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THE CONGOLESE ELITE AND THE FRAGMENTED CITY : THE STRUGGLE FOR THE EMERGENCE OF A DOMINANT CLASS IN KINSHASA

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Prelude: The Belgian Congo

This paper is about the present in the city of Kinshasa, the situation of the Congolese elite in the city and its relationship to the Congolese state. However, to arrive at a reasonable assessment, we need first to look at what kind of country the Democratic Republic of the Congo is, how its class structure has formed and then at the network of Congolese cities and their relation to the political economy of the country. We start with a few paragraphs on colonial history. Eventually, after trying to sum up some of the main features writers have captured about Kinshasa, we shall consider to what extent it is a city being made or taken over by an indigenous elite.

At least amongst those interested in Africa, the black legend associated with the misrule of King Leopold II of the Belgians and his Congo Free State has continued to live in literature and retain its horror film aura thanks to the continued best-selling writing of such captivating authors as Adam Hochschild, Vidia Naipaul and Michaela Wrong. (Hochschild, 1998, Naipaul, 1980, Wrong, 2000). There is a consequent tendency to ascribe the problems of the contemporary Democratic Republic of the Congo directly to its sin-laden beginnings and to ignore the struttings erected later by a colonial system proud in its day of its modernist achievements. The fifty-two years of Belgian colonial rule that followed the end of the Free State charter are less well-known. For the misdeeds of the Leopoldine period were not entirely chance acts of horror; they were part of a process of capital accumulation requiring little input from Belgium itself which allowed for the development from 1908 of a relatively wealthy and apparently successful colony that covered a huge swathe of central Africa. (Merlier, 1962) Above all, Leopold's foresight led to the acquisition of the Katanga pedicle carved into Northern Rhodesia which it virtually bifurcated with its enormous copper reserves, mines that also later yielded rich supplies of cobalt and uranium. The Congo also contained tin and gold mines in the east, coffee and tea plantations in highland country that rivalled in attraction anywhere in British East Africa and vast estates where dependent cultivators produced palm oil and rubber for the international market. Districts which yielded no valuable commodity for export produced either food for the estates, minefields and towns or manpower as well as taxes; only the most obscure corners were able to evade this omnipresent system. After World War II, the Belgian population in the Congo rose well over the l00.000 mark to a higher figure than in any British colony in Africa apart from Southern Rhodesia and to an impressive level of Belgian investment and involvement amongst the most important circles of capitalist activity in Belgium that has frequently been the subject of careful scrutiny by the Belgian left. In order to hold this huge territory together, the Belgians created a very impressive transport network focused on railways and river vehicles supplemented by road and served by air which was essential for the system as a whole to operate; from wartime on, significant [by African standards] if modest levels of industrialisation sprouted in the main urban centres.

Social segregation 'protected' the white population much as in the British settler colonies of Africa from the natives but Belgium never committed itself to devolution along the lines of Rhodesia or even Kenya. Only at the municipal level did resident whites have any political say. (Young, 1965) The Belgian administration was more committed than any other colonial equivalent in Africa to the need for a growing African working class imbued with basic skills; there was no intention of encouraging white emigration to the Congo at this social level. In the smaller towns, the Belgians created *centres extra-coutumiers* where some kind of neo-traditional governance could be practiced but they accepted the need in the cities to accommodate 'detribalised' Africans. (Young, 1965) In the last decade of Belgian rule, much money was expended on constructing neighbourhoods with thousands of flats and small houses for African families (modelled on the structural requirements of European families) to dwell, especially in the capital of Léopoldville, although only towards the very end were Africans able to purchase landed property. (Young, 1965; La Fontaine, 1970) The Catholic Church (whose political supporters usually controlled the Colonial ministry) was crucial in the widespread diffusion of primary education and healthcare on an impressive scale. This contrasted with the notorious absence of opportunities for higher education for the Congolese, an absence only addressed in the very final years of Belgian rule, although the Church itself took the initiative of training hundreds of highly educated Congolese priests. This priestly caste still carry a weight and influence amongst the elite that has no real equivalent elsewhere in Africa. (Markowitz, 1983, Schatzberg, 1988, Piermay, 1997)

What remained of Leopold's legacy was the relatively heavy hand of the breaker of stones, *Bula Matari*, the state and its repressive apparatus. While some chiefs in certain areas retained considerable influence, the bifurcated, indirect rule state of Mahmood Mamdani's imagination was much less in evidence in the Belgian Congo than elsewhere. (Mamdani, 1996) Nowhere else in tropical Africa were white administrators so thick on the ground and so determined to master their areas of control in terms of statistics and paperwork as well as armed men under orders. The number of African soldiers and policemen commanded were impressive. This was a system whose weight was strongly and systematically felt by ordinary workers and peasants, a vital complement to the pressures of the market that pressed forward 'modernisation'.

Decolonisation
This paper does not intend to reiterate the often-told story of how the Congo moved very rapidly from being a colony with no self-governing institutions at all to an extremely poorly prepared independent nation as a result of decisions taken in 1959 and 1960. Patrice Lumumba, the key political figure of the actual transition phase, was about the only Congolese politician with some kind of national remit although even his share of the vote largely originated in his native Orientale Province. Lumumba's forthright anger at the obvious neo-colonial manipulation involved in this phase was not backed by any effective strategy aimed at establishing a new fulcrum of control and, in a set of manoeuvres involving a number of guilty parties, he was overthrown, captured while trying to flee from the capital to his home province and sent to his death in Katanga Province (February 1961) where secession was the order of the day. (see Young, 1965; Althabe, 1972, Kanza, 1972, Hoskyns, 1965; Gérard-Libois, 1965)

Two kinds of disorder characterised the early independent Congo republic at a time when most Belgians had fled the territory but much of the extant colonial infrastructure remained intact. The first was decentralisation which included the struggle for secession in several areas, especially the copper-rich Katanga. Eventually a compromise was found in the creation

of a strongly federal system with numerous small provinces, the so-called *provincettes* (1962). Léopoldville itself was dominated by a set of parochial minded patrimonial bosses, notably the long-time tribalist activist Joseph Kasavubu associated with the ABAKO movement.[1] (Young, 1965) A pan-tribal alliance formed around the so-called Binza group.[2] The Binza group were apt to form economic linkages to mutual advantage with the hardier European business interests still in the harness at a time when, for instance, secondary industry actually was reviving. The possibility of permanent fracture remained however. For a time after the death of Kasavubu, the secessionist Katanga leader Moïse Tshombe was actually national president.

Secondly, radical leaders who took to the bush and proclaimed the 'second independence' found a ready following amongst ordinary Congolese who had felt oppressed under the Belgians and did not recognise the authority of the new elite. (Weiss, 1967; Young, 1965) Probably the most dramatic of the insurrections, associated with the killing and rape of Europeans in Stanleyville, also engineered the murder of hundreds of male members of the emergent local African elite. Eventually put down, notoriously with the assistance of mercenaries, it is important to recall that a bond was thereby created between that elite, justifiably terrified of the mob, and forces one is apt to call 'neo-colonial'. (Depelchin, 1981, Pongo, 1999) The elite in a sense emerged within the house that Leopold built and it depends on that house, however altered, being left standing or reconstructed, for its own existence.

