

Ethnic War and Ethnic Cleansing in Brazzaville

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I. The Sudden Outbreak of Ethnic Conflict

It was generally assumed that there would be ethnic political parties and ethnic voting after the fall of the African oneparty system and the transition to so-called democracy. But right there our imagination halted. No-one really believed, we suppose, that what seemed to be a generally positive process would lead to cruel ethnic war in large parts of Africa. We often seem to be surprised about the emergence of ethnic conflict. It appears, suddenly, as from nowhere. Horowitz refers to this pattern, i.e. its episodic character, in his thorough work on ethnic conflict; 'it comes and goes, suddenly shattering periods of apparent tranquility,' a fact that also explains our defective understanding of the phenomenon (1985:13).

In her recent work on the Congo, based upon fieldwork during the second half of the 80s, Ekholm Friedman (1994) provides a picture of the relationships among the various ethnic groups, claiming that there are no serious conflicts. They have their stereotypes about each other, and they may not love each other, but that is all. At that time the opposition between North and South, as two "super-tribes", was the most pronounced; The North had controlled political power since the *coup-d'état* of 1968.

The Mbochi, most visible among the groups from the North, was described by the people from the South, in their more negative moments, as "only half-human", as "fishermen" (opposed to cultivators), guilty of embezzlement on a large scale and uninhibited in their lust for food, wine and women. The Bembe from Bouenza were described as aggressive and violent. The Lari, from Pool, had a reputation among the other groups of being avaricious, 'never become *deuxième bureau* of a Lari', 'we call them

Agip Recherche because, like the Italian oil company they drill for new sources of wealth all over the place', 'they take other people's land, they are all over the country, even as far north as la Cuvette', etc.

There is also a traditional opposition within the Pool, between the Lari of Kinkala (district) and the Bakongo of Boko, even if, essentially, they are one and the same group, linguistically and culturally. Both groups emphasize, however, how mentally different they are from one another. A Lari man can marry a Bakongo woman, they claim, but the opposite will not work. Women from Boko are submissive and unobtrusive and therefore make good wives. The Lari women, on the other hand, are too hot-tempered and stubborn for a Bakongo man to live with. The Bakongo have since time immemorial been regarded as traitors (*vendeurs des plans*) by the Lari. There is an old story about a chief who hid from the French and was then betrayed by a Bakongo (they say *a* Bakongo even if it is wrong grammatically). And even after 1960 the Bakongo have continued their treachery. Congo's first president, abbé Fulbert Youlou, himself Lari, was replaced by Massamba-Débat after the so-called "socialist revolution" in 1963. Massamba-Débat was a Bakongo.

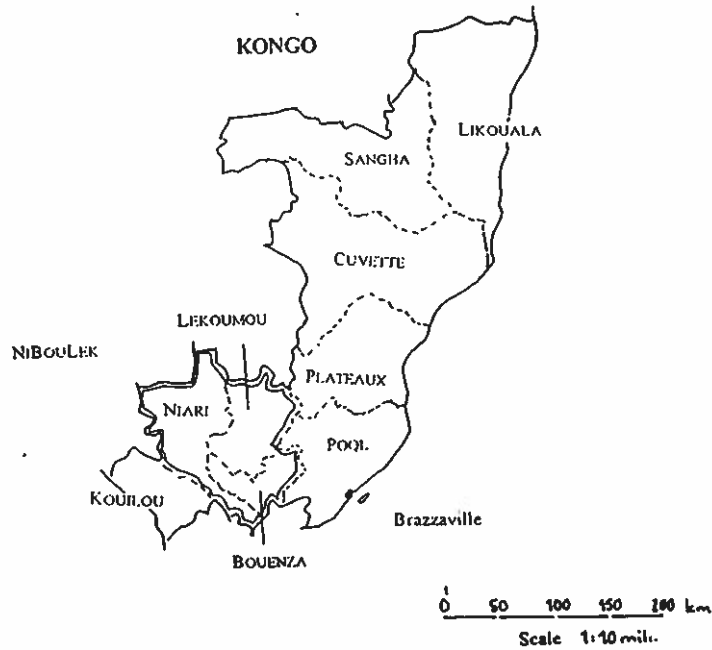
As late as in 1992, the minister of foreign affairs claimed in an interview (*Jeune Afrique*, 2-8/4) that 'il n'y a pas de tribalisme au Congo', i.e. 'there is no tribalism in the Congo'. A year later, ethnic war broke out.

We visited Brazzaville in May 1994. At that time it had been more or less calm since mid-February. The situation was again aggravated after our departure. The following attempt to understand the situation is based upon interviews with the various categories involved in the conflict. Thus, fieldwork was done after the events, and we have, for natural reasons, not been able to observe or to share their experiences.

During summer and fall of 93 we were reached by news and rumours. We heard about political unrest in Brazzaville, people had been killed, there were refugees after ethnic cleansing of certain parts of the capital. *Bacongo*, one of the residential areas, was called "Sarajevo", its militia, the Ninjas. There were rumours about training camps in Israel. New words appeared, such as Tchèque, Zulu, Cobra, Aubevillois, *la bande des 4* (i.e. the gang of the 4). Many Whites left Brazzaville. The Swedes returned to Sweden or moved temporarily to Pointe-Noire. The French left the capital in December after a number of them were "aggressés et molestés" (*Le Monde* 30/12-93).

II. Brazzaville in May 1994

1. There are two ethno-political blocks in Brazzaville. One is *La Mouance Présidentielle*, under Pascal Lissouba and based ethnically in Niboulek, i.e. the three provinces to the west of the Pool, the Niari, the Bouenza and the Lékoumou. The other is *L'Opposition*, under Bernard Kolelas, based ethnically among the Lari. Included in this block are also the Vili of the Kouilou province, and the former president Sassou-Nguesso and his PCT provide additional support.



Kolelas appears as more of a prophet than a politician. Like Moses he wants to lead his people to the promised land. He also refers to Matswa André Grénard, a political leader in the 30s who was turned into God, or the Son of God, after his death in the 40s. The Lari have always been like that, the Niboulek tell us, they have always devoted themselves to exalted movements of various types. Now it is Kolelas. His followers have his picture on the wall in front of which they adore him. He touches his followers with a buffalo tail when blessing them (interestingly enough mentioned in documents from the 16th century as a form of royal

blessing), they crawl between his legs before important activities (the father's blessing) and he prays and falls into trance before important meetings. It would be easy to join the Niboulek in their disapproval of the Lari, for having started the civil war and for their irrational behavior. Therefore we have especially tried to understand this group.

In Bacongo we observe wooden statues, fetishes, at the entrance to the area and at a couple of other places (taken from the museum). Our queries as to their meaning are answered in three somewhat different ways, all of them showing that the past is far from forgotten.

We have placed them there as protection, in the same way as the old did, our ancestors. When somebody enters he will know that this is MCDDI's territory.

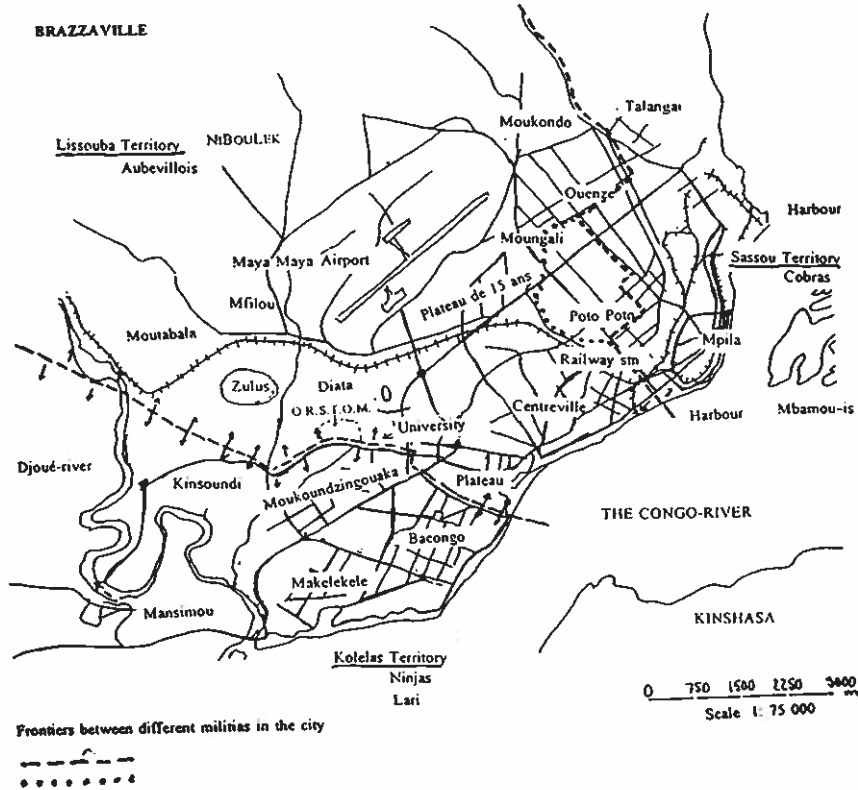
These statues tell those who come here that this zone is protected by God and the ancestors... yes, God and the ancestors are one and the same...he who comes here will know that he is in the Old Kolelas' territory. (we have, however, also heard the statement: *Dieu est mort*, God is dead.

