

COLONIAL STATE BUILDING IN THE CONGO, AND ITS DISMANTLING

René Devisch¹

Colonial State Building

From 1909 till 1960, the ambitious venture to colonise Congo aimed at a mode of elevation and an overall process of civilisation, stemming from the nineteenth century aristocratic-bourgeois concern in the West with industrialising, the panoptical and patriarchal state building, as well as conversion to christianity, and sanative and educational actions. Colonial officers, educators and medical personnel were defined in paternalistic terms as state builders and agents of the new international philanthropic humanism (Daye *et al.* 1929; Stengers 1989).

Panoptical administration and architectural display of order

Regimentation, supervision, and surveillance - the stock-in-trade of the colonial Panopticon - were by no means random phenomena. [...] New spatial configurations emerged which tended to reflect the character, boundaries, and severity of the

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disciplines enforced upon the ‘natives’. Spatial organisation involved more than the drawing of territorial boundaries that provided a framework of sorts for national integration. It also meant the drawing of boundaries around specific communities and regions [...]; around social roles [...] within specific institutional arenas, such as the school, the army, the ‘foyer social’, the mosque, the church, and the penitentiary... (Lemarchand 1992: 181-182).

Throughout the colonial period, in the Belgian Congo, state building remained an invasive enterprise. Till the late 1920s, both the British example, as well as Flemish-Belgian nationalism inspired or underscored in several parts of the colony the option for indirect rule and cultural relativism, which functioned as a nativistic framework or call towards indigenisation. Although, at that early stage, colonisation avoided straightforward assimilation of colonial people into European civilisation, all early colonialists held the view that ways had to be found to gradually accommodate the local cultures to the colonial institutions, to associate the local crafts to the socio-economic reform, as well as to incorporate the ‘legitimate chiefs’ and chiefly courts into the civilising endeavour of the state.

From 1926 onwards, the politics of mitigated indirect rule were gradually being transformed into an all-embracing civilisatory action (Ryckmans 1931). This modern administration or ‘constructive imperialism’, led by a centralising state, was to face the so-called degeneration of chiefly authority due allegedly to “their subjects’ growing individualism fostered by wage labour and evangelisation” (Gille 1953). The civilisational rhetorics were voicing the hope that the colonised would soon look toward freeing themselves from the unhealthy life conditions, and in particular from the enslaving collectivity and from the unschooled, that is crooked or incompetent, chiefs they were tied to. Socio-economic advance was to emancipate the local populations away from the unproductive gift economy at the basis of chiefly power, as well as from the irrational and lascivious, if not deviant traditions which were blinding their mind and weakening their will.

Dès 1920, il [le législateur] ne se leurrerait pas sur les dangers croissants qui menaçaient la fragilité des sociétés indigènes. Le rapport annuel de la Colonie de cette année les signalait vigoureusement: “Le contact même de deux civilisations aussi différentes ... est par lui-même une cause puissante d’action qui tend à influencer profondément l’état social des populations indigènes. ... Comment, en effet, substituer la liberté à l’esclavage, le respect de la vie humaine au cannibalisme, la justice européenne aux épreuves homicides, la morale évangélique au fétichisme, l’ordre public aux luttes intestines, la

circulation des richesses à leur improductive stagnation, sans influencer la société où s'accomplissent de si grands changements?" (Gille 1953: 741).

From the 1930s, colonial government established itself both by disarticulating local power networks and institutions, as well as by subordinating people to its administration and surveillance. It envisaged the gradual adaptation of the so-called native courts, local uses, customs and dialects to the modern rules, institutions and rational concepts of the colonial administration. Paramount chiefs and the heads of the leading clan in a small *chefferie* (comprising around a dozen villages), in case of succession, had to be chosen from among those who were amenable to western logic and cooperation, namely from among former soldiers or trained workers in the colony. Their titles of *chefs médaillés*, *chefs interposés* or *chefs de secteur* alluded to their modern power attributes, as they were from now on owing legitimation of rule to their very subservience or loyalty to the colonial authorities rather than to a proper ancestral filiation of their title. They were installed as local supervisors or transmitters of the new duties or requirements imposed by colonial rule upon the populations, like surveys, vaccination campaigns, repeated injections, required production or cultivation of cash crops and export products (namely palm oil, rubber, coffee, rauwolfia, jute), the compulsory construction or maintenance of roads and other *prestations* like carrying goods, as well as censuses, taxes, and various administrative authorisations (such as the passbooks, the workers identification papers and the medical visas). Inasmuch as these chiefs, put in place by the colonial authorities, were often undue successors to the founder of the lineage and thereby devoid from the traditional base of authority, they did not enjoy a great credit from the local population. And yet they were able to mobilise some co-operation with colonial rule inasmuch as they were a promise of some benefit.

Body politics, namely power over the physical body of the colonised, submitted to administrative records or exposed to the medical gaze and the microscope, constituted a major struggle, between the administration and the medical corps, for hegemony in the colony and legitimation of colonial rule. There were often serious tensions between the territorial administration and justice, imposing *corvées* for infrastructural works, on the one hand, and the sanitary action, the agronomic initiatives, and the resettlement programmes along the new roads sometimes at greater distances from sources of water and farm land, on the other. The administrators aimed at submitting the social body (i.e. the social organisation and mobility at grassroots level) to an overall administrative gaze towards an economic, mobility and sanitary regulation. The medical actions were to discipline the physical body and people's life world, as well as to supervise the inhabitants' physical reproduction in view of labour force. In that regard, administrator and

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medical doctor played out a competition around the question whether the future of regulation of people and their labour did lay with the administrative records, or with the microscope and the medical laboratories that surveyed the colony and defined the proper spaces for residence and cultivation, as well as the healthier modes of living and upbringing. Resettlement aimed at improved hygiene, the eradication of epidemic diseases, and easing the accessibility for administration and government inspection or control.

