# Centrifugal forces of decolonization (1957 – 1960)

## Urban sites of political ethnicization

At the end of the Second World War, the architects of Belgian colonial policy asserted that decolonization would occur on the centenary of the founding of the Congo Free State, in 1985. But their belief that they could determine the pace of political development within the Belgian empire turned out to be a fantasy of control detached from realities on the ground. <sup>2</sup>

After the School War, several conflicts began to come to a head at once: the dispute between Brussels and Léopoldville on how much political participation colonial subjects ought to be granted and how far imperial integration ought to extend; ethnic and regional antagonisms within the vernacular population and increasing splits among the *évolués*; and discord among Congolese party leaders on the timing of independence, relations with Belgium and the territory of the future state. In the three years between 1957 and 1960, centrifugal forces of decolonization came into effect in the Belgian Congo. While Patrice Lumumba was to champion the unity of the Congo, most members of his generation believed the colony ought to be split into smaller territorial units. Above all, though, a vernacular elite that had been so close to the colonial state was transformed into an anti-colonial elite that rapidly assumed the leadership of the independent Congo.

If we are to interpret the Belgian Congo's abrupt politicization, the dizzying pace of its transformation into an independent country and its postcolonial crises as consequences of late colonial elite-making policy, we must first examine how Belgian colonial policy responded to the political manifestos produced by Léopoldville's vernacular elite. While decolonization forged ahead in many parts of Africa, the Belgian colonial government persisted in its efforts to keep the new realities in check through a series of graduated reforms. Once again, the goal was to prevent the overthrow of the colonial system through targeted tweaks, by granting Congolese greater opportunities for political participation, enhancing their freedom of expression and extending their freedom of assem-

<sup>1</sup> This was the forecast made by Georges Caprasse in an issue of *Courrier d'Afrique* of 1946. See J. Van Bilsen, *Vers l'indépendance du Congo et du Ruanda-Urundi* (Kinshasa: Presses universitaires du Zaïre, 1977).

**<sup>2</sup>** Frederick Cooper comes to a similar conclusion in light of attempts at political reform in French and British Africa after 1945; Cooper, *Africa*, 38.

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bly,3 But frictions arose between Liberal colonial minister Auguste Buisseret and Governor General Léon Pétillon, who requested that Brussels put forward a detailed vision of the Belgian Congo's political future. Pétillon's urgent calls for a close political association between metropole and colony, as supported by the Belgian crown, was rejected by the Socialist-Liberal government.<sup>4</sup> Instead it prioritized implementation of the long-shelved plan to gradually allow Congolese to assume political responsibilities.

Since 1948, expert commissions in Léopoldville and Brussels had discussed drafts of the statut des villes, which was intended to give Congolese in towns and cities their first experience of political participation. This focus on urban areas reflected a Belgian conception of how political maturity develops. In Belgium too, forms of political participation had first existed at the municipal level, before being gradually extended to other territorial units. The statut des villes, finally enacted in March 1957, was more far-reaching and less paternalistic than earlier plans, which had envisaged mayors appointed by the provincial governors and separately administered Congolese and European districts.<sup>6</sup> Instead, given the existence of an increasingly politicized vernacular elite, the colonial government adopted a system of "consultations," which enabled all male residents of twenty-five and above to vote in elections to conseils communaux, which in turn appointed a mayor. Initially these elections were restricted to Léopoldville, Elisabethville and Jadotville.

To the Congolese elite, this reform seemed grossly outdated. First, the news had spread that Kwame Nkrumah had become the first African prime minister of an independent state south of the Sahara in March 1957. The fact that the statut des villes was directly inspired by British post-war reforms to the local administration in east Africa, which were significantly more restrictive than those in Ghana, reinforced the impression of a measure out of keeping with the times.<sup>7</sup> Second, around the same time the first elections had taken place in neighbouring Brazzaville in the wake of the loi-cadre reform, through which the French empire shifted away from its policy of integration. Paris now transferred administrative and financial powers to the various French overseas territories, including areas such as social policy, which had come to cost France dear due to African demands for equality. Yet this reform still sent a major political signal: the inhab-

<sup>3</sup> Correspondence between the colonial minister and governor general, 28 November 1956, AA/ PPA/3478.

<sup>4</sup> Stenmans and Reyntjens, La pensée politique, 23.

**<sup>5</sup>** Young, *Politics*, 40 – 41.

<sup>6</sup> On the following remarks, see ibid., 112-117.

<sup>7</sup> Mutamba-Makombo, Du Congo belge, 235.

itants of the various territories could choose their own government based on universal suffrage and these administrations enjoyed broad autonomy despite the presence of a French governor holding ultimate authority.<sup>8</sup>

The condemnation of the *statut des villes* as a restricted form of democratic participation by the ABAKO, which had been critical of colonialism in its "Counter-manifesto," was as predictable as its electoral success in Léopoldville. Under the leadership of Joseph Kasa-Vubu, a former seminarian now employed as a bookkeeper in the General Government's finance department, the ABAKO cultural association had detached itself from the influence of the Belgian Jesuits and transformed itself into a political advocacy group. Anticipating the reforms ushering in political participation in the cities, originally announced in 1952, Kasa-Vubu advanced the Bakongo's claim to leadership; this group made up 60 percent of Léopoldville's heterogenous population. The ABAKO thus tried to influence, to the benefit of the Bakongo, appointments to posts within the administrative apparatus of the Congolese city districts. In the early 1950s, this spurred the elite representatives of other regional and linguistic backgrounds to set themselves up as the spokesmen of numerically important population groups.

Led by a holder of the carte du mérite civique, the group of incomers from upstream regions, referred to as Bangala, were organized into the Liboke Lya Bangala. The Fédération de l' Équateur et du lac Léopold II (FEDEQUALAC), meanwhile, united several associations of the Mongo. Its members included Antoine-Roger Bolamba, editor-in-chief of the Voix du Congolais, Paul Bolya, a trainer at a vocational school for doctor's assistants, and Joseph Iléo, co-author of the Manifesto published in Conscience Africaine. 10 In Léopoldville, the language of the Mongo functioned as a means of distinction vis-à-vis the Bangala, though they were often identified with the latter because both came from the region east of the capital and had been educated by Scheut missionaries. This state of affairs facilitated strategic alliances between the Bangala and Mongo against the Bakongo, whose elite representatives, organized in the ABAKO, had been socialized in Jesuit schools. The founding of the regionally defined Fédération Kwango-Kwiloise (FEDEKWALEO) was initiated by Gaston Midu; like ABAKO president Kasa-Vubu, he had been granted immatriculation. The Fédération Kasaienne, an alliance of thirty associations of immigrants from the Kasai region, was headed by Eugéne Kabamba, an office assistant working for the General

<sup>8</sup> On the loi-cadre law, see Cooper, Africa, 77-81.

<sup>9</sup> Markowitz, Cross and Sword, 150.

<sup>10</sup> Young, Politics, 249.

Government and former president of both the ASSANEF and the *Cercle d'Études et d'Agréments*.

In comparison with the ABAKO, which was supported by a spatially proximate and linguistically homogenous population, these regional assemblages were more heterogeneous and thus more fragile. This made itself felt at elections. In December 1957, 8 out of 10 mayoralties and 130 out of 170 council seats in Léopoldville went to members of the ABAKO. This result changed the associational landscape in the capital once again, prompting Jean Bolikango, who had taught many local members of the elite during his 20 years of teaching at the Scheut mission school of St. Joseph and was chair of influential associations such as the ADAPES, to create the *Interfédérale*. This sought to unite the various regional and ethnic federations to fight future election campaigns, though ultimately unsuccessfully.



Fig. 15: Jean Bolikango, president of the Fédération des Bangala, prior to a meeting of this organization in Léopoldville, 1959.

The *statut des villes* exacerbated the conflict within the capital's *évolué* elite, whose leading figures increasingly engaged in power struggles with one another as the leaders of ethnically and regionally based communities. Educated Congo-

lese were still active in supra-ethnic bodies, such as alumni associations, Belgian-Congolese associations, debating clubs and the recently founded political study circles and trades unions. But the communitization of groups of origin held out a better prospect of success at the local government elections. The micro-cosmos of Léopoldville reflected the heterogeneity of the Congolese population like no other city and was viewed as a laboratory for a colony-wide vernacular elite. It was here that the multifaceted, highly complex and shifting battle lines and alliances that were to shape the frenetic process of decolonization in the Belgian Congo began to emerge. Ironically, it was Jesuit missionary Joseph Van Wing who first drew attention to the fact that this new "ethnonationalism" 11 in the cities would put the future unity of the Congo at risk. He himself had actively supported the establishment of the ABAKO as a means of preserving the Bakongo culture that he had constructed in his anthropological writings. He thus helped propel the "retribalization" of the Congolese elite.<sup>12</sup>

Van Wing's concerns were justified. The local government elections in the southern province of Katanga were subject to similar centrifugal processes as in Léopoldville. Crucially, the statut des villes in the Belgian Congo was introduced in a depoliticized landscape devoid of political parties, while the vernacular population had been shielded from political participation and ideological debates. In Elisabethville and Jadotville too, therefore, those who came out on top politically were the elite representatives of associations that emphasized the regional, linguistic or ethnic commonalities shared by majorities within the local population.<sup>13</sup> In contrast to Léopoldville, where the Bakongo were numerically dominant, elections in Elisabethville and Jadotville were won by representatives of the Baluba, who had immigrated from Kasai province on a massive scale in the wake of industrialization. They took three out of the four mayoralties, stoking latent tensions with long-established groups. That the Baluba already occupied many coveted posts in administrative offices was a result of the education they had received from Scheut missionaries in Kasai province. 14 It was thus from among the Baluba that most of the educated elite of Katanga were recruited; their representatives were not only the first elected mayors but had also made up the majority of évolué association chairmen.<sup>15</sup>

When the statut des villes was extended to four other urban settlements in several provinces in late 1958, the elections in Coquilhatville and Luluabourg

<sup>11</sup> See Lemarchand, Political, 192-197.