The nails (it is a nkisi Nkondi) are there to show that if somebody comes here to do harm to Kolelas, the nails will attack. But he who comes in peace will be protected.

Kolelas' militiamen wear bones on a string around their necks and wrists as a means of protection; they are supposed to render them invisible.

2. The city is divided into different zones controlled by ethnic groups or blocks. Ethnic cleansing has occurred, creating zones with homogenous populations who fear entering each other's territory. Bacongo, Makelekele and Kinsoundi, by the Lari themselves identified as Lari territory, have been cleansed of their Niboulek inhabitants. People have been killed or ousted and their homes plundered and sometimes completely destroyed. Even areas beyond Makelekele, i.e. Mansimou and its vicinity, were cleansed of their "foreign" elements. Many Niboulek who had bought land and built houses in that area, have been driven away, their homes destroyed and their belongings stolen and sometimes sold in the streets. The large market in Bacongo (*Marché Total*) has

lost its dominant position for the sale of fresh food with serious consequences for the market-women there.



Niboulek have, in their turn, taken over *centre-ville* and seized control of the area north of the railway, i.e. Mfilou, *Arrondissement* 7. This part of the city has been cleansed of their former Lari inhabitants. Even if it is more or less calm, the Niboulek still do not dare to enter Tchèque (Lari) territory, nor do the Tchèque dare to visit Mfilou.

Mpila, associated with Sassou and his Cobras, is not considered safe in the evening. Even Poto-Poto, where all the West Africans live, is conceived as somewhat dangerous because of the Cobras and more general banditry. The other areas, i.e. Moundali, Ouenze and the Plateau de 15 ans are regarded as more "cosmopolitan" as no particular group can claim the land as its patrimony, and have not been affected to the same extent. There have, however, been cases of kidnapping and shooting even there, and people do not feel completely safe.

3. A great number of people have been killed on both sides. The Ninjas and the Aubevillois, the Niboulek militia, have attacked and killed each other, and both of them have attacked unarmed and helpless civilians.

The victims were burned, buried alive, shot, thrown into the rivers, decapitated and/or slashed with machetes. Among the victims were men, women and children. There are reports of horrible acts of violence. Women and very young girls, sometimes mother and daughters, have been gang raped. In fact, raping the enemy's women seems to have played an important role here as in Bosnia. Infants have been placed in mortars and pounded to death. Babies have been thrown into the rivers alive. People have been put up on poles thrust through the body via the rectum. Fathers have been forced to (try to) have sex with their daughters in front of an amused crowd of enemy militia.

4. The material destruction is considerable. Houses have been plundered and demolished. Doors, windows, furniture, toilet, fridge, roof; everything, has been removed. Many people have lost all their belongings and have had to buy knives and spoons. ORSTOM was plundered and its historical archives (their own history) destroyed in January, after the devaluation of the CFA franc (in order to 'show the French'). The same has happened to the Faculty of Science (maybe because Lissouba is depicted as a man of science) and the Savorgnan de Brazza Museum.

5. The general conditions of life were miserable before and they are much worse today. Civil servants (there are few other jobs) have not been paid on a regular basis since 1991. Many of them have lost 11-14 months' salary. Brazzaville is filthy and disorganized. Nothing works. It is difficult for them to go to work. They have to walk as they cannot afford the bus, and they may live 8-10 km away. In February 1994, people still did not dare to go to work, or they were prevented by the militiamen. The devaluation of the CFA franc has led to a rise of the cost of living that makes survival still more precarious. Even the prices of locally produced food, such as *manioc* and *foufou*, have increased considerably. People are completely destitute, they starve, they have no food, no medicine. They are undernourished and easily affected by disease, and they die in great numbers. Schools function worse and worse, teachers leave because they are not paid, or because they have been forced to leave. We hear stories about teachers who faint of hunger in the classroom. Pupils whose parents cannot afford school insurance are dismissed.

The atmosphere at work places and in church is chilly. Old friends avoid each other.

6. The military and the police have also split along ethnic lines, which means that there has been no level above the different militias to prevent the disintegration of the political unit. Instead, members of the military have participated in both ethnic warfare and looting.

As a result of the disintegration of the political unit and the loss of military control, the city has relapsed into a state of general anarchy and banditry. Young men, armed with machine-guns and often intoxicated by drugs, constitute a constant danger to others. Gangs appear in various parts of the town as well as outside Brazzaville, terrorizing people. They erect blockades along the roads, or they dig holes and then fill them up, claiming payment from all those passing by. They rob and they demand food in the villages. In the countryside such gangs have claimed cattle from peasants under the pretext of being sent by *le Vieux*, i.e. Kolelas. Such activities continue even as civil war has come to an end, at least temporarily.

7. The politicians have withdrawn from the scene of popular action. People criticize the fact that *les responsables* do not appear on TV, radio or in the streets, in order to "talk" to the people. A chief must "talk" in the Congo. His interpretation of the situation as well as his admonition/criticism of his subjects' behavior have always been important aspects of his obligations.

The National Conference, held in 1991, instilled, in all of them, new hope for the future. A better life would follow, with jobs, money and good politicians who cared for their people. Nothing of that has happened; instead life is more miserable than ever. At the same time they can watch Lissouba's visit to Paris on television, with a delegation of 150 persons staying in the very exclusive luxury hotel Crillon, and so on, and so on.

8. Yet there are some positive signs. Warfare and systematic destruction have stopped. A *Force d'Interposition* has emerged whose purpose is to maintain law and order, made up of military personnel from the antagonist blocks, the Tchèque and the Bembe. The churches are active, trying to offer their "national" organizations for a process of reconciliation. Women are reacting, both individually and collectively. For the first time we listen to women who claim that they could do the job better than men. 'We have always been the back-bone of this country while the men have screwed it up,' they tell us. 'Yes,' we agree, 'it is true, but the women have never before expressed this view of the state of

affairs'. Meetings have been held; on May 20th women from all the various churches gathered in front of the *Palais de Parlement* for a powerful manifestation of unity where they emphatically demanded peace and reconciliation. People from the different blocks also meet each other and express their deep concern. They weep together. Young men reveal in interviews that they feel exploited by their political leaders.

III. What Happened?

The Two Blocks

The division into two political blocks may be a natural and inevitable outcome of free elections in a multiparty system. But why did it have such destructive consequences?

Political parties appeared as early as 1990, even if they could not be called "parties" but "associations" at that point, as the country according to its constitution was a one-party system. Smaller parties fused into larger, and alliances between larger units were created. Directly after the National Conference in June of 1991, a transitional government was installed. The president was Milongo, a man from Boko who formerly worked at the World Bank. There were several Bakongo in this government, among others Mgr NKombo, who chaired the Conference, and who now became *le président du Conseil Supérieur*.