From the 1920s, colonial discourse propagated optical or scopic metaphors regarding populations anarchically scattered around in small and disorderly hamlets. These were seen as part and parcel of a savage environment in the far remote bush or deep forest. To grant them the right to intervene, the colonial officers developed the imagery of a bewildering multitude of tribal groups, characterised as unconnected, if not at odds with one another. Village life was portrayed as of poor condition and made out of obscure or vague customary rules precluding any sense of compatibility or totality among the hundreds of ethnic and linguistic groups. The évolués who came to adhere to the colonial and evangelising bearers of knowledge and civilisation projects were to break with these spaces of negativity. They were to assimilate a new and basically European life style and work ethos, and the concomitant social identities and solidarities. In contrast also with the pervasive colonial imagery of remote and primitive villages in the bush, the colonial devices like maps, documents, roads, resettlement, as well as the architectural designs for the extracustomary centres and new towns, were bringing about the new civilisational space of enlightenment, exposed to the panoptical vision of patriarchal domination. Categorisation, codification, mapping, planning, efficient production, as well as what I would call an architectonic government, were mutually constitutive in the colony, as they were indeed in the mother country.

From the 1930s, prescriptive, administrative and judicial regulation of conduct developed along with other forms of social engineering like of hygiene, housing, and road building. These various actions were increasingly the corner-stones of the colonising and modernising project in itself, and a vehicle for more general visual control, namely for authoritarian supervision and intervention. In the coloniser's view, the preliterate or unrecorded nature of customs and descent relations, as well as the absence of roads and frontiers, along with the general lack of administrative institutions and quantitative information or written records, were all synonymous with potential disorder. In this perspective, this overall lack of order, administration and recording, diagnosed, together with the glaring problems of hygiene, the inferiority and inadequacy of the colonised, and grounded the need for an overall colonial management.

The ordered or classificatory presentation in the mother country of *exotica* from

the tropics acted as a display of mastery. It was evocative of the civilising ordering in the colony by means of the written documents, maps, administrative and medical reports. Somehow analogous to the position on the colonial scene of the *évolués* (as those assimilating the colonialists' lifestyle were being called), the newly-built extracustomary centres and the new townships in the colony, alike these *exotica*, all acted as in-between instances between the 'villages' and white administration or civilisation, as well as between the colony and the metropole. Besides the maps, and also the demographic, medical and economic reports, the ethnographic investigations organised by state institutions turned out to become the strongest expression of colonial discourse fuelling the Belgian fantasies of conquest or order and the civilising mission. From early on, the ethnographic monographs of the Brussels *Institut International Bibliographique*, much later completed by the ethnographic map of Congo (based on information collected shortly after World War II; see Boone 1961), fixed ethnic identity. These monographs and maps had the power to annex people, their customs and divisions to the master narrative of Europe's civilising mission, as did the *exotica* (in anthropology, archaeology, biology, botany, entomology, zoology) 'safely' displayed for the objectifying gaze of science and alien spectators in the Congo Museum at Tervuren-Brussels (Thys van den Audenaerde 1990, 1994). The Leopoldian urbanising reform of Brussels, and the imperial architecture of the Congo Museum with the geometric layout of its surrounding parks, alike the panoptical exploration of the tropics at display in the museum itself, acted as an epistemological model for the new world order to be brought about in the colony. The museum moreover represented the civilising mission and power of science to decipher the 'other', to penetrate into the enigmas of the 'interiors' of Africa, and to map and bring home the discoveries for further unveiling, scrutiny and classification.

In the extracustomary centres in the colony's hinterland, and later in the newly-built cities, the colonial architecture and neat spatial layout of the residential quarter along with the gardens and roads, were to produce an appearance of order and efficient government. This display of new spatial order was positioning the ruler and magistrate as the watching eye at the very centre of information and ordering. Yet, the panoramic architectural plan of the administrative centres, and the censuses, maps, documents and identity registers and cards, were not primarily meant as straightforward coercion, but as a form of social engineering. They had a discursive character: as Nicholas Thomas (1994: 33 ff.) convincingly argues, colonial rule was unthinkable without classification and territorialisation, implying a geographic and architectonic reinvention or reshaping of social formations.

Traditional rule, however, was deeply alien to this territorial mapping of identity or architectural display of order and government, and its concomitant court justice. Indeed, the Bantu political traditions of the Southern Savanna in Southwestern

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Congo do not draw on orders of visual representation and architectonic spatial models, but on organic, hydraulic and/or animal-totemic metaphors (related to the human body, the palm tree, the analogous rain-river-blood flows, as well as to the 'super-vision' of the leopard; see De Boeck 1994, Devisch 1988, 1993, Devisch and Brodeur 1996). These metaphors inform the political networks and strategies as an order of *events*, *forces*, *sources* and *relations*. Membership of and alliances between groups are not primarily tied to a geographic partitioning, but to filiation or blood ties, and to the mythical or primal space-time order in line with a constantly reenacting cosmogenesis of the hierarchical and reproductive weave between the founding ancestors, their foundational deeds, and the multiple populations and migrations.

The office and function of the chief or traditional political title-holder are far from the ones of a colonial administrator: they are thought of as prior to and as the source of all things, as well as the guarantee of their order. The chief represents and surpasses his subordinates by his twofold function. First, alike his totemic animals (leopard, eagle, crocodile), he is a sovereign *conqueror* and ruler. In his enthronement and rule, by embodying the founding ancestors the chief re-presents or makes present 'the primal space-time order' brought in by immigration and conquest at the origin of rule. In and through his body, particularly his clairvoyance or 'super-vision' and the nightly forces which he shares with his totemic animals, the ruler impersonates the founding ancestor and imposes the perennial hierarchical social organisation, territorial unity and moral order in his society, thereby linking the actual order to the primal and permanent space-time order. Second, the chief acts as the supreme, androgynous *life-giver* or mediator of the (re)generative processes in and between the land, society, man, and the 'the primal womb' in the earth, namely the cosmic egg-like source of life ceaselessly regenerating and emerging. His rule is thus basically one of *regeneration* and *consumption* through guaranteeing human, agricultural and social reproduction and installing commensality in his territory, over against the nightly anti-rule of envy, theft, sexual abuse, sorcery, social rupture. "Since we have settled here, we have been eating well and begetting healthy children", is the core definition of political rule. The elders in council, through their ceremonial exchange of the produce of the hunt, kolanuts, palmwine and authoritative speech, extend the chiefly regenerative capacity into the daily weave of events and relations uniting the various kingroups under common rule.