<sup>12</sup> Verhaegen, "Les associations congolaises à Léopoldville," 395.

<sup>13</sup> Lemarchand, Political, 193.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 97; Jewsiewicki, "Formation," 329.

<sup>15</sup> Dibwe dia Mwembu, "La formation," 128.

again served as catalysts for ethnically construed antagonisms between two population groups. In Stanleyville, whose population stood out for its heterogeneity, as well as in the ethnically homogenous Bukavu, by contrast, the voting passed off peacefully.

The clear election losers were the interest groups inspired by Belgian political parties, which built on the study circles that emerged during the School War. The Elisabethville-based *Union Congolaise*, which was established by famous lawyer Antoine Rubbens and had a progressive Catholic and supra-tribal orientation, was reduced to an insignificant force. The Action Socialiste, based in Léopoldville, which was affiliated with the PSB and temporarily counted the first Congolese trades unionists among its members, shared the same fate. Not only did the vernacular elite consider the European-led political parties a form of ongoing paternalism, but the ideological nuances of their imported party programmes mobilized few voters. When the Belgian parties finally discovered the Congo, any interest in them had already evaporated.

Furthermore, leaving aside the small number of settlements in which the statut des villes was introduced, the Congolese elite's opportunities for political participation were extended through increased representation on the councils serving the colonial administration. 16 The so-called Conseils de Territoire were initially established at the local level. Europeans, however, remained the dominant force on these councils. The reforms to political participation thus by no means assuaged the vernacular elite, instead bringing home to them the limits of their political participation and Europeans' enduring hegemony. Elite Africans viewed the Belgian-Congolese Community, which was still being propagated, as little more than the "community [that exists] between a rider and his horse." Rather than a tool for integrating the Congolese elite into the new colonial political apparatus, the mayoralties thus became a platform for anti-colonial agitators. ABAKO president Joseph Kasa-Vubu was less interested in local government politics in Léopoldville than in achieving independence as rapidly as possible. In his inaugural speech as mayor, he called for general elections and internal autonomy.18

<sup>16</sup> On this reform, see Brausch, Belgian Administration, 48-52.

<sup>17</sup> Young, Politics, 57.

**<sup>18</sup>** Ibid., 16–17; on the politicization of the ABAKO, see Lemarchand, *Political*, 184–190.

## Dissonant Congolese voices and évolués in crisis

Ultimately, the rise of the ethnic paradigm and growing anti-colonial sentiment in the urban settlements also discredited the colonial state's elite-making policy. That this inevitably signified a crisis for the *évolué* concept is evident if we examine the colonial public sphere, where the limits of freedom of expression increasingly began to shift.<sup>19</sup>

As an expression of the Belgian-Congolese Community, as early as 1956 daily newspapers that were mainly read by the colony's Europeans had increasingly begun to attract Congolese readers as well. In the case of the liberally inclined Avenir, based in Léopoldville, a young editorial team, including later autocrat Joseph-Désiré Mobutu, began to report on Actualités Africaines in an eponymous section of the newspaper. Three of these editors, including the younger brother of Thomas Kanza, who had received his academic education in Belgium, established an independent newspaper named Congo in 1957 with logistical support from the publisher of Avenir. "The first Congolese weekly newspaper by Africans"<sup>20</sup> was openly critical of colonialism. The articles in the Voix du nègres section, a conscious allusion to the Voix du Congolais, were attributed to the pseudonymous Mwena-Ditu, a "non-évolué without a voice."<sup>21</sup> They criticized the injustices of the colonial system and also took to task those members of the Congolese elite eager to adapt and close to the colonial state. They thus mocked Antoine-Roger Bolamba, long-standing editor-in-chief of the Voix du Congolais, because he was allowed to give a talk of just ten minutes at the 1957 Congrès international des écrivains et journalistes noirs in Paris. They also attacked Bolamba for his eight-month stint working at the Colonial Ministry in Brussels under the Liberal Buisseret, which they presented as a case of paternalistic fa-

<sup>19</sup> On decolonization and media in Africa, see Chomentowski, Gabrielle, and Leyris Thomas, "Médias et décolonisations en Afrique francophone. Une histoire à écrire," *Revue d'Histoire Contemporaine de l'Afrique* 1 (2021): 1–15. For a case study on journalism and political struggles in the Ivory Coast, see Fierens, Marie, "Journalisme et politique en Côte d'Ivoire (années 1930–1964). Itinéraires croisés d'une profession," *Revue d'Histoire Contemporaine de l'Afrique* 1 (2021). On newspapers and late-colonial politicization in Kenya, see Frederiksen, Bodil F., "'The Present Battle is the Brain Battle': Writing and Publishing a Kikuyu Newspaper in the Pre-Mau Mau Period in Kenya," in *Africa's Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self*, ed. Karin Barber (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

**<sup>20</sup>** To cite this periodical's subheading. See V. Kanza, "Congo, Journal interdit. Philippe Kanza et Mathieu Ekatou ou la genèse d'une presse congolaise libre et indépendante," in *Aspects de la culture à l'époque coloniale en Afrique centrale. Presse. Archives*, eds. M. Quaghebeur, and Bibiane Tshibola Kalengayi (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 165.

vouritism.<sup>22</sup> After just three months, the General Government revoked the provocative periodical's license.

Shortly before, however, Jean Labrique, a retired press attaché to the governor general, had managed to poach a few editors from Congo in order to establish another progressive newspaper. Quinze was published under the auspices of the recently established Agence belgo-congolaise de presse et de documentation and was produced at the liberal Avenir's printing works. This so-called "illustrated African weekly," much like the Congo, provided information on the lives of the first few Congolese who had made the trip to the metropole as musicians, students, and as representatives of associations and trades unions initiated by Belgians. This periodical also published articles by anti-colonial intellectuals such as Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire and Georges Balandier. Quinze informed its readers about the state of decolonization in Africa. It reported on the racist rule of "whites" in South Africa, similar developments in Rhodesia and Kenya, the dictatorial features of Portuguese Africa and the situation of independent Ghana and other territories in the British empire. Light was shed on the political consequences of the French loi-cadre law and on the first democratic developments in the towns and cities of the Belgian Congo. 23 This newspaper was an expression of the fact that after the School War the *cordon sanitaire*, through which Belgian colonial policy had for decades sealed the Congo off from external influences, had finally been breached.

Last but not least, Quinze carried reports on Léopoldville's vibrant cultural life, the latest hits and dances in the bars and night clubs, the winners of beauty contests and their cutting-edge fashion. It provides us with a slice of the Congolese lifeworld, which had previously appeared within the colonial public sphere solely as a negative foil for normative elite discourse. The femmes libres, frowned upon as uncivilized in the Voix du Congolais, were now presented to readers as successful businesswomen. As a fashion designer, divorced seamstress Victorine N'Djoli – who went down in history as the first female Congolese with a driving license -24 now earned as much as an office worker in the administration.25 *Quinze* also makes it clear that the young and sometimes better educated urban dwellers were turning away from the moral discourse of the "perfected black." They were not interested in the fragile respectibility of the official Congolese elite, which, in the form of évolué status, entailed more humiliation

<sup>22</sup> N. n., "Retour au pays," Congo (4 May 1957): 6.

<sup>23</sup> C. Perken, "Où va l'Afrique noire?," Quinze, no. 5 (August 1957).

<sup>24</sup> J. Davier, "Femme au volant," Voix du Congolais no. 108 (March 1955).

<sup>25</sup> J.-J. Kandé, "Elle donne le ton à la mode," Quinze (July 1957).

than privileges.<sup>26</sup> Reading between the lines, what we find is a generational conflict in which the old and new educated vernacular elites of Léopoldville were at odds over behavioural norms and moral values.27

But the colonial government shut down Quinze too after a few issues. The trigger was an article on marijuana consumption in Congolese urban districts, 28 which was viewed as likely to incite readers to try the drug themselves. Its author, Jean-Jacques Kandé, a graduate of the capital's St. Anne's Scheut mission school, ended up in prison without a trial and with no relaxation of the conditions of detention. As a typical representative of the young educated Congolese elite, he had opted not to apply for the carte du mérite civique or immatriculation, which would have ensured better treatment.<sup>29</sup> The editor of *Ouinze*, Jean Labrique, was deported.<sup>30</sup> The colonial government continued to define the limits of freedom of expression in an arbitrary way. The colonial state remained a repressive one.