During 1992 a new constitution was adopted followed by local elections, the presidential election, and, finally, elections to the *Assemblée Nationale*. Pascal Lissouba from UPADS became the new president. By the creation of alliances, a division into two main blocks emerged. The dominant block was called the *Alliance Nationale pour la Démocratie* and consisted mainly of UPADS (Lissouba), PCT (Sassou) and a number of smaller parties. The other block was called the *Force de Changement* and consisted mainly of MCDDI (Kolelas), RDPS (Tschystère-Tchikaya from Pointe-Noire), and RDD (Yombi from the North).

Lissouba's cooperation with Sassou, which was heavily criticized, broke down when the latter demanded too many and too important ministerial appointments (oil among others). Sassou, politically clever as always, went over to Kolelas, thereby altering the majority situation in the *Assemblée Nationale*. This position was used to oust Lissouba's prime-minister in the Fall (or rainy season) of 1992. Lissouba counteracted by dissolving the *Assemblée Nationale*, and new elections had to be held in 1993.

The elections of 1993 did not change the power relationship between the two blocks, but their compositions were somewhat altered. UPADS had lost Sassou and PCT but managed to get Yombi and his RDD in exchange. Yombi and Sassou would never be on the same side. Even Milongo joined this block, to the great frustration of the Lari. In addition, Lissouba had a number of smaller parties based in the Plateaux and the Cuvette provinces on his side. This block is today called *La Mouvance présidentielle*.

The Opposition consists of the union URD (MCDDI/Lari and RDPS/Vili) and PCT. As most Vili live in Pointe-Noire and the Kouilou province, at the other end of the South of the country, they are not able to provide any meaningful support to Kolelas and the Lari in Brazzaville.

Why is it now so completely impossible for Kolelas and the Lari to accept the outcome of the election? There are several principal factors. Firstly, parliamentary democracy is a general problem in political systems such as the Congo's (see below), simply because political power is the main, or only, source of wealth. To *partager le gâteau* is an expression for the kind of power-sharing that has always taken place within the Congolese political system.

The principle of power-sharing is deeply rooted in the minds of men of the senior generation. One of our Lari informants, frustrated and angry about the present situation when we meet in May 1994, refers to how they always used to share in the village.

In the village, there were various groups, and most of the time they minded their own businesses. But when somebody came home from the hunt with a game, *he shared with the others*. That's how it has always been here. One doesn't try to grab all of it, one doesn't exclude the others.

The Lari feel completely isolated, excluded, and they experience fear of extinction as well as rage about today's economic situation for which they blame the government.

But was Kolelas completely excluded? No, he was offered a share, our Niboulek informants claim. But a look at the political landscape reveals that Lissouba has been very keen in establishing political alliances to other groups thereby reducing the importance of the Lari. Lissouba is, himself, from the Niari. At his side he has "the gang of four", all of them Bembe. In order to balance their influence, he has taken on Yombi, with his group in

the North, as his prime minister, and Milongo, from Boko, as the president of Assemblée Nationale. There is not much left of *le gâteau* (the cake) for Kolelas and the Lari.

The Lari also provide a picture in which the Niboulek are even more corrupt and greedy than the PCT. 'They have "eaten" in all the previous governments, but they have never before been the dominant group in a government. Now it is their turn to 'eat', and they do it massively'. This interpretation seems convincing in a situation where people get no salaries, and starve and suffer more than ever. The Lari think that the increasing starvation they themselves experience, is caused by the Niboulek taking all the money. The dismal truth is that there is no money. No money is generated internally, and the constant inflow of money from outside has stopped, or at least has been considerably reduced.

Secondly, like other political leaders, Kolelas must promise his people positions and money if they vote for him. His militiamen were told (according to our interviews with them) that Kolelas would reopen the old state enterprises and that they, his people, would obtain all the positions and all the jobs. His loss necessarily becomes theirs. They feel deprived of a brilliant future that for a short while flashed before their eyes. Now the others have everything while they are left in misery.

The Lari appear as irresponsible and bad losers while the Niboulek beam with satisfaction with democracy. 'That's the way it is in a democratic society, they tell us, either you win or you lose'. But in a situation where the blocks are ethnic, it is definitely not that simple. Suddenly the Lari conceive of Brazzaville as their own patrimony (Kolelas won the local election) and the Niboulek as intruders. 'You may have won an election but not here in Brazzaville, you do not belong here, this is our territory, go back to where you came from,' was their message. The Lari have always been proud and ambitious, and for natural reasons they expected to play a decisive political role after shaking off the dominance of the North.

Rumors and Reality

Brazzaville is rife with horror stories of what happened during the war. How are we to distinguish between what is true and what are only rumors. The Congolese are well aware of the problem of false information.

A Teke man who was forced to leave his home in Bacongo refers to it in the following way:

Les gens doivent enlever l'esprit de désinformation et les intoxications de la masse, désinformation, en tout cas, absolument ça. Il faut effacer les intoxications et mettre fin à la désinformation. Ce qui n'est pas réel, on invente, ce qui n'est pas réel, on met l'image et on intoxique pour faire croire aux gens que c'est réel...(the problem is) la désinformation, la haine et l'intoxication parce que il faut donner une mauvaise information qui va faire vexer les gens et fait naître la colère, et puis les gens se mettent en mouvement. C'est comme ça.

When asked to provide examples of "disinformation" and "intoxication of the masses" he alludes to the accusations of fraud after the election in 1993. A woman from Kinsoundi who visited Kinkala in March provides another example. A local woman in Kinkala asked her about the situation in Brazzaville and added simultaneously that she already knew how terrible it was, that Lari were being killed right at that very moment in Kinsoundi etc. The visiting woman answered: 'No, right now it is calm, the war is over'. The other woman angrily turned against her and shouted to people around them: 'This one over here is on Milongo's side, she is lying, we have heard from others..'

Rumors may be false or exaggerated, but they cannot be removed from reality as such, as merely fantasies. On the contrary, they constitute a powerful driving force in destructive and cruel activities. One group fantasizes about the other group having attacked, raped and massacred their own people, and driven by this fantasy they attack, rape and massacre the others. It is important to take the rumours seriously as they provide an explanation to the intensity of their hatred and aggression towards each other.

The Course of Events

We will here try to describe the course of events. As there is no reliable documentation and our understanding is based primarily upon interviews, there are uncertainties and sometimes contradictory information or interpretations. We shall give an account of different opinions where they exist but also try to distinguish what "really happened".

The situation became critical after the election of 1993, in June-July. Political unrest occurred sporadically in 1992. Barricades were set up. On November 30, three men from Bacongo were shot at a demonstration when the army fired randomly at the crowd, and some Niboulek left their homes in Bacongo and Makelekele after their children were subjected to harassment and their houses to stone throwers. In February 1993, when one of us visited the Bacongo primary school, it had considerably fewer pupils than at the beginning of the school year in October 1992. There are contradictory opinions concerning which side started the political unrest in 1993. A common interpretation in Bacongo is that all the Niboulek left voluntarily in July because *La Mouvance* was planning to bomb Bacongo and therefore wanted their own people out of the area, in safety somewhere else. There was a massive exodus from Bacongo and Makelekele and a crowd gathered in front of the *Palais de Parlement*. That shows, our Lari informants claim, that all this was *bien organisé* (organized). There is, however, too much evidence of the Niboulek being ousted and even attacked and killed in Bacongo and Makelekele.

Another point of divergence concerns when the expulsion of Lari from the Niboulek provinces started; whether it happened before or after the expulsion of Niboulek from Lari territory in Brazzaville. The question is whether the Lari started the cleansing, or whether they responded to what happened in the Niboulek provinces.

What seems to be an unambiguous fact is that the Lari experienced fear, fear of being attacked, deprived, expelled and even fear of extinction. Their fear may have been unfounded, but it was there and it was an important factor in their reaction.

While they were still waiting for the results of the elections, a 14-year old son of the president of the protestant church was kidnapped and abused by Kolelas' group. This happened in June. His father had, on a couple of occasions, been observed in contact with *La Mouvance* and Lissouba, e.g. at Desmond Tutu's visit to the Congo and when funds from Sweden were handed over to the Makelekele hospital. These contacts, normal as they may seem, were interpreted as proof of the president being Niboulek. His ethnic identity, as Teke, is somewhat unclear politically.