The textual ordering of 'discovered' land and people

On its behalf, colonial rule did develop as a textual economy disassembling and inserting local realities into a panoptical investigation, recording and regulation. Colonial regulation was first concerned with accessibility and control, or people's

civil identity and geographic confinement to be regulated by a passbook (that had to be taken with on journey). Identity cards and various other forms of registration and documents were bestowing civil identity, hence white civilisational order on the évolué. In the administrators' view, colonial records were to stabilise or confine people geographically, by descent and marriage relations and customs, rules for land use and settlement, for succession to chiefly titles, as well as for matrimonial and private family (namely sorcery) affairs. The regulatory documents were meant to free the évolué from his customary attachments or subjection to traditional collectivism. The census, together with the geographic and later the linguistic-ethnographic map and date recording, were conveying and fixing a taxonomy and geographic compartmentalisation of bush versus new township, and of pure versus mixed languages and ethnic groups. Regulations, stimulations and interventions imposed colonial state power as a text or texture absorbing and domesticating people and events in and by the very *writing* and records of the administration.

The representational achievements of cartography were a major means towards imposing a territorial administrative rule above the traditional one. Patriarchal colonial government and its divide-and-conquer strategy 'discovered', reinvested and/or reinvented partly the political and hierarchical topography, naming the new-found places, and imposing geographical limits and resettlements, as well as its own constructs of regional hierarchies of chiefs upon the alleged incomprehensible traditional topologies and allegiances. Maps and plans, classifications and reports produced scope for enlightenment, surveillance and exploitation as they shaped, described and identified particular populations, arable land and zones for cattle grazing, forests for hunting and areas for mining, as well as social, judiciary and health problems, and strategies and quotas of labour recruitment and compulsory peasant cultivation and work. They thereby created charters for systematic intervention extending ever more into the remote 'interior' (*à l'intérieur*) of the colony, thus attesting the omniscience and paternalist concern of the colonial state. Arrows and numerical data on the maps signified the progress of civilising, and asserted a claim over the available land. The subject nation was encompassed, as a numerical, topographical and visual order of *facts* and *representations*, in books and documents. They enumerated, classified, hierarchised and located a range of frontiers and passage-ways (for products and exports), as well as infectious diseases and infected ecologies, and of dangers and (preventive) remedies or health measures. They offered quantitative information on labour force, riches and the results of industrial capital, or maps regarding villages and local power networks, languages and livelihoods. All this information offered the coloniser a strategic or overarching and a global (or bird-like) perspective on the 'discovered' land, awaiting for a master.

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The unknown realities of the hinterland or the bush, as well as the movements of people internally or across international boundaries, were to be caught and domesticated via the strict geographical order and ever-developing network of new roads and communication routes, clearly identified rivers or other registered ecological features, bounded-off administrative territorial entities, as there were the *secteurs* and *chefferies*, the extracustomary settlements, the workers' camps and company or mission compounds for those who became assimilated, the évolués. Partly disregarding traditional power networks, these geographic entities were caught in the overall territorial and white hierarchical and architectonic web after the model of European states. As a matter of fact, the new frontiers of territories and the epidemiological maps, the massive campaigns in the villages for vaccination, hygiene and medical inspection, as well as the imposition and supervision of production quota by the agronomist (locally called "the one who measures the fields"), and above all the regrouping of settlements and re-siting of villages, invested the colonial administrator of documents as the new, yet alien and unpopular, ruler.

The results of colonial administration at grassroots level were often rather accommodating appearance of the new civilisational order. As a matter of fact, the relocation in properly articulated houses and architecturally designed settlements of a new type, as well as the hygienic prescriptions in the customary and extracustomary worlds, did not succeed to drastically transform people's conduct in health matters. And yet all such results, or lack of them, did not lastingly reorient the colonial strategy, but fostered a strong in-group identification among the colonial personnel. In fact, as Nicholas Thomas (1994) convincingly argues, the colonial effort in relation to the indigenous people was as much a *symbolic* as a practical one. It aimed at making state power perceived, and it legitimated itself as a discursive and efficacious government, like a net or a text covering and putting everything into place. Through the written documents and registrations, colonial state power granted itself the aura of a neutral or non-partisan form of ordering and regulating, outreaching local partial interests, thus in a position to pacify and reform the hinterland.

From the late 1940s, the colony did develop a dual economy and three main stages for living, separated by civilisational pretence and colour-bar: (i) the European expatriates (1 per cent of the population "holding 95 per cent of the capital assets, and [which] accounted for 50 per cent of the national income", according to Leslie (1993: 101)), whose residential quarters, alike the christian missions and the colonists' stations, were witnessing to the welfare state programme in the metropole; (ii) the extracustomary settlements, the mission stations and the suburban cités for the évolués and proletariat which purveyed the former with working hands, and developed in the shadow of the white quarters; from 6 per cent in 1935, they entailed 22 per cent of the population in the late 1950s, with a

steadily growing income and infrastructure; (iii) and the extensive, poor and underdeveloped hinterland, largely excluded from material progress, which at independence entailed some 74 per cent of the men and 82 per cent of the women (Vellut 1982: 408). These settlements were creating new ideological and physical spaces of identity and collective imagination for the converted évolués.

