

# **The Problem of Change and Reorganisation of The One-Party Dictatorship in Congo<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Democratisation, a Buzzword**

Since the beginning of the 90s "democratisation" has been the buzzword for donors as well as agencies such as the IMF and the World Bank. However, we have also seen the "democratisation process" come to a stop in several cases toppled by "old leaders" coming back to power, either through election or by armed force. This has been the case in The Congo (Brazzaville) in 1997.<sup>2</sup> Since October 15, 1997, Denis Sassou-Nguesso, the President of the former socialist one-party state has been back in power. He won the civil war with help from France and Angola,<sup>3</sup> and perhaps also from other African leaders. It seems as if the democratisation process in the Congo has come to an end. The process of political and economic reorganisation of the society that started with the new constitution of 1991 has been interrupted. I assume, however, that the process of democratisation is not so easy to stop and that Sassou-Nguesso cannot return to the way he ruled Congo during the 1980s. Concurrently, the Central Africa region is undergoing a tremendous change and the political landscape is being transformed. South Africa is becoming more and more influential, the traditional influence from the West is changing. The position of the USA and France is not clear, and it is difficult to judge whether their influence is as strong as it used to be. Laurent Désirée Kabila in DR Congo has for instance sought support from states like China and Libya. But the influence from the different transnational oil-companies is indisputable.

In this paper, I intend to discuss the reorganisation of Congolese society that started in 1991 with the transitional government. Congo managed, in 1991, to engage in a National Conference without bloodshed, and then, in 1992, a transitional government was launched to prepare for democratic elections. I shall

discuss the problem of change from a one-party system with a Marxist label to a multi-party system with labels such as Democratic, Parliamentary and so on. The analysis is based on empirical data from fieldwork in 1994, 1995 and 1997 in Congo. During my fieldwork, I interviewed almost 60 persons, among whom some were interviewed more than once. I also lived in Brazzaville for six years, 1982-5 and 1989-92.

The paper is organized as follows. I start from the present situation where, in retrospect, I see the war in 1997 as disrupting the democratisation and reorganisation process. The disruption took the form of ethnic war that has happened twice since the new process started. Secondly, I discuss the attempt to change from a one-party system to multi-party system, seeking an understanding of what the Congolese were trying to do. Thirdly, I analyse what this reorganisation of society and polity really meant and why it has been so difficult to carry out, resulting in two civil wars so far.

## The Present Situation

### *The African Press*

Sassou-Nguesso, returned to office stronger than ever before; or so it seemed. His *entourage* is described as a mixture of trustworthy politicians and family members (Africa International Oct 1998 No. 318; (Badie 1992; N'Diaye 1998). If he could pay the salaries of public sector workers his position might be consolidated. After the war in 1997 there seemed to be no alternative even though people criticised the manner in which he came to power; and he was well connected to traditional leaders, that gave him an advantage. But today the situation is more ambivalent, and he certainly has difficulty bringing it under control.

In several issues of *Jeune Afrique* and *l'Autre Afrique* of 1997 the debate revolved around whether the political developments in different countries such as Uganda, Rwanda and Angola, were a setback for democracy, or they ushered in new possibilities of defining it within the African context. For according to a former politician and minister in Congo, Henri Lopez,<sup>4</sup> it had become evident that "It does not suffice to be elected democratically, you have to rule accordingly." "What does democracy mean?" and "How is it supposed to work?" were questions that the Congolese national press was equally concerned with. *Le Chemin* dealt with the conception of democracy as early as 1990 in issue No. 31, 1990. In 1996 and 1997, the newspapers dealt more with the specific situation in that country, questioning the Lissouba government and asking why not all the institutions of the Constitution had been installed (e.g. *La Semaine Africaine* No. 2117, 1997). Even President Pascal Lissouba himself recognized the problem arising from this failure: "*Je reconnais humblement ne pas avoir pu réaliser tout ce à quoi je m'étais engagé*" (*La Semaine Africaine* No. 2111, 1997).

The problem with the democratic processes in Africa so far has been that they inevitably have led to conflict and war. An important factor in today's world and certainly in Congo is the existence and the importance of networks (see Castells, M., 1996). Lissouba spent many years abroad and lost his political network in the national as well as the international arena. Sassou-Nguesso on the other hand managed to keep his and continued to use "clan politics" to regain power. Clan politics are used not only within the country, but also in the international arena. There are many interesting connections between the different African leaders as well as connections to France and the US to look into.<sup>5</sup> What is clear is that a large scale reorganisation and transformation of society and polity is taking place in Central Africa today. We see new formations of an economic and political character. Congo Kinshasa is now included in SADC.<sup>6</sup> Relations are established with South Africa while France and the US are becoming less visibly involved. This regional reorganisation and specifically the role of France are important factors in understanding the recent conflict in Congo. However in this article, these macro level issues will be dealt with only to the extent that they directly relate to the present situation in Brazzaville.

### ***Unforeseen Moves – Recent History***

On 5 June 1997, President Pascal Lissouba<sup>7</sup> decided to disarm the different militias starting with the Cobras, the militia of former president Sassou-Nguesso. The agreement about the collection of arms and demobilisation of the militias had been signed in December 1995 but nothing was done until June 1997. On 28 May 1997 the Council of Ministers resolved that all activities, and even the existence, of militias were henceforth forbidden (*L'Autre Afrique* No. 3, June 4-10, 1997). What made Lissouba take such a step at this particular time? The different parties in the conflict express different views. Both sides agree that the temperature of the debate in the presidential elections had been rising since April. Sassou-Nguesso's victorious group claims that Lissouba had, at this time, seen polls conducted by independent French polling agencies which indicated that Sassou-Nguesso would win the election<sup>8</sup> (*Les guerres civiles du Congo-Brazzaville 1998*). The intent of Lissouba's move was thus understood as an attempt to eliminate Sassou-Nguesso as a potential rival. Lissouba's defeated followers however, stress the importance of the decision taken by the Council of Ministers. They also claim that Lissouba had information about a possible coup d'état. It is striking to an observer, that Sassou-Nguesso had the time and capacity to transform his militia into a well equipped and well trained army, which implies that he was at least more aware of a possible military conflict than Lissouba seemingly was.<sup>9</sup>

The civil war was triggered by a clash between rival militias of Sassou-Nguesso and Jacques Yhombi Opango, which occurred in the north. Even though it has never been officially confirmed, Sassou-Nguesso is alleged to be a "collaborator"

of Yhombi in the murder of President Marien Ngouabi in 1977.<sup>10</sup> Both Yhombi and Sassou-Nguesso are from the north, but from rival ethnic groups, the Kukuyu and Mbochi, respectively. In any case, Sassou -Nguesso had started his political campaign in the north by provoking Yhombi in his home town Owando. Apparently Sassou-Nguesso wanted to be received in the traditional manner, which means to be carried in a tipoy into the town. All the political leaders have tried to use traditional symbols when campaigning. For example one of the generals trying to make a career as a politician, General Raymond Damas Ngollo,<sup>11</sup> could be seen on television, dancing in traditional raphia clothing. But Sassou-Nguesso's act carried a deeper meaning. By being carried in a tipoy into the fief of Yhombi, he would thus claim sovereignty like a conquering chief. Everything was arranged. Sassou-Nguesso had sent his security force to organise a bodyguard for his visit, which in this case was required. It so happened that a person loyal to Yhombi, who had been recruited into the bodyguard, at some moment felt threatened and pulled a gun. But Sassou-Nguesso's bodyguard was faster and the young man was shot. Yhombi then sent his own son (maybe only a relative, the word son is used in a categorical way) to calm things down, but this son was killed. As Yhombi was the organiser for Lissouba's campaign, this was seen as a clear provocation by both Lissouba and Yhombi.<sup>12</sup> When the Aubevilleois, Lissouba's militia and not the Forces Armées Congolaises (FAC) surrounded Sassou-Nguesso's headquarters in Mpila, Sassou-Nguesso's militia fought back. The Aubevilleois were taken by surprise by the resistance of the Cobras and were totally unprepared for the military strength of Sassou-Nguesso's "army". Sassou-Nguesso had apparently been preparing his defence for some time. His weapons were new and the militia well trained, whereas the weaponry of the Aubevilleois was less modern and the men not as disciplined. One might ask why Lissouba chose not to employ the regular army in the process of collecting the arms. The answer may be simple; he could not trust the army. FAC consisted of too many soldiers and especially officers who in a conflict would rather be loyal to Sassou-Nguesso. So in order to have faithful men Lissouba used his Aubevilleois, who, however were not as efficient as was needed (1998-06 MA.int, 1998).

