, cruelties, and hardships of the Free State years in Equateur (Boelaert et al. 1995, 1996).”

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 247, note 10.

overlapped with Whites in search of ivory, and with the Congo Free State, after it ousted the Zanzibari but kept many of their retainers and techniques to assist in the extraction of ivory and then rubber. Like the so-called history and popular paintings of Tshibumba and others, the narratives collected by Boelaert and Vincke provide a clear idea of history and experience through snapshots and confluences – through visuality. These stories give accounts of three general eras: before the white man, that is during the time of “Arabs” and *Arabisés*; the arrival of the white man; and the time of the concessionary companies, most notably the *Societe Anonyme Belge pour le Commerce du Haut Congo* (aka, *SAB*).

Before the arrival of the whites, the Arabs had come to the source of the river. They were the ones who gave guns to the Batetela. This white man was called Arab. He came from downstream. He came with the CTC chore. Our ancestors collected CTC in big baskets. If one’s harvest was of poor quality, one would be shot.<sup>97</sup>

In the Congo the first white man who came was Stanley. He first sent Commander Longwangwa and Léopold II to explore the river Congo. When he arrived among us, Mondji Yafe, Commander Longwangwa *had found the Batetela. After he chased the Batetela, he imposed the collection of CTC.* For this, he paid us salt and one meter of cloth. When CTC was abolished, they imposed the manufacture of raphia cloth.<sup>98</sup>

The stories go on to describe how white men arrived, ousted Zanzibari and a category of persons who are named “Kasaiens,” “Batetela,” or “Arabisés,” and imposed their own labor regimes (rubber, raphia). Many of these accounts tell the very same stories I heard about Ngongo Leteta (hundreds of kilometers to the south and decades later) about pregnant women being ordered disembowled. A story narrates the arrival of two white men, who then recruit African sentries. One soldier was told to shoot anyone who did not gather requisite amounts of rubber. The testimony goes on to state:

He killed many people. He spared no one: men, women, children. He killed them all. If a woman was pregnant, they ordered: ‘cut her open so *that we can see how*

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<sup>97</sup> Boelaert, Vinck, and Lonkama, “Enquête sur l’arrivée des blancs sur les bords des rivières équatoriales (partie II et fin),” 247.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

*the child lies inside her.*' This resulted in the death of the woman.<sup>99</sup>

What seems especially striking is the desire, once again, to *see* the foetus. The need to kill, each being inextricable from the other.

The narratives go on further to identify the Batetela (also called Kasaiens and Arabisés) as guilty of terrible abuses, and as connected to Zanzibari "Arabs," and whites. Intimidation and terror, as practices of power, were repeatedly associated with Ngongo Leteta in my 2008 conversations with Tetela in Sankuru. In particular the stories about disemboweling pregnant women came up many times in discussions about Ngongo.

Kasaiens were bad people [...] they ordered pregnant women to be disembowled in order to see how the child is inside. Kasaiens killed many of us, and took many away. The Kasaiens left, and then the SAB arrived. It perpetrated the same exactions as the Kasaiens.<sup>100</sup>

And,

Sometime later the Kasaiens arrived and killed many of our fellow countrymen. They took prisoners, men and women. They would poke someone's eye out, and leave the other one. They cut a woman's breast off, and left the other one. *A pregnant woman was disemboweled*: and the mother and baby died [...] Our people are in Kasai with Ngongo and Bontenga. About 4000. These [Kasaiens] are evil people.<sup>101</sup>

In these stories Kasaien meant Batetela, which also meant *Arabisé* and "Ngongo's people." This is quite different from what I found in Sankuru among contemporary Tetela, where names like Batetela, *Arabisés*, or Hamba, for instance are discussed and parsed with greater precision.<sup>102</sup> The *Aequatoria* testimonies go on to associate "Batambatamba" with Arabisés in a context of violence and kidnapping.<sup>103</sup> Boelaet and Vincke make their own editorial interventions: "Certain names are attributed to the

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 240–41.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 242.

<sup>102</sup> "Kasaien" seems to have been late 1950s-early 1960s nomenclature.