The Independence “in the Air”

From halfway the 1950s, a number of senior school teachers, clerks or church-sponsored évolués and former priest-students gradually moved to sociopolitical leadership functions in the new townships, as well as in the newly founded or reawakened independent churches or messianic movements. The colonial bureaucracy ceaselessly referred to orders from the capital or the metropole, but did not make the ultimate originating power centre visible to the people. In the collective imagination, the figure of the Belgian King, Baudouin, whose youth unseated his function of founding patriarch, was loaded with auspiciousness and emancipatory expectations. In particular in the Katanga/Shaba and in Léopoldville/Kinshasa, almost no clerks or craftsmen pertaining to the all-embracing trusts openly joined these emancipatory calls. Indeed, the workers' aspirations in the imperial trusts were being canalised by the trade unions and the periodical *La Voix du Congolais*, both headed by Europeans and levelled out by paternalism. A patriarchal image of the family and of the (European, post-war) subordination of woman to man and child to adult underscored the évolués' affiliation to the white patriarch. The coloniser would uphold this image when thinking of the sociopolitical order for the modernising Congo within an alleged organic unity of interests between black and white people. This very patriarchal iconography of the family kept a powerful hold over the workers' imagination, and indeed over the male évolués dismissing of women's aspirations from the emancipation struggle.

The évolués' relation to political emancipation was in part a selfcontradictory one, since their entire identity was inconceivable outside their assimilationist striving towards full access to the white world. The puzzle was that the colonial discipline and state, as well as the western ratio and evolutionist prejudices had entered the consciousness and lives of the évolués, as a pervasive and complicated set of regularised forms of conduct, thought and selfrepresentation, turning the évolués into mimesis, hence inner division against both the village life and that of the white master. In the words of René Lemarchand (1992), “deeply ambivalent self-images and identities”, “do's' and 'don'ts' through a complex combination of incentives and penalties” from the colonial state, had come to reorganise the social, pedagogical, agrarian, commercial, and public interactional spaces of colonial

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assimilation. Moreover, the access to political independence, an outcome of bureaucratic contests rather than of community activism and a nationalist revolution, was entailing a profound irreconcilability. It would turn the newly independent state into a repository of white hopes, male aspirations and privileges for the élite, while disconnecting the national leaders from people and their true power base.

White daydream and missed decolonisation

In the 1950s, the upcoming congolese political leaders were facing the immense task to deconstruct the colonial triadic power base in view of reaching true independence. The militant évolués used a triple banner. First, in the terms of the christian, humanist and/or socialist discourse of among the coloniser, they put the right to dignity, social emancipation and equality on the national stage. However, when voiced through the only accessible local missionary press, many of their claims remained white conventional ones. Second, their political aspirations were largely drawing on European traditions as they were, for example, rephrased by Kwame Nkrumah who was advising to draw on democratic nationalist or regionalist claims and wide community audience in view of building up an emancipatory and confrontational force in politics. The upcoming élite uncritically spelled these claims out in the colonial ideological discourse, associating modern economic development with the gradual political emancipation-to-be of the cohesive or stable nation. Thereby, they were made the accomplice of the modernising and authoritarian endeavour of the white welfare and nation-state, however so much alien to people at grassroots level and to their muted aspirations for winning hold again over their land, kinship and marriage rules, culture and own ideas. Third, in the terms of Bantu traditions, they favoured a palaver model of negotiation, ceaselessly coopting 'brothers' and 'doing things with words'. They were namely striving at a kinbased leadership and counselling traditions which the coloniser was at odds with. Congolese leaders remained impervious to the subtle diplomatic indirect talk of the colonial ruler, and ignored all of the imperial bureaucracy and industrial networks of the colonial state. In their proper home region, the new leaders were increasingly mobilising their clientele on ethnic grounds, in view of gaining access to the national political tribune and its white institutions, which they meanwhile were led to question through their very nationalist and emancipation militancy. They were also relying on the burgeoning political awareness in the suburban zones.

For their selfmonitoring leadership to succeed in their own milieus, the évolués felt tempted to particularise their political discourse and programme. Since christian values aimed too much at equality among the converts and submission to the missionary authority, the christian horizon proved unfit for mobilising a committed

audience and founding a new network of political allegiances. Therefore, these new leaders did increasingly draw on or even invent regional and ethnic peculiarities. Some did resurface discredited 'pagan' institutions or practices (for example, many went polygamous), and a genesis narrative of regional unity to offer a mobilising horizon for common political interests. But paradoxically the narrative of regional unity to be incorporated, through the delegates, in the nation-state was mute about the local people's concrete history. It excluded the traditional title-holders from the course to national power. The évolués ceremonial display of seniority and of rhetorical skills at meetings in their private homes and bars, in a sphere of rejoicing and with a great deal of pomp, offered replicas to the public celebrations and many inaugurations that the colonists had invented in the administrative centres, as well as to the latter's omniscient and omnipresent administration. And moreover, the upcoming Congolese leaders lacked the finances to forcibly organise the political campaign.

The évolués' emancipatory aspirations did not very much tie in with christian and pragmatic concerns with the daily needs of "food, schools, roads, housing, and sewage", or with the capitalist law of the market and scientific rationality or progress, which had proved to act 'against the native'. They, however, called for moral reparation of their freedom and dignity, and started to express their emancipation claims through precocious organisation, like in the independent churches, through some strikes, and in particular through entertainment in songs and the bars. There, they would mock at the racial inequality and white privileges, and explore ways to capture authority on the national scenes. They had to invent ways to draw on the consent and expectations of rural and suburban people, with whom they had broken culturally and in part socially. The call for *Dipanda* became openly voiced from the summer of 1958 onwards, which turned out to be less than two years before actual independence.