These are two crucial elements in understanding that which emerged after the coup which brought Colonel Joseph Desiré Mobutu, a publicist employed by the military, to power. Mobutu who was to rule the Congo, under a name associated with ancient legends of exploration, Zaïre, during most of its independent history, seized power in a coup in November, 1965. Born in a backwater region up the Congo River in Equateur Province and associated with a minor tribe, Mobutu had no local base from which to operate; he was completely a creature of the state-generated system. He has held the notoriety of being the ultimate neo-colonialist in African nationalist chronicles. It is certainly true both that he and his closest associates [whom he would occasionally dismiss and disgrace or restore to favour] salted away extraordinary amounts of money, for the most part outside Africa and that he committed himself early on, perhaps learning from the tragic fate of Lumumba, to a set of right-wing international alliances and to earning the approval of the powerful in the West.

But it is a real mistake to underestimate Mobutu who had numerous affinities with other African nationalists with less conservative associations and who was critical in creating, or renewing, the Congolese state that still exists today.[3] On core issues, he did not interest himself in advice from outsiders. With regard to the first point above, Mobutu directed a process of re-centralisation, restoring the big provinces and decreeing that all significant officials had to be assigned to jobs outside their own home province. He did his best to reduce or destroy the power of any local notables. (Callaghy, 1984) Mobutu continued the job of expanding—dramatically—the educational system that produced the elite which thereby acquired its legitimacy that had taken root during the federal period and he nationalised the

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[1] Interestingly ABAKO formed out of an association of music lovers in 1940, La Fontaine, 1970. La Fontaine suggests that tribal and ethnic associations were historically most important for newcomers to the city and became less significant when long-time urban dwellers formed more diffuse associations.
[2] La Fontaine notes the significance of the integration of Binza, a corner in the white section of the city. Of course, the Binza group and their associates employed many ordinary folk as servants, hangers-on, etc.
[3] In the military, Mobutu was one of the key MNL supporters of Lumumba and from Lumumba he inherited the enthusiasm for a single nationalist party dominating an African country. See Young, 1965.

Catholic and Protestant universities that had been established. On the foundation laid largely by the Catholic Church in the colonial period, a public health system was laid out that was a model for tropical Africa. (Persyn & Ladrière, 2004)

At his most potent, he promoted cultural nationalism, symbolised by the compulsory change in names demanded of all Congolese and he sponsored the wholesale nationalisation of businesses and industries. He favoured development in the form of the foundation of heavy industry, concrete, steel, automobiles and to cap everything, the use of power from the Congo river rapids above the capital, itself renamed Kinshasa, to supply the copper mines of Katanga, thereby holding this potentially secessionist area with its logical geo-economical links to Angola and to south-central Anglophone Africa, in the grasp of his state. (Willame, 1992) [4] The police and the army, enforcing *salongo*-compulsory public works labour- and constantly bullying and extracting revenue from the mass of people, notably in the countryside, were fundamental to the Mobutu system. (Callaghy, 1984, Schatzberg, 1980, 1988)[5] As late as 1983, a huge *ratissage* operation was effected in Kinshasa which resulted in massive shakedowns of the population and expulsions of the unwanted from the capital.

If some aspects of the Belgian economic system started to crumble by the late 1960s, Mobutu relied above all on the copper mines as his source of wealth. These were nationalised as Gécamines although Belgians continued to operate on contract as managers. It is possible to see the late 1960s and early 1970s as the period when the Mobutu system attained a kind of nationalist efflorescence. (Willame 1992, Peemans, 1986) Mobutu did much to prize open the remaining linkages of capital accumulation in the Congo to Belgian corporations. The state, rather than the ruling party, although Mobutu created one, was all-important. (Callaghy, 1984, Schatzberg, 1980) In a series of difficult struggles, the private sector and the Catholic Church continued to hold some autonomy from the state but on the whole this state apparatus became synonymous with the country Mobutu ruled.

By the middle of the 1970s, Zaïre entered a period of gradual and then spiralling decay. (Peemans, 1986) The grand plans for industrialization fell apart or collapsed and state revenues declined. One reason for this was the nationalisation of plantations, mines and businesses following a key November 30, 1973 Zaïrianisation decree. Some of the new Congolese owners were capable entrepreneurs; most were not and quickly ran enterprises into the ground, selling assets or letting them fall into decay. This was particularly the case with large, complex operations. (MacGaffey, 1987) Second, the sophisticated and vital transport and communications infrastructure the Belgians created no longer contained men with the commitment for repair, maintenance and modernisation. Most of it fell into ruin and the integration of the nation increasingly became dependent solely on state institutions. Third, Zaïre, as with most of Africa, was severely hit by the decline in commodity prices. In the case of copper, one can actually speak of a collapse. Under these conditions, the quantity as well as value of the mines, the goose that laid the eggs, fell steeply, reaching a nadir in the 1990s. Most of the other exports typical of the Congo were now spirited across the border to countries with stronger currencies and fell outside the grasp of state authorities. The situation was certainly made worse by the personal hold of Mobutu on what resources did pass his way; these he made sure did not decrease in value.

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[4] The 'white elephants doomed to early failure'. (Piermay, 1997, 232)

[5] Schatzberg believed, however, that the police, the judiciary and local government did contain significant elements that attempted to run a solvent state according to correct norms (Schatzberg, 1988) by contrast to the predatory dominance of the military.

The decay phase was clearly well advanced by 1980 but it took until 1997 for an army under Laurent Kabila with substantial aid from another ex-Belgian colony, Rwanda, finally to rid the Democratic Republic of the Congo (as it was renamed) of Mobutu. This was true despite the fact that his Western backers had largely washed their hands of him in the latter years. How was this possible?

One reason lay in Mobutu's unique ability to more or less hold this huge territory together. When a National Assembly was called and elected to hammer out a new constitution following pressure from aid donors and creditors, it was as though the country returned to the situation of the early 1960s with parochial local bosses quarrelling over turf and patronage; astonishingly the weakened dictator survived. Only after the 1994 revolution in Rwanda, which finally disrupted and destabilized for good the situation in the eastern Congo, did this cease to be true. However bitterly resented Mobutu was by educated Congolese and those who dreamt of a democracy in central Africa, they failed to find a plausible new champion with which to counter him.

Secondly, Mobutu and his predatory armed men stood between the elite, whose situation we will now move towards elucidating and the mass of potentially rebellious Congolese. This was dramatically demonstrated in 1991 when an air force mutiny precipitated riots that led to mobs effectively taking over Kinshasa and looting and destroying commercial property and the homes of the propertied with impunity while Mobutu fled to a boat in the Congo River. (Willame, 1992, Pongo, 1999) Order was restored but, until Kabila's arrival in Kinshasa six years later, that order remained in touch with the decaying remnants of Mobutu's power. Violent eruptions in other centres such as Kisangani, the former Stanleyville, and Goma, re-enforced this reality.

Nor could the overthrow and death of Mobutu in 1997 bring this situation to an abrupt end. The kind of forces that sustained the Mobutu regime were essentially in place under Laurent Kabila as well, once he discarded the Rwandan troops who were clearly unacceptable in the western part of the country. It is only after his own murder in 2001 and the succession of his son, Joseph Kabila, to power, that a kind of normalization has begun to set in, weakened however by heavy military expenditures. This has been aided by the dramatic improvement in the prices of primary products, especially copper, in the new millennium and deals which have begun (although still largely just at the level of talk) to imagine the reconstruction of at least some key national infrastructure. The Kabila power base does not lie in Kinshasa but in Katanga and access to and control over Katanga has been critical to the shaky emergence of some new stability in the country. By contrast, the east, with its enormous natural resource potential, has been in large part outside of government control. Very recently (2009) the willingness of Joseph Kabila to strike a deal with the Kagame regime in Kigali and round on the anti-Tutsi, anti-Rwandan forces that have been so potent in the east, may start to cut the Gordian knot albeit against the sentiments of most easterners.