What may not be evident is why the later negotiations in Libreville, Gabon, had failed. It was said in the news from Radio France International (RFI), that Lissouba had accused Omar Bongo,<sup>13</sup> the President of Gabon and the mediator of the conflict, of being partial. Omar Bongo is in fact married to Sassou-Nguesso's oldest daughter Edith and it was obvious to every Congolese that this would make him partial.<sup>14</sup> It is also interesting to note that Kabila, who had succeeded in conquering Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) from Mobutu, also wanted to get on the stage of international negotiation. Was he trying to rehabilitate himself in the eyes of the world by showing open interest in the stability of the region? It may be noted as well that France was not too keen about the prospect of

Kabila's success, which probably had to do with his recent connections with the US government.

There are similarities and important differences between the wars of 1993-94 and the war of 1997. The latter conflict was more political in the sense that it was a war between two warlords,<sup>15</sup> two politicians who had been enemies for a long time and who were so distant from the people that they were seemingly prepared to sacrifice them. In 1994-5, the ethnic element was more prominent and ordinary civilians took part in the killings and looting. In the 1997, conflict, ordinary people tried to keep out of trouble, and left Brazzaville in hundreds of thousands (UN IRIN, March 1998). There are also stories about northern families hiding refugees from Nibolek, and helping them to get out of Sassou-Nguesso territory. But the ethnic element has also been very cleverly played in the recent war, and cannot entirely be discounted.

On 27 August 1997, RFI reported that Lissouba had started bombing Mpila at 5.30 in the morning, the same day as negotiations in Libreville were supposed to have reopened. At this time there were also rumours about Sassou-Nguesso taking the North, and yet other news saying that the unrest was a question of attempted mutinies but that the army was still loyal to the government. Lissouba's electoral mandate ended on 31 August 1997. When interviewed by RFI in August 1997, Sassou-Nguesso referred to his rival as 'Monsieur Lissouba'. Omitting the usual presidential title signified that he did not recognise the legitimacy of Lissouba's power. Yet it was not until October 14 that Sassou-Nguesso could claim to be victorious. Lissouba left Brazzaville and so did the former opposition leader Kolelas, together with Yhombi. But not everyone fled. One of Lissouba's ministers Martin Mberi, quickly changed to the winning side upon which he was rewarded with a new ministerial appointment.

On the day of the victory, 15 October, and several days thereafter, the young Cobras danced in the streets of Brazzaville, dressed in wigs. They could be seen dancing on the tables of the former presidential palace, taking down crystal chandeliers and destroying them. The Cobras immediately began looting, which they continued into March 1998.<sup>16</sup> People in Pointe Noire were frightened that the Cobras would come to this area, when there was nothing more to take in Brazzaville. When Sassou-Nguesso later instituted a new government he found that no building had been spared the wrath of his militia; so not even one official room was left untouched that could be used for a government meeting.

### ***The Oil Business in the Late 1980s***

Today the Government has great difficulty in maintaining order and legitimizing itself in the eyes of the people. There are incidents of conflict and violence every day; and since October 1998 civil unrest in the Pool region has been in the news. The FAC were sent to settle the unrest but there has been no peace yet. Many people

have been killed. Indeed, military rule is back; but backed with what kind of state? For all practical purposes, the Congolese State has become weak. There is virtually no state today! It is therefore important to ask what happened to the Congolese State that it had become weak by the end of the 1980s. An important factor is decreasing oil revenue, especially during the decline in oil prices during 1986. But even in 1987 and 1988 considerably less oil revenue was reported, followed by budget cuts. But this was not made public till around 1990 when it was announced that the ELF agreement was very unfavourable to Congo. There was also the fact that almost all the oil revenue went directly to the President and his oil minister and not to the public treasury.

This was also the period when the Soviet Union and East European communist regimes had collapsed. For the Congo, these events meant a loss of both financial and military support. The PCT (The Congolese Workers' Party) discussed, as early as 1989 (Ordinary Session November 27-30), the importance of understanding the changes in the East, and on January 23, 1990 a commission was appointed for this purpose. The withdrawal of the East made the West even less motivated to transfer resources to countries such as the Congo. France has, of course, maintained its interest in Congolese oil and there have been constant rumours about French interference in Congo's internal affairs.<sup>17</sup> Today (February 1999) Sassou is accusing Elf of interfering in Congo's internal affairs and supporting his enemies, "the bandits". This is very interesting as it has been assumed that Elf supported Sassou's take-over in 1997. It was seen on the Internet that Elf gave Sassou only three years to rule.

By the close of the 1980s there were signs of an impending collapse already. But it did not become evident until the dry season (on July 18, 1990), when CSC (the united trades union movement), under Bokamba-Yangouma, demanded independence from the party. This was an immediate reaction to an attempt to reduce the number of civil servants by lowering the age of retirement from 55 to 50. In the Congo where the pension is 1/3 of a meagre salary, if pensions are paid at all, it is a catastrophe to retire as early as 50 (Friedman, 1994)

### ***Change of Politics – the New Power Struggle & Violence***

The *Bureau Politique* however answered "no" to the demand for independence (July 25). But it was too late to stop the process and after a couple of weeks there were visible conflicts within all the mass organizations as well as the military and even within the highest political organs, including the *Comité Central*. The party denounced Marxism-Leninism in December 10, 1990. A National Conference with 1100 participants was held in 1991 (from February 25 to June 10), followed by a transitional government under André Milongo from June 10 1991 to August 17, 1992. And when elections were held, Pascal Lissouba from UPADS became Congo's president, and a new government was formed.

Lissouba's party, UPADS, based regionally and ethnically in the provinces Niari, Bouenza and Lékoumou (Nibolek) made an alliance with Sassou's PCT in order to win the elections. But Sassou demanded too many ministries for his party – energy among others. When Lissouba rejected those demands Sassou went over to the opposition block, dominated by MCDDI under Bernard Kolelas. This enabled this block, called *l'Opposition*, to gain a majority of seats in the National Assembly, which they used to dismiss the government through a vote of censure. According to the new constitution, the President also had power to dissolve Parliament, which he also used immediately to counter the action of the opposition parliament. New elections were held in May 1993 and the outcome was still in Lissouba's favour. "The Opposition" did not accept the result and from then on the conflict rapidly escalated into an ethnic war with Brazzaville as the main arena. I shall describe below the wars that have totally destroyed Brazzaville, not only materially but to a point where one could even question the possibility of recovery.

It seems to me that the introduction of a multi-party system opened the doors for a new kind of power struggle. Clearly, parliamentary democracy is not quite compatible with a traditional Central African political system. As the largest party acquired political power the traditional system of power sharing was, at least for a while, interrupted. In this situation, the political hierarchy broke up without being replaced by some other form of political integration, a problem that has shown to be of a very serious kind and to which there is no effective solution at the moment. In the process, feudalisation of the polity occurred with intense conflict between the parties because of competition for state power and control over public resources (Ekholm Friedman, K. & A. Sundberg, 1995).

After the first ethnic war<sup>18</sup> in May 1994, two ethno-political blocks emerged in Brazzaville, each with its own militia. One was *La Mouissance Présidentielle* under Pascal Lissouba and based ethnically in Nibolek, i.e. the three provinces to the west of the Pool, the Niari, the Bouenza and the Lékoumou. The other was *l'Opposition*, under Bernard Kolelas, based ethnically among the Lari in the Pool. Included in the latter block were also the Vili of the Kouilou province, and the former President Sassou-Nguesso and his PCT providing additional support. Sassou-Nguesso is from the north so the opposition consisted of groups of people who do not belong to the same ethnic groups. The ethnic element is not fixed in the sense that it prevents negotiation for political reasons. What happened in Congo during these years (1991-8) is that alliances were made back and forth. My use of the term ethno-political is to show some kind of pattern. The city was at that time divided into different zones controlled by these ethnic groups or blocks. Ethnic cleansing had occurred, creating zones with homogenous populations who feared entering each other's territory. Baongo, Makelekele and Kinsoundi, by the Lari themselves identified as Lari territory, had been cleansed of their Nibolek inhabitants. The Lari and related groups were called *Tchèques*.<sup>19</sup> People had been killed or expelled and

their homes plundered and sometimes completely destroyed. Many *Nibolek* who had bought land and built houses in that area have been driven away, their homes destroyed, and their belongings stolen and sold in the streets. *Nibolek*, in their turn, had taken over *centre-ville* and seized control of the area north of the railway, i.e. *Mfilou* (Arrondissement 7). This part of the city had also been cleansed of their former Lari inhabitants.<sup>20</sup> *Mpila*, associated with Sassou and his *Cobras*<sup>21</sup> (militia), was not considered safe in the evening. Even *Poto-Poto* where all the West Africans lived, was regarded as dangerous because of the *Cobras*, and more generally because of banditry. There have since 1990 been sporadic attacks against West-African merchants and Lebanese. The other areas, i.e. *Moungali*, *Ouenze* and *Plateau de 15 ans* were regarded as more "cosmopolitan" as no particular group can claim the land as its patrimony, and they had not been affected to the same extent.