‘*Arabisés.*’ In most cases they are Tetela who belonged to the great roving bands of Ngongo Leteta, those who had taken part in the occupation of the area around Ikela (and elsewhere to the south and east).”<sup>104</sup>

Fast-forward to 1960: after the Tetela General Omonombe led Congolese army troops to Kasai and massacred civilians in Mbuji-Mayi, an important fraction of Luba-identified people, began to interpret Lumumba *as a Tetela* and as the heir and continuator of Ngongo Leteta’s actions, which had been to raid and enslave “Luba” in Kasai. “In the maternity hospital of Bonzola at Mbuji Mayi, boy babies, considered potential enemies, were stabbed to death by Lumumba’s military. The bellies of pregnant women were ripped open to find out the baby’s sex. Lumumba behaved like Ngongo Leteta, who in his time ravaged the Luba Kasai population.”<sup>105</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Zanzibari “raiding for ivory and slaves”<sup>106</sup> reached central Congo in the 1870s and caused in many places a total breakdown of society, as well as continuous war, famine, and epidemic, smallpox in particular. In this era groups of armed men, some slave, others free, affiliated themselves and began to identify with the Zanzibari ivory and slave traders. They also started to acquire new social identities. In the very late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they coalesced into distinct “social-ethnic” categories.

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<sup>103</sup> Boelaert, Vinck, and Lonkama, “Enquête sur l’arrivée des blancs sur les bords des rivières équatoriales (partie II et fin),” 260.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 388.

<sup>105</sup> Dibwe dia Mwembu, “Popular Memories of Patrice Lumumba,” in *A Congo Chronicle. Patrice Lumumba in Urban Art* (New York, N.Y.: Museum for African Art, 1999), 61. The author cites Pierre Makunda of Mbuji-Mayi.

<sup>106</sup> Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon: Of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo* (Duke University Press, 1999), 31.



Textual analysis of European accounts of travel, exploration and war in late nineteenth-century Central Africa, reveals close connections between seeing and knowing, killing, destroying and taking. Ngongo Leteta, the central figure at the threshold of Sankuru's and the Tetela's modernity, was never represented, never shown, by the technology of the photographic apparatus. This absence is something to puzzle over. Ngongo continues to be construed as someone who sees and wants to monopolize the right to see, as someone who wants to use the gaze as his weapon. I am referring specifically to the repeated stories of Ngongo Leteta wanting to open the bellies of pregnant women to see how the baby lies inside.

Violence and visuality connect in historical narratives in clear and specific ways. Violence, its perpetration, its memory and experience for a witness or victim, overwhelms the history of the late nineteenth century in eastern Congo. By the 1890s, photography had become a common technology. Because of its mimetic and indexical aspects, photography could not easily produce idealized visions of "nature and man." Nor was it meant to do so in the 1890s. Photography seemed an apt accompaniment to war, conquest, exploitation.<sup>107</sup> Texts, images, memories, narratives, repetitions, and vernacular knowledge, suggest a long duration of change in eastern and central Congo, which involved a profound set of epistemological shifts. In the span of at least two generations over four decades, from 1870 to about 1910, much changed, including ways of knowing, being, and seeing.

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<sup>107</sup> The literature connecting photography with state oppression is vast. See for instance, John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (December 1, 1986): 3–64. Also, Hayes, "'Cocky' Hahn and the 'Black Venus'"; Lorena Rizzo, "A Glance into the Camera: Gendered Visions of Historical Photographs in Kaoko (North-Western Namibia)," *Gender & History* 17, no. 3 (November 1, 2005): 682–713.

A global circulation of meanings about the Tetela began through African eyes and experiences, and made their way into the texts of European travelers, explorers, and imperial conquerors at the end of the nineteenth century. This global circulation continued with the publication of Tippu Tip's autobiography in the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>108</sup> The "Arab War" of 1891-93, the execution of Ngongo Leteta, and the first revolt in Luluabourg of the Force Publique *Batetela* in 1895 were key events for shifting meanings about Tetela.<sup>109</sup> The violence of the slave and ivory trade was the basis for the emergence of the "Batetela" as a social category. In the colonial sources of the 1890s, the name gathered to itself meanings connected with Zanzibari "Arabs," slavery, cannibalism, brutality, and firearms. Much of this arraying process took place through visuality.