Against the background of the new – if often short-lived – periodicals, the established press too sought to reposition itself. The Voix du Congolais, which had started life as the voice of the Congolese elite and medium of colonial development, relied on the familiar mix of cautious criticism within the colonial system and educational treatises on the cultural perfecting of the évolués. Its authors continued to champion bourgeois cultural paradigms and gender orders. While for the first time the Congolese man was now being addressed as a political being through reports on elected mayors and political parties, the Voix du Congolais also anticipated the further education for women that was launched in the mid-1950s. Its covers, now optically enhanced with a glossy finish, sometimes featured a group of ladies engrossed in reading.<sup>31</sup> Editorials extolled the "African woman in the modern world," flanked by images of working Congolese

<sup>26</sup> Interviewees of this generation seem to have been quite content to be viewed as "false" évolués by older members of the African elite, as long as they were paid "properly" and could enjoy themselves "properly." See interview with Jean Lema, Kinshasa, 13 August 2010; interview with Camille Auguste Mwissa-Camus, Kinshasa, 24 August 2010.

<sup>27</sup> In the Gold Coast, the different elite generations in the capital, Accra, carried on similar debates, which again emphasized the culture of entertainment. See J. K. Prais, "Representing an African City and Urban Elite. The Nightclubs, Dance Halls, and Red Light District of Interwar Accra," in The Arts of Citizenship in African Cities, eds. R. Fredericks and M. Diouf (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>28</sup> J.-J. Kandé, "Fumeries de chanvres," Quinze (16 August 1957).

<sup>29</sup> N.n., "Jean-Jacques Kandé en prison," Congo (23 August 1957): 2.

<sup>30</sup> Young, Politics, 55.

<sup>31</sup> Voix du Congolais no. 143 (February 1958).

females.<sup>32</sup> By contrast, its authors condemned the fashion shows and beauty contests celebrated in periodicals such as Ouinze or Congo as detrimental to the "civilizing of the woman." When it comes to the appeal of the *Voix du Con*golais as a forum for the vernacular elite's demands, its star had waned in view of the thin pickings from the status debate, the limits of the Belgian-Congolese Community and the sluggish implementation of promised reforms. The typical articles on cultural assimilation increasingly jostled with texts that did not equate civilizing with abandoning one's own traditions but instead championed a middle way. The discovery of the political mobilizing power of ethnic and regional communitization prompted the Congolese elite to write reports on the groups of origin they were now openly representing. The texts produced by editor-in-chief Antoine-Roger Bolamba, who had returned from Brussels by this point, no longer dealt with the perfecting of *évolués*, but instead with the history of the Mongo.<sup>34</sup>

That the supra-ethnic concept of the évolué had lost much of its binding power and promise was discussed openly in new rival publications. Established authors such as Antoine-Marie Mobé now submitted their articles, for example, to Conscience Africaine, if they were not published in the Voix du Congolais or Croix du Congo due to their "excessively" harsh criticisms. <sup>35</sup> Antoine Omari, whose articles in the Voix du Congolais had championed the reform of immatriculation, lamented the "fate of the assimilated" in Avenir's Actualités Africaines section. He contended that while évolué status endowed them with the same obligations as Europeans, they were not granted the same privileges, as evident in persistent legal forms of discrimination such as unequal pay. Omari referred to status-holders as the "sacrificed generation." He also defended the évolués, and thus himself as well, against the accusation that they had "discarded all Bantu customs in favour of a preposterous Europeanization."<sup>37</sup> Omari affirmed that, despite their adaptation to the European way of life, the évolués felt just as at home in the traditional milieu.

<sup>32</sup> M. Colin, "La femme africaine face au monde moderne," Voix du Congolais no. 145 (April 1957).

**<sup>33</sup>** Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> A.-R. Bolamba, "Vie, coutume et mœurs des Mongo de l' Équateur," Voix du Congolais no. 145 (April 1958).

<sup>35</sup> In February 1957, for example, Antoine-Marie Mobé placed a critical article on poor conditions of travel in Conscience Africaine that the Voix du Congolais and Croix du Congo had previously rejected. See correspondence between Croix du Congo and Mobé, January 1957, private archive Antoine-Marie Mobé.

<sup>36</sup> A. Omari, "Le sort des assimilés," Actualités Africaines (10 January 1957).

<sup>37</sup> A. Omari, "Immatriculés ou Fantaisistes?," Actualités Africaines (27 June 1952).

But it was not just against the background of the public revalorization of vernacular traditions that the *évolué* elite came under pressure to justify itself.<sup>38</sup> The aforementioned young generation of educated Congolese in Léopoldville, who were familiar with the limits of legal equality and the undignified application process from their own experience, had nothing but contempt for this rocky road of social ascent within colonial society. "Carte du mérite syphilis," 39 they scoffed. Particularly in the ever more anti-colonial elite milieu of Léopoldville, the flagging interest in évolué status was evident in numerical terms. By 1953, 146 cartes du mérite civique had been issued there, one in four of the total number for the Belgian Congo. 40 By 1958, just 104 further card-holders were added to this figure, only 16 percent of the total number of cards issued. A mere 23 individuals applied in the capital in 1958. A similar picture emerges in the case of immatriculation, granted to 44 individuals in the capital between 1952 and 1954. Four years later, the number had grown to no more than 100 in total. In late 1954, two out of three immatriculated were residents of the capital, but this share had dwindled to 46 percent by the end of 1958. The growing critique of the colonial system even spread to its linchpins. It dawned on the Congolese elite, who had put their labour power at the service of the colonial state and complied with the provisions of the assimilation policy, that future elections could not be won with the évolué concept.

The *Croix du Congo*, the competitor of the *Voix du Congolais* published by Scheut missionaries, also tried to keep pace with political and social change. The newspaper's "Africanization" had been initiated as early as 1955 with the appointment of Jean Lobeya, one of the founding members of *Conscience Africaine*, as its first Congolese editor-in-chief. The radical rupture, however, came in January 1958, when the publication was renamed *Horizons* and a young generation of editors took the helm. Through the input of journalists such as 27-year-old August Camille Mwissa-Camus, 41 who, like the authors of *Quinze* and *Congo*, had attended the Scheut mission schools in Léopoldville, a more combative tone took hold. This periodical continued to view itself as "religious" and "Christi-

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with André Matingu, Kinshasa, 7 September 2010.

**<sup>40</sup>** The following calculations are based on annual statistics produced by the colonial administration: Chambre des représentants, *Rapport 1954*, 103; Chambre des représentants, 1959, 104. **41** By integrating the element "Camus" into his name the author expressed his admiration for writer Albert Camus; interview with Camille Auguste Mwissa-Camus, Kinshasa, 24 August 2010. On his career, see M. Fierens, "Reporting on the Independance of Belgian Congo: Mwissa Camus, the Dean of Congolese Journalists," *African Journalism Studies* 37 (2016).

an,"42 but largely broke away from its original evangelizing mission and committed itself to political emancipation – as a "true fighter for the defence of freedom, truth and justice."43 This reorientation had the blessing of its publishers. The missionaries involved in Catholic Action were not afraid to critique colonialism. The Catholic Church had learned from the School War that the colonial system was neither a prerequisite for, nor guarantee of, successful missionary work,44 What the Scheutists of Léopoldville wanted was for Horizons to plug the gaps left by the ban on Quinze and Congo. 45 The missionaries' diversification of their media offerings in an attempt to advance their evangelizing mission in new ways did not entail changes in the cultural models they propagated urban entertainment culture, for example, was virtually absent from the newspaper. The Catholic associational and periodical landscape continued to champion monogamous marriage and bourgeois gender orders. The fact that women authors now published articles here and there in Horizons reflected the improved educational opportunities for women, which applied in Catholic schools as elsewhere. Articles on the Joys of a Mother within the Family, however, were an indication that even this progressive publication saw the life of the housewife as the ideal state for women. While it welcomed political independence, it was not interested in wives gaining independence from their husbands.<sup>46</sup>

Notions of the "Christian household" continued to be propagated by media associated with Catholic Action. One example of this is the periodical Nos familles congolaises, produced by the Mouvement Familial association, a body founded in 1954 as part of the MOC. In Léopoldville, however, no more than 300 African families joined this organization, which was run by Belgian (women) social workers. In contrast to the huge increase in this mass organization's membership in post-war Belgium, in the colony it reached only the educated and church-loyal elite. Léopoldville was characterized by high unemployment and a constant flow of economic migrants, so it was only the higher-earning elite that was in a financial position to afford the propagandized ideal of the bourgeois nuclear family with its patriarchal gender order. While the new gender re-

<sup>42</sup> Letter from Van Hamme to the governor general, 18 December 1957, KADOC/G/XIII/b/4/2.

<sup>43</sup> C. Mwissa, "Horizons," Croix du Congo (29 December 1957).

<sup>44</sup> On the reorientation of the Croix du Congo, see KADOC/G/XIII/b/4/2.

<sup>45</sup> Internal document of 21 August 1957, KADOC/G/XIII/b/4/2.

<sup>46</sup> On the role of Congolese women in decolonization and the independence struggle, see K. Bouwer, Gender and Decolonization in the Congo. The Legacy of Patrice Lumumba (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). On Andrée Blouin, who worked for the Lumumba government, see A. K. Joseph-Gabriel, Reimagining Liberation. How Black Women transformed Citizenship n the French Empire (Urbane: University of Illinois Press, 2020).

lations became firmly established among Congolese office workers, the majority of the urban population was dependent on subsistence agriculture, women's labour and extended-family networks.<sup>47</sup> Cultural debates, however, had become marginal within the media-based public sphere by the late 1950s. The motto of Ghanaian president Kwame Nkrumah, "Seek ye first the political kingdom," was also a leitmotif for the Congolese elite. Everything was subordinated to achieving independence.