Class and State in the Congo

An important debate reached its peak in the late 1970s and early 1980s concerning the capacities of the newly independent African states and the relationship of the state to class formation.[6] (Callaghy, 1988, Schatzberg, 1980, 1988, MacGaffey, 1984) Was there a new class forming that could shape the development of these territories? What was its relationship to the mass of the population? To what extent was 'neo-colonialism' reducing Africa's politicians to agents of an imperialism that no longer favoured colonial rule? What space was there for manoeuvre by these politicians and those serving the state? As we shall see, writers on the Zaïre and the Mobutu regime had very interesting things to say on these questions.

The first striking feature about the region with which we are concerned was the unusually limited space offered by Belgian colonialism for African class formation. There is probably more to be said for the emergence of a working class than for a typical African 'educated elite' although the foundations here were shaken to the roots by the wreckage of the structures the Belgians created after 1960. However, almost despite their plans, the Belgians began to discover already in the 1950s that there was, notably in Léopoldville, a growing stratum of successful African traders who were not part of the blueprint but whose emergence was a response to the remarkably rapid growth of an urban African population that purchased African foodstuffs and clothing material and sought to own property in the city.[7] Most of the provisioners were European, largely Portuguese, but some were African.[8] The KiKongo speaking peoples living west of the capital had a long history of exposure through the slave trade to commercial opportunities and were never entirely eliminated as cash crop farmers and small-scale traders; they would tend to profit in the western Congo after independence too as opportunities expanded. (Young, 1965, Schatzberg, 1980)

In the last several years of colonial rule too, it must be said, Belgian policy began to veer in a new direction as note the foundation of Lovanium University in 1954 and the growing availability of scholarships for study in Belgium. This gave birth to a classic type of educated elite whose legitimacy lay in diplomas and access to state office. For the most senior individuals, it was often an important advantage in entering this class to have been born and brought up so as to access the lowest levels of the colonial administration and learn the ropes of the administrative system, as was true of Mobutu himself. (Schatzberg, 1980) This stratum grew very rapidly during the early federal period and then again in the best years of the Mobutu regime. By 1972, there were over 17,000 students attending Zaïrois university classes, over 300, 000 enrolled in secondary schools and some 3,300,000 in primary school, twice the number in 1960. (Hull, 1970, Willame, 1992)

In these years, the possibilities for business activity and the range of consumption for Africans expanded dramatically. (Depelchin, 1981, Peemans, 1986) Michael Schatzberg has provided a very telling demonstration of this in showing the growth of consumption of industrially produced beer over these years—still almost never in sufficient supply-- in a major provincial town. (Schatzberg, 1980, 84) It could be said that part of the Mobutu plan was the assumption that the state would itself generate and hold in place a new ruling class

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[6] 'Given the political and economic international context in which it operates, the most striking thing about the Zairian absolutist state is that it exists at all.' Callaghy, 1984, 66.

[7] By 1953, 400 Africans in the city owned motor vehicles. The number of African-owned businesses was counted at 7,000 some four years later. Young, 1965, 202ff. For the life style of the African elite in Belgian times, see Baeck, 1959.

[8] There was a small Portuguese quarter near the market and abutting the European CBD in Léopoldville, for instance. La Fontaine, 1970. Portugese, Greek, West African and mixed race individuals were important in diffusing ideas of Western culture amongst the Congolese. Gondola, 1997, 16.

that would be critical in knitting the new nation together. As we have noted, the commanding heights of the economy were also destined for state control.

However, a series of observant writers have located instead the efflorescence of this elite in the period when the Mobutu regime began to lose its grip on society and when the economy inherited from the Belgians took a nosedive. (Schatzberg, 1980, MacGaffey, 1986, 1987) The bloody repression of Kinshasa university students in 1980 was a hallmark event here. (Callaghy, 1984) Under these circumstances, the state was no longer able to pay generous salaries to the highly qualified. Moreover, as the number of those qualified increased so rapidly, the available spaces for them in the state apparatus diminished and became more and more competitive.

This coincided with the nationalisation of the economy: Congolese were effectively invited to take over European businesses at bargain prices so as to make the economy a sphere of African control. In some cases, as MacGaffey shows in the case of fishing equipment, the new accumulators simply stole the property of extant businesses. (MacGaffey, 1986) This element of looting brings to mind the depredations of Idi Amin in despoiling the population of Indians in Uganda in the same period or the current theft of white owned land in Zimbabwe by the Mugabe regime. Those who succeeded here often had as silent partners Europeans who continued in fact to manage businesses (more typically Greeks or Lebanese rather than Belgians), or were the wives and children of Europeans. Some ethnic groups formed the basis of networks that also made for new successes. MacGaffey noted that it was in smaller operations such as sawmills and medium size plantations or fishing that either Congolese entrepreneurs, usually with some connection to European businesses, to riverain commerce in the past and possessing the educational skills to keep accurate accounts, or Greeks willing to live with a minimum of Western amenities, continued to develop and cope with the unpredictable. (MacGaffey, 1987)

In general, business conditions became far more difficult. Transport costs grew and much international trade was taken over by smuggling regimes, noted by different writers for Katanga, for the eastern province of Kivu (today divided up as the two Kivus, North and South) and in the vicinity of the capital in the west as well. On the one hand, this offered major opportunities for profit, overwhelmingly in the sphere of commerce rather than production, on the part of enterprising individuals who commanded influence and formed useful networks that crisscrossed the immense territory of Zaïre. (MacGaffey, 1986, Willame, 1992) These individuals could withhold or make available supplies, increasing profitability through the decay of the country more generally. (Peemans, 1986, 84)

They included numerous women who had been entirely, and still were largely, excluded from the professional careers that the state created, certified or legitimated for some men. Initially elite men had preferred the situation where women were kept out of direct economic activities and held instead the virtues of status and display. (Baeck, 1959) An early commentator actually emphasized the extent to which the new public society emerging in the cities of Zaïre was essentially masculine, excluding women from opportunities other than display in the favour of men with the exception of the minority of *femmes libres,* who will be discussed below. (Bernard, 1972) These became the model for a gradual transformation. Such women, acquiring a foothold in business, made strategic alliances, perhaps marriages with civil servants or lenders of capital, with men who could assist them. (MacGaffey, 1987)

In one sense, this could be said to shift the process of wealth formation from the public to the private sector.[9] However, the Congolese situation was far more complex. Some bureaucrats were fired, in what was called the *assainissement,* and hungry for finding new ways of making ends meet. (Piermay, 1997, Tshilemalema, 1973)With the collapse of state salaries, officials began to look to business for making ends meet and to accumulate wealth. To a remarkable extent, Mobutu tolerated and indeed encouraged a process by which scholars have actually been able to tabulate the growing share of income source outside salaries for officials. MacGaffey has explained for the Mobutu period how state officials were able to use privileged access to medical care, protection for locally made goods and many other examples of *circuits personelles* to benefit themselves.