At independence, 30 June 1960, the intellectual and commercial petty bourgeoisie was all too small to replace the vast colonial ruling class and their paternalist system. Decades of authoritarian colonial rule had not prepared the populations and their spokesmen for political autonomy within a modern and vast multi-ethnic state. And the colonised had developed so many skills to withdraw from concrete involvement with the state authorities. The emerging nation was at a loss to yield from its midst the necessary executives, modern knowhow, collective identity, and a vast literate populace for setting up a modern democracy and inventing a multifold relation to a nation-state meant to meet local needs and concerns. As a matter of fact, its Constitution was very much a white document, itself a replica of the Belgian one. The new state was soon unable to uphold an encompassing administrative fabric in the absence of its twin provision, namely taxes and huge economic or mining capital. Unlike for the anticolonial mobilisation, the

postindependence ruler, namely the so-called élite in the white urban institutions, was lacking in the heart of power any archive of popular memory, as well as any appealing mythology necessary for raising a national consciousness, for the collective expelling of the colonial traumas, and calling for a forward-thrusting journey to autonomy. The national elections proved unfit to rouse a coalition of regionally and ethnically based political parties vested in a well-defined political mandate. They fell short of mobilising public consent strong enough for the national delegates to claim control over the nation and the army, in the name of the very sovereignty of the populations. The Republic would soon lack the means to lastingly sustain rural development; for feeding its cities, it became deadly dependent on import and foreign valuta.

Casting away the Colonial Order

Five years after independence, facing a disunited country and numerous rebellions, Mobutu's military coup of 24 November 1965 was to restore order, law and prosperity.² From 1967, the pervasive nationalist and millenarist 'Resorting to Authenticity' (*Recours à l'authenticité*) movement aimed at an overall face-lift of the state institutions and a dignifying of the public selves casting away the colonial whitening. The president's voice on the radio and TV each morning and noon, convoked people to engage in productive work and civil service, helping the nation to do away with the colonial legacy and developing its own revolutionist way. Inebriated with its early millenaristic success, the Second Republic dared to nationalise all public institutions inherited from the colony: state administration, media, industry, commerce, army, education, youth movement, medicine. They were all very dependent on foreign expertise and control, imported equipment and oil, and above all on huge capital from the trusts' mineral exports (still in foreign hands) and international aid.

On 27 October 1971, Congo was renamed Zaire and the major cities with colonial names were again called after their precolonial or 'authentic names'; the zaire became the new national currency, and this name was also given to the river (one of the world's greatest) interconnecting and draining most of the country. From now, institutions inherited from the colony, like the schools, were to be adapted to the mental and social structures of the people, and to stop the whitening of identity through ideas and manners from the west, like through the christian names and European dress. The divides brought about by the colonial hierarchy between white

² The complex power struggles of the First Republic (1960-65), as well as of the Second Republic (1965-90) are already abundantly dealt with by Colette Braeckman (1991), Gauthier de Villers (1995), Nguza Karl I Bond (1982), Michael Schatzberg (1988) and Jean-Claude Willame (1992).

and black, évolué and villager, christian and pagan, as well as in the wake of independence by tribalism, were being levelled out in a new filiation emerging from the vital words of the Founder and Father of the New Nation. These first years of intense campaigns gave people a sense of nationhood while offering them full dignification and an expectation of equal chances, no longer as évolués, but as citizens of the one country (everyone being called now *citoyen, citoyenne*) and militants of the one party, namely the MPR (*Mouvement populaire de la révolution*, People's Movement of the Revolution).

The building up of nationhood as a cult of its leader turned the missionary theocentred credo into a divinising personality cult of the president, the Father of the Nation, the Great Steersman (*le grand timonier*). By becoming also the founder of the party-state, the president of the Republic thereby assumed and embodied the total reality of power. Yet autocratic rule would show off soon 'as a response to division', not its cause. First formed as a 'corps of volunteers' for defending the nation and arousing the national consciousness, the MPR was called to bundle the revolutionary energies and endorse the militants' sense of commitment to the nation, the 'God of the Bantu' and the "spirits of the ancestors'. The corps had also the task to foster 'vigilance' in relation to those failing to 'align'. Alike the founder, it was allowed to use violent intimidation, if needed. The party-state could initially foster general national enthusiasm and principally Third World praise, in particular for its effort to do away with "tribalism, injustice, moral deprivation, political irresponsibility" (Presidential address 20 May 1968; Mobutu 1975: vol.1, 304-311). Its nationalist revolution was considered resonant with Nyerere's *Ujamaa*, as well as with Senghor's African Socialism and *Négritude* cultural movement.

Latently, the christian legacy so central in the colonial memory was being recaptured. About all political personalities until the 1980s had been educated in the christian mission schools before independence. The heralds of the Resorting to Authenticity doctrine, Engulu Baanga Mpongo and Sakombi Inongo, have been largely drawing on their christian school training. At the peak of contest, presidential speeches were making an overlap between Christ Saviour and his Apostles, on the one hand, and the One Party Rule of both its Founder-Messiah and the Party's Central Committee, on the other hand (Presidential address 15 August 1974; Mobutu 1975: vol.2, 526-527). As Honoré Vinck (1995: 395) poignantly argues in his thematic comparison of the colonial schoolbooks from 1930 on with the today textbooks of the party and the school: "The President himself used more and more Biblical references like: 'We have patiently elaborated a document, I am speaking about the 'Manifeste de la Nsele', which is our 'Sermon on the Mount'". During the 1973-74 nationalisation of the school system, submission to the head of state was called for in line with the former teachings of

the missionaries, fostering faithful adherence to public authority. As Vinck (1995: 397) reports, the second National Synod of the Zairian protestant church, seduced by the president's blend of political and religious appeal, confirmed its support: "As in the colonial period, we have to respect the authorities. According to the teaching of the missionaries, we must continue to love and to respect our authorities. [...] Thank God for President Mobutu. God is Sovereign, it is He who gave us the President of the Republic. He [God] knows what He is doing by giving us this man. Should we oppose a gift of God?"