## Stumbling into independence

Against the background of growing politicization and division among the évolués, a failed elite-making policy and the first calls for independence, Belgium got a new government. When the Socialist-Liberal coalition was replaced by a minority PSC government in July 1958, long-standing Governor General Léon Pétillon was promoted to the post of non-party colonial minister. But his enduring commitment to far-reaching political reforms in the Belgian Congo, including greater decentralization of decision-making powers, had attracted criticism not just from the Liberal colonial minister, but even from parts of the PSC. Furthermore, Pétillon was eyed suspiciously as a sympathizer of King Baudouin, who continued to interfere in colonial issues following his much-acclaimed tour of the Congo. Together, the pair championed the idea of a Belgian-Congolese Community and now proposed that it be placed under the guardianship of the Belgian crown.<sup>49</sup> Despite his relative isolation, by convening a groupe de travail Pétillon managed to set the course for a cross-party decolonization policy. The groupe de travail, aiming to draw up concrete proposals on the political future of the Belgian Congo, brought together representatives of the three major Belgian parties in addition to politicians formerly concerned with colonial policy. In light of the inter-party discord thrown up by the School War, the idea was to ensure an "operation of national unity." 50 After just four months, however, Pétillon had to vacate his post at the Colonial Ministry due to the formation of a new governing coalition forged by Christian Social prime minister Gaston Eyskens with the Parti Libéral, though he remained in charge of the groupe de travail. The office of co-

<sup>47</sup> Van Reybrouck, Congo, 348.

**<sup>48</sup>** For an analysis of this dictum and its impact on the decolonization of Africa, see A. A. Mazrui, "Seek ye First the Political Kingdom," in *Africa since 1935*, vol. 8, ed. A. A. Mazrui (Paris: UNESCO, 1993).

<sup>49</sup> See Vanthemsche, La Belgique et le Congo, 127.

**<sup>50</sup>** Ibid., 162; Stenmans and Reyntjens, La pensée politique, 63 and 407.

lonial minister went to Christian Social politician Maurice Van Hemelrijck, who was credited with ending the Belgian School War.<sup>51</sup> For the first time after the debate on Belgium's takeover of the Congo Free State in 1908 and subsequent to the colony's strategically important role during the Second World War, the Belgian Congo emerged as a defining topic in Belgian politics.

In October 1958, the high-ranking members of the *groupe de travail* made a tour through the Congo. There they met with intense criticism. Highlighting the lack of representative spokesmen from all regions, Pétillon had opted not to appoint any Congolese. Instead the *groupe de travail* met with 212 Congolese and 250 European so-called "suitable interlocutors" to gain a sense of what people wanted. The *Présence Congolaise*, a weekly supplement to the Catholic daily *Courrier d'Afrique* aimed at Congolese readers, commented sarcastically on this procedure: much as with the *carte du mérite civique*, the authorities ought to introduce a "card for suitable interlocutors," in order to avoid questioning the "wrong" Congolese. Furthermore, the speech by French president Charles de Gaulle, which he had given a few weeks earlier in Brazzaville, had not escaped the vernacular elite's notice. He had aired the prospect of a referendum for the inhabitants of the French colonial empire that would allow them to choose between immediate independence and greater links with the metropole.

In response to this speech, a group of *évolués* from Léopoldville had submitted a petition to the Belgian colonial minister, who was in town preparing for the *groupe de travail*'s visit. They criticized the limited political participation of Congolese in comparison to the neighbouring French colony, welcoming "the present government's aspiration to decolonize the Congo," but assailing the territory's "politically anachronistic system." They demanded nothing less than "total independence." <sup>55</sup>

The signatories presented themselves to the colonial minister as a united group drawn from the capital's "African elite." In addition to mayors from the ABAKO camp, representatives of the most varied political currents in Léopold-ville had signed the petition. These included the liberal-minded Patrice Lumumba, who had moved to the capital just a year before from Stanleyville to take up a job as the sales manager of a brewery; Joseph Iléo, one of the co-authors of the

<sup>51</sup> Young, Politics, 148.

<sup>52</sup> Vanthemsche, La Belgique et le Congo, 128.

<sup>53</sup> On the composition of this group, see Stenmans and Reyntjens, La pensée politique, 52.

**<sup>54</sup>** Maks, "Une carte d'interlocuteur valable, s.v.p. Je désire être consulté," *Présence Congolaise* (11 October 1958).

**<sup>55</sup>** Letter to Colonial Minister Pétillon, 26 August 1958, quoted in "Importante prise de position des Congolais," *Présence Congolaise*, 30 August 1958, 1 and 7.

Conscience Africaine manifesto, whose roots lay in the progressive Catholic milieu: and Cyrille Adoula, who had by this point made a name for himself as a trades union leader. 56 These three elite representatives founded the *Mouvement* National Congolais (MNC) in autumn 1958 as a response to the groupe de travail with its exclusively European appointees. With its call for national unity, the MNC built on the famous "Manifesto," thus disengaging from the turf wars between supporters of the Bakongo and Bangala within city politics. In line with this, the founding members of the MNC included presidents of a variety of regional or ethnic federations in the capital. Among them were Jean Motingia, founder of Liboke Lya Bangala, and Patrice Lumumba, who had championed the overcoming of "ethnic antagonisms" in his role as chair of the Fédération des Batetela. In a petition to the groupe de travail, the MNC attacked the persistent paternalism of colonial policy and demanded that Congolese participate in the negotiations on the country's political future. The MNC set out its objectives in its founding charter as follows:

The struggle for the Congolese people's immediate acquisition of the basic rights guaranteed in the Charter of the United Nations; [...] resolute efforts to combat all forms of regional separatism; [...] and the attainment of the country's independence through peaceful negotiations and within a reasonable period of time.<sup>58</sup>

With its nationalist agenda, the MNC was an exception among the six parties that used the groupe de travail's visit as an opportunity to make their voice heard by late 1958. Particularly in those urban settlements in which mayoral elections had taken place, political parties emerged that focussed their efforts on ethnically and regionally defined groups of voters. The capital of the eastern province of Bukavu saw the rise of the Centre de Regroupement Africain (CEREA), led by Anicet Kashamura, who had been employed as a clerk in a number of firms and also worked as a journalist.<sup>59</sup> In Léopoldville, the ABAKO saw itself more than ever as the political voice of the Bakongo. In Elisabethville, in the shape of the Confédération des Associations Tribales du Katanga (CONAKAT), the presidents of several ethnic associations forged an alliance between those

<sup>56</sup> Lemarchand, Political, 198.

<sup>57</sup> Speech by Lumumba to the Fédération des Batetela on 13 April 1958, quoted in ibid., 201. 58 Le Comité, "Le Mouvement National Congolais est né," Présence Congolaise (18 October 1958). On the founding and splintering of the MNC, see the autobiography of one of its members: J. Mbungu Nkandamana, L'indépendance du Congo belge et l'avènement de Lumumba, Témoignage d'un acteur politique (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008).

<sup>59</sup> Artigue, Qui sont, 139.

groups long established within the provincial boundaries. As "authentic Katangans"<sup>60</sup> they sought to oppose incomers from Kasai province, who had managed to win the local elections. <sup>61</sup> Emerging from the local context of the mayoral elections, these parties by no means addressed themselves to all the colony's inhabitants, instead establishing themselves as the representatives of specific groups and regions.

Political communitization through parties institutionalized and intensified the fragmentation of the educated elites. This had been discernible in the internal conflicts afflicting the *évolué* associations but had been played down by the colonial state in view of its efforts to create a supra-ethnic *évolué* community. In retrospect it seems paradoxical that only Patrice Lumumba, who advanced to become the West's bogey during the Congo Crisis as a "new Lucifer," addressed the colony's inhabitants in the way the *Voix du Congolais* had done for years: as Congolese. The MNC's references to an ethnically heterogenous but indivisible Congolese nation – though reframed through a democratic lens – preserved the colonial state's discourse on a nationwide elite as an "imagined community."

Lumumba's definitive transformation from model *évolué* to anti-colonialist, however, only occurred a few weeks after the founding of the MNC. In December 1958, when the *groupe de travail* was still fine-tuning its final report, Ghanaian prime minister Kwame Nkrumah had invited African representatives of the colonized countries to attend the All-African People's Conference (AAPC) in Accra. While the General Government prevented ABAKO leader Kasa-Vubu, known as a vehement critic of colonialism, from attending due to supposed *lacunae* in his vaccination certificate, Lumumba, along with two other delegates of the MNC, were permitted to leave the country. In independent Ghana Lu-

<sup>60</sup> CONAKAT, quoted in Lemarchand, "Limits," 411.

<sup>61</sup> Young, Politics, 298; Lemarchand, Political, 194.

**<sup>62</sup>** This is how the former Belgian ambassador to the Congo, Jean van den Bosch, described Lumumba in an article in *La Libre Belgique* of 7 December 1960; L. De Witte, *The Assassination of Lumumba* (New York: Verso, 2011), 318.

**<sup>63</sup>** On this concept, see B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

**<sup>64</sup>** J. Mohan, "Ghana, Congo, and the United Nations," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 7, no. 3 (1969).

**<sup>65</sup>** Gilis, *Kasa-Vubu*, 118; Z. J. M. Kasa-Vubu, *Joseph Kasa-Vubu*, *mon père: De la naissance d'une conscience nationale à l'indépendance* (Brussels: Chabassol, 1985), 117. A greeting from Kasa-Vubu was, however, read out at the AAPC. See B. Verhaegen, *L'ABAKO et l'indépendance du Congo belge. Dix ans de nationalisme kongo (1950 – 1960)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003), 268.