However, the visuality that characterized the Zanzibari and the early colonial era was not only located in European narratives and images. Identifying persons through their association with cloth, clothing, guns and other prestige objects, constituted a key way of knowing in this period, for African and European alike. To some degree, Europeans ventriloquized African modes of signification into their words and texts. Fashion was a privileged modality for expressing "modernity" in Europe at the time.<sup>110</sup> In

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<sup>108</sup> This autobiography was first published in German in 1903, then in English in 1907. See, Melvin E. Page and Patrick Bennett, "The Inscribed Sandals of Tippu Tip," *Journal de la Société des Africanistes* 42, no. 2 (1972): 187-191. By the time of the "Arab War," Tippu Tip had already been retired for three or four years from the life of slave and ivory trading, as well as from his position as the Free State governor of Stanley Falls. In his autobiography, which goes back to the 1850s and 1860s and ends in about 1890, Tippu Tip shows no interest in discussing the *Batetela*. His descriptions of the "Watetera" in the country of "Utetera," however, are, as I have already mentioned, among the semantic ancestors of the later "Batetela."

<sup>109</sup> A second rebellion, in 1897, did not take place in Kasai, as did the first, but during Dhanis's Ituri campaign.

<sup>110</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (Phaidon Press, 1995).

Congo, after Zanzibari traders began appearing with their guns, clothing, and styles dress became all at once political, social, and aesthetic. Dress expressed change. Indeed, cloth, clothing, and fashion articulated with prestige in times of change.

With the arrival of the Free State's violent extractive imperialism, Batetela changed sides. They fought against their former Zanzibari overlords, and then enforced labor regimes for their new European allies and patrons, oppressing other Congolese on behalf of concessionary company agents. Through their experiences as first allies and later victims of racist and bureaucratic colonial states (the Free State and its Belgian colonial successor) Batetela strengthened their identities as modern African soldiers. The heyday of the Batetela ended with a series of rebellions. The first was at the Free State post of Luluabourg in 1895; it was followed by another in 1897 during the Free State's Ituri campaign. These rebellions, which came on the heels of the Free State's extremely successful "Arab War" campaign, brought Batetela fully into the collective consciousness of metropolitan and colonial Belgians, and into contact with newly created Belgian colonial publics ready to consume colonial knowledge and representation.<sup>111</sup> We turn now to the fate of Batetela representations in the metropole, and new positionings of the Batetela as a Belgian Congo "tribe."

Based on the testimonies of Free State field officers who took part in the "Arab Campaign," in particular the enormously popular Commandant Baron Dhanis, hero of the colonial conquest, the excellence of Batetela soldiers became, from the late 1890s and early 1900s, an oft-repeated commonplace in books and articles describing the Congo Free State. There were many examples of this prevalent view among Belgians and other

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<sup>111</sup> Matthew G. Stanard, *Selling the Congo: A History of European Pro-Empire Propaganda and the Making of Belgian Imperialism* (University of Nebraska Press, 2012).

Europeans who were involved in the colonial enterprise, or followed colonial news at the turn of the last century: “The Batetela make the best soldiers”<sup>112</sup> and, “Captain Weyns reported so favourably of the quickness of the Batetela recruits and their military aptitude, that all vacancies in [the auxiliary company of the Congo Railway] are now, like those in the rest of the Public Force, filled up with natives of the Congo territory.”<sup>113</sup> The “romance” between Free State officers like Dhanis and the Batetela was short lived, although it was significant, as was these officers’ disappointment when “their” troops mutinied twice in two years. The Batetela, whether as loyal auxiliaries and good soldiers, or as cannibalistic mutineers, played an important part in creating Belgian colonial sensibilities in metropolitan efforts at memorializing the “glorious” days of the conquest. As I will show below, the 1890s, were reappraised and repositioned in the post-World War I era as the heyday of Belgium’s colonial military glory. Belgian memories of Batetela soldiers, moreover, played an important role in the constitution of imperial constellations of race, masculinity, and “civilization.”