Let us listen to a young member of the Lari militia. It is revealing on several points:

I was *boy chauffeur* at a bus (he left because buses were fired at). I am illiterate. I left Brazzaville and

worked for a while in Ngoma Tse Tse with charcoal. When I heard about recruitments to the Ninjas I came back to Brazzaville. There were two different groups. I did not become a real Ninja but an *éclairneur*. My job was to point out where there were Niboulek houses and families. The real Ninjas stayed with the president of the Opposition and they constituted *un équipe d'intervention*. We, the "informers" (*les indicateurs*) worked in the area and did our job before the real Ninjas intervened. Then we plundered and destroyed the houses together, and we beat them up (his category had to hand over the loot to the higher-ranked Ninjas; our remark). I used to live in Kinsoundi with my uncle so I knew the area very well, who lived where and where they came from.

We were recruited, and after that we waited for some time. In the mornings we went *footing* (jogging). One day they told us to be prepared. That was after the elections, when they announced the results, they said: *on a triché* (that there had been fraud in connection with the elections). And they told us we had to be prepared for war against Niboulek. I did not want to fight at the beginning but then I heard that Lari had been driven out of Loubomo, Sibiti and Bouensa. Then I felt anger (*la colère*)!

This story shows that recruitment occurred some time before the counting of votes had been finished. The two groups, the real Ninjas and the "informers", were already formed at the beginning of July. They were told that there would be a war against the Niboulek. But he also reveals that they heard rumours about Lari being driven out of the Niboulek provinces and that it enraged him.

From other interviews with people in Bacongo it appears that the Ninjas were formed after the events of November 30th in 1992, when the three men were killed. The Aubevillois were created at about the same time.

We assume that a serious conflict was developing from the first elections in 1992, and that the conflict escalated on both sides. Niboulek people started to leave Bacongo and Makelekele as

early as the end of '92 and the beginning of '93. In connection with the election of '93, before July, Lari living in the Niboulek provinces were attacked and forced to leave.

The outcome of the elections and reports about Lari refugees added new fuel to the conflict in Brazzaville, and a more serious attack on Niboulek occurred in July, followed by reciprocal attacks on Lari in the western provinces. It is said that Lari working at Dolisie (Loubomo), in the forest, were told to go directly from the fields to the train without passing their homes. Their fields had been destroyed.

At the beginning of July, the Tchèque, a new name for the Lari (inspired by the events in eastern Europe and rhyming with Niboulek) started systematically to attack Niboulek people in Baongo and Makelekele. Homeless refugees, called the *sinistrés* ('because you cannot be a refugee in your own country'), camped along the streets in centre-ville and outside the presidential palace. Refugee camps were opened in various schools and hotels.

The Chef d'État Major refused to let the army enter Baongo in order to re-establish law and order. His decision has been severely criticized by the Niboulek who interpret it as an act of treason. Mokoko is from the North and held the same position during the Sassou government. Lissouba kept him against the will of other Niboulek politicians. Some of our informants are more understanding. It was a choice between violence and peace/dialogue, and he chose peace when he refused to intervene in Baongo and Makelekele. Some of his men were Lari, and it is doubtful that they would have gone against their Lari brothers? Anyhow, Makoko is now in exile, accused of a number of serious crimes. The official version is that he was planning a military *coup* with French help and that money, gold, drugs, arms, and compromising tapes were found when his house was searched.

The situation calmed down, and in August the authorities asked people to return to their homes. No one could, at that time, really believe that the situation was as serious as it was. Many of those who returned to their homes were now attacked and killed.

Ethnic cleansing increased during the Fall in the Niboulek provinces. A great number of refugees, the men often naked and beaten and the women raped, fled from Loubomo, Nkayi, Bouensa and Madingou toward Kinkala. There are also reports from the North about Niboulek as well as Lari being forced to leave.

Just before the beginning of November a great number of the Niboulek refugees found their way to Centre-ville but some of them, especially the Bembe, moved in with relatives in the areas north of the railway, i.e. in Mutabala, Diata, Mfilou, la Base and Makozo. Two opposing groups appeared thereby in the western parts of Brazzaville, the Bembe north of the railway and the Tchèque south of the railway in a state of mutual fear.

In November warfare broke out in this part of the capital, and there are several suggestions concerning which specific event triggered the war.

One of Kolelas' guards, together with a soldier from the North, was caught when trying to steal ammunition from a depot in Centre-ville. The media reported the incident, and Kolelas responded over the radio by ordering the authorities to release his guard, who also happened to be his nephew, otherwise there would be retaliation. He was not released and the retaliation came in the form of the kidnapping of two high-ranking Niboulek politicians. The government produced an ultimatum, 'release hostages in 24 hours or we will go after you'. The two men were released, one hour after the time assigned had lapsed. This entailed an escalation of the conflict between *La Mouissance* and *L'Opposition* but was probably less important for the occurrences that led to the clash between the north and south sides of the railway.

Another incident was the killing of three policemen in Bacongo at *La Fête des Morts* (All Saints' Day). Police were sent into Bacongo in order to stop vandalism and several of them were attacked, beaten and their cars set on fire. Kolelas declared that no police cars would be allowed to enter Bacongo.

The most important incident is probably the following: A young Bembe man, living in Mutabala, had an argument with his Lari girlfriend. She enrolled a group of Ninjas and they found him in a bar in Mutabala where they killed him (by hanging). This happened on the 1st of November. The event was very important to the Bembe as it proved to them that the Tchèque would continue to hunt them even north of the railway. They felt threatened and furious, and then, suddenly, they attacked.

The battle started when the Bembe launched an attack from Mutabala against both Ninjas and civilians living south of the railway. They attacked with machetes, knives and old guns. They are known as the Zulus in the political arena. The Zulu against the Ninjas might have been an uneven fight, as the Ninjas were equipped with modern arms. But in came the Aubevillois from

Bouenza, and a cruel war developed. What was Lissouba's role in this? The incident occurred when he visited Morocco, and it is claimed (by the Niboulek) that he never gave his consent to the involvement of the Aubevillois. They also claim that he emphatically forbade the distribution of weapons. The Bembe complained about him. 'He transforms us into women. Without weapons we are not able to defend ourselves'. The Lari called him derogatorily *Tata Pasteur*, meaning that he was not tough enough.

The war went on for 4 months, from the beginning of November to mid-February, between these ethnic groups and with the civilians in both areas as the main victims. A Teke woman, married to a Lari, gives the following picture of Kinsoundi:

Kinsoundi is in ruins. Houses are demolished, people have been killed, burned, buried alive, thrown into the rivers. There are many who do not want to eat fish from the river. This has been going on for 2 years. People die of hunger and there are no medicines. We cannot bury our dead because we have no money. And all the time *des querelles, des querelles, des barricades...*

They fired, pa, pa, pa, pa, bom, bom, bom, all day long, poff. Especially in the evenings. We couldn't go out. The bullets whistled. For 4 months, from November to February, it was like that. The Aubévillois fired from a certain place, they called it *la bouche de caïman* (the crocodile's mouth), and as soon as people tried to move they fired... I was traumatised. I had nightmares, *on ne pouvait pas vivre, et il y avait la faim, et il y avait la misère...* We became like animals, like dogs (she points at one) without any program for his life, you are there but have nothing to do, you sleep, you are hungry, you sleep...

This woman fled from Brazzaville in January with her youngest son who could not stand the constant shooting because of a heart disease. 'There were about 30 blockades along the route to Kinkala, and at each of them there was a group of young boys demanding money: *'vous laissez l'argent, vous passez,'* after 100 meters there was another group..'. Arriving in Kinkala she found the situation there even worse than in Brazzaville because of the

conflict between the Lari and the Bakongo. In both Kinkala and Ngoma Tse Tse, the Lari killed Bakongo. And why? 'They kill Milongo's people, what has happened to the Lari is Milongo's fault'.