**<sup>66</sup>** Other attendees included MNC founding members Gaston Diomi and Joseph Ngalula. Jean-Pierre Dericoyard, president of the *Classes Moyennes Africaines* association, also made it to the

mumba encountered numerous figures in the African decolonization movement. Within a few days, he had forged a close personal connection with Nkrumah,<sup>67</sup> got involved in a number of committees<sup>68</sup> and concluded his conference speech with the words: "Down with colonialism and imperialism. Down with racism and tribalism."<sup>69</sup> When Lumumba touched down in Léopoldville in mid-December 1958, he brought back with him a pan-African and anti-imperialist ideology.<sup>70</sup>

On 24 December 1958, Colonial Minister Van Hemelrijck received a detailed plan from the *groupe de travail* on the Belgian Congo's political future. The goal identified by the report was a democratic, unitary and autonomous state that should gradually be granted legislative and executive power. The European and Congolese population should be free to decide the nature of its relationship with Belgium. While the report included many details on the gradual development of corresponding institutions, it did not propose a timetable for the implementation of reforms. And because it continued to assume a lengthy transition period, it made no mention of independence either.<sup>71</sup> Before the report could be presented to the Belgian parliament in late January 1959, however, it had already become obsolete due to the rapid succession of events in the Congo. For regardless of the cross-party consensus on the colonial reforms in Brussels, tensions were rising in Léopoldville.

First, at an MNC rally on 28 December 1958, Patrice Lumumba had reported back to an audience of several thousand on the Accra conference and called for an immediate end to colonial rule. 72 The ABAKO under Kasa-Vubu was put on the spot by the MNC's adoption of "its" demand for immediate independence. For the ABAKO, the ideologically radicalized MNC, now also connected to pan-African networks, was serious competition. Previously, ABAKO leaders had viewed the MNC merely as the party of the incomers, but now it was setting itself up as the representative of "all Congolese" and as the opponent of the "Balkaniza-

conference. Lumumba owed his attendance to Kenyan independence fighter Tom Mboya, who is said to have been made aware of Lumumba during his layover in Léopoldville; G. Nzongola-Ntalaja, The Congo. From Leopold to Kabila. A People's History (New York: Zed Books, 2002), 84. Lumumba received an official invitation just three days before the start of the conference.

<sup>67</sup> On the significance of the Congo to Nkrumah's foreign policy, see K. Nkrumah, Challenge of the Congo (New York: Panaf, 1967).

<sup>68</sup> La Conférence des peuples d'Afrique à Accra, FV/RDC/Lumumba/N°009/4, 7.

<sup>69</sup> Lumumba's speech in Accra, 11 December 1958, FV/RDC/Lumumba/N°009/4.

<sup>70</sup> On the history and ideology of pan-Africanism, see A. Boukari-Yabara, Africa Unite! Une histoire du panafricanisme (Paris: La Découverte, 2014).

<sup>71</sup> On this report, see Stenmans and Reyntjens, La pensée politique, 52-53; Vanthemsche, Belgium and the Congo, 91.

<sup>72</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, The Congo, 84.

tion of the national territory." The ABAKO quickly called a mass meeting of its own for 4 January 1959, though it was prohibited by the colonial administration at short notice. Several thousand people turned up nonetheless, a number that swelled when they were joined by some of the 20,000 football fans in the area. When Kasa-Vubu sought to terminate the gathering in accordance with the regulations, there were calls for "independence" and scuffles with Europeans. The mood of the crowd then shifted, 74 triggering three days of unrest in the capital that was put down by the colonial state. According to estimates, the result was between 250 and 400 dead and several hundred injured Congolese. Countless European-owned shops were looted, while some of the establishments run by the mission station and colonial administration were vandalized.<sup>75</sup> The three ABAKO mayors, Joseph Kasa-Vubu, Gaston Diomi and Arthur Pinzi, were briefly detained.76

Since Belgium was keen to prevent a bloody colonial war of the kind waged for years by the French in Algeria, the violence in Léopoldville accelerated the decolonization process in unforeseen ways. Despite initial resistance from a few ministers from the Parti Libéral and the PSC, the Belgian government agreed to use the controversial term "independence" when presenting its reform plans to parliament. But King Baudouin beat them to the punch: in a radio address shortly before the scheduled parliamentary session he heralded "independence with no headlong rush." The subsequent government statement merely set out in more detail the gradual democratization of the Belgian Congo. This was to begin in late 1959 with elections at the local and territorial level, before being extended to the provincial and national level in the near future. Before the day was over, the colonial government also enacted the controversial statut unique, which eliminated inequality between Africans and Congolese in the world of work and with respect to pay. By announcing the "Africanization of the leadership cadres," the government sought to keep the politicized and anti-colonial elite in check.<sup>78</sup> At the stroke of a pen, moreover, all laws that

<sup>73</sup> Lumumba speech on 28 December 1958, reprinted in Présence Congolaise (3 January 1959).

<sup>74</sup> For a summary of these events, see "Le récit des évenements," Horizons (18 January 1959); Van Reybrouck, Congo, 293 – 294.

<sup>75</sup> See Nzongola-Ntalaja, The Congo, 85; Young, Politics, 290.

<sup>76</sup> C. Braeckman, ed., Congo 1960. Échec d'une décolonisation (Brussels: GRIP, 2010), 66.

<sup>77</sup> Radio address by King Baudouin on 13 January 1959, quoted in ibid., 65.

<sup>78</sup> Government statement of 13 January 1959, reprinted in Présence Africaine (17 January 1959): 7. In March 1957, a list was published of more than 400 state officials, doctor's assistants and office workers, which the reform had elevated into the highest wage bracket. See "En guise d'Africanisation des cadres," Présence Congolaise, 7 (March 1959): 13.

had enshrined discrimination against the African population were rescinded. Finally, the regulations on freedom of the press and freedom of assembly were relaxed once again.<sup>79</sup>



Fig. 16: Poster bearing the slogan "Belgium keeps its promises." Information campaign by the colonial administration in the run-up to the elections planned for December 1959.

As the end of colonial rule loomed, the vernacular elite broke decisively with their self-understanding as a colonial elite. Through the establishment of legal equality between Africans and Europeans, the few privileges their lengthy struggle for elite status had brought them now ceased to exist. The elite, along with the rest of the Congolese population, were now placed on the same legal level as Europeans. A Portuguese diplomat who had been following elite-making policy in the Belgian Congo from the neighbouring colony of Angola ridiculed the Belgian attempt to declare all Africans civilized overnight. From now on, the colonial legal system, which withheld rights from the African population by

**<sup>79</sup>** Government statement of 13 January 1959, reprinted in *Présence Africaine* (17 January 1959): 7. **80** See Keese, *Living*, 66–67.

highlighting their insufficient cultural assimilation, endured only in Portugal's overseas provinces. There, much like *évolué* status, the *assimilado* status, which was reformed only in 1954, granted partial privileges to just a few of the "assimilated."<sup>81</sup>

The vernacular elite in the Belgian Congo, which had been confronted with promises of reform on a number of occasions since the end of the Second World War, resigned themselves neither to a few modifications here and there nor to the vague prospect of independence, instead accelerating the pace of colonial development, which the architects of colonial policy had so far done all they could to slow. The elite finally gave the lie to Belgian actors' cherished belief that they alone could control political developments. Most of those Congolese dubbed *évolués* were no longer interested in the civilizational development of their own character. They had also abandoned their faith in the reformability of the colonial system, considering themselves long since mature enough to determine their country's future course as politicians.

While the symbolic capital associated with the status of *évolué* may have been devalued, the Congolese elite transformed its cultural and social capital into political currency. Their many years of experience with the colonial public sphere, their leadership of associations, their eloquence and deft articulation of demands to the colonial authorities, as well as the development of ramified networks of supporters: all of this furnished the *évolués*, who had been closely aligned with the colonial state, with a competitive edge in political terms. The cultural bourgeoisification of the Congolese elite now had repercussions displeasing to Belgian politicians responsible for colonial policy. The other half of the bourgeois citizen, which had been suppressed by the colonial state's elite formation, now came to light. The Congolese bourgeoisie no longer strove for cultural perfectibility but for political participation – and power.

With independence in sight, the founding of political parties reached its apogee. By mid-1959 there were more than 100.<sup>82</sup> It is no coincidence that there were personal and structural continuities between Congolese associations and the new political parties.<sup>83</sup> The associations engendered by the colonial state's elite-making policy, which were apolitical by design, had left their mem-

**<sup>81</sup>** From 1954 onwards, applicants for *assimilado* status had to submit a certificate confirming a Catholic christening and provide evidence of a civil marriage, a "civilized" job, a Portuguese way of life and a Portuguese sponsor. By 1959, just 5,000 Africans had been granted this status, or 0.8 percent of the population; L. M. Heywood, *Contested Power in Angola, 1840s to the Present* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2000), 118.

<sup>82</sup> Young, Politics, 298.