Presidential address for huge meetings of party-members, on the Nsele foundational land of the party, became a most forceful liturgy of nation building, and of salvation from the colonial wounds and postcolonial evils. The mass meetings took place at the fishing-village of Nsele on the Zaire river at some 60 km from Kinshasa. There, a Taiwanese cooperation (replaced by a Chinese one, after the president's visit to Mao) was building a harbour, a presidential palace, a farm, and a huge meeting ground. It was designed as the birth- and meeting place of the new organic nation-state, the "new revolution through progress". It acted as the cradle of the MPR, considered as the one connective flow spreading out via the majestic Congo/Zaire river and its many branches into the gigantic country. Alike the river flow, the MPR had the mission to unify the many populations of the country and to revitalise, hence ritually cleanse the various parts of the national body. Moreover, in the ideological campaign for authenticity and the rituals of national spectacle, the president was, in line with kingly references to Leopold II, being dignified as bearer of all authority. The palace and private church, alike for the King, became imports of the new empire-in-the make. Alike the Belgian Queen, the First Lady was visiting hospitals and giving money for the sick; *Fonds Reine Élisabeth* was now followed by the *Fondation Mama Mobutu*. "The eldest son of the President, in the heyday of the Second Republic, sat up aside of his father on a second throne, acting like a Royal Prince. The presidential decrees were introduced by the words 'It has pleased the Citoyen President', referring to the papal court style" (Vinck 1995: 397).

The Second Republic turned the school into a tool of national revolution. Yet, it was putting the interests of the party above everything and all, without recognising its own vehement rehearsing of patriarchal privilege, reminiscent of the colony. New textbooks were written; lessons on christian religion were forbidden at school and replaced by teachings of mobutism, the official state ideology. As Vinck (1995: 400) remarks:

history books were rewritten and very similar epithets as in the old colonial books appeared, this time with an application to the President. Representatives of the Department of Education, strongly controlled the application of the propaganda rules. The

achievements of the Whites were represented now as exploitations and humiliation. The colonial period was the 'Heart of Darkness' and the new regime had liberated the Zairians from the colonial slave trade. An array from wonderful events and realisations profitable to the people were summed up: the electric power central of Inga, the bridge over the Zaire river at Matadi, the steel plant at Maluku etc. All splendid goods, thanks to the New Regime. New money was introduced. *Corvées* and taxes were highly glorified as voluntary apports to the welfare of the nation. Healthcare was praised as a gift of the head of the state.

Initially, the authenticity programme was successful as a mere *rite de passage*, but disastrous both economically and socially. Ostentation and magniloquence were soon to replace concrete political engineering and justice. The choreographing of crowd spectacle and virtuoso orchestration by the party-state surely cleansed people's memory and self-image as colonised and 'underdeveloped', but the party denied their very individual rights and competence, and their idiosyncratic experiences. Already during its initial millenarist appeal, the party stifled the emergence of any personal or regional discourse or identity using sources from the ancestral past, or disclosing one's frustrations and disempowerment due to the authenticity movement itself and its many abuses against individuals and local traditions or hierarchy. From the late 1970s, the disempowered people felt more and more reluctant to the authenticity nationalism, because it made them potentially accomplices of the militants' self-serving that ruined the nation. The commoners and in particular women learned to keep their tongues until after the revolution by the party-state, or to talk of emancipation only in the independent healing churches which arose by hundreds on the ruins of the state and of modernity's pretention at general welfare. In the 1980s, the mimetic compliance would end in exhaustion, and people would refuse to ambiguously cooperate in their own dispossession as historic agency. For it is the future in which both men and women fully participate, not so much the past, that is at stake in the contest over which memories survive, and which traditions are empowered and transformed (McClintock 1995: 328, 386).

Conformity's exhaustion is one reason why, from the late 1980s, public institutions are losing their credibility. Overcrowded schools, underequipped medical facilities, and disintegrating government administration and court justice no longer provide the city populace with essential services; no-one invests any time in these institutions, except in order to try and collect some short-term benefit. Even colleagues of the same institution discourage each other from taking one or another professional initiative. Public administration no longer functions and its erosion only serves to amplify the widespread social paralysis. "The country has died" (li.,

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boka ekufi), is a recurrent theme in contemporary songs. People who for decades have been subjected to false orders and messages are no longer capable of showing, at least in the public domain, any respect towards the alien person's rights and property. Government, if any, is directed more and more by provisional solutions, denial of problems, resignation, and inertia. Official documents and papers - travel permits, driving licenses, resident permits, court claims, vehicle registration - cannot be obtained except by going through friends of friends and paying a compensation 'for costs' and 'for beans for the children'. Since the end of 1991, many civil servants do nothing more than make an appearance before the director, spending the rest of the day milling around with colleagues in the courtyard. Each morning, road works employees gather in front of their garages, while their broken down bulldozers and other equipment are strewn about construction sites where children play on them.

Without earlier experience of a nationalist struggle or liberation movement, the authenticity nationalism was without a grassroots activism and a people committed to both male and female hopes. The colony has left no common horizon and coherent symbols other than alien ones, like the Belgian King, the nation, the constitution, the parliament, the court of justice, the bible, the school, medical care, progress, modernisation, liberation, comfort. By its very scope, the Resorting to Authenticity campaign urged the dismantling of the colonial myths and patriarchy. By its very nature, colonisation had omitted to rehearse any local political foundational discourse, instance or myth from among the colonised. Today critiques in Kinshasa complain that, notwithstanding the authenticity campaign, the Zairian nation has still remained without a founding myth and national identity other than the privileged minority's passion for autocratic masculine power and materialist gain, but unable to bring a full national revolution in their train. The authenticity claim appeared as a millenarist spectacle for the masses and its leaders, in a reciprocal seduction. For protecting its privileges, this minority self-serving ruling class did soon abandon the masses and, as in the colony, left them without voice and underdeveloped (Mumbanza 1982: 180). As political project from above, the party-state, alike the court justice were colliding with the capitalist selfish interests of the self-appointed and often quite uncultured male leaders, as popular critique suggested by giving them the ambivalent name of *dinosaurs*. In fact, for mainstream people the authenticity project became never a truly emancipatory one. It called for resorting to an undefined foundational time, without roots in people's centuries-old local political, social, and cultural traditions or cosmologies, and with no other future than the one defeating the disempowered people.