A great number of people had been killed on both sides. The *Ninjas* and the *Aubevillois*,<sup>22</sup> the *Nibolek* militia, had attacked and killed each other and both of them had attacked unarmed and helpless civilians. The victims of assault were burned, buried alive, shot, thrown into the rivers, decapitated and/or slashed with machetes. Among the victims were men, women and children. There were endless reports of horrible acts of violence. Women and very young girls, sometimes mother and daughters, had been gang raped. Raping the enemy's women seems to have played as important a role here as in Bosnia. Infants had been placed in mortars and pounded to death. Babies had been thrown into the rivers alive. People had been impaled on poles thrust through the body via the rectum.

The material destruction was equally considerable. Houses were plundered and demolished. Doors, windows, furniture, toilet, fridge, roof – everything was removed. ORSTOM<sup>23</sup> was plundered and its historical archives destroyed in January 1994 after the devaluation of the CFA franc, an act ironically directed against the French. The same happened to the Faculty of Science and the Savorgnan de Brazza Museum. These acts can also possibly be related to the fact that President Lissouba is called *l'homme de science*; and therefore symbolically these destructions can be understood in this perspective.

The military and the police were also split along ethnic lines, which meant that there was no force above the different militias to prevent the disintegration of the polity. Instead, members of the military participated in both ethnic warfare and looting. As a result of the disintegration of the polity and the loss of military control, the city had relapsed into a state of general anarchy and banditry. Young men armed with machine-guns and often intoxicated by drugs, constituted a constant danger to others. Gangs appeared in various parts of the town as well as outside Brazzaville, terrorizing people. They erected blockades along the roads, or they dug holes and then filled them up, claiming payment from those passing by. They robbed and demanded food in the villages. In the countryside gangs



claimed cattle from peasants under the pretext of being sent by their leader Kolelas.

Ethnic war and ethnic cleansing occurred in a situation where many *Tchèque* were married with *Nibolek*, and their children consequently were of "mixed" ethnic group.<sup>24</sup> From a situation where the boundaries between the various ethnic groups were both socially and territorially, relatively distinct, these groups have intermarried and spread throughout province and country during the last three or four decades. They are found all over Brazzaville. The Congo has among the highest rates of urbanization in Sub-Saharan Africa (about 70%). The fuzzy boundaries between the groups involved in the conflict did not however, prevent them from killing each other. Both sides used various methods for identifying the other; but sometimes they made a mistake and killed one of their own. All this made Brazzaville a highly segregated town, with a poor public security record. Its inhabitants could not move freely due to the lack of security.

... if a person from UPADS, for example, enters *Bacongo* he risks his life. It is the same for someone from *Bacongo* who goes to Mutabala.

The most spectacular development in 1995 was that *Bacongo* had become a state within the State. It had established its own customs regime whereby where it generated income from the traffic with Kinshasa. Neither the *gendarmérie* nor the police dared to enter this part of Brazzaville as it was outside the control of the Congolese State. When we asked if it was true that it was calmer in *Bacongo* and *Makelekele* than in *Moungali* and *Poto-Poto*. Our informant answered:

It is true but in which way is it calmer? When ninjas operate, if they want to kill somebody, nobody knows about it, it is suffocated there, and the people of *Bacongo* live under terror that is to say, they cannot oppose Monsieur Kolelas. One cannot criticize M. Kolelas, it is like a little dictatorship, that's why people are silent. But it is really not a democracy, it is an area at the side, which the state doesn't control ...

The upshot of all these is that an internal repressive system has evolved.

Congo has known ethnic conflict and civil war twice during the 1990s. Both happened when the Constitution seemed too difficult to enforce. In 1997, the problem seemed to be the fear of a possible negative outcome of the election.<sup>25</sup> Both Lissouba and Sassou wanted to take power. In 1993, the problem that triggered the war started with a change in the balance of forces in parliament. Sassou did not get the ministerial posts he wanted, such as *ministère de l'énergie*, or claimed were part of the deal regarding the collaboration between PCT and UPADS. The PCT

therefore joined the opposition and MCCDI, the result being that UPADS no longer held the majority. Parliament then passed a vote of censure against the Government, following which the President retaliated by dissolving the Assembly. New elections were held which were allegedly riddled with fraud (Gauvrit, 1997), which immediately heightened ethnic tension. Rumours swept through Brazzaville regarding the intentions of what "the others" were going to do. Nibolek thought that the Tchèques were going to take revenge and the Pool felt that they were under threat of extinction (Ekholm Friedman, K. & A. Sundberg, 1995) (Ekholm Friedman, 1995).

After the National Conference the situation in Congo was one of national unity. Children learnt the "old" National Anthem within a week. Everybody talked about *Ya Milos* (the Prime Minister during the transition) but the situation soon changed. As the first elections drew nearer it was no longer just Milongo. Even children referred to the different politicians and who was best. In the neighbourhood of Makelekele the situation became more and more tense. And then in 1993 when the politicians were manoeuvring according to the change in the balance of forces in Parliament, and in anticipation of new elections, it became more and more important to reassert particular ethnic identities. In his work about Ghana, Akwetey argues that in such a situation the "re-assertion of identities" and "re-stating of claims" easily results in "ethno-political rebellion" (Akwetey, 1996: 104) The question is how to resolve conflicts arising from such conflicting claims. On this issue, Akwetey argues that there is a "need for an institutional-political or political-rational sphere in which representation by elites and participation by the mobilised masses in democratic deliberations over issues in dispute can be encouraged" (Akwetey *ibid*: 131). With the exception of the National Conference in 1991, such institutional frameworks did not exist in the Congo. I will show in the following sections what the Congolese have tried to do and why it has been so difficult to accomplish.

## **From One Party to Multi-party System and the Reorganisation of the Polity**

### ***From One Party to Multi-party System***

#### **The Congolese One-party System**

The political system of the Marxist-Leninist era, headed by former President Sassou-Nguesso, was, from a certain point of view, characterized by a distinction between the state and the popular sector. The state and its political class were self-sufficient due to its control over the major economic resources (oil) and the inflow of funds in the form of aid and foreign loans (Friedman, 1990). In other respects, the system can be seen as a *pyramidal structure* (Ekholm Friedman,

1993, 1994) (Friedman, 1993) (Friedman, 1994) where all important decisions were taken at the summit, by the President and the inner circle around him within *Bureau Politique* and *Comité Central*. No conflicting interests were allowed. The various mass organizations functioned as means of control rather than representatives of the interests of their members. The country was, according to its constitution, a Marxist-Leninist one-party state. The political organization and the party were two parallel structures from top to bottom, embracing the country as a whole. Before the summer of 1990, when the trades union movement suddenly resisted the regime and finally declared itself independent of the party, the political structure revealed no conflicting interests. It was a hierarchically structured system, encompassing the Party (with its *Bureau Politique* and *Comité Central*) and the Government. The Party-Government was at the top, and the various "mass organizations", as well as the army were subordinated to this top.

The Union (a united trade union) and the Youth Organization had more autonomy during the 60s but were brought under the rule of the Party at the beginning of the 70s and were controlled by the ruling group through loyal clan brothers in leading positions. The popular sector was controlled through the various mass organizations. Even the "Women's Movement" (URFC) was part of the power structure and not a "social movement" in the Western sense, where people are organized around certain common goals. Male members of the ruling party appointed its female leaders and all women were included in the URFC, through which they were controlled.

Ordinary people looked upon the State at the end of the 80s as "another world" (Friedman, 1994). There was no idea of the State being theirs, that politicians could be their representatives. The call for democracy and a multi-party system did not, in fact, come from the people. When the system suffered severe internal division, the cracks appeared at the highest level of the pyramid that is, within the ruling organizations themselves: the Party, the *Bureau Politique*, the *Comité Central*, the army, the Union and the Youth Organization. That is when the call for democratisation, with a multi-party regime emerged. And of course, this new attitude immediately won mass support and enthusiasm.