In consequence, it is hard to imagine that an independent bourgeoisie could or would ever want to shake off the state for all its iniquities. (MacGaffey, 1987) At the lowest level, this amounted to shakedowns, often of a brutal nature, on the part of licensed armed men that affected millions of village people. In the words of Jean-Claude Willame, 'In Zaïre, the subjects of the monarch are thus conscripted, controlled and punished rather than governed or administered.' (Willame, 1992, 57, my translation) As such, there is a contrast with what could be said for absolutist states in Europe, a comparison that Willame and Callaghy have both made for the Congo.(Callaghy, 1984) They in turn formed a model for criminal gangs that emerged and diffused violence into daily life. (Piermay, 1997) This held wide cultural repercussions: it fed into the delinquent adoption of *Billisme*, the cult of Western contact sports heroes and cowboy adventurers. (de Boeck, 2002) However, figures suggest that the possibilities for wealth increased directly with one's stature in the government and, of course, the very most prestigious and powerful individuals under Mobutu had the opportunity to become very rich indeed.[10]

Analyses unpacked with considerable acuity the growing irrelevance of official statistics maintained by the state; increasingly wealth acquisition was 'informal' and the 'real' economy was less and less captured by any licit state agencies. (MacGaffey, 1991) Was this in fact a process of class formation that fed off state failure and relied on the weakening of a corrupt and incompetent governmental machinery? Such a process could to some degree even be celebrated during a considerable phase when international agencies blamed African states for the foibles of development policies and demanded the withdrawal of the state from the commanding heights of African economies, whether under the aegis of leadership apparently devoted to a socialist path or simply pragmatists such as Mobutu who relied on the state to hold society together. Certainly Mobutu was one of those who discouraged independent power as a political tool.

Yet the reality was that he too had to compromise. The state went easier and easier over time on private accumulation. However it did not disintegrate or disappear. Instead Congolese society evolved as a kind of mosaic where a very corrupt and inefficient state tolerated and indeed stimulated but also held in check a dynamic of accumulation. Low as wages for civil servants might be, the opportunities that such jobs offered in positioning them for further income continued to give them an important advantage. (MacGaffey, 1991) Amongst those who have thought about this question, I am particularly impressed with the perspective of

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[9] MacGaffey, 1986, explicitly draws the contrast between high official whom she sees as parasites and the new accumulators whose energy and initiative she admires, particularly in the case of the women.

[10] These are described in some detail by Willame, 1992, who notes, for instance, the Lux soap monopoly. Most of this top elite also make their money through using bureaucratic or military power to control commercial networks.

Jean-Luc Piermay who has depicted a low level stasis, a mutual dependence of state and autonomous commerce that captured what accumulation processes were able to proceed in the declining Congolese economy of the 1970s and 1980s. (see also Trefon, 2004) Piermay points to the importance of fixers, of middlemen, in coming to the fore in enabling people to get anything done with a petrified system in gridlock.[11]

Broadly speaking, decline continued through the last years of Mobutu without check and despite the efforts of Zaïre's creditors to intervene and 'reform' its rotten economic structures.[12] Under the Kabilas, however, one can begin to see a stabilisation and to a limited extent, a turning of the tide. Joseph Kabila is clearly eager to create some kind of balanced relationship with Western interests that can be mutually beneficial. However, reforming a system that has acquired its own dynamism will be extremely difficult. One business expanded rapidly through the years of decay, the mining and sale of 'artisanal' diamonds, at first especially on the frontier with Angola where a long civil war raged, often adding both to dangers and to profits but latterly in the eastern Congo as well on a very significant scale. One estimate has it that perhaps at any time 700,000 Congolese venture out to the mines fields, including city-dwellers, while perhaps 100,000 are involved in trade in diamonds. (Cuyvers, 2005) The real wealth in the diamond industry has largely been captured by the hardiest of the outsiders, the Lebanese, who also have a major involvement in this business in West Africa, with Belgians and Israelis playing some part.

The other development worth particular notice has been the growing capacity of Congolese, elite but also ambitious men and women on the fringe of society, to access sources of wealth outside the country. (Trefon, 2004, de Herdt, 2004) These include drug dealers, physicians with practices in Johannesburg as well as in Kinshasa and traders who cross borders and organise commerce in the basic necessities of life. The most glamorous of such individuals, who have effectively colonised the old colonial capitals of Paris and Brussels but who often aspire to return home to successful business operations-- very typically bars and other places of entertainment-- to multiple property investments and to the patronage of numerous impoverished or ambitious kinsmen and friends. They are the subject of a new anthropological literature which captures how different such people are from the traditional unskilled labour migrants to Europe of twenty and thirty years ago. (MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga, 2000) The most fortunate are an elite that owes little to formal certification and the classic channels of social advancement; some are in fact individuals who took that route when young but abandoned it in favour of what seemed more promising.

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[11] MacGaffey's take is also telling: 'The poor and illiterate find the administration incomprehensible, alien and oppressive. They minimize contacts with it. The wealthy and influential backed by the power of office are served by it and given whatever they want. Those in between must resort to personal relations.' (MacGaffey, 1987, 207)
[12] The efforts of the German Erwin Blumenthal of the IMF, who wrote about his experiences of trying to reform the budget as the crisis intensified in the late 1970s by cutting out corrupt practices and who came to despise the Congolese notables, was a hate figure for the elite.(Callaghy, 1984, 199)

The Changing Network of Congolese Cities

Given what has been said above, it is hardly surprising that the Belgian colonial system denoted a logical series of urban settlements that grew either in centres where the evacuation of key exported natural products was organised or in administrative nodes where the government of districts or whole provinces took place. Almost all urban development was colonial in origin; there was virtually no older urban tradition. The largest settlement of all was at Léopoldville which became the capital as late as 1930 (La Fontaine, 12), having previously been a trading post and garrison base created on the site of trading and fishing settlements. Léopoldville was located at the lower end of Stanley Pool, a large sheet of water formed by the Congo which then flowed down through 150+ kilometres of rapids to open water ports accessible to ocean-going vessels. The capital was linked by rail to the first of these, Matadi. Given the shape of the Congo, it is as though a huge bottle emptied through a narrow neck. Léopoldville lies at the foot of the neck. If the produce of the Congo was to flow out without a leak, it was through this neck that it all had to go. Second largest was Élisabethville, centre of the copper mining district of Katanga in the far south of the colony. Third came Stanleyville, the river port where goods needed to be transferred by rail for a distance due to the obstacle of a waterfall. This was the transport nexus that organised the evacuation of the produce of the eastern Congo. In the worst Depression years but again as the economy began to stagnate in the late 1950s, the Belgians tried to transport 'excess' urban Africans back to villages but found this was resisted; urban growth had taken off beyond a point that was controllable. (La Fontaine, 1970)