"The storm of progress" (McClintock's expression (1995: 394)), fuelled in the 1970s by large export cash, as well as the one of national liberation through the authenticity quest, is now over. In the 1980s, the party-state was to abandon the

fata morgana of capitalist progress. It turned to a disavowed radicalisation of caesarian or neo-patrimonial rule power and clientelistically structured networks (Lemarchand 1992). In the 1990s, the collapse of the western credo of capitalist progress, now meeting the limits of the world's natural resources, as well as the toppling of the Soviet bureaucratic and military empire, dragged down two master teleologies of progress. The flows of military-industrial 'development aid' are since then cut off, thereby adding to the Zairian political scene's disarray, as well as to the bankruptcy of the national coffers and the state institutions.

Towards a New Crucible for Nationhood

Towards the end of the 1980s, *glasnost* spread a mood of liberation over Africa, yet locally political malaise intensified. During the first months of 1990, all over the country, state authorities invited people to express freely their disillusion with the oppressive party-state. In memoranda, people did not hesitate to reject the state, the army, the country's educational and economic organisation. Echoing this massive airing of grievances across the country, the presidential address of 24 April 1990 announced the dissolution of the MPR, the single national party. The inauguration of multiparty democracy radically changed the political scene and the whole horizon of public life in Zaire. The President's subsequent denial or correction, a week later, of this new course was unable to halt the march towards democracy already in progress: numerous parties and new political organisations were founded almost immediately and a relatively free and varied press sprang up, albeit with a heavily moralising character.

Are the national leaders, alike the state institutions, not caught up between two worlds and paralysed in a no-man's land without future ? To become successful heirs to the colonial reformist modernisation project, the élite was to integrate not only the coloniser's knowledge and skills, but also the collective unconscious of a eurochristian background in the west. The latter had been moulded since centuries by the judeo-christian concept of God-King of mankind, as well as by its creed of paradise, loss ('fallen nature, fault, needs, Devil'), redemption and the eschaton, calling western man to travel the self-ennobling road of progress, the journey forward of Salvation, of the Enlightenment or of the Dialectic. The coloniser set up a state to function with a well-developed local bourgeoisie as historic agency for deploying modernity. Thus, the évolués were made into converts to christian modernity and into westernised bystanders to industrial imperialism and the country's dispossession. Calling for a revolutionary nationalism, the Second Republic and its Resorting to Authenticity lacked any vision to excavate from precolonial memory people's own encompassing horizon of higher truth or collective empowering. This lack could not at all be compensated for by mass

rallies of national spectacle, or by nationalist talk on the radio and a few state symbols, mostly of white origin. The public institutions went bankrupt or turned into abuse: as a colonial inheritance, the white document and report as the very central devices of (post)colonial administration and court justice were being turned into means of power and money by the functionaries, and means of disempowerment and resistance of the people. Till the late 1980s, all modernisation theories praised the exogenous approach to development, namely of rupture with the past and innovation through white education and import of models, experts and means from the north. As Axelle Kabou's pamphlet (1991) states, the irony is that these theories and projects contributed to "developing Africa's underdevelopment".

Writing on the postcolonial state in Africa, Mbembe correctly underlines the extent to which the state, within the dominant context of the fight for survival, is seen from the perspective of the *politics of hunger* and thus becomes the preeminent *alimentary space*: "the state and its public services and police and military forces are perceived as both the source of foodstuffs and the instruments of extortion. They constitute the organisational loci of the forces of satiety and famine" (Mbembe 1985: 234-235; my translation). As De Villers has remarked, this "generalisation of the 'politics of the stomach' has completely disqualified the powerful and wealthy elite, and has undermined any legitimacy from the social hierarchy, thus provoking total confusion insofar as values are concerned" (1992: 91; my translation).

Linked to food and constraints of giving, sorcery (Fisiy and Geschiere 1993), and the 'night' (De Rosny 1992) are the categories people resort to for qualifying the entanglement of themselves and authorities into a common dead end. With the fading away of collective ideals and public ethics, the collective imaginary resorts to a dual worldview, where the anguish for evil and utopian dream are like two reverse sides of the same coin. Indeed, the recent lawlessness and disillusionment with the party-state have in fact allowed for the reemergence of hopes and ideals belonging to the colonial period; and indeed, some would call for a new form of colonial government, or for a return to the village, now called *Mputu*, the term used for the place where the first white men had originated, that is from the other side of the *River of Salt*, namely the Ocean, associated with the ancestral world.

The Dawn of a New Cosmology and Communitarian Ethics

In the early 1990s, through the waves of demonstrations, riots and massive uprisings, suburban people counteract the (post)colonial call towards western modernisation. Yet in a more latent way, they are breaking down the enlightenment and bourgeois regime of white ratio, as well as of the productivist work ethos and profit making, the capitalist maximisation calculus of investment

over time, and the capitalist consumerism imposed by colonialism and its heirs. Suburban people challenge the increasing oppositions of worlds and the false hope in the west's promises of development aid. Adepts of healing churches are disposed to break with western ideals of modernity and seek to restore aspects of the lineage mode of production and family solidarity patterns; they increasingly tend to confine matters of conjugality, education and health with the more inward-turned maternal domain. They speak of a *villagisation* in town, that is the revaluation of the small neighbourhood of a few matricentred households (a vicinity comprising some twenty houses along a road, or circumscribed by interconnected streets) as a locus for nesting, social solidarity in the daily struggle for survival and protection against the whims of jealousy, monetary devaluation, street violence and abusive state institutions. It involves no less than a moral revaluation of one's place in the *cit *, as mediated through a new sense of neighbourhood, communalism or communitarian power. Although it does not actually entail a physical return to rural village life, this sociocultural rooting in the (sub)urban space is drawing on ancient habits and the collective unconscious, as well as on an ethics of matricentred solidarity. Ritual specialists, prophetic healers, pastors or priests are called upon to seal off the family space, and to shape controllable passageways from this domain of reproduction and kin to the realm of economic and political morals and transactions.