In all the ruling organizations members of the Sassou-Nguesso clan would be found in top positions but there were members from other ethnic groups in what seemed to be a fairly stable alliance structure. In some cases it is evident that the Sassou clan abused its dominant position – for example in the army where military officers climbed the career ladder without possessing any military qualification. In most instances they were promoted for just being members of the Sassou-Nguesso clan, or for being conspicuously loyal. This was also the case at the University where some of the staff of the various faculties were either employed or promoted without proof of formal qualification (cf Bayart, 1989).

### A Traditional Central African Kingdom

Congo was the first African country to adopt Marxism-Leninism in 1970. Why did so many African states declare themselves Marxist-Leninist in the 1970s? It may be argued that it fitted the political elite to do so. It legitimized state monopoly of society and its resources. Therefore there should not be more than one party and no competition even within the party would be allowed. Thus, all attempts at organizing alternative political space from below were declared illegal and counter-révolutionary. The Marxist ideology fitted the political elite very well when it came to the identification of the main enemy of the people and the revolution. For example, entrepreneurs in various sectors of the economy became an easy target.

A strong state was according to the official ideology of the mid-80s, an absolute prerequisite, not only for economic development but also for the development of socialism and the liberation of the masses. It was claimed that Congo was in the transition from neo-colonialism to socialism (Goma-Foutou, 1985; Mouamba, 1985). Workers and peasants could not play their historic role without a strong state, as they were opposed by imperialist powers such as France, and a number of "reactionary classes" such as the national bourgeoisie and the "feudal lords". "Feudal lords" were, in this context, the clan chiefs administering lands that belong to their kin group members. The official view of the economic crisis was very much in accord with the *dependency school*. It was all blamed on external factors, which were beyond the control of the political elite (Markowitz, 1987). Congo's development problems and the suffering of ordinary citizens was, according to the political ideology, caused by imperialism and the adverse effects of the capitalist system. The political leaders were powerless against such vicious forces but they were doing their best. In due course they would solve all the problems. But Marxism-Leninism also fitted Congo at a deeper level. It masked the fact that Congo still, to a large extent, was constructed as a traditional Central African kingdom. The introduction of Marxist-Leninist paraphernalia from the outside must not obscure the fact that the one party system is deeply rooted in Congolese society. If it were foreign, it would certainly have been easier to transform it.

The ancient kingdoms (Soret, 1963; Friedman, 1972) were composed of a number of structurally isomorphic local units, hierarchically related to one another through exchange. "Tribute" was transferred from lower ranked groups to higher ones. In the opposite direction it took the form of distribution of foreign goods, which were acquired through external trade. All the different units were more or less complete societies, so to speak, with their proper economies and government. The central, or highest ranked, unit was more powerful than the others. Such units had more people, more slaves, more of everything; but they were not structurally different from the others. Their superordinate power was based upon the monopoly over external trade. Under traditional conditions they would still depend on the

other groups for social reproduction. They needed the resources and products of such minor groups for effective participation in the international system. The kingdoms comprised long chains of such hierarchically related groups. The principal strategy of the king was to use his resources to expand the size of his own group and also establish and maintain alliances with other groups.

Sassou's ruling group resembled the central unit of the kingdom in various respects. It constituted a world of its own, with no national consciousness or concern for the country as a whole.<sup>26</sup> Just as the king had monopoly over external exchange, the President controlled the inflow of resources from outside. There was no separation between the private and public economy (Médard, 1990). The ancient kings controlled domestic resources and external trade in a way that we would find clearly private. European trade goods went first to the king who then distributed them among his vassals. Today this is how Congo's resources are handled. Part of the oil revenues was first transferred to President Sassou and from him further to his vassals. There are still hierarchies where wealth is distributed from higher to lower groups in exchange for loyalty. Like a traditional king's, the President's power was fourfold; economic, political, judicial and ideological/religious. The Marxist-Leninist ideology played very much the same role as religion did under ancient conditions. The traditional undivided authority is today challenged and, as we shall see below, attempts are made to separate the judicial system from the political system and to disconnect the economic sphere from the political, etc.

Another characteristic trait of a traditional Central African Kingdom is that political power ideally should be extended by *the king-and-his-men* through conquest (Friedman, 1991). In myths about the origin of the Kongo kingdom, the founder was first crowned king by his people and together they would cross the river to conquer new lands. Kings were by definition rich and militarily powerful.<sup>27</sup> The political system was ideally established by military means and the king was, above all, a conqueror. Congo's military regime has, in other words, been rooted in the traditional system.

### **Clan Politics and Power-Sharing**

Congo is a clan society and its people practise clan politics. Clan politics does not however, follow automatically from the very existence of ethnic groups. It emerges as an instrument for competing for political power. The competing units are personal networks whose members belong to one and the same ethnic group, related to each other by kinship and patron-client relationships. What unites them is the trust they have in each other as relatives and clan members and the compelling necessity of making alliances and forming groups in order to achieve their goals. The advent of Europeans introduced new relations of competition and conflict among local groups. During the colonial period, some of the groups were favoured

by economic development and education. The South was in a better position than the North, and within the South, the Pool profited more than the other provinces, and within Pool, Boko (Bakongo) more than Kinkala (Lari). Soldiers were, however, recruited from the North according to the old colonial practice of "divide and rule".

Political independence in 1960 created a new and completely different situation where the struggle for political power came to overshadow all other concerns and strategies. In 1959, the first ethnic conflict exploded in Brazzaville, this time between North and South. At that time Brazzaville consisted of a central White part and two Black residential areas, *Bacongo* and *Poto-Poto* (cf. Balandier, 1955). *Bacongo* had an ethnically homogenous population from the South, while *Poto-Poto*, where the conflict erupted, was inhabited by people from both the North and the South. The two sides were here identified as *Mbochi* and *Bakongo* (including both the Bembe and the Lari). It started with a *Mbochi* man killing a Bembe woman, followed by a wave of ethnic cleansing staged by *Mbochi* and with hundreds of *Bakongo* refugees in *Centre-ville*. The Bembe and the Lari from *Bacongo* retaliated jointly in *Poto-Poto* and put an end to the turmoil (interview June 1995).<sup>28</sup> At the same time, ethnic war broke out in Kinshasa between *Bakongo* and *Bangala* (Young, 1965).

A one-party system combined with power-sharing has since 1960, been the natural political arrangement. It might seem as if Congo had a multi-party system in the years 1960-3. A closer examination reveals, however, that Abbé Fulbert Youlou from MDDIA the first President, immediately created alliances with other chiefs, thereby forming a de facto one-party system before it was politically confirmed by the "revolution" of 1963 (Kissita 1993: 39). Opangault, the president of the competing party (MSA), was brought into the government, first as *Ministre d'Etat* and later as Vice-President and *Ministre des Travaux Publics*.

One-party system and power sharing never implied stable political hierarchies where everyone was satisfied, even if it certainly reduced tension. Hence the political history of the Congo Republic after 1960 is replete with power struggle, treason and plots, *coups d'état* and attempted *coups d'état*, political murders and dismissals of ministers. There has been a constant power struggle in the political arena. Winners came and went while the political system itself has remained very much the same. On the other hand, there has been a remarkable continuity in personnel at the top. Pascal Lissouba was, for instance, *Premier Ministre* in 1963-5. In his work on politics in the Congo, *Les voies du politique au Congo, Essai de sociologie historique*, René Bazenguissa-Ganga shows that almost every political leader in the recent conflict was part of some earlier government and many were members of PCT (Bazenguissa-Ganga 1997).

### Reorganizing the Political System

As President of the transitional government in 1991, André Milongo started the

process of political restructuring. He considers his mandate as having been interrupted when Lissouba became the elected president. Milongo claimed that in the Congo it is certainly not sufficient to change the system on paper. I will give five different illustrations of what happens when the Constitution, with its new provisions for democracy, was confronted with the social realities of the Congo. These examples are from the period before Sassou-Nguesso's seizure of power.

1. Milongo underlines that the *division of power between the President and the Prime Minister* is a foreign idea in Congo, and that it may very well lead to political turmoil. The Constitution may even have to be modified on this point. Now, it is too unclear.