<sup>83</sup> For an overview, see Bakajika, Partis et société civile; Lafontaine, City Politics, 210 – 215.

bers with know-how germane to their work within political parties.84 Much like Western European associations in the nineteenth century, they turned out to be the "political workshop of the elite." 85 At times, associations were merged into parties, while at other times several associations joined forces. Their membership of multiple associations furnished members of the vernacular elite with an array of opportunities for cooperation. The opportunistic search for majorities, meanwhile, led to breakaways, federations, disbandment and the foundation of new groupings.86

But the existing associational landscape of the Congolese elite was of only limited use when it came to the competitive struggle for voters' support. The politicization of the ADAPES and ASSANEF alumni associations, which were active throughout the colony – as pursued, for example, by board member Antoine-Roger Bolamba – was a failure. 87 The influential members of these institutions, which were close to the missions, had long since associated themselves with various factions, which reflected ethnic, regional and linguistic forms of identification but also differing views on the timetable for independence, as well as contrasting attitudes towards the colonial state and the future political order of the Congo.

Against the background of an increasingly radical critique of colonialism, parties with a moderate stance that supported the official policy of gradually introducing Congolese to political office or advocated cooperation with Belgian actors were viewed as the henchmen of imperialism.88 The vernacular elite's longsought proximity to the European milieu and their arrangement with Belgian rule were now interpreted as betrayal in the battle between the political parties.

<sup>84</sup> Thomas Hodgkin puts forward similar arguments with respect to colonial Africa as a whole. By 1958, he was already interpreting African associations as breeding grounds for national movements and as workshops of cultural practices relevant to the world of politics; T. Hodgkin, Nationalism in Colonial Africa (London: Muller, 1958), 91. Other studies in colonial history also highlight the transformation of associations into parties. The TANU (Tanganyika African National Union), for example, emerged out of the apolitical Tanganyika African Association in 1954, largely thanks to the efforts of Julius Nyerere, later president of Tanzania. See Eckert, Herrschen, 127-128.

<sup>85</sup> Banti, "Der Verein," 110.

<sup>86</sup> Overviews of the political parties are provided by M. C. De Backer, Note pour servir à l'étude des 'groupements politiques' à Léopoldville (Brussels: Office de l'information et des relations publiques pour le Congo, 1959); A. Böhm, Gott und die Krokodile. Eine Reise durch den Kongo (Munich: Pantheon, 2011), 194-196.

<sup>87 &</sup>quot;L'ASSANEF, neuvième parti politique?," Présence Congolaise, 21 March 1959; "A l'ASSA-NEF," Présence Congolaise (4 April 1959).

<sup>88</sup> Van Reybrouck, Congo, 303.

The Parti National du Progrès (PNP),89 which developed out of twenty-seven regional parties, included former members of the Cercle d'Études et d'Agrément in the shape of Paul Bolya and Jean-Pierre Dericoyard, who maintained contact with Belgian politicians responsible for colonial policy. This invited the political competition to corrupt the party abbreviation. PNP now stood for the Parti des Nègres Payés or Pene Pene Na Mundele, which means "close to the white man" in Lingala. 90 In light of his decades in the employ of the Scheut missionaries, Jean Bolikango was mocked as "pene pene na Maria." Former editor-inchief of the Voix du Congolais, Antoine-Roger Bolamba, associated with the Parti Libéral in the mid-1950s, cast in his lot with the MNC in 1960. The other parties used the fact that he now chanted "Down with colonialism!" at campaign rallies and assisted Patrice Lumumba to discredit Bolamba as a turncoat who was struggling to conceal his betrayal of the Congolese people. 93 The anti-colonial vernacular elite, whose members had previously accused one another of failing to live up to the colonial ideal of the "perfected black," now assailed each other over their recent past.94

These allegations filled the column inches of the countless party publications that went to press across the country in 1959. Through the dominance of competing party newspapers and constantly shifting alliances, the vernacular elite's once highly controlled realm of media communication, typified by polite phrases, gave way to a late colonial cacophony of mutual slander. It was Congolese authors who had learned their trade working for the periodicals of the colonial public sphere that saw to the publication and editing of these "militant publications." Mathieu Ekatou of the short-lived *Congo* wrote for *Indépendance*, the organ of Lumumba's MNC. Auguste Camille Mwissa-Camus of *Horizons*, who

**<sup>89</sup>** The PNP was one of the few parties with a presence throughout the territory. See Mutamba-Makombo, *Du Congo belge*, 412.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 414 and 591; Lemarchand, Political, 212.

<sup>91</sup> F. Lukunku, "A Monsieur Jean Bolikango," Indépendance (30 April 1960).

**<sup>92</sup>** A.-R. Bolamba, "Important discours prononcé par M. Antoine-Roger Bolamba au congrès de Coquilhatville," *Indépendance* (30 April 1960).

**<sup>93</sup>** "Les 4 vérités, Antoine R. Bolamba ou 'la voix du son maître," *Présence Congolaise* (24 September 1960). The *Présence Congolaise* developed into the political voice of the breakaway MNC-Kalonji.

**<sup>94</sup>** Their past as model *évolués* did not doom Lumumba and Kasa-Vubu, probably due to their early radicalization. In other African colonies too, members of the Congolese elite formerly close to the colonial state cast off their past with varying degrees of success. On the case of Tanganyika, see Eckert, *Herrschen*, 190 – 191.

<sup>95</sup> For an overview of the party newspapers, see Lemarchand, Political, 268.

<sup>96</sup> Mutamba-Makombo, Du Congo belge, 456.



**Fig. 17:** Founding meeting of the PNP in Coquilhatville, 1959. Ferdinand Essandja is giving a speech; a picture of King Baudouin hangs on the wall. Party colleague Jean-Pierre Dericoyard is listening (fourth from left).

had initially established the moderate *Union Progressiste Congolaise*, together with other editors from the Scheut milieu working for that daily, took charge of the *Nation Congolaise*, the party periodical of the PUNA, led by his former teacher Jean Bolikango. As president of the *Interfédérale*, Bolikango, now occupying a senior position in the General Government, had had to acknowledge the failure of the coalition of incomers to Léopoldville labelled as Bangala. Through the PUNA, he now focussed exclusively on the residents of his parents' home province of Équateur.<sup>97</sup>

To reach their clientele, the party newspapers were published not just in French but also in the language of the target electorate. Furthermore, the leading figures of some parties complemented their self-portrayals as the assimilated elite through demonstrative traditionalism. As president of the PNP, Paul Bolya appeared in group photos with a traditional spear and draped a leopard skin over his three-piece suit at election campaign events. 98 In addition to

<sup>97</sup> Bakajika, Partis et société civile, 63-64; Lemarchand, Political, 196.

<sup>98</sup> Relevant depictions of Bolya appear in Sabakinu Kivilu, "Paul-Gabriel Dieudonné Bolya," 237; Lemarchand, *Political*, 178.

mass gatherings in public spaces, the Congolese parties also sought to gain supporters through meetings in urban bars. In Léopoldville, the consumption of beer was tantamount to a political statement: the slim Polar bottle was emblematic of MNC president, Patrice Lumumba, who had been sales manager for this brand in the late 1950s. By purchasing the bulbous rival product, Primus, ABAKO supporters demonstrated their allegiance to the equally portly Joseph Kasa-Vubu.99 On the campaign trail, the Congolese elite transformed urban bars from one-time dens of iniquity into an important arena of late colonial politicization.

Though all the parties in the Congo talked about independence, they did not all mean the same thing by it. The Belgian politicians who clung to the illusion of orderly decolonization were also at odds over what the Congo of tomorrow ought to look like. Alongside the official government strategy of laying the ground for a unitary state, an increasing number of figures in the General Government favoured a federalist solution. 100 Congolese parties who played the card of tribal and regional affiliation and knew they had majorities behind them within provincial boundaries also backed a federal state. The CONAKAT championed an autonomous Katanga with strong links to Belgium and by speaking in terms of a Belgian-Congolese Community deftly placed itself in continuity with colonial policy.<sup>101</sup> Under the leadership of Congolese businessman Moïse Tshombé, a member of the Conseil de Gouvernement who had otherwise kept his distance from the colonial state's elite-making institutions, the CONAKAT had shifted away from its hostile attitude towards the European population. Hitherto, it had accused Europeans of favouring the Baluba newcomers. But as the CONA-KAT moved closer to the positions of the *Union Katangaise* settlers' party, it became the Congolese voice of the influential European milieu of Katanga. For its election campaign, the CONAKAT could count on the support of the settlers' associations, the Essor du Congo as an opinion-leading local newspaper, and financially strong firms such as the UMHK. 102 The ABAKO under Kasa-Vubu, on the other hand, aspired to achieve a state for the Bakongo, which would extend from the Atlantic coast of Bas-Congo to Léopoldville. Oriented towards the borders of the vanished Congo kingdom, however, the state territory was to include parts of AEF and Portuguese Angola as well.

<sup>99</sup> On the role of beer in the election campaign in Léopoldville, see Gilis, Kasa-Vubu, 105; J. O. Tshonda and B. Verhaegen, "Patrice Lumumba et la guerre des bières," in Patrice Lumumba entre Dieu et Diable, eds. P. Halen and J. Riesz (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997).

<sup>100</sup> On this faction, see Vanthemsche, Belgium and the Congo, 91.

<sup>101</sup> Mutamba-Makombo, Du Congo belge, 414.

<sup>102</sup> Lemarchand, Political, 237-242.