In May 1994 the state has no effective control over the country. The army and the police are fragmented, as mentioned above, along ethnic lines. Both soldiers and policemen have been observed plundering. A train from Pointe-Noire with a cargo of oil, salted fish, flour and other goods was stopped at a station on the way to Brazzaville and plundered. In this case, the crowd was led by soldiers. After February, however, there has been a tendency for the army, or, at least, part of it, to stabilize as a neutral force. Some of our informants express a certain uneasiness about this fact.

What about Sassou's present role? The opinions are divided among the Niboulek. Those who think that he constitutes a danger point to the fact that he still has a lot of money (from the time as president) while Lissouba has little. He who controls the money also has the power. This has always been a very simple equation in the Congo. They also point to the rumours about Sassou having distributed weapons to both Lissouba's and Kolela's group. And what about his relationship to Yombi? They are on different sides, Yombi is the prime minister in Lissouba's government while Sassou is allied with Kolelas. But maybe the two northerners work together after all, just waiting for the right moment to take over. Then, again, the North might already be exercising dominance over a divided South. Others say, no, he is finished, his Cobras may cause some harm but he, himself, is of no political importance.

How might we understand this course of events? It is an unambiguous fact that different groups fight one another today. The nature of these groups is, however, not so clear. To call them "ethnic" is not wrong but, on the other hand, it does not take us very far in our understanding. There are certain aspects of the conflict that point in a somewhat different direction.

In the first place there has occurred a **feudalization** of the state as a public arena. *Les leaders politiques* are divided into two main groups struggling for political power. There are two, or maybe three, feudal lords, each one of them with his followers and his militia. It is *their* conflict. **The women** are not directly involved in any power struggle, nor are the hungry young men in the streets. The different militias recruit members from their own ethnic groups or blocks, but just as important is the fact that this group

as a whole is composed of impoverished, poorly educated young boys without any hope in the future. They are hired as mercenaries in exchange for food and a place to sleep. This category of young boys, described by the Congolese as *chômeurs, voleurs et fumeurs de chanvre* (lumpenproletariat, thieves and drug addicts), is responsible for most of the atrocities that have been committed against women, children, babies and the old. In most cases they have directed the violence toward members of the other group, but there are many reports of fighting among themselves. This is a **youth problem**, directly related to the existing economic disaster (Ekholm Friedman, 1994).

The young militiamen, or boys, whom we have been able to interview, reveal frustration, shame and a feeling of having been used by *les leaders politiques*. The problem is not limited to the Ninjas, the Aubevillois and the Cobras. Individual politicians who fear for their lives in the neighborhood hire their private guards.

Two Tchèques around 20 with insights into the situation in Makelekele provide the following description:

They can only recruit young men living under miserable conditions and who don't think. They usually get 300 Fr a day (c. 50 cents). The boys are told that they will get military training in Israel or in the US, and that they will return as officers. This is very tempting as we admire and envy the military. Even their parents are told so in order to get their consent. Sometimes the parents are fanatics who conceive of their political chief as God, and they want their sons to join the Ninjas. But the boys are not sent to Israel, they just get a gun and a short instruction in its use. After that, they have to obey orders. When the chief of the band (they operate in smaller units, our ann.) wants an attack to be carried through, he gives his orders. And you must obey because he is the one who feeds you. You cannot refuse. *Tu es nourri par lui, tu es logé par lui -même si tu ne dors pas bien, mais le fait de manger tous les jours, c'est déjà beaucoup*. You are fed by him and housed by him, for a boy like him that is enough.

It is a common interpretation of the situation that only poor and simple-minded men have been enrolled in the various militias. But this is certainly the whole truth. Some of them are well-educated, from "good" homes etc., and they are there for ideological reasons.

One of the frightening aspects of the conflict is that modern arms have been handed out to "young bandits", and that it is impossible to take them back. These men and boys will certainly not only keep the guns but will use them in their own interests. The guns provide them with power and food. With that, the Congo has definitively ceased to be a political unit. Two scenes from today's Brazzaville make an especially strong impression. One is from Marché Total in Baongo. A young man demands money from people who are passing by. He gets into an argument with a group of bus drivers who are angry at his behavior. He says: 'Today I want to see blood, I have to kill...oh, I ought to kill'. The other scene is from Makelekele. A man sits in front of his home with a machete in his hand and an expression of insanity in his face, he drinks all the time and talks about chopping off people's heads.

As we shall see below, it has been very difficult for them to distinguish between "us" and "them". They look the same, and they are mixed and intermarried. But this "difficulty" did not prevent them from cruelly killing each other.

IV. Ethnic Groups, Tribalism and Clan Politics

The difference between Africa and the West

Traditional anthropology has contributed very little to our understanding of ethnicity and tribalism in Africa. In spite of the fact that anthropologists generally studied ethnic groups, they tended to analyze "their" groups in terms of functionalism, structuralism and marxism (cf. Amselle, 1985). *The concept of tribalism* had such negative undertones in the West that it was entirely avoided for many years following decolonization. It seemed to underscore that Africans are different from us, modern people. This is a very important point, we think. The representatives of modern, Western society, i.e. "us", have not been able to relate objectively to this special "otherness" that Africa displayed. And why? Because it concerns strategies that we must, or at least should, reject in our own society.

In his attempts to explain why ethnicity, during the last centuries, has been less pronounced in the West than in developing countries, Horowitz (1985:20) refers to the unique, historical development of the West. The Industrial Revolution created a class structured society where the political struggle to a great extent aimed at ameliorating the social conditions of existence of the working class. However, when ethnic conflicts and ethnic wars, or tribalism, once again explode over large parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, we suddenly seem much more alike. It is symptomatic that Young in his recent work on cultural pluralism (1993:4), explicitly gives up the old dicotomy between developed and developing areas. We witness ethnicity and tribalism in our own part of the world; the dissolution of Yugoslavia, ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, regionalism, the development of diaspora-economies, ethnic-nationalist resentment and violence toward immigrants and "ethnic conflict" between natives and immigrants, or between subnational groups.

The parallel between Europe and Africa is present even in the Congo where Bacongo is referred to as "Sarajevo" and the Lari are called "Tchèque".

The decisive factor is economic development. In the West, economic development gave rise to a socio-economic super-organism, a system of role based positions with a life of its own, independent of the individuals occupying the various functions; we are all replaceable as human beings. Without economic development there will be no socio-economic system in which the individual might be integrated on the basis of his competence. The alternative is the formation of **social groups**, individuals connected to one another in personal networks of kin and patron-client relationships. This is the Congolese pattern.

The public institutional forms that can be observed in countries such as the Congo have no life of their own. They are, instead, embedded a strategic and hierarchical network of personal relations. When Hydén (1983) talks about the lack of public morality in Africa, he links it to the absence of a national bourgeoisie for which it would be of vital interest. Seen from the individual's point of view, the personal network of people he can trust is what matters for a successful career, and even for his very survival.

In modern Western society, it has been of vital importance to repudiate clan politics. One is expected to be impartial, to refrain from personal considerations when engaged in the exercise of one's official duties. The very word "nepotism" has a clearly

negative significance. We cherish the idea of equality before the law, of human rights etc. But even if modern society has repudiated clan politics, it has not managed unequivocally to free itself from it. Modern society emerges out of an in opposition to a clan type of society, but when the good times are over people begin to distrust the validity of its holy principles and fall back, of necessity, into clan politics. Locating nepotism in our genes (see van den Berghe, 1981) does not add further understanding. For example, Swedish researchers are today probably more interested in establishing personal networks where favors and support are exchanged than they were a couple of decades ago when both the present and the future looked brighter (on the other hand, clan politics seems to have existed at the top level throughout our history). But it is not easy for unemployed members of the old working-class to recreate personal networks. They have no cousins. In both France and Great Britain it has been observed that immigrants often get on somewhat better than poor natives. *The Economist* (30/4-6/5 94) presents figures for self-employment and employment of others pointing in this direction. Wieviorka points to a similar pattern in his work *La France raciste* (1992). The immigrants have their network, he says, while the underclass Frenchman stands alone. *The Economist's* interpretation is that England should be more open and welcoming to immigrants. But what the pattern really reveals is that clan politics, in this context meaning personal networks and ethnic enclaves, is an effective strategy in today's Western Europe. The individualized worker is handicapped in the new situation of declining resources and a shrinking socio-economic superorganism. This does not necessarily mean that clan politics among immigrants is beneficial to Western Europe and its native population.