The *villagisation* is gradually furthering a cultural critique, a critical apprehension of the postcolonial situation from within its own episteme: prior to fighting one another as consumers of modern cash goods and users of modern public institutions in the survival struggle and bitter disillusion with the vanishing utopia of mass-consumption prosperity and the 'white document', suburban neighbourhoods and rural communities are increasingly re-exploring in their daily care for the children, and in the healing churches their genuine sense of communality, their collective memory stored in body techniques and sensuous culture, while working towards a new social ethic and life space. Elders, diviners, healers, prophets in healing churches, and popular songs speak of the 'disease of money': they refer to the frustrations of contact with capitalism and the vices of possessive individualism while condemning the schools of privileged minorities, joblessness, severe income disparity, miserable housing, and mass hunger. Additionally, chaotic public affairs, displaced persons, the breakdown of family solidarity, the insubordination of youth, as well as AIDS - the experience of the contradictory social realities of capitalism and urbanisation - are all labelled by the diviners and healers as 'diseases of the city' or 'of the whites'.

People straddle worlds through hybridity or the imaginary transgression of codes, like in the utopian fields of humour, daydream, glottophagia. Hybridity in many

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cultural expressions is blurring the tradition-modernity, Bantu-western, precapitalist-capitalist oppositions. Songs on the radio today in vernacular languages and along old rhythms that moreover recall both the collective frenzy and euphoria in the bars of the 1970s and 1980s, as well as village festivities or rituals, are now unsettling the reformist voices of the (post)colony which had been connecting city life with French speech and *étiquette*, with school education and the petty bourgeois life style, or with documents of court or administration, alike with the well-equipped services of biomedicine. The current glottophagious reinvention of a kinois French colloquial language and of narrative styles in the songs and the newspapers, vitiate the modernist master-tales about the literate African citydweller over against the retrograde and illiterate villager. Through glottophagia in songs and humour, people of various layers invent the many forms of a hybrid and subversive symbolic capital in the absence of economic capital (Apter 1993: 45).

The proper feminine spaces (namely the house, the foodmarket, and the fields) are bringing forth a new communitarian ethics. People feel more and more united around a common issue: poverty and the bitter struggle for survival. The crisis in the 1990s seems to have lowered and levelled almost everyone. Today there is no middle class: “all have become again part of the populace, sharing the same frailty, united by the same economic insecurity” (Ciervide 1992: 22). After the lootings or Luddist outbreaks in the major towns of September 1991 and January 1995 (Devisch 1995), it is around mother figures that neighbourhood and food market networks are strengthening themselves. Alike the food market zones, the domestic and horticultural space of the women constitute the preeminent feminine domain of sociability. These spaces sharply contrast with the public and rather masculine zones of anonymous mingling without either personal communication or law. Many of the women in the suburbs now cultivate cassava, maize, and peanuts on small plots of ground on the outskirts of town. Men and boys have no role there other than as porters, helping the women, or being their substitute workers. The market and the field are the ‘exterior’ habitat of women, thus granting the public area a minimum of domesticity, and at the same time providing an affective boundary to the rather anonymous public area.

Women form the majority and are often the principal animators of the christian prayer groups, or of the basic christian communities, as well as of the healing churches (Devisch 1996). Many prophets and healing churches act as purveyors of new forms of moral accountability. In their preaching and etiological assessment of ills and societal disorder, prophets suggest that the destiny of the one is linked to the state of sin or of grace of all of God’s people. Some healing churches offer a ‘plural etiology’ of the vices and dangers of present urban life.

In the absence of state institutions and court justice, the established christian churches, through prayer groups and basic communities, enable the populace to express some of its concerns. Through exorcising materialist greed and westernisation of public *mores*, or even state politics, as “the work of *sataani* and his very ‘lineage’ members”, the healing churches develop a most forceful critique of the catastrophic collusion between economic modernisation and sociocultural dispossession or alienation. At the same time, through collective trances and ‘christian’ forms of telepathy and clairvoyance in the name of the holy spirit, the churches explore ways towards domesticating or taming these modernising and secularising forces: they set up a space-time order as brethren and sisters, namely a communalism that escapes the lived reality of a deeply divided *res publica* partly made white. The almost psychopathic extravagance of the prophets’ conduct, dreams and christian messages related to the holy spirit (itself lacking colour and form), elicits the belief in their truthfulness at the very moment of dematerialising the real, on the one hand, whilst it witnesses to the dislocating or disruptive nature of the christian and colonial encounter, on the other. The prophets witness how much people’s political and social disempowerment frees them culturally from (post)colonial bourgeois hegemony: whilst celebrating in their trances the mobility and indeterminacy of capital’s flux, their communalism manifests a radical cultural ‘difference’ or immunity with regard to modernity’s greed and capitalist class divides, all dismissed as the work of *sataani*.

The healing churches hasten and mould a newly emerging mentality, rejecting and protecting against the present lethal order of things. The coming of the holy spirit represents healing and an end to misfortune. In this way these churches transform a situation of failure and suffering into an opportunity for grace. This is an abrupt and innovative break with the traditional logic of affliction through bewitchment; the holy spirit bestows its vital breath and energy as a gift on those it chooses.

Kinois people say that it is within these rather critical brotherhoods and sisterhoods that will emerge “a new ethics of the person, of care for public money, of social rights, and why not, of progress... And from among these people will come the leaders of tomorrow”. A lay committee chosen from among the basic christian communities was able to mobilise the March of Hope on 16 February and 1 March 1992 (De Dorlodot 1994). The refusal by the Kinois population in early 1993 of the five million zaire note, the Marches of Hope, followed by the Dead-Town Days initiate a new history: of a people in pain, yet discovering in its midst the seeds of a qualitative change that breaks away from the utopian vision of political parties and healing churches. This sense of community and shared hope, and the recapturing of village ethics and cosmology, perhaps explain the passionate patience of the Kinois people.

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