The Batetela rebellions of the middle and late 1890s were both points of rupture (ongoing moments of about ten to fifteen years) and important points of engagement for Tetela in the production of historical and “ethnic” knowledge. In other words, Tetela self-fashioning was also a process of incorporating meanings of key historical events such as the Batetela (and Force Publique) rebellions of 1895-1910. Historically, the Batetela rebellions were a “pushing back” against the imposition of a new and oppressive colonial framework on Tetela, whose self-understanding through their early association with the

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<sup>112</sup> Charles Buls, *Croquis congolais* (Brussels, Belgium: G. Balat, 1900).

<sup>113</sup> Also, see Demetrius Charles Boulger, *The Congo State Is Not a Slave State* (S. Low, Marston and company, limited, 1903), 233–34; Guy De Boeck, *Baoni. Les révoltes de la Force Publique sous Léopold II: Congo 1895-1908* (Antwerp, Belgium: Editions EPO, 1987).

Zanzibari, and the Free State shortly thereafter, had been “modern.” But this modernity was in some ways ambiguous and peculiar: Tetela were also at times associated with cannibalism (Tetela have told me that their ancestors “ate people”), and with practices of dismemberment. The latter were rendered all the more lurid by European fantasies of Equatorial Africa, but were perhaps expressions of a “return of the repressed” i.e. the trauma of continuous violence in Free State Congo.<sup>114</sup> Free State modernity was itself characterized by militarism. The Free State and later Belgian Congo as colonial projects, expressed much of their identities militarily, through its Force Publique.<sup>115</sup> This was especially evident in the images that this early imperial era created, and that its memory generated.

On 4 July, 1895 “Batetela” soldiers garrisoned at Luluabourg rebelled against their white officers, immediately killing Captain Pelzer and wounding Lieutenant Cassart. Additional Batetela rebellions further destabilized the early Force Publique: during Dhanis’s Ituri expedition of 1897, and a shorter-lived mutiny in 1900 at the Fort of *Shinkakasa on the Atlantic*. In the aftermath of these rebellions, the Force Publique followed a policy of sending recruits as far from their homes as possible. Not all Force Publique soldiers were “Batetela.” According to Belgian military officers writing to one another during the events of the mutiny, many were “Baluba,” another newly expanded category of persons in the 1890s. Unlike the Batetela, the Free State considered the Baluba loyal.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Vellut, “La violence armée dans l’Etat Indépendant du Congo.”

<sup>115</sup> Geary, *In and Out of Focus*. Makes a similar argument with regard to colonial images of chained up Africans.

<sup>116</sup> Auguste Verbeken, *La Révolte des Batetela en 1895; textes inédits*, vol. 4, Mémoires in 8. Nouvelle Série VII (Brussels, Belgium, 1958). Part of the story of the Batetela Rebellion is a

From the standpoint of Congolese memory and experience, The narrative of the Batetela rebellions, could be interpreted as one of disrespect, betrayal, and trampled pride. The decades of the rebellions, from the middle 1890s to about 1910, saw “bush warfare,” pursuit and defeat, white panic at the idea of European travelers, officers, and missionaries falling into rebel hands, followed by further mutinies and their final suppression in the first few years of the twentieth century. Tetela accounts interpret this history as a transitional moment, when the Belgian state strengthened its colonial grip on all Congolese by, among other things, betraying the “Batetela” and throwing them henceforth into a large category of colonial subjects, undifferentiated from a political standpoint – they would all be colonized “natives” and subject, as such, to oppressive legal and economic strictures. In colonial iconography, the trapeze-shaped talking drum of the Tetela became ubiquitous in the early twentieth century. Colonial visuality presented this drum as its metonymic Tetela object of choice. On the other hand, colonial textual (if not visual) characterizations of the early Batetela as “warlike,” however endured beyond the end of the Free State era.