*... est-ce que c'est un régime présidentiel, est-ce que c'est un régime parlementaire ...*

What will happen he says, in a situation where the opposition wins the election and the Prime Minister subsequently belongs to a party in opposition to the President? This will create an impossible situation because the Prime Minister, according to the Constitution, has, in fact, more power than the president himself.

*... parce que les grands pouvoirs à ce système là sont détenus par le Premier Ministre, c'est celui qui définit la politique, c'est celui qui l'applique, et pratiquement le Président, selon la constitution, il n'a pas beaucoup de pouvoir.*

Thus, the Prime Minister shall both define the political programme and carry it through. According to the Constitution the President does not have much power. Will the President, M. Lissouba, accept that? "No", says Milongo. This may function in France but not in the Congo. "We have incorporated it into our Constitution but can we really apply it"? He again replied in the negative: "I think it is difficult."

2. According to the new Constitution *the judicial power is independent of the executive and legislative powers*. This would, of course, constitute a radical break with the old system, and it is not surprising that the new judicial institutions have not yet been established. The members of *the Supreme Court* had not yet been appointed when Milongo was interviewed in October 1995. He pointed out that judges of the Supreme Court (magistrats à la Cour Suprême) are elected for life (as in USA), and that the President consequently cannot be sure of their support. They were, however, elected by the Assembly and the Senate in December 20-21 (*Le Chemin* No. 56, 1996:12). According to our knowledge of the elected persons, it

seems to be quite a mixture of persons from different ethnic groups and regions. Being elected for life might help them to resist both family/clan pressure and political pressure.

Within the judicial realm there should also be a *Conseil Supérieur de la Magistrature*, in order to guarantee independence for the courts, and a *Conseil Constitutionnel*. None of them has been established. And here we can discern a clear retreat from the idea of separation of powers. The Chairman of the *Conseil Supérieur* is, in fact, the President.

*Article 134: Il est institué un Conseil Supérieur de la Magistrature présidé par le Président de la République ...*

The explanation for this is that there would otherwise be no link between the executive and judicial powers. Yet, the next article of the Constitution states that this Board of the Supreme Court guarantees the independence of the judicial power.

*Article 135: Le Conseil Supérieur de la Magistrature est garant de l'indépendance du Pouvoir Judiciaire. Sur proposition du Conseil Supérieur de la Magistrature, le Président de la République nomme les Magistrats du Siège et du Parquet. La loi fixe l'organisation, la composition et le fonctionnement du Conseil Supérieur de la Magistrature.*

Why are the politicians so reluctant to implement the separation of the judicial and executive powers? There are two main reasons.

*... je crois que c'est général dans les pays africains le gouvènement, le pouvoir exécutif, n'aime pas trop le pouvoir judiciaire. C'est la force de la Conference National qui a fait que ca soit comme ca, mais on n'arrive pas vraiment à le mettre en place parce qu'on craint toujours que ce pouvoir judiciaire indépendant risque de mettre les gens en prison parce qu'il y a trop de corruption, trop de détournement de denier publique much ...*

This is one aspect of the politicians' unwillingness to accept an independent judicial power. They have good reasons to fear an independent Supreme Court. There is also another reason:

*... il y a une autre cause, c'est la cause technique, est-ce que la Magistrature [i.e. the Supreme Court] sera dominée par une ethnie, un tribu ... tout ca fait exiter quand ca avec les événements qu'on vient de connaitre, ca fait beaucoup d'hésitation, parce que si il y a un tribu qui*



*est plus fort dans la Magistrature, là les autres seront inquiets, donc ça aussi ça joue, mais la raison fondamentale c'est que on craint que ce pouvoir soit fort, indépendant et alors on doit agir contre ceux qui gouvernent le pays, parce que il y a beaucoup de gens qui gouvernent qui ont des problèmes avec la justice.*

My informant pointed to the danger of ethnicity in this context. What would happen if the Supreme Court and other judicial institutions were dominated by one ethnic group?

3. *Freedom of the press* was a controversial issue at the National Conference. One of the six permanent committees of Parliament is the *Conseil de l'audio-visuel*. According to the Constitution, this committee is expected to guarantee the freedom of the press. But at the moment it only exists on paper. Somehow it was more or less taken for granted after the conference that journalists already had this kind of freedom. Hence, they could write about the unsatisfactory states of public affairs; for example, embezzlement. But when they did, the identified politicians reacted very strongly, accusing the journalists in question of defamation (libel). This created confusion on both sides: the politicians were upset and felt attacked while the journalists did not even know how to defend themselves.

A law limiting the freedom of the press was passed by the National Assembly in October 1995. Out of 123 articles, 40 impose definite restrictions on press freedom. Our informant explains:

... the deputies have added repressive articles. We are not against responsibility but when you read this act you understand that it aims at making the journalists afraid. They will definitely work under fear. There is a risk that people abandon this profession, they will not be able to continue ...

4. A *Cour des Comptes* (National Audit Bureau) should, according to the Constitution, be established in order to deal with public finance, how the public resources are managed and mismanaged. As one might expect it does not yet exist; these matters are much too sensitive, we are told. The only controlling organ is the *Inspection des Finances de l'État* (General Finance Inspection). Both are responsible for auditing state finances but the former would do so at the end of the financial year, while the latter may enter without notice at any time of the year.

My informant was himself an employee of the inspectorate. When asked about the possible sanctions or punishment against officers found to have engaged in irregularities or mismanagement of public funds, he would only make a gesture

of powerlessness. He explained that his report usually went to the Minister of Finance where no action would be taken. During the fall of 1995, the General Finance Inspection had just undertaken a huge investigation of the Army. The report was handed over to the Ministry of Finance but it was "too hot a potato" to be dealt with.

According to the new system a person who mismanages public funds could be prosecuted. But can a lower ranked officer really refuse to pay moneys to a superior officer? The problem is that the treasurer only takes orders from his superior. In any case, the new system presumes the existence of autonomous individuals within the system, which is not the case in Congo.

5. There seemed to be agreement that a reorganisation of the political system seemed to be the only solution. In order to improve economic conditions in the country the State would also have to loosen its grip on the economy. The political system should be decentralized in order to make room for initiatives outside the state sphere. State enterprises should be privatized, and entrepreneurial activity encouraged. In order to promote economic development a *Ministère de la Décentralization* was established.

6. In the old system there were no control mechanisms preventing, for instance, politicians from embezzlement and abuse of power and there was no legal security. The law was rather conceived as an expression of the President's power, and that of lesser power holders who came under him. As argued above, this is typical of the traditional political system of the Congo. It is repeatedly noted in the earlier ethnographic material about the ancient kingdoms of Central Africa that the authority of the king was fourfold; economic, political, religious and judicial (Ekholm Friedman, 1972, 1984). In accordance with this tradition therefore, Denis Sassou-Nguesso was the Supreme Judge and President of the country, as well as president of the Congolese Workers' Party (PCT). He also exercised personal control over a major part of Congo's oil revenues. With a system like this, it is not surprising that African presidents have managed to be ranked among the world's richest people.

During the one-party system the citizens did not enjoy any rights. They were repeatedly harassed by the police, militia and military. Obviously, the police were there not to protect the lives and property of the ordinary citizens. On the contrary, they were used by the political elite to pursue purely private agendas. The secret police, for example, constantly eliminated so-called undesirable persons for political reasons. Hence at the National Conference, for example, it was revealed that approximately 3,000 persons had been murdered for political reasons during the one-party era. Improvement of the human rights situation has important implications for the general political process, not only for the individual. A

*Ministère (or haut-commissariat) de la Démocratie et des Droits de l'Homme* was established to be in charge of this issue. Common people are not used to demanding anything from the State. The State is not regarded as theirs. They are not "aware of their rights". Therefore, they do not really constitute an active social force.

## **The Problem of Change**

### ***The Notion of Democracy***

Working in the Congo during the National Conference and the transition period, July 1991 to June 1992, gave me several opportunities to observe and listen to how people understood the concept of democracy. To most young people, it just meant freedom. Sometimes this freedom was conceived of as freedom to do whatever one wanted to do, which sometimes came very close to anarchy. This conception still prevails. Among the political and intellectual elite the notion of democracy is, of course, much debated and reflected upon. But there are problems regarding the application of democracy in a country such as Congo. The principles of Western parliamentary democracy do not entirely fit Congolese social reality or culture.