Enormous disruptions to the post-colonial economy and severe decline in some areas has had a major effect on this once logical network. (Omasombo Tshonda, 2002) Many towns have gone into substantial decline as a result. A particularly well-covered example is Stanleyville, which was renamed Kisangani. Kisangani was the site of an extremely violent popular rising followed by mercenary seizure in the late 1960s.[13] A decade later it had to some extent recovered and the American-based anthropologist, Janet McGaffey, provided a remarkably thoughtful and well-observed portrait of life there, particularly economic life. (MacGaffey, 1987) At that point in time, when Kisangani still remained a major centre of brewing and industrial textile production, it contained a diverse class of business people, including many women, who learnt to profit from the collapse of the Congolese transport infrastructure.[14] Accumulation followed a number of channels: it connected with the smuggling of ivory and coffee, with river-based commerce and with the provision of money lending in promoting mostly commercial operations, transport and property ownership in what had been the European residential area; industry was already in decline, however and MacGaffey writes little about craft activity. However, a far grimmer portrait was drawn by Omasombo at the end of the millennium when the economic logic of what had been the third largest centre in the country had virtually disappeared; few of the goods produced in what had been Orientale Province continued to flow through the city. Another devastating wave of foreign soldier occupation, Ugandan and Rwandan, had followed the end of the Mobutu era. The one economic logic that did remain came from the new development of artisanal diamond production in the not-distant hinterland. This was the one remaining source of wealth that kept the population going at a very low level of economic activity with the middle class largely engaged in trying to leave the city. (Omasombo, 2005; Omasombo Tshonda, 2002)

If some cities in the old Belgian Congo have decayed and declined, others have grown, reflecting changes in the post-colonial economy. By contrast with Kisangani, for instance,

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[13] MacGaffey estimates that 20.000 people died in the 1964 Stanleyville troubles. MacGaffey, 1987.

[14] There were still enough people with resources to support a Belgian model primary school then.

Goma, on the frontier with Rwanda and easily accessible to better transport conditions across the borders, has become an important city discussed elsewhere in this project. Another remarkable example is Butembu, well to the north of Goma. This is now a medium-sized city, the most important in North Kivu, where those who have made money from smuggling and from supplying the needs created by warfare over the past decade in the east, make their headquarters. Almost all of them belong to an ethnic group called Nande, of little consequence under Belgian rule. In fact the Nande were largely Christianised by American Protestants and rarely had opportunities for state employment or what was available in the way of higher education. Thus the new opportunities available from 1960 bypassed them and their most ambitious individuals turned to commerce, especially the transport of fresh produce out to the Congo river ports via Kisangani and the smuggling of coffee over the borders to Rwanda and Uganda. If most Nande traders still thrive on the illegal, the grandest have established good relations with the Kabila regime and would be able to restructure their affairs in a shift towards legality. Today Butembu is a city, remarkable as a relatively well-ordered centre with educational and health facilities as well as expensive homes, the respectable site of major elite festivities such as massively attended weddings, all of this at disconnect with the central state. There is a local administration effectively controlled by the wealthiest merchants and the Catholic Church (despite the fact that the richest Nande are not generally Roman Catholics themselves) plays the adjudicator and links the city to national authorities. Its rise is impressively documented in a recent PhD thesis by Patience Kabamba (2008), who describes it as a city based on a huge array of warehouses, continually emptied and filled again.[15] Another example is the diamond zone centre of Mbuji Mayi, a city of almost no significance in colonial times which is now often considered the third largest in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. (Piermay, 1997, 248-49) In 1979, a major conflict there pitted miners against state functionaries whose demands for bribes were refused. (Callaghy, 1984) These cities are the site of a new elite which combines linkages into a predatory, corrupt but still usually present national state (less so in the east, however) and a class of acquisitors who have gained through the commercial possibilities of a system where systematic state control is extremely limited.

Kinshasa
In some respects, Kinshasa, the national capital, fills this pattern as well. In other ways, however, Kinshasa is *sui generis* in the Congo. The World War II years saw its population double and the start of secondary industrialisation. (La Fontaine, 1970) In the final generation of colonial rule, Léopoldville enjoyed spectacular demographic growth which included housing a population of almost 20,000 Europeans at peak. (Young, 1965) They were the makers of the old core centre-city now known as Gombe. The population at independence already exceeded 400,000. Many of these had administrative, commercial and industrial employment but the city clearly attracted others beyond this desirable layer of workers. The city was intended only for those in gainful employment but, apart from the emergence of businesses that were not planned by colonial authorities, unemployed individuals became a large part of the population, perhaps 20% on the eve of independence, with the economic downturn of the late 1950s. (La Fontaine, 1970)

From the start, African workers were allowed to build basic housing for themselves in the city. (Tshingi, 1999) The oldest part of the city opened to Africans was dominated by narrow, crowded streets difficult to control but with some more affluent inhabitants, one *quartier*

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[15] However, MacGaffey (1987) has much to say already about the Nande. They were very active in Kisangani by the late 1970s as traders in agricultural commodities and had begun to buy up real estate. In addition to Butembo, the North Kivu town of Beni was an important site of Nande entrepreneurial activity.

being Dandale, the headquarters of Kasavubu and another, Kinshasa, which later gave its name to the entire city. (La Fontaine, 1970) These districts have become ever more crowded over time but with little vertical construction to mark a true urban densification in the built environment. (Piermay, 1997)

Today it is the *annexes*, yet further out that house most Kinois in unplanned and often environmentally degraded environments. If many workers were housed in state constructed townships south of the European business and residential core of the city (marked off by green spaces, Cuyvers, 2005)[16], there was already the beginning of a further expansion of *lotissements*, created spontaneously through deals between African urban residents and local chiefs and supposed landowners. The city began to sprawl up above the Congo river valley[17] on the basis of these lots or *parcelles* which would be walled in (Cuyvers, 2005)—required by the state --and contain various dwellings whereby life was lived largely in courtyards or on the streets. La Fontaine provides us with a remarkably clear view of *parcelle* life as it was lived in the first years of independence for the Congo. Usually the *parcelle* had tap water laid on, at least at first.[18] The *chef de parcelle,* or acknowledged owner, had a kind of patrimonial power that allowed for the settlement of the disputes amongst inhabitants; tenants moved around frequently and well-supported clients, especially relatives, would pay lower rates but be expected to provide greater favours for chiefs and property owners. Owners of *parcelles*, who from early on have included women[19], are key minor accumulators; this kind of ownership is often critical to opportunities in life and even more so, the ownership or management of the bars where much socializing is performed and business done. Such bars are concentrated in Matonge, the entertainment capital of Kinshasa but they are located everywhere in the Kinshasa conurbation. They were the site of countless places of sociability, bars, where Congolese musicians performed and urban social networks created.[20]

Initial occupation deals were cemented by individuals hired by the chiefs, called surveyors. However, very little of the ownership of houses (legally, land is only owned by the state) has actually been registered in accordance with the Land Law of 1972. (Piermay, 1997) On the one hand, local authorities were unable to control the process by which new housing was created; on the other, it was equally critical for property owners to gain some kind of official recognition of their situation from the increasingly corrupt state. Under Belgian rule, the city was divided into different politically structured districts in 1957 and it became a part of Bas-Congo province. These district structures at first offered substantial economic benefits to office-holders. They controlled waters, roads, markets and above all, access to *parcelles.* They also commanded more or less a municipal police force which, however, was capable of going on the rampage. (La Fontaine, 1970) The rapid rise of corruption led to the emergence

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[16] By 1960, not far from 20,000 units had been constructed by the Office des Cités Indigènes, either for rental or for sale on the instalment plan. La Fontaine, 1970, 12; Cuyvers, 2005, 251. Bandalungwa is a classic example. These housing units are much prized today, Piermay, 1997. A little more was added on in the better Mobutu days but this came to an end in the late '80s (*Cité verte, Cité Mama Mobutu*) after the closure of the *Office nationale de logement* in 1987.