These federalist parties were opposed by unitarists insisting on national unity within the borders of the Belgian Congo, such as Lumumba's MNC and the PNP. This aspiration to national reach, however, failed due to the ethnically and regionally fissured party landscape. While Lumumba, as MNC president, had initially canvassed support in Belgium for his preferred option of independence among representatives of all Belgian political parties in the spring of 1960, following his return to the Congo he tried in vain to achieve a joint position at the first congress of several Congolese parties in Luluabourg. The idea of pan-African solidarity failed even within his own party. In light of Lumumba's sharper tone towards the Belgian government and his growing claims to leadership, a moderate wing led by founding members Joseph Iléo, Cyrille Adoula and Joseph Ngalula broke away. The MNC, as a supra-ethnic party, which had by now established itself in several provinces through local lobbying offices, thus disintegrated. While Lumumba could build on a loyal following in Stanleyville, the site of his first political activities, his position in Léopoldville had been weakened by the departure of the local leadership. Particularly in the provinces of Katanga and Équateur, former MNC sympathizers then threw in their lot with parties defined in ethnic terms. The breakaway party faction, meanwhile, came under the leadership of Albert Kalonji, a former employee in the colonial administration and journalist for the Présence Africaine, who also succeeded in gaining the allegiance of the Baluba in his home province of Kasai. From now on, Lumumba's MNC, which was essentially nationalist in orientation, used the tensions between the two largest ethnic groups in the province to present itself as the champion of the Lulua, who had an antagonistic relationship with the Baluba. 103

The disintegration of the federations of several regional and ethnic associations, forged for strategic reasons after the mayoral elections in Léopoldville, triggered the foundation of a whole slew of parties in a city with an ethnically diverse population. In addition to the aforementioned PUNA, the FEDEQUALAC gave rise to the Union Mongo (UNIMO). UNIMO president Justin Bomboko, who had returned shortly before from studies at the Free University of Brussels as its first Congolese student, drew his support from the Mongo in Équateur province. He even dreamed of reconstructing the Mongo kingdom, as described by the Scheut missionaries in their ethnographies. Out of the ruins of the FEDAK-WALEO, meanwhile, arose several parties defined in ethnic terms or based on administrative districts, namely Abazi, Luka and the Parti Solidaire Africain (PSA), which now tried to attract voters in their home provinces. Much like the ABAKO, the area of influence of the PSA, whose leadership consisted of graduates of the Jesuit mission school in Kikwit, was in Léopoldville's immediate hinterland and, like the ABAKO, it succeeded in expanding into the region, <sup>104</sup>

If we focus on its political parties, the Congo disintegrated into countless, partially overlapping areas of influence, with representatives of the vernacular elite doing all they could to assert their power over them. In this context, independence could mean relations with Belgium as well as the relationship between the colony's territories. Differing ideas about a possible political future, as described by Frederick Cooper for Africa after 1945, 105 now emerged in the Belgian Congo as well.

The issue of the scope of the Congo's promised independence and what form it ought to take divided the Belgian camp as well. Political parties continued to disagree with each other and there was discord within their own ranks. Opinion among officials in Brussels and the Congo-based administration also diverged. In this climate of tension and confusion, the royal house and the government argued over who ought to be appointed to key posts in the General Government and Colonial Ministry. Under pressure from the Christian Social Party leadership, Maurice Van Hemelrijck vacated his post as colonial minister: he was viewed as the plaything of nationalist forces after entering into dialogue with Congolese politicians. Van Hemelrijck was succeeded by August de Schryver, who had played an instrumental role in transforming the *Parti Catholique* into the PSC after the Second World War as the new party's president and was regarded as a political heavyweight. It was during his tenure, in October 1959, that the Belgian government formulated plans for a restrictive version of independence. This provided for key areas such as defence and economy, foreign policy and monetary policy to remain in Belgian hands for a lengthy period while political institutions were established. 106

The struggle over the timing and extent of independence thus entered the next round. The leaders of the Congolese parties, all too familiar as évolués with the colonial state's strategy of delay, stepped up their efforts to accelerate the pace of change. The elections at local and territorial level, scheduled for late 1959 in the government statement, were boycotted by several parties. In the important port city of Matadi and other parts of the western province of Bas Congo, the core area of ABAKO support, just over one per cent of the elec-

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 19, 155, 255. On the PSA, see H. F. Weiss and B. Verhaegen, Parti solidaire africain (P.S.A.), documents 1959 – 1960 (Brussels: Centre de Recherche et d'Information Socio-Politiques, 1963).

**<sup>105</sup>** Cooper, *Africa*, 38.

**<sup>106</sup>** Vanthemsche, La Belgique et le Congo, 129 – 130.

torate cast a vote. 107 There the colonial administration was increasingly losing control, as evident, among other things in residents' refusal to pay their taxes. Following an MNC party conference in Stanleyville, at which Lumumba had described further cooperation with Belgium as "impossible" and called on his supporters to launch a "Congolese revolution," riots broke out that resulted in several deaths. Lumumba was arrested for inciting the masses.

To avoid further violence and avert the country's disintegration, the Belgian government backed down. Ruling out the military option, it embraced the opposition PSB's proposal to convene a table ronde made up of Belgian and Congolese representatives. 109 The question of independence was to be settled through the Belgian tradition of compromise, which centered on the political resolution of entrenched conflicts. 110 Beginning in late January 1960, then, meetings took place in Brussels at which delegates from the Congolese and Belgian parties, on the basis of equal representation, deliberated on the political system of an independent Congo.111 At the Belgian side of the table sat representatives of the Liberal, Socialist and Christian Social parties; the Flemish nationalists and the politically marginalized PCB were excluded. Delegations from the fourteen leading parties in the Congo made the trip to the metropole: the ABAKO, the two factions of the MNC, the CONAKAT from Katanga and its rival BALUBAKAT, the moderate PNP and the *Union Congolaise*. The disunited Congolese parties overcame their differences during the one month of negotiations. Even Patrice Lumumba was released from prison at short notice at the insistence of all the Congolese delegates and soon took his seat next to them. The African politicians, no longer willing to have the course of events dictated to them, closed ranks against the Belgian delegation. Men who had for years been condemned to look up to Europeans were now negotiating with them at eye level. As a "United Front" they caught their Belgian negotiating partners off guard, successfully demanding that the talks be resumed only when a date for independence had been fixed. Surprisingly, the *table ronde* agreed that the Congo should be granted independence after parliamentary elections on 30 June 1960.

In their new role as politicians, it was the former évolués who set the pace of developments. Furthermore, neither the Belgian party delegates' demand for a Belgian-Congolese Union linked by the Belgian crown nor the suggestion that

<sup>107</sup> Lemarchand, Political, 255.

<sup>108</sup> Lumumba, quoted in Tshonda and Verhaegen, Lumumba: Acteur politique, 284-285.

<sup>109</sup> See Vanthemsche, "Belgische socialisten." Otherwise the PSB remained quiescent on colonial policy.

<sup>110</sup> Vanthemsche, Belgique et le Congo, 133.

<sup>111</sup> Van Reybrouck, Congo, 302; Mutamba-Makombo, Du Congo belge, 434-446.

a number of key ministries remain in Belgian hands were accepted. 112 Still, a Belgian imprint was evident in the political system adopted for the independent Congo: the democratic unitary state had a parliament with two chambers that appointed a president, while the prime minister functioned as head of government; provincial governments with limited powers completed the picture. The members of the Parliament were to be directly elected just four months later, at the end of May 1960, while those of the Senate would be appointed by provincial assemblies.

## Rise of the old elite, breakup of the new state

Back in the Congo, the United Front, which had been held together only by its members' desire for independence as soon as possible, fell apart. In the rushed election campaign, the tensions and rifts between the Congolese parties resurfaced. These parties, most of which sought to attract the support of a regionally and ethnically bounded section of the population, organized conferences in an attempt to forge fruitful alliances and formed strategic coalitions as a means of attaining parliamentary majorities. The elections were won by the MNC under Patrice Lumumba, followed by the regionally oriented PNP, PSA and ABAKO.<sup>113</sup> At the provincial level, parties that mobilized large enough ethnic electorates were victorious: the CONAKAT in Katanga, the PUNA under Jean Bolikango in Équateur, the MNC under Albert Kalonji in Kasai, and the ABAKO in Bas Congo. 114 Lumumba's MNC also achieved its best result in his home province of Orientale.

While the electoral map laid bare the country's sharp divisions, as the winner of the election Lumumba tried to put together a government with broad support, allocating cabinet posts to representatives of the ten strongest parties. Lumumba's ministerial line-up embodied the political divisions of the Congo, but its members were extremely similar in terms of their social profile. The leading figures in the government were all illustrious representatives of the Congolese elite who had made names for themselves in the colonial public sphere since 1945 as authors, association presidents or holders of elite status. Of the 38 ministers, 22 had been clerks in the employ of the administration, while a further six

<sup>112</sup> Vanthemsche, Belgique et le Congo, 131-132.

<sup>113</sup> The elections of May 1960 left the MNC with 40 of 137 seats, followed by the PSA (13 seats) and ABAKO (12 seats). See Mutamba-Makombo, Du Congo belge, 474.

<sup>114</sup> Lemarchand, Political, 244-245.

had been doctor's assistants or journalists. Their names have appeared repeatedly in the present volume: President Joseph Kasa-Vubu (ABAKO) as one of the few immatriculated; Minister for Public Works Alphonse Salongo (MNC-Lumumba) as the diligent recruiter of new subscribers to the *Voix du Congolais*; Minister of Information and Culture Antoine-Roger Bolamba (MNC-Lumumba) as editorin-chief of the *Voix du Congolais*; Minister of State Paul Bolya (PNP) as secretary of the *Cercle d'Études et d'Agrément* and trainer at the school for doctor's assistants; university graduates Thomas Kanza (without party affiliation) as ambassador to the UN and Justin Bomboko (UNIMO) as foreign minister. The parliament too was dominated by members of the *évolué* generation who had started their professional careers after the Second World War and had initially believed the promises of developmental colonialism. More than half the parliamentarians were born between 1920 and 1930, while six out of ten had done the jobs typical of the vernacular elite, with former office workers predominating within both parliament and cabinet. The parliament and cabinet.