Modernity as a socio-economic super-organism with its implied rejection of personal network/clan politics, is a very fragile construction. It may always very well be gone to-morrow. What will be left are social groups; local groups, personal networks, the mob, "ethnic" styles - and, of course, a constant risk of civil war. In that sense, we may learn from Africa.

Ethnic Groups in Africa

Ethnicity and ethnic conflict have usually been conceived as mere epiphenomena by africanists; at a more fundamental level we are expected to find economic and political factors (cf. Paul Mercier, 1961). We can certainly all agree about that, to some extent at

least. Groups appearing in ethnic apparel usually have something to fight about, often money and political power. But ethnicity cannot thereby be deleted as, for example, "false consciousness". We must, as Horowitz point out, 'specify what the groups are fighting over... and why ethnic lines of conflict are so important' (1985:15).

The Congo is a clan society and its people practise clan politics. What then is an "ethnic group" in Central Africa and in what relation does it stand to the state?

In pre-colonial times there were no "ethnic groups". They were formed during the colonial system. This does not mean, however, that they were created by the colonial powers, as is suggested by e.g. Amselle (1985:9). A process took place where internal as well as external factors were involved. It was none other than Mao who said quite some years ago, 'in an adequate temperature an egg will develop into a chicken, but no temperature whatsoever will turn a stone into a chicken'. The colonial powers may have practised the principle of "divide and rule" and favored one group over others etc., but the local culture, if we use this term for socio-political structures as well as strategies and interpretations of reality, is never a passive object on which external forces make their imprint.

In pre-colonial times there were independent political units in the Congo area, first larger kingdoms and then lesser chiefdoms. These units were dynamic constructions, some of which expanded at the expense of weaker units. The latter contracted and sometimes disappeared completely from the political arena. The expanding units incorporated individuals from other groups through the mechanism of slavery, a powerful process of assimilation. This period was characterized by constant conflicts, external as well as internal, and the motor of the process was external trade, controlled by the central powers and carried on with both Europeans and neighbors within the region (cf. Ekholm 1972, 1977, 1991).

As an immediate result, colonization led to a break down of the indigenous social order (Ekholm Friedman, 1991). The former political units disappeared, hierarchies broke down and people were forced to participate in the projects of the intruders. But after the initial shock, a reorganization occurred where older men, especially the various types of chiefs, reestablished their dominance over other social categories by means of political relationships to the white sector and new types of economic transactions (what P-Ph Rey, 1972, calls "the articulation of modes of

production"; see also Bertrand (1975) about "la société lignagère marchande"). A new kind of indigenous society was formed and one of its characteristic features is the co-existence of different "ethnic groups".

At the beginning of the 20th century, bounded ethnic groups were formed by explicit strategies of endogamy. The main social actors were the older men, and they sought to keep marriages within their own groups. An extreme example is the old village chief of Kinsaba in the Bouenza who died at the beginning of the 50s. At an early point he brought in a couple of women from a neighboring and dying village, but after that, he firmly disapproved of marriages with outsiders, who, in his opinion, were nothing but a bunch of thieves and bandits. He decided who should marry whom, and they all seem to have obeyed to his will.

In spite of considerable similarities in both language and culture, the population of the southern Congo is, thus, divided into bounded ethnic groups. And these groups consist, during the first half of the 20th century, of alliances of clans and lineages. All the various groups, except the Teke, are kikongo-speaking and they understand each other fairly well, more so the closer they live of course. People from the Pool province have no problems understanding people from the Bouenza but may not be able to communicate, *en patois*, with, for example, a Tsangui from the Niari.

In the Pool there are still six distinguishable ethnic groups; Bakongo, Lari (or Soundi), Minkengi, Teke, Bangangala and the Pygmies, and they are associated with certain areas of the province. For example, the Bakongo are from Boko, and the Lari, or Soundi, are geographically associated with the Kinkala and the Ngoma Tse Tse districts.

But something else has happened. From a situation where the boundaries between the various ethnic groups were relatively clear, they have, during the last 3-4 decades, both intermarried and spread over province and country. They are, for example, all found in Brazzaville. The Congo has among the highest rates of urbanization in Sub-Saharan Africa (70%). This figure was estimated 5 years ago and may very well be less today when many people do not dare to stay in town and cannot survive in town. The high frequency of intermarriage is a consequence of the old men's loss of power and authority over the young. When the young found that they could choose for themselves, it even seemed advantageous to the individual to marry somebody from a

different ethnic group, as that would further weaken the control of their parents.

This means that today's ethnic conflict occurs in a situation where many Tchèque are married with Niboulek and their children are mixed.

Clan Politics and Power-sharing

Clan politics does not follow automatically from the very existence of ethnic groups. It emerges as a strategy in order to compete 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 for each other as relatives and clan brothers and the compelling necessity of making alliances and forming groups in order to achieve their goals.

During the colonial period, some of the groups were favored, mostly unintentionally, 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. Soldiers were, however, recruited from the North. Political independence in 1960 created a new and completely different situation where the struggle for political power overshadowed 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 was more homogenous, its inhabitants were all from the South, while Poto-Poto, where the conflict erupted, had a mixed population, with 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.

A one-party system combined with power-sharing has always been the natural political arrangement in the Congo. It might seem as if the Congo had a multi-party system in the years 1960-1963. A closer examination reveals, however, that abbé Fulbert Youlou from MDDIA, the first president, immediately created alliances to other chiefs, thereby forming a *de facto* one-party

system before it was politically confirmed by the "revolution" of 1963 (cf. 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 everybody was satisfied, even if it certainly reduced the tensions. The political history of the Congo Republic after 1960 is imbued with power struggle, treason and plots, *coups-d'état* and attempts at *coups d'état*, dismissals of ministers and political murders. There has been a constant power struggle in the political arena. Winners come and go while the political life-form in itself has remained one and the same.

V. The Marxist-Leninist State and its Feudalization

The Problem of Parliamentary Democracy in an African State

We will here argue that the so-called "democratization process" has been a process of disintegration from the very beginning. When hierarchical relations for some reason are weakened, this change may be experienced by subordinates as an opportunity to expand and to question their inferior positions. After all, neither the world system, nor its constituent states, hold together by consensus but by relations of power and dependence.

In spite of the artificial boundaries, drawn by the colonial powers, African states somehow held together after 1960 (cf. Worsley 1984). The reason for that can be found in the top-down structure of the African state itself. There are no attempts to break away from one other because all parties compete for the point from which money and other resources flow into the society. The state, and control over the state, is what matters. Conquering the state clears the path to the "Faucet" (footnote) from which the money flows. In such a system it is important that the state owns everything and that money from outside is channelled through the state.

In the West the state has, at least ideally, no resources of its own but is based economically on the taxation of labor and capital. This feature is important for the view of the state as democratic and of politicians as representatives of the people. In periods of economic recession the state has, however, intervened by nationalizations as a means of rescuing important enterprises

(which has been an unsuccessful strategy). Parliamentary democracy is a product of this particular society. It cannot work very well in a country such as the Congo where politics and economy are not separated from one other. There is nothing but the political hierarchy holding it together, no socio-economic system, and when this hierarchy breaks up the entire political arena disintegrates.

The State's Liberation from the People

The Congo has never been a nation in the Western sense of the word. This is very well understood by themselves:

Puisque la notion de la nation manque, donc, même nos biens nous ne savons pas en profiter, de les gérer. Donc le bien national est un bien tribal, le bien national est un bien clanique... parce que, quelque part, la notion de la nation n'existait pas (a protestant *doyen*).

Money was channelled into the political hierarchy via international economic and political links, in exchange for oil and as loans and aid. After Sassou's fall it was revealed that ELF's deal with the Congo was 17% of the profit; but out of these 17% only 2% went to the country while 5% went directly to the oil minister and 10% to the president. This made the state class independent upon the people. The military and all the various types of police and militia were exclusively focused on the protection of the rulers from their increasingly embittered subjects.