[17] Thus creating serious erosion problems eventually, Vennetier, 1991,16; Piermay, 1997, 228.

[18] By the 1980s however, more than 1 million Kinois lacked a supply of clean water, Vennetier, 1991, 152. The water supply is particularly bad in newer areas well above the elevation of the river. Water-borne disease is the cause of some 30% of recorded illnesses these days.

[19] One can exaggerate the position of the female accumulator, however. Piermay estimates that no more than 5% of *parcelle* owners are women. (Piermay, 1997, 240)

[20] Schatzberg explains well why bars were excellent, relatively reliable, sources of income for those with enough capital to invest in them and also that a small beer tax provided a splendid source of income for local government officials that was relatively licit. Elite patronage [and the emergence of a network of women fans] was often important in the making of famous musicians.

of an entire class of middlemen, known as *avocats,* who mediated between authorities and people.[21]) *Parcelle* ownership is usually not outright but involves some kind of certification. Best of all is when it combines with a fixed occupation: 'Security lies in permanent employment and in acquiring title to land'. (La Fontaine, 1970, 68) Because it is rare for *parcelle* ownership to be completely licit according to official records and the trained surveyors who control those records can be extremely corrupt, there are continual disputes over the extent and real ownership of them, with the enthusiasm of effective *avocats* and the doughtiness of tenant-clients playing an important part. [22] Over the course of time, chiefs in the vicinity of the city have been bought out in many areas and well-to-do Congolese themselves own, sell and speculate in landed property. (Piermay, 1997)

City government continues to be decentralised but provided with few resources, vague stipulations and little efficacy (Piermay, 1997). There continues to be the skeleton of municipal by-laws and regulations, which are somewhat more enforced in Gombe, the old colonial centre. (Cuyvers, 2005) as well as the creaky presence of official planning mechanisms sometimes assisted by foreign aid. By contrast, the appointed Regional Governor is powerful. By Mobutu's time, however, Kinshasa became a province unto itself; the post of *Première Bourgmestre* was a highly prized gift of Mobutu's central authority; the other *bourgmestres* were appointed as well and unlikely to be KiKongo. (La Fontaine, 1970)

One view of Kinshasa, taken from the classic dichotomy created by Bert Hoselitz was that it was a typically parasitic city. (Hoselitz, 1955) For this, Mobutu himself (at the second congress of his ruling party, the MPR) could be a good source:

> 'In effect; these dishonest citizens, concentrated for the most part in the capital city of the country; have transformed Kinshasa into a true centre for the exploitation of the whole interior. Three quarters of the money supply of the country is concentrated in Kinshasa: oil, food products, drugs and other imports from overseas stay in Kinshasa while the money that pays for their importation comes almost entirely from the sweat of the industrial and agricultural populations of the interior of the country.'[23] (in Schatzberg, 1970, my translation)

Such contemporaries as Senghor or Nyerere would of course have said the same about their own African capitals. Kinshasa was the classic example of an African city whereby urban employment in the formal sense first expanded, then stagnated and eventually contracted. As this process intensified and the life of the Kinois poor developed, it became more difficult to apply a simple model of urban exploitation along the lines the Mobutu quote suggested. (Piermay, 1997)

In terms of population, Kinshasa grew explosively. Piermay estimated that the total population by the middle 1990s was perhaps 4.5 million inhabitants. (Piermay, 1997, 227) Growth in the first years of independence can be accounted for in three distinct ways. First, there was the concentration of wealth and services in the core centre of the national state;

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[21] In addition, quarrels over property and the like were adjudicated by a system of *juges coutumiers* , according to La Fontaine, 1970, 80 who administered *coutumes à la Léo* which differ substantially from the varying customs of different parts of the Congolese hinterland.

[22] In the photograph BRAKIN collection, one can note the number of signs indicating that properties are 'not for sale' rather than the reverse! A further complication is that the largest number of Kinois are KiKongo people who have in the past reckoned inheritance along matrilineal lines; however, these days more and more Kinois do not wish their property to be inherited in this way and prefer to benefit their own children. (Piermay, 1997)S

[23] For this perspective developed, see Kabongo, 1986 especially.

accessing some part of this was so much easier in the capital. Second, the peculiar boundaries of the new republic were such that the growing possibility of smuggling and currency profiteering were of some importance. (La Fontaine, 1970; de Herdt & Marysse, 1999) It was only a short boat trip from Kinshasa across the river to the French Congolese capital of Brazzaville where the CFA franc and an economy increasingly based on oil export was present. *Cambisme*, black market money transactions in an era of long-term Congolese franc inflation, supported a growing number of market women, first on the 'Beach' along the river and eventually throughout the city, even though extremely few traders became wealthy. (de Herdt & Marysse, 1999) In Portuguese times, up to 1974, the linkages to Angola were very important as well. (Young, 1965) During this period, there were numerous Angolans (largely KiKongo speakers) in the city as a result of the violence of struggle between colonial forces and rebels.

The tumultuous events in the Congo itself, the struggles for a so-called second independence which had one major site to the east of the capital, was the third reason for dramatic urban growth. The city became a relatively peaceful place of refuge away from the exactions of the state in rural areas and the threat of violence. In a sense, the January 1959 riots which shook the foundations of the Belgian-centric city, despite some long-term destructive effects, was more critical in opening the city up to newcomers, especially the outlying areas ripe for expansion, or for the emergence of Matonge as a hub for music and entertainment. (Piermay, 1997, Willame, 1992) It is certainly true that for most of the Mobutu period, Kinshasa was not only the first place where wealth was accumulated albeit in shrinking amounts but also a place of relative safety if one ignores the ordinary depredations of the authorities. However, in September, 1991 and then several times again (for instance January 1993, in 1997 as Mobutu's soldiers retreated finally and also when the Rwandans were expelled in 1998) until the Kabila regime was well established, the city was the scene of looting and mayhem. Nonetheless its capacity to sustain itself, to pick itself up and renew itself is considerable.

Already by 1970, Kinshasa had grown to a size quite disproportionate to any other Zaïrois city. The appeal of the city was also, as elsewhere in Africa, cultural. Its school network was prestigious and post-1960 values elevated the signs of school learning (intimately linked to the still powerful Catholic Church, itself importantly international in its linkages and resources.[24]) and access to European culture to the heights of prestige.[25] The city was a way of escaping bad family situations and the ever-present and sometimes very oppressive presence of ethnically defined policing of omnipresent witchcraft.

Who were the inhabitants of independent Kinshasa? After the first spectacular waves of immigration, it is remarkable to note that the city continued to grow fairly rapidly but largely as a result of natural increase rather than in-migration (by 3:1) with an increasingly normal sex ratio. From 1967 to 1984, increase was estimated at 5% p.a. (Piermay, 1997, 227) By this time, the sex ratio was very close to even and the average age of the population estimated in 1984 at 15; the majority of the population were city-born. (Shapiro, 2004)

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[24] Moreover, the Congolese bishoprics have shown themselves able to sustain and extend aid links to foreign donors through the church that have breathed life into their continued influence, Schatzberg, 1988.