Fig. 18: The first Congolese government under Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba (front row with bow tie) in the gardens of the *Palais de la Nation* in Léopoldville.

<sup>115</sup> On their biographies, see Artigue, Qui sont.

<sup>116</sup> Of 137 parliamentarians, just five were above 50 years of age.

**<sup>117</sup>** Detailed information on parliamentarians' social profile is provided by Lemarchand, *Political*, 227–228.

The Congolese elite became the political elite of an independent state with lightning speed. In the Congo's first cabinet, it was common for an individual to be promoted from underling in the colonial administrative office to minister in one fell swoop. Drawing on elite theorist Vilfredo Pareto's notion of the circulation of elites, 118 it was the Congolese "reserve elite" that took the helm upon independence.

Yet the stellar career of former *évolués* meant that they had a long way to fall. The highest offices of state were occupied by a group that contained within themselves the contradiction, inherent in Belgian colonial rule, between territorial unity and ethnic fragmentation. After independence, these ambivalences broke out into the open as a result of the Congo Crisis. The Congolese elite thus stumbled into one of the largest-scale Cold War proxy conflicts on African soil. <sup>119</sup> The Congo of tomorrow, awaited with such impatience, became embroiled in a bloody conflict in which Belgium, the superpowers of the United States and the Soviet Union, Ghana and the United Nations all intervened – leaving Congolese politicians with little room for manoeuvre.

This was preceded by several events that turned into a national crisis. A few days after the independence celebrations, parts of the Force Publique mutinied, unwilling to accept Belgian generals' temporary authority. Several regions subsequently saw attacks on Europeans, to which Belgium responded with military intervention. The mass evacuation of the European population began. Since Congolese had only recently been allowed to occupy key positions, the country abruptly lost all its senior staff in administration and economy. The province of Katanga simultaneously declared its independence. Supported by the firms and European elites based there, as well as a number of officials in the Belgian government, Moïse Tshombé of CONAKAT made a reality of the rich industrial province's long-cherished desire for autonomy. 120 At Lumumba's behest, the UN then sent peacekeepers, but they merely cemented the status quo of a crumbling state. Albert Kalonji, leader of the breakaway wing of the MNC, also proclaimed the independence of his diamond-rich ancestral province of Kasai; there Lumumba's deployment of Congolese troops ended in a bloodbath. It thus seems unsurprising that Jean Bolikango sought to establish an independent state in Équateur province, though he failed due to lack of support from Belgian interest groups. The secessionist leaders had all been among the losers when Lu-

<sup>118</sup> Hartmann, Elitesoziologie, 28-29.

**<sup>119</sup>** See Young, *Politics*, 307–357; A. Wirz, *Krieg in Afrika. Die nachkolonialen Konflikte in Nigeria, Sudan, Tschad und Kongo* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1982), chapter 4.

<sup>120</sup> Lemarchand, Political, 247.

mumba formed his government: Tshombé's CONAKAT held just one ministerial post, Bolikango was denied the presidency he had been hoping for and Kalonji's MNC came away with nothing at all. <sup>121</sup> As a unitary state, the independent Congo was too small for the ambitions of the many provincial leaders – and fell apart.

When Lumumba, frustrated at the lack of support from the United States and the UN, increasingly turned to the Soviet Union, the Congo finally became a pawn in the hands of the superpowers, which perceived the country as an important provider of raw materials for weapons production. Henceforth, the global public saw Lumumba, the former *évolué* and sympathizer of the *Parti Libéral*, as a fervent communist, one whom the CIA and Belgium tried to neutralize. As the first democratically elected prime minister of the independent Congo, Lumumba barely had a chance to govern at all – after less than six months in office, he was murdered by political opponents in Katanga at the age of 35. The Congo crises and the armed forces' reestablishment of national unity extended over a period of several years. In 1965, Joseph-Désiré Mobutu, Lumumba's long-standing personal secretary, who was subsequently involved in his removal as a general in the *Force Publique*, began his 30 years of autocratic rule. Mobutu's departure in turn marked the beginning of a war that continues to this day. The political future of Congo remains uncertain. 123

Time and again, scholars and journalists have identified the insufficient development of a vernacular elite as a reason for the Congo crisis. As evidence, they point to the extremely small number of Congolese university graduates at the point of independence. But we must ask what a larger number of academics could have accomplished in the face of the Cold War as fought out on Congolese territory. As we have seen, the meagre cohort of university graduates does highlight the special features of Belgian education policy in the Congo. But the fact that there were so few graduates is not a wholly convincing basis for an assessment of colonial elite-making as entirely fruitless. <sup>124</sup> This is because the mission secondary schools, but also the associations, created a non-university educational elite. While its potential was not exhausted within the colonial order, its cultural bourgeoisification continued to exercise an important effect after independence.

<sup>121</sup> Van Reybrouck, Congo, 359.

<sup>122</sup> On the killing of Lumumba, see De Witte, Assassination of Lumumba.

**<sup>123</sup>** On the political developments and wars in Congo into the early 2000s, see D. Johnson, *Kongo. Kriege, Korruption und die Kunst des Überlebens* (Frankfurt am Main: Brandel und Apsel, 2008).

**<sup>124</sup>** For this line of argument, see H. F. Weiss, "L'évolution des élites. Comparaison entre la situation en Afrique occidentale," *Etudes Congolaises* 5 (1965).

The path to bourgeoisification led to a dead end in the colonial situation. But from a long-term perspective, a better metaphor might be running the gaunt-let, an experience that ultimately left scars yet strengthened the Congolese elite. It was none other than the culturally bourgeoisified *évolués* who assured themselves of a place in the many governments and that attained positions of power under the First Republic of the 1960s. For example, amid the turmoil of the Congo crises, Joseph Iléo and Cyrille Adoula, two of the founding members of the MNC and former clerks, held the post of prime minister. The ministries went to individuals long known to one another as fellow *évolués* or former political adversaries. Jean-Pierre Dericoyard, once the champion of immatriculation reform and president of the *Classes Moyennes Africaines* association, first headed the Ministry for Public Works, then the Ministry for the Economy. The two former editors-in-chief of the *Voix du Congolais*, Antoine-Roger Bolamba and Michel Colin, alternated as information minister. 125

But former *évolués* also rose to prominence beyond the tumult of post-colonial politics. Many of those who had worked as clerks in the colonial administration went on to enjoy careers as senior officials, such as Antoine-Marie Mobé, former president of the *évolué* association in Stanleyville, who headed the central government's Foreign Trade Department.<sup>126</sup> Anyone interviewing the former Congolese colonial elite in present-day Kinshasa will meet not just with senators and ambassadors, but also retired or aged luminaries of economy and media. The offspring of former *évolués* typically became highly educated and professionally successful individuals. The grandson of Antoine-Roger Bolamba, for example, not only bears the same name as his grandfather but has followed in his footsteps professionally as a newsreader on Congolese state television.<sup>127</sup> If we trace the biographies and *curricula vitae* of former members of the colonial elite over several decades and across generations,<sup>128</sup> we encounter successful

<sup>125</sup> In addition, Paul Bolya, for example, was not only minister of state in Lumumba's government (30 June-11 September 1960), but also in the government of Joseph Iléo (12 September-10 October 1960) and he was health minister under Cyrille Adoula as well (11 July 1962–18 April 1963).

<sup>126</sup> Artigue, Qui sont, 216.

<sup>127</sup> Interview with Antoine-Roger Bolamba, Kinshasa, 18 August 2010 and 19 August 2010.

**<sup>128</sup>** For a long-term analysis of an elite group of civil servants from northern Ghana since the 1930s, see C. Lentz, "Constructing Ethnicity: Elite Biographies and Funerals in Ghana," in *Ethnicity, Belonging and Biographies*, eds. G. Rosenthal and A. Bogner (Münster: Lit, 2009), 184–186; C. Lentz, "I Take an Oath to the State, not the Government.' Career Trajectories and Professional Ethics of Ghanaian Public Servants," in *States at Work: Dynamics of African Bureaucracies*, eds. T. Bierschenk and J.-P. Olivier de Sardan (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 181–185. On the case of Tanganyika, see Eckert, *Herrschen*, 236–242.

but also complex, serpentine lives moulded by the country's many changes of regime and crises. We find individuals whose parents were illiterate and whose children studied at US-American universities.

Nonetheless, the Congo's late colonial and post-colonial crises can in part be traced back to colonial elite-making policy. Paradoxically, the fact that the Congolese elite was numerically weak, internally divided and almost entirely unprepared for its new political responsibilities is evidence of the success rather than failure of elite-making policy. It was the colonial state's declared goal to exclude the vernacular population for as long as possible from political participation, higher education and positions of responsibility. The chaos and power vacuum that the agents of Belgian policy warned of in the event of premature independence – and which they cited to justify a depoliticized developmental colonialism and paternalistic approach to elite formation – was a direct consequence of elite-making policy in the Belgian Congo.