The historical material indicates that the Congo was relatively wealthy and developed at independence. Its wealth emanated partly from its position as a transit country for trade to Tchad, the Central African Republic and Gabon and from its position as center for the colonial administration of AEF. But part of it was the result of the relatively high level of industrialization. Congo exported industrial products such as sugar, soap, cigarettes, shoes etc. to neighboring countries. The development of light industry continued until the end of the 60s when it was suddenly interrupted. It seems plausible to connect this de-industrialization with the military take-over in 1968 and the proclamation of marxism-leninism as the official ideology. But it is, of course, possible that the tendencies were there before and that it took a while for them to be fully manifest.

Foreign capital abandoned the Congo around 1970, apparently as a reaction to the political situation. The military coup took place in 1968 but the situation had been aggravated somewhat earlier by the conflict between the government and the army and the killing of oppositionals. Marxism-leninism was adopted as state ideology by the military regime at the beginning of 1970, and the USSR and Eastern Europe became models for the political system. Bertrand says in his work of 1975, which was apparently written in 1972 judging from the statistical material, that the most important sectors of Congolese industry were dying at a raped rate (ibid:218). Private capital did not want to stay, or invest, and state enterprises functioned miserably.

The effects of the political system on state enterprises, entrepreneurial activities and foreign companies have been disastrous. State enterprises have been established, modern equipment has been bought but very little production has taken place. 'While our ancient kings built palaces and pyramids, our modern presidents erect steel mills and hydroelectric dams', says A. Mazrui in an article about Africa in general and Uganda in particular (1988:339). He calls the new structures "temples"; 'because like temples they are built in faith rather than through rational calculation'. In Congo's case it is clear, however, that these "temples" were not only for the gods; they were first and foremost a constant source of private wealth for the political elite. And why should they bother to produce when they could receive what they wanted in an easier way. All state enterprises are failures. Modern agricultural equipment, imported from various countries, both in the West and in the East, can be observed abandoned all over the country. Some of them have never been in use. Instead of generating incomes for the state, these enterprises have been in continuous need of funding from the state. The very high wages and other exorbitant payments to the management would be enough to explain the failure. But to make it worse, the directors of these state enterprises have constantly been embezzling funds. The entrepreneurial class that emerged in the sixties was outcompeted by the political elite. At the same time the members of the state class entered all kinds of entrepreneurial activities. Everything that generated money was absorbed; gas stations, bakeries, pharmacies, transport, import businesses, hotels and restaurants. It is important to notice, however, that the political class did not become entrepreneurs just by conquering entrepreneurial activities. Its members were incompetent in these activities in the same way that they were incompetent at running

state enterprises. They identified sources of wealth, captured them, exploited them, but when problems arose they looked elsewhere.

A Modern/Traditional Central African Kingdom

The Congo's political system was, in spite of the segregation between the state and popular sectors, a pyramidal structure. The country was, according to its constitution, a marxist-leninist one-party system. The political organization and the party were two parallel structures that went from top to bottom, embracing the country as a whole. Before the summer of 1990 when the Union suddenly proffered resistance and finally declared itself independent of the party, the political structure revealed no conflicting interests but was hierarchically encompassing; the party (with its *Bureau Politique* and *Comité Central*) and the government at the top and all the various "mass organizations" and the army under their dominance.

Why did African states declare themselves marxist-leninist in early '70s? Why this interest in marxism-leninism? One answer to this question is that it fitted needs of the state class perfectly, as it did in Eastern Europe. It legitimized state control. The state should control the whole economy, there could not exist more than one party, no competitors were allowed, all attempts at organizing from the bottom were illegal and counterevolutionary. The marxist ideology also fitted the political elite very well when it came to the identification of the main enemy of the people and the revolution. It was used against entrepreneurs of various types, what Amin (1969:147) called "the embryonic local bourgeoisie". This early class of "capitalists" has been zealously combatted in the name of marxism-leninism and reduced to petty traders.

But marxism-leninism also suited the Congolese state class at a deeper level. It masked the fact that Congo still, to a large extent, is constructed as a traditional Central African kingdom. The ancient kingdoms were composed of a number of structurally isomorphic local units, hierarchically related to one other through exchange. "Tribute" was transferred from lower ranked groups to higher, and in the other direction there was a distribution of foreign goods, which were obtained through external trade. All the different units were more or less complete societies, so to speak, with their proper economies and politics. The central, or highest ranked, unit was larger than the others, it had more

people, more slaves, more of everything, but it was not structurally different. Its position was based upon its monopoly over external trade, i.e. over the inflow of resources from the outside. Under traditional conditions it still depended upon the other groups for its social reproduction; it needed their resources and production for its participation in the international system. Those kingdoms were composed of long chains of such hierarchically related groups. The principal strategy of a Central African king was to use his resources in expanding the size of his own group and in establishing and maintaining alliances with other groups.

President 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. The president had a monopoly over external exchange. There was no separation between private and public economies. The main difference between the ancient kingdom and Sassou's Congo was the self-sufficiency of the central group. The modern ruler controlled directly the principal resources of the country, in the name of marxism-leninism, and he did not need the rest of the country for tribute or alliances.

External Factors

We must ask the question: What happened to African states, such as the Congo at the end of the 80s that weakened the power of the state? One factor was decreasing incomes from the oil. In 1986 (31/5) this "fact" was explained by oil prices. Even in '87 and '88 considerably reduced profits were reported followed by budget revisions. It was made public around 1990 that the ELF agreement was very unfavorable for the Congo, besides the fact that almost all the money went directly to the president and his oil minister. Lissouba has not been able to obtain loans based on oil as security, as the former president, Sassou, has already used this possibility until the year 2005.

At the same time the Soviet Union broke up, and Eastern Europe underwent profound changes. For the Congo these events led to a loss of both financial and military support. The PCT discussed, as early as 1989 (ord.sess. Nov. 27-30), the importance of understanding the changes in the East, and on January 23 in 1990 a commission was appointed for this purpose. The withdrawal of the East made the crisis-ridden West even less motivated to transfer resources to countries such as the Congo. France

has, of course, maintained its interest in Congolese oil, but it is a partial interest.

It appears that President Sassou reacted to his declining resources by expanding the dominance of his own group in the political arena, a move that gave rise to resentment and resistance among the others.

There were signs of an approaching collapse at the end of the 1980s, but it did not become fully evident until the dry season of 1990, when CSC (the united trade union) under Bokamba-Yangouma demanded independence from the party (July 18). 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. Such a change might be appreciated in a country where the pension does not differ appreciably from the salary. In the Congo where the pension is 1/3 of a meager salary, if money is dispersed at all, it is a catastrophe by the age of 55 (see Ekholm Friedman, 1994).

The *Bureau Politique* answered no (July 25) but the process could not be stopped, and after a couple of weeks there were visible conflicts within all the mass organizations, the military and even within the highest political organs, such as *Bureau Politique* and *Comité Central*. The party denounced marxism-leninism in December 10 of 1990. A National Conference with 1100 participants was held in 1991 (from Febr. 25 to June 10), followed by a transitional government under André Milongo between June 10 of 91 to August 17 of 1992.

The introduction of a multi-party system and so-called "democracy" opened the doors for a new kind of power struggle. The largest block has conquered political power and the traditional system of power-sharing does not work. It has been difficult to discuss this problem as democracy in people's minds is linked to a multi-party system, and everyone is in favor of democracy. Nevertheless people are aware of the disintegration of the political unit.

Nous sommes passés du système monolithique au système démocratique, même le pouvoir veut devenir un bien clanique, un bien tribal. Et c'est ça qui explique tout ce qui s'est passé...Même le pouvoir, chacun veut en faire un bien personnel.

This is to say that political power has become clan property, or tribal property. The political hierarchy breaks up without being

replaced by some other form of political integration. Thus, there is more to it than ethnic conflict. A new type of political system seems to have emerged. At the top, the "balloon", to borrow a term from Hyden, has split into two, maybe three, groups. These groups might be labelled ethnic, Niboulek, Lari and North, but they also display another important feature. They are led by old men who have participated in the intrigues and struggles with one another in the political arena for decades. *They* are not new but *their struggle* is new. In this situation they suddenly realize that they need the poor as mercenaries. A reintegration of the political leaders and the lumpenproletariat takes place at the same time as the former group's own children are sent abroad for studies, or just to be in safety.