Tetela men in 2008 and 2009, as well as some women, would invariably tell me that they, their tribe, their people are fierce, “straight-shooters,” but also quick to anger and slow to forgiveness. In short, this was an updated version of the colonial “war-like race” trope. Paul Diambulu’s remarks in Lodja in 2008 are representative of general ideas about Tetela in the Congo.

Tetela rarely back down after a decision has been taken. The first man to have killed a white man was Sergeant Kandolo in Kananga [colonial era Luluabourg]. These former men of Ngongo Leteta had been taken to Luluabourg to fight against Kalenda and the people of Kananga. The Tetela asked permission to go home

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somewhat new (in 1895) distinction between “Batetela” and “Baluba” soldiers in their relationship to the State as respectively “fierce” and “docile” colonial subjects.

because they had left their families behind ... One morning, a Mutetela Sergeant says “I want to finish with this.” [the injustices and ill-treatment]. In the morning, as they arrived [for morning roll-call], the Mutetela Sergeant disobeyed orders. He jumped on the white men. He is the one whose effigy has been inscribed on a Belgian ten Franc note.<sup>117</sup>

I asked my interlocutor whether it was really true that Kandolo, who was one of the first and one of the very few Congolese Non Commissioned Officers in the Force Publique of the 1890s, had been commemorated in Belgium, as an individual and on paper money. Papa Paul Diambulu, a man in his eighties, answered in the affirmative. “Yes,” he said, “with [on the image] a basket-shaped hat. You will find it on the ten Belgian franc banknote; this man is there. It is written in the history books.”<sup>118</sup>

Colonial and contemporary Congolese and Belgian histories, as well as the histories and memories that Tetela relate in the twenty first century, discuss the Batetela rebellions as major events.<sup>119</sup> In the field, people presented “history” and “memory” to me as authoritative discourses of knowledge, sometimes overlapping, but sometimes as occupying different registers. “Memory” was something older people were said to possess (and conversely younger people were not thought to possess important knowledge, *unless* they were teachers or priests, and read books), whereas history was “written in books,” although older men and women’s memories, I was often told, counted as ‘history.’ In the course of my fieldwork, the notables and chiefs to whom I was most

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<sup>117</sup> Papa Paul Diambulu, “About the Batetela Rebellion of 1895.”

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Verbeken, *La Révolte Des Batetela En 1895; textes inédits*, 4; Pierre Salmon, *La Révolte des Batetela de l’expédition du Haut-Ituri, 1897: Témoignages Inédits* (Bruxelles: Académie royale des sciences d’outre-mer, 1977); Ndaywel, *Histoire générale du Congo*; Michaux, *Au Congo : carnet de campagne*; Adolphe Lejeune-Choquet, *histoire militaire du Congo; explorations, expéditions, opérations de guerre, combats et faits militaires*. (Bruxelles, Castaigne, 1906); Guy De Boeck, *Baoni. Les Révoltes de la force publique sous Léopold II: Congo 1895-1908* (Anvers, Belgique: Editions EPO, 1987); Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila* (Zed Books, 2002).

often directed, spoke of the Batetela rebellions as a story of men, soldiers, from a particular “ethnic” or “tribal” community (their own) who had the remarkable wherewithal, early in the history of colonialism, to resist colonial abuse and truly challenge the white man. In the course of our conversation, Papa Paul added:

The Belgians noticed that all the people were afraid of them, except for the Atetela. This rebellion by the Batetela disadvantaged our region; here there were no schools. The Belgians decided to leave this population at a very low level.<sup>120</sup>

In the 1890s, before, during and even to some degree after the rebellions, the Batetela were, together with Francis Dhanis and a handful of Belgian officers, the heroes of the “Arab War” campaigns. In Lodja, in July 2008, Paul Diambulu had his own analysis of the Batetela rebellion, one which in many ways accorded with narratives of “Tetelanness” I heard from Tetela and others, in the Congo and abroad. For Papa Paul the Batetela soldiers were so closely connected to the identity of the colonial state and the conditions of its past existence, that even a leader of the Batetela rebellion of 1895 was memorialized, visually, on paper money, itself a multivalent symbol aspiration in twentieth-century modernity.