Despite this, the National Conference tried to reproduce the Western model for the Congo. The reason for this is that most lawyers and judges have had their education in France and in French law. The new Constitution, passed in a referendum 15 March 1992, was copied from the French Constitution of 1958 with division of powers and an executive president as its principal features.<sup>29</sup> The Parliament had two chambers, the National Assembly and the Senate, and six permanent committees. What happened in 1992 when the National Assembly voted out the Government, with the President responding by dissolving the Assembly, is a direct result of the crises that this type of constitution could create. As I shall try to show below, it has been very difficult to change from a political system such as Congo's to a Western-style democracy.

### ***The State v Private – Clientelism***

When the new Constitution came into force, the politicians realized that their positions would be jeopardised if it were made to work. In 1995 there were already several reinterpretations and modifications of the Constitution in order to bring it in line with the old system. Surely, there was a lot of talk about embezzlement by previous presidents and ministers during the National Conference. But the political class had exhibited a strong tendency to "share the advantages of material nature that the power provides" (Mandzougou, J. 1995) (Mandzougou, 1995), irrespective of the government in power. This habit undermines all attempts aimed at reducing the cost of running the Public Sector. According to Mandzougou, who was once the *Payeur General* of the Congo,

... the fundamental problem in Congo continues to be the irresponsible nature of its political class who, today as well as yesterday forgets the notion of duty in the administration of the public wealth, once in power. The political class is incapable of any action that calls for sacrifice or denial of self and therefore lacks credibility in its discourse." (Mandzougou, J. 1995).

This is confirmed by the *Inspecteur Général des Finances*, who was addressing the question of whether or not there is more transparency in today's administration and therefore greater control.

*Ce n'est pas, ce n'est pas très sûr. La grande différence est que: avant la conférence Nationale, on vivait dans un régime de monopartisme, et après celui-ci, on est rentré dans le système démocratique, où il y a plusieurs partis, ceci c'est sur le plan politique, o.k?– bien. Mais sur le plan administratif, il n'y a pas eu de grand changement. Certes, on a changé quelques Directeurs par d'autres, selon qu'ils étaient un peu du pouvoir ou pas du pouvoir comme vous le remarquez, ce sont alors toujours les mêmes registres qu'on retrouve, les mêmes méthodes, et le même état d'esprit qu'on retrouve, n'est ce pas?*<sup>30</sup>

Thus, the problem is not easy to solve. There certainly is a tendency to accept the embezzlement of public funds as long as it means that others will get their share. Embezzlement is condoned also because if a leader is very wealthy he has power, and he can help his people. The important issue here is the capacity to redistribute public wealth by private means. There is also the saying that the person who is contented can be the better leader because he has time for addressing his people's needs.<sup>31</sup> What people did not like about Sassou-Nguesso is simply that he, so to speak, took everything.

Ethnicity and the clan system do not quite correspond as ethnic identities at least shift from time to time. Such changes can alter forms of identity and new elements can also appear (Nnoli, 1989: 2; Dorier-Apprill 1997: 185). As, for example, the formation of Nibolek (mentioned above) shows new names such as Tchèques for the Pool-region and Norwegians for the Northerners<sup>32</sup> are given to groups.

Due to increasing poverty during the last decade the clan system has disintegrated, and those who today engage in ethnic conflict are more individualized than ever before. When a person cannot fulfill his/her duties towards the family or the clan, it is usual behaviour to withdraw from the family. This is necessary in order not to be accused of egoism and as a consequence, sorcery. These dynamic changes in social relations nonetheless affect the politics of the Congo. In fact, one problem with changing the system to a democracy was that the attempts at reforming the

political system by introducing the principle of separation of powers immediately opened the door to (or at least the possibility of) destructive ethnic conflict.

### ***Ethnicity, Class and Clientelism***

The problem of ethnicity has for a long time been regarded as an epiphenomenon by Africanists and it has been claimed that the important factors of the African crisis should be related to the theory of dependency. Everything was blamed on external factors that are beyond the control of the political elite. But as Kajsa Ekholm Friedman (1990) shows in a research report about rural development there are problems related to, what she calls, the cultural component of development, even though she stresses that this is not important when it comes to the subaltern society. She states: "... it may seem feasible to lay stress upon the cultural component when it comes to the understanding of the behaviour, or strategies, of the political elite." (Friedman, 1990: 10). The cleavage between the political elite and the populace is enormous (*ibid.*). The political elite has managed to separate itself almost completely from the common people. Such links as do exist are short term and instrumental. Thus the people were mobilised to vote and were recruited into various militias, but this did not imply any long-term responsibilities from the perspective of the politicians.

The ethnic problem is intimately connected to the lack of economic development. There are few jobs outside the *Fonction Publique*, and those with jobs have not been regularly paid during the last couple of years. There is no benevolent state to turn to in times of need. It may even be that the SAP, that have been forced upon Congo in order to restore the State's finances counteracts the democratisation process because it means it is impossible for the politicians to redistribute resources in a legal way. The only way left to redistribute is the "old" way of clientelism or patronage, which in a way may be less expensive but is in conflict with democracy, good governance and transparency. (Médard, 1990; Diouf, 1998). People are instead left with their family and local relations as the only source of security. The lack of economic development makes them heavily dependent on their ethnic networks and patron-client relationships.

Another problem about ethnicity has been whether it should be regarded as a colonial construct. Or if it has a deeper meaning, is it something that is almost endemic to Congolese society? I shall not attempt to enter the debate on this issue. I shall only try to show that ethnicity is an important instrument for mobilisation used by the political elite. The following is typical of how the ordinary people perceive it.

*Il ne s'agit pas de prendre l'ethnicité au pied de la lettre, ni de dénoncer par principe les 'illusions' identitaires, mais de prendre au sérieux les mobilisations qu'elle suscite, d'essayer de repérer les significations*

*qu'elles revêtent et les effets d'universalisation différenciée dont elles sont porteuses dans des contextes historiques précise*'. (Coulon, C. 1997: 38)

Following Hettne who gives the definition as "ethnic identity activated and used for the purpose of political mobilization" (Hettne, 1990: 190). I will use this to define ethno-politics.

A study of the militias and how they started shows that ethnicity is used from both above and below. For example, Bernard Kolelas, the opposition leader was thought of as Messiah or Moses, the saviour of the country. This notion of power, plays an important role as we have seen, in the recruitment of militiamen. *"Sometimes the parents are fanatics who conceive of their political chief as God, and they want their sons to join the Ninjas."* The role of the imaginary in political or ethnic mobilization cannot be ignored. Bernard Kolelas is also, to some, the descendant of Matswa<sup>33</sup> and therefore the Messiah who has come back to save his people. It is said that he also uses the traditional chief's or father's method of blessing, which means that people will crawl at his feet whereupon he touches them with a traditional whip, a buffalo tail. In the war of 1993-94, the *minkisi*,<sup>34</sup> which were taken from the museum or ORSTOM, were used as protectors of *Bacongo* and the Kolelas territories. Today it is Sassou-Nguesso who is thought of as the Messiah, "Sassou the Saviour" (BBC Focus on Africa, January-March 1998). But his reputation depended to a large extent, on whether he could find the money to pay the salaries of civil servants (Sundberg 1998). Thus ethnicity is used as an expression of clientelism and the loyalty that an ethnic entourage shows towards its leader (Friedman, 1998: 3). It appears that the rise of ethnic conflict has diverted attention away from objective issues in Congolese society, thereby militating against the formation of a class-based political group. But as our analyses show, class is a crucial feature of Congolese society even if it is hidden by ethnicity and diffused by clientelism. The interrelation of these three aspects of Congolese society should be considered more carefully by social scientists.

## Conclusion: Democracy a Zero-sum Game?

In the Congo, having a multiparty democratic system means that the opposition is excluded from access to political and economic power. What seems to be happening today is a return to the old system of power sharing. In other words, the traditional political system tends to resist change. When attempts are made to introduce Western-style democracy, the contradiction between it and the traditional system is aggravated in the form of ethnic warfare. In our discussions at the *Ministère de la Démocratie et des Droits de l'Homme* we learned that there was misunderstanding at the beginning of what the new Constitution meant.