VI. Ethnic Cleansing in Difficulties

We shall take up three different kinds of difficulties in relationship to ethnic cleansing.

Firstly, identifying the enemy is not an easy task in a situation where people look the same. Various methods have been used; commanding people to speak in order to reveal their dialect, examining identity cards in order to find out about birth place and name. Dialect, birth place and name should conclusively mark a person ethnically. But it only does so when the person in question's identity is unambiguous. When such is not the case, it is likely that there are misunderstandings, and "militants" have sometimes killed members of their own groups. In July the railway outside Brazzaville was blocked by railroad cars and by the removal of rails. When it was later opened, in January, the workers were attacked and killed by the Ninjas. The Ninjas killed their own Tchèque brothers by mistake. The rail was removed in order to prevent the enemy from being reinforced by new troops of Aubevillois, a very ineffective method as Brazzaville can be reached by air as well as by land from other directions.

Groups of militiamen used to stop buses or wait for buses at bus stops, ordering the passengers out in order to be identified. Those who were identified as members of the other ethnic group were molested or removed and killed. It is said that the Niboulek militia ordered their captives to dig their own graves before they were shot. 'You will be travelling', was a common expression, as an ironic explanation of what would follow, referring to the rumors about the Lari being sent to Israel for military training. Even people from the North were identified for this purpose:

...si tu tombes entre les gens qui supportent
Sassou, si tu dis que tu es de Yombi, alors c'est
fini. On te prend (a man from the North).

In this case the passengers had to declare whether they were on Sassou's or Yombi's side, and then their fate depended upon the ethnic identity of the militia.

Civil servants have worked for decades in other provinces than their "own". Their children are often born and raised there and speak the local dialect, not their own. *Munukutuba* (or kituba) is a generalized language in the South, based on the various variants of kikongo, but it is differently spoken in, for example, Loutete in the Bouenza and Kinkala in the Pool, due to different original "dialects". A young Congolese may speak a distinctive dialect (*patois*), such as Bembe, Kamba, Dondo etc. if he comes from the Bouenza; beside speaking kituba and French. A Lari who is raised in Loutete may speak kituba in a manner that is typical for this part of the Bouenza. When speech and identity card are used as ethnic markers, he may easily be taken for a Niboulek and killed. There are many reports of individuals as well as whole families who have experienced serious problems with both sides because of this. For example, one originating from the Pool lived and worked in the Bouenza. First they were molested and driven away from there, and later they had their ethnic identity questioned in the Pool. One Lari family that had lived for 25 years in Loutete, was forced to leave, moved into an empty house in Makelekele and was immediately suspected of being Niboulek - as their children only spoke kituba and French. A young boy from Pointe-Noire came to the Pool in order to visit his matrifamily in Kindamba. He is Teke on his mother's side and Vili on his father's. Arriving by bus from Kindamba he was met by Lari militiamen at Marché Total in Bacongo who searched for his ethnic identity. He does not speak Lari or Teke, only French and kituba from Pointe-Noire. That was not good enough, and he was robbed and beaten up, although not killed.

The difficulty in identifying people's origins also suggests that the basic driving force is hatred and aggression in itself, not a more objective relationship to the Other. We ask about the hatred and someone explains:

Mais puisque, là-bas on apprend qu'on a tué un
Tchèque, un Tchèque qui est à Mounjali ou bien

qui est à Kindamba. Bon, il ne faut pas supporter la présence d'un Niboulek.

Here we are back to the problem of false information. Our informant above refers to the rumors about Tchèques being killed in Dolisie (Loubomo); 'they said all the Tchèques had been killed but it was not true'.

What happened to mixed families? There are examples of all the possible variants. His matrifamily orders her to leave with "her" children, or he, himself, asks her and the children to leave. 'You are snakes, all of you,' said one father. Or, husband and wife are separated against their will. He leaves Bacongo while she stays, she goes to the village with the children while he stays in Brazzaville etc. There are also couples who manage to stay together in spite of the fact that they are from different ethnic groups. In these cases they have been successfully secretive about their origins, or they live in an area that is less affected by the conflict.

How is it possible to kill neighbors? We have tried to communicate with militiamen from the different blocks. The following account is provided by a young man who presents himself as *eclairneur* (the same young man as above):

It was very difficult at the beginning, as all the young in the neighborhood knew each other. We have grown up together. It as difficult to destroy their homes, but I had to do it. I pointed out the houses, and each time when *un équipe d'exécution* arrived, I was there to show them where by making signs or by marking the house with a cross. Once I only pointed out the house and didn't participate in the looting - *parce que pour moi, ça faisait un peu mal puisque tout le temps j'étais avec les jeunes là* (because for me it hurted a little as I had always been with their children). When their father had been away *en mission* and returned with meat, he used to offer me to eat. This papa often gave us food. That's why I only pointed out the house and didn't want to participate. Their father worked at CEGNA. It was *trop difficile d'aller piller cette maison*.

He is unhappy, ashamed and afraid of being recognized by his victims.

Sometimes I didn't want to do it, but I was hungry and had no money. I had left my job...and I couldn't go to the village because it wasn't calm there either....I had to kill, I think they added some drug to our coffee...I feel very sorry for the people we attacked. We got hold of somebody, often a young girl, and then we raped her, maybe 10 of us. Like the girl who was killed in Peka. She used to sell at *Marché Sita*. We all raped her and then we dumped her body vers le *Marché Sita*.

Once we got hold of a group of Niboulek. They tried to escape but we got hold of them. We said: Give us money, and they gave us their money, and then we killed them.

He does not like what he has done, and he tries to excuse himself with the same arguments as the Nazis did; I only obeyed orders, I had to, I was only a tool for somebody else.

Conclusion

There is a common tendency in the West to explain today's ethnicity in Africa as a result of colonialism. This is a gross oversimplification. Colonialism led to states harboring a number of different ethnic groups which often were formerly petty chiefdoms and kingdoms. The co-existence of ethnic groups within the boundaries of a political unit is not unique for Africa. This pattern can be found in today's Sweden and it has a long tradition in, for example, the USA and South-east Asia.

Ethnic war and ethnic cleansing in the Congo are, caused by two principle factors; the disintegration of the political unit and the sudden and massive experience of fear within social groups. The war is a predominantly male enterprise.

What is there to learn from this dark chapter in the history of Central Africa? First of all that the introduction of a multi-party system in countries such as the Congo may easily have destructive consequences. African dictators have argued in favor of the one-party system along these lines, and it might seem as if we do the same. Let us therefore be more precise. Parliamentary

democracy developed in the West on the basis of economic development. In Central Africa there is no equivalent economic transformation, therefore no societal super-organism, only a political structure composed of alliances of personal networks. The formation of two ethnic political blocks implies the disconnecting of the various parts of the country from one another. When that occurs, economic development is even more difficult to accomplish than before. In order to avoid a deleterious break-down of the political structure, which further weakens the economy, it is necessary to transform this structure in a much more conscious and controlled manner. Perhaps countries such as the Congo should search for democratic models in their own traditional society.

We have argued above that the state was weakened due to the decreasing inflow of resources from outside. The Congo has very little influence over this factor other than trying to maintain internal law and order in order not to further worry foreign capital as well as donor agencies.

What has happened in the Congo, as well as in Rwanda, also shows the rest of the world how dangerous it is when social groups experience ethnic fear. Their fear may be unfounded but, nevertheless, it must be taken seriously as it compels people (read:men) to attack the Other. There is a certain resemblance between today's Congo and Rwanda and yesterday's Nazi-Germany. It is about a "we", being under pressure, threatened, unwilling to accept a defeat, experiencing frustration and finally extreme rage. It reminds us of the sobriety of our own contemporary situation. We have, after all, created an arena where different and opposing ethnic groups escalate their conflict with one another.

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