It is important to use a notion of the “repressed” to understand the visibilities and invisibilities of the Batetela. In the next chapter of this study, I consider how the “Arab War,” the anti-slavery campaigns, and the anti-Batetela campaigns were recuperated in the 1920s and 1930s as the Belgian Congo’s “heroic era.” Through this operation, the Free State became heroic and foundational; it gave Belgian imperialism a glorious

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<sup>120</sup> Papa Paul Diambulu, “About the Batetela Rebellion of 1895.” Also, see Turner, *Ethnogenèse et nationalisme en Afrique centrale*, 241–245. Turner, who conducted research in Sankuru in the late sixties and early seventies, found a widespread view among Tetela of the colonial state having punished and sidelined their region because of the Tetela’s “negative reputation.” Decades later, beginning in the 1960s, it was Zaire’s dictator Mobutu Sese Seko who marginalized Sankuru as the birthplace of his rival and victim, Patrice Lumumba.



history. Military campaigns – their tales of adventure, sacrifice, and the ways in which they turned Belgian deaths into melodrama – did the work of repressing and replacing what seemed beyond the pale in Belgian reckonings: the Leopoldian rubber scandals, which had become international news in about 1900. The narrative and discursive recuperations of 1890s military campaigns in Belgian colonial newspapers, magazines, and books operated as erasure. However the *Batetela* then, the *Tetela* now, and more broadly Congolese nationalist historiography, have produced different narratives, ones which bear a relationship to colonial visual narratives, but have their own meanings, which themselves shed light on the history of the Congo Free State.

*Counterpoint*

Memory, History and Visuality in 2008

Papa Rudolphe was most talkative when he drove. I did my best to listen over the noise of the motorcycle, though my helmet muffled his words further. Papa Rudolphe was my richest source for Sankuru and Tetela historical narratives. His stories and histories made clear the fact that European historiography of Zanzibari and Free State Congo forms only one layer of historical discourse in Sankuru. Papa Rudolphe once began telling me about Leopold II's *Domaine de la Couronne* (Royal Domain). There, stood a "palace or perhaps a house," he said, built for the king. Papa Rudolphe said that he thought the King once sought refuge in that place during a difficult moment in Belgium's history. I did not tell him that Leopold II never actually set foot in the Congo. He also talked about Leopold's personal domain as a place where mysterious practices of extraction occurred. Papa Rudolphe spoke about rubber, but, like Abbé Marcel in Lubefu, also speculated on what else might have been going on. He thought that perhaps the area was rich in copper. He said that satellite photography could perhaps reveal what the Belgians did there.



Figure 25: “Pierre Joseph Florent De Roy, *Femmes Batetela, retour du marché*, b&w slide, 1898, Ethnography Section, Royal Museum for Central Africa.

Papa Rudolphe was of course the first viewer of my colonial photographs. When he saw the photograph “Batetela Women” (Figure 25) he noted that the women are wearing black *pagnes* (cloths), and that one is not wearing a top. “These are signs of mourning” Papa Rudolphe told me. “Men will go barefoot and even bare-chested for as long as one to two years during the mourning period.” He went on, saying that a piece of black cloth may be worn on one’s person until such a time as the whole family can convene in one place. Especially when a chief or head of family dies, these gatherings are occasions for settling accounts between family members. All problems and grievances get buried along with the departed. These funerals and family gatherings are historical moments and may mark political changes. Then, the newly elected leader or chief changes his name and becomes “the successor” of the previous one. Names such as “Okito” and “Pena” mean “replacement” or “successor.” Papa Rudolphe described

mourning attire thus: traditionally, white tops, black bottoms. Today, he added, white is for school children. In other photographs, Papa Rudolphe noted naked children. This,” he commented, “hasn’t changed very much.” As for men with shaved heads, they were slaves, or else also possibly in mourning. About the bicycles that seemed ubiquitous in 1950s missionary images: “In the old days, not everyone had a bicycle. It was cause for celebration in a family when someone acquired a bicycle.”