*... au début les gens pensaient qu'il fallait que celui qui a gagné gagne tout,*

*et celui qui a perdu perd tout, et c'est ce qui a été justement : la base de ce conflit. Les uns n'ont pas accepté de perdre tout ... D'autres ont pensé que les gagnants ont vaincu de manière irrégulière ...*

The interpretations differed at the beginning, we were told but eventually they reached a clear understanding of the new Constitution, which necessitates a revision of certain aspects of it –

*... notamment en pensant instaurer des vice-présidents pour mieux affirmer le principe de partage du pouvoir, car la constitution ... nous donne beaucoup plus l'impression qu'elle a été calculée sans tenir compte de la réalité conflictuelle congolaise.*

Thus, my informant (a Minister of State) declared that they must practice power-sharing because of the danger of ethnic conflict. *The Economist* in an article in 1996 (Feb3-9, 1996) directed its readers' attention to this phenomenon in Africa generally. "Multi-party elections in Africa did not produce democracies." Even worse, "(u)nder a winner-takes-all system, an African election is seldom an expression of national will and may be a prelude to civil war". Those countries which have rejected Western-style democracy have consequently, come off best. According to *The Economist*, the alternative is "the principle of inclusion". Among the countries that, in this sense, have "developed their own political ideas", are South Africa, Ethiopia and Uganda. "What is common to the (admittedly rare and fragile) African success stories is the principle of inclusion." The question posed by this conclusion is this: Is there an African road to democracy? This issue has been the subject of heated debate in both Africa and the West. (Weissman, 1993; Diouf, 1996; Roy, 1998) (Musua, 1988; Kissita, 1993) What would be a possible model for democracy is the African palaver and the traditional mode of consensus-seeking. This has been suggested by some of my informants trying to find roots for democracy in their own traditions and also in a way to contextualize the ideas of democracy.

- *Alors je disais qu'il faut se référer à cet article de la démocratie dans la tradition Kongo qui met en valeur le cadre des débats dans cette société Kongo. Comment s'opèrent les débats, et on met en bonne place le Mbongui/.../Donc le Mbongui, c'est un lieu vraiment qui existe au niveau des villages, c'est la maison commune là où tout le monde peut venir, on peut causer et on prend aussi des repas et donc il y a beaucoup de choses qui se passent au niveau du Mbongui.*
- *Oui ?*
- *Et, mais l'autre trait que je peux souligner dans cette démocratie Kongo, c'est que le dialogue est le fondement même de la démocratie, et l'autre*

*élément fondamental, c'est que le choix des hommes se fait justement à la base: il y a comme des élections également qui s'opèrent pour désigner un chef et c'est un littéraire qui a fait cet article, XX que tu dois connaître, tu dois le voir, il pourra mieux te préciser ces idées fausses ... (tape 5, 1995-0911)*

But this model may appear to us more democratic than it really is. *Orality* plays a much more important role in Africa than in the Western world. Oral authority is an aspect of the chief's general authority, meaning that consensus never deviates significantly from what he thinks. We took up this issue with André Milongo. Our question was whether the traditional consensus model was applicable in today's circumstances. According to Milongo, this *la palabre africaine*.

*la façon par laquelle nos anciens avaient l'habitude de résoudre les contradictions, les conflits, bien, on n'a pas intégré ça, parce que ce n'est pas moderne ça, qu'est-ce que ça veut dire le consensus, finalement pour revenir au monopartisme ... au monopartisme qui n'a pas fonctionné.*

Thus, Milongo identifies consensus with one-party system and power-sharing. "The principle of inclusion" is nothing else than the old African system of power-sharing. What might make it look different is the change from one party to several parties. However, the Congolese one-party system implied power-sharing between a number of ethnic groups (or rather political clans). In a multi-party system, practising power-sharing among a number of ethnic groups will not amount to any significant change.

Congo, and Africa in general, has often been described as traditionally collectivist as if this feature meant that there is also a very high degree of mutual trust among the people. This is however, not really the case. In the case of peasants and *collective* work in the fields "they do not like collective work, in the sense that fields and products are 'collectively owned'. They suspect, on good grounds, that 'collectively owned' means that the leadership will appropriate the benefit of their labour. Members of cooperatives frequently withdraw from work in the collective field, [...] Peasants constantly suspect the leadership of the cooperative of embezzlement, which creates an atmosphere of reluctance for collective work. There are also frequent cases of embezzlement leading to the dissolution of cooperatives. Their suspicions are in other words, quite right." (Friedman, 1990: x).

Another aspect of why it is so difficult to implement a democratic system has to do with the ways people vote and how they conceive of democracy. When all the political parties started to appear I talked to a person who was working with the executive committee of one party. This person confided that he would not vote for this party or its leader. He hailed from another region and would vote for the



politician from his own region. So why was he not working for the party of the candidate from his region? According to him, he would vote for the candidate from his region because he would advance in his personal career if this candidate should win. Thus, people will vote for the candidate from their own region for purely material considerations. People prefer their candidate to win and thereby become influential, wealthy, and able to redistribute part of the public wealth to them (Mbembe, 1995). Asked if the party programme, *projet de société*, did not have any meaning or whether they really thought that "their own" candidate was the best, a young man from Pool told me that if one does not vote for one's candidate it is treated as treason. I insisted on the integrity or secret of the voting process and that nobody would know how he would vote. "But it will show", he said. "How?" "One can not keep it a secret, it will come out, when you talk, even though you do not want to tell." Thus you must vote for "your own" candidate in the first round. But in the second you can vote for the "best" man if your man is not in that round. Another example of this is given by the Congolese Sociologist, Côme Manckassa who says "*quand on est Mbochi comme le président de la République on a l'impression de gouverner et de participer directement au pouvoir*" (Manckassa, C. 1992) (Manckassa, 1992). It is important to take into consideration the fact that most Western democracies are based on tax resources that emanate from production, work and consumption. This is not the case in Congo. The state has its own resources, primarily from the production of oil on the Atlantic coast, and consequently does not depend on the people and their work. To gain control over the state is therefore the main objective and ambition of the ethno-political elite. And as long as the Mbochi, just mentioned, believes that his belonging to the ruling elite gives him advantages, he will support them.

### Possible Solutions

The African theologian Kā Mana, concerned with the problem of the disintegration of the polity, suggests that the solution must come from within.

*La crise dont souffrent nos sociétés africaines n'étant pas seulement une crise de rationalité, mais un écroulement des fonds de notre vie et des conditions de notre être-au-monde, les bases pour en affronter les affres doivent relever d'un domaine qui excède les seules forces de l'entendement. Elles concernent l'imaginaire comme ensemble des puissances créatrices. D'où la nécessité d'articuler en elles le souci de l'être, le sens de la valeur, la créativité du coeur, la fertilité de l'imagination, l'exubérance du corps et la préoccupation des cohérences rationnelles dans l'organisation de l'espace social. Il ne s'agit pas seulement de révolutionner les logiques de la connaissance. Il s'agit de rénover les fondements même de l'être et les dynamiques de la culture. (Kā Mana, 1993: 30)*

He thinks it is a crisis not just of rationality, but rather of the whole culture. This is a problem that has concerned several other scientists like Daniel Etounga-Manguelle (1993) and Mazrui (1995-6). These two for example, have expressed a solution to the problem as the need for a cultural adjustment program, meaning a radical internal restructuring of society. Mazrui has gone as far as to regard it as requiring internal recolonisation.

### ***Some Final Thoughts***

The situation in Congo Brazzaville is difficult and the future looks very bleak. It is hard not to reflect upon ideas such as "*The Coming of Anarchy*" (Kaplan 1994) and "*return to darkness*" (Mbembe, 1995 and 1997) or the very recent "*La Renaissance de l'Afrique Noire*" (Ela 1998). It is obvious that "les Congolais n'obéissent plus" (*Jeune Afrique* No. 1979, 13-19 Oct 1998). That is people no longer accept the way their leaders have so far been acting. It is possible that the actual conflict can be seen as a step towards the development of another kind of democracy, not imposed but actually worked out by the Congolese people themselves, and in the Congolese context, as an answer to the present crisis.

### **Notes**

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1. This paper is based on an ongoing anthropological fieldwork in Brazzaville, a joint research project together with professor Kajsa Ekholm Friedman, starting in 1995 and financed by SIDA/Sarec. I am grateful for the possibility of participating in the Governance Institute 1997, organized by CODESRIA (for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa) in Dakar, Senegal. I benefited from the discussions with my fellow colleagues from different parts of Africa as well as from seminars of Jean-Marc Ela, Achille Mbembe and Mamadou Diouf. A travel grant from the Nordic Africa Institute made it possible for me to add another research period to my fieldwork. Finally another travel grant from the Swedish Institute gave me the opportunity to do research at Centre d'Etude d'Afrique Noire (CEAN) in Bordeaux. I was invited by Daniel Bach and enjoyed the comments from distinguished scholars such as Patrick Quantin, Christian Coulon, Comi Toulabour and especially prof. J-F Médard.
2. The name of the country is The Republic of Congo, but due to the change of the former Zaire to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), we shall use the name Congo (Brazzaville) to distinguish it from the DRC. Any mention Congo in the text refers to Congo (Brazzaville).
3. Moroccan soldiers have also been seen, as my informants have reported, probably mercenaries, but on which side has not been confirmed.