[25] By the 1990s, de Herdt, 2004, reports that school attendance fell substantially in the last years of Mobutu. For girls' education, see Shapiro, 2004. Up to that time, girls' education had become very widely available at primary level in the city. Shapiro provides an interesting intensive case study that indicates that women's social patterns differ dramatically for the small number of highly educated women but not for those with moderate amounts of education. For the parallel situation in health see Persyn & Ladrière, 2004. Despite the vicissitudes of Kinshasa's recent history, elite access to education and health care is up to a point available.

Women became far more prominent actors than in Belgian times although even then independent women—*femmes libres*—had emerged as a class. La Fontaine, in an important pioneering study, showed how such a social category had existed in rural contexts; they were readily attracted by the greater opportunities of the city. Prostitution was one form of earning income from employed men in towns but it tied into the provision of many other services and allowed the fortunate to acquire property.[26] Virtually excluded from paid employment, they had to pioneer autonomous economic activity. La Fontaine notes their ability to make use of the unemployed to carry out economic activities while they deployed relationships with men in order to expand access to capital. The fortunate amongst them—the 'vedettes'-- were role models for the acquisition of Western feminine consumer patterns and important patrons of musician-entertainers. (La Fontaine, 1974) By the 1970s, the *mamaBenzi* were a notable part of Kinshasa life just as in West Africa. (MacGaffey, 1988) Equally in the Congo, one can fall however into the trap of exaggerating the wealth and power of women; on average, they certainly are not better-off than men.

In addition, while certainly the population contained residents with origins from all over the vast territory of the Congo, the largest numbers by far were from the western part of the country. (Young, 1965) Early post-colonial observations suggest a situation where men from this region migrated in large numbers to the city whilst elderly people and many women stayed behind and a constant human flow could be observed. (MacGaffey, 1983) It is also possible to see a gradual shift from a situation where intense rivalry between KiKongo speakers, the earliest in the colony to form effective politically minded associations and others from up-river, a rivalry which still dominated the earliest elections, to one characterised by the rise of a Kinois sensibility with some sense of citizenship in the city, which has been captured by social scientists who have placed their emphasis on cultural observation. (Trefon, 2004) [27] The Lingala language, once the trading language of the lower to middle Congo, has become a common means of expression for this population and even in colonial times, its use dominated widely spread primary education. (La Fontaine, 1970) According to a recent survey of broad socio-biological trends, the proportion of KiKongo speakers has gradually diminished, the proportion of Luba, an ethnic group noted for their mobility and interest in business has increased and the Angolan element in the population, once very prominent, is no longer too significant. Kwilu-Kwango people from up the Bandundu road have also become more numerous. (Shapiro, 2004)

Food reaches the city from every direction. Considerable amounts of urban cultivation occur in Manyanga and other marshland areas near the river on the east side of the city. (Vennetier, 1992, Piermay, 1997), not to speak of what is possible to grow within the *parcelle*. (Tollens, 2004) The cultural inability of Congolese men to provide their own food provides major opportunities for women at various levels of the food chain. Food, as with other commodities, pass through a myriad of hands in complex commercial networks that often end up in very small amounts at local neighbourhood markets. The linkages with the Bas-Congo and also the

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[26] As in the classic Nairobi study of Luise White, *The Comforts of Home*, 1990.

[27] 'Believe you me, here [in Kinshasa] tribal origins lost their significance. Look at me for example with my name that is not identifiable, I change constantly my place of origins according to what is most convenient. I am a native of Tshikapa, Isiro or Kahemba from the moment that it is a question of talking about precious stones and that business. I am from Equateur [Province] if I want to impress the ladies. I am from Bas-Zaïre [if I wish] to be viewed and received with more warmth by the religious sects. But what I am is a native of Kinshasa, that is to say independent of sex or tendency as soon as one speaks politically, because this gives me the false alibi of neutrality.' (Willame, 1992, 212, my translation)

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Bandundu region (formerly Kwilu-Kwango) to the east, the two directions where there are usually transportable road connections, are important and sometimes strengthened by kinship ties, as these are the regions where many Kinois have family origins. (Piermay, 1997, 247) At times, shipments through the Pool from up-river have been most important. In peaceful conditions, an important breakthrough was reached when wooden boats capable of carrying reasonable amounts of foodstuffs began to be constructed locally, replacing broken-down imported machine-made vessels. (Tollens, 2004, 54) However, much food comes to the city by road, often in a myriad of small parcels carried on bicycles, and even on foot, by enterprising Kinois. (Piermay, 1997, 246) This is very inefficient but provides gainful activity for many, many mouths. However, this traffic must compete with the possibility for cultivators of earning more by selling for CFA francs on the other side of the river. At times, food aid has been critical in feeding the city. (LaFontaine, 1970; Tollens, 2004)

Since independence, good analyses have consistently been made, under the aegis of the university, of the diet and consumption habits of the city-dwellers. Life is sparse for the great majority, with cassava the key staple food. Most not merely rarely touch meat but often only eat less than once a day. Observers point to the decline in the normal African hospitable norms of sharing food with kinsmen and former fellow villagers. However, de Herdt notes the tendency for bigger households that include increasing numbers of single mothers, households that negotiate sharing food and other resources. (de Herdt, 2004) Having said this, however, it is equally startling that serious malnutrition is only at all common in the very poorest districts. (Tollens, 2004) Child food deficiencies are as low, or lower, than any measured elsewhere in the country. Kinshasa has lower death rates and later marriage rates but also higher birth, marriage and fertility rates than other measured sites in the Congo. (Piermay, 1997, 227; Shapiro, 2004) At a very basic level, there is a kind of biological logic in what attracts people to the capital.

With the decline of fixed, organised employment, the spatial logic for this city, easily after Lagos, Nigeria, the second largest in Africa south of the Sahara and north of the industrialised terrain of South Africa, creates a real problem for social analysis. (Piermay, 1997) Certainly the extent to which the state can continue to control wealth and particularly to attract institutions to the capital which can make life easier is not unimportant but it does not justify the size of the population by any means. Nor does the presence of an informal economy of 'la débrouille' where people use their wits to fend for themselves (also often referred to as the all-important if never written out Article 15 of the Congolese constitution) explain the urban logic of settlement entirely. It is true that smuggling has continued to have some importance but probably less than in the first decades of independence. It is also true that the diamond trade finds outlets, particularly numerous buyers, in the capital, but it is a long way from the diamond fields themselves and urban adventurers who wish to try their hand as diggers have to leave town to access this form of potential wealth. (de Boeck, 2002, 266) Perhaps one should note as well the sustained links with the outer world, the role of N'djili airport, the embassies, aid agencies, the UNO troops and foreign NGOs that have sprung up and support many people with resources from outside the Congo. Finally, let us not forget the underworld: since 1960, criminal gang activity, often associated with drugs, has become a significant way for youths to survive in Kinshasa. (Piermay, 1997) Undoubtedly actors inside and outside the state have taken advantage of this.

Kinshasa: A City for Whom?

Kinshasa is a distinctive city whose purpose seems especially hard to discern. On the one hand, it continues to be the place where the Congolese state exerts its presence, dysfunctional as it appears according to any political science formulation. The state continues to be there to ratify property rights, to demand a wide variety of certification and to be the source of some kinds of income, including the diffusion of income emanating from outside the country. The key role of Kinshasa in terms of communications with the West makes it important as a transit point. Foreign aid passes through many hands and supports many people. It is noticeable that accumulating Congolese from overseas and from the provinces often seem to aspire to possessing property there. It has the best national facilities for health and education purposes and the best access to imported goods. And yet the economic logic of Kinshasa is not very strong. A cliché, repeated frequently, is that the people support themselves in this city 'mysteriously'.