4. Henri Lopes, working for UNESCO, belongs to Sassou-Nguesso's entourage according to *Africa International* (October 1998, No. 318).
5. Networks have been built between African and French leaders who have been to the same schools in France and these networks work on a basis of friendship and exchange. (cf. Ela, 1998).
6. SADC (Southern African Development Community).
7. Pascal Lissouba was elected president in 1992, in the first democratic election since independence (1960). He was not new to politics, as he had been a member of the government of Massamba Débat. He was first Minister of Agriculture then Prime Minister, 1964-66. He was then arrested and then confined to the northern Congo. He later left Congo and had a position at UNESCO in Nairobi. As did many other "old" politicians he returned to Congo for the National Conference in 1991.
8. The Sassou regime is also writing history so as to show how they were forced into action. Two documents have been published so far. One book by Pigasse (Pigasse, 1997), the *Jeune Afrique* journalist and Sassou's friend and then by the Ministry of Justice a series called "Documents pour l'Histoire" with the title *Les guerres civiles du Congo Brazzaville, Novembre 1993 – janvier 1994, 5 juin – 15 octobre 1997*, tome I and II (1998) have been published. Other sources on the Internet are of different views, cf. <http://www.mygale.org/11/jecmaus/accueil.html>; [altern.org/congolais:coup.html](http://altern.org/congolais:coup.html)
9. According to *Jeune Afrique Economie* (No. 275, 16-29, November 1998) where Justin Koumba is interviewed, the Cobras consisted of militaries who had been "put aside" (*mise à l'écart*) by Lissouba.
10. This was one of the most debated subjects during the National Conference. But nothing was officially confirmed. In the middle of the 80's, Paul Anga denounced the complot. He was later killed together with the whole village outside Oyo.
11. Ngollo was Minister of Defense in Sassou's government before the National Conference in 1991. Many of the politicians are former generals, like Yhombi and Sassou. Another general was also trying to get into politics, their former *chef d'état Major* Jean-Marie Michel Mokoko. He and Ngollo served together during Sassou's regime.
12. Ali El Kenz talks about the symbols in a conflict and that the degree of violence has not necessarily any reference to the degree of violence in the first crime (Kenz, 1997).
13. Omar Bongo is also a friend of France and was supposedly the messenger of French interests. He was supposed to act as mediator, but did not manage to prove his impartiality.
14. Omar Bongo and Pascal Lissouba both belong to the same ethnic group, so this would imply a partiality towards Lissouba. President Bongo did not

manage to organize a meeting with President Chirac which shows that there are many factors in this power game. Further, Omar Bongo's first wife organized a demonstration against Sassou when arriving in Libreville.

15. The use of the word warlords would imply their power to or even will to destroy, which at least until today 1998 seemed to be one of the most important features of the recent conflicts, 1997) (cf. *War Lord Politics* by William Reno, 1998).
16. The interesting thing is that the looting that took place was performed in their own territory, except for the centre of the city. It has also been said that the ninjas did the same in their area. There seems to have been no loyalty towards "your own side", but this has to be investigated further.
17. Cf. Jean-Marc Ela (1998) (Ela, 1998) who discusses how important Africa is for the image and the importance of France on the international arena. Regarding the French politic on Africa see also Carina Gunnarsson, 1997 (Gunnarsson, 1997), Inger Österdahl, 1997 (Österdahl, 1997), Daniel Bach, 1983 (Bach 1983) and J-F Médard 1995 (Médard 1995).
18. This war has been called the first civil war, which is not true, as there has been conflicts similar to this in 1956 and 1959. My reason for calling it the first has to do with the time span I am discussing, which is the democratization process after the National Conference. (cf. Yengo 1997).
19. Why the name tchèke or tchèk? This is difficult to know, some say because the tchèke (i.e. the people) are like the Lari: they are everywhere (cf. Sundberg, A., 1995) (Sundberg, 1995).
20. Elisabeth Dorrier-Aprill writes that during the ethnic cleansing in 1993-94 people so to speak changed houses, with each other in order to go and live in areas that were considered safe by those concerned. So a Lari would leave his Lous in Diata to a Nibolek and go to Makelekele and live in the other person's house. (Dorier-Aprill, 1997b) According to my research this is not quite what happened. Even though people have been decent enough to pay each others electricity bills, this is just in order to survive. It did not happen as calmly or as well organized as Dorier-Aprill tries to show.
21. The names of the different militias can be related to popular films shown on Congolese Television as well as Cinemas, for example the name Zulu is related to the film *Chaka*- the Zulu (about South Africa) and the Ninjas can be related a number of Asian movies where the warriors and brave heroes are ninjas.
22. The name Aubevillois relates to the village Aubeville where the presidential guard was trained.
23. ORSTOM (L'Institut Français de Recherche Scientifique Pour le Développement en Coopération).
24. Of course children are not mixed, the systems of matrilinearity means that

they do belong to the maternal family, but there are always obligations towards the father's matrilineal family as *bala bambuta* (cf. Ekholm Friedman Friedman, 1994). It is more complicated though if a man from the north marries a woman from the south, because in the north the system is patrilineal, whereas in the south it is matrilineal. But sometimes this has meant that the couple has had fewer "problems" with the family, each side being careful not to offend the other side.

25. See the document "Documents pour l'Histoire, Les guerres civiles du Congo Brazzaville, Novembre 1993 – janvier 1994, 5 juni – 15 octobre 1997, tome I and II" (1998).
26. The intellectuals have recently been accused of not doing enough to provide the potential Congolese nation with cultural roots.
27. Nimbari Musua (1988: 181) (Musua 1988) compares the African (or third world) type of dictatorship with Greek tyranny. "Le tyran était celui qui avait conquis les pouvoirs et les conservait par la violence et non par des procédures légales."
28. As always it is very difficult to know the exact reasons for a certain event, because there are always interpretations. But it is interesting to note the different versions, because they are used as myths to explain what happened, how it happened and why. Regarding the events in 1959 Patrice Yengo writes the origins of the conflicts can be found in the change of majority in the Parliament when a member of UDDIA changed from one side to the other and then in 1959 when the Parliament was moved from Pointe-Noire to Brazzaville and the power game between MSA and UDDIA (Youlou). "La répression contre les matsouanistes est la face cachée des émeutes de 1959 ce qui donne à la politique post-coloniale toute sa dimension anti-populaire. 1959 a toujours été perçue comme une opposition Nord-Sud alors qu'elle intégrait aussi les mécanismes de répression intra-ethnique qui seront une constante des directions politiques" [Yengo, 1997 #86, p. 193] But this recapitulation of facts can also be part of "myth-building" or reinvention of history as well as the story that I was told by someone who lived in Brazzaville at the time and it enters into the logic of events that really put fire to the tension that had been building up.
29. There were also some traces from the American Constitution. Some Congolese who returned home for the National Conference had been working in the United States and had become influenced by the American Constitution. There has also been an exchange throughout Africa from one National Conference to the other.
30. This is not this is not very certain. The big difference is that before the National Conference we lived in a one party system and after that we entered into the democratic system where there are several parties, this is in the

political arena, ok? Well, *but in the administrative arena, there has not been much of a change*. Of course, some directors have been changed for those who are in power, as you can see, but they are all playing the same game, it is the same methods that are used, and the same kind of spirit that reigns, is it not?

31. This idea was given to me by J-P Daloz, CEAN Bordeaux, in October 1998, when discussing the state and its leaders in Africa regarding my research in Africa.
32. Norwegians, because the North was evangelized by Norwegian missionaries, who came from the North, Nordic countries. One detects a great influence from Scandinavia because many of today's politicians went to school either at the Swedish or Norwegian Missions. The other schools were the French Catholic schools. Lately, these labels have not been used so much. Actually there is some kind of semi-official order not to use these labels anymore, as if this would make them disappear.
33. André Grenard Matswa was a political leader who refused to pay taxes to the French colonialist regime and who organised the protest called "*les trois francs*", he died in prison in Mayama, Congo and quite soon people started to "pray to him" and some said that he would come back as Messiah. He was Lari from Kinkala.
34. Minkisi = Medicine, often statuettes used for protection or as cure.

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