Contemporary literature on Kinshasa has tended to shift from musing about the state and material living standards to an emphasis on culture in the last generation. (de Boeck, 2002; Gondola, 1997; Nlandu, 2002; Tshingi, 1999) In this regard, the literature about the city is particularly rich in comparison with other parts of Africa. There is a general agreement that a distinctive Kinois culture has arisen in which people exert pride and identity through their upbringing and survival in the city. But there have also been accounts which convince one that ideas about success and failure, good and bad fortune, witchcraft and conformity have been transmuted from rural roots and turned into a distinctive urban and 'modern' culture. De Boeck has considered this as a process of 're-enchantment' of the meaning of the city for its inhabitants (de Boeck, 2002)[28] although it can be argued that this process was already signalled for the earliest years of independence in the prescient work of Jean La Fontaine.[29] If the typical religious rituals of the rural Congo (including in fact the Kimbangu sect which was so strong when it was illegal in the colonial period) did not easily carry into the city, the urban environment reconstructed forms of ritual evil and benevolence. The *Matanga* a ceremony designed originally to break the mourning period amongst KiKongo speakers, has acquired a new and greater carnival like importance in the city. (La Fontaine, 1970, 178-82) Funerals involve neighbourhoods and follow different norms than in rural areas. Here we can look both at the grand public ceremonies of the Mobutu era or the more privatised bar culture which involves the largest number. Adherence to the three major Kinshasa football teams has become an important defining signifier.[30]

The KiKongo speaking populating is historically matrilineal (with sibling bonds often becoming the most important of all, La Fontaine, 1970) but this is also diffusing into more complex and more patrilineal patterns of association and inheritance. Typical money-sharing affinity groups, usually called *ikelemba*, are rural in origin (Baeck, 1959) but exist universally in the city; however, amongst the more moneyed they are formed amongst school alumni and members of other elite associations. De Boeck argues that it is above all women who continue to focus on such groupings; they are also crucial to the growing importance of Pentecostalism while more adventurous males prefer the risk of the search for diamonds. (deBoeck, 2004) Tribal identity, while certainly still present, is not so important and especially not in its rural forms. (Giovannoni et al, 2004) Marriages, however, still are largely between members of what are defined as the same ethnic group. The great poverty of the city

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[28] As such, this is meant to turn on its head the classic notion of Max Weber that the capitalist city is the seat of disenchantment and rationality. See deBoeck and Plissart, 2004, 86.

[29] An unexplored research area would be the extent to which an elite share in this popular culture.

[30] It was a football defeat that sparked the iconic 1959 riots.

contrasts with cultural richness and inventiveness. Urban sociability tied in to both survival tactics and status: 'The priorities established in urban spending derive from the competitiveness and display that are an integral part of the urban culture from which the city-dweller derives his values.' (La Fontaine, 1970) In a society where people spend most of their time not only out of doors but in company, clothing and clothing expenditure was and is very important to prestige and any sense of self-worth. A swathe of Congolese youth have notoriously come to emulate the *sapeurs* originating across the river who define themselves through the display of expensive male clothing imported from Europe. Congolese music and art are appreciated very widely. They are patronised by the local elite, spread to émigré Congolese nodes in Europe and elsewhere and find appreciation amongst Westerners. Out of a harsh history and an inept and cruel government, a new society seems to be being born, albeit one which links back both to the rural Congo (there remains much contact between the city and less distant rural communities) and centres of wealth and prestige beyond the country's borders. At the same time, some writers have argued that, while the centre city continues to exert a cultural and economic pull, increasingly Kinshasa is fragmented with intramural traffic difficult to access often and *la cité,* the neighbourhood, in contrast to *la ville,* is where the Kinois actually live. (Nlandu, 2002) Both have their importance.

I do not agree with the impression derived from some current writing that Kinshasa is almost entirely cut off from the globalising processes so often examined in current social analyses of changing international trends.[31] Thus the poor, including such categories as the archetypal marginal street children, attract the attention of numerous NGOs; the historian Elias Mbokolo estimated their number at more than 1,300. Some in effect become businesses with numerous employees.(Giovannoni et al, 2004)

There are opportunities for an emergent elite. Kinshasa offers them some advantages (as well as disadvantages) in access to the central state and its resources and to foreigners with relations to the state. Its need for self-sufficiency provides some, albeit usually modest, vehicles for accumulation. Facilities such as private clinics, the two big luxury hotels where foreigners stay, and the University of Kinshasa are also important. Accumulation of property in the city is desirable for any Congolese with ambitions.[32]

Having said this, however, there are real limitations too, which afflict Kinshasa compared to cities such as Dar es Salaam, Nairobi, Lusaka, Accra, Abidjan or Dakar with their increasingly visible class structuration to the advantage of a consolidating elite. It is true that as de Boeck has written, this is a city where the national bank often ran out of money, where streets would empty because the country had run out of petrol, where the university was unable to purchase any new reading material or organise the teaching of research doctorates.[33] Thus far the DRC has been unusually incapable in providing basic infrastructure and Kinshasa has had to rely too long and too late on a decaying provision from Belgian times. Life has been difficult for virtually everyone. In the last decade of the Mobutu regime, the city was in effect sacked twice by the poor, most notably in 1991 and again in 1993; the elite were unable to find protection for their properties and goods. (deVillers & Omasombo Tshonda, 2004; Pongo,1999) In the period of conflict when the capital was disputed between Laurent Kabila and Jean-Pierre Bemba, the warlord who was for a time dominant in the west,

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[31] This is the kind of impression the reader receives from the selections in Enwezor, 2002.

[32] Janet MacGaffey is perhaps the most insistent scholar in defining the *cultural* parameters of an elite that dreams of a stable middle class status. (MacGaffey, 1991,38)

[33] For the University of Kinshasa in recent times with its student body in excess of 25,000, see Munikengi and Kangol, 2004.

there was a further phase of looting and damage to infrastructure. Recovery from this phase remains fragile. The affluent still live close to the skirts of the UNO troops in the neighbourhoods once inhabited by Europeans in colonial times. (Cuyvers, 2005) At most, it appears that one can envision a gradual transformation in which a more self-confident national elite can make space for themselves in Kinshasa more securely. Piermay has speculated on whether Kinshasa can evolve into a city where an autonomous bourgeoisie, as in Mbuji-Mayi or Butembu, are clearly in charge; so far, there are signs pointing in this direction but this is not yet really the case. (Piermay, 1997)

Kinshasa is therefore neither simply a primate African city whose extent and dimensions reflect the presence of the state which in effect generates it (although its origins lie in the needs of the colonial regime) nor is it a city which reflects the trajectories of new social formations despite and beyond the purchase of the state. It has strong elements of both which inter-penetrate. Its elite has one foot in and one out of the state and strives to establish international linkages as a critical element in accumulation. As such it is an original kind of conurbation that defies many conventional characterisations of today's cities. Like the DRC as a whole, Kinshasa perhaps in exemplary form displays 'a real state of equilibrium for a weak society within the context of laissez-faire economics at world level' (Piermay, 1997, 244). Good governance in Kinshasa would require skills that the local state does not possess and means that they do not control. Nonetheless its size and importance makes it impossible to ignore in rethinking what makes those cities in Africa tick.

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